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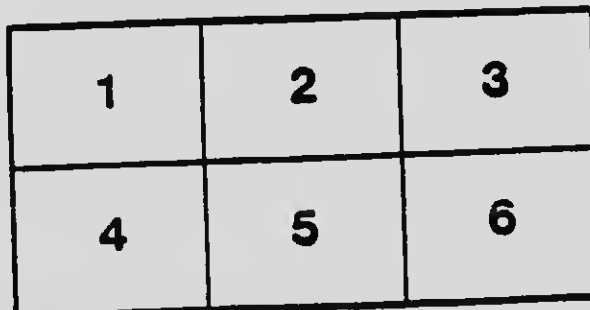
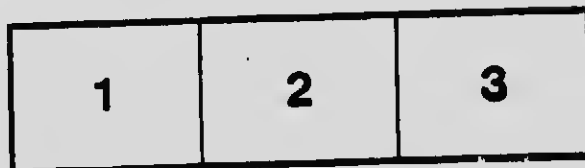
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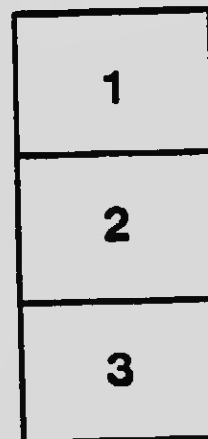
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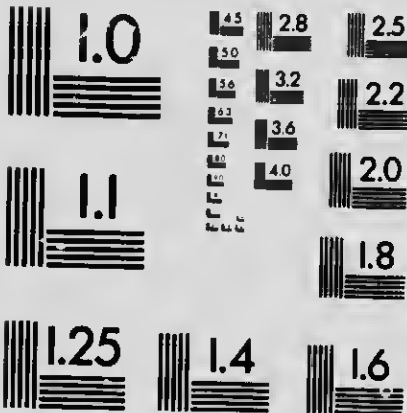
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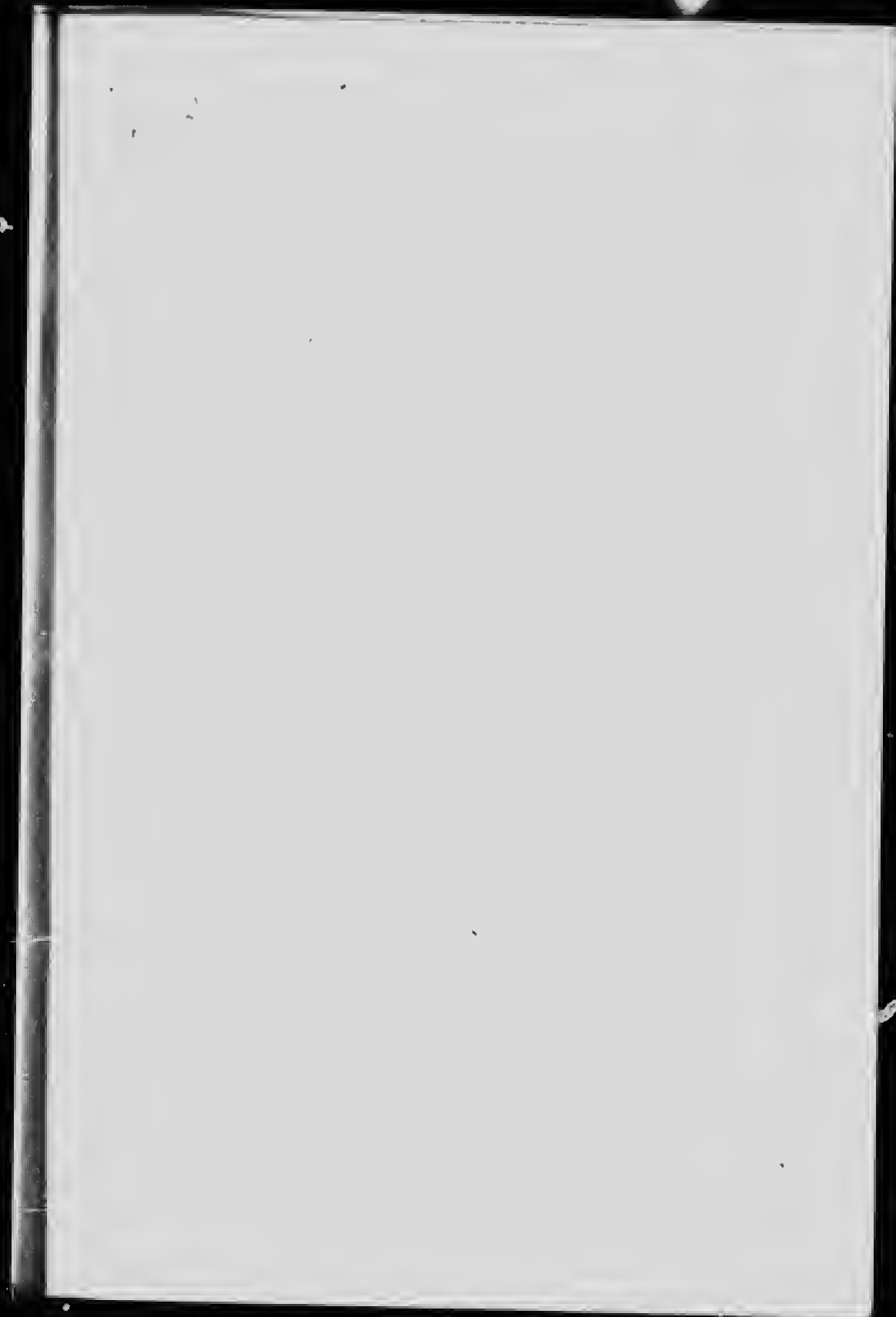
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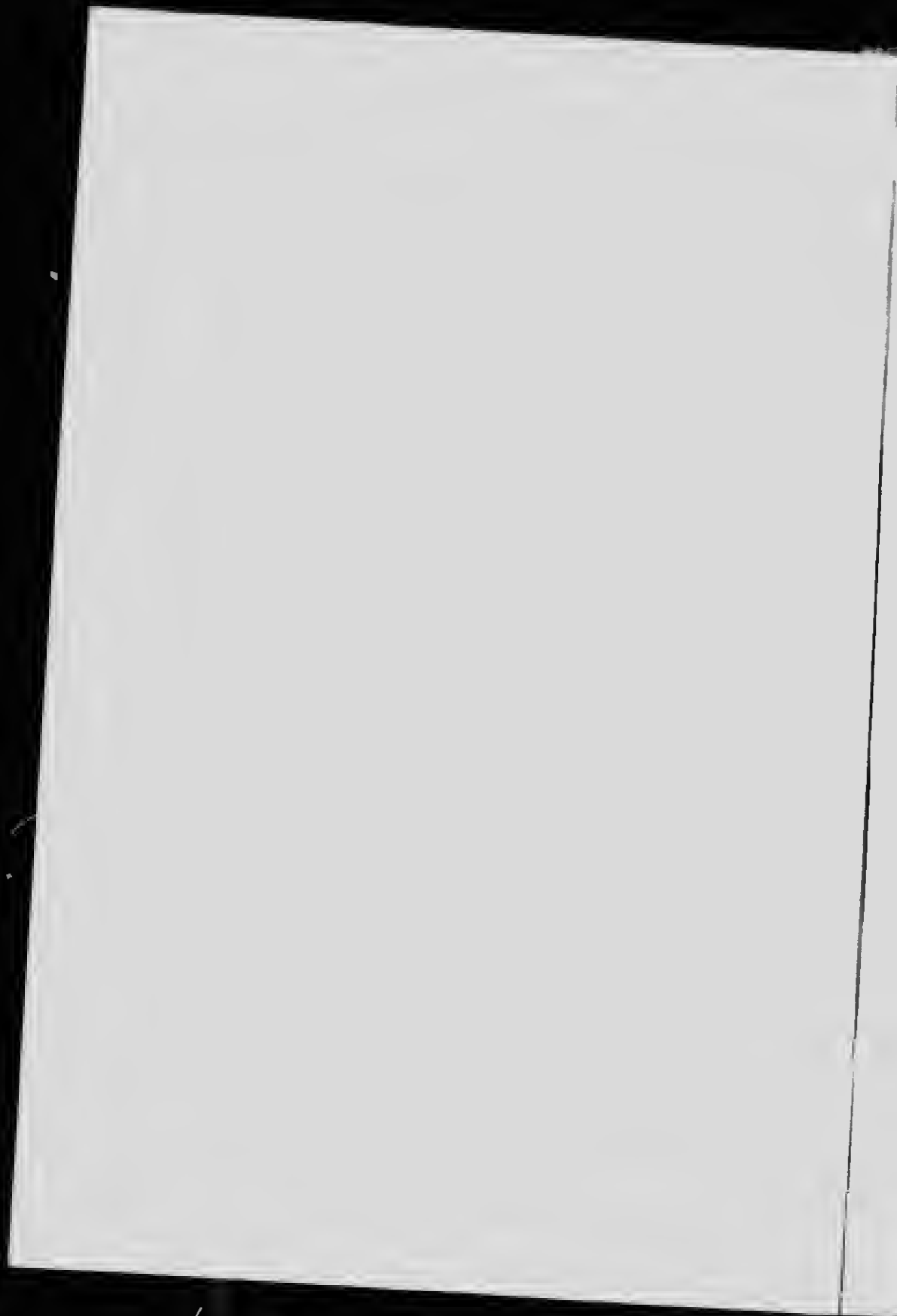


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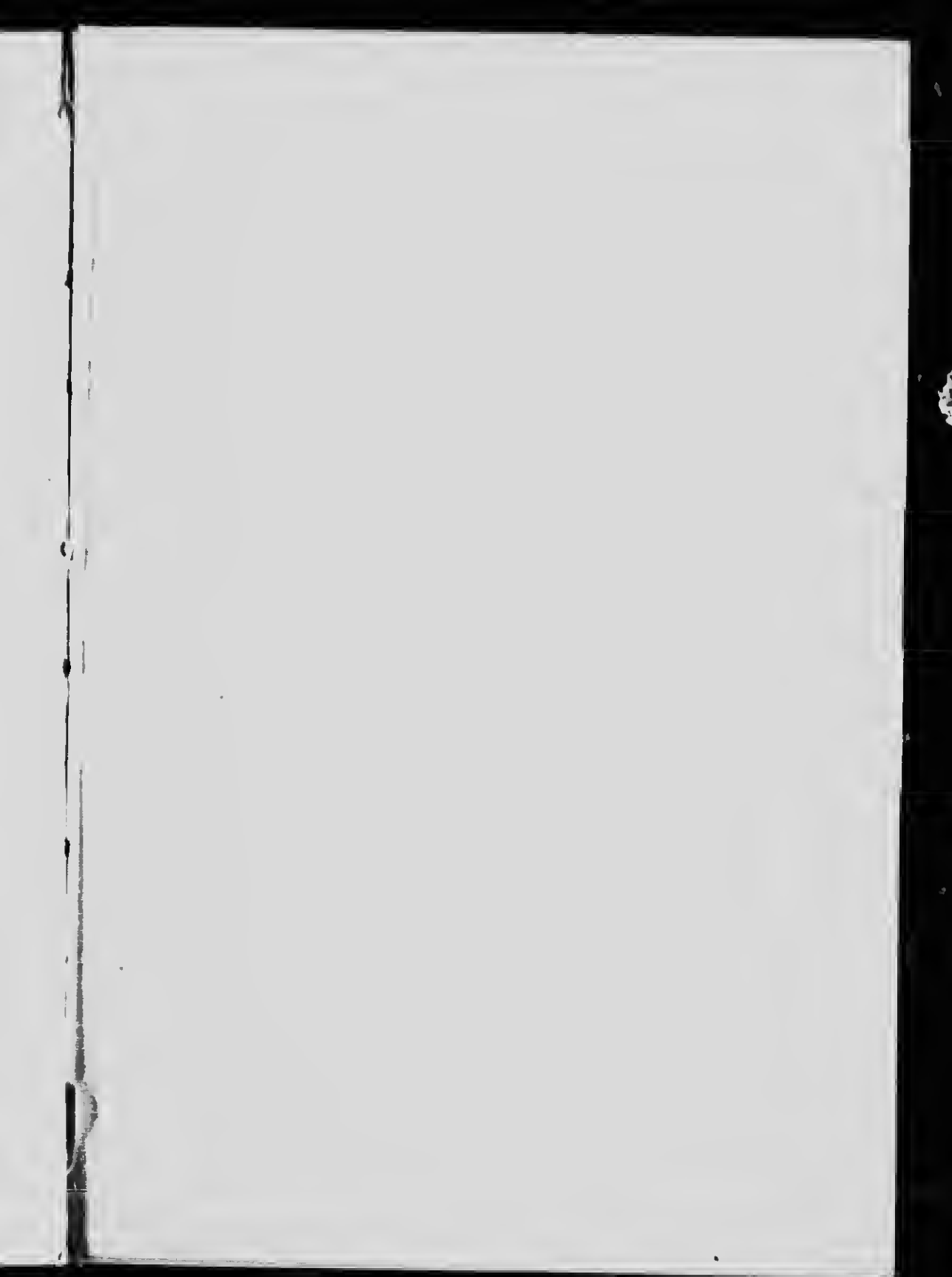


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**THE
MAN INSIDE**





“My dream! See, the panels are in the shape of a cross!”

[Page 198]

THE MAN INSIDE

BY
NATALIE SUMNER LINCOLN

AUTHOR OF "THE TREVOR CASE" AND
"THE LOST DESPATCH."

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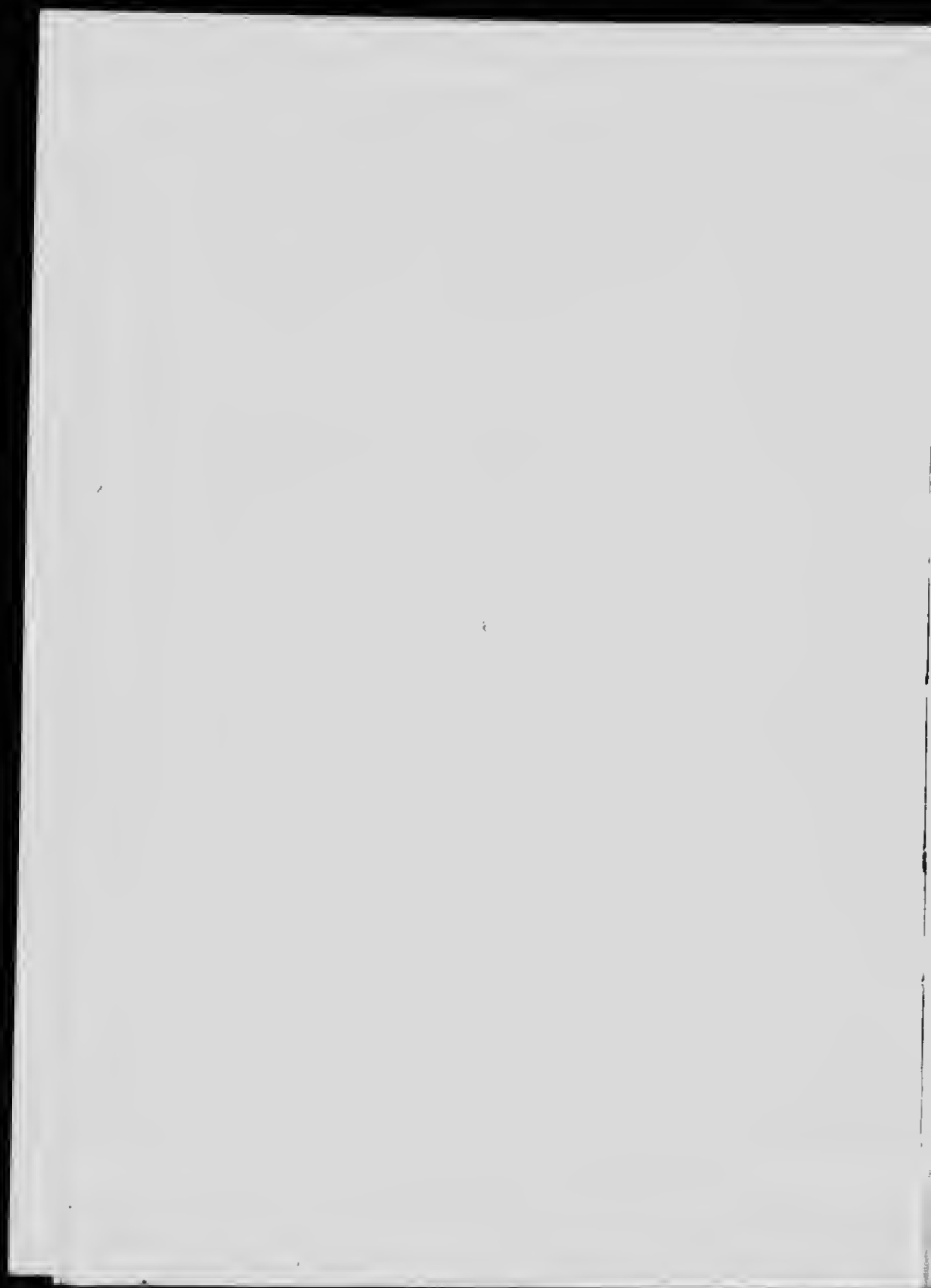
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MAJOR-GENERAL GEORGE LEWIS GILLESPIE
U. S. ARMY
WHOSE KINDLY FRIENDSHIP, GENEROUS
ENCOURAGEMENT AND DISCRIMINATING CRITICISM
MADE THIS BOOK POSSIBLE
IT IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED



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THE MAN INSIDE

CHAPTER I

"WHERE THE BEST IS LIKE THE WORST"

THE long hot tropic day was drawing to its close. The shadows were gradually rising and filling the narrow street, and every now and then from the side of the open drain which ran through the middle of the street a large black carrion bird flew up. There was no sidewalk, the cobblestones running right up to the low white house walls. The windows which opened on the street were for the most part few in number, small and heavily barred. It was not by any means the best quarter in Colon. One building, more pretentious than the rest, was distinguished from its neighbors by large French windows, also protected by the iron screen or *reja*.

It was impossible to tell the nationality of the one

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man lounging along the street. He seemed profoundly buried in his own thoughts. Dark as his skin was, and black as was his beard, there was something about him which negatived the idea that he was a Spaniard. His rolling walk suggested the sailor's life.

As he passed the building with the long French windows, the tinkle of a guitar roused his attention, and he stepped inside the front door and glanced furtively at the few men who lounged about the tables which dotted the long room. Passing by several empty tables and chairs, the stranger seated himself in the corner of the room on the side further from the street, near a window which opened on a neglected garden. A tropical vine thrust its branches against what had once been a wood and glass partition which formed the end of the room, the branches and leaves twining in and out among the broken panes of the window.

Some of the occupants of the room had glanced indifferently at the stranger on his entrance, but his haggard, unshaven face and worn clothing did not arouse their curiosity, and they again turned their attention to their wine.

The stranger, after contemplating the view from the window for some moments, leaned back in his

THE BEST LIKE THE WORST

chair, thrust his hands in his pockets, and stretched his long legs under the table; then indolently studied his surroundings. The room reeked with tobacco smoke and the odor of spirits. The scene reminded him of Port Said. Not quite as many nationalities were represented in Colon as haunt the entrance to the Suez Canal, but the low chatter of tongues which greeted his ears was polyglot. The men in the room were types of the born ne'er-do-well. Lazy, shiftless, they had drifted to Colon, thinking to pick up whatever spoils came their way during the construction of the Panama Canal. Drinking and gambling, gamb'ing and drinking—the sum total of their lives. The stranger's lips curved in a sardonic smile, and he crooned softly:

Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like
the worst,
Where there aren't no 'Ten Commandments an' a man can
raise a thirst.

His smile deepened as he caught the scowl of a Spaniard sitting near him. His glance traveled on, and, as he studied the flushed, sodden faces, a sudden horror of himself and his surroundings shook him. He passed a nervous hand over his damp forehead. Why had his memory played him so

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scurvy a trick? The past few years were not pleasant to contemplate, and the future even less so. He half started from his chair, then sank back and summoned the *mozo*. Quickly he gave his order in fluent Spanish, and waited impatiently for the man's return. He had been fortunate at the gaming table the night before, and could purchase a moment's respite from the torments of an elusive memory. Memory, in whose wondrous train follow the joys of childhood, parents and home! The stranger's strong hand trembled as he stroked his beard. Why was he an outcast? For him alone there were no childhood and no home; his thinking life began as a full-grown man. Was there to be no awakening?

In a few moments the *mozo* returned, and placed a glass and bottle of liquor before him. The stranger hastily filled and drank. As the stimulant crept through his veins, a feeling of physical contentment replaced all other sensations, and, lighting a cigar, he was slowly sinking once more into reverie when from behind the partition he heard a voice:

"No names, please."

The words, spoken clearly in English, startled him from his abstraction, and he glanced through the vine and, himself unseen, saw two men sitting at a

THE BEST LIKE THE WORST

table. They had apparently entered the *patio* from another part of the house.

"Quite right, I approve your caution." The words were also in English, but with a strong foreign accent, and the speaker, a man of middle age and fine physique, laid some papers on the table before them. "Where is the Senator this evening?"

"He accompanied several members of the Congressional party to inspect the plant of the Quartermaster and Subsistence Departments, and on his return will dine with Major Reynolds and several other officers at the hotel."

"I see." The foreigner drummed impatiently on the table. "You were late in keeping your appointment."

"I had the devil's own time in finding this dive," returned the younger man, and, as he moved his chair half around, the inquisitive stranger, peeping through the leaves of the vine, obtained a view of the speaker's boyish face. The weak mouth was partly hidden by a short black mustache; the features were well cut, and by some would have been called handsome.

The older man gave vent to a half-smothered chuckle. "Goethals and Gorgas have reformed the Canal Zone, and the local government is trying to

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do the same with Panama, but, *por Dios*, drinking and gambling continue *unnoticed* in Colon," he said, dryly. "I find a room in this house most convenient during my short visits here. No '*gringo*,'" he sneered, "dare show his face in this room."

The stranger settled down in his chair, which was wedged into the corner formed by the wall of the room and the wood and glass partition, until his head was screened from the two speakers by the thick foliage of the vine. The Spaniard and the Jamaican, who had occupied the table nearest him, had gone, and the few men who still lingered over their wine at the farther end of the room paid no attention to him. He could listen without being observed.

"So you believe the people of Panama are already dissatisfied with their president?" inquired the younger man, whom the listener judged to be an American.

"I do," came the firm reply. "And but for the presence of *los tiranos del norte* here there would have been already a *pronunciamiento*."

"Then you think the time is ripe for carrying out your scheme?"

His companion nodded without speaking and tugged at his gray imperial. "If it is done at all it

THE BEST LIKE THE WORST

must be soon," he said, finally. "American rule is not too popular here, and now is the time to act. And I pray God I shall be spared to see the fruits of the *labor de los cochinos sucios* reaped by another nation," he spoke with intense bitterness.

"And that nation?" questioned the other.

"Is better left unmentioned."

"You do not love my countrymen," exclaimed the American, as he drew out his cigarette case and passed it to his companion, who waved it away impatiently.

"Say rather—hate," was the terse reply. "But I do not look on you as one of that nationality. Your mother was my dearly loved cousin, and Colombia boasts no prouder name than the one she bore before she married your father. By the love you bear her memory I entreat you to assist me in this undertaking."

"I have promised," said the American gruffly. "I hear that Colombia intends accepting the ten million dollars offered by the United States for certain islands near Panama."

"Never!" The Colombian spoke with emphasis. "Our hatred lies too deep for that; it cannot be placated by an offer of 'conscience money,' no matter how great the sum."

THE MAN INSIDE

"The more fools you," muttered the American, *sotto voce*.

"The revolt of Panama was followed by an insurrection in Colombia," continued the other, "and the Government was overthrown. The American newspapers gave us a few paragraphs at the time—they did not mention that nearly one hundred thousand people were killed; that the horrors of civil war were augmented by pillage and murder. I was at the front with the troops, and, in my absence from home, my wife and child were murdered by some *insurrectos*. I tell you," he struck the table a resounding blow with his clenched fist, "there is no Colombian living who would not gladly see the United States humiliated."

"It is easy to see that the people in Panama are jealous of the success of the Americans," commented the young man.

"Naturally; the United States has always advanced at the price of Latin-America."

"How so?"

"Study your history. When the Thirteen Original States branched out, first came the 'Louisiana Purchase,' land originally settled by the French; then Florida, first settled by the Spanish, was bought by the United States. Later still, Texas seceded from

THE BEST LIKE THE WORST

Mexico, settled also by the Spanish; then came the Mexican War, and Latin-America lost the territory now known as New Mexico, Arizona, and California."

"Seems to me it would have been better if Colombia had accepted the original offer of the United States for the Panama Canal Zone."

"Why so?" The United States only offered a beggarly ten million. By waiting a year the French concession would have expired, and the Colombian Government would have received the sixty million which the United States eventually paid the French Company."

"Instead of which you got nothing," remarked the American dryly, "and lost Panama into the bargain."

"Through underhand methods," began the other hotly, then checked himself. "Enough of the past. Have you a message for me?"

For reply the young man drew out an envelope from an inside pocket and handed it to his companion, who opened it and read the communication in silence.

"Good," he said finally, tearing the note into infinitesimal pieces and carefully putting them in his leather wallet, from which he first took several let-

THE MAN INSIDE

ters. "Give this to the Ambassador immediately on your return, and this—" he hesitated for a second—"give at once to our mutual friend."

The American took the papers and placed them securely in an inside pocket. "Is that all?" he inquired.

"No." The Colombian drew out a small chamois bag whose contents emitted a slight jingling noise as he handed it to his companion. "You may find this useful. No thanks are necessary, dear boy," laying his hand on the American's shoulder as the latter commenced speaking. "The death of my wife and child has deprived me of near relatives except you, and I propose to make you my heir." Then, to change the subject, he added quickly, "Is there no way to induce the Senator to use his influence with Congress and the Administration for disarmament, and the curtailing of building more battle-ships?"

The American laughed disagreeably. "I think it may be done—in time."

The Colombian's face brightened. "Splendid! If we can stop his fervid speeches in behalf of a larger standing army and navy, we will have accomplished much. But how do you expect to alter his attitude?"

THE BEST LIKE THE WORST

"Through a woman," the American's lips parted in an amused smile. "There's no fool like an old fool, and the Senator is no exception to the rule."

"Indeed?" The Colombian raised his eyebrows. "And what has the woman to say in the matter?"

"Nothing. She emulates a clam."

The eavesdropper on the other side of the partition, who had caught most of the conversation, moved ever so slightly to stretch his cramped limbs, and then pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his heated face. As he did so a small slip of paper dropped, unseen by him, from his pocket to the floor. A large black cat came softly over to him and he lifted the animal up and placed her on the table before him. He stroked the purring feline and listened intently to catch the conversation which drifted to him through the vine-covered broken window panes. Apparently the two men were preparing to leave.

"Does the Senator really think to marry?" asked the Colombian, as he picked up his hat.

"I judge so. He is obviously very much infatuated with the girl's unusual type of beauty. And, believe me, she thoroughly understands the art of managing men."

THE MAN INSIDE

"Indeed? Who is the girl?"

"The young daughter of the famous Irish actress, Nora Fitzgerald. Senator Carew"

Crash—the bottle and glass smashed in pieces. The eavesdropper never stopped to see the damage he had done, but with incredible swiftness and stealth was out of the room and down the street before the irate proprietor had reached the deserted table.

"*Que hay?*" inquired the Colombian of the proprietor. He and the American had rushed into the room and over to the window by which the eavesdropper had been sitting.

"A drunken Spaniard knocked the bottle and glass from the table, and cleared out without paying the damage," explained the proprietor in Spanish, as he signed to the *mozo* to sweep up the mess.

"What's that in your hand?"

"A card, Señor, which I have just picked up from the floor."

"Let me have it."

"*Si, Señor, con mucho gusto.*" He quickly handed the paper to the Colombian.

The American looked over his companion's shoulder as the latter adjusted his eyeglasses and held up

THE BEST LIKE THE WORST

the visiting card so that both could see its contents.
With staring eyes and faces gone white they read
the engraved inscription :

MR. JAMES CAREW
MARYLAND.

CHAPTER II

AFTER THE BALL

FIFTY-FOUR!" bellowed the footman through his megaphone for the sixth time, and he slanted his umbrella to protect his face from the driving rain which half-blinded him. A waiting automobile, whose chauffeur had mistaken the number called, moved slowly off and gave place to a carriage and pair.

"Fifty-four," mumbled the coachman, checking his restive horses with difficulty.

The footman turned, touched his hat, and beckoned to Cynthia Carew, who stood waiting in the vestibule. With a rueful glance at the wet sidewalk, she gathered her skirts up above her ankles and, propelled by the sturdy arm of her escort, Captain Lane, was landed breathless at the carriage door.

"In with you," laughed Lane, as his umbrella was almost dragged from his hand by the high wind. "Your wrap is too pretty to be ruined. . . ." Cyn-

AFTER THE BALL

thia was half lifted, half pushed inside the landau. . . . "Good-night, my dearest."

The door slammed shut; the horses, weary of long standing, started forward at the sound and raced around the corner into Massachusetts Avenue before the sleepy coachman could collect his wits.

Cynthia, on the point of seating herself, was flung toward the farther corner of the carriage by the sudden jerk. Instinctively she threw out her hand to steady herself, and her open palm encountered what was unmistakably a broad shoulder.

"Good gracious!" recoiling and collapsing sideways on the seat. "Philip! How you frightened me."

Then she settled herself more comfortably and, with an effort, chatted on.

"The dance really was great fun, just our set you know, some of the Diplomatic Corps, and a number of the officers from the Barracks. I hated to leave so early," regretfully, "but I promised Uncle James. Mrs. Owen asked particularly for you, and was greatly put out because you did not appear. Honestly, Philip, I am very tired of trying to explain your sudden aversion to society. Why do you shun your friends?"

Not getting an immediate answer she repeated

THE MAN INSIDE

her question more emphatically. Still no reply. The silence caught her attention. Turning her head she scanned the quiet figure by her side.

The pelting rain, which beat drearily upon the carriage roof and windows, almost drowned the sound of rapid hoof-beats. The high wind had apparently extinguished the carriage lamps and the dim street lights failed to illuminate the interior of the rapidly moving carriage. In the semi-darkness Cynthia could not distinguish her companion's face.

"It is *you*, Philip?" she questioned sharply, and waited an appreciable moment; then a thought occurred to her. "Uncle James, are you trying to play a practical joke?" Her voice rose to a higher key.

Her question was ignored.

Cynthia caught her breath sharply. Suppose the man was a stranger? She shrank farther back into her corner. If so, how came he there? Intently she studied the vague outlines of his figure.

The landau was an old-fashioned vehicle built after a commodious pattern by a past generation, and frequently used by Senator Carew on stormy nights, as the two broad seats would accommodate five or six persons by tight squeezing.

Cynthia clutched her wrap with nervous fingers.

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"But Cynthia remained where she was and peeped over
the butler's shoulder"



AFTER THE BALL

If the man had inadvertently entered the wrong carriage, the least he could do was to explain the situation and apologize. But suppose he was drunk? The thought was not reassuring.

"Tell me at once who you are," she demanded imperiously, "or I will stop the carriage."

At that instant the driver swung his horses abruptly to the left to avoid an excavation in the street made by the sewer department, and, as the wheels skidded on the slippery asphalt, the man swayed sideways, and fell upon Cynthia. A slight scream escaped her, and she pushed him away, only to have the limp figure again slide back upon her.

He was undoubtedly drunk! Thoroughly alarmed she pushed him upright, and struggled vainly to open the carriage door with her disengaged hand.

With a tremendous jolt, which again deposited the helpless figure on her shoulder, the carriage wheels struck the curb as the horses turned into the driveway leading to the *porte-cochère* of the Carew residence. As the horses came to a standstill the front door was thrown open, and the negro butler hastened down the short flight of steps.

Cynthia, with one desperate effort, flung the man back into his corner and, as the butler turned the

THE MAN INSIDE

stiff handle and opened the door, half jumped, half fell out of the landau.

"A man's in the carriage, Joshua," she cried. "See who it is."

The servant looked at her in surprise, then obediently poked his head inside the open door. Unable to see clearly he drew back and fumbled in his pocket for a match-box.

"Keep dem hosses still, Hamilton," he directed, as the coachman leaned down from his seat, and then he pulled out a match. "Miss Cynthia, yo' bettah go inter der house," glancing at the young girl's pale countenance, "I'll 'ten to dis hyar pusson."

But Cynthia remained where she was and peeped over the butler's shoulder. He struck a match and held it in the hollow of his hand until the tiny flame grew brighter, then leaned forward and gazed into the carriage.

The intruder was huddled in the corner, his head thrown back, and the light fell on a livid face and was reflected back from glazing eyes. Cynthia's knees gave way, and she sank speechless to the ground.

"'Fore Gawd!" gasped Joshua, "it's Marse James—an' he's daid!"

CHAPTER III

A MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY

THE portières were pulled aside.
“Excellency, breakfast is served,” and the servant bowed deferentially toward a figure standing in the bow window. As the announcement reached his ears in the musical language of his native tongue, the Japanese Ambassador turned from the window and hastened into the dining-room.

A small pile of letters lay beside his plate, and he opened and read them as he leisurely ate his breakfast. Tossing aside the last note, he picked up the morning *Herald*, and his eyes glanced casually over the page then stopped, arrested by a three-column heading:

SENATOR CAREW DEAD

A MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY

Murder or Suicide?

THE MAN INSIDE

The Ambassador pushed aside his plate and read the smaller type with growing interest.

"During the cloudburst of last night, when the heavens themselves seemed to threaten Washington, a most mysterious crime was committed in the fashionable Northwest. United States Senator James Carew, of Maryland, one of the most distinguished and influential men in political and official circles, was found dead in his carriage early this morning.

"Much mystery surrounds the case. The tragedy was not discovered until the arrival of the carriage at the Carew residence. Miss Carew, whom her uncle was escorting home from a dance, was completely prostrated from shock, and had to be carried to her room.

"Owing to the lateness of the hour, with the paper already in press, only a few meager details could be learned by the special representative of the *Herald*.

"Senator Carew was found by his butler, Joshua Daingerfield, huddled in a corner of the back seat of the carriage. Dr. Penfield, the coroner, was hastily summoned, as well as detectives from headquarters. While awaiting their arrival, the policeman on the beat had the horses unharnessed and taken to the stable, and left the carriage under the porte-cochère.

A MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY

"On the arrival of the coroner and the detectives the body was removed from the carriage to the Senator's room in the Carew mansion. Dr. Penfield discovered that death was apparently due to a stab from a small, upright, desk bill file which had been thrust into the body with such force that the heavy, leaded round base was pressed tightly against the clothes. The sharp point had penetrated to the heart, and death must have been instantaneous. The weapon in the wound prevented any outward hemorrhage, and Senator Carew bled internally.

"These startling details but add interest to what promises to prove a mystery unique in the annals of crime.

"Senator Carew and his family have resided here for many years, and have been prominently identified with official and residential society. The old Carew mansion on Massachusetts Avenue east of Fourteenth Street has been noted for its lavish hospitality. It was erected by Senator Carew's father, General Van Ness Carew, shortly before the commencement of the Civil War, and the foundations and walls were of such unwonted thickness that General Carew was pestered with inquiries as to whether he was not building a fortress!

"The inmates of the Senator's household are his

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widowed sister, Mrs. George Winthrop, her stepson, Philip Winthrop; and her niece, Miss Cynthia Carew, daughter of the late Philip Carew, a younger brother of Senator Carew.

"Mrs. Winthrop is well known in Washington, having kept house for her brother since the death of his wife in 1881. Miss Cynthia Carew made her début last December at a memorable ball which her aunt and uncle gave for her. Since then Miss Carew has received much attention, and is regarded as one of the most popular of the winter's débutantes.

"Philip Winthrop has spent most of his life in Washington, and, since his graduation from Princeton, has been acting as private secretary for Senator Carew. He is a member of the Alibi, the Chevy Chase, and the Riding and Hunt Clubs, and is popular with his associates.

"A fearless leader, an upright American, Senator Carew has served his country well, first as representative, then as senator. Possessing the confidence and friendship of the President as he did, it was frequently prophesied that he would be the power behind the throne in deciding many of the important issues now confronting the country. His inexplicable death is therefore a severe blow to many besides his immediate family.

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"The known facts at present point to murder or suicide. The negro driver, Sam Hamilton, has been arrested pending a closer examination."

The Ambassador regarded the printed lines long and thoughtfully. Then his foot pressed the electric button concealed in the carpet under the table. The bell had hardly ceased to buzz before the well-trained servant was by his side.

"Send for my motor," came the brief order.

"It is already at the door, Excellency."

The Ambassador tossed his napkin on the table, pushed back his chair, and rose. "My hat and coat," he directed, walking into the hall.

In a few minutes he stepped out into the vestibule and filled his lungs with the delicious breeze that fanned his cheeks. No trace of the heavy storm of the night before was in the air. The sky was blue, and the May sunshine lit up the budding trees and shrubs. The touch of spring and new-born life was everywhere. The Ambassador snapped off a spray of honeysuckle which grew along the fence protecting his parking from his neighbor's, and tucked the spray in his buttonhole as he entered the waiting motor. "Drive to the club," he directed briefly, as the car moved off.

CHAPTER IV

THE BROKEN APPOINTMENT

ELEANOR THORNTON turned in bed and stretched herself luxuriously. It was good to be young and to be sleepy. For a few seconds she dozed off again; then gradually awoke, and, too comfortable to move, let her thoughts wander where they would. In her mind's eye she reviewed the events of the past months, and, despite herself, her lips parted in a happy smile. She had come to Washington in November to visit her friend, Cynthia Carew, and, delighted with the reception accorded her, had invited her cousin, Mrs. Gilbert Truxton, to chaperon her, and, on her acceptance, had rented a small furnished residence near Dupont Circle for the winter.

Mrs. Winthrop and Cynthia Carew, whom she had known at boarding school, took her everywhere with them, and her cousin, Mrs. Truxton, belonging as she did to an old aristocratic family of the District, procured her entrée to the exclusive homes of

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the "cave-dwellers," as the residential circle was sometimes called.

Born also with the gifts of charm and tact, Eleanor's wild rose beauty had made an instant impression, and she was invited everywhere. The butler's tray was filled with visiting cards, which many newcomers, anxious for social honors, longed to have left at their doors.

Eleanor was one of the older girls at Dobbs Ferry during Cynthia's first year at that boarding school. They had taken an immense liking to each other, which later blossomed into an intimate friendship. After her graduation she and Cynthia had kept up their correspondence without a break, and, true to her promise, given years before, she had left Berlin and journeyed to Washington to be present at Cynthia's début.

After the death of her mother, Eleanor had been adopted by an indulgent uncle, Mr. William Fitzgerald, of New York, and on his death had inherited a comfortable fortune.

In many ways the winter had brought numerous triumphs in its train, enough to spoil most natures. But Eleanor was too well poised to lose her head over adulation. She had sounded the depths of social pleasantries, and found them shallow. In

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every country she had visited all men had been only too ready to be at her beck and call—except one. The dreamy eyes hardened at the thought, and the soft lips closed firmly. She had made the advances, and he had not responded. A situation so unique in her experience had made an indelible impression. Angry with herself for even recalling so unpleasant an episode, she touched the bell beside the bed; then, placing her pillow in a more comfortable position, she leaned back and contemplated her surroundings with speculative eyes.

Her individuality had stamped itself upon the whole room. A picture or two, far above the average, a few choice books, whose dainty binding indicated a taste and refinement quite unusual; one or two Chinese vases, old when the Revolutionary War began; an ivory carving of the Renaissance; a mirror in whose lustrous depths Venetian beauties had seen their own reflections hundreds of years ago. All these things gave sure indication of study and travel, and a maturity of thought and taste which, oddly enough, seemed rather to enhance Eleanor's natural charm.

A discreet knock sounded on her door. "*Bon jour, Mademoiselle,*" exclaimed the maid, entering with the breakfast tray.

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"*Bon jour, Annette,*" responded Eleanor, rousing herself, then lapsing into English, which her maid spoke with but a slight accent. "Put the tray here beside me. Must I eat that egg?" she made a slight grimace.

"But yes, *Mademoiselle.*" The Frenchwoman stepped to the window and raised the shade. "Madame Truxton gave orders to Fugi to tell the cook that he must send you a more substantial breakfast. She does not approve of rolls and coffee. I think she wishes you to eat as she does."

Eleanor shuddered slightly. "Did—did she have beefsteak and fried onions this morning?" she inquired.

"But yes, *Mademoiselle,*" Annette's pretty features dimpled into a smile, "and she ate most heartily."

"Not another word, Annette, you take away my appetite. Is Mrs. Truxton waiting to see me?"

"No, *Mademoiselle;* she was up at six o'clock and had her breakfast at half-past seven." Annette paused in the act of laying out a supply of fresh *lingerie*. "What have the Americans on their conscience that they cannot sleep in the morning?"

"You cannot complain of my early rising,"

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laughed Eleanor, glancing at the clock, whose hands pointed to a quarter to twelve.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, you have lived so long away from America that you have acquired our habits."

"You may take the tray, Annette; I have even less appetite than usual to-day." Eleanor waited until it had been removed, then sprang out of bed. "Come back in fifteen minutes," she called.

It did not take her long to complete her *toilette*, and when the maid returned she was seated before her dressing table.

"What news to-day, Annette?" she asked, as the Frenchwoman, with skilful fingers, arranged her wavy hair, which fell far below her waist.

"Madame and Fugi——" began the maid.

"I don't want household details," broke in Eleanor impatiently. "Tell me of some outside news, if there is any."

"Oh, indeed, yes; news the most startling. Senator Carew——" she paused to contemplate her handiwork.

"Well, what about him?" inquired Eleanor listlessly.

"He is dead."

"Dead!" The handglass slipped from Eleanor's

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grasp and fell crashing to the hearth. Annette pounced upon it.

"Oh, Mademoiselle, the glass is broken. *Quelle horreur!*"

"Bother the glass." Eleanor's foot came down with an unmistakable stamp. "Tell me at once of Senator Carew's death. I cannot believe it!"

"It is only too true," Annette was a privileged character and deeply resented being hurried, also her volatile French nature enjoyed creating a sensation. She had eagerly read the morning paper, and had refrained from telling Eleanor the news until she could get her undivided attention. "Senator Carew was found dead in his carriage early this morning on his return from the dance at Mrs. Owen's"—A te had no reason to complain, Eleanor was giving her full attention to the story—"he had been stabbed."

The maid's hand accidentally touched Eleanor's bare neck, and she felt the taut muscles quiver. Covertly she glanced into the mirror and studied the lovely face. But Eleanor's expression told her nothing. Her cheeks were colorless and her eyes downcast.

After a barely perceptible pause Annette continued her story. "The coachman has been ar-

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rested——" a knock interrupted her and she hastened to open the door, returning in an instant with a note.

"Fugi says the messenger boy is waiting for an answer, Mademoiselle."

Eleanor tore it open and read the hastily scrawled lines.

DEAR ELEANOR:

I suppose you have been told of last night's terrible tragedy. Cynthia is prostrated. She begs pitifully to see you. Can you come to us for a few days? Your presence will help us both.

Affectionately,

CHARLOTTE WINTHROP.

Eleanor read the note several times, then walked thoughtfully over to her desk.

DEAREST MRS. WINTHROP: [she wrote] It is awful. I will come as soon as possible.

Devotedly,

ELEANOR.

"Give this to Fugi, Annette, then come back and pack my small steamer trunk," as the maid hastened out of the room; she picked up a silk wa'st preparatory to putting it on, but her *toilette* was doomed to another interruption.

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"Well, my dear, may I come in?" asked a pleasant voice from the doorway.

"Indeed you may, Cousin Kate," Eleanor stepped across the room and kissed the older woman affectionately. Mrs. Truxton's ruddy face lighted with an affectionate smile as she returned her greeting. She did not altogether approve of her young cousin, many of her "foreign ways" as she termed it, offended her, but Eleanor's lovable disposition had won a warm place in her regard.

Mrs. Truxton seated herself in one of the comfortable lounging chairs and contemplated the disheveled room and Eleanor's oriental silk dressing gown with disapproval.

"Do you know the time?" she inquired pointedly.

"Nearly one," answered Eleanor, as she discarded her dressing gown for a silk waist. "Lunch will soon be ready. I hope you have a good appetite."

"Yes, thank you; *I've* been out all the morning," reproachfully. "Mrs. Douglas has asked me to dine with her this evening, and, I think, Eleanor, if it will not interfere with your arrangements, that I will accept the invitation."

"Do so by all means," exclaimed Eleanor heartily. "I hope she won't talk you deaf, dumb, and blind."

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"She is rather long-winded," admitted Mrs. Truxton, tranquilly. "On the telephone this morning she took up twenty minutes telling me of the arrival here of her nephew, Douglas Hunter—good gracious, child——" as Eleanor's silver powder box rolled on the floor with a loud bang—"how you startle one."

"I beg your pardon," Eleanor was some seconds picking it up, for her fingers fumbled clumsily. "What were you saying, Cousin Kate?" replacing the silver on the dressing table.

"Mercy, child, how inattentive you are! I was only remarking that Douglas Hunter is no stranger to Washington. He was raised here, as he belongs to one of the first families of Georgetown."

"I never heard of a 'second' family in Georgetown," smiled Eleanor; then, seeing her cousin's offended expression, she hastily changed the subject. "Have you heard the shocking news of Senator Carew's—" she hesitated for a moment—"tragic death?"

"Indeed I have. Washington is talking of nothing else. Why are you packing, Annette?" as the servant entered.

"Mrs. Winthrop has just written and asked me to spend a few days with them," explained Eleanor

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hurriedly, "so suppose you invite Miss Crane to stay with you in my absence."

"Of course you cannot very well decline to go," said Mrs. Truxton thoughtfully. "Still, I hate to have you mixed up in such an affair, Eleanor."

"Nonsense, Cousin Kate, you must not look at it in that light," Eleanor patted the fat shoulder nearest her affectionately. "Cynthia told me yesterday that Senator Carew had said he was going to discharge the coachman, Hamilton (a surly brute, I always thought him), for drunkenness. I have no doubt he committed the murder from revenge, and while under the influence of liquor."

"I sincerely trust that is the correct solution of the mystery," Mrs. Truxton looked dubious, "but there has been one fearful scandal in that family already, Eleanor, and I very much doubt if Senator Carew was killed by a servant."

"Why, what do you mean?" Eleanor wheeled around in her chair and faced her abruptly.

"Time will show." Mrs. Truxton shook her head mysteriously.

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Eleanor impatiently.

As Mrs. Truxton opened her lips to reply, Annette reëntered the room.

"Pardon, madame, you are wanted at the tele-

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phone," and as Mrs. Truxton lifted herself carefully out of her chair and walked out of the room, she handed a package to Eleanor. "This has just come for you, Mademoiselle; the boy who left it said there was no answer."

"Annette! Annette!" came Mrs. Truxton's shrill voice from the lower hall.

"Coming, Madame, coming," and the maid hastened out of the room shutting the door behind her.

Left alone, Eleanor turned the sealed package over curiously. The address was written in an unknown hand. Quickly breaking the red sealing wax and tearing off the paper, she removed the pasteboard cover and a layer of cotton. A startled exclamation escaped her as she drew out the contents of the box—a necklace of large rubies and smaller diamonds in an antique setting.

Eleanor, who knew the value of jewels, realized from their color and size that the rubies were almost priceless, and in the pure joy of beholding their beauty laid the necklace in the palm of her left hand and along her bare arm. After contemplating the effect for a moment, a thought occurred to her, and she pulled out the remaining cotton in the box and found at the bottom a small card. She picked it out and read the message written on the card.

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"The appointment was not kept. Well done."

The card fluttered to the floor unheeded. The pigeon blood rubies made a crimson stain on Eleanor's white arm, strong wrist, and supple fingers.

CHAPTER V.

MUTE TESTIMONY

DOUGLAS HUNTER sighed involuntarily as he left busy Fourteenth Street, and walked down Massachusetts Avenue. Twelve years' absence makes a great difference in the ever-shifting population of Washington. He felt like another Rip Van Winkle as he gazed at each passer-by in his search for a familiar face. Even the streets had changed, and he was almost appalled by the grandeur of some of the huge white palaces erected by multimillionaires on Massachusetts and New Hampshire Avenues, and the Avenue of the Presidents. He had spent part of the morning motoring about the city with one of his cousins, and the outward and visible signs of wealth had staggered him. What had become of the unpretentious, generous-hearted hospitality, and the old world manners and courtly greeting of the former host and hostess who had ruled so long at the National Capital? Had Mammon spoiled the old sim-

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plicity, and had Washington become but a suburb of New York and Chicago? It truly seemed as if plutocracy had displaced aristocracy.

As Douglas approached the Carew residence he glanced keenly at the handsome old mansion and at the numerous idlers loafing in the vicinity drawn there by idle curiosity. A policeman stood on guard in the driveway, and a number of photographers loitered near by, cameras in hand, waiting patiently to snapshot any member of the Carew family who might incautiously venture out of doors.

The house itself, a handsome square red brick and stone trimmed four-storied building, stood some distance back from the sidewalk with beautifully kept lawns divided by the carriage drive. The blinds were drawn and the ominous black streamer over the bell presented a mournful spectacle. It was the finest residence in that once fashionable locality, and Douglas decided that he preferred its solid, home-like architecture to the more ornate and pretentious dwellings in other parts of the city. As the years went by Senator Carew had added improvements until the residence was one of the most delightful in Washington.

As Douglas turned into the walk, a large touring car wheeled into the driveway, and as it purred

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softly by him, he stepped back respectfully and raised his hat to the tired-faced man sitting alone in the *tonneau*. He did not need to glance at the small coat-of-arms of the United States emblazoned on the polished door, or at the two Secret Service men following on their motor cycles, to recognize the distinguished occupant of the car.

As the motor stopped under the *porte-cochère*, the colored butler ran down the steps, and the President leaned forward and placed a note in the bowing and scraping negro's hand; then the big car continued on down the driveway and out into the street.

Douglas waited where he was for a few minutes before mounting the short flight of steps. The hall door was opened several inches on his approach, and Joshua solemnly extended his card tray, which Douglas waved aside.

"I called to see Mr. Brett; is he here?" he asked.

"Yessir," Joshua opened the door still further, and inspected him carefully.

"Take my card to him and ask if he can spare me a few minutes," and he dropped his visiting card on the tray.

"Walk in, suh," exclaimed Joshua, impressed by Douglas' well-groomed appearance; then he hesitated, embarrassed by a sudden idea.

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"I'll wait here," volunteered Douglas, stepping inside the square hall.

"All right, suh," Joshua closed the front door, "just a moment, suh," and he stepped softly across the hall and into a room. Douglas glanced about him curiously and caught a glimpse of spacious rooms and lofty ceilings. It was a double house, and to the right of the entrance was the drawing-room, and back of that another large room, which Douglas took to be the dining room, judging from the glittering silver pieces on a high sideboard of which he had a glimpse through the door leading into the square hall. Across from the drawing-room was the room into which Joshua had disappeared, and back of that a broad circular staircase which ran up to the top floor.

Douglas was idly gazing out of the glass panel of the front door when Joshua returned, followed by a middle-aged man with a keen, clever face.

"Is it really you, Mr. Hunter?" he asked, as they shook hands warmly. "I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw your card. Come this way," and he conducted Douglas into the room he had just left, and closed the door softly behind them.

"When did you arrive in Washington?" he in-

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quired, motioning Douglas to take a chair near the window and dropping into one opposite him.

"Yesterday." Douglas leaned back and studied his surroundings. His eyes traveled over the handsome carved rosewood bookcases which lined the walls, at the large desk table, and the comfortable leather-covered revolving desk chair. The desk silver, drop lights, and large upholstered davenport pushed invitingly before the huge fireplace with its shining brass fire-dogs and fender, each told a tale of wealth and artistic taste—two assets not often found together. His eyes returned to Brett, and he smiled involuntarily as he caught the other intently regarding him.

Brett smiled in return. "I was wondering why you looked me up so soon," he admitted candidly. "Don't think I'm not glad to see you"—hastily—"but I remember of old that you seldom do things without a motive."

"On the contrary, I am here this afternoon to find a motive—for Senator Carew's tragic death." The smile vanished from Douglas' clear-cut features. "One moment," as Brett opened his mouth to speak. "After reading the account of the Senator's death in the morning papers, I went down to headquarters to get what additional facts I could, and they told

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me that you had been put on the case. So I decided to look you up in person, and here I am."

"May I ask why you take such an interest in this case?"

"Certainly, Brett; I was coming to that. Senator Carew used his influence to get me in the Diplomatic Service, and during the past twelve years he has shown me many kindnesses, such as seeing that I was detailed to desirable posts, and helped me to secure promotion."

"He wouldn't have done that, Mr. Hunter, if you hadn't made good," broke in Brett quickly.

"I saw him last at Delmonico's in New York on my way to Japan a little over a year ago," continued Douglas. "He asked me to lunch with him, and evinced great interest in the mystery of the Jewel Custom Fraud which he, in some way, knew I had had a hand in exposing."

"Sure he did. I told the department about your assistance when I was in Paris. If it hadn't been for you, I'd never have landed those swindlers. They led me a pretty dance over the Atlantic."

"We worked together then," said Douglas thoughtfully, "and, on the strength of our past success, I'm going to ask you to take me on as a sort of advisory partner in this Carew case."

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"Suppose you first tell me the reason for making such a request."

"In the first place I owe a debt of gratitude to Senator Carew. For the sake of his friendship with my father years ago, he has taken a great interest in me. Secondly, I am in Washington at his request."

Brett looked his interest, and Douglas went on rapidly: "Some time ago I received a note from him asking me to apply for leave of absence from Tokio and to come direct to Washington, saying that he wished to see me on important business."

"Did he state the nature of that business?" inquired Brett eagerly.

"No. I at once followed his suggestion and applied to the State Department for leave. It was granted, and I hastened home as fast as steamer and train could bring me."

"Did you see Senator Carew?"

"Unfortunately, no. I only reached Washington late last night. I expected to see the Senator this morning, instead of which I read of his mysterious death in the morning papers."

Brett mused for a few minutes, then roused himself. "I am only too glad to have your assistance, Mr. Hunter."

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"Good!" ejaculated Douglas, well pleased. "Suppose you tell me all the facts in the case so far discovered."

Brett leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs. "On the face of things it looks as if the negro driver, Hamilton, was guilty."

"Tell me what leads you to think that?" inquired Douglas quickly.

"He is the worst type of negro, a vicious brute with a taste for liquor. I have inquired about him and examined him thoroughly and am really puzzled, Hunter, to find out why Senator Carew ever employed him."

"Is he an old family servant?"

"No. He has only been in Carew's employ about a year I am told. He knows how to handle horses, and took excellent care of the Senator's valuable stable."

"That probably explains why he was kept on," said Douglas. "I've been told that Carew was hipped about his horses."

"Yes. I gathered from Mrs. Winthrop that Hamilton has been drinking steadily, and his conduct to the other servants grew intolerable. Senator Carew had to discharge him."

"When did that happen?"

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"Yesterday afternoon."

"Then, how was it that he was driving the carriage last night?"

"Oh, Carew gave him a week's notice, said he couldn't fill his place at once, and told him to stay on. Joshua tells me that Hamilton uttered some ugly threats in the kitchen that evening, but that the servants paid no attention to his black humor, as they saw he had been drinking."

"I see in the papers that Hamilton vehemently declares his innocence."

"He does," agreed Brett, checking his remarks off on his fingers; "he declares he did not see Senator Carew after being discharged by him; that no one was in the carriage when he drove away from the stable at midnight; that he went directly to Mrs. Owen's residence; and that he does not know when or how Senator Carew's body was secreted in the carriage."

"The plot thickens," muttered Douglas. "Do you believe his statements?"

"I do, and I don't. The servants all declare that he was half drunk; therefore, I doubt if he was in a condition to pay much attention to anything, or that his statements can be relied on. He was sobered by the shock of finding Carew's body in his

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carriage, and, when I arrested him, collapsed from fright."

"Well, judging from the facts you have just told me, I don't much believe he killed Carew."

"Why not?" argued Brett. "Hamilton was apparently half out of his mind from rage and drink, and his brute nature made him seek revenge. It's quite possible Carew entered the carriage thinking it would not be safe for his niece to drive home alone from the dance, and Hamilton took that opportunity to kill him."

"I read in the evening paper that Hamilton was told to stop at the house for one of the maids, but, instead, drove directly from the stable to the dance," said Douglas. "Therefore Carew did not enter the carriage at this door."

"Hamilton may have been too befogged with drink to have remembered the order," suggested the detective.

"I grant you, Brett," said Douglas thoughtfully, "that the negro may have the nature, the desire, and the opportunity to commit murder—but why select such a weapon?"

"Probably picked up the first thing at hand," grunted Brett.

"But a desk file is not the 'first thing at hand' in

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a stable," remarked Douglas calmly. "In fact, it's the last thing you would expect to find there."

"I don't know about that; perhaps it was thrown away in a wastepaper basket, and Hamilton may have picked it out of the ash pile," suggested Brett.

"What did the file look like?"

"It is of medium size, the slender steel being very sharp, the round solid base being silver. I've shown it to several jewelers, and they all say it's like hundreds of others, rather expensive, but popular with their well-to-do customers, and that they have no means of tracing it back to any particular owner. It was something like that one," pointing to an upright file on Senator Carew's desk.

Douglas leaned over and took it up. "An ideal weapon," he said softly, balancing it in his hand as his fingers closed over the round heavy base. He removed the cork which was used to guard the sharp point and felt it with his thumb. "It must have taken a shrewd blow to drive the file through overcoat and clothing so that it would cause instant death."

"The Senator wore no overcoat." Douglas looked his surprise. After a moment's silence Brett edged his chair closer to his companion and lowered his voice. "You recollect how it rained last night?"

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"In torrents. I have seldom seen such a cloudburst," admitted Douglas.

"It commenced to rain about ten-thirty," continued Brett, "and it did not stop until after three o'clock. Hamilton drove twice in that drenching rain to Mrs. Owen's and back again, first taking Miss Carew to the dance and returning with her. Senator Carew's body was discovered on the last trip home. Miss Carew told her aunt that no one was in the carriage with her when she made the first trip to the dance. Senator Carew's body was not removed until after my arrival here this morning, and I then made a thorough examination of the carriage and, with the coroner's assistance, of the body as well"—he paused and cleared his throat—"I found Senator Carew's clothes were absolutely dry—as I said before, he wore no overcoat—now, how did Carew get into that carriage in that soaking downpour without getting wet?" asked Brett, settling back in his chair.

"Perhaps he was first murdered and then carried out and put into the carriage."

"Perhaps so, but I doubt it."

"He may have entered the carriage at the stable when Hamilton was not around."

"I thought of that," returned Brett, "and as soon

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as it was daylight examined the yard and the alley. The concrete walk from the house to the stable is being laid now and cannot be used, so that one has to tread on the ground, which is extremely soft and muddy. The alley is a long one, and Carew's stable is about in the center of it, and the rain, settling in the holes of the uneven cobbles, made walking very unpleasant. I am telling you all these details because of another discovery I made," went on Brett slowly; "the Senator's shoes had been recently polished and the blacking was not even stained."

Douglas leaned back and bit his thumb nail, a childish habit of which he had never been able to break himself.

"Where did Carew spend the evening?" he asked finally.

"That is what I have not been able to find out," growled Brett. "Mrs. Winthrop told me she had not seen her brother since breakfast. That he went to the Capitol as usual in the morning. She was told on entering the house just before dinner that he would not return for that meal, but they did not state where he was going."

"Upon my word it's a very pretty problem," commented Douglas softly.

"It is," agreed Brett, rising and slowly pacing the

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room. He glanced piercingly at Douglas, who was thoughtfully contemplating a life-size portrait of one of Carew's ancestors which hung above the mantel over the fireplace. Douglas Hunter's clear-cut features, broad forehead, and square jaw indicated cleverness and determination. When Douglas smiled the severe lines relaxed and his smooth-shaven face was almost boyish. He had a keen sense of the ridiculous, which prevented him from taking himself too seriously. In the past Brett had conceived a high regard for the other's quick wit and indomitable courage.

"This is Senator Carew's study or library," he said, stopping before the desk, "and I was giving the room my special attention when you came in."

"Have you met with any success?" inquired Douglas quickly.

"So far only one thing—it may be a clew or it may not; under this writing pad I found this blotter," holding up a square white sheet; "it has been used only once, first on one side then on the other, so that by holding it in front of this mirror you can read quite clearly, see——"

Douglas rose, stepped behind Brett, and peeped over his shoulder into the silver-mounted mirror,

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which the latter had removed from its place on the mantel.

The large, bold writing was fairly legible. "What do you make out of it?" asked Brett impatiently.

Obediently Douglas read the words aloud:

"'Am writing in case I don't see you before you'—" the writing ceased.

"He must have been interrupted," explained Brett, "and clapped down the blotter on top of the sheet so that whoever entered couldn't see the written words. Now look at the other side," and he turned over the blotter on which were traced only a few words:

"'I have discovered——'" read Douglas.

"What do you think of it?" asked Brett, putting the blotter in an inner pocket of his coat.

"It depends on when it was written"—Douglas' eyes strayed to the door. Surely Brett had closed it when they entered, now it stood partly open into the hall. He pointed silently to it, and by common impulse both men stepped out into the hall.

Listening intently they heard a faint rap on one of the doors in the upper hall; then a high-pitched, quivering voice reached them:

"Eleanor, Eleanor, I'm so glad you've come. I'm nearly sick with misery. They quarreled, Eleanor,

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they quarreled——" her voice caught in a sob—the door slammed shut.

The two men glanced at each other, their eyes asked the same question. Who quarreled?

CHAPTER VI

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

A SLIGHT sound behind him caused Douglas to wheel swiftly around. A pretty woman, with astonishment written largely in her round eyes, stood regarding the two men. She was carrying a handbag.

"Whom do you wish to see?" asked Brett sharply.

"No one, Monsieur," replied Annette, her accent denoting her nationality. "I am Miss Thornton's maid."

Douglas started. "Eleanor—Miss Thornton!" Was it possible that she could mean *the* Eleanor Thornton he used to know?

"I am taking her bag to her room as she is spending the night here," added the servant.

"Indeed." Brett inspected her keenly. "When did Miss Thornton enter the house?"

"A few minutes ago, Monsieur," vaguely. "Joshua showed Mademoiselle in while I stopped a

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

moment to speak with the chauffeur, and he left the front door open so that I could enter."

At that moment the butler appeared from the dining-room carrying a tray on which were glasses and a pitcher of ice water.

"Joshua, is this Miss Thornton's maid?" asked Brett.

"Yessir," Joshua ducked his head respectfully as he answered the detective. "Annette, Miss Eleanor done hab her same room next do' ter Miss Cynthia's. Yo' kin take her things right upstairs, and tell Miss Eleanor I done got der ice water fo' her."

With a half curtsy Annette stepped past the two men, and ran quickly up the staircase.

"Stop a moment, Joshua," ordered Brett, as the butler started to follow the maid. "Who opened the door into the library a few moments ago?"

"'Deed I dunno, suh; I been so busy takin' in cyards I ain't noticed particular."

"Who has been in the hall besides yourself?" persisted Brett.

"Ain't no one," began Joshua, then paused. "Now I do recollect dat Marse Philip cum in right smart time ergo, suh. He axed fo' yo', and I tole him yo' was in de lib'ry. I 'specks he mighter been alookin' fo' yo'."

THE MAN INSIDE

"Ah, indeed; where is Mr. Winthrop now?"

"Ah dunno, suh."

"Well, find him, Joshua, and tell him I wish to see him—at once." Brett's pleasant voice had deepened, and Joshua blinked nervously.

"Yessir, I'll tell him, suh, 'deed ah will," he mumbled, as he started upstairs.

As Douglas and Brett walked across the hall to enter the library a man stepped out of the drawing-room.

"Are you looking for me, Mr. Brett?"

The question was asked courteously enough, and Douglas was the more astonished to encounter a hostile stare as the newcomer glanced at him.

"I hope you can give me a few minutes of your time," said Brett; "will you be so good as to step into the library?" and he stood aside to allow Philip Winthrop to enter first. Douglas followed them into the room and locked the door. As the key clicked slightly Winthrop frowned, and his pale face flushed.

"That is only a precaution against eavesdroppers," explained Douglas quickly.

"Mr. Winthrop, this is Mr. Douglas Hunter, who is assisting me in my efforts to unravel the mys-

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

tery surrounding Senator Carew's death, and with your permission will be present at this interview."

"Why, certainly," exclaimed Winthrop, with well simulated heartiness; "won't you both sit down?" and he dropped into the revolving desk chair. Douglas picked out his old seat in the window and turned his back to the light the better to face Winthrop and Brett, who also sat near the desk.

"When will they hold the inquest, Mr. Brett?" questioned Winthrop.

"The coroner, Dr. Penfield, told me to-morrow."

"Has Hamilton a lawyer to look out for his interests?"

"That's not absolutely necessary at the inquest, Mr. Winthrop. At present the negro is simply held on suspicion. If the inquest so decides, he will be charged with the murder and held for the grand jury."

Douglas had been busy scanning Winthrop's face intently. He noted the heavy lines in the handsome face, and the unnatural brilliancy of his eyes. It was apparent to both men, by Winthrop's thick speech and unsteady hands, which kept fingering the desk ornaments nervously, that he had been drinking heavily.

"Where did you last see Senator Carew?"

THE MAN INSIDE

"In this room yesterday afternoon."

"Did you see him alone, or were others present?"

"He was alone."

"Did he show you a letter which he was then writing?" inquired Douglas at a venture, and was startled at the effect of his question on Winthrop. The latter whitened perceptibly, and pulled his short black mustache to hide his twitching lips.

"I know nothing about any letter," he stammered.

Brett did not press the point, but asked instead: "Where did you spend last night?"

"I dined here with my mother and cousin."

"And afterwards?" put in Douglas.

"I went to the Alibi Club soon after dinner."

"How late did you stay there?"

"Most of the night," was the evasive reply.

"Please mention the exact hour you left the club," persisted Brett.

"I really cannot recollect the exact time; I did not reach this house until after two this morning. We had a pretty gay time at the club, and I was in no condition to remember the hour," and he smiled deprecatingly.

Again Brett did not press the question. He turned over the pages of his small memorandum book in which he had been making entries.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

"Have you any idea where Senator Carew dined and spent the evening?"

"No," came the emphatic answer. "He asked me to tell my mother not to expect him at dinner, that was all."

"Ah, indeed. Have you any idea when the Senator left the house?"

"No, I left him here, and went up to my room, where I stayed until dinner was announced."

"Where is your room?"

"Third floor, back."

"Who has rooms on the next floor?"

"Senator Carew's bedroom, bath, and sitting-room are over this part of the house; Miss Cynthia Carew occupies the suite of rooms across the hall from his rooms. My mother and I have the third floor to ourselves." Winthrop plucked nervously at the desk pad. "Talking is dry work; won't you and Mr. Hunter join me, I'll ring for Joshua."

"One moment," Brett's tone was peremptory and, with an unmistakable scowl, Winthrop sank down in his chair and leaned heavily on the desk. "What members of the family were in the house yesterday afternoon?"

Winthrop thought for a moment before replying. "No one but my uncle and myself," he said reluc-

THE MAN INSIDE

tantly. "My mother and Miss Carew went out early to some bridge party, and did not return until just before dinner."

"I see." Brett leaned back in his chair and contemplated Winthrop thoughtfully.

"Mr. Winthrop," asked Douglas, breaking the short silence, "were you and your uncle always on good terms?"

"Why, yes." Winthrop's twitching fingers closed unconsciously on the slender desk file, and as he spoke his shifting eyes dropped from Douglas' clear gaze, and fell on the sharp steel desk ornament in his hand. With a convulsive shudder he dropped it and sprang to his feet. "What's all this questioning about?" he demanded loudly. "I've had enough of this, you——" his hands clinched, and the blood flamed his pale face, a gurgle choked his utterance, and before Brett could reach him he fell prone across the desk.

CHAPTER VII

A PIECE OF ORIENTAL SILK

I'M glad you could come back, Mr Hunter," said Brett, as Joshua opened the library door of the Carew residence and admitted Douglas. "Can you stay here all night?"

"If necessary," replied Douglas, glancing at him in surprise.

"I think it would be best. Mrs. Winthrop is completely unstrung; her niece, Miss Carew, prostrated from shock, and Mr. Philip Winthrop in bed with a bad attack of delirium tremens. In such a household your presence to-night might be invaluable if anything else were to happen—not that I am anticipating any further trouble or tragedies."

"Very well, I will stay," agreed Douglas.

"'Deed I'se mighty glad ter hyar dat," volunteered Joshua, who hovered just inside the door on the pretext of arranging some furniture. "But I dunno whar I'll put yo', suh. Miss Eleanor, she's

THE MAN INSIDE

in de gues' chambah, an' Annette's in de room back ob her's, and de nusses fo' Marse Philip has der spar rooms in der third flo'."

"Never mind, Joshua, I can camp out in this room. That sofa looks very comfortable," and Douglas pointed to the large upholstered davenport which faced the empty fireplace.

"Just a moment, Joshua," exclaimed Brett, as the old butler moved toward the door. "Did you see Senator Carew leave the house yesterday afternoon?"

"No, suh."

"Did he take luncheon here?"

"No, suh; he cum in 'bout three o'clock; least-ways dat was when he rung fo' me, an' I reckon he'd only jes' arrived, 'cause he had his hat an' coat on his arm."

"What did he want with you?"

"He axed me why Hamilton hadn't called fo' him at de Capitol as ordered, an' when I tole him dat Hamilton was a-sittin' in de stable doin' nuffin, he said I was ter go right out an' send him to de library—which I done."

"Did you see Senator Carew after that?"

"Yessir. After 'bout fifteen minutes Hamilton cum out lookin' mighty black an' mutterin' under his

A PIECE OF ORIENTAL SILK

breff. Den Marse James rung fo' me ag'in, an' sent me to tell Marse Philip dat he wanted ter see him to onst."

"Was there anything unusual in Senator Carew's manner?" inquired Douglas, who had been listening attentively to the old darky's statements.

"He seemed considerable put out, dat was all," responded Joshua, after due reflection.

"Was Senator Carew irritable and quick-tempered?"

"Mostly he was real easy-going, but sometimes he had flare-ups, an' den it was bes' ter keep outer his way."

"Did you find Mr. Winthrop?"

"Yessir. I gib him de message, an' he went right down to de lib'ary."

"Do you know how long Senator Carew and young Winthrop remained in this room?"

"No, suh. I went ter de fron' doo', an' while in de hall I heard a regular ruction goin' on inside dis room."

"Could you hear what was said?" demanded Brett eagerly.

Joshua shook his head. "I couldn't make out a word, but Marse James' voice was powerful riz an' Marse Philip's, too."

THE MAN INSIDE

"Was that the first time that Senator Carew and Mr. Winthrop have quarreled?"

"Deys had words now and den," muttered Joshua, evasively.

"About what?" broke in Douglas, sharply.

"Oh, nuffin in particular. Marse James uster get mad with Marse Philip 'cause he wore so lazy, an' den he's been adrinkin' right smart, which Marse James didn't like nuther."

"Is Mr. Winthrop a heavy drinker?"

"No, suh, but he's been adrinkin' pretty steady fo' de pas' three months."

"Have you any idea, Joshua, what caused the quarrel yesterday afternoon?"

"Well, it mighter started over Hamilton. Marse Philip persuaded Marse James to keep him las' fall when he was 'bout to discharge him fo' bein' impertinent."

"Did Senator Carew give you a letter to mail yesterday afternoon, or a note to deliver for him?" inquired Douglas thoughtfully.

"No, suh, he did not," Joshua declared with firmness.

"How long have you been with Senator Carew, Joshua?"

"Most thirty years, suh. I worked fust fo' his

A PIECE OF ORIENTAL SILK

father, der ole Ginerol. Ef yo' doan want me fo' nuffin' mo', gen'man, I reckon I'll go an' close up de house fo' de night."

"All right, Joshua," and the butler beat a hasty retreat.

Douglas took out his cigarette case and handed it to Brett. "Formed any new theory?" he asked, striking a match and applying it to the cigarette between his lips.

Brett did not answer at once. "The inquest will make Winthrop and Joshua talk. I am convinced neither of them has told all he knows of this affair," he said finally.

Douglas nodded in agreement. "But the inquest will have to be postponed now. Winthrop is in no shape to appear before it."

"And Miss Carew, who is an equally important witness, is still confined to her bed," volunteered Brett. "Miss Thornton tells me that she cries whenever the subject of the murder is mentioned, and that she is completely unstrung by the tragedy."

"By the way, who is this Miss Thornton?" asked Douglas. "And what does she look like?"

"She is a cousin of Mrs. Truxton, of Georgetown"—Douglas whistled in surprise; Brett glanced at him sharply, then continued: "I am told she is

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Miss Carew's most intimate friend, although about five years older. Miss Thornton must be about twenty-three. She is tall and dark, and has the most magnificent blue eyes I have ever seen in a woman's head."

Douglas drew in his breath sharply. "It must be the same girl whom I knew in Paris, but I had no idea then that she was related to old family friends of mine in Georgetown." He changed the conversation abruptly. "Come, Brett, what theory have you formed?" he asked again with more emphasis.

"I think both Winthrop and Hamilton have a guilty knowledge of Senator Carew's death, but how deeply Winthrop is implicated we have yet to learn."

"But the motive?" argued Douglas. "It is highly improbable that Winthrop killed the Senator because he discharged a worthless servant."

"If we could find that letter which I am convinced the Senator was writing when Winthrop entered the room yesterday afternoon, we would know the motive fast enough," retorted Brett.

"Have you searched Carew's belongings?"

"Yes, all of them, and all the furniture in his bedroom, sitting-room, and bath, as well as the rooms on this floor; but I couldn't find a trace of

A PIECE OF ORIENTAL SILK

it. I have also thoroughly searched his office at the Capitol."

"Did you think to examine the landau? The Senator might possibly have tucked it under the carriage seat."

"I thought of that, and examined the interior of the carriage, but there is no possible place where a letter could be concealed. The carriage has recently been reupholstered in leather and there's no crack or tear where an envelope could slip through."

"Have you inquired at the different messenger services in town?"

"Yes, but there is no record at any of their offices that Senator Carew sent for a messenger to deliver a note yesterday afternoon or night. I also sent word to the post-office officials asking to have an outlook kept, and a search made for a letter franked by Senator Carew and postmarked yesterday."

"It's exceedingly doubtful if you get any results from that quarter, when you don't know when or where such a letter was posted or to what city it was addressed."

"The frank may help," Brett glanced at the clock. "Eleven-thirty—I must be going." He rose. "Did you meet with any success, Mr. Hunter, in the inquiries you said you would make this afternoon?"

THE MAN INSIDE

"In a way, yes. Winthrop was at the Alibi Club, taking supper with Captain Stanton. But Julian Wallace, who was one of the party, told me that Winthrop left the club about twelve-thirty."

Brett whistled. "And he did not reach this house until three hours later! I am afraid friend Winthrop will have much to explain when he recovers his senses."

"Hold on; the Carew carriage returned here a few minutes before one o'clock—when the Senator was found dead inside it. That only left Winthrop less than half an hour to get from the club to Mrs. Owen's residence, a considerable distance, and commit the murder."

"It's not impossible for a man in a motor," declared Brett sharply.

"I thought Senator Carew only kept horses," exclaimed Douglas.

"And so he did, but Winthrop owns an Oldsmobile roadster. I was here at the house when he arrived this morning. The machine has a cover and wind-shield, so he was fairly well protected from the rain. As I said before, Winthrop will have much to explain. I hope you will have an undisturbed night, Mr. Hunter; I told Joshua and the nurses to call you if anything is needed."

A PIECE OF ORIENTAL SILK

"Don't worry about me," laughed Douglas, as the two men stepped into the hall. "I've camped out in much worse places than this room."

"Well, good night. I'll be here the first thing in the morning," and Brett pulled open the door and ran down the steps.

As Douglas replaced the night latch on the front door, Joshua joined him.

"I brunged yo' ~~dis~~ 'comfort'," raising a soft eider-down quilt, which he carried tucked on his left arm. "I thought yo' might like it over yo' on der sofa."

"Thanks very much," exclaimed Douglas, taking it from him.

Joshua followed him to the library door. "I ain't goin' ter bed," he explained. "I couldn't sleep no-how," the soft, drawling voice held a touch of pathos, "Marse James was mighty kind ter me—and thirty years is a mighty long time ter be 'sociated in de fam'bly. So I jes' reckon I'll sit on der window-seat in der hall. Ef yo' want anythin' jest let me know, Marse Hunter."

"All right, Joshua. I'll leave this door open, so you can call me if I am needed. Good night."

Douglas placed the door ajar, and walked over to the well-filled bookcases, and, after some deliberation, selected a book and sat down in the re-

THE MAN INSIDE

volving chair. The book held his attention and he read on and on. He finished the last chapter and tossed the volume on the table, then glanced at the clock, the dial of which registered two-thirty. The upholstered davenport, which stood with its back resting against the length of the desk table, looked inviting, and Douglas rose, extinguished the light, and walked over and lay down.

After placing several sofa cushions under his head he pulled the eiderdown quilt over him, as he felt chilly. The added warmth and the softness of the couch were most grateful to his tired body. He was drowsily conscious of the clock striking; then his last thought was of Eleanor Thornton—beautiful Eleanor Thornton—strange that they should meet again; why, he had actually run away from her in Paris—a few minutes more and he was sound asleep.

Some time later Douglas opened his sleepy eyes, then closed them again drowsily. The room was in total darkness. As he lay listening to the tick-tock of the clock he became conscious that he was not alone in the room. Instantly he was wide awake. He pulled out his matchbox, only to find it empty. As he lay a moment debating what he should do, a soft, small hand was laid on his fore-

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A PIECE OF ORIENTAL SILK

head. He felt the sudden shock which his presence gave the intruder, for the fingers tightened convulsively on his forehead, then were hastily removed. He threw out his hands to catch the intruder, but they closed on empty space.

Swiftly and noiselessly Douglas rose to his feet and stepped softly around the end of the davenport, hands outstretched, groping for what he could not see. Suddenly, his eyes grown accustomed to the darkness, he made out a shadowy form just ahead of him and darted forward. His foot caught in the long wire of the desk telephone and, dragging the instrument clattering with him, he fell forward, striking his face and forehead against the edge of the open door.

"Fo' de lub ob Hebben!" gasped Joshua, awakened out of a sound sleep, and scared almost out of his wits. "Marse Hunter! Marse Hunter! Whar yo' at?"

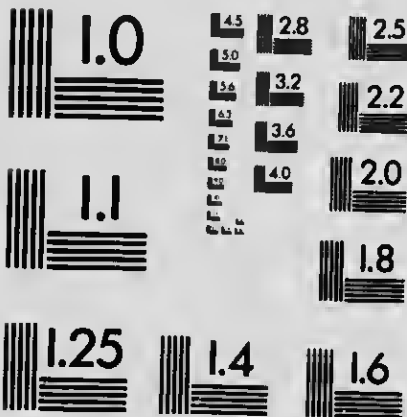
"Here," answered Douglas. "Turn on the hall light; then come to me."

Obediently Joshua groped his way to the button and switched on the light, after which he hastened into the library and did the same there. Douglas, who sat on the floor nursing a bleeding nose, blinked as the strong light met his dazed eyes.



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THE MAN INSIDE

"Did you see anyone leave this room, Joshua?" he demanded.

"No, suh." The butler's eyes were rolling about to an alarming extent, showing the whites against his black face, which had grown gray with fright. "'Twarn't no one ter see—it must ter been a harnt."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Douglas heatedly. The telephone bell was keeping up a dull clicking as the sleepy central tried to find out what was wanted, and he leaned over and replaced the receiver on the hook as he picked up the instrument. "No ghost put out your hall light, and no ghost wears clothes. I caught the intruder's gown, and if it hadn't ripped away I'd have caught her." As he spoke he opened his right hand and disclosed a torn piece of oriental silk.

CHAPTER VIII

KISMET

GOOD morning, Uncle Dana."

The tall, distinguished looking, gray-haired man standing in front of the mantel wheeled around with a visible start of surprise.

"Good Lord! Eleanor, I didn't hear you enter the room. How silently you move, dear."

Eleanor's pretty mouth dimpled into a smile as she kissed her uncle warmly. "I'll send you an ear-trumpet," she declared, saucily. "Come and sit by me on this sofa. Did you get my note this morning?"

"How like a woman!" He dropped down on the comfortable rosewood sofa with a sigh of content. "Of course I received it—why otherwise should I be here?"

"Then you will take the case?" she asked eagerly.

"I am not a criminal lawyer."

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Eleanor's face fell. "Oh, don't refuse," she begged earnestly. "Dear Mrs. Winthrop needs some one to watch her interests, and if, later on, occasion requires a criminal lawyer, which pray Heaven may not be, you can then engage one for her. She was so relieved when I suggested sending for you."

"In what way does Mrs. Winthrop need my services?"

"Why, to take charge of everything"—vaguely. "A man in authority is required here at once."

"Where is Philip?"

"Philip!" Eleanor's tone spoke her contempt. "He is sick in bed—a trained nurse in attendance"—then added quickly, answering her uncle's unspoken question—"too much dissipation has again caused his downfall."

"Um! I don't envy Mrs. Winthrop her precious stepson." Colonel Thornton's pleasant face hardened, and Eleanor, seeing her advantage, pressed the point.

"Mrs. Winthrop is almost overwhelmed with anxiety and sorrow, which she has practically to face alone. Do, Uncle Dana, if it is possible, take some of this dreadful responsibility off her shoulders."

KISMET

"I will do what I can," announced the Colonel, after a moment's deliberation.

Eleanor clapped her hands. "Dear Uncle Dana! I knew you would, when you thought it over. Just a moment—I'll send word to Mrs. Winthrop that you are here; she wants to see you."

Joshua was in the hall, and to him Eleanor confided her message for Mrs. Winthrop, then returned to the drawing-room and seated herself on the sofa by her uncle.

"Did you ever know anyone in Georgetown named Douglas Hunter?" she inquired.

"Douglas Hunter—Douglas—why, surely, he must be the young son of John Hunter who used to be a neighbor of mine in Georgetown. Cousin Kate Truxton can tell you all about the Hunters. She was an intimate friend of John's wife. The Hunters belong to the F. F. V.'s. Why do you ask about Douglas?"

"Joshua told me that he spent last night here, and that he is taking a deep interest in the mystery surrounding Senator Carew's tragic death."

"You must be mistaken," exclaimed Thornton, glancing at her in surprise. "To the best of my recollection Douglas Hunter entered the consular service very soon after he left college; then Carew

THE MAN INSIDE

evinced an interest in his career and had him transferred into the Diplomatic Service. He's not a detective, child."

"Well, he's acting as if he were one—prying around"—Eleanor checked her hasty speech and rose as the portières parted, and Mrs. Winthrop advanced into the room. She was a well-known figure in Washington society. Although small of stature, her erect carriage and graceful movements made her seem taller than she really was. She was said to have the longest calling list in Washington, and, although an aristocrat to her fingertips, she had friends and acquaintances in every walk in life, for she possessed the true spirit of democracy which springs from a kind heart and does not ape humility. She had been of inestimable assistance to her brother, Senator Carew, during his political career.

As Colonel Thornton bowed low over her small, blue-veined hand, he noticed the heavy lines and dark shadows which fatigue and sorrow had traced under her eyes, and his hand closed over hers in silent sympathy.

"It is good of you to come, Colonel," she began, seating herself in a large armchair next the sofa, "and still kinder to offer to advise me, I feel stunned"—she put her hand to her head with a ges-

KISMET

ture pathetic in its helplessness, and her sad eyes filled with unbidden tears. Eleanor put out her hand, and it was instantly clasped by the older woman. "Forgive me, Colonel." She blinked the tears away, and by a visible effort regained her lost composure. "My brother was very dear to me, and——"

"I know no man who had more friends," replied Thornton gravely, as she paused and bit her trembling lips.

"Exactly, therefore his violent death seems monstrous!" declared Mrs. Winthrop. "Who would commit such a deed? My brother's greatest fault was his kind heart—he accomplished so much good unobtrusively. Now, Colonel, the first thing I wish to consult you about is offering a reward for the discovery of his murderer. Can you arrange it for me?"

"Certainly. I think it a wise suggestion. How much shall it be?" Thornton drew out his notebook.

"Five thousand dollars;" then, noting Thornton's expression, asked: "You think it too much?"

"It would perhaps be better to commence with a smaller sum—say one thousand dollars—then you can increase it, if that amount brings no results."

THE MAN INSIDE

"That is a capital plan. Well, James, what is it?" to the footman who had entered a second before and approached her chair.

"Mr. Brett wants to know, ma'am, if you will see him an' Mister Hunter fo' a few minutes. They want to ax yo' a few questions."

Mrs. Winthrop glanced interrogatively at Thornton. "What shall I do?"

"Perhaps it would be just as well to see them," he replied.

"Very well. James, show the gentlemen in here," and, as the servant hastened out of the room, she turned to her two guests. "You must be present at this interview, and I depend on you, Colonel Thornton, to check any undue inquisitiveness on the part of the detective."

"I will, madam," and Thornton's grim tone conveyed more than the mere words. He ranked as one of the leaders of the District bar, and few opposing lawyers dared take liberties with him when trying a case.

Eleanor made a motion to rise, but Mrs. Winthrop checked her with a low-toned "Wait, dear," as Brett, followed by Douglas Hunter, strode into the room.

Mrs. Winthrop acknowledged Brett's bow with a

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courteous inclination of her head, but, as he murmured Douglas' name in introducing him, she rose and shook hands with him.

"I have frequently heard my brother speak of you, Mr. Hunter," she said, "and have regretted not meeting you before," and, as Douglas voiced his thanks, she added, "Eleanor, Mr. Hunter"—and Douglas gazed deep into the beautiful eyes which had haunted his memory since their last meeting in Paris. For one second his glance held hers, while a soft blush mantled her cheeks; then Colonel Thornton stepped forward briskly and extended his hand.

"No need of an introduction here, Douglas," he said heartily. "I should have known you anywhere from your likeness to your father, though I haven't seen you since you wore knickerbockers."

"I haven't forgotten 'Thornton's Nest,' nor you either, Colonel," exclaimed Douglas, clasping his hand warmly. "I about lived on your grounds before I went to boarding school."

"Pray be seated, gentlemen," and, in obedience to Mrs. Winthrop's gesture, Douglas pulled up a chair near hers, while Brett and Colonel Thornton did likewise. "Now, Mr. Brett, what do you wish to ask me?"

THE MAN INSIDE

"Have you any idea where Senator Carew dined the night of his death?"

"Not the slightest," was the positive reply.

"Was it your brother's custom not to inform you where he was dining?" asked Brett.

"Stop a moment," Thornton held up a protesting hand. "Mrs. Winthrop, you cannot be compelled to answer questions put to you by Mr. Brett; he has no legal right to examine you now."

"I am quite aware of that, Colonel Thornton," put in Brett composedly. "I am asking these questions that I may gain a little more light on this mystery. I only saw Mrs. Winthrop for a short time yesterday, and, while I do not wish to intrude, I feel that I can accomplish better results by a longer talk. This tragedy must be investigated thoroughly."

"Very true; but you forget, Mr. Brett, that the inquest is the proper place for bringing out testimony. Mrs. Winthrop will have to appear before it, and, until that is held, she must not be pestered with questions or harrowed by intrusions."

"I am willing to answer all questions within reason," said Mrs. Winthrop, before the detective could reply. "If you mean, Mr. Brett, that Senator Carew was secretive about his movements, you are mistaken. On the contrary, he was most open and

KISMET

above board in his dealings with me. Occasionally, when hurried, he did not tell me his plans for the day, but, as a general thing, I knew all his social engagements."

"Ah, his social engagements," echoed Brett, "how about his official engagements, Mrs. Winthrop?"

"With those I had nothing to do. I never meddled in my brother's political or official career; that was out of my province," was the calm reply.

"Then you think it likely that he dined with some of his official colleagues?"

"I am unable to express an opinion on the subject."

"You had better ask his private secretary what engagements he made for Monday, and with whom he was last seen," broke in Thornton.

"Mr. Philip Winthrop is in no condition to answer questions now. He will be examined before the coroner's inquest when able to leave his room."

"Then I do not see the object of this interview," objected Thornton. "Young Mr. Winthrop is better able to tell you of Senator Carew's movements that day than Mrs. Winthrop."

"I cannot wait so long." Brett shook his head decidedly. "What clues there are will grow cold,

THE MAN INSIDE

and I cannot afford to risk that. I am deeply interested in clearing up this terrible affair."

"And do you think I am less so?" demanded Mrs. Winthrop indignantly. "On the contrary, Mr. Brett, I will move Heaven and earth to find the perpetrator of that dastardly deed. I have just told Colonel Thornton that I will offer a reward of one thousand dollars for information leading to the criminal's arrest."

"Ah, then you do *not* think the negro coachman, Hamilton, guilty?" put in Brett quickly.

"I have not said so," but Mrs. Winthrop looked disconcerted for a second, then regained her usual serenity. "My idea in offering the reward was to assist your investigation, and Colonel Thornton agreed with me that it was an excellent plan."

"Mrs. Winthrop," the detective spoke with greater distinctness, "was Senator Carew on good terms with all the members of his family?"

"He was, sir, with members of this household." Mrs. Winthrop hesitated briefly, then continued, "I think that I had better tell you that, since his return from Panama a short time ago, my brother received a number of threatening letters."

"Indeed," Brett's tone betrayed his satisfaction. "Can I see the letters?"

KISMET

"Unfortunately my brother destroyed the one he showed me."

"What was its contents?" inquired Brett.

"To the best of my recollection the message, which was written in an obviously disguised writing, read somewhat like this:

"Your movements are watched. If you act, you die."

"Did you see the envelope?" asked Brett, as he jotted down the words in his memorandum book.

"No. At the time my brother showed it to me he told me that he had received several others; that he had no idea to what they referred; and that he never paid attention to anonymous communications."

"I see." Brett thoughtfully replaced his notebook in his pocket. "Can I talk to your niece, Miss Cynthia Carew?"

Mrs. Winthrop shook her head. "She is still too prostrated to be interviewed."

"Poor little soul! It was a ghastly experience for her," ejaculated Colonel Thornton.

"It was indeed," agreed Mrs. Winthrop. "She was devoted to her uncle, and he to her. Consequently the shock has driven her half out of her mind."

"Miss Thornton—" Brett turned and faced

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Eleanor—"do you know to whom Miss Carew referred when she exclaimed on greeting you yesterday afternoon: 'They quarreled, Eleanor, they quarreled!'"

Mrs. Winthrop caught her breath sharply.

"Why, her words referred to Hamilton, the coachman," replied Eleanor quietly, and her eyes did not waver before Brett's stern glance.

The detective broke the short silence which followed. "I won't detain you longer, Mrs. Winthrop. I am exceedingly obliged to you for the information you have furnished. Mr. Hunter, are you coming down town?"

Douglas nodded an affirmative as he rose. Mrs. Winthrop and Colonel Thornton detained Brett with a question as he was leaving the room. Douglas seized his opportunity, and crossed over to Eleanor's side.

"How have you been since I saw you last, Miss Thornton?" he inquired.

"Very well, thanks. And you?"—Eleanor inspected him with good-natured raillery: "You look—as serious as ever."

Douglas reddened. "It has been my lot in life to have to take things seriously. I'm not such a Puritan as you evidently think me."

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"Come and see me, and perhaps on better acquaintance"—she paused.

"What?"

"You will improve." Her charming, roguish smile robbed the words of their sting.

"You think then that I am an acquired taste?"

"I have not seen enough of you to know."

"When may I call on you?"

She parried the question with another.

"Why did you leave Paris without saying good-by to me?"

The simple question sobered Douglas. It brought back an unpleasant recollection best forgotten. Eleanor's bewitching personality had always exerted an extraordinary influence over him. He found himself watching her every movement, instinct with grace, and eagerly waiting to catch her smile. In Paris he had often cursed himself for a fool, even when attending a reception just to catch a glimpse of her. She was a born coquette, and could no more help enjoying an innocent flirtation than a kitten could help frolicking. It was her intense femininity which had first attracted him. Frightened at the influence she unconsciously exerted over him, he had deliberately avoided her—and Fate had thrown them together again. It was Kismet! Therefore,

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why not enjoy the goods the gods provided and be thankful?

" 'Time and tide wait for no man,' " he quoted. "I had to catch a steamer at a moment's notice, hence the 'P. P. C.' card. Please show your forgiveness, and let me call."

"And if I don't?"

"Why, I'll come anyway."

Eleanor's eyes twinkled. "Bravo. I like the spirit of young Lochinvar."

"He came out of the West, whereas I come out of the East."

"Oh, well, extremes meet."

"Then don't be surprised if I carry you off." The words were spoken in jest, but the look in Douglas' eyes caused Eleanor to blush hotly.

"Marse Brett am awaitin' fo' yo', suh," said Joshua from the doorway, breaking in on the *tête-à-tête*.

"Oh,—ah,—yes." Douglas was suddenly conscious of the absence of the others. "Miss Thornton, I had no idea I was detaining you. Please say good-by to Mrs. Winthrop and your uncle. I never realized in Paris that you belonged to *the* Thorntons in Georgetown."

"You never took the trouble to make inquiries

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about me?" She surprised a look in Douglas' face—why did he appear as if caught? The expression was fleeting, but Eleanor's eyes hardened. "Good-bye," she turned abruptly away, without seeing his half-extended hand.

Douglas looked anything but pleasant when he joined Brett, who stood waiting for him in the vestibule. They strolled down Massachusetts Avenue for over a block in absolute silence.

Brett was the first to speak. "When you were eating breakfast I saw Annette, Miss Thornton's French maid, and questioned her in regard to the dressing gowns worn by the Carew household."

"What luck did you meet with?" inquired Douglas, rousing from a deep study.

"She says Mrs. Winthrop, Miss Carew, and Miss Thornton all wear dressing gowns made of oriental silk."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Douglas, much astonished. "Still, they can't be the same pattern."

"It won't be so easy to identify your midnight caller by means of that silk," taking out the slip which Douglas had torn from the dressing gown the night before. "Annette says the gowns were given to Mrs. Winthrop and Miss Carew by Miss Thornton, who purchased them, with hers, at a Japanese

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store in H Street. The French girl isn't above accepting a bribe, so when I suggested her showing me the gowns, she got them and brought them into the library, while Mrs. Winthrop and Miss Thornton were breakfasting in Miss Carew's boudoir."

"Did you see all three of them?"

"Yes, and they are as alike as two peas in a pod. And, Mr. Hunter," his voice deepened impressively, "I examined them with the greatest care, and not one kimono was torn—nor had any one of them ever been mended."

CHAPTER IX

AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT

THIS gentleman has called to see you, sir," and the messenger handed a visiting card to the Secretary of State, who laid his pen down on his desk and carefully inspected the card.

"Show Mr. Hunter in," he directed, then looked across at his stenographer. "You need not wait, Jones."

As the stenographer gathered up his papers and hastened out of the room, Douglas was ushered in, and after a few words of greeting the Secretary motioned him to take the large leather chair placed beside his desk.

"I was sorry not to find you when I called yesterday, Mr. Secretary," began Douglas.

"I was detained in the West and did not get here until this morning. What do you wish to see me about, Mr. Hunter?"

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"First, to thank you for granting me a leave of absence."

"That is all right. Senator Carew came here and asked as a particular favor to him that you be allowed to return to Washington. By the way, his death was terrible, terrible. His loss will be felt by the whole country."

"It will, indeed," agreed Douglas.

"Did you see Senator Carew before his death?"

"No, Mr. Secretary; I only reached Washington on Monday, the night of his murder."

"It seems an outrage in these days of our boasted civilization that a man of such brilliant attainments, a man whose life is of benefit to his country, should be killed wantonly by a worthless, drunken negro," exclaimed the Secretary, with much feeling.

"You believe, then, that Senator Carew was murdered by his servant?"

"I gathered that impression from the newspapers, and they all insist that the negro is guilty. Do you think otherwise?"

"I do."

"And your reasons?"

"The use of the letter-file, an extraordinary weapon for a negro coachman to use."

"Is that your only reason for believing the negro

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innocent?" The Secretary's piercing eyes studied Douglas' face intently.

"No, sir."

"Is there anything which strikes you as being of vital importance in the case which has not yet been brought out?"

"Senator Carew was chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee."

The Secretary stared at Douglas for a full minute without speaking.

"I don't quite catch your meaning, Mr. Hunter," he said finally.

"Let me explain, Mr. Secretary," began Douglas earnestly. "Some time ago I received a letter from Senator Carew *suggesting* that I apply for leave of absence."

"Why?" snapped out the Secretary.

"He did not specify directly," returned Douglas calmly; "he said he wished to consult me about my future. One moment"—as the Secretary opened his lips to speak. "At the end of the letter the Senator added that he hoped I was making the most of my opportunities; that it was only the part of wisdom to inform myself of all that was going on in Japan, and that he expected that I would be able to give him some interesting data about the 'Yankees

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of the East,' as he had always been curious as regards their customs, past history, and future plans."

The Secretary settled back in his chair and fumbled with his watch chain. He was the first to break the silence. "Did you follow Senator Carew's advice?"

"I did, sir."

"With what results?"

"Among other things I discovered that there was an unusual activity commencing in the shipyards; army maneuvers were being conducted unostentatiously, and finally, the day I sailed, I heard a report that three transports were being fitted out at Waka-yama, a closed port, and were to sail shortly under sealed orders."

"Excellent! Have you any idea of the transports' destination?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you not send me this information before?" the Secretary spoke with unwonted sternness.

"I did cable a cipher despatch to Senator Carew. I thought you had requested him to get certain information, and did not care to have it sent through the Department directly."

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"The Senator did not take me into his confidence in the matter," declared the Secretary, studying his companion's face intently.

"That's very strange," muttered Douglas. "Very strange. Detective Brett, who is investigating the Carew case, declares, from writing found on a blotter, that the Senator wrote a letter to some unknown person. On one side of the blotter were clearly traced the words: 'Am writing in case I don't see you before . . . '—and on the other: 'I have discovered . . . ' Brett thinks Senator Carew was interrupted on two occasions while writing the letter, and laid the blotter on the fresh ink to prevent the person who entered from seeing what he had written."

The Secretary followed Douglas' story with the greatest attention. "A likely hypothesis," he acknowledged, slowly settling back in his revolving chair, for he had been leaning forward on his desk the better to catch every word spoken by Douglas in his quiet monotone. "To whom do you think that letter was written?"

"To you, undoubtedly, Mr. Secretary. Possibly my information may have given him the clew he needed to verify certain suspicions. You were in the West, he wanted to get the news to you without

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further delay, and the only thing he could do was to write or wire."

"Or telephone," supplemented the Secretary; then, as Douglas' face brightened, he added, "Unfortunately for your theory Senator Carew did none of those things."

"You mean——?"

"That I have never received a letter, a telegram, or a telephone from him while I was away," announced the Secretary solemnly.

"He may still have written a message and have been killed before he could get it off to you."

"Has such a letter been found by Brett?"

"No, sir; nor any trace of it. So far, he has been unable to find out whether such a letter was seen or posted by any member of the Senator's household. All he has to go on is the blotter."

"Why did you not go at once to see Senator Carew when you arrived in Washington?"

"Because my cousin, Captain Taylor, who met me at the Union Station, gave me a note from Senator Carew asking me to call on him at nine o'clock Tuesday morning at his residence."

"How did the Senator know where a note would reach you?"

"He enclosed it in a note to my cousin asking him

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to see that it was delivered to me at once on my arrival."

"Has it occurred to you that Senator Carew's missing letter, which Brett is so anxious to find, may have been addressed to you?"

"I never thought of that!" exclaimed Douglas, "I was so thoroughly convinced that he had tried to communicate with you."

"I would inquire about your mail if I were you, Mr. Hunter."

"I will do so at once," Douglas half rose.

"No, no, sit down." The Secretary waited until Douglas had resumed his seat. "Where are you stopping?"

"At the Albany."

"You have brought me very serious news, Mr. Hunter. So serious that I must insist on some verification of your statements about Japan before you leave me."

Douglas took from a cleverly concealed pocket in the lining of his coat a number of sheets of rice paper and handed them to the Secretary, who studied the closely written papers long and intently. Suddenly he pulled open a desk drawer and took out his strong box.

"I will keep these papers, Mr. Hunter, for future

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reference," he announced, unlocking the box and placing the rice papers in it. Then, with equal care, he replaced the box in the drawer, which he locked securely. "We must go slowly in this matter. A slip on our part, and two great nations may become involved in a needless and bloody war."

"I realize the gravity of the situation, Mr. Secretary, and have come to you for advice in the matter."

"Good. I depend on you not to mention our conversation to anyone, nor do I think it wise to acquaint Brett at this time with your suspicions in regard to the motive for Senator Carew's murder. With all good intentions Brett might blunder and cause international complications."

Douglas stroked his clean-shaven chin reflectively for a moment. "Don't you think, Mr. Secretary, that there is danger of being too secretive, and that the guilty party may slip through our fingers?"

"It is a risk which we will have to take. Frankly, I think you and Brett are equal to the situation. The Secretary glanced at his watch. "Have you any engagement just now, Mr. Hunter?"

"No, sir. My time is at your disposal."

The Secretary reached up and touched the electric

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buzzer hanging above his desk, and in a few seconds his stenographer appeared from another room.

"Jones, call up Secretary Wyndham and ask if he can see me," and, as the clerk disappeared to execute his order, he turned back to Douglas. "There are certain charts of the Pacific which I wish you to see; they have been made recently. Well, Jones?" as the clerk reentered his office.

"Secretary Wyndham is expecting you, sir."

"Thanks. Now, Mr. Hunter, get your hat, and we will go to the Navy Department."

CHAPTER X

THE THEFT

THE Secretary of State and Douglas hastened through the wide corridors of the immense State, War, and Navy Building. As they passed an elevator shaft in the navy wing, Douglas caught a fleeting glimpse of Eleanor Thornton in one of the lifts as it shot downward toward the ground floor. On their arrival they were ushered at once into Secretary Wyndham's private office.

"Glad to see you," exclaimed Wyndham, "your call is most opportune"—he stopped on seeing Douglas standing behind the Secretary of State, and his eyebrows went up questioningly.

"This is Mr. Douglas Hunter, attaché of the American Embassy at Tokio, Wyndham," explained the Secretary of State.

"How are you, sir." The Secretary of the Navy shook hands brusquely. "Will you both be seated?"

"I brought Mr. Hunter with me that he might tell you of certain information which he gathered

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in Japan about some prospective movements of their navy." He glanced significantly at Douglas, who nodded understandingly, and without more words gave a clear, concise statement of naval affairs in Japan, omitting all mention of other matters.

Secretary Wyndham listened to his remarks with the closest attention. When he ceased speaking Wyndham sprang from his chair and, walking over to the adjoining room, spoke to his confidential clerk, then closed the door and returned.

"I have told him to admit no one," he explained briefly, as he seated himself in his swivel chair.

"May we see the new charts of the Pacific?" inquired the Secretary of State, moving his chair closer to the other's desk.

"Certainly; but first I must tell you of a remarkable occurrence which took place here earlier this morning." A violent fit of coughing interrupted Wyndham, and it was some minutes before he could speak clearly. "Ah!" he gasped, tilting back in his chair and mopping his flushed face, "a spring cold is almost impossible to cure."

"I don't think yours will be improved if you continue to sit in a direct draft," remonstrated the Secretary of State, pointing to the open windows.

"I had to have air. By George! man, if you had

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been through what I have this morning——” he did not complete his sentence.

“What happened?” asked the Secretary of State, with growing interest.

“The plans of the two new dreadnaughts have been stolen.”

“Impossible!” The Secretary of State half started from his chair.

“Impossible? Well, I’d have said the same five hours ago,” dryly.

“Were they stolen from this office?” asked Douglas.

“Yes, and not only from this office, but under my very eyes.”

“How?”

“To give you both a clear idea I must go into details,” Wyndham drew his chair up closer and lowered his voice. “About twelve o’clock my private secretary brought me word that a man wished to see me personally. Of course, I have daily callers who all wish to see me personally, and usually my secretary takes care of them. This particular caller refused to give his name and said he would explain his business to me alone. I thought he was simply a harmless crank, and told my secretary to get rid of him as soon as possible.” Wyndham sighed. “In

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a few minutes my secretary was back in the office, saying that the stranger had a message for me from Senator Carew."

"A written message?" asked the Secretary of State.

"No, a verbal one. With everyone else in Washington, I have taken great interest in the terrible murder of my old friend. The man's statement aroused my interest, and, having a few minutes of leisure, I told my secretary to show him in."

"What did he look like?" inquired the Secretary of State, deeply interested.

"A tall, dark chap; his hair and beard were black, and he had the bluest eyes I've ever seen in human head."

"Was he well dressed?"

"No, his clothes were shabby but fairly neat. He looked as if he had spruced up for the occasion. I can't say I was prepossessed in his favor by his appearance."

"Did he give you his name?"

"No."

"Do you think he was an American?" put in Douglas.

"It's hard to say. At first I sized him up as being a Spaniard."

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"Didn't you ask his name?" again inquired the Secretary of State impatiently.

"I did, and his errand. He ignored my first question, and in answer to the second said that he had come to examine some records. I informed him that he had come to the wrong office, and that my clerk would direct him to the proper room. He then made the astounding statement that he had an appointment to meet Senator Carew here in this office at twelve o'clock. I was taken completely by surprise by the man's statement and asked: 'What day did you expect to meet Senator Carew here?'

" 'This morning, at twelve o'clock,' he answered, and then added, 'He is late.'

"Thinking the man a little daft or drunk, though I could detect no sign of liquor, I said abruptly, 'A likely tale; Senator Carew is dead.'

" 'Dead!' he shouted, springing out of his chair.

" 'Yes, dead—murdered last Monday night.' I hadn't anticipated giving him such a shock, or I would have broken the news more gently. The effect on my visitor was appalling. He collapsed on the floor in a fit. The electric bells in this office are out of order, and, although I shouted for help, no one heard me. I sprang out of my chair, undid the man's necktie and collar, threw the contents of my

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ice pitcher in his face, and then bolted into the other room to get assistance. Most of the clerks had gone out to their lunch. I called two men who happened to be eating their lunch in an adjoining room, and we hastened back here only to find my strange visitor gone!"

"Gone!" ejaculated the Secretary of State.

"Vanished. The only sign of his presence was the spilled ice water on the floor, and that chair overturned," pointing to the one Douglas was occupying.

"Did no one see him slip out of the door into the hall?" asked Douglas.

"No. Unfortunately the messenger, who sits near my door, had gone into the room across the corridor. The man made a quick getaway, and luck broke with him, for no one noticed him leaving the building."

"How do you know he isn't hiding somewhere?" inquired Douglas.

"If he is, he will be captured, for Chief Connor and a number of Secret Service men are searching the building."

"When did you discover the plans of the battle-ships were missing?"

Wyndham swore softly. "That's the devilish

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part of it," he said bitterly. "As soon as I realized the man had really run away I glanced over my papers. Everything seemed to be all right. I pulled open this drawer," opening it as he spoke, "and saw these blue prints lying exactly as I had placed them under this folded newspaper. I slammed the drawer shut, thinking my strange visitor was simply a harmless lunatic, who had probably read about Carew's death until he became obsessed with the subject, and dismissed the matter from my mind."

"Was this drawer locked when your strange visitor was admitted?"

"No."

"Then anyone might have stolen the papers," exclaimed the Secretary of State in surprise.

Wyndham reddened. "No, they could not. The only time I've been out of this room was when I ran out looking for aid for that miserable scoundrel. That is the only chance there has been to steal the papers."

"You think, then," began Douglas, checking his remarks off on his fingers, "first, that the whole thing was a plot; that the man used Senator Carew's name to arouse your interest or curiosity; that he faked a fit, and in your absence removed the plans and substituted false blueprints, taking a chance that

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you would simply look to see that everything was safe in your drawer and not examine further, and then made his escape."

"You've hit it exactly," acknowledged Wyndham. "Those were the conclusions reached by Chief Connor also."

"It was no irresponsible person who committed that theft," declared the Secretary of State thoughtfully. "It was a well-laid plot, neatly carried out. How long have the papers been in your possession, Wyndham?"

"They were sent here yesterday for my inspection. There has been a leak here somewhere, damn it!" Wyndham set his bulldog jaw. "I'll trace it to the bottom, and when I find out——" he clenched his fists menacingly.

"What callers did you see besides the Spaniard?" asked Douglas.

"Let me see—the usual run, several office seekers, a number of naval officers—oh, yes, my wife came in with Colonel Thornton and his niece, Miss Eleanor Thornton."

"Before or after the Spaniard had been here?" questioned Douglas swiftly.

"Shortly afterward. They came in about a quarter of one and did not stay long."

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"After you had discovered the loss of the plans?"

"No, before. I only discovered their loss three-quarters of an hour ago."

"How long were your wife and her friends in this office?" inquired Douglas persistently.

"About fifteen minutes."

"Then how does it happen that I saw Miss Eleanor Thornton descending in one of the elevators when the Secretary and I were on our way to this office to see you?"

"Oh, Miss F'ancer told me that she was going to the library to look up the records of some of her ancestors, as she wishes to join the Colonial Dames. I think she has been up there ever since. My wife and Colonel Thornton left together without waiting for her."

"You are absolutely certain, Wyndham, that you haven't been out of this office except on that one occasion?" asked the Secretary of State for the second time.

"I will take my Bible oath on it," exclaimed Wyndham solemnly.

The three men gazed at each other in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. The Secretary of State was the first to recover himself.

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"Have you had your lunch, Wyndham?" he inquired.

The latter shook his head. "I've lost my appetite," he growled.

The Secretary of State rose and placed his hand on the broad shoulder of the younger man. "Don't take it so much to heart, Wyndham," he said kindly. "We'll get at the bottom of this tangle before long. We'll all stand by and help you, and, remember, Chief Connor is a host in himself."

"Thanks," Wyndham straightened his bent shoulders; his face was set and his eyes snapped as the spirit of the born fighter returned. "I'll move Heaven and earth until I catch that Spaniard. Must you both be going?"

"Yes." The Secretary of State answered for Douglas as well as for himself. "We have detained you quite long enough. Let me know immediately of any new developments."

"I will. Mr. Hunter, it's been a pleasure to meet you, although I am afraid the information you have given me, considered with the loss of the plans of the new battleships, complicates the situation. Good-bye, come and see me again," and the big door swung shut.

Halfway down the corridor the Secretary of State

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paused and regarded Douglas seriously. "Talk of complicated situations——" he passed his hand wearily over his forehead, then started with sudden resolution. "Come on, Hunter, I'm going over to the White House; a talk with the President may clear my brain. Wyndham may have lost his appetite, but he's given us food for thought."

CHAPTER XI

OVER THE TEA CUPS

CYNTHIA turned a flushed and tear-stained face toward Eleanor, as the latter entered the boudoir and approached her couch.

"Is it all over?" she asked, choking back a sob.

"Yes." Eleanor lifted her black crêpe veil, and, pulling out the hatpins, removed her hat and handed it to Annette, who had followed her into the room. "Take my coat, too, Annette," she directed, "then you need not wait." As the servant left the room she pulled a low rocking-chair up to the couch on which Cynthia was lying, and placed her hand gently on the weeping girl's shoulder. "Are you feeling better, dear?"

"A little better." Cynthia wiped her eyes with a dry handkerchief which Annette had placed on her couch some moments before. "Oh, Eleanor, I am so bitterly ashamed of the scene I made downstairs."

"You need not be." Eleanor stroked the curly,

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fair hair back from Cynthia's hot forehead with loving fingers. "It was a very painful scene, and Dr. Wallace's tribute to Senator Carew, while beautiful, was harrowing. I am not surprised you fainted, dear."

"Aunt Charlotte didn't, and she was so devoted to Uncle James."

"Mrs. Winthrop had not been through your terrible experiences of Monday night. Consequently, she had the strength to bear to-day's ordeal with outward composure."

"Was it very dreadful at the cemetery?"

"No, dear. The services at the grave were very simple, and, as the funeral was private, it attracted no morbid spectators."

"Did anyone accompany you?"

"Just the handful of people who were here for the house services."

"Where is Aunt Charlotte?"

"She went to her room to lie down."

Cynthia raised herself on her elbow and glanced searchingly about the pretty sitting-room filled with its bird's-eye maple furniture. The yellow wallpaper, with its wide border of pink roses, chintz curtains and hangings, cast a soft yellow glow, which was exceedingly becoming, as well as restful to the

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eye. The afternoon sunshine came through the long French windows which overlooked a broad alley.

"Eleanor, would you mind closing the door of my bedroom," she asked, "and please first see that—that Blanche isn't sitting there sewing."

Eleanor glanced curiously at Cynthia as she rose, crossed to the adjoining bedroom, and softly closed the door. "There is no one in your room," she reported, on her return to her rocking-chair.

Cynthia settled back among her pillows with an air of satisfaction. "At last I have you to myself. First the trained nurse, whom I didn't need, and then Aunt Charlotte, have always been hanging around, and I haven't had a chance to ask you any questions."

"What is it you wish to know?"

"Was there—was there—an autopsy?" Noting Eleanor's expression, she exclaimed hastily: "Now, Eleanor dear, *don't* say I must not talk of Uncle James' death. The nurse wouldn't answer me when I spoke on the subject; said I must not think of the tragedy, that it was bad for me. Such nonsense! I would have asked Aunt Charlotte, but she's been so queer lately, not in the least like her own dear self."

"Mrs. Winthrop is living under such great strain

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these days, Cynthia, it's not surprising. Her brother dead—Philip very ill——”

“They told me he was better,” hastily jerked out Cynthia, with a startled look in her big, brown eyes.

“He is, now,” Eleanor hesitated. “The doctor at first thought he might develop brain fever, but I am told all danger of that is past.”

“What is the matter with him?” persisted Cynthia. “I asked the nurse what the trouble was, but she never told me. Was his attack also caused by the shock of Uncle James’ death?”

“Yes, from shock,” answered Eleanor, mechanically. “You must not blame your aunt if her manner is distraught; she is a very reserved woman and dreads, above all things, letting herself go and breaking down.”

“Oh, I hope she will keep well, she has been so unhappy. I can’t bear to think of her suffering more, but,” she laid her hand pleadingly on Eleanor’s arm, “you haven’t answered my question about the autopsy.”

“Yes, they held one.”

“And what was discovered?” eagerly.

“That Senator Carew was perfectly well physically, and that his death was caused by a stab from the sharp-pointed letter file.”

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Cynthia suddenly covered her eyes with her hand, and lay for some minutes without speaking. "Is Hamilton still in jail?" she questioned finally.

"Yes, he is being held for the inquest."

"Inquest?" Cynthia glanced up, startled. "I thought the inquest was over."

"No, it hasn't been held yet."

"But Uncle James was buried to-day."

"The funeral could not be postponed, Cynthia. The doctors who performed the autopsy will testify at the inquest."

"But I thought it was always necessary to hold the inquest after a violent death."

"It is usually, but in this case the inquest was postponed because you and Philip, two of the most important witnesses, were too ill to attend it."

Cynthia closed and unclosed her tapering fingers over her handkerchief spasmodically. "Are the detectives still hanging around the house?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"It's shameful!" announced Cynthia, sitting upright, "to allow those men to intrude on our grief and privacy. They have arrested Hamilton for the crime, and should leave us alone."

"They do not think Hamilton guilty."

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"Whom—whom—do they suspect?" The question seemed forced from her.

"Mr. Brett hasn't confided in me."

"Mr. Brett?"

"He's the detective in charge of the case."

"Oh, is he the tall, fine-looking man I saw talking to Joshua in the hall yesterday morning?"

"No, that was probably Douglas Hunter."

"Douglas Hunter? Not the Douglas Hunter of the Diplomatic Corps, whom Uncle James was forever talking about?"

"The same. Do you know him?"

"No, he has always been absent from Washington when I've been in the city. What is he doing here now?"

"Trying to help Mr. Brett solve the mystery of Senator Carew's death."

"Good Heavens! What earthly business is it of his?"

"Don't ask me," Eleanor's usually tranquil voice was a trifle sharp. "I suppose he is hoping to win the reward offered by Mrs. Winthrop."

"Reward?" Cynthia's voice rose, and drowned the sound of a faint knock at the hall door.

"Yes. Your aunt announced that she would give five thousand dollars to anyone who could solve the

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mystery." Cynthia was listening with absorbed attention to Eleanor, and neither noticed that the hall door was pushed open a few inches, then softly closed. "Uncle Dana told her that was too much to offer, and she reduced the sum to one thousand dollars, with the proviso that it should be increased if the first offer brought no result."

Cynthia sighed deeply. "Why, why did she do it?" she cried passionately. "She must be mad!"

Eleanor glanced at her companion in astonishment. "Cynthia, you must not excite yourself," she remonstrated firmly. "Otherwise, I shall leave you."

Cynthia rushed out and clutched her arm. "Don't go," she cried. "I must——" her words were interrupted by a sharp rap on the hall door. "Come in."

In response Annette opened the door. "Pardon, Mademoiselle, but it is five o'clock, and I thought you might like your tea up here instead of downstairs."

"Capital, Annette," exclaimed Eleanor, as the maid entered carrying a tray. "Wait a moment, and I will get that small table." Deftly she removed the books and magazines, and then carried the table over to the couch. Annette put a tray

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laden with tempting sandwiches, small cakes, the teapot and its accessories, on the table, then bent over and arranged Cynthia's pillows at her back with practiced hand.

"Mademoiselle is more comfortable, *n'est ce pas?*" she asked briskly.

"Yes, indeed, Annette," Cynthia nodded gratefully at the Frenchwoman.

"Have you everything you wish, Mademoiselle Eleanor?"

"Yes, Annette, thank you. If I want anything more I will ring."

"Be sure and close the door, Annette," directed Cynthia, "I am afraid of a draft"; and she looked around until she saw her order obeyed.

"Have a sandwich?" asked Eleanor, handing the dish and a plate to Cynthia.

"I'd rather eat good sandwiches than solid food," announced Cynthia, after a pause, helping herself to another portion.

"Solid?" echoed Eleanor. "I call *pâté de foie gras* and deviled ham pretty solid eating, Cynthia; especially when taken in bulk," glancing quizzically at the rapidly diminishing pile.

"Don't begrudge me these crumbs." Cynthia's smile was followed by a sigh. "I've lived on slops

OVER THE TEA CUPS

for three days. Why are you giving me such weak tea, Eleanor? I loathe it made that way."

"I am afraid to make it stronger, Cynthia, it will keep you awake."

"I don't want to sleep; I'd give anything *not* to sleep!"

"Why, Cynthia!"

"If I could really sleep—drop into oblivion—I would like it, but instead I dream, and, oh, God! I fear my dream."

Eleanor laid a restraining hand on her shoulder. "Lie down," she commanded, "and compose yourself."

Cynthia lay back on her pillows, panting a little from her exertion, the color coming and going in her winsome face.

"I would give anything, Eleanor, if I had your tranquil disposition," she said, more quietly. "I cannot help my temperament. My mother was Scotch to the fingertips, and, I have been told, had the gift of second-sight—although I sometimes doubt if such a thing is a gift."

"Perhaps I can understand better than you think," said Eleanor gently. "My mother was Irish, and the Irish, you know, are just as great believers in the supernatural as the Scotch."

THE MAN INSIDE

"You always understand," Cynthia bent forward and kissed her friend warmly. "That's why you are such a comfort. Let me tell you why I am so nervous and unstrung. Since a little child I have been obsessed by one dream, it is always the same, and always precedes disaster." She sighed, drearily. "I had it just before my grandmother's death; then before my uncle, Mr. Winthrop, killed himself; and on Sunday night I had it again." She shuddered as she spoke.

"What is your dream?"

"It is this way: I may be sleeping soundly, when suddenly I see a door—a door which stands out vividly in a shadowy space, which might be a room, or hallway—the door is white and the panels are in the shape of a cross, so"—illustrating her meaning with her arms—"I hear a cry—the cry of a soul in torment—I rush to the rescue, always to find the door locked, and wake myself beating on the empty air"—she shuddered as she spoke, and drew her kimono closer about her. "I awake cold and trembling from head to foot."

"You poor darling," Eleanor took the limp form in her arms with a gesture of infinite understanding and compassion.

"I had the dream Sunday night," sobbed Cynthia,

OVER THE TEA CUPS

"then Monday, when I thought we could announce our engagement——"

"Whose engagement?" asked a quiet voice behind the pair. Startled, Eleanor wheeled around to find Mrs. Winthrop standing behind her, as Cynthia slipped from her arms and buried her head in the friendly cushions, her slender form shaking with convulsive sobs.

CHAPTER XII

A COUNCIL OF WAR

PHILIP WINTHROP moved restlessly in bed, then lay still, for a feeling of deadly nausea almost overcame him. Half an hour passed, and, feeling better, he raised his hand and felt his throbbing temples. Wearily he tried to collect his ideas, but all appeared confused.

What was it that he had promised? Slowly his torpid conscience awoke. "For value received"—the phrase held a double meaning which penetrated even his dulled senses. He could not afford to lie there like a bump on a log any longer. He opened his eyes; apparently it was late, for the room was in total darkness, save for a streak of light which came from the half-open hall door.

With an effort Philip raised himself on his elbow and glanced about him, but even that slight exertion was too much in his weakened state, and, with a groan, he slid back on the pillows. For some seconds he lay without moving, but the yellow patch of

A COUNCIL OF WAR

light troubled him, and he rolled over on his side facing the wall. He struggled apathetically to piece together the occurrences of the past few days. Suddenly he caught the sound of a light step and the swish of skirts approaching his bed.

The next instant a glass was thrust under his nose and placed gently against his mouth. He raised his hand and pushed the glass away from him. "G'way," he stammered faintly; "leave me 'lone."

Apparently no attention was paid to his request, for the glass was again placed at his lips. Again he tried to thrust it from him, but his feeble efforts made no impression against the strong wrist. His resistance only lasted a few minutes, then his weaker will surrendered to the stronger, and he sipped the medicine obediently, after which the glass was withdrawn.

Downstairs in the library three men sat smoking around the large desk table.

"I am glad you could join us to-night, Colonel Thornton," said Brett, as he placed one of the ash-trays conveniently near the lawyer. "Three heads are better than one, and it is time we got together and discussed certain features of this case."

THE MAN INSIDE

"Quite right, it will help us to a clearer understanding," agreed the Colonel.

"Then suppose, Mr. Hunter, that you first tell us any theories which you may have formed."

Douglas dropped the paper-cutter he was balancing in his hand, and, leaning on the table, looked seriously at his companions. "I think," he said deliberately, "that Philip Winthrop has a guilty knowledge of Senator Carew's death, if he is not the actual murderer."

"Your reasons," demanded Colonel Thornton.

"There was bad blood between them, that has been proved," Douglas picked his words with care. "Possibly the quarrel was brought about because Senator Carew had found out something discreditable in Philip Winthrop's past. He had a responsible position as the Senator's private secretary, and there is a chance he betrayed his trust."

"In what way?" asked Brett eagerly.

"It may be that he is in the pay of some lobby anxious to influence important legislation." Douglas, mindful of the Secretary of State's caution, was feeling his way with care.

"Senator Carew was the last man to be influenced by such a character as Philip Winthrop," said Thornton contemptuously.

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"He may not have tried to do so, but simply have betrayed valuable information of committee plans and caucus."

"That may be," acknowledged Thornton, "particularly as I am told that Philip has been spending a great deal of money lately; far more than his salary would warrant."

"'Value received.'" Douglas shrugged his shoulders expressively. "I have also found out that Hamilton, the coachman, is a Jamaican negro, his real name being Samuel Hamilton Quesada, and that he was brought here nearly two years ago by young Winthrop when he returned from a visit to Jamaica. The Senator took him into his employ at the former's request and recommendation."

"And your theory is?" questioned Brett sharply, laying down his cigar.

"That Winthrop either bribed Hamilton to kill Senator Carew, or to help him after he, Winthrop, had committed the murder. You must remember," he added hastily, as Brett started to speak, "the Jamaican negro has a revengeful disposition when roused, and I have no doubt Senator Carew gave him merry hell when he discharged him Monday afternoon, and Hamilton was ready to risk everything to get even."

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Brett shook his head. "How did Senator Carew get into that carriage?" he asked doubtfully.

"Hamilton probably lied when he said he did not first stop at this house on his way to the ball to bring Miss Carew home. Or perhaps Winthrop came into this room, found Senator Carew busy writing, stole up behind him, seized the letter file and stabbed him with it."

Again Brett shook his head. "If that had been the case, the Senator would have been stabbed in the back; whereas he was stabbed directly over the heart, and whoever committed the crime was facing him."

"Well, that is not impossible," argued Douglas. "Winthrop may have stood near the Senator's chair and talked to him for a few minutes without the latter suspecting danger, may have even picked up the letter file, a harmless thing to do under ordinary circumstances, and, without warning, thrust it into the Senator's chest."

"And afterward?" questioned Brett.

"Afterward—Winthrop may have stepped into the hall, found no one there, tip-toed into the room again, telephoned"—pointing to the desk instrument—"out to the stable and told Hamilton to drive at once to the front door. The sound of the horses'

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hoofs was probably drowned by the heavy rain, so no one in the house would have heard the carriage enter the *port-cochère*, but"—impressively—"Winthrop, from this window, could see its arrival. He probably stepped into the hall again, found the coast clear, opened the front door, dashed back, picked up Senator Carew, who was much smaller than he, carried him out and placed him inside the carriage. Hamilton had been drinking, and was perhaps too befogged to notice anything unusual, and, when Winthrop slammed the carriage door, he probably drove off none the wiser."

"As much as I dislike Philip Winthrop I do not think him capable of committing murder," said Colonel Thornton, slowly. "Secondly, I believe, no matter how secretly you think the murder was planned, that, if Philip were guilty, Mrs. Winthrop would have some inkling of it, and if their quarrel was so serious she would have known it, and would naturally try to hush matters up. Instead of which, she is the first to offer a reward, a large reward, mind you. It is not within reason that she would have done such a thing had she the faintest idea that Philip was the murderer."

"I beg your pardon, Philip is not her son. There may be no love lost between them."

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"Good God! what a suggestion. You don't mean to insinuate that she offered that reward knowing her stepson might be guilty." Thornton looked at Douglas with sudden horror.

For reply Douglas nodded quietly.

"No, no, Douglas, you are shinning up the wrong tree. I have known Mrs. Winthrop for over fifteen years; she wouldn't injure a fly, let alone try to trap one whom she loves as her own flesh and blood. She was devoted to her husband, and for his sake legally adopted Philip and brought him up as her own son; in fact, she was entirely too indulgent and generous, which has proved his downfall. He hates work like a nigger."

"Mr. Hunter has drawn a strong case against Philip Winthrop, except for one serious flaw," broke in Brett, who had been a silent listener to their argument. "And that is that Philip Winthrop was at the Alibi Club on Monday evening. A number of reputable men are willing to swear to that. It is certain that he could not have been in two places at once. Secondly, Mrs. Winthrop swears that her brother spent Monday evening away from this house." Brett leaned forward and spoke impressively, "Senator Carew was killed by another hand than Philip Winthrop's."

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"By whose hand?" asked Thornton and Douglas simultaneously.

"Captain Frederick Lane."

"Fred Lane, of the Engineer Corps?" ejaculated Thornton, much astonished, while Douglas looked as blank as he felt.

"Yes, sir."

"Bah! you're mad."

"Just a moment," Brett held up a protesting hand. "Don't condemn my theory unheard. I seemed up against a blank wall in this house, so to-day I started an investigation at the other end; that is, at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. James Owen, where Miss Cynthia Carew attended a dance on Monday night."

"Go on," urged Douglas, as Brett stopped and glanced behind him to see that the hall door was closed.

"I called on Mrs. Owen. She was not inclined to be communicative, but her daughter, Miss Alice Owen, who came in during our interview, let the cat out of the bag, and Mrs. Owen had to tell then what she knew, which was this: that Captain Lane and Miss Carew were engaged——" a muttered word escaped Colonel Thornton, and Brett turned to him instantly, "I beg pardon, did you speak?"

"No," growled the Colonel.

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"Apparently they had planned to announce the engagement at the dance," resumed Brett. "Anyway, Miss Owen, who already knew of it, was told by Miss Carew that her uncle, the Senator, refused to give his consent, and had threatened to turn her out of doors if she did not instantly break the engagement."

"Poor Cynthia, poor little girl," murmured Thornton, "I am very fond of her, and her father was my most intimate friend. It was beastly of Carew to issue such an ultimatum. She is entirely dependent upon him."

"So Miss Owen thought. Miss Carew confided her troubles to her on her arrival. Miss Owen said that while they were sitting in the library Captain Lane came in looking very dejected, and she immediately got up to leave the lovers together. Before leaving the room, however, she overheard Lane tell Miss Carew that he had just seen her uncle, hoping to persuade him to reconsider his refusal, but that he flatly refused to do so in the most insulting terms."

"Upon my word, for a mild-tempered man, Carew managed to have plenty of quarrels on his hands on Monday," exclaimed Thornton.

"And the last one undoubtedly brought about his death"; Brett spoke so positively that Douglas

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hitched his chair nearer in his excitement. "After I had finished my interview with Mrs. Owen I asked permission to question her servants. The footman told me that Miss Carew left the dance earlier than the other guests, and that she had to wait a long time for her carriage. He said he called her carriage check number repeatedly, and with no result. That Captain Lane, becoming impatient, put on his overcoat and hat and walked down the street searching for Miss Carew's carriage."

"And you think?" broke in Douglas.

"That Captain Lane not only found the carriage but the Senator sitting in it, and seized the opportunity to punish him for his deviltry to the girl he loved."

A long pause followed as Colonel Thornton and Douglas sat thinking over Brett's startling news.

"Where did he get the weapon?" inquired Douglas finally.

"Out of Mrs. Owen's library, of course. He may have picked it up in a fit of absent-mindedness and carried it with him."

"Did the footman or butler notice anything in his hand when he left the house?" questioned Thornton.

"I asked them, and they declared that he carried an umbrella in his left hand, and that they had not

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noticed whether he was holding anything in his right hand or not. The footman declared that it was raining so hard that it was impossible to see anything clearly. They both said Captain Lane was some fifteen minutes returning to the house."

"Did he find the carriage?"

"He told the footman that he hadn't, and ordered him to keep calling the number, which he did, and soon after the carriage drove up."

"Of all the cold-blooded propositions!" ejaculated Douglas. "Do you honestly mean that you think Lane deliberately put the girl he loved into the carriage to sit beside the man he had just murdered?"

"I do," firmly, "and I stake my reputation as a detective that Captain Lane is guilty. You were with me, Mr. Hunter, when I overheard Miss Carew exclaim, as Miss Thornton entered her bedroom on Tuesday—"They quarreled, Eleanor, they quarreled.'"

"She may not have been alluding to Captain Lane," declared Douglas stoutly; "she may have referred to Philip Winthrop. He also quarreled with Senator Carew."

"Philip is very much in love with Cynthia and wishes to marry her," volunteered Thornton quietly.

"Is that why Senator Carew objected to her en-

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agement to Captain Lane?" asked Brett. "Did he wish her to marry Philip Winthrop?"

"I never heard that he did"; Thornton paused and reflected a moment. "I might as well tell you, for you will probably hear it from some one else eventually, that there has been a feud of long standing between the Lanes and Carews."

Douglas whistled. "A Montague and Capulet affair?" he inquired.

"Exactly. Carew and old Governor Lane were political rivals. Lord! how they hated each other! They almost tore Maryland asunder when running for the governorship, which Lane won by a few votes. Carew charged fraud, which, however, was never proved. They cherished their animosity to the day of Governor Lane's death, and I can imagine it was a terrible shock to Carew to find that his dearly loved niece wanted to marry the Governor's son."

"What sort of a fellow is Lane?" asked Douglas.

"A fine specimen of the American gentleman," exclaimed Thornton enthusiastically, "a soldier, every inch of him, brave to a fault; he has twice been mentioned in orders for gallant conduct—just the sort of a fellow a romantic young girl like Cynthia would fall head over heels in love with."

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"In naming his virtues you have overlooked his greatest fault," said Brett calmly. "He has a fiendish temper, and, when provoked, falls into the most insane rages, so his brother officers tell me."

"You are making out a black case against him," agreed Douglas, "but there is one point you seem to have overlooked, and that is, did the letter file used to kill Senator Carew belong to Mrs. Owen?"

"That is the one flaw in my case," acknowledged Brett regretfully. "She declines to answer the question."

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CHAPTER XIII

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

THERE'S a note done cum fo' yo', suh," announced the elevator boy lounging in the doorway of the Albany as Douglas stepped inside the entrance of the apartment hotel. "I'll get it," and visions of a tip caused the mulatto to hasten his leisurely footsteps to the small office to the left of the entrance. In a few seconds he was back at the elevator shaft, where Douglas stood waiting, and handed him a square envelope stamped with the words "State Department" in the left-hand corner. "Wanter go to yer room, suh," slipping the expected coin in his trousers' pocket.

"Yes." The door slammed shut, and the elevator shot upward. "Anyone been to see me or telephoned, Jonas?"

"No, suh." The mulatto brought the cage to a standstill at the third floor, and Douglas stepped out and hastened to his tiny apartment. Throwing his

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hat and cane on the bed, he drew a chair to the open window, having first made sure, with a caution which had grown upon him, that the hall door was securely locked, and that the chambermaid was not loitering in the vicinity. As he opened the note an enclosure fell into his lap, and, without looking at it, he perused the few written lines. It was from the Secretary of State.

Dear Mr. Hunter: [he read] So far, no further developments. When people are at play they are usually "off guard." I enclose an invitation to the garden party at the White House this afternoon, for which I asked. The Diplomatic Corps will attend in a body. I hope to see you there.

Very truly yours—

Douglas picked up the enclosed envelope with the words "The White House" stamped in small gold letters in the upper left-hand corner, and pulled out the engraved card. The gold eagle crest at the top of the invitation was almost stared out of countenance, so long and so steadily did he regard it, as he slowly weighed in his mind the events of the past three days.

If the desk file used to kill the Senator did belong to Mrs. Owen, then Brett had woven strong circumstantial evidence around Captain Lane. Was it pos-

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sible that the young officer, incensed at Senator Carew's threat to turn his niece, Cynthia, out of doors, and goaded past endurance by a possible tongue lashing at their last interview, had seized the opportunity offered by chance and killed Carew, an hereditary enemy? From time immemorial family feuds had, alas, often led to murder.

If so, what, then, became of his own theory of an international intrigue? Were Senator Carew's interest in things Japanese, his desire to see Douglas, the information gleaned by the latter in Japan, the untimely death of the Senator, and last—the theft of the plans of the new battleships—were these simply coincidences?

Douglas roused himself and glanced at the hour mentioned in the invitation—five o'clock. Jerking out his watch he found he had but half an hour in which to change his clothes before he was due at the White House.

Shortly afterward Douglas walked through Lafayette Square on his way to the eastern entrance of the White House. A long queue of smart turn-outs and motors stretched along Pennsylvania Avenue from Seventeenth Street to Executive Avenue, as the short street between the Treas-

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ury Department and the White House is called.

The policeman on special duty scrutinized his card of admission carefully before allowing him to pass down the corridor and out into the garden.

The President and his wife were receiving on the lawn under a huge blossoming chestnut tree near the south portico. As Douglas waited in line to approach the President, he glanced about him with great interest. He had been to many brilliant functions in other countries, but he decided in his own mind that he had seldom seen a more beautiful setting for an entertainment than that afforded by the stately mansion and its surrounding gardens. The lovely rolling grounds, with their natural beauty, and the towering white shaft of the Washington Monument in the background, made a picture not easily forgotten.

The full dress uniforms of the military and naval aides on duty added to the brilliancy of the scene. The Marine Band, their scarlet coats making a vivid touch of color against the huge fountain with its myriad sprays of water, were stationed on a raised platform far down the lawn. The southern breeze carried the stirring airs they were playing to Douglas' ears and sent the hot blood dancing in his veins. Or was it the sight of Eleanor Thornton, looking

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radiantly beautiful, which set his heart throbbing in a most unusual manner? Some telepathy seemed to tell her of his presence, for she looked around, caught his eye, and bowed.

He had kept moving as the guests ahead of him advanced, and the next moment he was being presented to the President by the military aide stationed in attendance at the latter's elbow. He had but time to receive a hearty handshake and a cordial word of welcome from the President and the "first lady of the land," for the other guests were waiting impatiently to greet them, and he could not loiter.

"Douglas Hunter! as I'm a sinner!" A hearty slap on the shoulder emphasized the words, and Douglas wheeled around and found Captain Chisholm, of the British Royal Artillery, addressing him. "The idea of your being here and not letting me know, old chap," he added reproachfully, as they shook hands.

"I didn't know you were in town," declared Douglas. "Thought you were still in Paris."

"I was transferred to the embassy in Washington three months ago. Upon my word, Douglas, I took you for a ghost when I first saw you. I was under the impression that you were stationed at Tokio."

"So I am; I am only here on leave of absence." The Englishman's eyebrows went up. "I had to at-

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tend to some Washington property, which has been recently left me. This is my native heath, you know."

"I wasn't aware of it," dryly; "but then, Douglas, you are perpetually springing surprises, like your nation, on us benighted foreigners."

"Anything to drink around here?" inquired Douglas. "I am as thirsty as a herring."

"There is some excellent champagne punch, come along," and the tall Englishman led the way to a long table placed under the trees near the tennis courts, where refreshments were being served. They corraled a colored waiter, and soon were sipping iced punch as they stood at some distance from the crowd about the table and watched the animated scene.

"I didn't want to come to Washington," acknowledged Chisholm, after a moment's silence, "but now, I'd hate to leave it. The people are delightful, and I have never met with such genuine hospitality."

"You are right; Washington people never forget you. Go away for ten years, and on your return you will be greeted just as warmly as to-day."

"Don't talk of going away, I've only just come," laughed Chisholm. "'Pon my word, Douglas, this seems like old times. I can almost imagine myself

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back in Paris, the chestnut trees in blossom, which remind me of the Parc Monceau, help the illusion. And there's another illusion"—nodding his head toward Eleanor Thornton, who stood at some distance talking to two staff officers—"or, I should say, a *delusion*." He smiled gayly, but there was no answering smile on Douglas' face. Not noticing his companion's silence, the Englishman added, "Is she still hunting around looking up old files and records?"

Douglas started as if stung. "I don't know," shortly.

"A dangerous habit," commented Chisholm calmly. "If Miss Thornton had not left Paris and gone to Berlin when she did, her interest in government affairs might have led to serious trouble—for her."

"Now, what the devil do you mean?" demanded Douglas hotly.

Chisholm turned and regarded him steadily for a second, then his monocle slipped down and dangled from its silken cord. "There, there," he exclaimed soothingly. "Don't get your rag up, I was only spoofing."

"You have very rudimentary ideas of humor," growled Douglas, still incensed. In his heart he

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knew the Englishman was right; Eleanor Thornton was an enigma. Dare he penetrate the mystery, or was he afraid to face the issue?

Chisholm laughed good-naturedly. "Miss Thornton is looking at you, Douglas; don't let me detain you. I'll see you again before I leave here."

Douglas hesitated. "I'll be back soon, Chisholm," he said and walked across the lawn to join Eleanor.

The Englishman looked after him with speculative eyes. "Still touched in that quarter," he muttered, twirling his blond mustache in his fingers. "Too bad, Douglas is such a bully good chap, and she——" he was not allowed to indulge in more reflections, as he was seized upon by a bevy of pretty girls and forced to dance attendance upon them for the remainder of the afternoon.

Recollections of his last interview with Eleanor troubled Douglas. How would she greet him? His doubts were soon put at rest, for at his approach Eleanor put out her hand and greeted him warmly. The two staff officers, who were introduced to Douglas, saw they were *de trop*, and, after a few minutes, made their excuses and departed.

"Will you have an ice or sandwich?" inquired Douglas.

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"Neither, thanks; I have already been helped."

"Then suppose we stroll down to the fountain. We can't hear the Marine Band with all this chatter," and he glanced disgustedly at the joyous crowd about them.

Eleanor laughed. "Don't be hard on your fellow creatures, if you are out of sorts."

"What makes you think that?"

"You looked so cross when talking to Captain Chisholm. I am sorry you found your topic of conversation so boring."

"What do you mean?"

"You both glanced so frequently at me that I naturally concluded I was under discussion."

"On the contrary, we were discussing—masked batteries." She scanned him covertly, but could get no inkling of his thoughts from his blank expression. "Captain Chisholm has a fatal habit of talking shop whenever he gets a chance. Isn't that Colonel Thornton beckoning to us over there?"

"Why, so it is. Shall we walk over and join him?" She paused to exchange a few words of greeting with several friends, then turned back to Douglas smilingly: "Come," and he suited his steps to hers as they started across the lawn. "How long will you remain in Washington, Mr. Hunter?"

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"Until the sale of some property of mine is completed," briefly. "I asked for you this morning, Miss Thornton, thinking you might care to go for a motor ride, but they told me that you were lying down and could not be disturbed."

"They? Who?" swiftly. "This is the first I have heard of your call."

"Indeed? Why, I spoke to Annette when I reached the Carew residence this morning."

"Annette!" in growing astonishment, "*Annette* told you I was indisposed and could not be disturbed?"

"Yes. My cousin had loaned me his car for the morning, and I thought it just possible that a run in the fresh air might set you up after the funeral yesterday."

"It was good of you to think of me, Mr. Hunter." She raised her eyes in time to see the Secretary of State regarding her intently as they strolled past him. He lifted his hat courteously and returned their words of greeting, but his face was grave as he paused and watched them moving through the throng. "I am sorry about this morning," continued Eleanor, "Annette and I will have a reckoning when we reach home."

"Would you have gone with me?" eagerly.

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"Yes." Douglas bent to catch the monosyllable. Her foot turned on the uneven ground and he put his hand on her arm to steady her. As his fingers closed over her soft, rounded arm, he instinctively drew her closer. The warmth of her skin through her glove thrilled him.

"I hope you will ask me again," she said.

"To-morrow—will you go with me to-morrow?" insistently.

"Yes." She met his eyes for a second, then glanced away, while a hot blush mantled her cheeks. "Provided, of course, that Cynthia Carew does not need me." Then in a louder tone, "Well, Uncle Dana, how are you?"

"Feeling splendidly. No need to ask about you and Douglas"—he smiled quizzically. "I am glad that you could come here to-day, Eleanor."

"I did not wish to, but Cousin Kate Truxton insisted that I had to bring her here. She declared that she would not come otherwise, and made such a point of it that I could not refuse, particularly as Mrs. Winthrop and Cynthia would not hear of my remaining with them."

"I have just come from there," responded Colonel Thornton; "Cynthia came into the library while I was talking to Mrs. Winthrop, and I was

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shocked by her appearance. The child has wasted away."

"Is it not pitiful?" exclaimed Eleanor. "It nearly breaks my heart to see her suffering. She neither eats nor sleeps."

"Can't you give her an opiate?" asked Douglas.

"She declines to take one."

"Can't you administer it surreptitiously?"

"I have a better plan than that," broke in Colonel Thornton. "The child needs a change of ideas. The atmosphere of the house is enough to get on anyone's nerves, particularly with that dipsomaniac, Philip, raising Cain at unexpected moments."

"What's your plan, Uncle Dana?"

"That you bring Cynthia over to my house tomorrow to spend Sunday. You come, too, Douglas. Cynthia hasn't met you, and she won't connect you with any of the tragic occurrences of the past week." Then, as he saw the look of doubt on Eleanor's face, he added, "Human nature can stand just so much of nervous strain and no more. Cynthia must have relaxation and diversion."

"But I don't think Mrs. Winthrop will approve of her going out so soon after the funeral," objected Eleanor doubtfully.

"Bah! That nonsense belongs to the dark ages.

'AT THE WHITE HOUSE

What good will Cynthia's staying in that gloomy house do poor Carew? I'll drop in to-morrow morning and see Mrs. Winthrop; leave the matter to me, Eleanor. There is no earthly reason why she should object. I'll ask Cousin Kate Truxton also."

"Cousin Kate!" echoed Eleanor, her conscience smiting her. "Where has she gone?"

"I left her talking with Senator Jenkins some time ago." The Colonel glanced behind him. "Speaking of angels, here she comes now."

Mrs. Truxton was walking leisurely in their direction. Seeing that they had observed her, she waved her parasol and hastened her footsteps.

"Cousin Kate, I think you already know Mr. Hunter," said Eleanor, as the older woman reached her side.

"Indeed I do," Mrs. Truxton extended both her hands, her face beaming with smiles. "Why haven't you been to see me, Douglas?" she added reproachfully.

"I have been extremely busy since my arrival, Mrs. Truxton," apologized Douglas. "I was looking forward to calling upon you this Sunday."

"Have you had a pleasant time this afternoon, Kate?" asked Thornton.

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"Yes. It has been a delightful entertainment, just the right people and the right number."

"It would be pretty hard to crowd these grounds," laughed Eleanor.

"There isn't any elbow room about the refreshment table," put in Thornton; "I almost had to fight to get a plate of ice cream a few minutes ago."

"A much needed improvement would be small chairs scattered about the lawn," grumbled Mrs. Truxton, leaning heavily on her parasol. "It is exceedingly tiresome having to stand so long."

"It would be prettier, too, and less formal," agreed Eleanor. "The guests would then saunter over the lawns and not stand crowded together near the President."

"It would also be much more brilliant if the members of the Diplomatic Corps wore their Court dress," announced Mrs. Truxton with decision, "instead of those hideous frock coats and gray trousers."

"What, in this weather, Kate?" exclaimed the astonished Colonel. "Do you wish to kill off the Corps bodily? They wear their Court dress only at the state receptions and the diplomatic dinners held at the White House every winter, or when Royalty is present."

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"I know that," pettishly. "But it would improve the brilliancy of this affair."

"Even with the objectionable frock coat," laughed the Colonel, "this is a scene characteristic of the national capital alone. Nowhere else in this country can such a gathering of distinguished men and women be brought together."

"You are quite right in that," acknowledged Mrs. Truxton. "I've seen ten presidents come and go, and I have lived to see Washington develop in a way which would have surprised the founders. Mercy on us, look at 'Fuss and Feathers.'" She nodded toward an overdressed, pretty little woman who was advancing in their direction.

"Mrs. Blake has certainly outdone herself," agreed Colonel Thornton, as he and Douglas raised their hats in greeting to the pretty woman who strolled past them. "I wonder she doesn't make you wish to break the eighth commandment, Eleanor."

"Why?" exclaimed his niece.

"On account of her collection of magnificent rubies"—Eleanor changed color—"I thought that stone was one of your 'fads.'"

"I like *all* jewelry." The slight emphasis was lost on her companions. Eleanor fingered her parasol

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nervously and glanced uneasily over her shoulder to where Douglas stood beyond earshot, talking to an old friend. "But I shall spend my time in wishing—I can never hope to rival Mrs. Blake's collection."

"Marry a rich man and persuade him to give you rings and necklaces," advised Thornton. Eleanor moved restlessly.

"Mrs. Blake looks like a jeweler's window," broke in Mrs. Truxton, in her uncompromising bass. "Such a display at a garden party is unpardonable. It is extremely bad taste for any woman to wear to the White House more jewelry than adorns the President's wife."

Thornton laughed outright. "Few women will agree with you, Kate. By the way, why didn't you come to the telephone last night? I wanted to speak to you particularly. It wasn't late when I called."

"I gave Soto, Eleanor's cook, his English lesson last night, and when we got to a present participle used in a future sense to indicate a present intention of a future action I was so tired I had to go to bed," explained Mrs. Truxton, as Douglas rejoined them.

"After that I am only surprised that you ever got up again," ejaculated the Colonel.

"Cousin Kate nearly worries herself sick teaching

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Soto," laughed Eleanor. "I only wish you had heard her describing the Kingdom of Heaven to him. She introduced some new features into that Kingdom which would probably surprise the Presbyterian synod. I suppose she didn't want to disappoint his great expectations."

"Is Soto a Jap?" asked Douglas, curiously.

"Yes. I prefer Japanese servants, and both Soto and Fugi have been with me for some time," said Eleanor. "Do you know, Uncle Dana, I have just discovered that Fugi has studied five years at the American school in Japan, two years at the Spencerian Business College, and is a graduate of Columbia University."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mrs. Truxton. "After this I shan't dare to ask him to pass me the bread. What did you want to say to me on the telephone, Dana?"

"I wanted some facts about the late Governor Lane of Maryland, and, knowing you were a walking encyclopedia, I thought you might help me out."

"Of course I can. Do you——"

"Hush!" exclaimed Eleanor anxiously. "Here comes Captain Lane."

Douglas scanned the tall young officer approaching them with keen interest. His uniform set off his

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fine figure to advantage, and his face was one to inspire confidence.

"How are you, Mrs. Truxton," he said. "Miss Eleanor, I've been searching the place for you. Won't you come and see the rose garden with me? Oh, I beg pardon, Colonel, I didn't see you at first."

"That's all right, Lane. Have you met Mr. Hunter?"

"No. How do you do, sir." Lane wrung Douglas' hand. "Glad to know you."

"It is time for us all to go," declared Mrs. Truxton. "We must say good-bye. Come with me, Douglas, I want to ask you some questions about your family."

As the small group strolled toward the White House, Colonel Thornton was buttonholed by an old friend. Mrs. Truxton, with Douglas in tow, crossed the ground to where the President was standing talking to several late arrivals.

"Now's our time," whispered Lane in Eleanor's ear. "The rose garden is to our right." He said no more until they had passed the south portico and walked down the path leading to the wonderful box hedges which surround the rose garden. They had the place to themselves, and Eleanor exclaimed with

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pleasure at the beautiful flowers which were blossoming in profusion.

"How is Cynthia?" demanded Lane, stopping in the middle of the garden path and regarding his companion intently.

"Almost a nervous wreck."

"My poor darling!" The soldier's strong face betrayed deep feeling. "I wish I could comfort her." His voice changed. "Miss Eleanor, why does she refuse to see me?" Eleanor hesitated perceptibly. "Wait, let me finish. I have called repeatedly at the Carews', only to be told that Cynthia is confined to her room; I have written notes which I have given personally to Joshua to deliver, and have never received an answer to one of them.

"I love Cynthia with all my heart and soul," Lane's voice shook with feeling, "and I would have sworn, before her uncle's death, that my affection was returned. I cannot understand her avoidance of me, and her silence cuts deep"—Lane stopped a moment and cleared his throat—"Miss Eleanor, you are Cynthia's most intimate friend, and you are with her constantly. You must have heard of some reason for her treatment of me."

Eleanor nodded without speaking. She heartily wished the interview was over.

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"Then I implore you to tell me the reason of Cynthia's silence."

"Cannot you imagine that for yourself?" began Eleanor; then, as Lane shook his head, she added: "Cynthia is overwrought, every action on Monday night seems distorted——" She again hesitated and bit her lip—"You went to look for her carriage; you were gone a long time, and when she entered the carriage her uncle was sitting there—dead."

Slowly her meaning dawned on Lane. "Good God! You don't mean——?" he staggered back, his face gone white.

"Yes."

"And she thinks *that*! Cynthia, Cynthia, had you so little faith?" Lane's agony was pitiful.

"You must not be unjust to her," cried Eleanor, her loyalty up in arms. "Remember, you had just told her of your fearful quarrel with her uncle; she had also seen you playing with a letter file when you were with her in the library——"

"But, great Heavens! I didn't take that out in the street with me," exclaimed Lane passionately. "I tell you what it is, Miss Eleanor, I must see Cynthia and explain this terrible tangle. Can you help me meet her?"

Eleanor considered for a moment. "I have al-

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ready urged Cynthia to see you, but she has been so unnerved, so unstrung, that I could not make her see matters in a reasonable light. I think the best thing for you to do is to meet her when she least expects it."

"Capital! Can you arrange such a meeting?"

"My uncle, Colonel Thornton, has asked Cynthia and me to go to his house in Georgetown to-morrow and spend Sunday. I think Mrs. Winthrop will permit Cynthia to go, and, if that is the case, you can call there to-morrow night."

"Good." Lane paced the walk restlessly for a minute, then returned to Eleanor's side. "It's pretty hard to wait so long before seeing her," he said, wistfully.

Eleanor held out her hand. "Don't be discouraged; Cynthia loves you devotedly."

"God bless you for those words!" Lane caught her hand and raised her slender fingers to his lips.

"Miss Thornton," said a cold voice back of them, "Mrs. Truxton is waiting for you," and Eleanor flushed scarlet as she met Douglas' eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MOTH AND THE FLAME

DUGLAS brought the powerful roadster to a standstill under the *porte cochère* of the Carew mansion, and disentangling himself from among the levers and wheel, ran up the few steps. Before he could ring the bell the door was opened by Colonel Thornton.

"Come in," he exclaimed heartily. "I saw you from the drawing-room window, and, as Joshua has gone to ask Mrs. Winthrop if she can see me, I thought I would let you in and not keep you standing outside."

"Thanks, Colonel." Douglas followed the older man into the drawing-room. "Have you seen Miss Eleanor?"

"No. Here, don't sit on that gilt-edged insecurity," as Douglas pulled forward a parlor chair. "This sofa is big enough to hold us both. Tell me, are there any new developments in the Carew case?"

"Only that Brett is convinced Captain Lane is

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guilty, and, from what he said this morning, I should not be at all surprised to hear of the latter's arrest."

"Good Lord! you don't say so. Poor, poor Cynthia. I greatly fear another shock will prove most dangerous in her present nervous condition."

"Has Mrs. Winthrop consented to Miss Carew's spending to-morrow at your house?"

"I don't know yet——" Colonel Thornton stopped abruptly as the portières parted and a woman stepped into the room. Thinking it was Mrs. Winthrop, he started to rise, but it proved to be Annette, and he sank back in his seat.

"*Bon jour, Messieurs,*" Annette readjusted the portières with care, then walked with catlike quickness over to where the men were sitting. "Mistaire Hunter, you are investigating ze death of Senator Carew, *n'est-ce pas*, and you, Monsieur," turning to Colonel Thornton, "are Madame Winthrop's man of affairs?"

"Well, what then?" asked Douglas quickly.

"Only that I may be of help."

"Indeed?"

"Oui, Messieurs," calmly. "I know—*much*."

"Good," Thornton's tone betrayed his satisfaction. "Go ahead and tell us."

"Ah, *non, non, Monsieur,*" Annette shook her

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head violently. "First, I must have some monie."

"What, a bribe?" Douglas spoke with rising indignation.

"*Non, Monsieur*; a reward."

"You must first tell us what you know," explained Thornton patiently. "Then, if your information leads to the arrest and *conviction* of the murderer, you will be paid the one thousand dollars offered by Mrs. Winthrop."

"One thousand dollars, did you say, *Monsieur*? *Non*, I will not sell my news for that."

"It is the amount offered by Mrs. Winthrop."

"But Madame Winthrop is willing to give five thousand." Annette glanced eagerly at the two men.

"My news is worth that."

Thornton shook his head. "Mrs. Winthrop has reconsidered, and will not give more than one thousand," he declared with finality.

An obstinate frown marred Annette's pretty face. "I will not take less than five thousand," she announced with emphasis.

"You go too fast," broke in Douglas quietly. "First, the reward will not be paid until after the murderer is convicted; secondly, your information may be of no value whatever."

"Zo?" Annette's smile was not pleasant. "Zen I

THE MOTH AND THE FLAME

keep my news to myself," and she started for the door.

"Wait," commanded Thornton. "Come back here." Then, as she obeyed, he added in a more kindly tone: "If your information is really valuable, Annette, I am willing to advance you some money. But first you must tell us what you know and suspect."

"How much?"

"Say fifty dollars," drawing out his leather wallet and extracting several yellow backs which he held temptingly in his hand.

"Not enough, Monsieur."

Thornton lost all patience. "I shan't offer you another damn cent," and he thrust the money back into the wallet.

Annette's eyes flashed. "Very well, Monsieur le Colonel; I go. But when I come back you will have to pay me more—but yes—more than that beggarly five thousand!" and with a stamp of her foot, she turned and hastened out of the room.

"A nice she-devil!" remarked Thornton, *gazing* blankly at Douglas.

"I think——" Douglas stopped speaking as the *portières* were again thrust aside and Eleanor walked in.

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"Uncle Dana, Mrs. Winthrop is waiting to see you in the library. Oh, Mr. Hunter, good morning"—her slender hand was almost lost in his firm clasp—"I did not know you were here."

"I called hoping that you might care to take a motor ride," said Douglas quickly.

"Why, yes, with pleasure." She sank down on the sofa and motioned Douglas to draw up a chair.

"Eleanor," broke in Thornton, returning from the hall door, "did you tell that precious maid of yours that Mrs. Winthrop would give five thousand dollars reward for information leading to the conviction of the murderer of Senator Carew?"

"Annette!" in profound astonishment. "No, certainly not; I've never spoken to her on the subject. Where did you get such an idea?" Her voice rose to a higher key.

"She has just been here and insists that we pay her five thousand for some information which she declares will solve the puzzle of poor Carew's death."

Eleanor smiled incredulously. "Nonsense, I don't believe she knows a thing about it." Her bright color had faded and she gazed anywhere but at the two men.

"It may be," suggested Douglas thoughtfully,

THE MOTH AND THE FLAME

"that while in this house she has found a certain paper for which Brett is searching."

"That's possible," agreed Thornton. "It was announced in yesterday's papers that a reward of one thousand dollars had been offered. But what gets me is how Annette knew Mrs. Winthrop might raise the amount to five thousand—the very sum, in fact, which she first thought of offering."

"I'm sure I don't know." Eleanor frowned in perplexity.

"Is she a good servant?" inquired Douglas.

"I have always found her honest and reliable. She brought me excellent recommendations when she came to me in Paris, where I engaged her," replied Eleanor.

"It may be that the mystery has gone to her head," suggested Thornton, "and she is inspired to play detective."

"Personally, I think she is taking advantage of the present situation to extort money," objected Douglas.

"I believe you've hit it," exclaimed the older man. "Tell Brett, Douglas, he may be able to induce Annette to tell what she knows. I must go now and see Mrs. Winthrop."

"Let me know what she decides about Sunday,"

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called Eleanor, as Thornton, for the second time, hurried out of the room.

"You are looking tired, Miss Thornton," said Douglas, glancing at her attentively.

"I didn't get much sleep last night. Cynthia was miserable, and I sat up with her until five o'clock this morning."

"No wonder you are worn out." Douglas looked his concern. "I really think a motor ride would do you lots of good. Do keep your promise and come for a spin."

Eleanor glanced doubtfully down at her pretty house gown. "If you don't mind waiting while I change——"

"Why, certainly."

"I won't be long"—and Eleanor disappeared.

Douglas did not resume his seat; but instead paced the room with long, nervous strides. Eleanor was not the only one who had passed a sleepless night. He had sat up and wracked his brain trying to find the key to the solution of the mystery surrounding the Senator's death. Annette must be made to tell what she knew. Perhaps Brett's authority as an officer of the law might intimidate her. It was worth trying. Walking down to the folding doors, which led from the drawing-room to the din-

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ing room, he opened them and found Joshua busy polishing the mahogany table.

"Is there a branch telephone in the house?" he asked, "besides the one in the library? Mrs. Winthrop is in there and I don't want to disturb her."

"Suttenly, suh; dar's one right in de pantry, suh," and Joshua, dropping his work, piloted him to the instrument.

It took him but a few minutes to get police headquarters on the wire, only to find that Brett was out. Whistling softly, he hung up the receiver and went back into the drawing-room. Eleanor had not appeared, and he sat down at the inlaid desk, which was supplied with pen, ink, and paper, and wrote a short note while he waited for her return.

"Where's Eleanor?" asked Thornton, coming into the room and picking up his hat, which he had left on one of the chairs.

"Here," and his niece, who had entered just behind him, joined them. "I am sorry to have kept you so long, Mr. Hunter, but I found Annette had gone out on an errand for Cynthia, and I had to do without her assistance."

"You were very successful." Thornton made her a courtly bow, as he gazed at his beautiful niece. Her fashionable light-gray suit and smart hat were

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extremely becoming. Eleanor colored faintly as she read the admiration in Douglas' eyes.

"What luck did you have with Mrs. Winthrop, Uncle Dana?" she asked.

"The best. She said she thought it an excellent plan. So I shall expect you both this afternoon, Eleanor, and you had better stop and pick up your Cousin Kate Truxton on your way out."

"Very well, I will; but, Uncle Dana, we won't get over to you until just before dinner."

"That will do." The two men followed Eleanor out into the square hall. "Don't forget, Douglas, that I expect you, too."

"That's very good of you, sir," Douglas hesitated, "but don't you think I might be in the way in a family party?"

"A family party is exactly what I wish to avoid," exclaimed Thornton. "Cynthia needs to be taken out of herself. And, therefore, I want you to spend Sunday with us, as if it were a regular house party."

"Then I'll come with pleasure." Douglas helped Eleanor into the low seat of the motor, and clambered in behind the wheel. "I'm awfully sorry there isn't a third seat, Colonel, and that I can't take you where you wish to go."

"I left my car down by the curb; thanks all the

THE MOTH AND THE FLAME

same, Douglas," and Thornton waved a friendly good-bye to Eleanor as the motor started slowly down the driveway.

"If you have no objection, I will stop at the Municipal Building for a moment, Miss Thornton," said Douglas, turning the car into Thirteenth Street.

"I don't mind in the least. What a magnificent motor!"

"Isn't it?" with enthusiasm, as he steered safely between another machine and a delivery wagon. "My chief in Tokio has one just like this, and I learned to run his car."

As they crossed K Street he put on the emergency brakes hard and the motor stopped just in time, as a touring car shot in front of them and disappeared down the street. When the car was again under way, Douglas turned to the silent girl by his side.

"That was the Japanese Ambassador, was it not?"

"Yes."

"He seemed to be in the devil of a hurry; it was a near smash."

"A little too near for comfort." Eleanor drew a long breath. "I noticed some luggage in his car—oh, take care!" as the motor skidded toward the gutter.

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"I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to frighten you," said Douglas, as he applied the brake going down Thirteenth Street hill to Pennsylvania Avenue.

"That chap got on my nerves; I don't care if he is an ambassador, and exempt from arrest, he has no business to be breaking our rules and regulations."

"Come, now, didn't you break some rules when in Japan?" asked Eleanor, her lovely face dimpling into a smile. Douglas started slightly, but she apparently did not notice his discomfiture. "Judging from the luggage in the car, and the rate at which they were going, I imagine the Ambassador was trying to catch a train."

"It does look that way." Douglas brought the car to a standstill before one of the entrances to the Municipal Building. "I won't be a minute, Miss Thornton."

"Don't hurry on my account," called Eleanor after him.

Brett was still out, so Douglas gave the note he had written when waiting for Eleanor at the Carews' to the attendant, first adding a postscript and enclosing it in a large envelope, with instructions that it was to be delivered to the detective immediately on his return. Then, with a lighter heart, he hastened out of the building and rejoined Eleanor.

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"Where do you wish to go, Miss Thornton?" he asked, as they started slowly up Pennsylvania Avenue.

Eleanor considered a moment before answering. "Suppose we go out the Conduit Road," she said finally.

Douglas swung the machine across the broad avenue and through the short street behind the Treasury Department into the drive which circles around the White House grounds. "It's some years since I've been out in this direction, Miss Thornton, so, if I go astray, please put me back on the straight and narrow path."

"Straight out Pennsylvania Avenue and through Georgetown," directed Eleanor, as the big car swung back again into that avenue. "The narrow path only comes after you reach the Conduit."

"Then it should be spelled 'Conduct.' You have been going out a great deal this winter, have you not?"

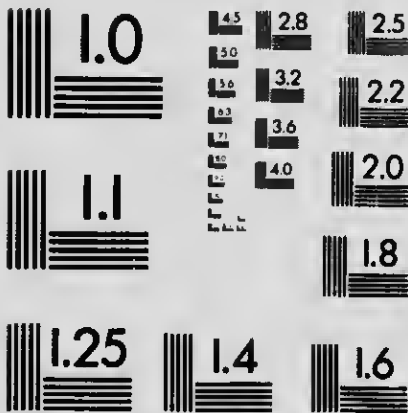
"Yes; Washington has been extremely gay, and I have enjoyed it so much."

Douglas smiled down at her. "And I bet a thousand to one that Washington enjoyed you. I asked about your going out, because I am wondering if, among all the men you've met this winter, you have



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come across a middle-aged man with black hair and beard and very blue eyes?"

Not receiving a reply, Douglas turned and scanned his companion. She sat silent, gazing straight before her. The car sped on for several squares before she roused herself.

"That is a very vague description, Mr. Hunter. Do you remember the man's name?"

Douglas shook his head. "I have never heard it. I only asked because I was under the impression that I saw him with you at the Navy Department on Thursday morning."

"With me—at the Navy Department," gasped Eleanor, sitting bolt upright. She was white to the lips.

"Yes, I thought I saw him talking to you in an elevator. I just caught a glimpse of you as the cage descended past the floor on which I was."

"You are entirely mistaken, Mr. Hunter." Eleanor's eyes did not waver before his questioning look. "I was alone, though I do recollect there was another passenger in the elevator who got out on the first floor, while I continued on down to the basement."

"Then I was mistaken." Douglas slowed the car down to the limit prescribed by law as he crossed

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the M Street bridge over Rock Creek, then increased the speed as they progressed through Georgetown.

"You have aroused my curiosity." Eleanor settled herself more comfortably in the low seat. "Why do you take an interest in a man with blue eyes and black hair?"

"Because I thought he was with you."

"Upon my word!" Eleanor's laugh held a shade of annoyance. "That's a very silly reason."

"I don't think it is," replied Douglas, steadily. "*I am interested* in everything that concerns you."

Eleanor surveyed him keenly. She studied the fine profile, the broad shoulders, and the powerful hands holding the steering wheel. The quiet figure seemed instinct with the vital personality of the man, a living part of the pulsing machine which he was guiding through the narrow, congested street with such skill. They crossed Thirty-seventh Street, and in a few minutes the car leaped ahead up the hill leading to the Conduit.

Eleanor said nothing, and Douglas was equally silent. They had the narrow road to themselves, and he increased the speed. The wheels raced like velvet on the finished macadam. On they sped. Soon Eleanor caught a glimpse of the Potomac below them, and the bright sunlight sparkled on the

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water and on the green foliage of the wooded banks of the Maryland and Virginia shores. They passed the Three Sisters, then the reservoirs, and Douglas saw a straight stretch of road ahead and no vehicle in sight. The next moment the powerful machine, gathering speed, shot down the road, which seemed a narrowing white strip as the revolving wheels devoured the distance.

Douglas turned his eyes a moment from the flying landscape to Eleanor, who sat, tense, fearless, her pulses leaping as the rushing wind stung her cheeks. She caught his look. "Faster, faster," she called. And obediently Douglas threw wide open the throttle. On, on they flew. A wild exhilaration engulfed Eleanor; her spirit seemed to soar, detached from things earthly. She cast a glance of resentment at Douglas who, seeing the road curved in the distance, slackened speed. By the time the big car reached the turning, he had brought it to a standstill near the side of the road.

Eleanor drew a long breath. "Oh, why did you stop?" Her eyes shone like stars. "It was glorious."

"I stopped"—Douglas turned squarely in his seat, and faced Eleanor—"because I want to ask you to confide in me."

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"To do *what?*" Eleanor's deep blue eyes opened to their widest extent.

"To tell me"—Douglas hesitated over his choice of words—"your mission in life."

Eye to eye they gazed at each other. Eleanor was the first to speak.

"I am at a loss to understand your singular request," she said, freezingly.

"Miss Thornton, do me the justice to think that I am not asking from idle curiosity—it is because I have your welfare so deeply at heart."

"If I did not know you to be a sane person, I would think you had suddenly lost your mind. As you take the matter so seriously, I must repeat that I am *concerned in nothing.*"

Douglas held her gaze, as if in the limpid depths of her blue eyes he would fathom the secret of her soul. Eleanor's breath came and went, she colored painfully, but her eyes never dropped before his. Nearer he bent and nearer. The virile strength of the man drew her, and his arms closed about her slender waist.

"Eleanor, I love you." The very repression of his tone added to its intensity.

Fearlessly she raised her lips to his—in surrender.

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Some time later Douglas backed the car a yard or two, then turned it toward Washington, but their return trip was made with due attention to the speed law.

"Will you please tell me—Douglas"—she hesitated adorably over his name—"Indeed, you must not kiss me again"—drawing back as far as the seat would permit. "Why did you avoid me in Paris?"

A shadow passed over Douglas' radiant face, and was gone before Eleanor observed it.

"I suppose you would call it false pride," he said. "I had no money—you had much—and so I worshiped from a distance. Now that my inheritance has made me well-to-do, I felt that I had a right to ask you to marry me. In Paris I thought you would take me for a fortune hunter."

"Which only goes to show what fools men are," exclaimed Eleanor roguishly. "Bend down nearer me"—she placed her mouth close to his ear. "You could have had me for the asking then, dear heart"—his left arm stole about her—"for I know a man when I see one."

"Not a word, remember."

"Madame has my promise." Annette tucked the small roll of bills inside the bosom of her gown, as

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Mrs. Winthrop replaced her pocketbook in her leather handbag.

"Where is Miss Eleanor?"

"Joshua tells me that in my absence Mademoiselle left ze house to motor wiz Monsieur Hunter."

"If she asks for me on her return tell her that I will be back in time to lunch with her and Miss Cynthia."

"*Oui, madame.*" Annette assisted Mrs. Winthrop into her coat, then left the bedroom. From a safe distance down the hall she watched Mrs. Winthrop descend the staircase, and waited until she heard Joshua close the front door after her and retreat into his own domain. She then slipped noiselessly down the hall and into Mrs. Winthrop's bedroom. Half an hour passed before she again appeared, wearing a satisfied smile. The hall was empty. "I have seen what I have seen," she muttered under her breath exultingly, as she proceeded downstairs. "And I think I will haf more monie by to-morrow. *Mon Dieu!*"

The peal of the front bell had startled her from her reverie. As Joshua did not appear to answer it, she crossed the square hall and opened the door. A tall man, wearing nondescript clothes, confronted her in the vestibule.

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"Miss Thornton, is she in?" he questioned. The contrast of his deep blue eyes against his tanned skin and black beard held her attention. Receiving no reply, he repeated his question with emphasis.

"*Non*, Mademoiselle is out in ze motor," she answered, none too civilly.

Without a word he turned on his heel and hastened down the steps. Annette stared up the street after him; then closed the door softly, her pretty forehead puckered in a frown. Where had she seen those eyes before?

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CHAPTER XV

"THORNTON'S NEST"

DOUGLAS, suitcase in hand, ran across Seventeenth Street in time to catch a Georgetown car. As he paid the conductor he heard his name called and, glancing down the half empty car, saw Captain Chisholm seated at the farther end and beckoning to him. He made his way down the center aisle and joined the Englishman.

"Can you dine with me, Douglas?" asked Chisholm, making room for him on the narrow seat.

"Ask me some other time, old man, I am dining with Colonel Thornton to-night."

"Then suppose we make it Monday night at the Metropolitan Club?"

"Thanks, I will. At what hour?"

"Eight o'clock. I was sorry to miss you when you called this afternoon, Douglas."

"How did you know I had been to see you, Chis-

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holm?" in surprise. "The telephone girl told me you were out."

"I stopped for a moment at the Rochambeau and found your card in my letter box. I am on my way to the embassy now. Washington seems to agree with you, Douglas," eying his companion with interest. "I never saw you looking better."

"Happiness is a great health restorer," laughed Douglas.

"Happiness?" Chisholm tugged at his fair mustache. "Hum!" he looked carefully around. They had that end of the car to themselves. "Heard the news?"

"What news?"

"About the Japanese Ambassador?"

"No."

"He has been recalled."

"For what reason?"

"Not given out," shortly. "He called at the White House and State Department, presented his papers and left this morning." Chisholm looked Douglas squarely in the face. "Can't give a poor blasted Englishman a point on the situation, I suppose?"

Douglas smiled with his lips, but his eyes were grave. "I would if I could—but I can't. The Am-

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ambassador's sudden departure is as great a surprise to me as to you."

Chisholm leaned forward and touched the electric button as the car approached N Street. "I'll look you up to-morrow, Douglas. Ta-ta, old chap," and he hurried out of the car.

Douglas settled back on his seat and pondered over the information Chisholm had given him. What did the Ambassador's abrupt departure portend? Was it but another of those puzzling coincidences which seemed to follow in the wake of Senator Carew's murder, or was it the culmination of an intrigue which would end in war?

The spring day was drawing to a close as Douglas left the car in Georgetown and walked toward "Thornton's Nest." The old place had not altered since he had seen it last, twelve years before, even the beautiful old garden appeared as usual, the same box hedge, the envy of the neighboring landowners, separated the sidewalk from the well-kept private grounds. The large, old-fashioned mansion stood back some distance in its own grounds. The bricks had been brought from Philadelphia by sloop, and the fanlight over the front door had been imported from England in the days prior to the Revolutionary War. The huge columns supporting the arched

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roof shone white in the gathering darkness. Douglas turned in at the gate and ran lightly up the few stone steps leading to the portico and rang the bell. He had hardly removed his hand from the button when the hall door was opened and an old darky confronted him on the threshold.

"Cum right in, Marse Douglas, I'se mighty glad ter see yo' ag'in, suh."

"Nicodemus, is that you?" shaking the old man's hand. "I haven't seen you since you chased me off the grounds for stealing apples. How's Sophy?"

"Only tol'able, thank ye, suh; she's got a misery in her back. Want ter go to yo' room, suh?"

"No; I'll just leave my hat and overcoat here."

"Yessir; let me take yo' bag, suh; I'll tote it upstairs. My!" as Douglas stepped forward so that the hall light fell full on him, "how yo' do favor yo' pa, the ole Cunnel."

Douglas laughed. "Thanks. Have the ladies come yet?"

"Yessir. Dey's upstairs makin' demselves comfo'able. Cunnel Thornton will be down direckly. Yo' jes' walk inter de pawlar."

Douglas strolled over to the large hall mirror and inspected his tie with care; he had been in a hurry when getting into his evening clothes at the Albany,

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and the tie had proved troublesome. He readjusted it with care, felt in his vest pocket for a small box, then turned and surveyed his surroundings. A coach and four might have driven through the broad hall which ran the length of the house. At the end of the hall two broad circular staircases led to a wide landing, from which branched the two flights of steps leading to the first bedroom floor. Doors leading to the drawing-room, library, billiard, and dining-rooms opened on the right and left of the hall.

Remembering that the drawing-room was to the left of the entrance, Douglas entered the open hall door and walked over to the mantelpiece to see the time by the tall marble clock.

"Aren't you going to speak to *me*?" asked a voice behind him, and Douglas sprang around with an exclamation of delight. Eleanor was seated on a chair by one of the windows, and its high back, which was partly turned to the hall door, had concealed her from view.

"My darling!" Douglas kissed the winsome face rapturously. "Nicodemus told me you had arrived, but that you were upstairs, otherwise I should have come in at once; I begrudge the time I wasted in the hall."

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"I hurried and came down ahead of the others, hoping that you would get here early; I particularly wanted to see you, Douglas."

"Did you?" in mock surprise. "I've been wanting to see you ever since I left you this morning. The time has dragged since then."

She slipped her hand in his. "It's just this, Douglas," her softly modulated voice had a trace of nervousness: "I want to ask you to keep our engagement a secret"—his face fell—"just a few days," hastily. "I want to get accustomed to it before telling the family"—she blushed divinely. "It's such a precious secret."

Douglas took her face between his hands and pressed a passionate kiss on her lips. "Your wish is my law," he said gravely. "I was disappointed for the moment, because I am anxious to have the whole world know my happiness. I brought you this"—pulling a small square box from his vest pocket and laying it in her outstretched hand.

With a low cry of pleasure she pulled off the wrapping paper and opened the box. The light from the lamp on the table near her chair was reflected back from a superb ruby in a diamond setting. The box slipped from her nervous fingers and rolled on the floor.

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"Oh, get it quick, Douglas, I didn't mean to be so clumsy."

Douglas reached under the table, where the box had rolled, and picked it up. "It's all right, my dearest; don't look so worried; the ring isn't injured, for it is still in the box, see——" he held it before her eyes. "Give me your left hand, dear;" Eleanor shrank slightly away from him, but Douglas was intent in removing the ring from the box and did not notice her agitation. "It is very becoming to your hand," slipping it on the third finger, "the deep crimson shows off the whiteness of your skin."

"It's just lovely." Eleanor drew a long breath, then raised her head and kissed him tenderly. "Thanks, dear heart, for so beautiful a present. But I am afraid if I wear it to-night our engagement will be a secret no longer."

"That's true!" exclaimed Douglas, his voice betraying his disappointment. "Put it back in the box"—holding it out to her.

"I'll do no such thing"—indignantly. "Take it off, Douglas, and give it to me"; he did so, and she slipped the ring inside the bodice of her low-cut evening gown. "Tell me, dearest, how did you happen to select a ruby?"

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"It's my birthstone"—Douglas colored—"I hope you won't think me horribly sentimental."

"I shall not tell you what I think—it might turn your head. Hush! here comes Uncle Dana."

Thornton strode into the room with outstretched hand. "Welcome to 'The Nest,' Douglas; I am sorry I wasn't downstairs when you came. I hope Eleanor has been doing the honors acceptably."

"She has, indeed, and proved a host in herself," laughed Douglas.

"Good; though it's a mystery how she got down ahead of the others."

"I was selfish enough to keep Annette to myself until I was fully dressed," said Eleanor, "then I sent her to Cousin Kate."

"So you brought Annette with you?" asked Thornton.

"Yes, indeed. I had no intention of inflicting your bachelor household with three women and no handmaiden. I knew Sophy would have her hands full cooking dinner, therefore I brought Annette along." Her restless eyes detected a figure hovering just outside the hall door. "Come in, Cynthia," and she went forward to meet her friend.

The two beautiful girls made a picture good to look upon as they stood together. Cynthia wore a

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simple frock which matched her cheeks in whiteness; while the pathetic droop of her mouth and the dark shadows under her eyes did not detract from her charm, she looked wretchedly ill. She shook hands with Douglas, when he was presented to her, with polite indifference, then seated herself in a chair and leaned back wearily. Douglas and Thornton exchanged glances, and the latter shook his head sadly. He was about to speak when Mrs. Truxton bustled into the room.

"I am sorry to keep everybody waiting," she exclaimed, as Douglas pulled forward a chair for her. "But, if you will have dinner at such a ridiculously early hour, Dana, you must expect your guests to be late."

"You are not late, Kate, for dinner has not yet been announced. I had it earlier than usual as I thought we would retire soon afterwards and get a good night's rest."

Cynthia shuddered involuntarily, and Eleanor, whose hand rested on her shoulder, patted it affectionately. "It's all very well for you older people to keep early hours, Uncle Dana, but Cynthia and I are going to do just as we please. Personally, I expect to stay up until the wee sma' hours."

"Dinner am served," announced Nicodemus,

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opening the folding doors leading to the dining-room, and, with an old-fashioned courtly bow, Colonel Thornton offered his arm to Mrs. Truxton and escorted her to the table, the two girls and Douglas following in their wake.

The dinner passed quickly. Thornton was an agreeable talker, and Douglas, who had traveled in many lands, seconded his efforts by recounting many amusing experiences which had befallen him. Cynthia's pale cheeks assumed a more natural hue as the two skilful talkers drew her out of herself, and Thornton sat back, well pleased, when he finally succeeded in making her laugh.

"Washington isn't what it used to be," he declared. "As trite a statement as it is true. Its very bigness has spoiled it socially. There are cliques within cliques, and too many foreign elements dominate it nowadays."

"Do you refer to the Diplomatic Corps?" asked Douglas, breaking off a low-toned conversation with Eleanor.

"Not entirely. When I speak of the 'foreign element,' I also mean the 'climbers.' "

"We Georgetown people call them the 'pushers,' " announced Mrs. Truxton, helping herself to the ice cream which Nicodemus was passing.

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"And yet," continued Thornton, "I dare say there were just as amusing characters in Washington fifty years ago as now."

"How about the woman of whom I have heard," asked Eleanor, "who carried off the silver meat skewer at the French Legation, as it was then, as a souvenir, and afterwards proudly used it as a hat-pin?"

"Human nature is very much the same from one generation to another," acknowledged Mrs. Truxton. "But the types are different. I recollect my grandmother's telling me that she attended services one Sunday at St. John's Episcopal Church on Lafayette Square when the rector preached a fiery sermon against the sin of dueling. Mrs. Alexander Hamilton and her daughter sat in the pew just in front of my grandmother, and she said Miss Hamilton bore the tirade for some minutes, then rose, turned to her mother, and remarked in an audible tone: 'Come, Ma; we'll go. This is no place for us.'"

"Come, you needn't put it all on Washington," exclaimed Douglas. "Georgetown has famous blunders and eccentric characters as well."

"And ghosts," added Mrs. Truxton. "Do not deprive Georgetown of its chief attraction. Ghosts

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and Past Glory walk hand and hand through these old streets."

"Ghosts," echoed Douglas, turning to his host. "Unless my memory is playing me false, this house used to be thought haunted. It seems to me I've heard tales of secret passages and mysterious noises."

Thornton laughed outright. "That old legend was caused by flying squirrels getting in the wall through cracks in the eaves and chimneys. Sometimes on still nights I can hear them dropping nuts, which make a great noise as they fall from floor to floor. It's enough to scare a nervous person into fits."

"You are very disappointing, Uncle Dana," objected Eleanor. "When Douglas—Mr. Hunter,"—catching herself up, but no one apparently noticed the slip, and she went on hurriedly—"spoke of spooks I had hopes of an ancestral ghost."

"I always understood that this house was haunted, Dana," put in Mrs. Truxton.

"Well, I believe we are supposed to possess a ghost—a very respectable, retiring one," added Thornton, as Cynthia's eyes, which were fixed upon him, grew to twice their usual size. "My great-aunt, Sophronia Thornton, was a maiden lady, a

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good deal of a Tartar, I imagine, from the dance she led my Great-grandfather Thornton, who was an easy-going, peaceable man. She ran the house for him until his marriage, and then ran his wife, and, according to tradition, she has run her descendants out of her room ever since."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Cynthia. "Do tell us all about her."

"There is not so very much to recount." Thornton smiled at her eagerness. "The story goes, as I heard it first from my grandfather, that when he attempted to occupy her room, the southwest chamber, he was driven out."

"How?"

"He was very fond of reading in bed. As I said before, my great aunt was very rigid and did not approve of late hours, which was one rock she and her brother split on. My grandfather, not having the lighting facilities of the present day, used to read in bed by placing a lighted candlestick on his chest, holding his book behind the candle so that its light fell full on the printed page. At eleven o'clock every night he would feel a slight puff of air and the candle would go out. He tried everything to stop it. He stuffed every crack and cranny through which a draft might be supposed to come,

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but it was of no use; his light was always extinguished at eleven o'clock."

"Do you believe it?" asked Cynthia.

Thornton shrugged his shoulders. "I can only give you my own experience. I occupied the room once, when home on a college vacation. The house was filled with visitors, and I was put in the southwest chamber. Everything went on very smoothly until one night I decided to cram for an examination, and took my books to my room. I had an ordinary oil lamp on the table by my bed, and so commenced reading. After I had been reading about an hour the lamp went out suddenly. I struck a match and relit it; again it was extinguished. We kept that up most of the night; then I gathered my belongings and spent the rest of the time before breakfast on the sofa in the library, where I was not disturbed by the whims of the ghost of my spinster great-aunt."

"'There are more things in Heaven and earth,' " quoted Eleanor, as she rose in obedience to a signal from Mrs. Truxton. "Where shall we go, Uncle Dana?" as they strolled out into the hall.

"Into the library. Nicodemus will serve coffee there, and, if you ladies have no objection, Douglas and I will smoke there also."

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"Why, certainly," exclaimed Mrs. Truxton, picking out a comfortable chair and signaling Douglas to take the one next hers, and without more ado she plunged into questions relating to his family history. He cast longing glances at Eleanor, but she refused to take the hint conveyed, and, to his secret annoyance, walked out of the room shortly after.

Cynthia was having an animated conversation with Colonel Thornton and sipping her coffee when, happening to look in the direction of the hall door, she saw Eleanor standing there, beckoning to her. Making a hurried excuse to the Colonel, she joined Eleanor in the hall, who, without a word, slipped her arm about her waist and led her into the drawing-room.

"What is——?" The words died in her throat as she caught sight of a tall, soldierly figure standing under the chandelier. Eleanor discreetly vanished, closing the hall door softly behind her as she went.

"You!" Cynthia shrank back against the wall as Lane stepped forward.

"Cynthia, darling!" He held out his arms pleadingly, but with a moan she turned her face from him. His eyes flashed with indignation. "Cynthia, you have no right to condemn me un-

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heard. I am innocent." He approached her and gently took her hand in his.

Her eyes were closed, and a few tears forced themselves under the lids, the scalding teardrops that come when the fountain is dry and only bitter grief forces such expression of sorrow.

"Dear one, look at me. I am not guilty. I have forced myself upon you because I want you to understand"—he spoke slowly, as if reasoning with a child—"that I am absolutely innocent. . . ."

"Not in thought!" burst in Cynthia.

"Perhaps not,"—steadily,—“but in deed. I spoke in anger. Your uncle had insulted me grossly when I met him just before going to Mrs. Owen's dance, and in my indignation I uttered a wish which would have been better left unsaid. But listen to reason, dear; to think evil is not a crime."

Cynthia threw back her head and gazed at him wildly. "Oh, I would so gladly, gladly believe you innocent!" She placed her small, trembling hands on his breast. "It hurts horribly—because I love you so."

Lane caught her in a close embrace. "My darling—my dear, dear one——" His voice choked.

Cynthia lay passive in his arms. Suddenly she raised her white face and kissed him passionately,

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then thrust him from her. "Oh, God! why did you take that sharp letter file with you?"

"I didn't!" The words were positive, but his looks belied them.

"She says you did—she declares that when she met you looking for the carriage you held it in your hand——" The words seemed forced from Cynthia. She placed a hand on the chair nearest her as she swayed slightly.

"She! Who?" The question was almost a roar.

"Annette."

CHAPTER XVI

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

ELEANOR tiptoed over to the bed. At last Cynthia had dropped asleep. It seemed hours since Lane's call for help had taken her into the drawing-room, where she found Cynthia stretched upon the floor and the young officer bending frantically over her. Dr. Marsh, who fortunately resided next door but one, had been sent for, and, on his arrival in hot haste, Cynthia had been revived and carried to her room. Cynthia had shown a sudden aversion to having Annette about, so Eleanor had sent the maid to bed, and since ten o'clock had been sitting with Cynthia, trying to quiet her.

Eleanor glanced about the room. There was nothing more she could do, and, stretching herself wearily, she arranged the night light so that it would not shine in Cynthia's eyes, and placed an old-fashioned brass bell on the small table by the bed,

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so that if Cynthia needed assistance she could ring for aid. Then, moving softly for fear of waking the sleeper, she stole across the room, turned out the gas, and, stepping into the hall, closed the door gently after her.

Some time later she was busy undressing in her own room when a faint knock disturbed her. On opening the door she found Mrs. Truxton standing in the hall with a quilted wrapper drawn tight around her portly figure.

"I thought you hadn't gone to bed," she remarked in a sibilant whisper which was more penetrating than an ordinary pitched voice. "I just could not go to bed"—seating a large oak rocker—"until I had some explanation of this extraordinary affair. Will you please inform me what made that poor girl faint in the drawing-room?"

"She is in a very nervous, excitable condition, Cousin Kate, which reacts on her heart action." Eleanor glanced despairingly at Mrs. Truxton. She knew the latter was an inveterate, though kindly, gossip. Apparently she had come to stay for some time, as she sat rocking gently to and fro, her curl papers making a formidable halo around her soft gray hair.

"Heart action?" echoed Mrs. Truxton. "That's

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as it may be. What was Captain Lane doing here?"

Eleanor started violently. She particularly wanted to keep the fact that Cynthia and Lane had been together a secret. She had watched for his arrival, and had let him in before he had an opportunity to ring the front door bell, and had shown him at once into the deserted drawing-room. During their interview she had mounted guard in the hall. Hearing Lane's call for assistance, she had opened the drawing-room door, and, before summoning her uncle and the servants, had advised Lane to leave the house. She supposed he had followed her advice.

"Where in the world did you see him?" she asked.

"So he was here!" Mrs. Truxton smiled delightedly, while Eleanor flushed with vexation as she realized she had given herself away unnecessarily. "Your uncle and Douglas were discussing politics, and I slipped away to remind Nicodemus to put some sandwiches in my room, as I always want a late supper, particularly after so early a dinner. When I walked through the billiard room on my way to the library I happened to glance through the door leading into the hall, and was

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surprised to see a man standing by the hatrack. As he raised his head I thought I recognized Fred Lane—I wasn't quite sure, though, but before I could call his name he had vanished."

"I see." Eleanor came to a quick resolution. "You have probably heard, Cousin Kate," sitting down on the edge of her bed nearest the older woman, "that Fred Lane is very much in love with Cynthia." Mrs. Truxton nodded her head vigorously. "Eventually, after he had paid her a great deal of attention, they became engaged. Unfortunately"—Eleanor was feeling her way with care—"unfortunately they had a lover's quarrel. Cynthia refused to see Fred, and he finally came to me and asked me to arrange an interview, saying that he felt convinced, if given the opportunity, he could straighten out their misunderstanding."

Mrs. Truxton pondered some moments in silence. "Did this lover's quarrel take place *before* Senator Carew's death?" she asked.

"Yes." Eleanor's blue eyes did not waver before Mrs. Truxton's piercing look. "Why?"

"I was just thinking that, if Senator Carew had known of an engagement between a member of his family and a Lane, he'd have died of apoplexy—instead of having to be stabbed to death."

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"What was the exact trouble between Senator Carew and Governor Lane, Cousin Kate?" asked Eleanor. "I never have heard."

"It began years ago." Mrs. Truxton hitched her chair close to the bed. "Governor Lane was an intimate friend of Philip Winthrop, Sr., and, after the latter's marriage to Charlotte Carew, came frequently to Washington to visit them. To my thinking, Philip Winthrop was a bad egg, specious and handsome; and he took in the Carews completely, as well as Governor Lane. He was a stock broker in Wall Street, and during a panic was ruined financially. He promptly committed suicide."

"Oh, poor Mrs. Winthrop!" exclaimed Eleanor warmly. "What hasn't she been through!"

"Well, losing her rascal of a husband was the least one of her troubles," said Mrs. Truxton dryly. "Philip Winthrop's failure was not an honorable one; there was talk of criminal proceedings, but all that was put a stop to by Senator Carew stepping forward and paying his creditors." She paused for breath.

"I don't see what Governor Lane has to do with it," objected Eleanor, glancing meaningfully at the clock, which was just striking one o'clock. She stifled a yawn.

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"I am coming to that," explained Mrs. Truxton. "Philip Winthrop appealed to Governor Lane, among other of his old friends, to loan him money to tide over the financial crisis, and the Governor trusted him to the extent of ten thousand dollars."

"That was exceedingly generous of him."

"Yes, and I reckon he repented of his generosity many times." Mrs. Truxton spoke with emphasis. "He loaned it to Winthrop without taking security and without knowing that the latter was on the point of absolute failure. And this is where the row comes in. Lane went to Carew and told him of the transaction, showed him the canceled check, and the latter, on finding that Lane had no promissory note or other security, declined to pay off the indebtedness."

"I see." Eleanor was paying full attention to the older woman.

"Lane was naturally incensed, for Carew had assumed all the other obligations, and he felt that his was a prior claim, being a debt of honor between friends. Carew didn't see it that way, and it led to a bitter quarrel. The ill feeling between the two men was intensified on Governor Lane's part because he met with financial reverses later, and the

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old Maryland homestead, which might have been saved by the return of the ten thousand dollars, was sold under the hammer."

"This is all news to me. I was only told they were political enemies."

"They were. Lane vowed to get even in every way in his power, and so entered politics. He was a man of great force of character and intellectual ability—although lacking in business sense," she interpolated, "and a born orator. And when he found, after holding several important state positions, that Senator Carew was going to run for governor of Maryland, he entered the field against him, and Carew was beaten by a few votes only."

"When did this happen?"

"Oh, back in the early nineties. The quarrel was most acrimonious, particularly on Carew's side. He must have realized that he had not acted fairly to his old friend. As long as he had assumed Winthrop's debts it seemed only right that he should return the money owing to Lane. Public opinion was with the latter."

"Perhaps at that time he may not have had the ten thousand," suggested Eleanor. "I have always heard and believed the Senator an honorable man;

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and certainly it was good of him to shoulder any of his brother-in-law's debts."

"He only did it to protect his sister, who was left penniless, and quiet scandal."

"Mrs. Winthrop penniless! Why, how comes it, Cousin Kate, that she lives as she does."

"Senator Carew gave her a large allowance. He always said that Cynthia should inherit his fortune."

"I never knew until the other day that Philip Winthrop was not Mrs. Winthrop's son."

"She adopted him legally, I believe, at the time of her husband's death, and persuaded her brother, the Senator, to have him brought up as one of the family. Philip Winthrop's first wife was a South American, I am told. I never saw her, as she died before he came to Washington. Mercy on us!" glancing at the clock, "I had no idea it was so late." She rose and started for the door. "How did you leave Cynthia?"

"Sound asleep, thank Heaven!"

"Did she and Fred Lane patch up their quarrel?"

"I am afraid not." Eleanor kissed her cousin a warm good night, and watched her cross the wide hall to her bedroom, then closed and locked her own door and hastened to complete her undressing.

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About three in the morning Cynthia awoke and lay for a few minutes, bewildered by her surroundings. Then recollection returned to her with a rush, and she sank back among her pillows with a half-strangled sob. Slowly she reviewed her interview with Fred, trying to find some solace; but she could discover none, and with a moan turned on her side and buried her face in the pillow. Their romance had promised so much, but, instead, her happiness had been nipped in the bud.

She raised her hot face and glanced about, looking for a glass of water, for she was parched with thirst. Eleanor had forgotten, apparently, to place any drinking water in the room. Cynthia sat up and gazed eagerly around by the aid of the night light, but she could discover no glass on either the chiffonier or bureau. She was on the point of lying down again when she remembered having seen a pitcher of ice water on a table near the head of the stairs. She started to ring the brass bell, but decided it would be cruel to call Eleanor, who had been up with her most of the night.

She pondered a moment, but she was growing more thirsty, and, after a few minutes of indecision, she climbed out of the huge four-poster and, slipping on a wrapper and bedroom slippers, stole out

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of her room and down the hall in the direction of the stairs.

So intent was Cynthia in reaching her goal that she never noticed a figure crouching on the landing of the stairs, who drew back fearfully into the shadows at her approach. She found the ice pitcher on the table with several glasses. Filling one of them, she took a long drink of the ice-cold water, then, feeling much refreshed, she refilled the glass, intending to take it with her to her room. She paused again and looked about her with interest, for the hall was illuminated by the moonlight which streamed through the diamond-shaped panes of a window at one end of a wing of the house. The figure below her on the stair landing peered at her intently, poised for instant flight to the darker regions below in case she started to descend the stairs.

Cynthia was about to return to her room when her roving eyes fell on a closed door leading to a room in the wing. The moonlight was beating upon it. For one long second Cynthia stood transfixed; then she uttered a cry which roused the sleeping household—a cry of such terror that it froze the blood in the listeners' veins.

The figure on the landing stood glued to the spot until recalled to action by the hurried opening of

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doors; then, with incredible swiftness, it vanished, as Eleanor, her hastily donned wrapper streaming in the wind, rushed to Cynthia's side.

"Good God! Cynthia! What is it?" she gasped, throwing her arms about her friend.

Cynthia caught her wrist in a grip which made her wince. "Look!" she cried. "Look!" pointing toward the door at the end of the wing. "My dream! See, the panels are in the shape of a cross!"

Eleanor cast a startled glance in the direction indicated. It was true. The panels stood out in gold relief in the brilliant moonlight, and they formed an unmistakable cross.

"Yes, yes, dear," she said soothingly. "It simply shows that your dream was founded on fact. Come to bed."

"No, no!" Cynthia was trembling violently, but she refused to leave the spot. "You forget that in my dream the door is always locked."

"In this case it is not," exclaimed Colonel Thornton, who, with Douglas, had rushed into the hall as soon as they had struggled into some clothes. Mrs. Truxton brought up the rear, her curl papers standing upright and her eyes almost popping from her head. "It's simply used as a storeroom," he added.

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"Don't be so worried, Cynthia," catching sight of her agonized face.

"I tell you it is *not!*" She stamped her foot in her excitement.

For answer Thornton stepped down the short hallway and turned the knob. To his intense surprise the door did not open.

"Ah!" Her cry was half in triumph, half in agony. "I told you it was locked. It must be opened—I shall go mad if it is not," and her looks did not belie her statement.

Douglas joined Thornton as he stood hesitating. "I think it would be best to humor her," he said in an undertone.

Thornton nodded in agreement. "I can't understand how it got locked," he muttered. "How the devil can I get it open? It is English quartered oak."

"Is there any way of entering the room by a window?" asked Douglas.

"No, it's too high from the ground, and there's nothing but the bare brick wall to climb up; no tree grows near it," said Thornton thoughtfully. "And unfortunately I have no ladder long enough to reach the window."

"Then there's nothing left but to try and force

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the door." Douglas braced his powerful shoulders against the panels until his muscles almost cracked under the strain. "Run against it," he gasped, perspiration trickling down his face; and Colonel Thornton obediently threw himself forward as the door gave slightly. "Again!" cried Douglas, and he threw his own weight on the panel, which yielded a little. "Once more," and with a rending crash the upper and weaker panel splintered sufficiently to allow Douglas to slip his hand inside and turn the key which was in the lock. He also shot back the rusty bolt with difficulty, and withdrew his hand.

"Get the women back into their rooms," he whispered, his face showing white in the moonlight. "The room is full of escaping gas."

Thornton gazed blankly at him for a second, then turned to Mrs. Truxton. "Kate, I insist upon your taking these girls to your room." She nodded understandingly, and he turned to Cynthia with an air of command. "Go with Mrs. Truxton, Cynthia. I promise to come instantly and tell you what we discover in this room."

She nodded dumbly, past speech. The reaction had come, and Mrs. Truxton and Eleanor led her, unresisting, back to her room and helped her to bed,

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where she lay, her eyes pleading to be relieved from her mental anguish.

Colonel Thornton and Douglas watched them until they disappeared inside the bedroom, then the latter opened the broken door of the locked room. An overpowering smell of illuminating gas choked them, and they drew back, gasping. Douglas stepped over to the hall window and threw up the sash, letting in the cool air. Then, holding his breath, he rushed inside the room and, locating the escaping gas jet by the overpowering odor, he reached up and turned off the cock of the wall bracket.

"It's no use; we'll have to wait and give the gas a chance to evaporate," he said, returning to the Colonel's side. "Are you sure the room is unoccupied?"

Thornton's eyes were half starting from his head. "Unoccupied?" he stammered. "It's been unoccupied for half a century. This is the southwest chamber, which is supposed to be haunted by my great-aunt. A dog won't sleep there."

Douglas stared at his companion in amazement for some seconds, then, holding his breath, again bolted into the room. The remaining gas almost overcame him, but fortunately, catching sight of the

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outlines of the windows, he opened first one and then the other, and rejoined the Colonel, who was hovering in the doorway, as quickly as possible. Without speaking they waited until the pure night air had swept away the poisonous gas; then Douglas stepped inside the room, struck a match and applied it to the chandelier. As the light flared up a horrified exclamation escaped Thornton.

"Good God! Look!"

Douglas' eyes followed his outstretched arm. Stretched on the high four-posted bedstead was the body of a woman, lying on her side, her face concealed by the masses of dark hair which fell over it. A book lay by her side, one finger of her left hand caught between the pages. A drop light, minus shade and chimney, stood on a low table beside the bed.

Reverently the two men tiptoed to the bedside. Thornton laid a shaking hand on the drop light. "She must have been reading and fallen asleep," he muttered between twitching lips. "She didn't know that the light is always blown out after eleven o'clock in this room."

Awestruck, Douglas gazed down at the silent figure. No need to feel pulse or heart; to the most casual observer the woman was dead.

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"Who—who—is it?" demanded a quivering voice behind them. Both men wheeled about to find Eleanor, white-lipped and trembling, standing there. She had stolen into the room without attracting their attention.

Douglas leaned forward and raised the strands of hair gently from the cold face.

"Annette!" Eleanor's trembling lips could hardly form the whisper; she swayed backward, and Douglas caught her as she fell.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

WHERE S Brett?" asked Thornton, coming hurriedly into the library, where Douglas was seated at the telephone. The latter hung up the receiver before answering.

"He will be here directly, Colonel; at present he is with the doctor and coroner in the southwest chamber. You had better sit down, sir," glancing with commiseration at Thornton's haggard face; but the Colonel continued his nervous pacing to and fro.

"Jove!" he muttered. "This affair has given me a devilish shock." He paused before a small wall cabinet, and, selecting a key on his ring bunch, he opened the door and took out a decanter.

"Will you join me?" he asked, placing it on the table with several tumblers.

"No, thanks, Colonel." Douglas heard the glass click faintly against the mouth of the decanter as the Colonel poured out a liberal portion, which he

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drank neat. He was just replacing the decanter in the wall cabinet when Brett, followed by the coroner, walked into the room.

"If you have no objection, Colonel Thornton, we will hold an informal investigation here," said Dr. Penfield, courteously.

"Not at all, sir, not at all," exclaimed Thornton heartily. "I am most anxious to have this terrible affair cleared up as soon as possible. Simply state your wishes and they will be carried out to the best of my ability."

"Thanks." The coroner seated himself at the mahogany table standing in the center of the room and drew out his notebook and fountain pen, while Brett established himself on the opposite side.

"Shall I retire?" inquired the Colonel.

"I think it would be best," replied Dr. Penfield gravely. "I prefer to examine the members of the household separately. No offense is intended."

"And none is taken." Thornton smiled wearily. "You forget I'm a lawyer, Doctor, and understand your position. If you wish to see me I will be in my room."

"All right, Colonel." The coroner consulted his notebook as Thornton left them, then turned to

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Douglas. "You were the first to enter the southwest chamber, were you not?"

"Yes, I broke in a panel of the door with Colonel Thornton's assistance, and——"

"One moment." Penfield held up his hand. "Was the door locked on the *inside*?"

"Yes, by an old-fashioned bolt, as well as by lock and key."

"Did the bolt and lock work stiffly?"

"They did."

"In your opinion would a person locking the door and shooting the bolt into place make enough noise to awaken the sleeper?"

"I think so, yes."

"Did you find the windows of the room also bolted when you entered?"

"No, they were closed, but the bolts, similar to the one on the door, only smaller, were not fastened."

"I see." Penfield drummed on the table for a moment with his left hand. "Could anyone have slipped past you and Colonel Thornton when you stood waiting in the hallway for the gas to evaporate?"

"No, we would have been sure to see them, and, besides, no one could have remained in that room alive, the escaping gas was overpowering."

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"Did the room have no other exit except the one door leading to the hall?"

"That is all I could discover. I searched the room thoroughly with Brett." The detective nodded affirmatively. "We could find no trace of any other entrance or exit."

"Strange!" exclaimed Penfield. "The windows are too great a height from the ground, and can only be reached by a scaling ladder."

"And beside that," put in Brett, "I've examined the ground under and near the two windows of that room, and there isn't a trace of a footstep or ladder anywhere around."

The coroner laid down his pen. "I think that is all just now, Mr. Hunter. Brett, will you ask Dr. Marsh to step here."

The two men left the room. "I'll wait in the drawing-room, Brett," called Douglas, as the detective started upstairs to find the doctor. In a few minutes Brett reappeared in the library with Dr. Marsh.

"I won't detain you long, doctor," began Penfield. "Be seated. You were the first to examine the dead woman upstairs; what do you think caused her death?"

"She was asphyxiated by illuminating gas. Every

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symptom points to that. Of course," added the doctor cautiously, "this cannot be proved absolutely until the autopsy is held."

"I think you are right; my diagnosis coincides with yours," said the coroner. "Did you discover any evidence of a struggle or marks of violence about the woman's person?"

"No. Judging from what I found, and I believe nothing had been disturbed by either Colonel Thornton or Mr. Hunter, I think that the Frenchwoman was reading in bed, fell asleep, and was overcome by the gas."

"How long do you think she had been dead before you reached her?"

"Several hours, judging from the condition of the body. She was lying in such a position that she got the full force of the gas directly in her face; the room did not have to become filled with the deadly fumes before she was affected by them."

"I noticed that," exclaimed the coroner, "the drop-light stood on a low stand, so that the gas fixture was on a level with the woman's head, as the four-poster bed was an unusually high one. I have no further questions to ask just now, Doctor; an autopsy will be held this afternoon at the city

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morgue, where the body will be taken shortly. Brett, ask Miss Cynthia Carew to come here."

Doctor Marsh stopped on his way to the door. "I have just given Miss Carew an opiate," he said quickly; "she must not be disturbed at present."

The coroner's face fell. "That's too bad," he grumbled. "I particularly wanted to ask what she was doing in the hall at that hour, and what drew her attention to the closed door."

"As it happens, I can answer those two questions." Marsh returned to the table. "Before I could quiet Miss Carew she repeated her experiences a dozen times. It seems that she was thirsty and went into the hall to get a glass of water, as she recollected seeing an ice pitcher and tumblers on the hall table near the stairs. She drank some water, and was returning when she noticed the door in the moonlight, dropped the glass she was carrying, and screamed."

"I found a broken glass lying in the hall," supplemented Brett.

"What was it about the door that caused her to scream?" asked the coroner.

"The panels, which are made in the shape of a cross," explained Doctor Marsh. "It seems that Miss Carew apparently suffers from nightmare

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which takes the form of a door with panels of that shape. She declares it always foretells disaster. When she found such a door confronting her in the ghostly moonlight it was too much for her nerves and she screamed."

"What is all this I am told about the southwest chamber being haunted?"

Marsh shrugged his shoulders. "I have resided all my life in Georgetown and have always heard that a room in this house was supposed to be haunted. That particular kind of door with the panels forming a cross is called the 'witches' door,' and was put there in the days just after the Revolution. It is to ward off evil, so the legend goes."

"Well, it doesn't seem to have fulfilled its mission." The coroner carefully turned a page in his notebook and made an entry. "I am very much obliged to you, Doctor," as Marsh prepared to depart. "I wish you would let me know when Miss Carew is in fit condition to see me."

"I will; good-bye," and the busy physician beat a hasty retreat.

"Suppose you get the butler, Brett," said the coroner when the two men were alone.

"May I suggest, Dr. Penfield, that you allow Mr. Hunter to be present when the servants are ex-

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amined," began Brett. "He is deeply interested in the murder of Senator Carew, and is assisting me in trying to unravel that mystery, and I think"—deliberately—"this French maid's singular death has something to do with the other tragedy."

"Indeed!" The coroner's eyes kindled with fresh interest. "Certainly, Brett, if you think Mr. Hunter should be present, call him in. I will be glad of his assistance."

The detective hastened out of the room, to return within a few minutes with Douglas and Nicodemus. The old darky was gray with fright, and his eyes had not regained their natural size since being awakened by the commotion attending the breaking in of the door. He had lain in his bed, too frightened to get up, until Douglas entered his room and hauled him out from under the bedclothes and made him go downstairs and build the fire for the cook, Sophy, who was more composed than her brother, and busied herself in preparing coffee and an early breakfast for those who desired it.

"Is there such a thing as a long scaling ladder on the premises?" inquired the coroner, after he had asked Nicodemus' full name and length of service.

"No, suh; dey isn't, only a pa'r ob steps so high"

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—demonstrating with his hand. "Dat's der onliest one on de place."

"Is any house being built in this neighborhood?"

"No, suh, dar isn't."

"How did you come to put the maid in that room?"

"I didn't put her dar," in quick defence; "she went da. ob her own accord; 'deed dat's so, Marse Douglas," appealing to him directly. "De Cunnel, he done tole Sophy an' me ter fix three rooms fo' de ladies, an' a room fo' yo', suh; he done say nuffin' about de maid, Annette."

"Then you were not expecting her?"

"No, suh. I was 'sprised when Miss Eleanor brunged her. After I haid shown de ladies ter dey rooms I took Annette up ter de third flo', an' tole her she could take de front room dar."

"Then how did she come to be occupying the other room?" asked the coroner quickly.

"It were dis-away, suh; jes' befo' dinnah she cum ter me an' Sophy an' say she doan like de room in de third flo'——"

"Why not?" broke in Penfield.

"She said it were too far off from her folks, dat she had to be down whar she could hear dem. I tole her dat de warn't no room down on de second

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flo', dat dey was all occupied, an' she says, quick-like, dat she had jes' been in de room in de wing, an' dat she'd sleep dar."

"Ah, then it was her own suggestion that she should occupy the room," exclaimed Brett quickly.

"Yessir. She dun say dat de bed looked comfortable, an' dat she'd jes' take de bedclothes offer de bed in de room on de third flo', an' move her things down inter de odder room. Sophy tole her dat de place were mighty dusty, 'cause it's been used as a storeroom, but Annette said she'd 'tend ter dat."

"Did she speak to Colonel Thornton or to Miss Eleanor before moving into the room?" asked Douglas, thoughtfully.

"No, suh, I don't think she did. I axed her ef she had, an' she said dat dey was all in de drawin'-room, waitin' fer dinneh, an' dat she didn't want ter 'sturb 'em, an' dat dey wouldn't care whar she slep'."

"Then *no* one knew she was occupying that room except you and Sophy?" asked the puzzled coroner.

"No, suh; 'less she tole dem later. I done warned her dat dat room were unlucky,"—Nicomodemus' eyes rolled in his head,—“an' dat no good would cum ob her sleepin' dar, an' she jes' larf and

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larf. An' now she's daid,"—he shook his woolly head solemnly; "it doan do ter trifle wid ghosts."

"I won't keep you any longer," said the coroner, after a long pause. "Send Sophy up here, Nicodemus. "By the way, is she any relation of yours?"

"Yessir, she's ma sister, an' we've bof worked hyar since befo de wah. I'll send her right up, suh," and he disappeared.

Sophy was not long in coming, and she confirmed all that Nicodemus had said. She added that the southwest chamber had not been occupied as a bed-chamber for years, although the four-poster was left standing with its mattresses and pillows in place, after which she was excused. Colonel Thornton was then sent for by the coroner.

"Your servants say, Colonel, that you did not expect your niece to bring her French maid, Annette, with her last night," began Penfield. "Is that so?"

"My niece is at liberty to bring anyone," with emphasis, "to this house," said Colonel Thornton. "But I must admit that I did not know until just as dinner was announced that the maid had accompanied her."

"Did you not see them arrive?" asked Brett.

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"No, they came earlier than I anticipated, and I was not in the house when they reached here."

"Did Nicodemus inform you that the maid was here?"

"No; why should he? He knows that this is my niece's second home, and that she is virtually mistress of the house."

"Then your niece is thoroughly acquainted with this building?" put in Brett.

"Haven't I just said so,"—impatiently. "Miss Thornton brought her maid with her because she knows I have but two old servants, enough for my bachelor needs, but she very naturally considered that my other guests, Mrs. Truxton and Miss Carew, might desire a maid's services."

"I understand. Were you aware that Annette intended to sleep in the southwest chamber?" continued Brett.

"I was not. If I had known it I would not have permitted her to occupy the room."

"Please tell me the exact superstition which hangs about that room," said the coroner, after a brief pause.

"It is believed that no light can be burned in that room after eleven o'clock; after that time it is always extinguished by some mysterious agency."

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"How comes it, then, that you allowed gas pipes to be placed in the room?"

"I gave the contract to have gas put in the house years ago, at the same time that I had running water and plumbing installed. The gas contractor naturally fitted each room with modern appliances. As the room is never used after dark, I never gave the matter another thought."

"Then why was a drop-light fastened to the wall bracket by the side of the bed?"

"I've been puzzling over that fact myself,"—the Colonel tipped his chair back on two legs,—"that drop-light is one I used to have in my bedroom. It didn't give very satisfactory light to read by, so several months ago I purchased another, transferred the chimney and shade to the new lamp, and sent the other one into the storeroom."

"Then it is highly probable that Annette found it there, and, wishing to read in bed, attached it to the bracket herself."

"And thereby sealed her own fate," added the Colonel solemnly.

"Do you really think that supernatural means caused her death?" asked the coroner incredulously.

"It seems to be either that or suicide."

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"From what I hear I incline to the latter theory," acknowledged Dr. Penfield. "I don't take much stock in ghosts or other hallucinations, Colonel, with all due respect to you, sir. Will you be so kind as to ask your cousin, Mrs. Truxton, to step here for a few minutes?"

On being summoned by Colonel Thornton, Mrs. Truxton hastened into the library. Her statements added nothing to what the coroner already knew, and she was quickly excused and Eleanor Thornton sent for.

Douglas had not seen her since carrying her to her room some hours before, and he was shocked by her appearance. "My precious darling!" he murmured in a tone which reached her ear alone as he opened the library door to admit her. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

She shook her head and smiled at him, a smile which hurt him woefully, for it showed the effort it cost her. Dr. Penfield, struck by her beauty, which was enhanced by her unnaturally flushed cheeks and the dark shadows under her large eyes, rose and pulled forward a chair for her use.

"I won't detain you long, Miss Thornton," he commenced, reseating himself. "Did you know your maid was sleeping in the southwest chamber?"

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"No, I did not. On the contrary, she told me, when helping me change my dress for dinner, that she had been put in the room over mine."

"When did you last see your maid?"

"She came to my assistance when Miss Carew fainted, shortly after dinner. After I had seen Miss Carew revived and put in bed I had Annette help me out of my evening dress, and then told her to go to bed, as I would not require her services any longer."

"At what hour was that?"

"Shortly before ten o'clock. I do not recollect the exact time."

"Did she say nothing to you then about having moved down on your floor?"

"Not a word."

"Has your maid had an unfortunate love affair?" inquired the coroner.

"Not to my knowledge."

"Has she been despondent of late?"

"No; she seemed in her usual good spirits."

"Do you know if she had lost money?"

"I never heard her mention such a thing."

"Has she been with you long?"

"About two years."

"And you found her——?"

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"Excellent in every way; honest, reliable, and capable."

"Miss Thornton," facing her directly, "have you formed any theory as to how your maid came to be asphyxiated?"

"I think it was due to an accident. She probably fell asleep, leaving the gas burning."

"But Mr. Hunter found the two windows closed, no possible draft could get into the room to blow out the light—nor could any person have blown it out, for the door, the only way of entrance, was locked on the inside. How was it possible to have an accident under those circumstances?"

"Possibly it was suicide, though I cannot bear to think so," Eleanor spoke with much feeling.

"Miss Thornton,"—Brett rose, walked over to the table, and stood looking directly down into the lovely face raised so confidently to his—"did your maid ever utter any threats against Captain Frederick Lane in your presence?"

"Never!" Eleanor's eyes opened in surprise.

"Did she ever insinuate that he had something to do with the murder of Senator Carew?"

"No, never!" But Eleanor's firm voice quivered as she uttered the denial, and Brett detected it. His eyes lighted with excitement.

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"What was Captain Lane doing here last night?"

The question was unexpected, and Eleanor started perceptibly.

"He came to see Miss Carew," she admitted, faintly.

"Did he see your maid?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Did Captain Lane spend the evening with you and Colonel Thornton?"

"Oh, no, he only saw Miss Carew."

"How long was he with Miss Carew?"

"About ten minutes."

"Indeed!" Brett paused and spoke with greater deliberation. "Captain Lane, who is being shadowed by several of my men, was seen to enter this house last night between nine and half-past—and, though my men waited all night, he was never seen to leave it."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE NAME OF THE LAW

WELL, and what then?" demanded a curt voice behind the group. The three men and Eleanor wheeled around and gazed at the young officer in surprise too deep for words. "Well, what then?" demanded Captain Lane for the second time.

"How did you get here?" asked Brett, recovering from his surprise.

"Through the door. How did you suppose?" with a flicker of amusement in his handsome eyes. "The butler told me I would find you here when he admitted me a few seconds ago." Then his face grew stern. "I entered in time to overhear your remark,"—turning directly to Brett. "Because your men did not see me leave the house it doesn't follow that I spent the night here."

"Then where did you spend it?" asked Brett swiftly.

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"With my cousin, General Phillips, at his apartment at the Dupont," calmly.

"At what hour did you reach his apartment?"

"About twelve o'clock."

"And where were you between the hours of nine-thirty and twelve?"

"Most of the time walking the streets."

"Alone?"

"Alone." Lane faced them all, head up and shoulders back, and gave no sign that he was aware of the antagonism which he felt in the tense atmosphere. The coroner was the next to speak.

"Suppose you take a chair, Captain Lane, and give us a more detailed account of your actions last night," he suggested, and Lane dragged forward a chair and seated himself. "When did you leave this house?"

"About half-past ten o'clock." He caught Eleanor's start of surprise, and added hastily, "I am, as perhaps you already know, engaged to Miss Carew. During our interview last night she fainted, and I summoned Miss Thornton, who urged me to go, but I felt that I could not leave the house until I knew that Miss Carew was better. So, instead of going out of the front door, I picked up my coat and hat and slipped into the dining room, which was empty."

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"What was your object in going there?"

"I hoped that Miss Thornton would come downstairs again, and I could then get an opportunity to speak to her."

"Would it not have been better and more straightforward to have stepped into the library and informed Colonel Thornton of your presence in his house?" asked the coroner, dryly.

Lane flushed at his tone. "Possibly it would,"—haughtily,—“but I was acting on impulse; I was extremely alarmed by Miss Carew's condition and could think of nothing else."

"What caused Miss Carew's indisposition?" inquired the coroner.

"She is not strong, and overtaxed her strength yesterday."

The coroner did not press the point, to Lane's relief. "Did anyone see you in the dining room last night?"

"I think not; the room was not lighted, and the table had been already cleared, so no servant entered the room."

"Did you see Miss Thornton again?"

"No. I had not been waiting long before I saw Colonel Thornton come down the stairs with a man whom I judged to be a physician. As they passed

the dining room door I heard the doctor tell Colonel Thornton that Miss Carew had regained consciousness, and would be all right after a night's rest. A few minutes after that I left the house."

"How?"

"I have dined frequently with Colonel Thornton and know the house fairly well; so, as I had promised to keep my visit to Miss Carew a secret, I opened the long French window which gives on the south veranda, ran down the steps, and walked down the garden path, jumped the fence between this property and the next, and walked out of their gate into the street."

Brett said something under his breath that was not complimentary to his detective force. "May I ask you why you thought such precautions necessary?" he inquired.

"Because I was perfectly aware that I had been followed over here," retorted Lane calmly. "And, as I considered it nobody's business but my own if I chose to call on Miss Carew, I decided to avoid them."

"And what did you and Annette, Miss Thornton's French maid, discuss before you left here?" Brett rose to his feet and confronted Lane squarely as he put the question.

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"I did not speak to anyone except Miss Carew and Miss Thornton while in this house,"—steadily.

"No? Then perhaps you only saw the maid, Annette, when she was *asleep*?"—with emphasis.

"I don't catch your meaning?" Lane tapped his foot nervously with his swagger stick.

"Listen to me, Captain Lane,"—Brett dropped back in his chair and emphasized his remarks by frequent taps on the table with his left hand. "You can't dodge the issue with fake testimony."

"I am dodging nothing!" Lane's eyes flashed ominously and his voice deepened, the voice of a born fighter, accustomed to command. "I have no testimony to fake."

"I suppose you will say next,"—sarcastically,—
"that you don't know the maid, Annette, is dead."

"Dead?" echoed Lane, bounding from his chair.

"Dead—murdered last night."

"Good God!" There was no mistaking Lane's agitation and surprise. Brett watched him closely; if he was acting, it was a perfect performance. "How—what killed her?"

"Asphyxiated by illuminating gas,"—briefly,—
"when asleep last night."

"This is horrible!" Lane paced the floor in uncontrollable excitement. "But what," pulling him-

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self up, "what has that unfortunate girl's death to do with me?"

"What had *you* to do with the unfortunate girl's death is more to the point," retorted Brett meaningfully, and Lane recoiled.

"By God; I'll not stand such an insinuation!" He made a threatening step toward Brett, who did not move. "Are you such a fool as to imagine because I was in this house for a short time last night that I killed a servant whom I had seen occasionally when she opened the door for me on my calling at Miss Thornton's residence?"

"I am not a fool, nor am I a believer in miracles." Brett grew cool as Lane's excitement rose. "I was to have seen Annette this morning to get sworn testimony which she said would implicate you in Senator Carew's murder." Lane staggered back, appalled. "Instead, I find her dead, under mysterious circumstances; you are the only person whom her death benefits. And you were in this house, unknown to the inmates, and, by your own admission, no one saw you leave it. It is stretching the probabilities to suppose her death was a coincidence. You, and you alone,"—his voice rang out clearly,—“had the motive and the opportunity to bring about her death.”

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"I deny it—deny it absolutely!" thundered Lane, his knuckles showing white, so tightly were his fingers clenched over his swagger stick, which he raised threateningly.

"Stop, Mr. Brett!" exclaimed Eleanor, who, with Douglas and the coroner, had sat too astounded to speak during the rapid colloquy between the two men. "You forget that the door to the southwest chamber occupied by Annette was locked on the *inside*, and that door was the only means of entering the room. It is only fair to you, Captain Lane,"—turning courteously to the young officer,—“to remind Mr. Brett of the very obvious fact that no one could have entered the sleeping woman's room, blown out the light, and, on leaving the room, locked and bolted the door on the inside, leaving the key in the lock.”

"Thanks," exclaimed Lane gratefully, as he sat down and wiped the perspiration from his white face.

Brett scowled. He had hoped that his summing up of damaging facts and sudden accusation might wring a confession from Lane, or, if not that, some slip of the tongue which the other might make in his agitation might give him a clew as to how the murder was committed. He was convinced of Lane's

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guilt. He glanced angrily at Eleanor. Why had she intervened? Long and silently he gazed at the beautiful face. The broad forehead, delicately arched eyebrows, and the large wistful eyes, shaded by long curling eyelashes, and finely chiseled features were well worth looking at; but Brett did not see them—a new problem was puzzling his active brain.

"I understood you to say, Captain Lane, that you had promised to keep your visit here a secret," he said, breaking into the conversation of the others. "To whom did you make such a promise?"

"To Miss Thornton." The question was unexpected, and the answer slipped out thoughtlessly; then Lane bit his lip as he caught Eleanor's warning glance too late.

Brett turned swiftly on Eleanor. "Why did you wish him to keep his visit here a secret, Miss Thornton?"

"Because I was afraid Mrs. Winthrop would hear that Captain Lane and her niece had met here; my uncle might inadvertently mention it to her. Mrs. Winthrop does not approve of Captain Lane's attentions to Miss Carew," explained Eleanor quietly.

"On what grounds?"—quickly.

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"Ask Mrs. Winthrop; she can tell you better than I."

"I will," grimly. "Captain Lane," wheeling around, "why have you returned to this house at so early an hour in the morning?"

"I came to inquire for Miss Carew. I asked to see Miss Thornton, and the butler showed me into this room. And this is the first opportunity I have had, Miss Eleanor, to ask you how Cynthia is this morning." His face betrayed his anxiety.

"She is asleep just now," answered Eleanor, "but I hope she will be much better when she wakes up. I will tell her that you have called."

"Thanks." Lane rose. He felt that he was dismissed. "Has Cynthia been told of Annette's death?"

"Not yet. We explained the breaking in of the door of the southwest chamber by saying that Nicodemus had locked it and neglected to tell Colonel Thornton, who had it forced open."

"I understand." Lane shook hands with her warmly. "Will you please telephone me how Cynthia is. I'll be at the Army and Navy Club all day. Good morning." He bowed formally to the coroner and Douglas, then turned to leave the room, only to find his exit barred by Brett.

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"It is my duty to inform you, Captain Lane, that a warrant has been sworn out for your arrest," he announced, taking a paper from his pocket.

Lane stepped back involuntarily. "What do you mean?" he stammered.

"In the name of the law I arrest you for the murder of Senator Carew." Brett ceased speaking and signaled to several men who were sitting in the hall to enter the room.

It was some seconds before Lane broke the strained silence.

"Stand back!" he growled between clenched teeth, as the two detectives approached him. "I'll go with you peaceably. Let me tell you, Brett," glaring defiantly at him, "you'll live to regret this day's work! Who swore out that warrant?"

"Mrs. Winthrop."

Lane gazed at him in dazed surprise. "Mrs. Winthrop!" he mumbled. "Mrs. Winthrop!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE ACCUSATION

ELEANOR dropped her embroidery and gazed out into the garden, with its flower-beds lit by the fading rays of the Western sun and the soft wind from the open window fanned her cheeks. An involuntary sigh escaped her.

"A penny for your thoughts," and Douglas, who had approached unnoticed, stepped up to the raised windowseat. A loving smile curved Eleanor's pretty mouth as she made room for him beside her and slipped her hand confidingly in his.

"Do you think a penny would bring me any comfort?" she asked.

"Take me for a penny, and I will do my utmost to comfort you." Douglas kissed her gently as she leaned her head against his broad shoulder.

"Take you—gladly!" She raised her hand and pressed it against his cheek. "And I am richer in happiness than I ever was before."

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"My darling!" Douglas checked his impetuosity; the dark circles under Eleanor's eyes had deepened and her extreme nervousness was betrayed by her restless glances about the room and the incessant movement of her fingers. "Now for your thoughts."

"My thoughts? They are all with Cynthia. Oh, Douglas!"—straightening up,—“I can't tell her of Fred Lane's arrest; on top of all she has borne it would be cruel, cruel!"

"Is she better?"

"She is at last sleeping naturally. When she awoke from the opiate, some hours ago, she evinced no interest, and so I was able to avoid the questions which I feared she would ask me."

"She was probably still under the effects of the opiate and too drowsy to recall the events of last night."

"I dread her awakening."

"You will have to put off telling her of Lane's arrest and Annette's death until she is strong enough physically to bear the shock."

"Do you think him guilty?" The question seemed wrung from her.

"Of which crime?"

"Of both."

"I don't see how it is possible for him to have

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had anything to do with Annette's death," replied Douglas thoughtfully, "for the very reason you pointed out when Brett was accusing him this morning. It would be physically impossible for him to have left the room and locked and bolted the door on the inside."

"What do you think caused her death?"

"I think it highly probable that she committed suicide."

"You don't think the draft blew out the gas?"

"A draft? Where on earth could it come from? Both windows were tightly closed, and the door also. Upon my word," turning to look at her, "you don't place any faith in that old legend about the ghost—of your great-great-aunt's habit of extinguishing all lights in her room after eleven o'clock at night?"

"Yes, I do," reluctantly.

"Oh, come now," a chuckle escaped Douglas, but it died out suddenly. He had remarkably keen eyesight, and as he raised his head he encountered a steady stare from an oil portrait hanging on the wall opposite him. It was not the stare that attracted his attention, but the remarkable whiteness of the eyeballs in the painted face on which the light from the window was reflected. As he looked

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the eyes seemed to blink, then were gone. With an exclamation he rose, startling Eleanor by his sudden movement, and walked across the room until he stood directly in front of the painting, which was life size and represented a handsome man in a navy uniform of the War of 1812. On closer inspection, the eyes appeared not to be painted in at all, and were represented by shadows. As he retreated from the portrait, however, the shadows took form and he distinctly saw the long lashes and eyeballs. It was an optical illusion, cleverly conceived by the artist, and, satisfied on that point, he returned to Eleanor, who had watched his movements with growing curiosity.

"Why this sudden interest in my great-great-grandfather?" she asked.

"It's a fine portrait." He reseated himself by her side. "I didn't notice it last night. What is the old gentleman's name?"

"Commodore Barry Thornton; my father was named for him. He inherited the same black hair, blue eyes, and tastes of that old sea-fighter," nodding toward the portrait. "Do you know on what grounds they arrested Fred Lane for the murder of Senator Carew?"

"Only in a general way. It is known that the

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"With an exclamation he rose, and walked across the room"

THE ACCUSATION

Senator opposed his engagement to Cynthia, that they had a bitter quarrel that night, and that Lane left the ball to look for Cynthia's carriage. He was gone some time, and, when the carriage did turn up, Senator Carew was seated in it—dead."

"Is that enough to convict?"

"It's purely circumstantial evidence,"—evasively,—"I don't know yet what new testimony Mrs. Winthrop may have contributed to cause his arrest."

"Mrs. Winthrop's attitude is incomprehensible to me," burst out Eleanor. "Fred's father, Governor Lane, was her husband's best friend, and Mr. Winthrop was under great financial obligations to him when he died. And now look at the way Mrs. Winthrop is treating that friend's son—hounding him to the gallows. Is that gratitude?" with biting scorn.

"Some natures don't wear well under an obligation, and the cloven hoof crops out." Douglas pushed the window farther open. "Ingratitude is an abominable sin, and the one most frequently committed." A faint knock on the hall door interrupted him. "Come in," he called, and Brett opened the door. He drew back when he saw Douglas was not alone.

"Don't go," said Eleanor, gathering up her embroidery and workbag, "I must run upstairs and ask

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the nurse how Miss Carew is." She hastened toward the door, which Brett still held open, but he stopped her on the threshold.

"I will be greatly obliged if you will spare me half an hour, Miss Thornton; when you come downstairs again will be time enough," he added, as Eleanor stepped back into the library.

Eleanor studied his impassive face intently for a second before answering, then: "I'll be down again shortly," and she disappeared up the hall.

Brett closed the door carefully and selected a chair near Douglas, and sat down heavily. Douglas pulled out his cigarette case and handed it to the detective, who picked out a cigarette and, striking a match, settled back in his chair contentedly as he watched the rings of smoke curling upward.

"I am glad of an opportunity to have a quiet word with you, Mr. Hunter," he began. "Things have been moving pretty swiftly to-day, and I'm free to confess that the death of Annette has stumped me. Was it murder or suicide?"

"Everything points to suicide."

"I'm not so sure of that," drawing his chair nearer and lowering his voice. "I've been searching Annette's belongings and have found several things which puzzle me completely."

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"What were they?"

"Well, for one thing, the torn kimono."

"What—you don't mean——?"

"Exactly. Annette apparently owned a wrapper precisely like Miss Thornton's, and it was she who paid you that midnight visit when you spent the night in the library on Tuesday evening at the Carew residence. I found the wrapper upstairs among her effects. She had mended the tear very neatly, but the slip which you tore out of it that night exactly fitted the darn. I had the slip with me in my pocket and fitted the two together."

"Great Scott! what on earth was she doing in the library at that hour?"

"Aye, what?" significantly. "You recollect that Nicodemus testified that Annette did not want to sleep on the third floor because—'it wor too far off from her folks, an' she had to be down whar she could hear dem.' It looks as if Annette were in the habit of taking an unusual interest in her mistress' affairs."

"It does indeed," agreed Douglas, knocking the ashes from his cigarette on the window ledge. "Did you get any information from Annette yesterday?"

"Very little. I saw her soon after I found your note telling me of her interview with Colonel

THE MAN INSIDE

Thornton. She admitted that she had information which she was willing to sell, and finally made an appointment to see me early this morning. Thanks to circumstances—call it murder or suicide—I am no wiser than I was twenty-four hours ago.”

“Do you still cling to the theory that she met her death because some one was afraid of what she would tell you to-day?”

“Yes; it looks that way to me. And yet I can’t for the life of me discover how anyone could have committed a murder in that locked room.”

“In searching the room did you discover any secret passages leading to it?” exclaimed Douglas.

“I did not. I thought I might find one, so I tapped that entire wall, but could not find a trace of any concealed door. I tell you, Mr. Hunter, Annette did not commit suicide,” Brett spoke earnestly. “She expected to receive a large sum of money within a few days; I virtually pledged the amount to her. There was no object in her taking her own life.”

“Why don’t you investigate her past, Brett? That might give you a clew.”

“I have already cabled her description to the Paris police, asking for any information about her which they may have. I expect an answer shortly.”

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"Good. Tell me, what information did Mrs. Winthrop supply which induced you to arrest Captain Lane?"

"She told me that he had been seen on the street Monday night, when looking for Miss Carew's carriage, and that he was carrying a sharp letter file."

"Who gave her that information?"

"She didn't state, but I have an idea that it was Annette; probably the girl wanted money and went to her direct, she was none too scrupulous, apparently."

"I believe you are right," exclaimed Douglas.

"Mrs. Winthrop also told me that she found, tucked away among her brother's papers, yesterday an envelope containing a threatening letter. The contents were written in a disguised hand, but the postmark on the envelope read, 'Lanesville, Maryland.' She is firmly convinced that, if young Lane didn't write those letters himself, he instigated them."

"Oh, nonsense! He isn't such a fool," roughly. "I believe he is innocent."

At that moment the door opened and Colonel Thornton walked in. He flung his hat on the table. "I am glad to find you both here," he said. "Don't get up," as Douglas rose, "I'll take this chair. I

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called you up at headquarters, Brett, but they told me you had just come here, so I hurried over from Mrs. Winthrop's to catch you."

"Does she want me for anything in particular?" asked Brett.

"She simply wanted to ask a few more details in regard to the coroner's inquest. She is very much upset over Annette's extraordinary death. It seems that the girl made some statement to her, and Mrs. Winthrop depended on her testimony to prove Lane killed Senator Carew."

"What did I tell you?" Brett glanced triumphantly at Douglas. "I'm afraid, though I'm morally certain of Captain Lane's guilt, that we will have some difficulty in establishing the fact."

"You will," agreed Colonel Thornton. "So far you have only proved, first, that there was enmity between the two men; second, that Lane had the opportunity; third, that Annette saw him with the letter file, the weapon used to kill Carew, in his hand."

"The last has not been sworn to," objected Douglas, "and Annette is dead, so that statement, the most important of all, cannot be accepted as testimony."

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"Unless some one else saw Lane in the street at the time Annette did," burst in Brett swiftly, resuming his seat.

"If they had they would have come forward before this," reasoned Douglas. "I consider it extremely probable that Annette was lying when she said she saw a letter file in Lane's hand. Remember the drenching rain; walking in what proved almost a cloudburst would make most people blind to so small a thing as a letter file carried in a man's closed fist."

"What on earth was her object in making such a statement?" asked Colonel Thornton.

"That is what we have yet to find out," answered Douglas. "And there's another point, Brett, which you have overlooked."

"What's that?"

"You recollect that you told me Senator Carew's clothes were absolutely dry when his dead body was found in the carriage. Considering the down-pour of rain that night, it seems incredible that he should not have got wet."

"I have come to the conclusion that the coachman, Hamilton, lied when he said he had not stopped at the house for Senator Carew on Monday night," replied Brett. "Having lied in the beginning, he is

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now afraid to admit the truth for fear that he may be convicted of killing the Senator."

"That sounds plausible," acknowledged Colonel Thornton.

"I don't believe it." Douglas shook his head obstinately. "It has been proved already that the Senator did not spend Monday evening at home. I tell you the key to this mystery is how Senator Carew got into that carriage on such a stormy night without getting his clothes wet. When you have solved that problem you will know who committed the murder."

Thornton was about to reply when the hall door was thrown open, and Eleanor, her lovely eyes opened to their widest, exclaimed:

"Uncle Dana, the Secretary of State wishes to see you!"

"God bless me!" Colonel Thornton sprang out of his chair as the distinguished statesman followed Eleanor into the room.

"Please don't let me disturb you," exclaimed the Secretary, as Douglas stepped forward, and Brett edged toward the door. "I only dropped in for a second to pick up Mr. Hunter," laying a hand on Douglas' arm. "They told me at the Albany that you were stopping here for a few days, so I came

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over in my motor to ask you to drive back to my office with me, although it is Sunday."

"Won't you be seated, Mr. Secretary?" asked Colonel Thornton, as Douglas hastily gathered up some papers which he had left on the center table, and started for the door.

"Thanks, no; it is imperative that I get to my office——" The Secretary stopped speaking as a man darted inside the door and slammed it shut. In his haste the newcomer collided with Douglas and then collapsed into the nearest chair.

"Philip Winthrop!" gasped Eleanor, while the others gazed at the exhausted figure in amazement.

"Have you any brandy?" exclaimed the Secretary, noticing the ghastly color of Winthrop's face. Thornton hastily produced a decanter and gave the half-fainting man a stiff drink, which in a few minutes had the desired effect of bringing him round.

"Thanks," he murmured faintly.

"What does the doctor mean by letting you come out?" asked Thornton. "You are in no condition to leave your room."

"I'll be better in a minute; give me some more," Winthrop motioned toward the decanter. Colonel Thornton glanced questioningly at the Secretary, who nodded assent, so he gave Winthrop a milder

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dose, which restored him somewhat, and his voice was stronger when he resumed speech. "The doctor doesn't know I'm here. I slipped out while Mother was lying down, caught a cab at the corner, and drove over here. I want to see the detective, Brett."

"Here I am, sir." Brett stepped forward into the circle about Winthrop.

"Good!" Winthrop raised himself just in time to see Eleanor open the hall door softly. "Come back!" he shouted; then, as she paid no attention to him, cried, "Stop her! stop her; don't let her slip away!"

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Colonel Thornton, as he stepped forward and pulled Eleanor back into the room and shut the door. "You drunken loafer! stop bellowing at my niece."

"I won't, I won't!" Winthrop had worked himself into a frenzy. "She can't drug me here, fortunately—I won't be silent—*she is an international spy, and she murdered Senator Carew!*"

CHAPTER XX

WEAVING THE WEB

SLOWLY the meaning of Winthrop's words dawned on the four men.

"It's false! false as hell!" thundered Douglas. He stepped forward and seized Winthrop in a grip of iron and shook him as a dog would shake a rat; then, before the others could intervene, threw the struggling man on the floor. "Bah! you're not worth killing."

Whimpering with rage and weakness, Winthrop caught hold of the table and dragged himself upright, and stood swaying on his feet.

"It's true, it's true!" he reiterated. "Look at her,"—pointing a shaking finger to where Eleanor stood aghast, watching the scene. Her hand was on the doorknob and she seemed poised for instant flight. A curious smile twisted her pale lips as the men turned and faced her.

"He doesn't seem to have recovered from delirium tremens," she remarked slowly.

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"It may be, Miss Thornton,"—the Secretary of State spoke with grave deliberation,—“but it is a serious charge which he is making, and I think it had better be investigated now.” Eleanor winced visibly, then, controlling herself, advanced further into the room.

"I am at your service," she said with sudden hauteur, "but as I have an important engagement later I trust you will be brief."

"Sit by me here, Eleanor." Colonel Thornton, who had listened to Winthrop's charges in stupefied silence, pulled forward an armchair. "Mr. Secretary, will you occupy the desk chair, and you," turning to Winthrop, who cowered back as he caught the smoldering wrath in the older man's eyes, "sit over there," pointing to a chair some distance away.

Brett, seeing that Winthrop was too exhausted to move without assistance, piloted him to the chair indicated by Thornton, and, getting another chair, placed himself by Winthrop's side. Douglas, at a sign from the Secretary, sat down at the further end of the table and handed the statesman some paper and ink.

"Now, Mr. Winthrop," began the Secretary, "if you are more composed, kindly answer my questions. Why have you waited all this time before

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mentioning that you think Miss Thornton guilty of Senator Carew's murder?"

"Because I've been drugged, so that I couldn't give evidence. I tried twice to get a message to Brett, but Annette said she couldn't reach him." Winthrop spoke with labored effort.

"Annette!" chorused Colonel Thornton, Brett, and Douglas, while the Secretary and Eleanor looked their surprise.

"Yes, Annette," peevishly; "she used to come in occasionally to give me water when those devilish nurses were neglecting me. She told me that Brett was seldom at the house, and that she never had an opportunity to speak to him alone."

"The monumental liar——" Brett checked himself. "Never mind that now, Mr. Winthrop, go on with your story."

"She told me how Miss Thornton used to steal in and drug me, and asked me why she did it."

"Great Heavens!" Eleanor's exclamation was followed by a half-strangled laugh which ended in a sob. "What a viper!"

"You were not there last night," sputtered Winthrop vindictively, "and therefore I didn't get my usual dose, so I can tell what I know to-day." A triumphant leer distorted his features.

"Suppose you continue your story without making comments," directed the Secretary sternly.

Winthrop nodded sullenly, then began: "You recollect that I spent Monday night at the Alibi Club, Brett?"

"Yes."

"Well, when I left there I motored up Nineteenth Street, instead of taking the more direct way home. I thought I would turn into Massachusetts Avenue at Dupont circle, where there was less danger of running into electric cars, for the rain was falling in such torrents that I could hardly see through my windshield."

"When opposite the Owen residence I ran into a lot of waiting carriages and motors, and had to slow down. In fact, I went so slowly that by the time I was nearly opposite Miss Thornton's residence I stalled my engine and had to get out in all the wet and crank up," he paused dramatically. "You can imagine my surprise when I saw Miss Thornton come down under the awning which led to her front door and stand at the curb, looking up and down the street."

"How do you know it was Miss Thornton?" broke in Douglas harshly.

"There was a street lamp by the side of the

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awning and the light fell full on her; besides, I recognized the scarlet cloak she was wearing. I have seen it many times."

"What did my niece do, besides standing still and looking up and down the street?" demanded Colonel Thornton scornfully.

"She ran out into the middle of the street and down where a carriage was drawn up at the curb, opened the door, stood there talking, apparently, for a few minutes, then shut the door and bolted back to the awning, and I presume entered her house, as I saw no more of her."

"What did you do next?" inquired Douglas, with peculiar emphasis.

Winthrop flushed at his tone. "I had curiosity enough to step back and see that it was Senator Carew's landau, the last of a long queue of vehicles, at which she had stopped; then I went on about my business."

"Do you mean to say that you did not investigate further?" asked the Secretary, leaning forward the better to scan Winthrop's face.

"No. I knew enough never to interfere with Senator Carew's love affairs!" His sneer was intolerable.

"By God!" Colonel Thornton sprang to his feet

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and advanced on Winthrop, but Brett stepped between the two men.

"Have a little patience, Colonel," he said, pushing the irate man toward his seat; "then you can settle with Mr. Winthrop."

"Do you think I'm going to sit here and listen to aspersions on my niece's character?" he shouted. "Let me get my hands on that scoundrel!"

"Wait, Uncle Dana,"—Eleanor leaned forward and placed her hand on his arm,—“let him finish; then I will speak,” and her lips closed ominously.

"That is excellent advice," agreed the Secretary; "resume your seat, Colonel Thornton." His tone of command was not to be denied, and Thornton dropped back in his chair. "Now, Mr. Winthrop, explain your last remark."

"Senator Carew told me on Monday afternoon that he expected to marry Miss Thornton, and that he intended to spend the evening with her."

Douglas leaned forward and gazed earnestly at Eleanor, but she refused to meet his look, and with a troubled expression he turned his attention to Winthrop, who was again speaking.

"I told Senator Carew that I had heard a member of one of the embassies here declare that Miss Thornton was an international spy."

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"And what did he say to that statement?"

"He said that he would look into the matter."

"When did this conversation take place?"

"On Monday afternoon."

"And is that all you have to go upon for such an accusation?" inquired Brett scornfully.

Douglas was gazing moodily ahead of him. A memory of Paris, of Eleanor's extraordinary behavior there, of the whispers which followed her about, harassed him. Had his faith been misplaced? No, a thousand times no. He would pin all hope of future happiness on her innocence and purity of soul. He rose suddenly and stepped behind her chair, and laid his hand encouragingly on her shoulder. She looked up, startled, then, seeing him, her lips parted in a smile, and her hand stole up to meet his. His firm clasp gave her courage to face the situation, for it told her of his unshaken confidence and love.

Winthrop glowered at them when he saw the tableau, and his eyes gleamed wickedly. "It is very obvious," he said, "that Senator Carew found my statement was true, and charged her with being a spy; then left her house. Exposure meant Miss Thornton's ruin; even her influential relatives,"—he glanced meaningly at Thornton,—"could not in-

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tervene to save her, so she took the law into her own hands, picked up the letter file, stole out of the house, opened the carriage door, engaged the Senator in conversation—and stabbed him."

A strained silence followed, which the Secretary was the first to break. He turned directly to Eleanor.

"You called to see Secretary Wyndham at the Navy Department on Wednesday morning, did you not, Miss Thornton?"

Douglas' hand tightened involuntarily, but Eleanor showed no sign of agitation as she answered, "Yes, Mr. Secretary, I did."

"Have you anything further to say, Mr. Winthrop?"

"Not now, Mr. Secretary."

"Then let me suggest," exclaimed Thornton, "that Mr. Winthrop, in trying to implicate my niece in a dastardly crime, has but established his own guilt."

"How so?" The question shot from Winthrop's clenched teeth.

"We all know from the testimony of reputable servants that Senator Carew and you had quarreled," continued Thornton. "We know your habits are none of the best; we know that you have

WEAVING THE WEB

suddenly become possessed of large sums of money——”

Winthrop moistened his dry lips. “I deny it,” he exclaimed.

Thornton paid no attention to the interruption. “You alone knew where Senator Carew was spending the evening, and you went there and laid in wait for him, and now, you despicable cur, you are trying to lay the blame on an innocent girl.”

Winthrop rose, goaded by the scornful looks of the others. “I may have had the motive and the opportunity to kill Senator Carew,” he admitted sullenly, “but I did not have—the weapon. The criminal sits there.”—he pointed at Eleanor;—“I am absolutely positive of her guilt, for the letter file used to kill the Senator belonged to a silver desk set given her by Miss Cynthia Carew.”

Thornton frowned and turned a troubled countenance toward Eleanor, who nodded reassuringly as she rose to her feet, stepped back to Douglas’ side, and, leaning on the back of the chair she had just vacated, addressed the Secretary.

“I am a young girl, Mr. Secretary,” she began, “and, living alone as I do, I have been forced on numerous occasions to use my own judgment. It would have been better, perhaps, had I spoken of

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certain events before this, but I was so alarmed by the position in which I found myself placed that I foolishly held my tongue. I had hoped that certain facts would not become public. Those facts Mr. Winthrop has maliciously distorted. I have been guilty of a blunder, not a crime."

"I would be most happy to believe you, Miss Thornton," said the Secretary gravely; "but to probe this matter to the bottom I must ask certain questions."

"Which I will gladly answer."

"Did Senator Carew call on you on Monday night?"

"He did, reaching my house about nine-thirty, just before the rain commenced."

"Did anyone else know that he was there?"

"Only my Japanese butler, Fugi, who admitted him. My cousin, Mrs. Truxton, who is spending the winter with me, had gone to bed immediately after dinner."

"Was Annette in the house?" asked Brett quickly.

"No, it was her evening out. She returned shortly after the Senator left."

"At what hour did he go?" questioned the Secretary.

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"About half-past twelve o'clock."

"Wasn't that rather an unusual hour for him to stay?"

Eleanor colored warmly. "It was most unusual," she admitted. "But the pouring rain was responsible for that. He telephoned for a herdic cab or a taxi, but they were all engaged, and he waited, hoping that one would eventually be sent to my house."

"Mr. Winthrop spoke of an awning at your door, Miss Thornton," again broke in Brett. "I have passed your house a number of times and have never seen one."

"I had a large tea on Monday afternoon, and had the awning put up for that occasion, as the weather was threatening and my house stands some distance from the curb. The awning was removed early the next morning."

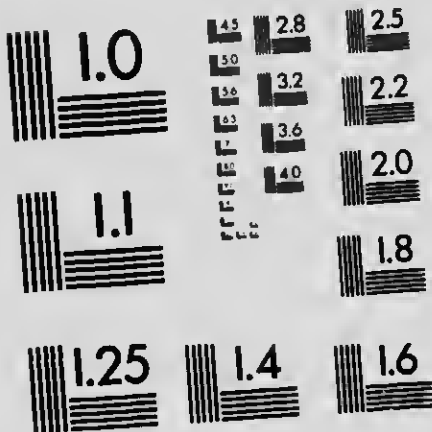
"It is not so very far from your house to the Senator's residence," mused the Secretary. "I should have thought, considering the lateness of the hour, that he would have walked home."

"But he was not going home, Mr. Secretary. He told me that he was going to drive to your house, as he had to see you immediately on your return that night."



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"Indeed!" The Secretary was bending forward in his eagerness. "Did the Senator state what he wished to see me about?"

"Only in a general way. He said that he had that afternoon discovered proof of a gigantic plot against the United States; that the secrets of the Government were being betrayed; and that he must give you the names of the arch traitor and his confederate. He called up your house by telephone earlier in the afternoon, and found that you were expected home on the eleven-o'clock train."

"I had intended to take it, but was detained at the last moment by pressing business and did not reach Washington until the following night," explained the Secretary. "If he couldn't get a cab, why did he not call up his own house and send for his carriage earlier in the evening?"

"He tried to, Mr. Secretary, but his telephone was out of order, and no one answered the stable call."

"How, then, did he get his own carriage?"

"My drawing-room windows look out on Nineteenth Street, and the Senator, in one of his numerous trips to discover if the rain was letting up, saw his carriage standing in front of my door. He recognized the horses and Hamilton by the light

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from the lamp-post under which they stood, waiting for the long queue of carriages ahead to move up the street. The Senator instantly decided to enter his carriage, wait for Cynthia, and then drive to your house, Mr. Secretary."

"So that's how he got into the carriage without getting wet," cried Brett; "the awning protected him. I suppose he just popped into his carriage and said nothing to Hamilton, as he intended to wait for his niece, and Hamilton was too befuddled with drink and the storm to notice the opening and closing of the door. Did you watch the Senator leave the house?"

Eleanor shook her head. "No," she said.

"Miss Thornton,"—the Secretary bent forward impressively,—“were you engaged to Senator Carew?"

Eleanor's color rose, but she faced the keen eyes watching her unflinchingly. "No, Mr. Secretary; the Senator did me the honor to ask me to marry him on Monday night, but I refused."

"Then you deny running out after his carriage, which Mr. Winthrop declares you did?"

"No, sir, I do not deny it. Mr. Winthrop is quite right." She paused, and the men looked at her expectantly. "I have a quest in life—not the

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one attributed to me by this gentleman,"—waving her hand scornfully toward Winthrop, who was listening to her statement with an incredulous smile distorting his features,—“but an honorable legacy which my dear mother left me to execute.

“On bidding me a hasty good night, Senator Carew, whether in jest or earnest, told me that, if I would marry him, he would assist me to bring my mission to a successful conclusion.”

“Would you mind stating what this quest is?” asked the Secretary.

Eleanor hesitated. “It is a family matter, and I would rather not go into it just now. But—if necessary—I promise to explain later.”

The Secretary did not press the point. “Continue your story, Miss Thornton.”

“About five minutes or more after the Senator left I came to the conclusion that my duty”—she glanced appealingly at Douglas—“compelled me to marry him. On an impulse, I picked up my cloak, which was hanging on the hall rack, opened the front door, and ran down to the curb.

“The Carew landau is easily recognized, and after peering up and down the street I saw that it had moved up several doors. Without stopping to think or consider the consequences, I ran down the

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street to the carriage and opened the door——”
She stopped, breathless.

“Go on, go on,” urged Douglas.

“I opened the door,” she repeated, “and, as God
is my witness, I found Senator Carew sitting there—
dead.”

CHAPTER XXI

AN INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE

AS her voice ceased on the last solemn word Eleanor read astonishment and incredulity written on her listeners' faces, and her heart sank. She bit her lips to hide their trembling.

"How did you discover Senator Carew was dead, Miss Thornton?" asked the Secretary harshly. "It has been testified that the interior of the landau was dark and that the carriage lamps had been extinguished."

"I did not see he was dead,"—Eleanor hesitated. "After opening the carriage door I spoke to him several times. On getting no reply, I put out my hand and accidentally touched his chest, and my fingers encountered the round base of the letter file." Her large eyes filled with horror at the recollection. "I did not, of course, know what it was then, but I realized that something was dreadfully wrong. The Senator's silence, the touch of that cold metal in such a place terrified me. I drew back, instinctively

AN INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE

closed the carriage door, and fled to my house. The next morning I heard of the murder from Annette."

"Why did you not come forward with this information then?" asked Brett sternly.

"Because I was afraid." Eleanor threw out her hands appealingly. "I had no one to verify my statements, and I feared I would be charged with the crime. Confident of my own innocence, I did not think any information I might furnish would assist the arrest of the guilty person."

"You should have spoken sooner," said Colonel Thornton sharply. He tempered his rebuke by rising and leading Eleanor to his own comfortable chair, into which she sank wearily. "But the harm your silence has done can fortunately be remedied. Philip Winthrop,"—swinging around on the young man,—“your plea that you lacked the weapon used is puerile; you could easily have picked one up at the club; letter files are kept on most desks. Knowing where Senator Carew was to be on Monday night, you laid your plans carefully beforehand, and with devilish ingenuity picked out an unusual weapon, so that it would be harder to trace the murder to you."

"You lie!" growled Winthrop fiercely; then,

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addressing them all, "I had nothing whatever to do with the Senator's death. She did it, though: your misplaced sympathy blinds you to the truth."

"Miss Thornton's sex will not shield her," declared the Secretary firmly, "if she be guilty—but, Mr. Winthrop, your story will also be investigated to the minutest detail. Until your innocence is proved without a shadow of a doubt you will consider yourself under arrest. Brett will see that the proper papers are made out."

Winthrop blanched. "I'm—I'm—in no condition to go to jail," he stammered. "It is monstrous!"

"Just a moment," broke in Douglas. He had been deep in thought, and had paid but little attention to their conversation. "You say, Winthrop, that the letter file used to slay Senator Carew belonged to a desk set given to Miss Thornton by Miss Cynthia Carew."

"I do," exclaimed Winthrop positively.

Eleanor's surprise was reflected in her uncle's face. Was Douglas taking sides against her? Her eyes filled with tears, which she winked hastily away.

"Have you such a desk set, Eleanor?" demanded Douglas.

"Yes, Cynthia gave it to me last Christmas."

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"Is the letter file missing?"

The answer was slow in coming. "Yes," she breathed faintly.

"Ah! What did I tell you?" cried Winthrop triumphantly.

Douglas paid no attention to him, but continued to address Eleanor. "Where do you keep this desk set?"

"In the writing room across the hall from my drawing-room."

"Describe your first floor, please, Eleanor."

"The drawing-room is to the left of the front door; to the right is the small writing room, back of that the staircase, and back of the drawing-room is the dining room. The house is what is called three-quarters."

"I see. Does the dining room communicate with the drawing-room?"

"Yes; there are old-fashioned sliding doors between the two rooms."

"Do you use portières?"

"Yes, on all the doors."

Douglas smiled at her encouragingly, then he turned to the four men. "Miss Thornton has testified that no one of her household knew that Senator Carew was with her Monday night. She is

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mistaken. There was one other person who knew that fact; who had ample opportunity to overhear her conversation with the Senator; to take the letter file from the desk in the writing room, and steal after him when he left, open the carriage door, and stab him."

"Who was it?" questioned Eleanor breathlessly, while the others hung on his words.

"The servant who admitted him."

"Fugi!" gasped Thornton. "My God! I believe you're right. But the motive, man?"

"An international intrigue." Douglas caught the Secretary's eye, who nodded appreciatively. "Miss Thornton has already stated that Senator Carew told her that he had discovered proof of a plot against this country, that the secrets of this government were being betrayed, that he knew the names of the spy or spies, and that he was on the way to inform the Secretary of State. Concealed in one of the portières, Fugi overheard all this, and, to save his own life, killed Senator Carew."

"You've solved it," declared Brett, rising. "I'll run over to your house now, Miss Thornton, and catch Fugi before he can get away."

"I don't think you'll find him there," interposed Eleanor. "Mrs. Truxton went out in my motor for

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a drive this afternoon, and Fugi, who acts as chauffeur as well as butler, is driving the car. I expect them here at any moment."

"So much the better."

"There is a car drawn up alongside of mine now," exclaimed the Secretary, who had gone over to the window overlooking the street.

Brett started for the door, but, before he reached it, it was flung open and Mrs. Truxton precipitated herself into the room. Her hat was cocked on one side in the most rakish manner and her flushed face testified to her perturbed state of mind.

"I've found you, Mr. Secretary!" she exclaimed, slamming the door shut. "Don't go," as Brett moved past her. "I went to your house, then to the State Department——" She stopped, breathless.

"Sit down," said the Secretary soothingly, "and tell me why you wished to see me so urgently."

"Oh, dear, I'm so confused!" Mrs. Truxton drew a long breath, then plunged into her story. "I stopped at our house, Eleanor, as I had forgotten to bring my writing materials here. I found my letter book in my room where I had left it, and, opening it, discovered this letter addressed to you, Mr. Secretary"—drawing out an envelope from

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her handbag. "I can't conceive where it came from," added the poor woman, "except that I left my letter book in Eleanor's drawing-room on Monday night on my way to bed. I was up early Tuesday morning before any of the servants were down, and, on entering the drawing-room, found my letter book still lying on the table, with several of its leaves turned over. I gathered up all the papers without looking at them carefully, and took them up to my desk and laid them away in a drawer. This is the first time I have opened the letter book, for in your absence, Eleanor, I have used your writing room." Mrs. Truxton paused to take breath. "It's marked 'important,' and that's why I hurried after you; besides, handwriting is like a photograph to me, and I never forget one I have seen—that letter is from Senator Carew."

"Good God! the missing letter!" shouted Brett.

The Secretary took the letter from Mrs. Truxton and tore it open, and, in a voice of suppressed excitement, read its contents aloud.

"MY DEAR MR. SECRETARY:

"I am writing to you in case I do not see you before you attend the Cabinet meeting to-morrow morning. Your servant tells me that you are ex-

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pected home on a late train to-night, but I may be detained in reaching your house, or the train may be later than scheduled, and therefore I might miss you. The President will reach Washington to-morrow on the *Mayflower* from his trip down the Chesapeake, and it is impossible for me to reach him to-night.

"I have discovered that Colombia is inciting Panama to revolt. We are not too well liked down there as it is. I have also discovered that Japan will take a hand in the game. The Island of Gorgona, in the Pacific, which belongs to a wealthy Colombian, has a magnificent harbor—the Harbor of Trinidad—and it has been offered to the latter nation as a coaling station. Japan does not have to appeal to European nations to finance a war; the South Americans will provide funds. They are jealous of our growing prestige, our increasing commerce, and fear our colonization. We reached out and grasped Panama, and they think we are casting covetous glances at Mexico and other countries to the South. Japan has also been guaranteed the Philippines.

"I induced Douglas Hunter, attaché of the American Embassy at Tokio, to make certain investigations. I expect to see him to-morrow, and, if he has discovered anything of material value, I will bring him with me to the State Department at once.

"In making these researches I find perfidy and dishonor exists in an astounding quarter. Govern-

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ment secrets are being betrayed by a paid spy and traitor—Dana Thornton——”

A chair was dashed aside, and, before anyone could move, Colonel Thornton had thrown open the hall door and disappeared. So totally unexpected was the *dénouement* that the others sat too stunned to move, and that moment's respite gave Thornton his chance. The roar of a motor broke the spell, and the men, galvanized into sudden action, raced to the front door, only in time to see Eleanor's powerful car, far down the street, with Colonel Thornton at the wheel. He turned the machine into Wisconsin Avenue and disappeared.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE PURSUIT

TAKE my car!" called the Secretary of State, as Brett and Douglas started up the street on a run. They turned and rejoined the Secretary as the latter's chauffeur, attracted by the disturbance, hastened out of the garden, where he had gone to get a glass of water.

The three men sprang into the machine, and in a few seconds were off. They swung into Wisconsin Avenue and sped on up that thoroughfare. The avenue was almost deserted at that hour, and the Sunday quiet was only broken by the whirr of their car as it gained headway. Far in the distance they could descry Thornton's motor, and, in obedience to Brett's order, the chauffeur increased his speed.

On and on they went. A bicycle policeman shouted at them as they whizzed by and, clambering on his machine, started in pursuit. They passed a crowded trolley car, and the passengers stared at their mad speed. They reached the outskirts of

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Georgetown and the more open country beyond. They gained on the car ahead of them, and Brett shouted aloud with the joy of the chase as they drew nearer. They passed the Naval Observatory, cut across Massachusetts Avenue extended, just shaving several other automobiles, the startled drivers thereof wasting their breath in sending endless curses after them. They swept past the Cathedral Close and continued their race along the Rockville pike.

As they approached the River Road they saw Thornton turn his car, scarcely reducing his speed, and cut across the road. It was a dangerous corner at any time, and as the front wheels made the turn the body of the car slued around. There was a grinding, splintering crash as the car struck one of the tall poles supporting the overhead trolley wires, and the big machine turned turtle.

Brett's chauffeur put on a final burst of speed, and the limousine leaped madly down the road. A cry of horror broke from the three men as a tongue of flame shot up from the overturned car ahead of them.

"By Heavens! the gasoline has ignited!" gasped Douglas. He was on the running board when the car slowed down near Thornton's motor. The lat-

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ter was a mass of flames. Douglas sprang to the ground, and the others followed him. "Get some fence rails," he directed. "We must try and lift the car so that Thornton can crawl out."

In a few minutes the men were back with boards torn from a nearby fence, but in that short time the flames had gained headway, and they were driven back by the intense heat. Unfortunately there was no loose sand at hand. An outgoing trolley car stopped, and several passengers ran to Douglas' aid. The fence boards caught fire and had to be put out, but finally the car was raised a slight distance from the ground, and a cry of exultation broke from the toiling men, only to die into a groan as a sharp explosion, followed by a heavier detonation, rang out. Dropping their hold on the boards, the men bolted to a safe distance down the road.

"It's hopeless!" gasped Brett. "No man can live in that fiery furnace."

Douglas groaned aloud. He had been shocked beyond measure by the discovery of Thornton's guilt and treachery, for he had liked him, and had accepted his hospitality. It was horrible to see him meet such a fate. Better the electric chair than being roasted alive.

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"Perhaps he jumped from the car before it turned turtle," he suggested.

"It's hardly likely," exclaimed Brett dubiously. "Still, we might look along the road. We can do no good over there." He shuddered slightly as he turned to look at the still burning car. The steel and metal work had been twisted into grotesque shapes by the great heat, which added to the ghastly picture.

Their search along the roadside was fruitless, and Douglas and Brett returned to the Secretary of State's limousine. They had to wait some time before the flames about the remains of Thornton's car died down into a smoldering mass. After the fire had burned itself out, Brett, with the assistance of horror-stricken spectators among the crowd that had collected with the Aladdin-like magic which characterizes street gatherings, examined the ground with minute care. Suddenly he moved over to where Douglas was standing, keeping back the curious crowd, and beckoned him to one side.

"Colonel Thornton did not jump from the car, Mr. Hunter," he said gravely. "We've just found all that's left of him—his ashes."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE END OF THE QUEST

AND so that was his end!" Eleanor drew a long, shuddering breath. "Poor Uncle Dana! Douglas, do you really think he was guilty?"

"I'm afraid so," sorrowfully. "The very fact that he was trying to escape proves it; otherwise he would have stayed here and faced an investigation."

"It's dreadful, dreadful!" moaned Eleanor. "And almost unbelievable. A traitor! A murderer! But"—checking herself—"that last hasn't been proved."

"That's Brett's voice," exclaimed Douglas, springing from his chair and crossing to the hall door. "Come in, Brett; Miss Thornton and I are sitting in the library."

The detective gave his hat and light overcoat to Nicodemus and followed Douglas back into the room, first closing the door carefully behind him.

"Has Captain Lane been here yet?" he inquired.

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Yes, he came over at once on being released. Mrs. Truxton took him upstairs to see Cynthia, who is rapidly improving, now that the mystery of Senator Carew's death is solved and Fred cleared of any complicity in it," explained Eleanor.

"Then would you mind asking Captain Lane to come down, Miss Thornton? I have several pieces of news which I must tell you, and I think his presence is necessary." Eleanor looked at him questioningly, and he added hastily, "He won't be involved in any further trouble."

"What tragedies have happened since I reached this house twenty-four hours ago," exclaimed Douglas, pacing the room restlessly. "Annette's death last night, and now the Colonel——" He did not finish his sentence, but instead stopped before the full-length portrait of a dead and gone Thornton, and gazed moodily at the painted face. From that gallant naval hero to Dana Thornton, traitor, was indeed a great descent. "A good man gone wrong," he commented, finally.

"An accomplished scoundrel," growled Brett. He stopped speaking as Eleanor reëntered the room, followed by Fred Lane. The young officer showed the ordeal he had gone through that morning and afternoon by the deep lines under his eyes and

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around his mouth. He bowed curtly to Douglas and Brett.

"You wish to see me?" he asked.

"Sit down, please." Brett pushed forward a chair for Eleanor, and the others grouped themselves about the center table. By common consent they all avoided Colonel Thornton's favorite arm-chair. "I am anxious to have a talk with you because there are several loose threads to this mystery which must be straightened out."

"What are they?" questioned Lane impatiently; he longed to be back with Cynthia.

"On my return from the River Road to headquarters I found an answer from the Paris police to my cable. They tell me, Miss Thornton, that your maid, Annette, was an international spy."

"Great heavens!" ejaculated Eleanor, in round-eyed astonishment.

"She was also in the habit of impersonating you." Eleanor's face was a study. "She had clothes made exactly like yours, even her kimono was a duplicate. From what I hear, Mr. Hunter, I judge Annette, who you recollect was in the hall when we were discussing the mysterious letter written by Senator Carew, decided to try and find it, and that's why she paid you a visit in the library last Tuesday night."

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She did not know that I had asked you to sleep there."

"I was grossly deceived in her," declared Eleanor bitterly. "I presume her splendid recommendations were all——"

"Forgeries," supplemented Brett. "Quite right, they must have been. I have just talked with one of the nurses from Providence Hospital who attended Philip Winthrop, and he declares that he caught Annette trying to give Philip a sleeping powder. Probably she wished to reap all the reward that she could, through blackmail and otherwise, and was afraid if Philip saw me that he would spoil her 'scoop.' With her usual habit of involving you, Miss Thornton, she made that crazy fool believe you were drugging him."

"Will you please explain to me," broke in Fred Lane, "why Mrs. Winthrop swore out a warrant for my arrest? What led her to believe me guilty?"

"Mrs. Winthrop wished me to tell you, Captain Lane, that she bitterly regrets her hasty action. I never saw anyone so completely broken up. It seems she wanted that graceless stepson of hers to marry her niece, Miss Carew, so that he would eventually inherit the Carew fortune. Then she has a natural antipathy for you because you are

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your father's son, and she was, unfortunately, only too ready to believe you guilty. Annette told her a number of lies,"—Brett shrugged his shoulders expressively,—“and there you have it—along with other circumstantial evidence, which would have pretty nearly convicted you.”

Lane flushed angrily. “So Mrs. Winthrop took the word of a worthless servant, the better to humiliate me . . .”

“Had Annette any grounds for her accusation?” questioned Brett swiftly. “Mrs. Owen said her library desk file mysteriously disappeared the night of her dance.”

“A coincidence which I cannot account for,” declared Lane, looking the detective squarely in the eye. “It may be that Annette saw the end of my silver handled umbrella which I was carrying, and in the uncertain light mistook it for a weapon of some sort.”

“Considering Annette's natural disposition to lie,” broke in Douglas, “I think it highly probable that she made up the story, and told it to Miss Carew.”

“And probably promised to keep silent if Miss Carew paid her,” suggested Brett scornfully. “It's too bad Miss Carew permitted the maid to blackmail her.”

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"What about the threatening letters to Senator Carew which Mrs. Winthrop thought I sent?" inquired Lane.

"Philip Winthrop wrote them."

"The miserable scoundrell!" ejaculated Lane.

"He was that and more—the Secretary of State and I took him back home in the former's motor, and when we had done grilling him we had cleared up many details in regard to this international intrigue. Through Senator Carew's letter and Winthrop's disclosures the intrigue has been nipped in the bud before more serious results can happen."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Douglas devoutly.

"It seems that Philip Winthrop has been a go-between for a wealthy Colombian, whose name he obstinately withholds, and some person whom the conspirators called 'our mutual friend.' Strange to say, Philip declares he never knew until Carew's letter was read that the mysterious individual was Colonel Dana Thornton. He says he gave all communications for the 'mutual friend' to Annette, and Annette, if you please, made him believe that the spy was—Miss Thornton."

"Well, upon my word!" cried Eleanor, her eyes blazing with indignation. "I was a nice cat's-paw

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for her. Do you know, I believe she, and not my uncle, killed Senator Carew."

"I'm sorry,"—Bre' hesitated, then went slowly on. "I'm sorry to say there's no doubt but that Colonel Thornton did murder the Senator. I don't want to inflict any more pain than necessary, Miss Thornton, but you will hear the details from others if not from me. I have seen Soto, your Japanese cook, and he swore that Colonel Thornton called at your house on Monday night, just after the Senator's arrival, and Fugi admitted him. On being informed that Senator Carew was with you, your uncle told the butler not to announce him, but that he would wait in the writing room until the Senator left. Soto showed me an umbrella which Fugi had carried to the kitchen to dry for the Colonel. It has your uncle's initials engraved on the handle, and Nicodemus positively identified it as belonging to the Colonel when I showed it to him on my arrival here just now.

"On being pressed, Soto also admitted that late Monday night he left your house to post a letter. As he came up the area steps to the terraced walk, which was covered by the awning, leading from the house to the sidewalk, he almost collided with Senator Carew, who seemed buried in thought and did

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not notice his approach. Soto drew back respectfully toward the area steps to let him pass. As the Senator entered his carriage another man sped down your high front steps, and, on reaching the carriage, pulled open the door and entered the vehicle, which then moved on. Soto swears solemnly that this last man was Colonel Thornton."

Eleanor drew a long, sobbing breath, and glanced helplessly at the others. Her uncle was not only a traitor but a murderer. Her worst fears were realized. None cared to break the pause, and, after waiting a moment, Brett took up his narrative where he had left off.

"It must be, Miss Thornton, that your uncle overheard all or part of your conversation with the Senator. He probably waited in the writing room until the Senator left the house, picked up the letter file, as he had no other weapon handy, and stole after him. Hamilton was too drunk to notice anything. The horses probably moved up the street of their own accord when the preceding carriages made room for them to advance. It was unpremeditated murder, and yet chance concealed Colonel Thornton's tracks most successfully."

"You are right," agreed Douglas. "If Annette had found Carew's letter to the Secretary of State

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instead of Mrs. Truxton, Thornton would have escaped detection."

"Annette was always complaining of Mrs. Truxton's early rising," Eleanor laughed hysterically, then cried a little.

"My darling, let me get you some wine!" exclaimed Douglas in distress.

"No, no, sit down!" Eleanor clutched his coat. "Don't pay any attention to me; I'll be all right in a minute."

"Fugi has disappeared," went on Brett, after a brief silence. "I think he overheard our conversation here this afternoon, for Nicodemus says he was loitering in the hall. On searching his room at your house, Miss Thornton, I found evidence, through certain papers, that he had seen in your uncle's pay."

"He thought it wiser to bolt," commented Fred Lane. "I have no doubt he knew more of affairs than we are giving him credit for."

"It's a great pity, Miss Thornton, that you kept silent so long," said Brett. "If I had known that Senator Carew spent the evening with you, and also about the awning, I would have cleared up this mystery sooner."

"I should have spoken." Eleanor looked so

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troubled that Douglas sat down on the arm of her chair and took her hand gently in his. As his strong grasp tightened she formed a sudden resolution. "There is another reason for my silence which I have not told you; wait a moment," and she rose and hurriedly left the room.

The men smoked in silence until her return. "The room is very dark, won't you light another burner, Douglas?" she asked, on her return. She waited until her wish had been complied with, then, as the men seated themselves near her, she began her story. "On Tuesday morning, just after I had heard of Senator Carew's death, I received a cardboard box containing jewels. That in itself bewildered me, but I was astounded by the message written in an unknown hand which I found on a card inside the box." As she spoke she opened the small box which she had just brought into the room with her. "Here is the card; read the message aloud, Douglas."

"*'The appointment was not kept. Well done.'*"

Douglas laid the card on the desk and the three men looked at each other in amazement.

"The message frightened me horribly," continued Eleanor. "I realized that some one must have thought me guilty of the Senator's death—and *approved* of it. The mystery of it appalled me.

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I did not know whom to take into my confidence; so I put the jewels into my strong box and said nothing, hoping that I would be able to ferret out the mystery by myself."

"Let us see the jewels," suggested Douglas.

Eleanor opened the box and pulled off the top layer of cotton, then rolled the necklace of rubies on the table, where the stones lay glittering under the strong light.

"They are superb!" exclaimed Douglas, while a low murmur of admiration broke from Lane.

"Their almost priceless value frightened me more than anything else," explained Eleanor. "I could not imagine who had sent them to me——"

"That's easily answered." Brett picked up the necklace and examined it minutely. "This necklace was sent you by the man who stole it."

"What?" ejaculated the two men, while Eleanor collapsed limply in her chair.

"These are the Hemmingway rubies," went on Brett. "They were stolen about a month ago in New York, and the police of this country and Europe were notified of their loss. I have here," drawing out a leather wallet and extracting a thin, typewritten sheet, "one of the notices sent to Headquarters. Let me refresh my memory." He

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skimmed over the lines, then a shout of exultation escaped him. "Listen: 'Mrs. Hemmingway was entertaining a house party at the time of the theft. Among her guests were Mr. and Mrs. Henry St. John, of Philadelphia; Miss Snyder, of Chicago; Colonel Dana Thornton, of Washington——' "

"Oh, no, no!" Eleanor cried, throwing out her arms as if to thrust the idea from her, then dropped forward and buried her head on her arms on the table.

Douglas started to move over to her side, but Brett checked him. "Let her alone," he advised in an undertone; "it's a shock, but she will recover." Then, in a louder tone: "By Heavens! that man was a positive genius!" in reluctant admiration. "He probably heard that the case had been turned over to the police, although the Hemmingways had asked to have the search conducted quietly, and therefore it did not reach the papers. Fearing to keep the necklace in his possession, he sent it to his niece with a cryptic message which he knew she would not, under the circumstances, dare show to others, and also reasoned that she would keep the necklace concealed for the same cause. I don't doubt he expected her eventually to ask his advice about the jewels and then he would get them back again, as

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soon as all danger of detection was over, on the plea that he would have them returned to the rightful owner, or some such plausible excuse."

"Upon my word, such villany exceeds belief." Lane gazed incredulously at the detective. "And yet I don't doubt you have guessed the right solution of the problem."

"Eleanor, dear,"—Douglas turned to the weeping girl. "If you feel strong enough I wish you would tell us about your quest to which you alluded this afternoon." Eleanor raised her head and looked reproachfully at him. "I realize the subject may prove painful to you at this time, but, Annette having implicated you in her transactions, I think it is best for you to clear up any seeming mysteries."

"Perhaps you are right." Eleanor sighed as she wiped away her tears. "I must first tell you that my mother was N. J. Fitzgerald——"

"The famous actress?" broke in Brett.

"The same. She gave up the stage when she married my father, Barry Thornton, then a lieutenant in the United States Navy. Their married life was unusually happy; therefore it was all the more incredible and tragic when one day he disappeared——"

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"Disappeared?" echoed Douglas blankly.

"Disappeared utterly. His ship was at Hampton Roads and he was given shore leave one day. At the wharf he told the coxswain to come back for him at ten o'clock that evening, and he walked on up to the hotel. From that hour to this he has never been seen or heard from." Eleanor paused and pushed her hair off her forehead, then continued: "A short time before his mysterious disappearance my father fell from the rigging of the ship to the deck with such force that he was picked up unconscious. It is supposed that the fall may have affected his brain, and so accounted for his subsequent disappearance."

"That is very likely," commented Lane. "I saw a similar case in the Philippines, but pardon me, Miss Eleanor, I did not mean to interrupt."

"Several days after my father's disappearance a nude body was washed ashore miles below Norfolk. The condition of the body prevented positive identification, but many persons, among them Uncle Dana, believed it to be my father. My mother, however, refused to accept that theory. She was convinced that he was still alive and suffering from mental aberration. She returned to the stage, first placing me with my uncle, John Fitzgerald, who

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brought me up. She visited many cities and many countries, but could find no trace of my father. Shortly before her death she sent for me and charged me solemnly to continue her search, which I have done to the best of my ability."

"My poor girl," said Douglas softly.

"My idea has been that if my father was still alive he would pursue his profession, so I searched the records of other navies, thinking that perhaps he might be serving under another flag. The day that you saw me at the Navy Department, Douglas, I had been going over old records, hoping to find some clew to his present whereabouts."

Douglas colored hotly as he remembered the construction which he had put on her presence in the department. "What did you mean," he asked, "by saying this afternoon that Senator Carew told you he could help you to bring your quest to a successful conclusion?"

"Senator Carew said that while in Panama he had seen a man who closely resembled my father. The stranger apparently did not recognize him, but so certain was Senator Carew of his identity that he gave him his visiting card, and insisted that he should call at the Navy Department in Washington. Douglas, do you recollect asking me about a man

who you thought you saw with me in the elevator at the Navy Department on Wednesday?"

"I do."

"I was terribly excited by your apparently simple question, for in stating that the man had black hair and blue eyes you exactly described my father."

"Great heavens!" Douglas sprang to his feet. "It is most astounding, but such a man as you describe really did call at the Department that morning and insisted on seeing the Secretary, saying that he had an appointment to meet Senator Carew."

"What became of him?" Eleanor's lovely eyes were aglow with excitement.

"I don't know. The Secretary and I both thought he had stolen the plans of the battleships." Eleanor's shocked expression stopped him. "Of course, now we know it was Colonel Thornton who called there later with you and Mrs. Wyndham, although how on earth he managed to steal the plans under the very nose of the Secretary is beyond me."

"Let me think." Eleanor pressed her hands to her throbbing temples. "I remember now; it must have been when Uncle Dana was using the desk telephone. He was leaning forward across the desk, and I recall that I noticed he had his right hand in a drawer; I couldn't see very distinctly, as his body

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was between us and the drawer and his overcoat was also thrown on the desk. Mrs. Wyndham was looking at a book, and the Secretary was coughing his head off by the further window, with his back toward us."

Brett struck the table a resounding blow with his clenched fist.

"By George, but he was slick! The smartest criminal I've run across in years."

A discreet tap sounded on the library door, and a muffled voice asked: "'Scuse me, but am Miss Eleanor in dar?"

"Come in, Nicodemus," called Eleanor. The old darky entered and, circling the table, handed her a note on the silver salver. She hastily tore it open and read its contents. "I must consult Cousin Kate," she announced, rising hastily, "before I can answer this."

"We must all be going," said Brett, following her into the hall, while Nicodemus paused to put out the lights. "One moment, Miss Thornton, will you please give me the ruby necklace."

"Why, I handed it to you," ejaculated Eleanor, in surprise, turning back from the staircase.

"I beg your pardon," said Brett, with positiveness. "I saw Mr. Hunter drop it on the table in

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front of you." Douglas and the young officer joined them.

"So he did," declared Lane, and with the other followed Eleanor as she hastily reentered the library.

"Why, it's not anywhere on the table." Eleanor felt among the table ornaments. "Douglas, do light the gas," in growing alarm.

"Where in thunder are the matches?" growled Douglas, overturning a vase on the secretary in his endeavors to find a matchbox. "Got any, Nicodemus?" as a figure brushed by him in the darkness and approached the chimney. The other men were busy searching vainly in their pockets for a match.

"Good for you, Nicodemus," called Douglas, as a tiny flame appeared in the direction of the chimney. "Bring it over here and light this candle-lie." His order was not obeyed.

The flickering light grew stronger, and then Douglas realized that it was burning some distance from the servant. The flame became stronger, and by its rays a face grew out of the surrounding darkness. A strong, handsome face, whose pallor was enhanced by the heavy black beard and dark shaggy eyebrows. The eyes were fixed on Nicodemus, who stood in the shadow with his back to the rest, and

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the two stared unblinkingly at each other. The silence was intolerable. Eleanor and the three men stood transfixed, too astounded to move. Suddenly a choking sob burst from Nicodemus. He threw out his arms as if to ward off some overmastering horror, swayed forward, and fell heavily to the floor.

The candle flickered suddenly as it was raised and applied to a wall gas jet. The sudden light caused the spellbound spectators of the scene to blink violently; then, as their eyes grew accustomed to the illumination, they made out the figure of a tall man in nondescript clothes standing near the chimney.

"Who—who are you, and where in hell did you come from?" gasped Brett.

"I am Barry Thornton, formerly of the United States Navy." The newcomer caught sight of Eleanor, and stretched out his arms pleadingly. "My dear, dear daughter."

Eleanor, grown deadly white, clutched the table for support. "I don't understand," she stammered.

"I forgot." The newcomer's arms dropped to his side. "You were too young to remember me when I last saw you. Fortunately," meeting Brett's incredulous stare, "Nicodemus knows me."

"Your spectacular appearance seems to have knocked him silly," exclaimed Captain Lane, regain-

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ing his voice. "I reckon we'll have to bring him around before he can identify you properly."

"Nicodemus, tell these gentlemen who I am," commanded the newcomer.

"Yo' is my marster, Cap'n Barry Thornton, suh." The voice came from behind Douglas, and all in the room wheeled in that direction. There stood Nicodemus, his eyes starting from his head, his face gray with fright. He had entered unnoticed a second before.

Eleanor's senses were reeling. With desperate effort she controlled herself. "Then who is that?" she cried, frantically, pointing to the motionless figure which was partly hidden from their view by the divan.

For answer the newcomer stepped forward and thrust the sofa to one side, then stooped and rolled the figure over, disclosing the white hair and well-known features of Colonel Dana Thornton.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FINAL EXPLANATION

DOUGLAS caught Eleanor as she fell and carried her to the lounge.

"Get some water and wine, Lane," he directed, and the young officer sped out of the room, to return quickly with Nicodemus bearing the necessary articles. Douglas forced some of the stimulant between Eleanor's clenched teeth, and bathed her temples and hands with the iced water, and, to his infinite relief, he had the satisfaction of seeing her open her eyes.

"Father," she murmured, "Father!"

"I am here." The tall, sad-faced man stooped over her, and she placed her trembling hand against his cheek. "Don't look so wild, my darling,"—as recollection returned fully to her. "Think no more of it," and he laid his hand softly over her eyes. She smiled like a tired child, and, reaching over, laid her hand in Douglas', then, reassured, lay still. Seen together, the likeness between father and

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daughter was obvious. Eleanor had inherited his handsome deep blue eyes, long eyelashes, and brilliant coloring.

Brett rose from beside the still figure. "He's dead—this time," he said tersely. "Apoplexy. It beats me how he got out of that burning automobile."

"He wasn't in it," said Barry Thornton calmly.

"He wasn't?" Brett's excitement overcame him. "Why, I saw him with my own eyes."

"You saw him leave here, yes; but you probably did not notice that the Japanese chauffeur was crouching at his feet in the car. When the machine turned into Wisconsin Avenue, out of your sight, my brother slowed down and sprang out, giving his hat to the Japanese, who took his place at the wheel and raced the machine up Wisconsin Avenue."

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated Brett. "So it was poor Fugi who was burned up. But, good Lord! when Colonel Thornton had made so successful a getaway what induced him to put his head in the lion's mouth by returning here, and what was he doing in this room?"

"If you search his pockets you may find out," was the cryptic reply as Barry Thornton drew up a chair by Eleanor's couch and seated himself.

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Brett thrust his hand first in one pocket of the dead man's clothing and then in another. In the last one he jerked it out again as if his fingers had been bitten. In his hand dangled the priceless ruby necklace and a wallet filled with bank notes! Brett sat down on the floor, for once speechless.

"How did you know it?" he asked finally.

Barry Thornton raised his disengaged hand and pointed to the portrait of his ancestor and namesake. "I was watching this scene through those peepholes,"—an exclamation escaped Douglas,—
"you almost caught me this morning, Mr. Hunter. This old house is honeycombed with secret passages. My brother kept a large sum of money in a secret drawer in that desk. He probably needed funds to assist him in escaping from this country, so came back here and entered the house by means of one of the secret passages. He has been concealed behind that sliding panel,"—pointing to an aperture in the wall near the chimney,—
"waiting to slip into this room. He seized the opportunity when Nicodemus put out the lights, and left by the billiard room door, to steal the necklace as well as get his money. Your reëntering the room flustered him, and he was making in haste for the secret passage when I stepped out of it and faced him.

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Thinking me dead years ago—his escape barred—the shock proved too much . . .” Thornton did not complete his sentence. There was a moment’s silence.

“I think it would be as well, Mr. Thornton, that we remove your brother’s body to his room,” suggested Douglas, recovering somewhat from his astonishment.

“Well, I don’t know about that; the coroner——” objected Brett dubiously.

“We can all testify to the details of Colonel Thornton’s death,” put in Lane. “But we cannot leave him lying here on his own floor. His death was natural, brought on by shock.”

“Very well, sir.” Brett rose and walked to the door. He returned in a moment with a plain-clothes policeman, and, with the assistance of Douglas and Lane, all that was mortal of Dana Thornton was carried to his room. Barry Thornton had requested them to return, and Douglas, Lane, and Brett trooped back to the library.

“Eleanor has told me of her long search,” began Thornton. “My disappearance came from lapse of memory, and the latter was brought on by a fall on shipboard. That fall,”—deliberately.—“was caused by my brother, Dana.”

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"Ol., Father!" Eleanor sat bolt upright.

"Yes, I had found out some of his deviltries and taxed him with them. I told him I would expose him if he did not mend his ways, and he promised to do so. He visited me on board ship, and while he was there I had occasion to mount the rigging. He followed me up, and managed to push me as I was swinging from one of the ropes. I lost my balance and fell, with what result you already know."

"The fiend!" cried Eleanor, bitterly. "And I trusted him so."

"His ability to inspire confidence has been his greatest asset," said her father dryly. "After leaving the gig that day at Old Point Comfort, everything is a blank to me."

"What brought back your memory?" asked Douglas.

"A chance remark overheard in a drinking hell of Colon, Panama. Two days before that a man whose face was dimly familiar met me in the streets of Cristobal and gave me his card, telling me I must ask for him at the Navy Department at Washington, and that the Secretary was keeping a place open for me. At the time, while his words impressed me deeply, they conveyed no very clear idea, nor did Senator Carew's name enlighten me; but

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they caused me to renew my efforts to remember the past, which I felt convinced was very different from my surroundings then.

"As I have said, two days after I overheard two men plotting against the United States. Toward the end of their conversation the younger man, whom I took to be an American, mentioned the name which woke the sleeping chords of memory—the name of my dearly loved wife, Nora Fitzgerald,"—his voice broke with a sob. Eleanor raised his hand to her lips and kissed it tenderly. Her father's grasp tightened involuntarily and he continued:

"I hastened back to Washington as soon as I could get here, working my passage, and on my arrival went to see Secretary Wyndham. The news of Senator Carew's death was a great shock, for I had depended on him to assist me to find my wife and child. I believe I had some sort of attack at the Department, but all I recollect is finding myself again in the street."

"What did you do then?" questioned Douglas, as the older man paused.

"I came on here, thinking I might find Dana. He was out, but old Nicodemus opened the door for me. He recognized me almost instantly; hurried me out into the kitchen, and there poured out

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such an extraordinary tale of Dana's behavior that I sat dumfounded."

"Do tell us what he said," urged Brett, hitching his chair forward.

"In justice to myself I must," was the grave reply. "Dana was a moral degenerate; brave to a fault, and very clever, he did not know the difference between right and wrong. If he had been content to keep straight he might have risen to high places; instead he practiced deceit and dishonor." Thornton's sad face hardened. "He was always a first class actor, and that talent helped him in the doubtful life he was leading. Nicodemus told me that he was in the habit of disguising himself whenever he was up to deviltry."

"Ah, that explains why Annette did not know that Dana Thornton was 'the mutual friend' to whom she delivered and from whom she received secret despatches," put in Brett, who had followed Captain Thornton's words with breathless interest.

"After what Nicodemus told me I decided not to let my brother know of my presence here," continued Captain Thornton, "and so occupied an unused room in the garret, where Nicodemus took care of me."

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"Oh, why didn't you come to me?" asked Eleanor passionately.

"I did, dear; yesterday morning, but you were out." An exclamation broke from Eleanor. "I did not leave any message or name, so you were not told of my visit. Nicodemus told me of my wife's death, and of your presence in Washington, Eleanor.

"How I kept my hands off Dana I don't know!" Thornton's eyes blazed with righteous indignation. "He was the cause of all my misfortunes. When possible I spied upon him; not an honorable occupation, but I felt I must fight the devil with fire. When I entered this room just now I intended to slay him, but Providence intervened and gave him a more merciful death than I would have meted out to him."

"I don't know about that," said Brett; "in the hour of his triumph you snatched his victory from him. God only knows what thoughts were concentrated in his active brain when physical endurance succumbed to the shock of seeing you."

"Perhaps you are right," agreed Thornton wearily. "I think that is all I have to tell you, gentlemen."

"There is one question I feel I must ask," Brett rose to his feet as he spoke. "Did Annette com-

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mit suicide, or was she killed by human or supernatural agency?"

"I think my brother planned her murder; one crime more or less did not trouble his elastic conscience."

"By Heaven! she brought it on herself by offering to confess to Colonel Thornton what she knew of Senator Carew's murder. But how the devil did he accomplish it?" questioned Brett. "The only door was locked on the inside, and no one could have entered by the windows. I examined all the wall space, thinking there might be a concealed entrance, but couldn't find a sign of one."

"But you did not examine the floor of the closet," replied Thornton. "It has a trapdoor cleverly concealed. The passage leads to a secret door which opens on the landing of the circular staircase leading from this floor to the next. My idea is that Dana stole into the room, found the maid asleep, and blew out the gas, leaving her to be asphyxiated, and then returned to his room."

"Did you see him do this?"—sternly.

"Most certainly not. If I had had the faintest idea that he intended to murder the maid, I would have prevented the crime. I stayed downstairs last night, going over some papers in Dana's desk until

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nearly three this morning. I was stealing up to my room when I saw Miss Carew coming down the hall, and, when she screamed and roused the household, I bolted into the secret passage opening from the stair landing."

"I am exceedingly obliged to you, sir, for straightening out these mysteries," said Brett, stepping to the door. "How much do you wish made public?"

"Only that which is absolutely necessary to clear the innocent from suspicion," returned Thornton gravely. "I leave the matter to your judgment."

"Very good, sir; I'll hush it up as much as possible. Good evening,"—and Brett departed.

Eleanor slipped from the lounge where she had been lying. "Wait for me here, Father," she requested, as she left the room.

"Will you excuse me, Mr. Thornton," said Fred Lane, rising. "I would like to join Mrs. Truxton and Cynthia for half an hour."

"Certainly, Captain, and I will be exceedingly grateful if you will explain to Mrs. Truxton what has taken place here to-night. Tell her as much or as little as you think necessary."

"I will indeed, sir; good night," and Lane, his step elastic as he thought of joining Cynthia, hastened to Mrs. Truxton's room.

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Eleanor was not long absent. Walking over to the lounge, she laid a number of leather-bound journals on her father's knee.

"Mother kept a diary for you, Father; she charged me never to part with it until we should meet, when I was to give it to you."

Thornton kissed her in silence. As Eleanor stood hesitating, Douglas' arm stole round her waist. "Come with me, dear heart," he murmured. The lovelight transfigured his strong face and was reflected in her beautiful eyes. Together they strolled to the door, but before passing out of the room Eleanor paused and glanced back at her father.

Thornton's iron composure had given way, and his head was bowed over the familiar handwriting as he read through tear-dimmed eyes the messages of love and faith penned by his girl wife in the years that were no more.

THE END

