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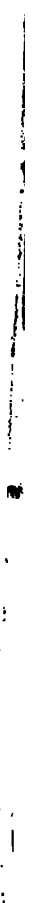
*The* UNCLAIMED  
LETTER

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ANNA McCLURE SHOLL



LITTLE, BROWN



For  
Jack Keenan  
1922

Shelli



# **THE UNCLAIMED LETTER**

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**ANNA McCLURE SHOLL**



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# THE UNCLAIMED LETTER

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BY  
**ANNA McCLURE SHOLL**  
AUTHOR OF  
"THE LAW OF LIFE," "BLUE BLOOD AND RED,"  
"THE FAERY TALES OF WEIR," ETC., ETC.

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To — Matilda *and* Shubael Cottle

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## CONTENTS

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CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Letter	11
II	The Quarry Hole	26
III	Gordon Brent	38
IV	The Hermit	66
V	Gordon's Story	71
VI	The Shawangunks	78
VII	Raymond	80
VIII	The Evergreen Walk	87
IX	Miss Almira Is Surprised	101
X	"The Brotherhood"	117
XI	Threads of Fate	133
XII	In the Garden	137
XIII	Room No. 14	163
XIV	The Missing Alibi	176
XV	Bender's Trunk	185
XVI	The Handkerchief	199
XVII	At the Falls	215
XVIII	White Violets	246
XIX	The Cable	249
XX	The Reading of the Letter	262



**THE UNCLAIMED LETTER**



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# The Unclaimed Letter

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## I

### THE LETTER

The postmistress removed her glasses, rubbed and replaced them. Holding the letter to the light she turned it this way and that, while the villagers watched her with the patient interest of people gathered in the country post office for the daily mail in the hope of an event.

“New handwritin’, I reckon,” a farmer commented, “or Miss Almira wouldn’t be screwin’ up her face at it.”

“Looks kind o’ pale, as if she was seein’ a ghost,” remarked another loiterer.

Miss Almira, perched behind her little cage of boxes, paid scant attention to the comments of the gathering, for the violent beating of her heart sounded louder to her than all their voices. She wondered if she looked as shocked as she felt.

At last she put the letter down as carefully as if it contained nitroglycerin and resumed her routine, though with such confusion of mind that she sent some people away letterless whose mail lay on the desk before her. “When he comes,” she whispered to herself, “I’ll show the letter to



him, and ask *him* what he thinks of it. He won't be so likely to gab."

Frederick Dewitt usually arrived late for his mail, and she hoped that no one would be then in the little store; no one but he—soldier of fortune in detective circles—must see or overhear the terrible address on that letter. Luckiest thing in the world that he had been ordered to his old haunt, East Burleigh, for his health. "For nothin' fazes him," she reflected, "though I bet he never saw a letter addressed like that."

She had placed it face down, and in that position she was almost ready again to doubt the evidence of her senses. Though she avoided touching it as she sorted an adjacent pile of newspapers, her eyes were never long away from the white envelope, of the kind that is sold in country stores for ten cents a package.

People drifted away at last and she was left alone with her sinister letter. If Mr. Dewitt did not arrive by noon, she told herself, she would go to his boarding-house and ask to speak to him privately.

But in the midst of her planning he arrived with his usual, "Good morning, Miss Almira"; and the sight of him was like a rescue from a nightmare.

"Oh, Mr. Dewitt!" she quavered, "I'm in such trouble."

"Trouble? What's happened? Snooper isn't sick, is he?"

Snooper was the long-eared gray cat who usually followed Miss Almira around the village like a dog.

"No! It's a dreadful letter that came in this morning's mail!"

“Bad news?”

“The letter—wasn’t for me.”

“One of your family?” he ventured.

“O, I hope not,” she cried wildly.

Dewitt was not easily bewildered, having wandered long through the intricacies of both spiritual and physical detection; but for a moment he looked blank. “How could you know what was in the letter if—”

“I don’t,” she interrupted, “it’s unopened.”

“Will you tell me, dear Miss Almira, what’s so dreadful about an unopened letter?”

“The address,” she answered solemnly.

He had seen strange addresses in his time—letters that seemed to have been mailed to reach no known port, but the element of dreadfulness was no part of their singularity. “And how could that be?”

She pointed to the letter. “There it is. I don’t feel as if I could touch the thing again.”

He picked it up, read the address, held the letter at arm’s length, read it again, this time aloud,

“To the person who committed the  
Murder at  
The old Bostwick Farm,  
East Burleigh,  
Ulster Co., N. Y.”

He smiled as he commented, “It is likely, Miss Fennell, that this letter will remain unclaimed—a joke, probably! Is there such a place as the Bostwick Farm?”

“Gracious me, yes! Uncle Abraham Bostwick’s farm, four mile out the village on the old Zeno

road that started to climb Outlook Mountain, and got discouraged."

"Does your uncle live there?"

"He's been dead five years."

"His family, then?"

She shook her head. "He had only one son, my cousin Hercules, a carpenter here in East Burleigh. Uncle Abe was mother's brother. He worked the farm over sixty years, though he said it grew more stone than crops. The old abandoned California quarries is on it. They did a sight of quarryin' there about Civil War times, and until concrete put stone out of business."

Like the majority of narrators she was giving more information than had been asked; but Dewitt had learned in his profession never to stop people's tongues; he heard the voluble one to the end in the hope of singling out the significant word from the multitude. Moreover, the incident had captured his imagination and was carrying him rapidly forward into the fascinating world of the elusive. This oddly addressed letter might prove his refuge from those spectres of dissatisfaction to which enforced rest had opened too many doors.

"Is anyone living in the house?" he inquired.

"No, it has been shut up since Uncle Abe's death."

"Why?"

She hesitated. "Well, it ain't been easy to sell—situation's too lonesome; ground too rocky."

"Is that all?"

His clear gray eyes searched her wholesome, apple-colored old face, too used to mirroring plain, everyday truths to hide now the shadow of concealment he saw there. She flushed, looked away. "No, it *ain't* all. Even in Uncle Abe's

time, and afore his time, 'way back to the war of 1812, the house had—a story. A young girl had been killed there by Injuns—that much was fact. Her cryin' and walkin' nights for years after her death—that's nonsense. But the talk stuck. You know," she added sagely, "onct a word goes out from anybody it lives like it was a person. It's the only thing in God's creation you can't—murder."

The last sentence came hesitatingly.

"You're right as rain. We won't speak of the letter to anyone. You don't have to post it up as unclaimed for a fortnight, and by that time we can pretty well know if it's a hoax. I'll go at once to the farm if you'll give me directions—and the key."

"Alone?" she quavered.

"Alone," he answered with a smile that brought back the look of youth prematurely banished by difficult work and thoughts not shared by the majority.

"Hercules, he has the key, and he won't think nothin' of your askin' for it," she advanced. "I've sent several summer folks up there lately—that thought they'd like to buy the place for a country home. But they all came back with the same tale, too lonesome."

"Well, I am looking for a country home, too—for my imaginary bride," he laughed. "Meantime, keep that letter in the general delivery."

Never did anyone deserve his name less than Hercules Bostwick, a little bright-eyed man, thin as a white pine lath. In response to Dewitt's request he brought out a large old-fashioned key, saying, "Cousin Almira ought to have a commish for sendin' so many folks to look at the farm.

You know the road—stone quarries both sides of it for nigh half a mile after you leave the old Dering place. That's shut up, too, and it's the last house before you come to Father's."

Dewitt started off at once—through the village, past the cemetery, to a cross-roads, to another cross-roads, then into the forest and a silence broken only by a stealthy ground wind and the occasional flirt of a chipmunk into his cranny. More than usually sensitive to the soul of regions, himself high-strung and in love with mystery, he felt it approaching him like a veiled woman. As an imaginative boy he had read Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe;" but with too keen a relish for life to bury himself in books, he had abandoned the labyrinth of philosophy for the tangible mazes of human problems; the riddles people set each other through crime or the wild play of their passions.

On this road—what was creeping near him?

The Dering farm, named by Hercules, was no relief to the silence and solitude, with its desolate out-buildings and dark stone farmhouse, whose little windows seemed to be peering fearfully at the road, which now entered the quarry region.

Rocks large enough for cenotaphs of giants! Stones heaped to the lowest branches of enormous pines; dark, stony avenues diverging from the road toward pits of certain darkness and uncertain depth. "No wonder the summer flitters are discouraged," Dewitt muttered. "Imagine this road on a moonless night."

The stillness seemed sinister and threatening, as the quarry cliffs encroached closer on the road. Here and there a rusted instrument of labor protruded from the naked underbrush, black against

the melting snow, as if its former manipulator had thrown it down on some sudden impulse and departed never to return.

Abruptly the hide-and-seek roadway took a sharp turn, revealing not only a glorious view, but, perched on a natural bluff of seemingly solid granite, the farmhouse of his quest, a gem of a place with its long Dutch roof, its stone walls bulwarked by massive chimneys, and its many-paned windows overlooking a blue expanse of country. No signs of decay were upon it, rather an air of defying time like a young-hearted great-grandmother. "Whoever built you first in this wilderness had a stout heart," Dewitt addressed it. "But, heavens, what a lonesome place!"

A lane led past the big red barns to the house, lined with oaks and elms that settled into the earth or soared to the sky with the same air of everlasting age. Dewitt found himself walking slowly and quietly.

All at once he drew up short, saying aloud: "No tricks of the imagination, please!"

For that had happened to him once in Rome, in the fading light of the Campagna, once in the yellow glare of a Chinese port. What he thought he saw, looking out of the window of a room to the right of the front door of the farmhouse, was the face of a woman.

It was a white flash—full of expectancy; or had he dreamed it? Probably a trick of the reflected sunshine on glass, or of his rather bad eyes. But if a reality, what was she doing in this lonely place? Of course no woman would come to such a spot unless she expected to meet someone. Women were not afraid of war, or pestilence, or great spiritual cataclysms, but most of them were

afraid of mice and darkness and deserted places.

He took out the key; better not to use it, he reflected, until he had walked all around the house to discover if any door or window had been left open by which an intruder could have obtained entrance. Very carefully and quietly he skirted the massive walls, and found all windows tightly locked down—all doors closed, until he came to a rickety wooden one that admitted to a kind of enclosed porch or shed, and faced a house-door that stood ajar. If there were anyone in the building he or she had gained admission that way. Probably the last country-house seeker had omitted to lock up.

The story of "the haunt" came back to him, and though for the sake of avoiding possible inaccuracies he was the most skeptical of men regarding alleged spiritualistic phenomena, yet a slight shiver passed over him at the remembrance of the face in the window.

He stepped into a hoary old kitchen rendered dark by the close-crowding lilac boughs against the window-panes. The place smelled of ancient wood, dried fruit and hickory smoke. The heaviness of dead days of toil brooded over it.

Before exploring the house he took the precaution to lock the door by which he had entered and slip the key into his pocket, wishing to be master of any situation that might arise. But he was convinced now that he had been mistaken about the face at the window. A profound silence brooded over the premises, so well-built that not even a board creaked as he crossed the kitchen and began his exploration.

The ground-floor rooms showed no sign of any deed of violence, their yellow woodwork giving

back the clear light of a pleasant April day with a cheery glow far removed from any suggestion of his errand. Upstairs it was just the same—a succession of old-fashioned apartments bare of anything but sunshine. It did not seem worth while to go into the garret at the behest of some practical joker who had intended only to alarm and mystify good Miss Almira.

But even while the thought was in his mind, a faint footfall on the floor above him sent again a thrill through his nerves. He listened, straining his ears to catch the slightest noise, and it seemed to him that the attenuated essence of sound which registered at intervals corresponded closely to the cautious tread of a woman's foot. Those footsteps he followed from a spot directly over his head to the side-wall. Whoever it was might be contemplating a drop from an upper window—not such a difficult matter—and certain muffled sounds immediately confirmed the theory. With a rush Dewitt made the garret stairs, and stood confronting the palest woman he had ever in his life beheld.

She was standing by the window which, evidently, she had been trying in vain to open; and her eyes, fixed fearfully upon him, were dark with some unfathomed anguish. In the instant of their meeting he saw first her paleness; then her quite extraordinary beauty, of a proud and exquisite type. The soul lurked in the mouth, in the eyes, and turned even her great fear into a white light.

She had backed up to the massive chimney, her hands pressed against the stones, her body tense and rigid with fear. Whatever she was, whatever she had done, Dewitt's first impulse was to end that horror.



"I beg pardon," he said kindly, "I am afraid I frightened you."

Her lips opened, but no sound came nor did her muscles relax. Her eyes, so shaded by thick lashes that their color was not apparent, still gazed with an intensity not in the least diminished by his reassuring voice. Then he realized that something beyond his presence there was inducing that condition of extreme apprehension; something which made him but a link in the general horror.

"The owner of the place," he went on in a casual voice, "gave me the key to look it over. Too lonely for my taste."

As he spoke he could see the conventional woman in her—the girl of *débutante* parties, of opera boxes and dances—struggle to dismiss to some corner the now anguished and affrighted woman. The effect brought color to her face, life to her eyes. She stepped forward into the light, and he noticed the quiet richness of her walking dress.

"Yes, I was looking over the place, too," she said in a voice not quite even, but of a penetrating sweetness. "It's an interesting old dwelling—but very lonely."

"Far too much so for anyone—unprotected," Dewitt said with emphasis. "I would not care to have a sister of mine alone here."

He saw a shiver pass through her; but he knew now that she was not afraid of him, since he had exercised a power which was one of his peculiar gifts, the filling of his voice with reassurance, with electric sympathy.

She was not afraid of him; but she was desperately afraid of something. What was it?

He led the way to the living room that commanded a view of the road and of the quarries. And there, as she paused in the calm light, he saw her with that sharpness of vision that presages love; noted the lovely texture of her skin, the proud but sensitive curve of her lips, red with their own blood, thank heaven; the cheeks in which her color came and went; the abundant dark hair, as if shadowed from a Rosetti painting. But the eyes, most beautiful feature of all, were still full of fright. What had they seen?

“Miss Almira Fennell, the postmistress of East Burleigh, with whom I am acquainted, tells me that there is a legend attached to the house,” he began in an effort to dissolve her fear and win her again to the speaking point.

“Indeed?”

“Yes, a ghost story. The villagers think it is haunted by the spirit of a young girl who was killed here by the Indians.”

To his amazement she uttered a muffled cry, then dropped like a stone at his feet.

He lifted her and placing her on an old settee, ran for water. To locate the well and a water vessel took several minutes, and by the time he returned—he heard her voice as he paused on the threshold, conscious, indeed, but still in anguish. “Gordon, we are ruined!”

She was sitting up, looking wildly about her; and Dewitt hurried to come within the range of her vision as if he had not heard her words.

“Here is some water. You fainted suddenly. You must have walked too far.”

“I must have walked too far,” she repeated with a visible effort to pull herself together.

After drinking the water she thanked him, and stood upon her feet unsteadily.

“Wherever you came from you are not fit to walk back,” he said with gentle authority. “I shall put you outside in the sunshine while I go for some conveyance for you. Where—are you staying?”

“At Outlook Mountain House,” she replied.

Outlook Mountain House! Why, it was a matter of a thousand feet above them—the old all-the-year-round caravansary, built on the summit of the mountain and commanding a look-out into five states.

“Of course it is impossible—for you to climb this mountain. I will go to the village for a car.”

He took her silence for assent, and unlocking the front door led the way into the garden where, facing the quarries, an old wooden seat stood. Toward this he conducted her, but suddenly she stopped with an imploring look.

“If you please, I would rather sit at the back of the house. The kitchen doorstep is in the sun.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to sit here?” Dewitt suggested. “The place is so deserted. On this bench you will at least be in view of the road.”

“No, not here!”

Her eyes again became dark, dilated with fear.

“No, please,” she went on, “don’t let’s argue. Go for the car, and I shall be so very grateful to you.”

There was nothing for it but to leave her, and hurrying away on his errand Dewitt had an uncanny feeling of having dreamed the whole experience; or that the girl, in the garb of the present, had emerged from those vast folds of the mountain where, like Rip Van Winkle, she had been

held enchanted by the ghosts of her Indian assailants.

Once he paused to look back. The scene was peaceful but curiously removed from the whole range of his experience in many lands. A white-faced girl seated on the sill of an old house promised a mystery deeper and more complicated than any he had ever encountered. Yet of objective evidence of this presence he had none, except her swooning. An apparently healthy young woman does not faint at the mention of a legend, if the story has no bearing on her own experience.

Haste was imperative. He swung along at a good pace and was soon clear of the quarries. By and by he became aware of a figure advancing along the road; a man was coming toward him at his own sharp pace and seemingly out of breath from fast walking. As he drew nearer Dewitt saw that he was quite young, with the look of those American juniors whose background has been university and France; something fine and worn and tempered about him as if youth had been arrested and stamped in imperishable metal. He greeted Dewitt easily and then asked:

“Am I on the right road to the old Bostwick farm?”

“You are,” Dewitt answered, immediately convinced that this was the other half of the situation! Of course the girl was waiting for this man. But why her fear and agitation over anyone so overwhelmingly and obviously trustworthy? Why her acquiescence in his, Dewitt’s, plan to get a car to take her up the mountain, if she had an appointment to meet this newcomer? Were they lovers? If so, they could not originally have

chosen a lonelier spot for a secret meeting; now not so secret after all!

The stranger was by this time as far out of reach of question as the girl herself. Dewitt continued on his way. He must fulfill his part at least.

An hour later he was driving a rickety but reliable little fury of a car at a breakneck speed over the road. Just before he reached the farmhouse a singular sight met his eyes near the last spur of quarry stone that reared a sheer hundred feet of granite defiance to the sky. At its foot, within its shadow, a man was crouching, looking intently at the ground. The sound of the car evidently disturbed him in his investigation, for he sprang to his feet, and as he disappeared into the forest Dewitt saw it was the man he had met on the road.

He could scarcely wait now to find the girl again, lovely, white, silent, frightened atom of femininity that she was—but with power beneath the delicate fashion of her face, determination behind the fear in her eyes. She would forge on to her goal, whatever she dreaded. Of that he was sure.

The sun must be gone from her doorstep. He could not get to it too quickly; but as he really and surely expected, she was not there—nor was she in the house, or in the fields, or in the ever-widening circles of his search. Then all at once a horrible thought came to him, and he directed his steps towards the spot where he had seen the inquiring stranger stooping over something.

A curious sort of clear daylight was in the air, the kind that diffuses itself in the mountains where the sun has gone for the day behind some spur or shoulder of the everlasting hills, but is still far

---

from its setting. Everything stood out miraculously clear, solemn and emphatic of the light's approaching departure. The shadows, very deep, brought on a sudden sense of evening as he came close beneath the towering giant of a cliff; then held his breath and drew back just in time. At his feet was night, hideous night, blackness that would be there at midday, because it penetrated into the bowels of the earth.

It was a hole nearly round, possibly eight feet in diameter, and of indefinite depth, forming a dark gulf of menace to the unwary walker.

“Good Lord! what do they mean by leaving such a place open?” Dewitt exclaimed. His second thought was of the man he had seen peering down it, and a sick fear followed. Where was the girl? Had a second murder been committed in this sinister spot?

## II

### THE QUARRY HOLE

He picked up a stone; dropped it into the depths; counted. The faint thud that came at last to his ears told of a frightful depth. Were there no ledges?

In throwing the stone down he had held his arm straight out over the pit. Now he experimented with a second stone, dropping it close to the edge. The fall this time was not so great; and the sound was fainter, as if the rock had encountered not rock, but a substance like earth—or flesh. Evidently there was a ledge half-way to the bottom of the horror. What was on it?

Strange that Miss Almira had not mentioned this hole as the one perfect place on the old Bostwick farm for a murder. Did she know of it? He must get back to her quickly.

But as he started for the car a figure rose in his path, literally, it seemed to him in all after-thoughts of the incident—so like a wraith was the tall East Indian, as Dewitt immediately recognized him to be by his native costume. The moon-like, benevolent face beneath the swathed white turban peered anxiously into his, as his inquiry was made in English, free of foreign accent.

“Have you, sir, if I may inquire, beheld a young lady, a very beautiful young lady, on this road?”

“I have, indeed!” Dewitt ejaculated fervently.

"I brought that car from the village to take her up the mountain, but when I arrived she was gone."

"I am her servant. I am Ramah Tong."

The simple words were spoken with great dignity, and with a melancholy accent, as if the task of attending upon an elusive and beautiful young person were severe, requiring the imagination of a poet and the vigilance of a detective.

"She left the hotel soon after the lunch hour, having risen from a sick bed. Usually I follow at a distance to see that no harm comes to her. Today, alas, I was not prompt in starting. The curse of my late master will be upon me should harm befall her."

"No harm is likely to befall her—unless there are more holes like that on in the neighborhood."

"Alas, yes!" His grave, calm eyes followed the direction of Dewitt's pointing finger. "You have not heard, then, of the accident."

Dewitt gave a startled gesture. "What accident?"

A look of sorrow disturbed the calm of Ramah Tong's face. "We are waiting for the authorities. I did all within my power, then notified your coroner in East Burleigh, and wired the aunt of Madame to come at once. In the country all moves slowly. That was two days ago—two days since the accident. Madame's aunt has not arrived; nor has your distinguished coroner, Mr. Hercules Bostwick, taken pains to give me the aid I require for a difficult undertaking."

The shadows were thickening and Dewitt deemed it best to restrain his curiosity long enough to take Ramah Tong out to the highway where his mistress might even then be on her road



to Outlook Mountain. The Indian servant seemed grateful for his interest; and with the noiseless, adroit movements of his race, took his place at the wheel without a word and ran the car to the cross-roads, next turned it up the mountain where, after a run of about a mile, they saw ahead of them a swiftly moving pedestrian, who proved to be the young lady of their search.

She showed no surprise at being overtaken, seemed, indeed, glad to take her place without apology or explanation in the car, sinking into the seat like one at the breaking-point of fatigue.

"We will get you to the hotel," Dewitt said gently. "Then I will help your servant to bring your friends to you. I see you are in trouble."

"Great trouble!" she murmured. "I was too restless to wait at the farm. I had to start back."

"Certainly," said Dewitt, true to his principle of always agreeing with a tired or nervous woman.

On they sped, the white-clad figure at the wheel seeming to Dewitt the very incarnation of the strange events of the day; bringing into that fresh American forest the wraith-like mysteries of an immemorial land. He had been drawn to Ramah Tong on sight—felt instinctively the faithfulness and devotion of his service to this beautiful young woman, concerning whom Dewitt's mind was by no means easy. If there had been an accident he was confident that she knew more about it than her servant.

At the hotel, a chilly barrack lighted up gaily in spite of its April emptiness, they found an agitated French maid, who at once took voluble possession of her mistress, informing her that Madame, her aunt, Mrs. Richards, was on "ze way by aid of ze good *Dieu*;" and on this the two

women vanished together. Dewitt was left alone in the hotel corridor with Ramah Tong, whose kind, dog-like eyes followed his mistress sorrowfully as long as she was visible. Dewitt laid a hand on his arm.

“Come outside. You can then tell me, perhaps, how I may be of service.”

The Indian followed him with alacrity to a vast ledge of granite known of old to Dewitt, which jutted out toward the stars and the moon, above an abyss of waving forest trees spreading their branches over a heavy shoulder of the mountain. In the valley below winked the lights of East and West Burleigh.

“Now tell me what has happened. In the first place, who is your mistress?”

“Three days ago she was Miss Christine Harcourt, daughter of my late and beloved master, Dr. Adrian Harcourt, of the town of Highland Park. Two days ago she became Mrs. Martin Carfax. Immediately after the marriage we started to motor to Outlook House, where the honeymoon was to be spent, the maid Henriette to follow the next day with some luggage. I was at the wheel. We reached East Burleigh without incident, but on our way up the mountain we were misdirected, sent into that old road which ends at a farmhouse. We had proceeded as far as the entrance to the farm when I, becoming suspicious that we were lost, stopped the car to make inquiries at the house, not knowing it was empty. Mr. Carfax also got out to look around him; and the last I saw him he was going toward the great cliff, Mrs. Carfax following a few feet behind him. It did not take me long to discover that no one was in the farmhouse, and I had almost reached the car

again when Madame, white as a ghost, came running to me, screaming out that Mr. Carfax had lost his footing and had fallen into a great hole at the foot of the cliff.

“For a minute we both called and cried into the dreadful place. It seemed bottomless. Then Madame implored me to go at once for help; and I drove the car like wings of the wind; but before I could reach a house I met fortunately on the main road, two men—that I thought at first were Italian workmen but who proved to be countrymen of mine—with coils of rope and a ladder, on their way to some house in the neighborhood. I hurried them to the hole. The ladder might have been a twig. On what could you rest it in that gulf! The rope was no better! I implored Madame to go on to the hotel. I would send a telegram to her aunt, Mrs. Richards, and notify the authorities of East Burleigh. The coroner—a carpenter, I believe—is neither a wise nor quick man. He seemed not to believe my word,” Ramah Tong ended with melancholy accent. “And what can I do unaided! Grappling irons are needed. Ropes of incredible length.”

“Good heavens! man! you didn’t let the matter rest there! Your master may have suffered loss of consciousness only—caught on some ledge!”

“I did what I could,” the Indian replied with a fatalistic gesture, his dark, sombre eyes looking into the gulf of the night. “Madame was ill in this mountain hotel; in fever for two days; in fever now. I believe my new master dead!”

“Dead or alive, he must be rescued tonight,” Dewitt exclaimed. “I shall go straight to the village. Stay with your mistress, Ramah Tong. Say nothing.”

"I speak only to the wise man," the Indian replied, "or to the man in authority, though he be not always wise."

Dewitt drove his car down the vast curves of the Outlook Mountain road at a reckless speed. A horror of realization filled him, his own dread of wells and tunnels and dark, shut-in places aiding him to visualize the actual objective grimness of that pit in which a man, once on the verge of supreme happiness, might be lying in hideous abandonment. The two days' delay might already have accomplished the possible slow death begun by a fatal misstep.

His mind was so intent on the problem of rescue that it was some time before the outlying accompaniments of the situation forced themselves upon his consciousness. Then the bells jangled. Too much was unaccounted for; and the clue to the missing parts of the story Dewitt believed was the unknown Gordon whom Christine Carfax had gone to the farm to meet.

Was this Gordon the young man he had met hurrying along the Bostwick farm road? Did he see Mrs. Carfax? hear from her the story? Probably, else why that peering into the hole?

On the other hand, if he knew there was a man there to be rescued, why at the sound of the car had he disappeared like a flash into the woods? "Good God, it doesn't hang together!" Dewitt groaned, horribly afraid of rushing into a road that might lead him to the conclusion that of all others he most dreaded. Usually the human beings of a criminal drama were to him mere pawns whose relative positions under the movements of the law, and as much Gospel as the circumstances permitted, would in the end determine a solution

of whatever puzzle was on the boards. Whether A, B or C were hung or sent to the chair, or to the cell, was less a matter over which to be emotional than to be scientific.

But her face had blotted out science. Under the pale moon he saw it, like the resurrection of all his youthful dreams of romance and beauty; for in the beginning his romantic rather than his scientific nature had led him—to the amazement of his Bostonian relatives—into detective circles. There through his combination of patience with intuitive genius, of lightning flashes of insight with a passion for detail, he had made his name famous—had risen to be a silent partner in the most noted firm of unofficial investigators in the city, that of Wickford & Gale. But even in that position he treated his craft in the romantic as well as the scientific spirit. Other men might accept life. He would investigate it, following clues of temperament as faithfully as the witness of the dropped glove or the crooked letter, or the blood stain. His motto had been always, "Back of every symbol, a soul." Limping legs, misplaced furniture, the very hang of a curtain, might lead the adventurous into veritable labyrinths of the human spirit. No accident in the least whether a woman choose blue or violet hangings for her boudoir. Crime was always in the soul—died in the soul; or emerged into the objective. The lines of crime converged always to a point of human consciousness, a center of radio-activity from which the fine filaments went forth. The point of human consciousness in this instance was a woman's love. For whom?

His heart sank into nadir depths as he asked the question, for already love—sudden, swift,

overwhelming—had produced in him that sixth sense through which the real lovers of the world know the end from the beginning. His destiny lay clear before him, and it held no hope. About her was the undefinable atmosphere of a woman who has loved deeply; and she was not one to swerve from a great emotion. But who was the man toward whom it was directed, the unknown Gordon, or the husband of a few hours? As he thought of that poor wretch he unconsciously speeded up the car. Five minutes later he was pounding at the door of Hercules Bostwick.

The little man appeared rather amazed over the racket Dewitt had set up. "Lordy, what's on fire?" he queried.

"Nothing! Two days ago a man fell into the quarry hole of your farm; and two days ago you were told of it."

"Gosh!" was Hercules' first comment. He stood scratching his head and blinking his white eyelashes. "Gosh! Two days ago was April Fool's Day. I thought that nigger was an April Fool joker dressed up! Nobody believed the fellow. Nobody wanted to fall for it on April One; nobody wanted no cold ride o' five miles to look down a hole everybody's seen. Now, you don't say it's true!"

"I've been told it's true by the man you call a nigger. He's the East Indian servant of the lady whose husband met with this horrible accident. We can't waste time in talk—we've got to get rope and grappling hooks."

"Of course, certainly," said Hercules, but he made no move, seemed still reflecting on the possibility of the matter being a hoax.

"Why didn't you have that hole boarded up?"

“Everybody knows about it,” replied Hercules calmly. “All any fool’s got to do is to keep away from it.”

“The summer people don’t know about it. What of the children of summer people?”

“O, if I rented the farm I’d cover the hole or rail it off from the children. Well, I guess we’d better alarm the village.”

Easier said than done. People were skeptical and seemed inclined to think that “there was nothin’ in the story.” Search was made for the heavy hooks on which bales are lifted and swung. While commandeering rope Dewitt stopped for a moment at the East Burleigh post office and related what he had found out to Miss Almira. Of all the villagers she alone met his solemn gaze with one of equal solemnity.

“It’s true, then,” she whispered.

“What’s true?”

“That letter—the address on that letter.”

“We can’t tell yet—whether it was accident—  
or—”

He couldn’t bring himself to say the word.

“Let me see the letter again.”

It had evidently been mailed at the post office to which it was directed; mailed in the night. “Is there a night-drop for letters?” he inquired.

She stepped outside and showed him the slit cut into the clapboarding. “The fellow who posted it didn’t take any chances,” Dewitt commented.

He examined the address—typewritten, of course. What a boon to criminals the innocent typewriter has proved! “Well, keep it! We don’t know anything yet, Miss Almira.”

And he had not told her all. “Gordon” was taken from the narrative. He dreaded excessively

the introduction of this possible lover or rival into anyone's consciousness.

The party of rescue from the village did not get well under way until nearly ten o'clock in spite of Dewitt's fever of impatience. It would be too late soon to telegraph the daily papers the version of the tale that he intended they should have. She must be protected at all costs. As the procession of automobiles started up Outlook Mountain Dewitt went over every detail of the case since Miss Almira had showed him the unclaimed letter in the East Burleigh Post Office. The letter was the starting point of strange conjectures.

It could not be an April Fool letter, since it was mailed on the night of April second. The writer, whoever he was, knew of an occurrence, criminal or otherwise, at the Bostwick farm. Obviously the letter was posted not as a missive, but as an advertisement—for who under the sun would acknowledge that he was the person for whom the letter was intended? It was simply a round-about, anonymous method of accusation. Whom did it accuse?

The scene at the hole when the work of grappling had begun resembled a night piece by some fantastic painter. Gasoline torches lit the scene up wildly, projecting vast jerking shadows of skeleton trees high against the great cliff. Within the circle of light, like a depthless eye staring out of night into night, the pit frowned. Dewitt had made inquiries concerning the hole, found that it had been uncovered by the force of a mighty blast years ago and was believed by the villagers to be bottomless.

The circle of spectators about the central group



of workers constantly widened, though the night was cold and windy. Mostly farm and village people these, for the summer visitors rarely arrived in April; but hovering in the background, the Indian servant standing guard behind her, Dewitt to his astonishment beheld Mrs. Carfax. Her face, immobile as marble, was turned toward the pit; her eyes followed every movement of the workers.

Directly opposite to her, his face as deathly as her own, stood the man who had inquired of Dewitt the road to the Bostwick farm. His eyes were directed to Mrs. Carfax with no effort apparently to conceal an agitation, an intensity of sympathy that marked him out from all the bystanders. Whatever his connection with the affair he apparently stood ready to throw secrecy to the winds.

An ex-miner had volunteered to be lowered into the pit; and several yards of rope had been played out before his warning jerk told the rescuers that he had reached a stratum of air in which his light had been extinguished. Pulled to the surface he reported a great depth beneath the point where the foul air had rendered his return necessary. It was now determined to use grappling irons.

To Dewitt the process of preparing the paraphernalia of rescue seemed interminable. The rope was played out again; and hollow sounds rose weirdly as the hooks struck against the sides of the pit—down, down, to what seemed an appalling depth. All at once Hercules Bostwick's high-pitched voice broke the expectant stillness.

“Boys, the hooks has caught.”

Their burden was heavy and many hands were reached out to assist.

“Careful now,” Bostwick directed, “no bruises that we c’n prevent.”

The silence grew tense. Dewitt’s gaze was directed, not at the pit, but to the face of Christine Carfax. Her expression had changed from fear to a kind of passive misery. Once she turned and clutched the arm of Ramah Tong; and he looked down upon her with a depth of compassion in his eyes that won Dewitt, albeit envying him that office of protector.

A sigh, muffled cries, the last straining of powerful shoulders and muscles, then a strange and sinister sight: the head of a man with wide-open, dead eyes—and parted, astonished lips, blue and rigid—rose above the level of the well. The body in this vertical position sent a shock through the assembly. Dewitt saw Ramah Tong step directly in front of his mistress.

But she pushed past him and was on her knees beside the body before the hands of the rescuers could compose it for her anguished survey. Bending over it, her face covered with her hands, she completed a scene for which Dewitt in all his experience had no counterpart. The crowd stood motionless, all but one man—the inquiring stranger of the afternoon. He went quickly forward and laid a hand on her shoulder. At his touch she uncovered her face, raised her head in a dazed way, and cried out in a passionate voice:

“Don’t touch me. Oh, don’t touch me!”

The man drew back as if shot.

### III

#### GORDON BRENT

It was nearly two in the morning before Dewitt had accomplished the ensuing formalities. Following Mrs. Carfax's outcry Ramah Tong had hurried her to a car where her maid, still voluble and evidently frightened out of her senses, was waiting to receive her. Then he returned to ask Dewitt's help. There was no reason, the latter said, why the body after the inquest could not be sent directly to Highland Park. Meanwhile the village undertaker would assume its charge.

Tong thanked him profusely, and attended upon his directions with the silent perfection of a high-type East Indian servant. When matters were well understood by all concerned, Dewitt drew Tong into the shadow of the trees.

"Can you tell me the name of the man who put his hand on Mrs. Carfax's shoulder as she was kneeling by the body?"

Tong's eyes betrayed sudden anger. "It was unwarranted," he said. "Yes, I can tell you his name. It is Gordon Brent. He lives in Highland Park, and for years he has been in love with my lady."

"But why should he have followed her on her wedding journey?" Dewitt asked.

Over the face of the Indian ran a quiver of indignation. "He is mad—mad!"

Stepping into the circle of light, but with his

back to the men who were gently and reverently lifting the body of the dead bridegroom on to a temporary bier, Dewitt scribbled his name and address on a card, and handed it to the waiting Ramah Tong.

"Give that to your mistress, please; and tell her that she can call upon me for anything—anything in the world!"

Between two and three he reached the little hotel where he was stopping. Usually it presented after ten o'clock a dark exterior, but tonight lights burned in the various rooms. People were up and about, evidently too excited over the tragedy at the California quarries to go to sleep. Dewitt had no desire to discuss the matter with anyone, and was hurrying to his room when he collided in the hall with the man called Gordon Brent, who drew back, recognized him and seized his arm eagerly.

"May I have a word with you?"

"Certainly," Dewitt answered coldly, not averse, however, to a conversation with this man who might throw some light on the crucial question—accident or murder?

Gordon Brent seemed in no hurry either to ask questions or to answer them. Dewitt, studying his face as he lit a cigarette with the evident distaste of a man who prefers cigars, decided that what he most resembled were those young, gallant, good-looking hybrids of Du Maurier who were born in England and brought up in France. He was decidedly composed, in the romantic manner, by heredity, environment or whatever forces had lent to him that air of serious, knightly nonchalance. When he did begin to talk it was, so to speak, in the middle of his narrative.

"Of course," he said, "everyone knows that

Martin Carfax had a very weak head for deep places, high places; and a corresponding temptation to visit them. He nearly lost his life in the Grand Canyon years ago; couldn't bear dizzy heights; was always drawn to them. It seems a strange fatality—this death on his wedding day."

"Where were they married?"

"At her late father's home—'The Towers,' Highland Park."

"You were—at the wedding?"

"Heavens, no!" his face contracted with pain.

"That was out of the question."

"Yet you were well acquainted with Miss Harcourt—as she was then?"

"I have known her since she was six, and I eleven."

"And you are now?"

"Twenty-nine, and twenty-four."

"Were you, too—in love with her?" Dewitt asked boldly.

"Ah, that's just the point," came the ready answer. "We were at one time engaged to be married."

"And since you are so good as to give me these details, when was that engagement broken off?"

"Two years ago."

"By her?"

"Naturally."

"The reason?"

"She was jealous of a girl to whom I had been friendly—a distant cousin—a mere matter of form."

"No reason to be jealous?"

"Not the ghost of one. She knew that I lived—only for her."

"Did she fall in love with Mr. Carfax?"

“No, he fell in love with her; rushed her into this marriage.”

“Were you and he friends?”

“No! enemies!” his voice was hard and metallic. The hand on the table clenched into a fist. “I hated him so,” he said slowly, “that I wanted anything to happen to him—anything. That was not right, but men in love are not always clear-headed. He was openly exultant and insolent. I never resented it on the surface—it seemed too big a tribute. But when she sent for me and told me of this awful happening up there, I seemed like a person free of an intolerable load. I forgave him, as you might forgive something that had poisoned your good air or stolen your sunshine.”

The candor of this narrative was having a curious effect upon Dewitt, as if he were listening to an innocent man rapidly recording himself guilty. “It is evident,” he said, “that her friendship for you was unimpaired, or she wouldn’t have sent for you immediately in her trouble.”

Gordon’s face blanched. He met the statement with silence, taking long puffs at his cigarette before he answered. “That wasn’t in the least the reason why she sent for me.”

It was Dewitt’s turn to look amazed. “Surely she was in need of help.”

“O, horribly so! I could do nothing. You see I was stunned, too.”

“By the news, of course.”

“Yes, but more by her—delusion.”

“And what is that?”

“I’ll not tell you till I have to,” he answered savagely as he rolled himself another cigarette, “and then you’ll be as astonished as I was.”

“It takes a good deal to astonish me.”

“Yes, I’ve heard so,” Brent commented.

“How have you—heard of me?”

Brent looked amused. “You are very modest—or very ignorant of your fame. I followed you through the Holloway affair, through the Pickford case—though I didn’t agree with you about the significance of Dr. Pickford’s leaving in the middle of his dinner party.”

Dewitt chuckled. “Dr. Pickford told me I was right—months later.”

“Oh, indeed,” Brent said in a disappointed tone.

“You are a bit of an investigator yourself?”

“Oh, no! just for amusement, when I’m not painting pictures.”

“But you were going to astonish me. I can wait; though there are a few things I’d like to know. Tell me, is Mrs. Carfax wealthy?”

“The late Martin Carfax believed her to be.” The bitterness of his tone, which was yet free of vituperation, illuminated much that had been dark to Dewitt. This conversation, almost entirely without sequence, seemed to him to have something of the quality of a magic lantern. Images were flashed upon his brain by this young man’s talk, vivid, indeed, but unrelated. Had Carfax married her for her money? Surely not for that alone. Her extraordinary beauty would conquer even avarice.

“As a matter of fact, she is immensely rich,” Gordon Brent added. “The converging lines of more than three large fortunes met in her. Not that all this inheritance ever for a moment spoiled her. Never have I known anyone so gloriously free from that kind of self-consciousness, but her wealth has been a temptation to others. That

dreadful aunt of hers, Mrs. Richards, who will arrive in the morning and add another sting to death, has fairly battered on the poor girl. Martin Carfax, I imagine, though much in love with Christine, had his own selfish motives for hastening the wedding. Christine jumped in at the last—almost without fuss; no bridesmaids or that kind of thing.”

His eyes grew sorrowful, wistful. Despite his volubility, the loquaciousness of a very tired man, Dewitt had no sense of an unseemly exposure of private matters; rather the weary recital of conditions now on such a far horizon that all the world might safely know them.

“And the Indian servant? Where did he come from?”

“Dr. Adrian Harcourt, Christine’s father, picked him up first in New York; then Tong acted as a kind of courier for him in India. He was out there studying tropical diseases. Tong is a highly cultivated person himself.”

“I gathered as much. I am glad she has him to look after her. He seems most devoted.”

“He *is* devoted. He’d go through fire and water for her. And I believe East Indians can do that literally,” he added.

Either he was very clever or very stupid, Dewitt concluded, when Brent had bidden him good-night with a promise to be on hand in the morning to render any assistance necessary. Feeling no inclination to sleep Dewitt proceeded to marshal his facts, selecting only those that seemed decidedly mysterious. These were:

1. The turning into the Bostwick farm road when it was obviously a by-path, and could not lead to the Mountain House.



2. The secret meeting of Christine and Gordon, two days after the accident.

3. Christine's cry, "Don't touch me," as she was bending over the body of her husband.

4. The *unclaimed letter* at the post office.

The element of intangibility in the case rendered it to Dewitt all the more fascinating. On the surface, a gentleman subject to dizziness had met his death by venturing too near a deep hole, his unfortunate bride being apparently the sole witness of the accident. Dewitt, however, had learned that in many instances not the event itself, but its context, is the mine of significance. The context in this case involved several contradictory elements.

Again he took up the leading points which lent oddity to the whole affair. First, the divergence into a branch road, even though that road had once been opened with a view to its continuing on up the mountain, beyond the Bostwick farm. Strangers in the region could not know its history, and inquiries of the natives could not have resulted in prospective guests of the Outlook Mountain House taking the accustomed routes. Martin Carfax, used to cars for years and with the Blue Book tucked in his luggage, was not likely to make such a mistake. The Indian servant was, of course, excusable.

To Dewitt's mind there was always in any story a point from which it really began, however long the preliminaries. These, of course, might reach back to Noah's Ark. The point of starting here was the switching off from the right road to the wrong one.

He threw himself, fully dressed, on a coach, the better to ponder the matter, with the result, of

course, that he was soon asleep. The violent ringing of his telephone woke him in the broad light of the April morning, and half-dazed he caught the message: "A gentleman to see you, sir. Mr. Harold Brock, of Highland Park."

"Send him up," he replied. Evidently he was known to Mr. Brock, though the latter was a stranger to him.

Entered a sulky-looking person, whose searching gaze at Dewitt implied that he was taking a thorough mental inventory of that famous young detective.

"Pardon disturbing you," he muttered. "I'm Brock, Martin Carfax's best friend. I was best man at his wedding three days ago. When I heard you were nearby, I couldn't get to you quick enough."

Dewitt raised his eyebrows. "I am honored, but I don't see the connection. Professional detectives are scarcely needed in case of accident."

"Accident, hell!" ejaculated Mr. Brock. "Martin was killed, murdered, anything you like. Mrs. Carfax's servant telephoned me last night; but I didn't swallow his story. Tong's hiding something, protecting somebody! You can't tell me that the happiest man in New York State would walk into a death-hole. Say," he wound up, "my car's at the door; take me up to the California quarries. If poor old Martin has had his life juggled out of him, I'm the little boy that's going to send someone to the chair, if it's Christine herself."

His bulldog jaw settled into grimmer lines. He looked, indeed, not unlike a well-set-up English bull, with his own decided views of life, men and affairs.

"You're dreaming," Dewitt replied. "It's a clear case of accident. What has Mrs. Carfax to gain by killing her husband? She has a great deal of money. She had just married him, and certainly he couldn't have beaten her on the road within four hours of their wedding."

"Martin Carfax would never have lifted a finger against her—if she was prepared to shoot him!" commented Brock. "Take me to that damned hole. I've seen the poor boy at the undertaker's. I've got to get this straightened out."

"I am as interested as you are in getting it straightened out," Dewitt said. "Of course, I'm not here because I was sent for. I happened to be up here to recover from a combination of influenza and overwork. Don't, for pity's sake, talk murder when the community has accepted accident. Work with me, if you want to, and keep still."

Brock grunted. "I'll hold my tongue. Don't worry."

They swung up the mountain. Roads being bad, cars were few. "God-forsaken place to go on a wedding trip. Tong arranged all details, I believe," Brock commented.

Dewitt gave such a start that the car swerved. "Tong arranged the details, did he? Then why in thunder did he lose his way going up this mountain? They went into a side road—a road that had started for the summit and never got there. Tong must have known they were off the track."

Brock gave another of his grunts. "I tell you, there's something in it. You probably don't know, perhaps, that there was another love affair before this—a fierce one."

"Indeed!" Dewitt commented languidly.

"Yes, the only one, in my opinion, that ever

really meant anything to Christine Harcourt, as she was then. She's that kind of a woman, white-fire and steel; always makes me think of those cup-and-dagger women one sees in frescoes of Italy. Poor old Carfax did all the loving—she let him. What she had up her sleeve I don't know, but she saw the thing through; kept her word. The first thought that flashed through my mind when Tong telephoned was, 'She's flunked the job—wiped him out on a minute's impulse.' Pushed him in, to put it plainly."

"Great heavens!" Dewitt exclaimed in an appalled voice; and all his nature rose in protest. She, beautiful and rare, must be cleared from this charge, if it took the rest of his life. It did not matter that only one man, and he jealous for a dead friend, thought this of her. That single suspicion would reach her like a poison, and infect her spiritual atmosphere. Her way must be clear and wholesome to whatever happiness life in the future held for her.

"Gives you a jolt, doesn't it?" said Brock. "Ah, see who's here!"

A car was approaching, driven by Tong himself. Two ladies occupied the back seat, and one of them was Christine. Tong, in recognizing Dewitt, slowed down, finally stopped the car and got out. Brock and Dewitt alighted, and the former went to the side of the other car on which Christine sat, and held out his hand stiffly. She did not take it, did not even seem to see it.

"When did you arrive?" she asked.

"Tong telephoned about midnight. Why didn't you send for me when this first happened?" he demanded in a tone in which there was little kind-

ness. Dewitt saw Christine shrink back as she answered:

“I was too dazed to send for anyone. Ask Tong why he didn’t send for you, not me.”

Meanwhile Dewitt addressed himself to the Indian. “Mr. Brock tells me, Ramah Tong, that you made the arrangements at the hotel for Mr. and Mrs. Carfax. If this is true, how is it that you took the wrong road on the day of the wedding?”

“I made all arrangements by mail,” he replied quietly with a patient air, as if to say, “I am expecting such questions. Ask as many as you like.”

Was he shielding his mistress? Her appealing eyes were fixed upon him; and as Tong gave back her gaze with quiet reassurance, it seemed to Dewitt that she breathed a sigh of relief. He now went up to her. “The inquest is at twelve. Do you wish to see me before you testify?”

Her bloodless face was averted for a moment from him, then she leaned forward and asked in a low tone that could only reach Dewitt’s ears, “Why are you going to the farm?”

“Mr. Brock wishes to look down the hole.”

“Is that all?”

“So far as I know—yes.”

“Where are you stopping, Mr. Dewitt?”

“At the Mill Stream House.”

“Is it true that you are a professional detective?”

“Yes.”

“May I see you—at the Mill Stream House in an hour?”

“Most certainly.”

The two cars then went their separate ways. Brock was voluble, excited, and exclaimed more

than once over the roughness of the road. "Anybody would know this was a cul-de-sac—anybody!"

"Well, what of it?" Dewitt said coldly. "What does it prove?"

"Somebody's lying," he retorted. "And I want to know why Gordon Brent is in East Burleigh, instead of Highland Park."

"Maybe Tong sent for him—just as he sent for you."

"Not likely."

"Perhaps Tong's mistress sent for him."

"If she did she's not the girl I took her for. I admire Christine Harcourt, though I hated her for marrying poor Carfax without an ounce of love for him."

"People get bewildered sometimes," said Dewitt, "and keep on the wrong road from sheer moral bewilderment."

"Shucks!" said Brock fervently. "Now show me that damned hole. Not visible from the road, eh? Then how did the honeymooners know of its existence?"

"Fatal instinct, perhaps," Dewitt answered, leading the way to the pit.

Brock examined both the place and the approaches with minutest attention. "Unless Carfax deliberately tried to stand with half of his feet protruding over the edge," he commented, "he couldn't possibly have fallen into the thing. You see the rim is slightly raised above the surrounding soil; and yet the pit is entirely visible."

"Who would have any object in pushing him in?" Dewitt inquired. "Mrs. Carfax needn't have married him."

"Yet he was pushed in," said Brock.

“You are as sure of it as if you did it,” Dewitt gave back.

Brock smiled. “I can prove an alibi. Don’t worry.”

Dewitt thought of the letter and after running Brock back to East Burleigh he went straight to the post office, and asked to see it again. Miss Almira drew him into a corner.

“What do you think?” she whispered, after glancing around to make sure they were alone. “Miss Marden down in the telegraph office said that two nights ago, very late, the telephone rung—you know the office is in her home—and she was asked to send two messages—both to Highland Park; one asked some man to meet her at the Bostwick farm; the other begged a woman friend to come at once. Both telegrams was signed ‘Christine.’”

“Miss Marden was very imprudent and unprofessional to tell you anything of the kind,” Dewitt commented. “Does she talk to everybody?”

“Land, no.”

“Well, if you’re the only one, there’s no harm done. It’s my experience that a person can be safe who confides to one perfectly discreet human; if he confides to two, you might as well say he’s talked to two thousand—and each will have a different version of his tale.”

Miss Almira looked frightened. “But how about the murder?” she asked casually.

“There’s no murder, my dear lady. Someone is playing a practical joke on you.”

But he was not sure in his own mind of the truth of that assertion, and still less certain when he was face-to-face in the parlor of the Mill Stream House with a beautiful and agitated

woman. Christine had still a look of horror in her eyes, inexplicable even on the assumption that she had been whole-heartedly in love with her husband. Dewitt's first task was to quiet her, bring her into that detachment when, in a sense, the mind lets go its torture, rests, looks on if only for a brief minute, and judges calmly.

"Mrs. Carfax," he said gently, "Why not get out of doors? The morning's mild. Let's talk under the sky."

"Oh, yes!" she said eagerly. "That will be a relief."

He took her in the direction of a pine grove, where was a little path worn hard and smooth by the artists who flocked to East Burleigh in summer, and which followed one of the broad, brawling streams for which the region was famous. It was his experience that confidences came more quickly with accompaniment of sound. People afraid of their own voices in an entirely quiet room would speak freely if a piano were played, or a street organ happened along. Dewitt recalled his famous instance of wringing a confession of murder from a man while a Cathedral organ was pealing forth the March of the Priests, from "Aida." Her eyes, eloquent of memories, were gazing in the stream as if she wished she might be tossed away by its waters.

"What a torrent," she murmured. "And I can remember the summer when—"

She caught herself up quickly with a frightened glance at Dewitt, who only remarked in a quiet way, "You know the region?"

"Highland Park is only thirty miles away. Yes, I spent several summers here, when I was studying landscape painting."



“Were you familiar with the old Zeno road?” he inquired.

A slight flush reddened her cheeks, but it seemed that she was incapable of prevarication. She held her head high as she answered, “Perfectly.”

“And—you knew that it did not lead to Outlook House?”

Her face was white now, and a wave of tenderness swept over him, as if to hurt her was but to rouse all the compassion of his nature. “Your Indian servant, Ramah Tong, said that he took the wrong road by mistake, stopped at last to inquire at the deserted farmhouse; and in that little interval Mr. Carfax’s fatal curiosity to see the old quarry pit led him to his death. Am I right in these facts?”

A millenium of suffering was in her eyes as she turned them upon him; and in that moment Dewitt wondered why the majority of young girls thought that to be continually laughing or smiling increased their charm. He waited for her answer with an intensity of interest that a few days before he could not have supposed himself capable of feeling.

“No.” The monosyllable was faint as a sigh.

“Then why did Tong—”

“Tong is—shielding me.”

“And who are you shielding?” was his instinctive unspoken question, as he paused in the path, his eyes now as sorrowful as hers. “Then what East Burleigh knows, what the papers know, is not the whole truth?”

All at once her desperate calm forsook her and she burst into passionate weeping. He let her cry her heart out, become still and evidently exhausted before he attempted to question her; for the pas-

sion of protection her tears had awakened knew now but one goal. He must save her for final happiness and peace if it took years. The word "dear" almost crossed his lips as he said gently:

"Do you feel, that on this slight knowledge of me, you can trust me, a professional detective—but more! I have lived through many experiences and have rarely failed to know truth and goodness when I saw it. If it were ever in woman, it is in you—whatever your mistakes. Solemnly I ask you to trust me, as I trust you."

She raised her heavy eyes to him. "I promise this," she said, "whatever I tell you will be true as far as it goes. I do not promise to tell you all. But I do trust you."

"Thank you. Now let us walk on into the sunshine. When you are quite calm, tell me as much as you see fit."

"I am calm now. You help me. We took the wrong road that day because Martin—Mr. Carfax—had heard of the Bostwick farm's being for sale, and he wanted besides to see the quarry hole. I never knew anyone, of such easily disturbed balance, with such a mania for high or deep places. He would go miles out of his way to see a precipice, a deep ravine, and yet he dreaded them. I cannot tell you how he dreaded them."

Dewitt nodded understandingly, well enough acquainted with emotional psychology to know that fear, desire and hate are not only the three most powerful magnets of existence; but in their extreme forms always attract the subject to the object, the object to the subject. A man who hates another, is as surely drawn to the one hated as the lover to his mistress. The malign attraction, he knew, by a strange paradox, forges chains of

union from which there is no escape; and in like manner to fear anything is to draw calamity. According to this psychology it was natural enough that Carfax, with his strange mania for places that affected him disagreeably, should seek them out. Natural, perhaps, that in the average of accidents he should fall at last a victim of his own morbid curiosity—but was he a self-made victim?

“We sent Tong on to see if the house were open,” Christine continued, “and while he was gone Martin spoke of the hole, said it was at the foot of the high cliff, he had heard, and proposed we should look at it. I reminded him of his tendency to dizziness, and he replied, ‘We won’t go too near. Do you think I’d take any risks on my wedding day?’”

“Just the same he strode on ahead of me at a very rapid pace—almost as if he could not get to the hole quickly enough. I followed as fast as I could. Then—”

She paused, overcome by an agitation which apparently she could not conceal from him.

He said gently, “Have you reached the point of your story beyond which you do not wish to go—the end of the truth trail?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“Mrs. Carfax, I am going to confide something to you in my turn, something which may excuse in your eyes my seeming persistence. At the post office yesterday—”

But he was destined to leave the sentence unfinished. A whirlwind of a woman, with snapping black eyes, seemed to rush out of nowhere in her character of *deus ex machina*. “Christine,” she summoned, “you have no consideration for my nerves! I want to know if we are going to motor

back to Highland Park or go by the train. I have a committee meeting this afternoon that I know even poor dear Martin would want me to attend."

Christine introduced Dewitt to her aunt, Mrs. Richards, and then answered her. "Whether we can start or not depends entirely on the coroner's jury."

"Why, my dear, these mere formalities will be over in fifteen minutes. They meet at twelve. It is now half-past eleven. You had better come to the hotel. I have some black for you, loaned by the landlady—who is about your figure. Very kind of her. You will excuse us, Mr. Dewitt."

Perforce he had to, and made his own way slowly back, wondering if the women who were fools undid the work done by women who weren't, in the march of civilization. He dreaded intensely the sitting of the jury and the giving of evidence by those concerned. Her words, "Tong is shielding me," came back to him like the echo of violent calamity. How mysterious she was, made all the more so by those sudden direct statements of truth; as if to cling to truth were her only protection against oncoming madness. Had she suffered momentary mania? pushed to his death a man who had fairly goaded her into marrying him? But a fatigued heart and nerves could not wholly account for such an extraordinary reversal of all the instincts of her nature. He felt the truth of her statement that she had urged Martin Carfax not to visit the quarry hole. No! whatever had caused his death, his own folly or another's hand, Dewitt was as certain as the everlasting hills that she had no part in it, not even by wish or thought. But even as the conviction fixed itself in his heart

a small boy, approaching him, put a note in his hand. Opening it, he read:

“Dear Mr. Dewitt:

“There was a sight of gossip in post office this mornin’ I couldn’t help hearin’. Some folks was there that recognized Mrs. Carfax—knew her when she was studyin’ paintin’ here some years ago, though they wasn’t quite sure at first on account of her bein’ so pale and wearin’ her hair different. Lem Colgate said she was engaged then to a man named Gordon Brent; and people often met the two of ’em on the old Zeno road. It may be a pack of lies; or they just want to hear themselves talk; but the tale that Injun’s tellin’ ain’t generally believed. Folks says she knew that road blindfold. What’s more and as you know, this here Mr. Brent is stayin’ at the Mill Stream House, for why nobody knows, except Miss Marden. She told me he’s the fellow the telegram was sent to. I told her to hold her tongue for love of heaven, ’cos people said a woman never could. That fetched her! She’s ambitious. Then there’s the letter. It may not be government regulations, but it’s locked up. That’s a dead letter if there ever was one! You and me is all that knows of it, except him that wrote it.”

Miss Almira’s name was signed to this disjointed epistle. Of course, trouble was ahead! How could Christine expect that anyone would believe Tong’s story of the wrong road when she herself had traversed it often in happier, bygone summers?

The coroner's jury met in the undertaker's sitting-room, a place as wholly removed in appearance from gruesome suggestion as sunlight, geraniums and a fine brindled cat could make it. Into it Dewitt ushered Christine and the impatient Mrs. Richards, followed by the sad-eyed, patient Tong. In the background, among the spectators, Dewitt discovered Gordon Brent. The jury, composed from the inhabitants of East Burleigh, had no eyes, every man of them, except for the slender girl, now paler than ever in her black dress. Proceedings were informal but Dewitt, always sensitive to the spirit of assemblages, felt this to be both curious and hostile.

The testimony was taken by Hercules Bostwick in his character of coroner, with such homely adjurations as "Give's the hull durn tale."

Tong testified first. Told of his unfamiliarity with the neighborhood, of his taking the wrong road, and the logical development of the tragedy from that point. He dwelt with emphasis upon his new master's inclination to dizziness at such spots as the quarry hole.

Then Christine testified, and Dewitt noted how carefully she adhered to her principle of truth-telling, initiating her narrative not with the story of the wrong road, but with her late husband's wish to visit the quarry hole. But his preoccupation with her verity blotted out for an instant the frightful blunder she had made. One of the East Burleighites was immediately on his feet.

"Ef you didn't know that road," he challenged, "how did the gentleman know of the quarry hole?"

Dewitt saw a white, appalled face lean forward, flash out for a moment from the others. Christine

trembled visibly, but she replied in a firm voice:

“Mr. Carfax said to me that we must be passing through the famous old California quarries; and he had heard there was a dreadful hole at the foot of the highest cliff. He asked me to walk with him to find it. He had always a love for such curious places.”

“Let the lady proceed with her evidence,” said Hercules, who had a depressed air as if this tragedy had ended all chance of his renting or selling the farm.

“He walked very quickly,” Christine went on, her voice still firm, “and I had hard work to keep up with him—falling behind at last about twenty feet. He was standing on the brink, motionless, looking down, when suddenly he fell forward with a cry. Oh, a dreadful cry!”

“You say he had them dizzy spells?” asked Hercules, his little bright eyes resembling those of an intelligent brown squirrel.

“Always in high places; but he would seek them out. He nearly lost his life in the Grand Canyon.”

The coroner shook his head doubtfully, while a neighbor was seen to nudge him, another to whisper in his ear. Finally Hercules spoke in a dreary voice, which seemed to indicate that if *by accident* was bad for real estate, *murder* knocked the bottom out of everything. “There’s some says, Mrs. Carfax, that you know’d that road of old. That you was here as a student several years back.”

“It is true I was here as a student; that was six years ago, when I was eighteen; always in summer time. Landscapes and localities look different when the trees are bare, and anyway, I did not know but what the road might have been opened

toward Outlook. It was begun, they tell me, with that intention."

The jury mumbled among themselves. Truly there seemed nothing on which to linger doubtfully, and Christine's own candid air was winning much for her. The jury retired, deliberated and brought in a verdict of accidental death.

Then almost everybody filed out. Gordon Brent was among the lingerers. He crossed the room and begged Dewitt for a word with him. Once in the street he said impulsively: "Tell me, do you know much about women?"

"I'd be a brave or boastful man to affirm that," Dewitt replied. "Just a moment, I must speak with Mr. Brock."

That scowling person had just passed them with a curt nod. Dewitt swung around and buttonholed him. "Please get Mrs. Carfax home as soon as possible. I think she is quite worn out."

"And well she may be," Brock said. "She's hiding something, and that's wearin' on anybody. I offered to motor her and that silly fool of an aunt straight to 'The Towers,' but Christine said she wanted to see you again. There! I have given you her message."

When Harold Brock had swung around the corner Dewitt addressed Gordon Brent. "What do you know of him?"

"A great deal—nothing at all. He was Carfax's most intimate friend; he and Brock were at Harvard together, and I think Brock worshiped the ground Carfax walked on. He's a stock broker, and Christine's younger brother was in his office."

"*Was*. What happened?"

"Change of plans, ambitious, I don't know!"



“Where is that brother now? Why isn’t he with his sister?” inquired Dewitt.

“He went to California, to an uncle who is a wholesale fruit dealer there. Very suddenly, very quickly, he went out. I always scented a mystery there, too. Oh, well, I’ve wandered in nothing else for days, months.”

His tone of profound dejection was like an avenue to a closed house. In spite of his garrulity heavy shutters of reticence barred out intrusion, yet Dewitt ventured to ask: “Weren’t all cards, so to speak—on the table?”

“Not by a jugful. Then there was always in the background not only the mystery of our changed relations, but the problem of her engagement to Carfax. I knew she didn’t love him, that he was almost repulsive to her; and yet she drove straight toward this thing that ended so horribly—four hours after the wedding. It would be a relief, this sudden death, if so much didn’t remain to be settled.”

“But everything *is* settled. She’s going home for the funeral. They’re sending the body to his father’s house. After some months or years she’ll emerge out of the bad dream and—”

He couldn’t finish with Brent’s wistful eyes upon him, for he didn’t want Brent to have her, or anyone.

“Nothing’s settled,” Brent declared. “I think Harold Brock wants to make trouble for her. He doesn’t like her, nor she him.”

“Has that anything to do with her brother’s leaving Brock’s office?”

“I think it has.”

“When, if I may ask, was your engagement with her broken?”

“Two years ago. We had been engaged four years; Dr. Harcourt didn't want Christine to marry too early.”

“And when did this young man go to California?”

“Six months ago.”

“And when was her engagement to Carfax announced?”

“Not long after. Though there was not much announcing. It was kept pretty quiet.”

“Ah.”

Dewitt's mind was piecing his puzzle together rapidly. If Christine had engaged herself to a man she was far from loving, something had occurred to put her in his power. Obviously it could not be an act of her own. But the brother—

“What kind of a chap is this brother?”

“F'lighty—something of a spendthrift; bit of a fool, likable and spoiled to the limit. Raymond is his name—Ray they call him mostly. Christine is devoted to him—only brother, you know, that sort.”

“Tell me,” said Dewitt suddenly, “why don't you buck up and see her home? In her nervous condition it must be terrible for her to have Brock around.”

Brent's face grew white and bleak. “That's just the point—her nervous condition. She wants me least of all. She has, well—fancies. I only pray God they'll clear from her brain when she gets home and has a chance to rest.”

“What sort of fancies?” Dewitt inquired.

Brent paused, grasped his arm. “I trust you! Ask her! Tell her I said you could ask her!”

About her bedroom door commiserating cham-

bermaids of the hotel lingered, each eager for service. That was her way, it seemed, to win people easily, in an hour's time. Dewitt remembered how he had longed to serve her in the instance of that strange meeting in the farmhouse garret. Traveling on from that point he found himself wondering why no testimony had been offered by the man or men who were the first to attempt the rescue of Carfax immediately after the accident. East Burleigh had apparently accepted without question Tong's statement that he ran to the main road for help; and found men with ropes that were too short and a ladder that wouldn't reach.

He would ask her about these men.

She was lying on a couch in a loose robe, her aunt hovering fussily over her. But for the tremble of her eyelids she might have been a figure on a tomb.

"Tell me," she said abruptly as Dewitt came toward her—then caught herself up. "Aunt Mary, do you mind leaving us for a moment? Mr. Dewitt is here in a professional capacity."

When the door had closed on a rather indignant relative she smiled faintly, then asked: "Has Mr. Brent left town?"

"No, we have just parted at the steps of the hotel."

"He should go! It is dreadful of him to linger." Her fingers clasped Dewitt's wrist. "Won't you use your influence to induce him to leave this town?"

"But he is staying for your sake!"

"For my sake! How can he—dare—" But even as she spoke, her voice faltered, her head drooped. The betraying color of love banished for the moment her pallor.

“Mrs. Carfax,” Dewitt interposed, “you forget that I am almost entirely in the dark as to this whole sad history. I came with the purpose of asking you questions. May I ask them?”

“Of course,” she murmured. “Ask me anything you please.”

“Well, then, when Tong went for help, what did you do?”

“Remained close to the hole shouting down words of courage,” she replied. “I kept calling, calling, that the sound might perhaps reach his consciousness and keep him living. The worst of such an awful situation would be to feel yourself forsaken. I didn’t want that, no matter what—he had been.”

“He had not been—” Dewitt hesitated—“kind?”

“Oh, kind, yes. Fair—never! I—I was trapped.”

“There was a—a reason quite out of the ordinary for this—marriage?”

Her eyes opened wide; regarded him for a moment with suspicious inquiry; then the child-like look of confidence came back.

“Yes, a grave reason. I did it to save someone else.”

“I see. Now to go back. You remained calling at the hole. How long was Tong away?”

“It seemed a very short time. I was still shouting when he came back with two men and coils of rope—very new rope. It glistened like a yellow snake as it was paid out.”

“New rope. And the men?”

“Both quite dark and silent; not like laborers, and yet in working-men’s clothes. Tong told me afterward they were East Indians who had been

employed at one time on the Ashokan dam. They worked quickly. They didn't speak. Then I left off calling. The only sound was the slapping of the rope against the sides of the hole. Oh—!" She closed her eyes and a spasm of pain passed over her face. "I saw it again—horridly!"

"Then what happened?"

"I must have fainted. When I came to I was in the car, the men were gone and Tong was driving. He told me I was so ill that he was getting me to the hotel as quickly as possible, and that he would do everything to hurry the rescue, though I felt as if he knew Martin was beyond all help. I said I must send for Harold Brock; and I knew I must see—Gordon Brent. Tong knew why. We tried the telephone first, but couldn't get anyone; and we didn't want to call up old Mr. Carfax, who is past eighty and childish. The hotel people were kind—but seemed dazed and confused by our story; advised Tong to go to Hercules Bostwick, as both owner of the farm and coroner of the town. I think the reason they didn't suggest anything themselves was that they thought it so hopeless. They knew how horribly deep the pit is. I was ill again, and they put me to bed; and Tong went down to the village, with the result you know. They thought him a practical joker—poor Tong. At midnight, when he returned, we 'phoned the telegrams. Now, is there anything more?"

"That I want to ask? No, not here and now. You have told all you should tell for a while. How are you going home?"

"Will you call my aunt? She is aching to get away from here; but Harold Brock is attending to the details of our leaving. When he is ready, I suppose we'll go."

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A thrill of indignation went through Dewitt. What hold over her did Brock still possess that he could thus control her movements? He readmitted the aunt and was taking his leave, when there came a heavy knock at the door. Opening it he found a group of men headed by Hercules Bostwick, their faces grave, their bearing official.

“What is it? What do you want?” Dewitt asked, with a sudden sinking of the heart. Bostwick replied by turning to the man behind him, who advanced into the room with a determined manner as if he wished to get a disagreeable task performed promptly.

“I am the deputy sheriff,” he announced, not looking at Christine, but at Dewitt, “and I have here a warrant for the arrest of Mrs. Martin Carfax as accomplice in the murder of her husband, the late Martin Carfax.”

## IV

### THE HERMIT

Not a sound in the room for an instant, then a shriek from Mrs. Richards:

“Oh, you dreadful person! What do you mean? Christine, darling! do you hear!”

Christine sat up on the couch and gazed fixedly at the sheriff, who seemed better prepared to meet her eyes than the lamentations of the elder woman.

“What I mean, lady, is we’ve found a witness who saw the whole thing.”

Again the silence; then a man was half-pushed forward by Hercules Bostwick and others—a pale, long-bearded, hollow-eyed visionary-looking individual, whom Dewitt instantly recognized as “the hermit,” a harmless person who lived in a shanty on the slope of Outlook, raised a few vegetables and herbs in summer, and wandered a good deal through the woods in search of wild honey and the plants from which he extracted various decoctions. He was said to have religious mania, and to be of that high-pitched type that experiences ecstasies. Sometimes he would be lost to view for weeks together; then he would reappear with something to sell.

“Tell your story, Haines,” someone said, “tell ’em what you saw at the old quarry pit on April Fool day.”

A look of distress came over the old man’s face, and he threw an almost imploring glance at Chris-

tine, who had risen as if to hear her death sentence; and stood, white and immobile, facing the group proudly.

“Go on, man, tell ’em,” adjured the sheriff.

“I don’t want to bring trouble on no one,” Haines quavered. “And when I was to the village this noon and told ’em as how I seesomethin’ queer, I just thought them movie men was round again. They’ve used the old quarries a lot. Lemme see. It was two days ago. Yes, Fool’s Day, and I certainly was fooled, me thinkin’ it was movies and all.”

“Get on! get on!” said the sheriff.

“Well, I was wanderin’ around in the woods nigh to the old Bostwick farm, when I come sudden to an openin’ in the trees, and not far away I see two people; a lady and a man who was walkin’ ahead of her towards the old quarry pit. Thinks I, shall I yell out about that there pit? Then sez I to myself, ‘No, they’ve got eyes and you can see it plain—long afore you come to it’; so I just watched ’em and the big car standin’ in the road. ‘Movies,’ I sez, ‘that big cliff is a favorite spot with ’em.’

“All of a sudden I saw the man stop, and the lady she stopped, too, about twenty foot behind him. Everything got still as if the wind had stopped blowin’. I knew he must be standin’ near the pit, for he was lookin’ down. Then—” he paused and looked wildly around the company—“then all of a sudden a man came from out the trees back of the other man and give him a push, and the man at the pit stretched out his arms and dropped. The woman she stood quite still, like a frozen statue, and it was then I noticed a queer man, with a white turban, standin’ in the



road, his eyes big and awful. 'Lordy,' I sez, 'I don't like this show at all—' and I turned and hurried down the mountain. I'd never a known it was murder, not movies, if I hadn't come to the village for corn-meal."

Dewitt looked at Christine—and read in her face that the narrative was true! She held out a hand as if to implore heaven itself to help her, and a tall figure glided from the throng to take up a position of guardianship behind her. It was Tong. But Dewitt took the outstretched hand, and as he did so met the anguished eyes of Gordon Brent. Brock was behind him, and Brock was looking at Brent with an expression of malignant triumph, ugly and threatening in the extreme.

The harmless man who had crystallized the vague suspicion in many minds of something wrong was regarding Christine with compassionate interest. Evidently it hurt him to have unconsciously incriminated her. Tall, thin, white-bearded, with blue eyes that seemed used to contemplating abstractions, he was not unlike a prophet of Israel.

The sheriff addressed Christine. "Is the old man's story correct?"

In a voice that seemed to come from a far hill she answered, "Yes."

"Why, then, did you omit to mention the trifling fact—" said the sheriff, waxing ironical and indignant, "—that your *husband* was pushed into the quarry hole?"

"Because I could not—"

Her voice broke.

"Because you are protecting someone?"

"Yes," she answered faintly.

“Do you realize that such protection makes you an accessory of the murder?”

“How?”

The single word spoken with such candor of interrogation was in itself a seal of innocence; but the sheriff only frowned.

“Evidently you are strangely ignorant of the law, young lady. You are under arrest.”

Even Mrs. Richards seemed stunned to silence. Haines the hermit broke it with a high, far-away voice, as if he were answering Christine from another hill. “The Lord careth for His own. Put trust in Him, poor lady, whatever crime he done—that friend of yourn.”

The silence that followed was broken by another voice. Gordon Brent stepped directly in front of the sheriff.

“I am the man Mrs. Carfax is protecting.”

Christine uttered a cry of anguish. There were ejaculations, murmurs, crowding faces, and a sudden uproar, above which Dewitt’s voice rose. “Clear the room, Sheriff. This is not a public place! Get out of here, all of you, double-quick. Get to hell out of here.”

The old muscular strength of his days on the police force of a large city had not deserted him despite his breakdown, and he proceeded to eject forcibly those who showed an inclination to linger. Then he shut the door on a group that included Brock, Brent, the hermit, the sheriff and Hercules Bostwick, now in the last stages of despondency. The farm had wrestled with one murder story for one hundred years only to have another saddled to it.

They had seated Christine in an arm-chair near the window. Her glances at Gordon held horror

and apprehension, but revealed also the strength of the bond between them. These two would be lovers even against their wills.

“Now, Lady,” said the sheriff, “you hear what this man Brent says. Does he speak the truth? Is he the man you are protecting?”

Dewitt leaned over her. “Be careful,” he whispered. “Think!”

“Yes, he is the man I am protecting,” came the answer faintly.

Gordon stood in the center of the room, and in his eyes Dewitt detected the same strange look of compassion, almost tender compassion, which still lingered in the hermit’s countenance. He seemed oblivious of everyone but Christine. But the sheriff sharply claimed his attention.

“Mr. Brent.”

“Yes, Sheriff.”

“Do you plead guilty to this charge of murder?”

In the tense silence that followed the question Christine rose uncertainly to her feet and gazed at Gordon, her eyes dilated, her hand half-raised as if in judgment, or to implore Heaven for them both. He met her look unflinchingly and with the same strange compassion in his eyes. The stillness, tragic, heavy with destiny, was broken again by the sheriff’s voice.

“Do you plead guilty to a charge of murder?”

“No!”

V

GORDON'S STORY

Brock ejaculated, "Good thunder! Is he mad?"

The sheriff turned to the hermit who was now apparently suffering as much as Christine herself. She had sunk again into her chair, visibly astonished and agitated by Brent's strange reply.

"Haines, what about it? Is this the man who pushed Mr. Carfax into the pit?"

"Alas! yes! The clothes, the hair's the same, queerish red-brown hair. Blue suit. I'd a knowed him anywheres."

"Queerish," was not a bad description of Gordon's rather unruly hair, for it was of a curious copper shade that would have made him noticeable in any assemblage. The suit of blue serge emphasized the color of the hair.

"He looked like one of them player fellers to me," the hermit went on.

"What is your occupation, Mr. Brent?" the sheriff inquired crisply.

"I am a landscape-painter," Gordon replied.

"What was your object in causing the death of Mr. Carfax?"

"I did not cause the death of Mr. Carfax."

"Yet you admit that you are the man Mrs. Carfax is protecting."

"Yes, I admit it."

The sheriff spoke with anger. "Do you realize,

Mr. Brent, that this ain't April Fool's day, and that you can't monkey with the law?"

"I am not, as you put it, monkeying with the law. At the time of that assumed murder, which seems to have been about four-thirty on the afternoon of April first, I was miles away in a farmhouse of the Shawangunk mountains."

Even Dewitt was taken aback by this statement made with the same air of candor which had characterized his outpourings to Dewitt. The sheriff allowed an oath to escape him which echoed one from the scowling Brock. Mrs. Richards and Tong exchanged glances. Christine rose to her feet with the word,

"Gordon!"

Her utterance of his name seemed to unnerve him, and for an instant he buried his face in his hands as if to conceal a spasm of suffering. Dewitt was miserably, hopelessly aware that these two were of a rare class of lovers which alone have value to dramatists because—through all suffering and separation—the supreme emotion will endure!

The sheriff was like a man dispossessed from his own orderly house of cause and effect.

"Watch your step, young man!" he thundered. "Here's a reliable lady people tell me's a friend of yourn testifies she seen you—"

"She didn't," retorted Gordon. "She said I was the man she was protecting."

"Sure thing," snapped the sheriff. "And here's Haines, as never told a lie in his life; a good, reliable man, if a trifle funny about knowin' his Creator well, which ain't in reason. Haines confirms the lady's word and says he saw you do the deed—made no outcry, believin' it movies, for

which he had excuse, neighborhood being overrun with them. For all he knew they had a net over that pit. Two people say you pushed Mr. Carfax—”

“Christine,” Gordon interposed, “do you say it?”

She looked wildly from Tong to Dewitt. The Indian servant's face was like a benediction as he bowed over her and whispered something. A heavy silence ensued, testifying to the interest in her answer.

“I saw Gordon Brent push my—push Mr. Carfax into the quarry hole,” she said at last in a slow, mechanical voice.

“And you still deny this charge?” the sheriff asked fiercely, turning to Gordon.

“I still deny it. I was miles away in the Shawangunk Mountains.”

“Can you prove this statement? Can you prove an alibi?”

“If I can find the farmhouse where I rested.”

“Rested?”

“Slept—slept for an hour. I had walked miles. I was quite tired out.”

“Why were you walking?”

“That is none of your business, Sheriff. All you need know is, that I started walking from my home in Highland Park about eight o'clock in the morning of April first. I didn't care much where I went, so I kept moving; and at last I found myself up in the Shawangunks, though what part it would be difficult to say. I stopped at a farm on a by-road, and asked a woman if she would let me buy from her a lunch of some kind, for I was chilled through. She had a fire in the stove in the best room, for she was expecting com-

pany; and she showed me in there. I stretched out on the haircloth sofa after removing my overshoes, and went sound asleep—slept like a log for an hour. She was kind. She didn't wake me up—but kept hot milk on the stove for me. I drank it and wandered on again—miles, wandered till it was moonlight, and then I hiked toward Highland Park. Someone going that way gave me a long lift in his car—miles and miles—set me down at midnight about three miles from home. I walked that distance and reached my studio about one o'clock."

"Do you live alone?"

"Yes."

The sheriff looked at Hercules Bostwick, who shook his head mournfully as if the riddle were too much. "Great Scott, you don't ask us to swallow much: a farmhouse you can't remember; a lift from a stranger who goes shootin' off into the night; you turnin' up at home with nobody to say that you did show up at the hour named."

"Will you bear in mind, Sheriff," Dewitt interposed, "that the only testimony of any value in the case would be that of the woman at the farm where Mr. Brent rested at the hour he states? He might have reached the Shawangunks quite easily by automobile between the time he was, it is assumed, at the quarry hole and moonrise; it is not such a great distance, and the subsequent events would not signify either to prove his guilt or his innocence. But the incident of the farmhouse *would* prove that two people, Mr. Haines and Mrs. Carfax, were mistaken."

"Three people," corrected Brock. "You forget Ramah Tong."

The Indian stepped forward with the patient air of one used to being overlooked.

"Ramah Tong," said the sheriff, "did you witness this murder?"

"Unhappily I did, honorable sir."

"Were you returning from the farmhouse when this deed was committed?"

"I was, sir. I saw Mr. Brent come out from the trees which crowd close on one side of the hole, push my master in and vanish among the rocks before either Mrs. Carfax or I could utter a word. So swift and powerful was the push he gave him that Mr. Carfax dropped like a stone. It was all over in a second."

"What did you do then?"

"Prevented my lady from casting herself after my master in her eagerness to save him. I left her crying his name, when I ran for help."

"What house did you go to?"

"None."

Dewitt, who had been watching Christine, now fixed his gaze on Tong, alert for inconsistencies of narrative, but the quiet, rather pathetic voice gave almost word-for-word the statement made to Dewitt himself.

"Before I could reach a house I met two men on the main road who were on their way to a farm in the neighborhood with coils of rope and a ladder. I drove them quickly to the pit, but the ladder was useless, the rope too short."

"Do you remember to what farm they were going?" Dewitt asked.

The Indian shook his head. "They didn't tell me."

Suddenly the hermit exclaimed: "I seen 'em long about four o'clock—mebbe a mite before.



They were strangers to me, dark men like dagoes, and they didn't speak when I spoke to 'em."

"They were not Italians," Tong replied in his high-bred, quiet voice. "They were East Indians. They told me they had come to this section years before to work on the Ashokan Dam."

His statement was received without comment, for foreigners had been plentiful in the neighborhood during the construction of the great dam. In Dewitt's mind alone did this confirmation of Christine's previous statement arouse sudden suspicion. Why should countrymen of Tong's be so conveniently by with a rope and ladder unless Tong had prepared for their presence?

Hercules Bostwick's sigh was heard at this juncture. "Don't know who could o' wanted new rope. Nobody's chimley's topplin' as I heard of."

This did not make much impression, lost in the glare of a proved inconsistency—the word of three people against one. The sheriff was plainly baffled, but official assurance did not desert him. Brent, of course, was endeavoring by a gigantic, stupid lie to face down testimony that would send him to the chair.

"It's my duty to place you under arrest, without bail," said the sheriff to wind up the matter. "Mrs. Carfax is also under arrest, but bail will be allowed in her case."

Brock's harsh voice broke in upon the last words. "Sheriff, justice must be done! To me it's a clear case of collusion and not, as you seem to think, the sentimental shielding of a friend. Why should a woman protect a man who had just killed her husband by a dastardly and cowardly act if—"

At that moment a capable hand was placed firm-

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ly over Brock's mouth, and Dewitt, his eyes flashing, said in a voice of thunder, "Will you keep your inferences to yourself, you hound!"

"I will like hell—come on out! Come on out, and I'll beat you to a pulp, you dirty detective."

With a swing of his arm Dewitt pinned Brock against the wall; then exerting all his muscular strength, twisted him around and thrust him into the hall, where he stood panting and puffing, calling down execrations on Dewitt and all his tribe. The sheriff checkmated a rush back to the room by slamming the door and putting the key in his pocket.

"Now, Mr. Dewitt," he said, "no more rough-house. We want to get ahead with this job."

## VI

### THE SHAWANGUNKS

To the south the Shawangunk Mountains rose solemn and clear in the April evening light, their strange, jagged outlines cut sharp against the horizon. A car containing Dewitt and Ramah Tong, Mrs. Richards, now reduced to silence, and Christine, white and immobile, by her side, was silently and smoothly running over the State Road toward Highland Park. Tong was at the wheel, so Dewitt had eyes for that solemn mountain range where all hope for two forlorn people lay. If Gordon Brent, now in jail, had really wandered into rest and sleep high up there in the Shawangunks, some one, also, must be found to take the place of a man in a blue serge suit with copper-colored hair—his counterpart, if such existed.

Though Dewitt knew how far the future would take Christine Carfax from him, there was hope and surcease from pain in this drive with her through the evening light to her home. So many years he had wandered through mazes that only increased his sense of the subtleties of existence, without awakening the precious soul of romance, that this sudden introduction to its spirit embodied in a pale, defeated woman was like translation, ecstasy or any experience of the dowered minority.

And now the light had deepened behind the

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Shawangunks; and in its magical golden depths he read defeat, indeed, of earthly passion; but renewal of old dreams—the dreams and thoughts of a boy wandering in Spring valleys. “I love you—and lose you,” he thought. “You may break my heart and my life, but I shall prove that your lost love was in these mountains, as he said, or lose myself in the attempt.”

The car sped on. Once Ramah Tong turned his head. “Madame, the Shawangunks!”

Dewitt, glancing back at her, saw that she opened her eyes and gazed at them as if recalled from another world. His own eyes returning to those blue, broken silhouettes beneath a mystic depth of light, sought peace there from the tumult of the day’s voices. Upon that peace Ramah Tong’s musical voice broke gently.

“Has Monsieur ever visited India?”

## VII

### RAYMOND

“The Towers,” as revealed by the light of a high, clear moon, was an irregular house of stone with two tall, up-rising structures—the source of its name. The place had been purchased, Tong had informed Dewitt, on Dr. Harcourt’s return from India, and for a sum quite a fortune in itself.

Every window was lighted as if the house were in preparation for some festival. This rather odd feature drew even Christine’s attention; and she leaned forward to say to Tong:

“It looks like the times when Ray was here.” Then as the car approached the porte-cochère, “Why, he is here!” she ended joyfully. “He must have just arrived. See, there on the steps. Look, Aunt May; oh, I am so glad! This is fortunate.”

A youthful figure ran down the steps of the main entrance, and waved as they approached. As the car came to a stop Ray Harcourt leaned over the running-board. “Am I too late, Tong?” was his curious greeting, then as he looked at his sister, “Christine, whatever is the matter?”

For answer she was out of the car and into his arms in an instant. The close embrace in which he folded her won for him Dewitt’s forgiveness for all time. The two ran up the steps and vanished together, while Mrs. Richards, now quite

subdued, turned to Dewitt and to his joy said to him beseechingly: "You'll stand by us, won't you? We must have your help."

"I shall be only too glad to be of service," he assured her.

"You will stay with us, then. You must not go to a hotel." Addressing Tong, she added, "Give Mr. Dewitt Dr. Adrian's suite of rooms, and wait upon him personally."

Nothing seemed more desirable to Dewitt than that he should have Tong as his attendant, since it would give him the opportunity to learn much of the family's antecedents; those intimate details which throw piercing rays of light on the psychology of a situation. Particularly he wanted to know more of this brother Christine had clasped so tenderly in her arms.

Dinner was served to him in his own allotted sitting-room, which Tong told him had been Adrian Harcourt's library, but it had the look of a scholar's rather than a rich man's library—no elaborate bindings, only the book seized hot from the printer on some favorite subject—two paramount, occult works, and works of science; strange wedding of the poles, thought Dewitt.

Tong emerged from the gloom, a gleam of silver in his hand, silvery rays of beneficent service from his alert and noiseless person.

"I see your late master was a student of occultism."

Tong smiled, sighed. "Westerners, if the honorable gentleman will pardon me, do not study occultism. They play with it. It is the difference between the child in the nursery and the chemist in his laboratory."

“You mean we are amateurs?” Dewitt commented.

“The Western civilization forces you to be,” Tong said gently as if speaking to a child, “placing, as it does, all the emphasis on material welfare while the soul pines and starves. Men who live by the evidences of the senses and not of the eternal spirit are necessarily bunglers and amateurs in the occult realms.”

“But your occultists are dreamers, and men must live. Do you know what the rents in New York are? Do you know the price of eggs? What chance has a mystic in New York?”

Tong’s dreamy smile was his first answer, while his clear, agate-colored eyes noted that the salt was missing and brought it. “Mystics—true ones—” he commenced, “are the most efficient people on earth, because they know where the true source of energy lies, and apply it to all planes. Your practical Westerners think that energy is in dollars, or electricity or steam. These are but manifestations on the material plane of greater unseen forces. In the new era men will harness not fire and steam only, but thoughts, impulses, emotions; the very blood of the race will fever or cool under the dynamic control of those who know the secrets of the universe. It will be a perilous era to the uninitiated—and you Westerners—pardon, honorable sir—are too egotistic, too satisfied with material prosperity to take the steps of the great initiation which will render you free of matter and therefore, masters of matter.”

“Magicians, in other words,” commented Dewitt. “The trouble is that knowledge does not purify. Some of the most highly educated men have been of the criminal class. The Renaissance

tyrants, familiar with every crime in the catalogue, were men of exceptional culture, authorities on Greek coins, collectors of Byzantine mosaics."

"Head culture!—another mistake of the West which lodges final authority in the brain, rather than in the sub-conscious—which is the true spiritual store house and reservoir of energy for every man," Tong commented.

Dewitt could have gone on with this all night; but a knock at the door just then presaged the entrance of Raymond Harcourt, a gust of wind from the realms of adolescence.

For despite his twenty-two years the first impression he gave was of the effervescence and light-heartedness of youth. He shone for a moment on the hearth rug, asked Tong for cigarettes; and then dropped confidentially into a chair close to Dewitt.

"My sister has been telling me of your kindness. I'm grateful. I came too late, but I'm glad he's dead—the hound. What do you think she's just told me?—no, Tong, you needn't go."

"Tell me anything you think best to tell me—you realize, of course, in what a perilous situation your sister is!"

The boy's face became grave, and the beauty that lurked there flashed forth for a moment his strong resemblance to Christine. "You see, I went West under a cloud. I was a clerk in Brock's office—he is a broker—and I was accused of stealing securities that now I believe Carfax himself extracted from his friend Brock's safe, not because he needed them in the least, but to have me in his power. This supposed theft of mine enabled Carfax to play the magnanimous with Christine. He wouldn't let Brock expose me, send



me to jail. Oh, no! he would appease bulldog Brock—that's what we called him—and the price—very simple—just marry me; it's the least you can do, Christine. She's just sobbed the whole thing out to me. I protested my innocence to her at the time, and she told me Carfax had persuaded Brock not to have me arrested. I damn wish they had! Precious chance they would have had of seeing the thing through. No evidence that even a bought-and-paid-for lawyer could have cooked up. But poor Christine was too alarmed and anxious to save me to think clearly. I asked her to let 'em send me to jail, checkmate 'em, sue 'em for libel. Not a bit of it!"

"She insisted—"

"Yes, she insisted on flight, transportation. Poor Sis, I think I had given her just enough anxiety by the way I slung money around to make her believe there was a chance of the story's being true. She insisted I accept the 'protection' of Carfax, not telling me the price. She didn't even write she was going to marry him till a month ago. The letter went to the wrong address; and I only got it in time to sling some things into a suit-case—and start. Now, I'm going over to Brock tonight and tell him just what my own suspicions are of his late friend—and that he can send me to jail tomorrow if he wants to."

He glowed with the joy of the prospect. Sister and brother were strangely alike in a kind of eagle-soaring against the sun of joy; or the fire of destruction. The boy's tossed-off challenge to destiny recalled his sister's words—"Tong is protecting me." The same indifference to self ran through them.

"Don't you think," Dewitt said quietly, "that

your sister has trouble enough just now?"

"That's it!" came the eager, child-like answer, "let's get the whole mess cleared up at once—and start fresh. Gordon will soon be out of jail."

"I fear not," came a quiet voice from the shadows.

Raymond darted a quick glance towards Tong. "Surely you don't believe Brent guilty, Ramah Tong?"

"What am I to think, young Master—that he pushed Mr. Carfax into that horrible pit to be sportive and playful on an April afternoon? I saw him do it; Madame your sister saw him, and a wanderer in the woods."

"But are you all sure it was Brent?" Ray persisted. "He isn't, can't be, the only red-headed man in a blue suit on the planet."

"Mr. Brent's hair is copper-colored," corrected Tong gently, "very unusual shade. I have never seen anything like it. Besides, he hated the late Mr. Carfax as only a disappointed lover of the intensest type can hate a successful rival."

Raymond tossed away the stump of his cigarette. "Ramah Tong, with all your wisdom you don't know anything at all. He didn't hate him because he won Christine. He must have felt trickery—I've known Gordon Brent since the time I sat on his back when he took me in swimming, a little kid. He couldn't commit murder that way—come up behind and push a man down."

"What way could he commit murder?" Tong asked with an indulgent smile.

"He couldn't commit it at all. He's too nervous, emotional, sensitive, poetic. Whoever heard of a landscape-painter killing anybody? Imagine

Corot running for the butcher's knife to stab his mother-in-law—if he had a mother-in-law!”

“He couldn't afford one,” Dewitt commented. “He was very poor.”

Ramah Tong had gone to the window, a large mullioned bay thrown out over a roofless terrace or esplanade below. The moonlight flooding his erect form and turning his white turban into another moon against the dark outlining draperies produced a ghostly and unreal effect, which his soft voice at last dispelled.

“Mr. Ray, sir, come here. I think that is your sister in the dark cloak, walking on the stone terrace. It is not good for her to be alone this night. Go down to her.”

Half an hour later, himself alone, Dewitt, drawing his curtains, glanced down and saw the brother and sister, their arms close around each other's waists, still pacing the white terrace quietly in the moonlight.

“That's good,” Dewitt thought. “Now he won't go to Brock.”

## VIII

### THE EVERGREEN WALK

Dewitt slept late, and woke to find Tong drawing the water for his bath. "How is Mrs. Carfax?" was his first question.

"Fairly well, sir. Henriette and I watched in the little anteroom all night; dropped off to sleep in our chairs from time to time. It was best so. Madame was very nervous, was up and down asking for things, water, a book, smelling salts; quite unlike her usual way, for she is very considerate of her servants. She is up and around now."

"And Mr. Raymond?"

"Still asleep. I heard no sound at his door; best to let him have his sleep out."

He went out, to reappear with a tempting breakfast tray. After pouring Dewitt's coffee and putting another log on the fire, he asked to be informed what services he could render during the day that might relax the tension of the situation. Dewitt was considering, when a woman's high, shrill scream brought him to his feet—and Tong to the door. There, with horror-stricken eyes, stood Henriette.

"Tong, oh, my God!"

"What is it, woman?" he asked sternly.

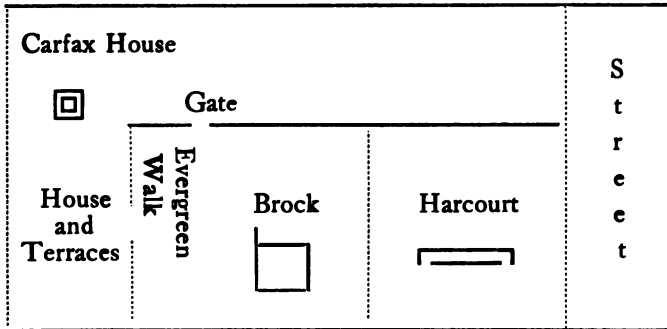
"Ray! He's murdered!"

He stared. "Ray, not our Ray?"

“Shot! A gardener on the Brock place found the body—down by the evergreen walk.”

“Are they sure he is dead?” Dewitt said to her. “Don’t tell Mrs. Carfax yet.”

He seized his hat and started off, Tong after him gliding along with the silent swiftness of a panther across the frosty lawns that glistened in the morning sun. The Brock estate, it seemed, adjoined the Harcourt; and a break in the dividing hedge let them through to more lawns set in trees and traversed diagonally at one corner by what was known as the evergreen walk, two parallel rows of conifers secluding a brick walk which extended from a terrace to a fountain now, of course, boarded up. Beyond the fountain the walk continued to a wicket admitting to an overlapping corner of the Carfax grounds, which there described an ell on its side, the long arm being a strip of land that ran behind the two neighboring properties. Dewitt, for his own guidance, later made this map of it:



Just at the point where the evergreen walk ended at the wicket a group of men were bending over the body of the boy, who lay face upward, his arms outstretched, a faint smile on the blue lips, as if the last conscious moment held no warning of danger. Dewitt's practiced eye discerned at once that Ray, although perhaps mortally wounded, was not dead.

A physician from the village was bending over him, and now rose and confirmed the fact, "Shot through the head," he stated, "probably a quarter of an inch made the difference between death, and a slim chance for life. But he has it. Tong, we need your help."

The East Indian did not at once respond, shaken out of his usual calm by a violence of grief which surprised Dewitt. Tong was on his knees by Ray, kissing one of the helpless hands, stifling long sobs to utter strange Hindu words, whose accents alone told Dewitt that they were terms of endearment, the little language, perhaps, of nursery tenderness. Even Brock showed signs of emotion as he turned an imploring gaze on Dewitt, and declared:

"If you have the skill you're said to have, help us now. This was an awful thing to happen on my place."

"An awful thing to happen anywhere," Dewitt retorted, then turning to the physician asked, "Can you tell by his condition how long ago this shooting took place?"

"I should say he had been lying here several hours," Doctor Jenkins replied, "and that's several hours too long. The shooting might have occurred about midnight. Here they come with the stretcher, Tong. Now we can move him."

Willing hands lifted Ray from the ground, and

as the little procession started toward the house, Dewitt, to his dismay, saw Christine leave it and run to meet the men. Telling Brock to wait a minute, he hurried ahead of the bearers to assure her that her brother was not dead. The relief of his words brought color and courage to her face.

"I'll fight for his life," she said, transfigured, roused at once to action from the trance-like suffering of the past days. The flash of resolution in her eyes was like the gleam of a white sword. Wasting no time in words or lamentations, she turned back at once to prepare the sick room.

Dewitt returned to the scene of the tragedy, where he found Brock pacing up and down, his manner still showing signs of nervous agitation. Not a trace now of his bulldog ferocity.

"This is terrible, terrible!" he said. "We've got to run it to earth."

"And some other things, too," Dewitt answered curtly. "You heard what the doctor said about the probable time of the shooting. May I inquire where you were at midnight?"

"Talking with my valet Bender about a new saddle I am having made. Here, Bender. Tell the detective what we did last night."

A man emerged from the group. "I was with my master from eleven until nearly one o'clock, when I helped him to undress, as his rheumatic hand was troubling him again."

Brock grunted assent. "Played chess with me for an hour of that time—can't sleep when I have rheumatism."

"In which hand is it?"

Brock held up the right one.

"Are you ambidextrous?"

"Eh?"

“Can you use your left hand as well as your right?”

“Only to shoot.”

A thrill of admiration passed through Dewitt. The bulldog might be everything that was evil; but he was not a coward.

“Was young Harcourt at your house last night?”

“He was. He called with the express purpose of insulting me and maligning poor Carfax.”

“Did you lose your temper?”

“I did,” proclaimed Brock loudly, seeming anxious not only that this inquisition should go on, but that everyone should hear it. “And Ray was in a towering rage, too, though he didn’t speak loud. After half an hour of senseless accusations he flung himself out, saying he meant to take the matter to old Mr. Carfax. That was the last I saw of him.”

“And this matter that was so on his mind?”

Brock’s face grew sullen and secretive. “I’ve protected him, mind you, all these months. I don’t intend to blab now.”

“You might as well. You’ve said enough already to hurt the poor fellow’s name by that smug speech of yours.”

To this Brock made no answer. Dewitt, who was examining the lawn for the slightest clue to this new riddle, now resolved to send for Christine to learn at just what hour she had parted from her brother. By questioning her in Brock’s presence it would be easier to dovetail her facts into his. Disagreeable as Dewitt found him, he was yet an enemy in whom confidence could be placed—since even enemies might be reliable or unreliable. The



“bulldog” seemed lost in thought, but emerged to say, “Damn that sheriff, where is he?”

“I think that’s his car now,” Dewitt replied.

There was a long delay before Christine arrived, an interval filled in by the sheriff with much surmise and, Dewitt thought, a rather purposeless patting and scrutiny of the damp grass about the walk. When she appeared at last, Dewitt noticed that she greeted everyone but Brock, casting at him a glance which told plainly that she suspected him of the attack on her brother. The sheriff put questions to her, and she related that Raymond had talked with her the night before about an injustice which he had suffered; but after a prolonged pacing of the terrace with him, until ten o’clock, indeed, he had seemed quite calmed down and sensible about the matter, and kissed her good-night, saying he was tired out and was off to bed.

“What time, Mr. Brock,” the sheriff asked, as Christine finished her statement, “did Mr. Harcourt call?”

“Soon after ten. I was reading in the library.”

“Then, Mrs. Carfax, he must have changed his mind about going to bed immediately after he left you.”

“It is evident that was the case,” she said.

“Did you have any idea as to Mr. Harcourt’s errand when he was announced, Mr. Brock?”

“I thought he had come with some message from his sister. I was, as events proved, quite mistaken.”

“Are you at liberty to tell the nature of his errand?”

Brock glanced at Christine. “It has no bearing on subsequent happenings. It might have had, if I had been—a murderer.”

“Perhaps you wanted to be,” she gave back with sudden fierce passion.

“Has the bullet been extracted, Mrs. Carfax?” Dewitt asked to cut off a possible retort from Brock.

“Yes, I waited for that. Dr. Jenkins says it is from a Colt revolver of .45 calibre.”

“I have a Colt revolver—of that calibre,” Brock said steadily. “Take this key and bring it, Bender,” he added, addressing his valet. “You know the drawer.”

Others were questioned. Not a soul had heard young Harcourt leave the house, but at that time of the evening the servants were generally in their own quarters in a remote wing. The valet, now absent, had testified to answering Mr. Brock’s bell shortly after eleven, the usual summons at the usual hour to play a game of chess, which last evening was short, as Mr. Brock seemed preoccupied and made bad moves. The subject of the new saddle was then taken up.

Bender at this juncture returned. “The revolver ain’t there, sir,” he announced, looking frightened, as if he expected instant arrest. “The drawer was unlocked.”

“Oh, sir!”

A jumpy feminine voice broke the ensuing silence. “Oh, sir, I didn’t want to tell you, because it wasn’t my night out—and Mrs. Hopper is that severe on us; but I did go to the movies with my gentleman frien’; and he was seein’ me home about midnight. We come up through the long back drive; and all of a suddint I yelled out—for there in the drive in front of us stood a dark man, tall, looked like Ramah Tong, only he hadn’t

nothin' white on his head. 'Oh, Tong! you scared me,' I said—but mebbe it wasn't Tong."

The Indian servant, who had joined the group, regarded her apparently without surprise as she collapsed into tears and incoherence, but Henriette's voice was now heard in high-pitched protest.

"Tong was not out of ze way, one meenit, not one leetle meenit, monsieur. At midnight he and I were sitting up together, lest Madame, she should want something. Madame could not sleep."

"Mrs. Carfax," said the sheriff, "is this true?"

"Quite true."

"Did you leave the room during Mr. Harcourt's call?" Dewitt addressed Brock, who looked astonished, but replied promptly, "Once, to answer the telephone. It's in the hall."

"Were you long at the 'phone?"

"About five minutes."

"Was your revolver in the library?"

"Yes, in a desk drawer."

"Where were your keys?"

"In my pocket."

"Are you sure the drawer was locked?"

Brock hesitated. "It was my impression that it was."

A general discussion ensued, in the midst of which a sudden inspiration sent Dewitt to the evergreens nearest the spot where Ray had been found. He shook them violently and something fell to the ground—a revolver, loosened from the notch of the boughs where it had evidently been placed. Dewitt held it out to Brock.

"Is this yours?"

Brock examined it. "Sure thing," he replied in a tone of curious interest as if mystification had at last overcome anxiety. "It was fully loaded when I put it in the drawer last. Now one chamber is empty."

"Can you account for that?" Christine challenged.

"I don't blame you for suspecting me," Brock answered. "Somebody meant you should, or they wouldn't have stolen the gun and stuck it in that tree after the shooting. But I'm not guilty. I always protected your brother—"

"He needed no protection," she interrupted, and turned from him as if to hide sudden tears.

Dewitt felt that he must talk with her alone and, communicating this desire to her they went back to the house together, where, after a visit to the sick room, she rejoined him in the library.

"Ray is still unconscious," she reported. "The doctor thinks the coma may last many days because of the nature of the wound."

She seated herself before the fire with a slight shiver as of cold or nervous apprehension. The pearl-like contour of her profile was thrown into relief by the shadowy background of the library; and a pictorial quality was lent to the scene by the firelight which played upon the pearls at her white throat and lit up her brooding face. Her capable, delicately formed hands alone betrayed her restlessness. Dewitt noticed that she had removed her wedding ring.

"Tell me, Mr. Dewitt, do you believe in evil forces?" she asked abruptly.

"Just what sort?"

"Evil energy, like electricity, or any other energy, only infinite volts more powerful."

“I can’t say I ever thought of evil as force; that implies order, intelligence, foresight, and most evil-doers just hit out in the dark and smash something or do some wickedness on impulse. Very little of it, in my experience, is prearranged.”

“Yet I can’t help thinking,” she replied, “that evil was started by Martin Carfax, and it’s going on—on. Here is Gordon Brent—in jail; and my brother’s life nearly taken just as he had come back to clear the air, to save me. Brock protecting his name!” she exclaimed, “he wanted to slur it by saying that. My poor brother!”

“Can you tell me in detail just what Mr. Brock’s charge was against him?” Dewitt asked, wishing to have her version of what Ray had told him the night before.

“A package of valuable securities had been taken from Harold Brock’s safe, where they had been placed temporarily pending their removal to the bank deposit vaults. Ray handled them last. He was at that time a clerk in Mr. Brock’s office.”

“Did anyone besides Brock and your brother know of their presence?”

“Yes, Martin Carfax. These securities belonged to a cousin of his, a wealthy maiden lady, of whose estate he was guardian. It is my conviction now that he took them himself from the safe after Ray had placed them there. Brock’s office was practically his also—I’ve always believed him a silent partner—and he knew the combination that unlocked the safe. Ray has many faults—but he isn’t a criminal; he isn’t a thief. He spent money too freely; but then after father’s death he had a good deal to spend.”

She was silent for a while, and Dewitt, who

desired her confidence above everything else, waited for her to resume.

“Martin had wanted to marry me for years,” she went on at last, “and when my stupid jealousy of Gordon made a break between us, it was his chance—and he used it. Oh, he used it.” Her face grew bleak and bitter as she added, “He knew how much I loved Ray—my only brother! So he ruined him, and caught me by this noble promise to shield him!”

“But if your brother had plenty of money of his own to spend, how did they think they could—”

“‘They’? Perhaps Martin only! Brock is an angry, quarrelsome person; but I think he’s ignorant of the real situation; just as he is ignorant of what Martin really was. You see, this happened shortly after the trustees had cut down Ray’s allowance, as they had the right to do at their discretion until he was twenty-five, but not below a certain figure.”

“And that figure?”

“Twelve hundred a year.”

“Had they brought it to the limit?”

“They had.”

“Who are these trustees?”

“Father’s brother, James Harcourt, and his cousin, Alexander Harcourt. Brock wanted to go straight to them, but Martin wouldn’t let him. Ray denied the whole charge, of course, wanted to stay and fight it out, but I begged him to go to California, to this other brother of father’s, my Uncle Richard, who has always wanted him. That seemed a natural, if a sudden move; didn’t call for explanations to the Harcourt trustees. Then Martin made it clear that he must marry me; be in a real position to protect a member of the fam-

ily. I was confused, dazed, and I thought Gordon didn't—care—"

For a moment she placed her hands before her face.

Blindness of lovers, reflected Dewitt; eternal game of hide-and-peek through the glades and porticoes of time. Gordon not caring! Gordon who had wandered like a distraught man for miles on the day of her wedding!

"You know now he does," Dewitt forced himself to say, riding the steed of his will over his own pulsating emotions.

"Yes," she answered solemnly, then reached her hand out and took his. "Will you be my friend? They say you are very wonderful in these matters. I want Gordon—cleared—yet how can he be cleared! How in my sane mind can I ask such a question? He did it. I saw him do it!"

"Yes, and others saw him," Dewitt said wearily. "Unless we can find a man who exactly resembles him, I am afraid the case is hopeless; or prove his alibi, which seems to have as its accompaniment the proving of three trustworthy people either mad, or suffering the same malady of vision."

"That's just it! What I fear is that Gordon was really out of his mind with jealousy and despair, and followed us at a distance with the terrible way jealousy has of never letting its object out of its sight. I once did the same thing, so I know. At parties and picnics I was always talking to someone else and looking at him—when I could. It was my jealousy that broke the engagement. Gordon might have followed us, and while not really planning anything, might have been caught by the dreadful opportunity in some

manner that of itself blotted out the occurrence from his mind. People in his overwrought state don't really know delirium from fact. Isn't it possible that he might have fancied himself far away asleep in the Shawangunk Mountains when he was really at the quarry hole?"

"It is entirely possible, but these now classified phenomena of morbid or abnormal psychology are very difficult to deal with in a court of law. The law is after facts; and lawyers are obliged to strike the word soul from their thesaurus. In the new era which since the war is swamping us with the suddenness of its onrush, whole vocabularies will be used by the multitude which will be a long time finding their way into court—necessarily so! If it was difficult to deal with man as an animal, it will be infinitely more difficult to deal with him as a spiritual and eternal being."

Silence fell between them. She broke it at last by asking:

"Do you think Harold Brock tried to kill Ray?"

"No."

She turned her face in astonishment to him.

"Who, then?"

"That I haven't thought out."

"Why don't you suspect Harold Brock?"

"First, the alibi, though of course his valet might have been in collusion. I don't think he was, however. Second, Brock's personality. He roars, fights, gets into rages over a dead friend; but he doesn't—attempt murder."

"I must clear Ray's name. You must help me do this," she said appealingly. "That's as much my duty as to clear Gordon's."

"It shall be cleared! We'll work day and night



to clear it. The case of Mr. Gordon Brent is far more difficult."

"I wish you could see him today—take him a message from me," she said wistfully, then was silent. Her eyes—dreaming and beautiful—seemed fixed on far-off scenes.

"The message?" Dewitt questioned softly. "The message for Mr. Brent?"

"You are starting for East Burleigh now? and you say you may go on to the county jail? Will you tell him—" she hesitated, then proceeded in a quiet voice—"will you tell him, that whatever he did—at the quarry pit—I believe him innocent at heart. I believe he was ill, feverish, quite beyond himself. I believe him innocent, anyway. Tell him, too"—she hesitated, then added with a beautiful smile, "no, I will give him that message myself."

## IX

### MISS ALMIRA IS SURPRISED

She was sorting letters when he entered, and almost fell upon his neck in the eagerness of her curiosity and sympathy.

"Tell me it ain't true that poor lady's had another blow."

"Her brother was shot last night about midnight," Dewitt confirmed. She demanded details, and as he gave them her head turned sidewise, like that of a bright-eyed bird. At his conclusion she sighed and "well-welled" with the dazed manner of a country woman unable to focus her kind eyes on criminality.

"Hercules, he can't see further than that the farm is busted for good as a rentin' proposition," she commented at last, "but my heart aches for them young folks. Everybody here thinks there's col—col—what do they call it?"

"Collusion?" Dewitt supplied.

"Yes, that's it—and that if old Haines hadn't come along nobody wouldn't have been no wiser than to think it accident; and him and her could 'a' gotten married, though why she should go through all the fuss of marryin' another man, when she had loved this here Mr. Brent—"

"I'll tell you all about it some day," Dewitt interrupted. "Meanwhile let us take a look at our letter."

She reached for a bunch of keys and applied

one of them to the keyhole of a small drawer, the third in a series which reached from the cage of little boxes to the floor. The key did not fit easily until Miss Almira rammed it in with, "Don't it beat the Dutch how contrary things is sometimes;" and her vigorous action, accomplished by a jerk, brought the drawer out to its full length.

She and Dewitt gave a simultaneous exclamation. The drawer was empty! Miss Almira turned a pale face and blinking old eyes to the detective.

"What under the sun—" she began. "Why, it's been—stole!"

"Are you sure you didn't put it in another drawer?"

"No, indeed! From the day it come it's never been in any drawer but this. Mr. Dewitt, what shall I do?"

"This proves it was anything but a hoax. I wish that I had obeyed an impulse I had to telegraph the post office authorities at Washington about it. But one hates to get excited over what may prove to be only a practical joke. Let me take a look at that lock."

He examined it carefully. "As I suspected, it has been tampered with. Do you lock up well at night, Miss Almira?"

"Tight as a drum."

But her conception of this simile was not his, for the catches over the windows were of the sort that can be turned with perfect ease by wedging the blade of a pocketknife between two sashes. Dewitt took out a microscope and examined the woodwork around the catch; found clear evidence of a recent scraping of the paint by some sharp appliance. Then he illustrated his theory by in-

serting the blade of his knife between the sashes, and raising the lower one. Through the aperture thus created a slender man could easily crawl.

“Have you been disturbed by ‘noises at night recently?’” Dewitt inquired.

“Last night Snooper woke me yowling, but I thought it was just like his nonsense, and turned over and went to sleep again.”

“Was Snooper in or out?”

“In, and he wanted to get out. ‘Ef all the cats in East Burleigh is makin’ fools of ‘emselves, Snooper,’ I said to him, ‘you shan’t. Moonlight ain’t good for you, nohow.’”

“Do any neighbors’ windows face this post office one?”

“No, it looks straight down the old Wilder lane, you see,” she answered, pulling the shade up high. “Ennybody could climb in and no one could see ‘em. The neighbors all go to bed about eight-thirty, and the nearest person keeps a dog is old Jake Teritt; and the dog’s as toothless as Jake.”

“Snooper knew it was a burglar,” Dewitt said, stooping to caress the gray bullet head and heavily marked, broad back of Miss Almira’s long-legged pet. “Have you examined your money till carefully, and the sheets of stamps?”

“No, but I’ll do it now!”

Nothing was missing. Miss Almira counted the last stamp sheet and locked the drawer. “They didn’t want nothing but the letter—that’s clear!”

“Now why did they mail it on the day after the murder only to break in and get it again, practically a day or two later?”

Miss Almira remained non-committal. “You know,” she said to Dewitt as to an oracle.

“I don’t know. I conjecture that something

occurred between the time the letter was mailed and this filching of it that altered the face of things. What I am inclined to believe is that it was intended to publish some fact broadcast; and the mailer thought a hue and cry would be raised at once about it, not counting on our quite different attitude—to keep it quiet. Now I am convinced it has been sent where it will start something—as the saying is.”

“To Gordon Brent?” she suggested.

“He is the assumed murderer, of course. But he does not admit his guilt. There would be no purpose in sending the letter to him—for to open it would be to claim it, to acknowledge himself the murderer, which he cannot do, since he has recorded himself innocent.”

“Then where has the letter gone?”

“Torn up—perhaps. Did you never want to get a letter that you had just mailed, out of a post box? Probably not, because you could. Suppose you couldn’t, and you stand staring at the iron thing that has just gulped down your foolishness—and you wonder when the collector will be along, and if he will swallow your story that you know all about a certain letter and want it back. This person evidently wanted it back—with an intensity that didn’t even stop at house-breaking.”

“But suppose a different person took it out?” commented Miss Almira shrewdly.

“Well said, Miss Almira! There’s some reason to think that the same person who mailed it didn’t take it out. In that case, the person who posted it wanted something known, and the person who stole the letter wanted the facts, whatever they were, suppressed. That seems good logic, doesn’t it! And since you’ve started me off so well let’s

go further, and say that the mailer and the thief were enemies, working at cross-purposes. And, as far as we can see, the thief is ahead in the race. He has suppressed valuable information. Had we communicated with Washington at once, and received permission from the post office authorities to open the letter, a queer case might have been quickly cleared up. I think it very likely the sender of the letter expected that was exactly what we could do. But we played instead into the other fellow's hand. Well, it's gone. The next thing is to get it back."

She shook her head mournfully. "Nobody can get it back, I'm afraid."

Dewitt had his theories, but on these he did not take the time to dwell further. He was anxious to get to Gordon, and enjoining Miss Almira to secrecy, he was soon on his way to the county jail, where his badge gained him quick admission to the prisoner, who was occupied in drawing desultory sketches on the margins of an old magazine. He looked thoroughly worn out, but at Dewitt's greeting rose delightedly.

"This is good of you!"

"Oh, you'll have me here every day."

"How is she?"

"There has been—another blow."

"What do you mean?"

Dewitt told the story. "Do you suspect Brock?" he asked in conclusion, to test his own theory. "Think it over. Remember, they had just had a violent scene."

"If it had been Martin Carfax—but Brock, no! He's a fierce, angry sort of person, but it's not the anger that creeps up and—"

He paused, smiled drearily, "as they accuse me

of doing. Does she still believe she saw me at the quarry pit?"

"My dear boy, don't forget that two other people are suffering from the same delusion. Now, personally, I don't believe you, of your own will, murdered Martin Carfax—not of your waking, conscious will—but people have been known to commit crime while sound asleep. Psychologists call this 'somnambulistic automatism'; and there are several well-authenticated cases of this sort of self-hypnosis by which in a state of sleep or nightmare men have been known to commit terrible crimes. One well-known instance is of a very gentle youth, an inventor. Threatened by a practical joker who wrote, 'Will kill you and your family if such-and-such things are not done,' our inventor so brooded over the message that he rose in his sleep one night and himself performed the terrible deed of murdering his family. Brought to consciousness he had no recollection of his action, but only a dream of defending himself against burglars."

Into Gordon Brent's face came the baffled look of the man suddenly doubting his own honest evidence.

"How are you working this out in my case?" he asked.

"May I ask you questions?"

"As many as you like."

"You thought constantly of Miss Harcourt in these weeks or months before her marriage?"

"Indeed, yes."

"You disliked and mistrusted Martin Carfax?"

"With all my soul!"

"You felt you would like to do anything to prevent this marriage?"

“Anything! I used to lie awake nights wondering what I could do to prevent it, and always going around in a circle and treading on my own thoughts until I’d fall asleep from sheer exhaustion. I never planned anything really; but I’d find myself hating him, wishing him dead. Then I would bring myself up with a sharp turn—as if I had almost fallen into a pit. I was blind-jealous, blind-unhappy for days, weeks on end; then I wouldn’t be able to paint, and I would do just what I did on her wedding day—take perfect whales of walks. It seemed to relieve something to walk until I was ready to drop, with no sense of direction or any care where I brought up. And I brought up in extraordinary places—once did a day and night of it, and found myself within street car distance of New York.”

“Did you ever go toward Outlook Mountain?”

“Never!” came the prompt, emphatic answer.

“I avoided all that locality as if there were a plague there. You see, the summers of our engagement had been spent in East Burleigh. Christine’s chaperon was an easy-going aunt, not like Mrs. Richards, and we used to run about over the country like two youngsters up for a fresh air week. We knew the quarry hole well. Used to amuse ourselves throwing stones down it. Christine was a wonderful out of doors girl—she could ride, shoot, anything.”

“You say ‘was,’” Dewitt commented with a smile.

“That girl is dead—just as I am—” he broke off. “Well, where were we? In the toils of somnambulistic automatism?” He wound up with a wan smile.

“Christine sent you a message.” He repeated

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it word for word, adding, "She believes you innocent. I'm trying to prove it, not to you, nor to myself—but to the world at large. Have you engaged counsel?"

"I shall appear for myself—a right, I believe, I have—unless they insist on assigning counsel to me. In that case he shall be my mouthpiece—not I his!"

"Good!"

"Before you resume the questionnaire—will you take this message for me? Tell her if I ever get out of this I'll want nothing but to serve her all my days—however that may be. You see," he added boyishly, "this just sweeps on, this—this love of ours; it's not like fancies that come and go."

"I am sure of that," Dewitt said gently. "Now, let's resume. As far back in your family history as you can go, are there any cases of insanity, hysteria, or even hyper-sensitive temperament, such as I think you possess?"

"Not one that I ever heard of! My grandfather was a very solid merchant of the old, conservative type; my father, his only son, being rather delicate, was allowed to follow his decided talent for landscape-painting. Perhaps you have seen his things in collections—the name is Richard Holmes Brent."

Dewitt gave a long whistle. "I should say I had! I wanted to pawn everything I possessed once to buy his 'Moonlight on the Upper Delaware.' He was a magician with moonlight!"

"And lived and died sane as they come," Brent declared. "I mean, he was really a business man; paid his bills, wore his hair short, very regular at meals. Mother used to say, 'Richard, your

paintings don't seem like those of a man who eats three good meals a day.' I know what she meant—they were ethereal, unearthly things with a touch of the Edgar Allen Poe in them. Mother's people were Quakers; very gentle, sensible people, as Quakers mostly are. No, Dewitt, I'm afraid you can't cook up insanity—or this walking in my sleep business."

"Did you ever walk in your sleep as a child?"

"Never heard the family or my nurses say so."

"Isn't it possible," Dewitt urged, "that considering the overwrought state in which you were on the day of her wedding, you might really have fallen, through fatigue, into a condition resembling sleep, and in that state found your way to the quarry hole, unfortunately just as Carfax was satisfying his morbid curiosity to see it?"

Brent shook his head. "Impossible! You're working hard to prove that I didn't kill Carfax consciously. Dewitt, leave that track, and go after my alibi. Get your teeth in that!"

"You mean you want me to believe you were really in the Shawangunk Mountains at the time of the murder, when three reliable people agree that they saw you at the quarry pit?"

"I was in the Shawangunks asleep on a hair-cloth sofa at four-thirty the afternoon of April first. You've got to find that farmhouse, the woman who prepared the hot milk and sandwich for me. The alibi proved, we can attack the mystery from another standpoint—that I have a perfect double, for instance."

"And his motive in killing Carfax?" Dewitt inquired with a touch of irony. "Two men with copper-colored hair and blue suits could scarcely be in love with Mrs. Carfax."

“Oh, there are plenty of other counts against him besides his daring to marry her,” Brent said briskly. “Carfax was put out of a club once for cheating at cards. Brock was the only man of his set that wouldn’t believe it. He stuck to the rogue through thick and thin. I always rather admired him for that, though he hates me like the devil.”

“Yes, I understand. I feel the same way toward Brock—he never lets go.

“Brent, there was another queer thing about this case. I haven’t mentioned it before,” Dewitt amended; then told of the letter, the starting point of his expedition to the old Bostwick farm; and of its mysterious disappearance. “Now in my mind I have linked the theft of that letter up with the attempted murder of young Harcourt. Whoever was responsible for Carfax’s death—your red-haired double, if you will—for some reason wanted that chap out of the way, too. I’m sure of it! Mrs.—Carfax—”

“Oh, call her Christine!” Brent interrupted in an imploring voice. “She never was his, thank God—really his!”

“Well, Christine, then, wants her brother’s name cleared as much as she wants yours. I don’t know which will be harder to do, and believing you both innocent at that! Brent, I’ll keep stirring on the alibi, but I must be hot-footed on other trails, too. Now, describe this farmhouse to me as well as you can.”

He took out his notebook and put down in shorthand a meagre description only too well-suited to the generic farmhouse: white and green in color, trees about it, red barns; and of the best room; only one sorry detail—that haircloth sofa. “I give you my word, I didn’t notice another thing

besides the stove. I was conscious of that because it was so good and warm; and of the sofa because I kept slipping off—you know what haircloth is! and I was mad to sleep, to forget. I had asked if I might stretch out on it, because I had been walking since morning. The woman said I could. She looked tired herself, as so many farmers' wives do, and as if she knew what it was to want terribly to lie down and rest your aching feet.

"I'll advertise!" Dewitt said. "I'll put your description in the county paper, and one or two others that farmers take, agricultural journals, etc. And in the New York papers. Ten to one, though, the people who ought to see it—won't. Did the farm look well kept up?"

Brent shook his head. "I can't tell, Dewitt. It *felt* lonesome, though—oh, lonesome, lonesome.

"Did you see anyone besides the woman?"

"Not a soul. A gray horse had his nose over the barn half-door, and an old dog came to meet me, but didn't bark. Dogs like me generally."

Dewitt mused. "Sounds like one of these little old widow or spinster farms; last female of the old stock—you know, hanging on to a few acres with the aid of a horse and a cow. Probably never sees a paper—unfortunately!"

In his heart he didn't in the least believe an alibi was possible. Outside the county jail he met Hercules Bostwick, whose first words were, "I couldn't give the old place away now. It's a hoodoo farm, sure. Have you heard the latest? Lights in the windows up there last night. Gosh! I'd like to see them as spread the tale. Everybody to the store thinks it's the chair for that painter-fellow Brent."

Dewitt smiled. "Funny how people like to be

sure other folks are punished. I'm going up the mountain to make a few inquiries, and I want the key again, Mr. Bostwick. Also, I want to know where one of our witnesses lives—the hermit, Haines.”

“Footpath on the other side of the farmhouse; starts from the old granary—follow through woods half a mile.”

He was soon on his way. Arriving at the farm he ran his car into a shed, locked the wheels and proceeded on foot through a wild stretch of wood where it would seem, by the haphazard position of immense boulders, giants had once played ball with petrine monstrosities. The path, after a short half-mile, stopped abruptly in a little clearing centered about a log cabin from whose chimney smoke was curling. The hermit was at home.

“Thank God, you've come,” was his greeting to Dewitt. “I know you for an honest man.”

“Much obliged for the description. I hope I am! I believe you to be a reliable witness, and I want your private testimony of what happened at the quarry pit.”

“Come in. Out of the way, Caesar.”

A big, yellow, nondescript dog rose heavily and Dewitt was admitted to a not overly clean but comfortable room, whose walls of polished, rounded logs gave back the warm glow of an open wood-fire on the hearth of the primitive chimney. A big black Bible was on the table by the fire together with some rough china on which were the remnants of a meal. The Bible, Dewitt noted, was open at the prophecy of Jeremiah.

“I read the Word,” said the hermit. “It's my only book.

“And what else do you do?”

"I till my garden when summer comes."

Dewitt noticed an exceedingly rusty gun over the fireplace, and inquired, "Do you ever use it?"

"I cannot take life. I buy meat for Caesar. I do not eat it. No, not because it is so dear. The vision leaves me when I eat meat."

"What vision?"

"Heaven, hell, death and judgment," replied the Hermit. "I sees 'em plain as I see you when I keeps my body down—nor pamper the abominable flesh."

"Oh, I see—inner vision, you mean. Now, I want your testimony about this case—what did you see with your wide-open eyes, on the afternoon of April the first?"

"I seen what I said I seen at inquest," replied the hermit, "a man push another man into the quarry hole—movie-actin' I thought it was."

"And the man you saw seemed to you to be the same as Mr. Gordon Brent."

"Like as two peas. It was him—the lady saw him, I saw him—and that dark fellow—same as was here an hour ago."

"Ramah Tong here!" Dewitt exclaimed.

"Don't know his name—said he was workin' sort of private to help his lady clear Mr. Brent—said his lady's brother was shot at last night."

As he spoke, a creaking of the boards above his head caused Dewitt to look at the ceiling of the cabin. "Is there a loft above?"

"Yes—there is."

"Where's the staircase?"

"There ain't none. The cabin's built against a hill, and they's a door right onto it from the loft."

"Anyone up there?"

"No one now. A fellow stayed there last night;

knocked me up at one A. M. and asked for shelter. Seemed like a furriner."

Dewitt's mind leaped instantly to the maid's story at the examination, of a stranger she and her "gentleman frien'" had met on the drive of the Carfax place, and who at first glance she had mistaken for Ramah Tong. "He went off early after I give him a cup of coffee," Haines added.

No sound for a moment but the stealthy wind insinuating itself behind the squat, solid shutters of the tiny windows, "And didn't come back?" Dewitt inquired. "How did he explain his arrival at that hour of the night?"

"Lost his way, like hunters do in the hunting time, when they've been after deer way over towards Indian Head. Come in spent—I showed him to the bed of skins up aloft. Mind ye, I didn't kill the beasts. Hunters give me the skins years agone."

"Yes, yes—how was he dressed?"

"Slouch hat—gray overcoat, muffler round his throat."

"And the color of his hair?"

"Darkish—tall. I tell you, he looked like the fellow that serves the poor lady."

"East Indian—was he one of the men you met with the ladder and rope?"

"Couldn't say. He came in the dark and was up and drunk his coffee, with his hat over his eyes, while it was still 'the morn's morn,' as the sayin' is. Mebbe he does work around here; his goin' off early looked like it."

"May I have a look into that loft before I leave—listen, there *is* someone up there!"

Both sat in strained silence; but the hermit's vague gaze betrayed little interest in the creakings

of his cabin, as if for years his ears had been accustomed to those elusive noises of the wilderness, which may be wind or wild animals, but which in no wise concern the inhabitant. Dewitt thought of him on lonely winter nights with the hurricane tormenting the stark trees above him, the phantoms of the snow wailing in their winding-sheets at his darkened windows.

Instinctively he glanced over his shoulder at the nearest one, and it seemed to him that a shadow passed it and fell for a moment on the floor. He sprang up and ran around the house, up the hill and into the doorway of the loft, the hermit following at a slower pace.

The room revealed by the modified daylight, which sifted in between the forest trees and a little window opposite the door, was naked of everything but the bed of skins, a sleazy curtain of some faded red material and a kind of rude seaman's chest. As Dewitt crossed the door-sill he paused and grasped the hermit's arm.

"Do you smell that odor?"

The hermit expanded his pinched nostrils. "Yes, there's a strong odor."

"It's sandalwood," said Dewitt. "It couldn't have lingered here. There must be some of it around."

Down on his hands and knees he went, searching. Extracting a flashlight from his pocket, he turned it on the few obscure spots which the bare room held, and triumphantly brought forth from an angle of the chimney a large carved bead, at which he sniffed. "Sandalwood, sure enough, but it's queer that the odor of one bead could fill a whole room. The man's clothes must have been



full of it. Yes. It's around the bed. Evidently he laid down without undressing."

"I thought it smelt funny," said the hermit, "kind of a burnt smell like, yet sweetish."

Dewitt was examining the bead. "Looks as if it might have come from a Buddhist rosary. I've seen them in India made of beads like this. You have had an East Indian for a guest. Did you think him," Dewitt asked, smiling, "what you would call a good man?"

"How can I tell! He had a powerful knowledge of Scripture. While I made the coffee he asked me what I thought of the Deluge; then he talked queer—things I didn't understand."

"What did he say?"

"Said nobody should have money what couldn't use it for opening up the universe; that was all it was for, sez he, openin' up the universe—and it ought to be took from people that just bought houses and lands and fine equipages with it."

"Socialist species, I fancy. I'll keep this bead, Haines. Don't mention your visitor to anybody. If he comes again, watch him; get everything out of him you can. I'm off to find that farm where the new rope and the ladder were to be used."

He retraced his steps to the Bostwick house, over which the long shadows of afternoon were again falling. As he drew near it, he saw to his astonishment a slender figure in black emerge from the door of the kitchen, raise an arm, wave a handkerchief three times to some one in the distance, and then quietly turn and re-enter the kitchen, closing the door behind her. It was Christine, whom he had left seated before the library fire in her own home.

## X

### “THE BROTHERHOOD”

Instinctively he crouched in the underbrush, and turned his gaze in the direction toward which she had been signaling, a copse or glen near the slope of the mountain which swept upward from the jagged edges of the quarry. An eagle, poised high in mid-air, was for a time the only living creature in sight; then slowly, stealthily, with a curiously sinuous movement, a dark body emerged from the trees and approached the house, pausing at times to look from right to left with a slow, discerning vision. Darkness seemed to envelop him, move with him, probably the effect of a heavy black cloak he wore, falling like Hamlet's from his shoulder. Dewitt followed every movement, for he had made up his mind that he would, once the form had passed a certain spot, get up and go to meet it. The thought of Christine, again alone in that fated and fateful house, was like madness to him. What, indeed, had occurred that she should again seek this sinister spot?

But just as he was to put his plan in execution, another figure detached itself from the forest, slunk into full light, then rose in the path of the black-cloaked man. This second actor on that wild and deserted stage wore the gray coat and slouch hat of the hermit's description. The two men plunged soon into angry controversy, visible, if not audible, through gestures which seemed

threatening to the on-looker. Cautiously Dewitt gained the kitchen door without apparently attracting the attention of these two whose angry voices now rose, or fell, as the wind veered or swept again toward Dewitt's straining ears. All at once, high above the head of the black-cloaked man, shone the gleam of a knife. The next instant the long figure was stretched on the ground; and the man in the gray overcoat was fleeing to the shelter of the woods.

Dewitt scarcely knew whether to give chase, or go to the assistance of the wounded man. Drawing his revolver, he fired at the fleeting figure, now about two hundred yards away, but to his disgust his hand trembled, his fingers convulsively bungled, and the shot went wide of its mark. While still maintaining a running fire, the forest again received and swallowed up the fugitive. Stopping abruptly and looking down he found nearly at his feet, so quick and direct had been his attack, the wounded stranger.

The black cloak was stained crimson about the region of the heart; the powerful head of a lean but muscular man was strained back, revealing a long, full throat and the collar of what seemed like some kind of uniform embroidered just below the edge with a curious device resembling an image of the rising sun. The skin was sallow, and now rapidly gained a mortal pallor. The dark eyes gazed at Dewitt, but seemed looking beyond. The blue lips moved as if they would speak, and Dewitt bent down.

“Tell me—who attacked you?”

“The Brotherhood!” was the strange answer, and then with a convulsive gasp, “the letter—I mailed the letter—”

“At the East Burleigh post office—the letter to the murderer—”

“Yes, to—”

A pause; and Dewitt, wild with anxiety, tried to raise the head of the man dying now under his eyes, dying without the word that might clear up the mystery. “Ah, who was it?” he asked eagerly.

But the eyes had glazed. The head fell back. The silence of the eternal mountains was the only answer to Dewitt’s frantic question.

He looked down at the body, into the face which already seemed changed by the elusive shadows and secrecies of death. The man was before him who knew the murderer of Martin Carfax, and who had tried with his last breath to speak his name.

And now another figure emerged from behind the old red granary—the hermit himself coming quickly over the fields that separated him from Dewitt, as if conscious of a tragedy and eager to be of service.

“I heard the shots,” he panted. “What’s happened?”

“Only another murder. Look at him. Have you ever seen him before?”

Long and earnestly Haines regarded the up-turned face. “Yes, he is one of the men,” he said at last. “One of the men with the rope and ladder.”

“Then your friend in the gray overcoat is the other. He has just stabbed this fellow to death. We’ll have to leave the body here until I can get Bostwick—but first, I am going to the farmhouse. Stand guard, Haines. There may be dogs in the neighborhood, or vultures.”

“I will stand here until you return, if it is mid-

night; and if I do not stand, I will kneel. He must be prayed for—the poor creature.”

Once Dewitt glanced back. The tall, white-bearded figure standing in the middle of the field, arms now outstretched, looked like Elisha the prophet.

“I’m glad he’s here to help me,” he thought. “Now for Christine.”

As he approached the farmhouse he observed with satisfaction that the shutters of the windows which faced the scene of the stabbing were closed, as were most of the shutters on the other windows, a precaution observed by Hercules since the Carfax tragedy, as he himself had informed Dewitt. Where was the girl hiding in this darkened house?

The kitchen door, as he expected, was open, and he stepped cautiously over the sill, peered into the dark cavern of the place with its everlasting smell of burnt wood and burnt-out oil. As he did so a draught of the coldest air, an unfamiliar icy atmosphere, struck his forehead. He shivered as with a sense of something uncanny. Had he really seen her? Was the slender woman in black who signaled to the man in the dark cloak actually Christine? Again the old ghost story gave back to him a strange flavor of reality. One hundred—nay, fifty—years ago, they would have denied Marconi and his works. Now even scientists were beginning to admit that matter was just as mysterious as spirit; and for a man to call himself a materialist explained nothing either to his own consciousness nor to the world. The properties of matter were really not understood at all in their essence, only in their accidents.”

Out of these thoughts it was time to emerge.

“Mrs. Carfax!” he said loudly, then flashed his

pocket electric light; but its glare revealed nothing, and only silence answered him. Crossing the kitchen he went through the passage from whose farther end the front rooms opened, stopping abruptly as he heard the sound of voices and the following conversation:

“But suppose this person—the writer of this note, comes armed, Tong; and you are—defenceless?”—Christine’s voice.

“Madame knows I never carry arms; but put my trust in a power stronger than swords and pistols.”

“But he may attack you, Tong; and then what shall I do to defend you!”

“He will not attack me, Madame. If he keeps his appointment, answers your signal, be sure he has information for us. He will want money, not our lives.”

“I have brought money. You know how much. If he must be bribed, shall I give first a half, a third, or all?”

“Give all and demand all,” came the answer.

Dewitt listening, and hating as a man what he was obliged to do as a detective, felt the old doubt raise its head. Christine had given no hint to him of this coming adventure, and she and Tong betrayed in their conversation a secret understanding which indicated that in this tragedy they were vitally dependent on each other. Again he had to summon the image of the hermit as he had last seen him, to reassure himself. The wilderness dweller was trustworthy; and he had seen Gordon Brent kill Carfax.

On a sudden impulse he knocked loudly at the door. A startled exclamation from Christine was followed by the door’s being flung wide open.

Ramah Tong, confronting Dewitt, exclaimed, "Oh, sir, this is fortunate."

"Were you waiting," Dewitt asked, "for a tall man, an East Indian, in a black cloak?"

Ramah Tong looked almost childishly curious. "Sir," he replied, "neither Madame nor I had the least idea what the aspect is of the person for whom we are waiting; nor whether man or woman. After you left this morning a note came to her, handed in at the door by a nondescript messenger. Both address and contents were type-written, telling her that if she wished information concerning her brother's assailant to come here at this hour unattended, to bring money with her, and to wave three times from the kitchen doorstep in the direction of the upper wood. With two of these conditions she has complied, but I would not allow her to come unattended. When we heard your knock we thought this anonymous writer was at hand."

"He is dead out there in the field," said Dewitt. "Didn't you hear shots?"

"Dead!" cried Tong.

Christine came forward, held out her hand in a dazed way, her voice apologetic as she said: "I had to come for the chance of getting information—and now! now, what shall we do!"

Oddly enough, she seemed only to regret that death had prevented the messenger; not that the messenger was dead. Was she too inured to horrors even to respond to them by a thrill of the nerves? Dewitt related briefly his visit to the hermit and the ensuing incidents, Tong listening open-mouthed.

"East Indians, you say. Ah, they may have been the men who helped me that day."

“Come out and identify this one. The hermit says he thinks it is one of the men he met with the rope and ladder.”

Dewitt had already made up his mind to send Tong for Hercules Bostwick, that he might have time in which to question Christine alone; and to tell her of the receipt and then the theft of the letter; and of his conversation with Gordon. The two of them had difficulty in keeping up with Tong, who was striding toward the spot where the hermit, now kneeling, still kept watch. Arriving at the body, he bent over it and looked long and curiously at the dead face.

“Yes, he’s one of my countrymen,” Tong at last said slowly, “and he’s one of the men who were carrying a ladder, though that day he wore workman’s clothes.”

“What’s that device on his collar?” Dewitt asked.

Tong shook his head. “I do not know. There are hundreds of secret societies in India, men banded together for every conceivable purpose—from attaining Nirvana to stealing a Rajah’s jewels. You say this man with his last breath accused a Brotherhood? It looks to me like the avenging of an old crime. Possibly the dead man was merely one of those cheap mystery-mongers who wished to inform Madame through divination of the true circumstance of the attack on her brother, and who was after a fat sum of money; when the Brotherhood’s representative intervened to settle some old scores of their own.”

“Of course, they probably judged Mrs.—Carfax—a wealthy woman on the day of the disaster—when they came to her help.”

“Precisely,” said Tong.



“And attempted this way of getting money.”

“Yes.”

“Then, Tong, don’t you think it the likeliest thing in the world that one of them did the shooting? Remember the maid’s testimony—a tall, dark man she thought was you at first,” Dewitt advanced.

“I think it probable, sir,” the East Indian agreed.

“Go for the coroner, Tong. My car is just beyond the quarry hole. Haines, are you chilled through? Shall I take your place by the body?”

But the hermit shook his head. “Take the lady into the house, and light a fire for her. I am used to the wind and cold.”

Dewitt acted on his words. In the room where the settee stood he started a fire and drew the settee before it. He told her of the letter, of his interview with Gordon. She caught eagerly at his theory that Gordon had committed the crime in a state of “somnambulistic automatism.”

“But remember,” Dewitt warned, “we’ve got to locate the spot from which he wandered in his sleep, and that’s going to be difficult. It was certainly not the hermit’s spare bed, which seems, by the way, to have been occupied last night by the murderer of that East Indian out there. Mr. Brent may have dreamed the Shawangunk Mountains, you know; dreamed it all at a spot so near the quarry hole that he could arise in broad daylight, and sound asleep go to it precisely at the moment you reach there. I don’t mind telling *you* that it’s stretching the long arm of coincidence pretty far.”

“Oh, too well-timed!” she exclaimed desperately. “But, Mr. Dewitt, you must save him—for me!”

Her low, vibrant voice was full of tenderness and entreaty, as if she longed to make amends for those two tragic years of separation which had ended in such a crashing-down of the structure of their lives. The leaping flames gave color to the brooding face that leaned to the fire as if she would read in it the symbol of her purgatorial purification and release. Dewitt took the bead from his pocket and put it in her hand.

“India!” She spoke the word as one would say, “Behold a star!” “Behold a great flame!” then, “It is a sandalwood bead from a Buddhist rosary!”

“How did you know?” Dewitt exclaimed.

“Tong had a similar one—much smaller beads, but carved like this. It was one of my first toys. This odor brings back Simla, the fresh air that was like the fanning of an angel’s wing after the swelter of the plains. Our Indian nurse, a sweet woman, would bathe little pale-faced Ray and myself; dust us with sandalwood-scented talcum; and put us to bed where the cool hill air swept over us. She used to say ‘the Light of Heaven’—that was her name for my father—will kill those children keeping them in the plains too long with his terrible studies. My father wrote several books on tropical diseases.”

“Of what did he die?” Dewitt inquired.

“The doctors themselves were uncertain. It was a slow, wasting disease contracted in India. He only came to the United States because he was forced to. The doctors recommended his native climate; so he bought ‘The Towers’ and sent for Ray and me, at school in Switzerland. Tong came all the way across the Atlantic for us; and brought us back—poor, faithful Tong.”

Suddenly her face lit up and she clapped her hands. "I know who can help us more than anyone on this theory of somnambu—what is it, somnambulistic—"

"Automatism," Dewitt supplied. "Who, then?"

"Tong, of course. He was all kinds of things in India, a physician among the rest—why, he even taught Father secrets. Father used to say if he were ill he'd rather have Ramah Tong than a whole college of surgeons and physicians."

"But Tong couldn't help him in his last illness?"

She shook her head. "He wouldn't give Tong any help, wouldn't rouse his will; and the best of physicians can do nothing alone. When we arrived he was so listless, so apathetic, that he scarcely greeted us. Of course, it was part of the disease."

"We'll talk with Tong tonight," Dewitt said. "Meanwhile let's examine our clues: a rosary bead; one dead East Indian; one living one; a tale of a dream farmhouse in the Shawangunk Mountains—from the lips of a man seen by three people—"

"Don't!"

"Christine," he said solemnly, as if he had the right to pronounce her name, "I want to help you and Gordon Brent to some future happiness, as I never before wanted to accomplish anything. Tell me, had you ever seen the hermit, ever spoken with him, before the day of the—accident?"

The implication did not escape her with her brier-keen mind back of the soft, feminine face. "Mr. Dewitt," she replied, "I am neither shielded now, nor being shielded. Had the hermit not

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appeared I would have persisted in my first story—would have been placed on the rack rather than betray Gordon.”

He believed her. “Then we attack the impossible.”

“You have to prove my story and Gordon’s, too,” she answered. “May I ask you—a little about yourself?”

“Just who I am? Well, to begin, I am a silent partner in the firm of Wickford & Gale—that means a private detective, an unofficial servant of officialdom. The police force of New York, or of any other city, has good reason to know that a uniform and a revealed badge is not exactly a toboggan slide in the capture of a criminal. In consequence, some of us go about like civilians seeking who has been devoured.”

“Of course, I know your record.”

“Then is there anything else?” he asked gently.

“Yes, it seems a strange business for you to have gone into!”

“Not at all. There’s magic in it—sometimes,” but he did not look at her as he said the words.

A sudden crashing of glass, and simultaneously the crack of a pistol. Dewitt, with a swift, strong sweep of his arm, picked up Christine, and ran with her to the door and into the hall just as a second bullet whizzed past them. Flashing his electric light, he located the position of a cupboard in the dark hall, almost threw her into it with “Stay there. I’ll give chase,” and was out in the open, speeding in the direction from which the shots had come.

But the fields were vacant of any presence, and the bare trees could afford no permanent refuge to a sharpshooter. The interval of provision for

Christine's safety had been, it was evident, just long enough for a sprinting criminal to make for shelter across the fields that sloped away from the farmhouse to the red granary. Behind the granary the man might be hiding, waiting to pick him off as he advanced into the open. The thought was not agreeable; but Dewitt plunged out of the shelter of the house, to take the one chance he had of making a capture. Evidently the first shots had been fired from a tree, as only from such a vantage could the marksman secure the needed range.

His surmise concerning the red granary was correct; but excitement was evidently interfering with the excellence of the marksman's aim. A bullet passed through Dewitt's hat, another through his coat, the third tore its way through the muscles of his upper left arm. His assailant was now in full view—gray overcoat and all. Dewitt running, fired; but a simultaneous crack witnessed to the fact of aid in battle. Someone shooting from another angle had brought the fellow down; but he was on his feet again in an instant, and a second later had disappeared in the woods.

Dewitt turned, and discerned in the distance a car containing Tong, Bostwick, and three other men; one of whom was still brandishing a revolver. To Dewitt's astonishment, the man proved to be Brock. Waving to him, Dewitt started on a run toward the woods beyond the granary, for he could still hear the crashing of the underbrush that indicated a wild and headlong flight. This he followed, panting. All at once the sounds ceased, seemed to sink into the

ground. Dewitt stared—before him woods, behind him woods and the silence of the grave.

To go on now gave more chance to the pursued than the pursuer. Bloodhounds were needed for this job. He wheeled about—came face to face with Christine, breathless from her long run behind him.

“Did you think,” she panted, “did you dream for a minute that I would *stay* in that cupboard!”

A sound of someone running. Tong! white as milk. Down on one knee he went—kissed the hem of her skirt! “Thank God, Madame. Brock fired that shot. He meant to kill you!”

“Tong!” she cried sharply, “don’t let your devotion to me carry you too far.”

“He aimed from the machine—I am confident it was not at Mr. Dewitt’s assailant.”

“Tong!” she rebuked him again. He cowered before her.

By this time there arrived on the scene, Brock, the deputy sheriff, and a third who waved a languid hand in Dewitt’s direction, and said:

“Do I behold the *Don Quixote* of the force? I’ve had the rotten luck, Frederick, to be appointed detective for the prosecution of Gordon Brent.”

Dewitt introduced his friend Chalmers, Morgan Chalmers. “You needn’t be afraid of him, Mrs. Carfax,” he added blandly, “Chalmers puts on a monocle to chase a burglar. Did you ever discover anything, Chalmers?”

Chalmers sniffed at his gardenia, worn with much display in his buttonhole. “Yes, I discovered long ago that most mysteries are blurted out sooner or later. I bank everything on the fact that people can’t hold their tongues. Dewitt is

infringing on my copyright a good deal—goes around the country encouraging people to talk; and most of 'em don't need encouragement. Man, your coat sleeve's red."

"Flesh wound only—Brock, if you hadn't arrived just then it might have gone hard with me."

The bulldog grunted. "You're more valuable to me dead than alive, Dewitt. The car was slowing down and swerved just at my last shot, which, in consequence, went much too near Mrs. Carfax. I ask her pardon."

"You are entirely excusable," said Christine, but she did not meet his eyes.

Hercules, now quite willing to consign his farm to perdition, took up his melancholy march behind the deputy sheriff in the direction of the East Indian's body. Dewitt heard a soft voice over his shoulder:

"Come into the house, honorable sir, and I will attend to your arm."

Dewitt remembered those ministrations long, long after as being, in a sense, unique. Even his injuries during the war had not been treated with so magical a touch. Tong's finger tips had a peculiar cool, drawing quality, like the application of some delicate ointment, and the skill with which he washed and bandaged the wound would have done credit to an experienced nurse. Dewitt felt the pain flow away in a soft, retreating tide. Christine seemed to divine his sensations.

"I told you Tong was a wonderful doctor. He can cure a headache by a few passes of his hands—not even touching your forehead."

Chalmers entered at this juncture; and immediately sought out Christine, seeming most

anxious to put her at her ease, to make her feel that she was not under suspicion.

“ ’Pon my word, Mrs. Carfax, they don’t know a lady’s way—that’s all the impediment! An old friend? Certainly, you could only keep silent. Terrible position, terrible! Suppose we stroll over the grounds a bit.”

It was astonishing—such commiseration from the detective of the prosecution! The languid and melancholy Chalmers might have much up his sleeve; but on the surface he was all sympathy, appreciative of the fine shades; of textures beyond the raw material of crime.

Dewitt dismissed her to him, for she looked his way for instructions. Tong and he joined the group, then, around the body.

“The other fellow can’t be far off,” said the hermit, “but he will never be again in my cabin.”

“He’s badly wanted on two charges,” said the deputy sheriff, “killin’ this one, and like as not Mrs. Carfax’s brother, las’ night at midnight. Boys, we got to run in somebody for these here murders. The county’ll get a bad name. Suppose we organize a posse right now on the spot, and I’ll get up Michael Wharton’s bloodhounds.”

“I don’t want no criminal hidin’ on this poor old dog-blasted place,” Hercules mourned. “Ain’t it enough to have a quarry hole on it, without all these mix-ups? I stand to lose a cool six thousand.”

“Losin’ it ever since old Abe died,” commented the sheriff. “Well, let’s get busy. Ramer Throng, or whatever your name is, tell us suthin’ about East Indians. Are they good runners, good hiders? We’ve got to beat up these woods. These two was lurkin’ around here some time pre-



vious to the Carfax case; as you found 'em, you say, carryin' rope and a ladder. Nobody heard tell of their bein' hired out on any farm in these parts—must've a roost somewheres in these woods!"

Then Brock spoke, looking straight at Christine, who had come up to the group with Chalmers. "Are you sure, Mrs. Carfax, that these men are the same who first were called in by Tong to help him in the rescue?"

"I am absolutely sure of this one—though he was differently dressed on that day."

"Your brother's—" he began, and she interrupted him.

"Don't speak of my brother, Harold Brock. Someone attempted his murder, cold-blooded murder. These men—"


She bit her lip, checking herself before the accusation could find tongue, but he seemed to read her thoughts.

"Take care, Christine. I'm not—easy-going like poor Martin."

"I came here today," she went on more calmly, "to get information of the circumstances of the attack on my brother, held out to me by the writer of an anonymous letter, evidently this dead man. He never reached me; he was stopped midway by the man who stabbed him."

The deputy sheriff was looking from one to the other of them, as if a light were breaking on his mind. "Brock," he said sharply, "tell me again all about that revolver of yours. I didn't like its being found where it was."

Brock turned savagely on him. "Do you suspect me of hiring someone to kill a man? That's not my way, Sheriff. If I thought he needed killing I'd do the job myself."



## XI

### THREADS OF FATE

Tong drove Christine and Dewitt down the mountain. When they reached the village he was about to turn the car in the direction of Highland Park, when Christine put her hand on Dewitt's arm.

"Won't you take me to Gordon?" she asked in a low voice. "I feel that I can't rest tonight unless I have told him myself the message I sent by you."

"Do you think this is best, Mrs. Carfax?" Dewitt asked. "Remember that you are suspected of complicity—and but one interpretation will be put on your action by the people who see only the obvious. Do you think it wise?"

She hesitated. "Would my going be likely to hurt him in any way? lessen his chances?"

"No, his situation is positive, fixed for the time being. I was thinking of you."

"I care nothing for myself. If anything happens to him it must happen to me also. I have nothing to lose, because I've lost everything. Take me to him!"

Her voice was vibrant with passionate entreaty. Dewitt glanced at Tong, who had turned to them for instructions.

"Honorable sir, will you not do as she wishes?" the Indian murmured. "Her star shines by another's light these days."

The mournful, musical words swept away Dewitt's hesitation. The prison authorities might not admit her, but at least he could take her to the gates, and do that much to meet her desire.

They flew along the smooth road that left the blue, mysterious mountains farther and farther behind them. The April day was lingering gloriously. Flashes of gold in shining willow branches and across awakening fields told of a rich sunset behind gray and amethystine clouds; softness of spring permeated the air like the ghost of an old romance. Christine seemed unaware of all the beauty, but she looked more than once across the valley to the jagged outlines of the Shawangunks.

At the prison, by some miracle unforeseen even by Dewitt, she was admitted, and told she could talk with Brent a moment or two in the presence of others. Dewitt did not accompany her, and the prison attendants dwindled away to one. Evidently her beauty and youth had pleaded for her.

As she followed the guard through the corridors to Gordon's cell a glow of renewed faith and devotion possessed her spirit. The terrible events of the past days, while shaking her life to its foundations, had established also a fresh equilibrium, the poise of the heart that at last yields to love re-born and stronger than ever before. The darkness that had descended upon her at the quarry pit had been scattered by new light, fresh confidence. Gordon stood out again in the clear radiance of their early love—the strong, sincere, winning nature that through the transient emotional experiments of her girlhood, of her gay and care-free artist life, had represented what was real and enduring.

Their paths had so nearly met, only to be lost

in this jungle of appalling circumstance. But against the inexplicable tragedy at the quarry pit she was now opposing the hopes and faith of a romance that seemed destined to survive all shocks of fortune; as if, indeed, it possessed a life of its own beyond her will or Gordon's. If they were imprisoned in circumstance, at least the vision of their love was clear again—uplifted and purified by suffering. Thank God for that!

The attendant at last paused before a cell, behind the bars of which a figure was pacing. Her courage until then had been high, but at the sight of that imprisoned form her composure for the moment deserted her; and she could not answer the rapturous cry which Gordon uttered on recognizing his visitor; could only hold out her hands to the iron barrier between them.

"I had to come, Gordon," she faltered at last, "to say to you myself the message I sent this morning."

"God bless you for that, Christine. I knew you couldn't really believe me—" he broke off and looked entreatingly at the prison attendant. "You can trust us. Indeed, you can."

The man seemed to think so, for he drew back a few steps; and the two lovers, their gaze upon each other, were content to read in that long look what words could never adequately say. Christine broke the communion of silence with an entreaty for forgiveness.

"You'll forget these two years, Gordon—and all my jealousy when I doubted you and hurt you? This would never have happened had I—"

"Dearest—hush. I need your forgiveness, too; but I want you to believe me innocent—*that* most of all."

"I do believe you innocent from the depths of my heart, Gordon. Whatever you did, you could not have known that you did it. Of that I am sure—forever sure."

"Thank God!" he murmured. "But, Christine, I was not there. I was not at the quarry hole. Believe that, too, my darling!"

Her face saddened. "If I could! Gordon; but how can I doubt what I saw? Don't let us talk of that now. I came to tell you that I am all yours, to serve you—to help you through this time."

"It's a blessed time, then," he answered fervently. "And, beloved, never reproach yourself. I can't bear it. I was so faulty, too."

"We'll both begin again."

"Yes, here and now. It will be my gate to paradise. I can leave all this. They can't shut up my spirit. I can always go to you in my thoughts—my dear love."

His voice sang on the last words, and again they were rapturously silent.

"Gordon," she said at length, "what do you want most for me to do for you?"

He smiled, the boyish, innocent, gay smile that had always enchanted her. "It has nothing to do with the law," he answered.

"No?"

"No, dear. What I want more than anything else is a few of those white violets that grow down by the springhouse. They should be out soon. Do you remember—they were the first flowers we picked together after we became engaged?"

"Do I remember!"

## XII

### IN THE GARDEN

By nightfall it was known in all the district from Highland Park to East Burleigh that Harold Brock was "being watched," and as he was by no means popular in the community people were inclined to believe that he had at least instigated the attack upon Raymond Harcourt, though sufficient proof was lacking to warrant an arrest. After all, some urged, the valet might have been bribed to declare an alibi; or the East Indian, now generally supposed to have shot young Harcourt, might have been Brock's confederate. Against this theory, however, was the unexpectedness of Ray's return.

Dewitt's interview with Tong on the subject of Gordon Brent's possible somnambulism was scheduled for nine that evening. Christine had expected to be present, but the events of the day had over-fatigued her and she had been put to bed by the zealously of Mrs. Richards.

On the surface matters did not seem to have advanced much. The dogs of the sheriff's posse had, indeed, disturbed the peace of Outlook Mountain, but not a trace could be found of the dark stranger in the gray overcoat. The sandalwood bead was all that Dewitt possessed as evidence of his nationality and recent presence.

Four days or four hundred years since the

tragedy of the quarry hole! Time had held too much and had gone unrecorded. Dewitt, pacing the library floor while waiting for Tong, had a sense of immeasurable distance between himself and the man who had come to East Burleigh for rest and quiet! Not the tragic events, but Christine herself had swept him so far from old moorings. Meteoric women of her type would always be a disturbing, if charming, potency in the lives of others.

A knock. Tong entered, looking very tall in a white turban and long light tunic caught snugly about the loins with an embroidered sash.

"The honorable gentleman would like to talk with me," he said in his gentle voice.

"Decidedly. Do you smoke, Tong?"

"Fumes of tobacco cloud the spirit. I have abstained."

All the ascetic temper of the East was in his declaration. Whatever powers he had attained he had rendered the price, and Dewitt had vast respect for people who are willing to pay for their enterprises, whether good or bad. Too many wanted the adventure and refused the coin.

"Tong, this is a strange case—this murder of Martin Carfax. Have you enough confidence in me to talk freely?"

"The man Madame trusts, I trust."

"What was your—reaction to Martin Carfax?"

The Indian's eyes blazed. "He was an evil genius in Madame's life. Gordon Brent was her star and this man put out its rays; though, of course," he added, philosophically, "Madame had allied herself to the darkness of jealousy, which opened the road to further darkness. She would not listen to my warnings."

“You warned her, then?”

“In India we *scent* villians, as people here scent weeds and poisonous plants. The man’s emanations of evil were stifling.”

This was strange talk to Dewitt; but he had learned the value of taking lessons from everybody according to the old proverb, “No man is your friend. No man is your enemy. All are your teachers.”

“Why, then,” he asked boldly, “was this man Brock so devoted to Carfax?”

The Indian smiled. “Brock is not a sensitive. And it is possible to love very evil men without sharing their evil.”

“Yet today you thought Brock had fired on Mrs. Carfax.”

“The shot went in her direction,” replied Tong calmly. “Remember he is possessed with the idea that she herself is an accessory after the fact, in what he believes was the murder of his friend.”

Silence fell for a moment between them, broken only by the crackling of the wood, the sighing of the April wind around the house. An enormous black Angora attached to the establishment now sidled out of the shadows and purred mysteriously about Tong’s feet, its eyes amber slits of the inscrutable. The Indian, fingering its short, aristocratic ears, murmured something in Hindu, and the feline immediately acted as if someone had waved an astral sprig of catnip in the air, cavorting, rolling over on its side.

“You know the secret code of the animal kingdom,” Dewitt commented smiling.

“Cats are the sensitives, the adepts, the initiates of the animal world,” Tong replied. “The intense morbid fear of them noted by physicians,



in certain people otherwise normal, is not without justification. They are strange creatures."

"Not so strange as human beings. Tell me. Do you believe that Mr. Brent is the victim of amnesia? or of what the psychologists call 'somnambulistic automatism?'"

"He was at the quarry pit. He pushed Mr. Carfax in—so much is fact. I agree with Madame, however, that he could not have been conscious of his act," was Tong's reply.

Dewitt gazed into the enigmatical face, like the soul of the East, trying to read there the answer to the persisting question of how much the Indian knew of the heart of the mystery. Was he, after all, Gordon Brent's friend? Could he have hypnotized the young lover to do this dreadful deed for some dark purpose of his own? Was he attempting to establish his power over Christine to gain her fortune ultimately, and so ruin Brent while putting Carfax also out of the way? Did he fire the shot at Ray? But if ever Dewitt had seen real grief it was Tong's as he knelt by the side of the wounded boy.

"His counsel will have difficulty in persuading a jury that a man known to be in an inflamed state against his successful rival was not acting in full possession of his senses," Dewitt remarked. "Ramah Tong, your mistress considers you an expert in nervous and psychological states. You must help us to clear Gordon Brent."

"I live with no other purpose," the Indian replied solemnly. "But from what point can we depart?"

"The alibi."

"The honorable gentleman knows that is im-

possible. Three people witnessed his act, one an accidental onlooker."

"He dreamed or imagined that tale of the Shawangunk Mountains, then?"

"Most certainly," the Indian replied with a touch of impatience, "in his overwrought condition he might have imagined anything. Have you a theory—" he added politely.

"Only the theory of the sub-conscious mind. Mr. Brent is a sensitive artist, honorable, high-strung, passionate but idealistic. Whatever his impulses of hatred against Martin Carfax—he is incapable of cold-blooded murder." He paused, then as if commenting on his own diagnosis continued, "But was it cold-blooded? Could it be possible that, chancing near that fatal pit on the day of your Madame's wedding, the opportunity to thrust his rival to his death was too strong for him? In a moment of madness he was wrenched as far out of his own character as if, indeed, he were possessed of a dual personality. Tell me—did he disappear as quickly as he had appeared?"

Tong's eyes darkened. "I should never have let him escape; but, remember, I was easily one hundred yards from the pit. I could not see the hole. I could only see the people about it. Madame was too stunned, too bent on rescue to note what had become of Mr. Brent. Had I seized him much might have been proved. I have dealt with persons suffering from amnesia or sudden mania, and the symptoms are familiar to me."

"I feel we are walking 'round and 'round that quarry pit without getting anywhere," Dewitt said impatiently. "The East Indian who was the hermit's guest last night left only this trace of his

presence in the hut." He drew out the bead and handed it to Tong, who commented:

"A rosary bead! Those East Indians must still be prowling about the neighborhood. It is my theory that of my two assistants that day, one evidently believed that Madame would pay any sum to clear up a deed yet to be committed—"

"You mean her obvious wealth inspired these villains to follow her to Highland Park, where her brother's sudden return gave one of them a chance to ask for bounty by betraying the other? But wouldn't that be a very quickly cooked-up affair? Remember that nobody expected Ray Harcourt from the west."

"Criminals are often more *en courant* with the affairs of a wealthy family than the family itself," replied Tong. "I do not think it a bad move in the game that suspicion is again directed against Brock. Nothing will come of it, probably, as I do not believe him guilty, but his defense will occupy his own very active mind, and keep him from aiding the prosecution of Gordon Brent unduly."

"Do you expect his arrest?"

"Not enough evidence. That Ray was shot in his grounds proves nothing. Nor the quarrel. People always make so much of quarrels in murder cases; and hold for the most part that a quarrel must be followed by killing. A man who is going to kill another rarely quarrels with him. Lust of money is at the bottom of the majority of murders, and it is *the coldest passion on earth*, doesn't quarrel with its victim, stealthily finishes him."

Dewitt was about to reply when a knock came, the door opened softly. There stood Christine in

a long white negligée, which seemed to flow from the pallor of her face. She was trembling.

“Something very curious has happened—” she began. “Ray’s night nurse had occasion to go out on the sleeping-porch which opens from the sick room, to get something from a little refrigerator placed there, and on top of it she found this letter. It’s addressed to you, Mr. Dewitt.”

“Have I your permission?” Dewitt asked, extending his hand to take it.

She nodded silently. He looked at the address, and gave a gesture of surprise. “What a foreign handwriting!”

Ramah Tong and Christine examined it. An unmistakable odor of sandalwood emanated from the letter, which was addressed “Frederick Dewitt, Detective.”

“Look at the seal,” he said. “It has the same device that was on that fellow’s collar—the rising sun.”

He cut the seal carefully out, intact; opened and read the letter aloud:

“You are hereby warned that if you continue to work on this case you will share the fate of the East Indian at the Bostwick farm.

Death to those who stand in the way of

“The Brotherhood.”

“I have seen too many of these letters to be easily frightened by them,” Dewitt commented. “Ramah Tong, would you say that was written by an East Indian?”

Tong’s opinion was that it was decidedly the handwriting of a person used to the formation of the Hindu characters. Christine looked earnestly at Dewitt.

“Are you sure you oughtn’t to heed that? Don’t go on with this case if you have the slightest sense of risk.”

“Risk!” he exclaimed. “I live by it—daily bread—part of the cost. Don’t dream of my dropping this even if you want me to. Now, how did this fellow get on the porch?”

“Simple enough,” remarked Tong. “The height from the ground is negligible. He must have been someone who climbed like a cat to get up, however.”

“Come and see for yourself,” Christine said, and led the way to the sick room. On his passage through it Dewitt saw a telephone on what was evidently Ray’s desk, and in a brief pause, while Christine spoke to the nurse, he had time to notice that the number was a private one and not that of the house.

They went out on the porch. The broken twigs of a Wisteria vine witnessed to the truth of Tong’s assertion. Dewitt ran down through the house, to examine the ground outside, not wishing to take the same route adopted by the intruder lest he should disturb evidence. Beneath the porch he found the damp grass trampled; and flashing his light here and there, came upon a round, hard substance—a bead.

“The scramble tore another off,” he commented, holding it up to Tong, who was leaning over the porch rail with Christine. “I’ll have a complete Buddhist rosary before long.”

He and Tong persuaded her to return to her bedroom; but at its door, Tong having departed on some errand, she asked: “Did he help you any?”

“About Mr. Brent’s case? We didn’t get far. He scouts the theory of an alibi; but he isn’t sure

that Mr. Brent was conscious of what he did. I am inserting a notice in several papers that ought to reach that farm—I mean one of them, at least. There's another theory—" he paused and she caught him up quickly.

"Oh, let me have it."

"Disguise! Martin Carfax, from all accounts, had few friends and many enemies. It is possible that someone took advantage of Brent's known antagonism toward him to revenge his own wrong; adopting Brent's aspect. But, of course, the weak spot is just—"

"Oh, I know! Just the fact that no one could have known beforehand of Martin's desire to visit the farm, to buy it for a country place. For his wish to see the quarry hole was unexpected. 'We must be passing through the old California quarries,' he said. 'I've heard there's a dreadful hole at the foot of one of the highest cliffs. Will you go with me to find it, Christine, while Tong investigates the farm?' No one could have foreseen all that and arrived there in disguise at the right moment. Certain things are beyond even the wildest possibilities."

"I am afraid so," Dewitt said. "May I ask another question? Has your brother a private telephone number?"

"Yes, he had a private wire put in long before he went to California. He was very popular; and the girls and boys of his set were always calling him up to make engagements—so he had a direct wire to his room."

"I see! As far as you are aware no one expected his return."

"No one. That's the baffling part of the case—to find an explanation that will hold water."

On this discouraging aspect of the situation they parted and Dewitt returned to his sombre library, where the haunting spirit of the dead Adrian Harcourt seemed always to meet and challenge him to rise to a supreme opportunity—the freeing of his daughter. Collusion between her and Gordon Brent was not as yet whispered down, presented, indeed, too many plausible sides to be quite extinguished in people’s minds. What was fact at least was her acknowledged effort to save Brent, to conceal the crime. Oh, if she had not tried to hide the facts; had trusted to her high instinct that in the face of all evidence to the contrary Gordon Brent could not, in his right senses, have committed the murder.

In his heart he excused her. Love and terror had overcome her better judgment.

The sound of pebbles thrown at his window brought him to his feet. Opening one of the lattices of the large bay, he perceived by the light of a late and waning moon the imperturbable Chalmers, gardenia and all.

“Hist and list, noble Frederick,” he gave forth in his melancholy-humorous fashion. “Come around to the postern—otherwise the side door—and let me in. ’Tis not seemly for the prosecutor’s detective to disturb the domestics of the lady under suspicion.”

“In a twinkle,” Dewitt said, glad of the chance to talk the case over with his old confrère.

Chalmers seemed delighted with the room, and after his somewhat exasperating fashion was inclined to talk books, and to examine the late Adrian Harcourt’s library.

“The old boy was a bit of a collector, eh? Here are some rare volumes on magic; works of our

old friend Paracelsus, I see; Rosicrucian stuff; theosophical stuff. Methinks I perceive the guiding taste of friend Tong. The Doctor and he were thick as thieves, they tell me; and Tong was courier, majordomo and nurse to the children, besides librarian and chemist. Valuable servant, eh!"

"I'm not thinking much of Tong. Those two countrymen of his get my goat. Tong has the dead one for charity's sake, somewhere out in the garage. The corpse under this roof was a bit too much for Mrs. Carfax; but Tong didn't want a fellow-countryman buried in the potter's field—whatever his crimes. The live Indian is more in my line, and Lord knows what further mischief he'll do. I suppose Tong is known in India, and his mistress's great wealth is a temptation to rogues out there. One of the Hindus got killed trying to sell information to her."

"So I understood. Dewitt, you'll never pull through with your defense in the world—three witnesses of the crime; and a chance of collusion between a wild-headed artist and the beautiful widow."

"Cut that out," commanded Dewitt. "She's the one innocent person—"

"Well, she concealed the murder, didn't she? Why they didn't arrest Tong, too, for helping her, gets me. He did help her to shield her lover; cooked up a silly tale of losing his way; as if such an experienced person would lose his way in the moon."

"Ramble on," said Dewitt. "You're acting like a green hand on the force, instead of a seasoned old stager. You know you have better sense."



“At least I have facts,” retorted Chalmers, “not queer theories. I know she saw him. I know she concealed his crime.”

“Do you know who shot Ray Harcourt, since you know so jolly much?”

“Not that old fire-eater, Brock. He is the only person I am sure didn’t shoot him.”

“The East Indian, then?”

“For what motive?”

“None, apparently.”

“Then it isn’t an East Indian,” said Chalmers. “Few people attempt to kill without an object, especially Indians.”

He sniffed his boutonnière and after a while lit a cigar. “I am still on the track of tangible proof that somebody’s lying—Tong, or Mrs. Carfax, or both; as for Gordon Brent and his tale of the Shawangunk Mountains, that’s simply ridiculous. Let me give you a tip, old fellow. Whoever committed one murder knew something about the other.”

“Well, Gordon Brent is one person who could not have shot Ray; being locked up at the time, his alibi is perfect.”

“And Tong was indoors with the French maid attending on Mrs. Carfax; and Brock and his valet were playing chess. Truly a cleared stage. After a while let’s wander over to that garage, which, you say, is serving as a morgue.”

Dewitt, for purposes of his own, related the story of the threatening note. “Looks as if the East Indian were still around,” he wound up.

Acting on Chalmers’ suggestion, they made their way after awhile through the gardens to a small isolated garage that had been used only for Ray’s car in the palmy days before the trustees

came down hard on him. A light was burning in it; and Dewitt and Chalmers, hugging the hedges and garden bushes as closely as possible, sidled at last to an open window and looked in. The place was bare of everything but a bier on which the stark outline of the East Indian was visible, his angular limbs creating sharp watersheds of linen, which had been spread liberally upon him. Standing by the bier, looking down upon him thoughtfully, stood Tong—a silent, impressive figure.

As they regarded the strange scene, another occurrence diverted their attention. One of the maids from the house, sharply accentuated in the pale moonshine by her black and white costume, came across the garden calling, "Tong, oh, Tong! Hodgson wants you!"

"Who's Hodgson?" whispered Chalmers.

"The butler," replied Dewitt. "The servants all seem too excited to go to bed these days."

Tong evidently did not respond; and the girl's half-bantering, half-frightened voice continued to adjure him. At last the Indian heard her or chose to answer her, appearing in the doorway opposite the window which afforded Chalmers and Dewitt their chance to watch. "Grace," they heard him say, "what does Hodgson want?"

"Wants to know where the key of the silver chest is."

"I have it. What does he want out of it?"

"Bread and cheese, of course," answered the girl saucily. "Give me the key, Ramah Tong."

"Certainly not."

"Can't you trust me to take it to Hodgson?" she pouted.

"I wish to open the chest myself," Tong re-

plied calmly. "Who wants something out of it at this time of night?"

"Mrs. Richards. It's something for the sick room, she said."

"You stay here and watch," Tong commanded, "while I go to the house."

The girl's face turned putty-color. "Oh, Tong, I can't!"

"Why not?" he inquired.

"I'm afraid."

"What of?"

"The dead man."

"Never fear the dead. Fear the living," was Tong's answer. "Go in there, now. I won't leave the poor corpse alone if it is that of a black-mailer."

"Oh, Tong, please!"

The girl's voice had risen now to a wail of entreaty. Dewitt and Chalmers, crouching beside the open window, and only ducking when Tong faced them, heard him say: "I will remove all fear from your mind, poor little atom of a materialistic civilization. Look at me, Grace. Look straight in my eyes."

Tremblingly the girl raised her eyes to him. He placed a hand on her forehead, returning her gaze with a long, deep, earnest survey of her pretty but indefinite features. Dewitt saw the color return to them, the eyes soften and become quiet. Finally the head drooped, and the girl stole by Tong into the room, where she seated herself at the foot of the bier like one in a dream.

"Watch her," whispered Chalmers. "That's worth seeing."

In the ten minutes of Tong's absence she never stirred, except once to turn her head toward the

dead man, but with no sign of fear in her face. When the Indian returned she rose and seemed to await his word of release. He gave it and she stepped out of the garage into the moonlight.

As she emerged a figure darted from a clump of shrubbery about fifty feet away, and hurried to her. Dewitt, who had kept her in the range of his vision, leaving Chalmers behind, recognized Bender, Brock's valet; heard him say, "Didn't you hear me whistle?"

"I thought you'd forgot."

"Me forget, with little Grace waitin' for me and cryin' her eyes out if I didn't arrive?"

"Shut up, silly. Takes more than you to make me cry."

"I've brought sumpin' for you," he announced.

"Now, don't get all excited. Wait."

The command to wait gave Dewitt the opportunity to slink behind a parallel line of shrubbery to a point nearly opposite to that where the valet and the maid stood. The man was fumbling with a package, teasingly stupid with the string to prolong expectation in the girl whose eyes were now as round as saucers. Wrapper after wrapper was removed to uncloset at last a leather box, a flat oblong suggesting jewels.

"Goody! Goody!" exclaimed the excited girl. "My man Bender, he's a spender," she sang in high falsetto.

"You little peach, I couldn't have *bought* you this, to get one kiss from you, if I'd toiled and starved with old Brock all me days. I was—"

He whispered something. The girl appeared awestruck, but her curiosity over the jewels was evidently stronger than the effect of his communication.

“*Vite! Vite!*” she urged.

“Don’t copy that old cat, that maids your Madame. Now! one, two, three—look!” and he drew out a chain, much bejeweled, which even at that distance and in the moonlight conveyed to Dewitt its unique and foreign character.

“What’s the matter? Are you disappointed?” the valet asked in a flat voice, then impatiently, “Well, what’s wrong with it?”

“Queer lookin’, not like—”

“Of course not!” her companion exclaimed impatiently. “Things from India don’t look like ours. You’re showin’ you don’t know anything; never been anywheres. Of course, I can give this chain to Maggie.”

“No, you can’t,” she snapped back, and snatched at the necklace to his evident pleasure and amusement.

“I thought I’d start somethin’. Now mind, you’re not to wear it—not for a long time. Not until I tell you, in fact.”

She pouted. “What good will it do me?”

“Lots—later on. Don’t be glum, Grace. I have a string of coral here. You can wear that. If anybody asks you where it came from, say you had a great-uncle, a whaler, and he fetched it from the South Seas to your great-aunt, who left it to you. Do you bite?”

“Let me see it,” she said eagerly.

He pulled out a string of beads from his pocket. “I feel like a walkin’ jeweller’s establishment. But it’s all to the good.”

All at once the girl grew sober and thoughtful. “Did you come by these honest?”

“Sure, I did!”

“And they have nothing to do with poor Mr. Ray in there?”

Silence for a moment; then, “Honest to God, I didn’t know any use was goin’ to be made of—”

The rest was in a whisper. Dewitt passed on. He had all the information he wanted.

Still in the shadows he said a word of good-bye to Chalmers, who rejoined him in the grounds near what he had euphoniously called “the postern.” “Get anything to help your case besides a chill?” Dewitt inquired.

“Forgot all about the case watching the East Indian hypnotize that pretty girl into taking the role of chief mourner for ten minutes. Neat. Wish I could third-degree a few criminals that way, anesthetize them and extract the truth like a tooth. Painless detection—for my own feelings—is what I’m after. Hate to see ’em writhe and jump as I thrust in question after question. They brace against me and collapse into truth only when totally exhausted. Wearing! Very!”

“I’m going in,” said Dewitt. “Exhibitions of hypnotism don’t keep out the cold. Join me? I’ve some good cigars in there.”

“No, thanks—see you in the morning.”

Beside the wood fire which he found burning brightly on his hearth—the special care of a manservant over whom Tong exercised his iron rule—Dewitt reviewed delightedly the best cards that fate had yet staked for him. Of course, the valet had been in collusion, not with his master, but with an East Indian who had bribed him with jewelry which might or might not be valuable; and was at least less valuable than the information wanted. What was it? Whom did it concern?

Out there in the night lay one victim of the coil that seemed to have tightened to strangulation about this household and its members. Dewitt was becoming more and more confident that there was a connection between the murder at the quarry hole and the shooting of young Raymond Harcourt. Was it an eye for an eye? revenge instantaneous on the part of Brock for the murder of his best-beloved friend? Had one of these Indians—the dead one most plausibly—sought incriminating information from the valet Bender to convey to Tong, that Tong could bring to justice the slayer of the child he had almost literally brought up from babyhood—the boy that was like his own son? Under cover of getting further information to his mistress had Tong himself arranged the appointment at the farmhouse, through which one of the East Indians had met his death?

But this pre-supposed a closer acquaintance of Tong with his first assistants at the quarry hole than Tong's own testimony warranted.

Yet it was possible that one of them, having identified Tong as the majordomo of a wealthy mistress, should endeavor to obtain money from him, capitalizing the chance that the second crime had been planned and carried through by Brock in collusion with his valet. The movements of Ray Harcourt between the time that he left Brock's house in a towering rage, and the hour of the shooting—midnight—had never been accounted for. Ray himself, still unconscious, could throw no light on the matter. No one had seen him in the village; no one had seen him at home. He might have returned to his room, of course, to plan out his design of taking the case

of the stolen securities straight to Carfax's old father; but why go to him at midnight, the most unlikely hour for a disagreeable errand?

Yet Harcourt could not have been in the evergreen walk by accident. Dewitt had learned from Christine that unlike many men Raymond enjoyed smoking out of doors, would pace a walk or stretch of sward sometimes for an hour on end, smoking, thinking. "Summer nights, of course?" he had inquired, and she had answered, "Oh, certainly. Ray hated the cold."

Dewitt decided that he must have been in his room that intervening hour. Easy enough to reach it unobserved if he wished to—as that evening's incident of the note bore witness. He must ask Christine whether Ray had ever adopted that informal method of gaining his own premises; and he must find out where Bender lived when he wasn't in attendance on Brock; where he spent his nights off, and so on.

Two o'clock struck from the stable tower, which held up a large timepiece for the observation of the stable men—Christine kept several riding horses—and Dewitt's thoughts turned bedward. But first he wanted to take a turn around the house to make sure that all was well. The incident of the letter had revealed the necessity for a strict guarding of the premises.

Before the library fire he found the butler Hodgson—keeping vigil apparently under a similar conviction.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Dewitt? Come in! come in!" he said in the hearty tone of a man relieved to have a temporary companion in his night watch. "I thought I'd better not go to bed, because Tong is out in the garage where they put the furriner."



Not that he intends to sleep much. He was sayin' in the servants' hall that he was goin' to keep a sharp lookout for the man who climbed up on the sleeping porch, and he's got the night watchman on the job besides—old Greene, who's watchman for three places, Carfax's, Brock's and ours. I was glad of it—for most of the maids is very jumpy, sir."

Dewitt listened, his eyes fixed upon the side-board where stood two high candlesticks, silver-gilt and beautifully chased with Eastern designs of strange animals, birds and foliage, through which ran, it would seem, some symbolism known to the initiated.

"Those were brought from India?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Tong don't trust me or anybody to clean 'em and care for 'em; and it's the same with the rest of the stuff. Formal dinners are a cinch, for Tong sees to all the plate. Some thinks I ought to get on my dignity and take over the job. But what's the use of being on your dignity when someone is savin' you work?" he added philosophically.

"Is there much of this Eastern silver?"

"Say *gold and silver*, sir, and you'll come somewhere near it. Ask Tong to show you the famous wine-bowl set with moonstones and amethyst matrixes. It's one beautiful piece. Ask him to show you the silver trays the Master picked up in Bombay! and the great gold basin—funny spoons, too, all sizes and shapes. Mrs. Richards wanted some out tonight for sick room use."

"I would like to see the collection, when all this trouble is over. Mrs. Carfax is fortunate to have such devoted attendants as you and Ramah Tong, and her own personal maid. The domestic prob-

lem has never penetrated Highland Park, it is evident."

"Nobody can help wanting to serve Madame!" said Hodgson. "Yes, we don't change much."

"And Mr. Brock's valet seems to have been with him a long time."

Hodgson scowled. "I wish Mr. Brock would fire him. He's always been too free with the maids over here."

"Really?"

The frown deepened. "He better not monkey with"—he caught himself up. Dewitt thought of the pretty Grace and assumed competition. The heavy and respectable butler was probably losing ground as against the gay Bender, who could now juggle jewels out of the air.

"Isn't he, if I may inquire—reliable?"

"Flighty, flashy, good-for-nothing; brains enough to play chess with his master, sir, or cheat at cards, say. I nearly knocked him down in the servants' hall one night."

Dewitt in his varied experience had found that there is no such thing as top crust and bottom crust. The pastry got strangely mixed sometimes; and out of the depths of the kitchen would come the secrets of the lid of the pie. He often antagonized people of his own will and intention, but never, never did he antagonize a cook, a butler, a lady's maid, a laundress, a valet or a plumber, the six people in all this universe who know more about the hidden side of affairs than all the rest of the circle put together.

Hodgson, heavy, faithful, disapproval of all that section of society which is butlerless written on his square, blank face, was really sent by the Lord to sketch off Bender to him.

“Does he spend much on these women—these susceptible parlormaids and kitchen girls?”

“More than he ever earns,” Hodgson said emphatically. “If poor, dear Mr. Ray hadn’t been found with all his money and his watch untouched, I would have sworn afore any court that wretch Kid Bender fired the shot. But Bender would never try to kill anybody unless he wanted to loot ’em afterwards.”

Dewitt’s keen glances were directed to various parts of the room, but chiefly to the three long French windows that opened out upon a terrace. “Glad you drew the curtains, Hodgson. Tell me, had Mr. Ray had any love affairs?”

“Gay, flirty ones—nothin’ serious. ‘Hodgson,’ said he to me one day, ‘some time I’m going to have the real thing, and then I won’t waste time on flowers and candy and courtin’—I’ll just grab her and get married!’”

Dewitt thought of the youthful, unconscious figure lying in deep coma in an upper room. “Maybe he’s finding the real thing, Hodgson, out there near that Western line so many journey to. I don’t know why we always think the real thing must happen on this planet.”

“His sister—she found it and didn’t know it,” Hodgson said brokenly.

“You mean she and Mr. Gordon Brent were true lovers?”

“Yes! I think her marriage to Mr. Carfax turned Mr. Gordon mad, sir, I do, indeed! I know the poor fellow well—known him since he was in knickers. He couldn’t hurt anybody in his right mind. If anything happens to him it will kill my lady.”

“Nothing must happen to him. By the way,

where does this Kid Bender hang out when he isn't valeting?"

"Lives at Merion, about ten miles from here; has an old mother down there. Doesn't stay with her, though; has a room at the hotel and splurges there, I'm told, like he was able to have a valet himself. I've no use for him. Even Tong can't chase him out of the kitchen."

"Tong has tried, then?"

"More than one time. Bender he just laughs and says, 'You can make the dead walk, Tong, and you can see spooks and make 'em hand you napkins, but you can't hocus-pocus a nice little man like me out of your kitchen, not while one pretty girl is left washin' dishes.'"

"Does Tong do all these wonderful things?" Dewitt laughed.

"Oh, that's just because he's furrin' and knows how to hold his tongue. Anybody that holds their tongue is suthin' of a wizard," Hodgson said meditatively, stroking his stubby side-whiskers.

Dewitt was inclined to agree with him.

Next morning he went to the central telephone office and asked to see the night operator who was on duty around midnight of April third. They pointed out to him a plain young woman, who seemed rather an alien among her gay and pretty companions. Taking her aside he showed her his badge, and asked her if the private number of Mr. Raymond Harcourt had been called at midnight of April third. To his surprise she answered promptly,

"It was, and I've been wondering ever since if I should tell the family, but they were in such trouble that I hesitated."

"Precisely. Natural enough—but not wise.

Now, just what did you hear, if anything, after you had connected the person calling with the person called? By the way, was it a man's voice that asked for the number?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then?"

She blushed. "I don't like to listen in, but I did hear this: the voice said, 'It's Hodgson. I'm telephoning from the garage. Buddha wants to see you at the end of the evergreen walk on the Brock place.' The answer came, 'Your voice don't sound natural, Hodgson. Got a cold, or is it,' he laughed, 'just telephone change of voice? Tell Buddha I'll be there, all right. I was at that walk once before this evening. Goodbye.' That was all."

"You haven't, of course, spoken of this to anyone?"

"Not a soul, sir. I have kept too quiet, perhaps."

"It's always well to send in information that might throw light on a difficult case. But don't talk to anyone but me. What's your name, please?"

"Meta Case."

He laughed. "I hope it's prophetic."

When he left her he went for a walk to formulate the new aspects of the mystery brought to the surface by the telephone girl's story. The young man had been lured, then, from the house; for Dewitt dismissed at once the possibility that Hodgson had called young Harcourt. Someone else impersonating that solemn monument of respectability had sent a message Harcourt was all the more likely to obey because of his own restless and excited state. Really a summons to

death at the hands of an assassin! Who was "Buddha?" Dewitt remembered the Carfax maid's story, of meeting a man she took for Tong in the long drive of the ell that led from the Carfax estate, back of the premises of the neighboring places belonging to the Brock and Harcourt families.

But Tong and the French maid, according to the latter's tale, had been in an anteroom of Christine's bedroom at that midnight hour. Someone else was Buddha; someone, apparently, well known to Raymond Harcourt.

Only Christine could throw light on this, and Dewitt, returning to The Towers, asked to see her. She received him in her own sitting-room, alone, looking in her black dress like a tall white lily, he thought, with a sad, far-off envy of Gordon Brent. To have her love was worth imprisonment.

Briefly he told her of his visit to the telephone office and the information he had obtained there.

"But 'Buddha' is Ray's pet name for Tong!" she exclaimed. "Ray used to say Tong looked like the statues of Buddha! Someone used both Hodgson's and Tong's names to lure the poor boy there!"

"Of course, it's out of the question that Hodgson called your brother; but you'd better ring for him, and ask him what he was doing at midnight April third."

Hodgson was summoned, and reported that he was sound asleep in his bed at that hour. When he was gone again Dewitt said, "The fact still remains that someone well acquainted with your household must have sent that telephone message."

Even as he spoke the thought of Bender flashed across his mind. Bender, of course—not the actual assassin, perhaps, but an accomplice of the East Indian. Bender could have telephoned the message.

Of the incident of the necklace he did not speak. To have it taken from Grace's possession at this juncture would only be, in common parlance, "to spill the beans." Bender must be shadowed, not at Highland Park, but at his own town of Merion.

Quickly as the thought came he proceeded to lay his trail.

"Mrs. Carfax," he said, "I shall be out of the immediate neighborhood for several days; but I shall find a way to communicate with you should I have obtained any strong evidence that might throw light on Mr. Brent's case, or your brother's. The East Indian who is still at large is the most important person on the horizon. I am on his track now."

She held out both her hands and took his. "These are services money can never repay. If the two people I—I love best, are cleared, I shall never be able to show my gratitude."

"Do not think of that," he replied. "Some rare experiences in this world—such as I am having—are their own rich reward. It is enough to be able to be of service to you."

## XIII

### Room No. 14

Merion was of the usual type of small river towns, with a long border of brickyards, and beyond this red edging a long treeless street which led up to the one hotel. This was a two-story-and-garret affair, very wide for its depth, with double porches running the whole length of the facade, and it bore the name of Shadwick House.

Dewitt, disguised out of his normal color scheme by a wig and moustache, approached the clerk with a demand for a back room overlooking the river.

"All taken," said the man, "by regulars."

"People who live here the year 'round?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't any of them ever go away and sublet?"

The clerk mused a moment. "Some of 'em do. Must you have a back room?"

"I want sunlight and quiet. I am a writer, and I've planned to do a good deal of work here, if you can make me comfortable."

"That depends . . ."

The clerk put his head through an adjacent doorway and called to some one. "Say, when did Kid Bender say he'd turn up again?"

"Most any time," was the unsatisfactory answer.

"Which is his room?" Dewitt threw in carelessly.



“Number 14.”

“Well, if I can't have that, what about the one this side?” he asked, indicating the number on the framed hotel plan which lay on the desk.

“Old Mr. Backus never rents his. I could put you in Number 13, on the other side, for a week; but I'd have to move you then.”

“All right. That suits me.”

No. 13 was a drab room with metal ceiling of a dingy gray, sparsely furnished with an iron bed, a rickety washstand, and a still more rickety table so splashed with ink that it looked as if a summer shower of it had entered by a window left inadvertently open. This retreat commanded a view of the brickyards and the Hudson. The door opposite the window possessed a transom, through which the April wind soughed dolefully. Dewitt wondered which was more desolate,—sordidness in the city or in a small country town.

He leaned out of the window to get a better view of the premises, and noticed that between his window and that of No. 14 was a heavy water pipe, constructed of lead and fastened close against the bricks of the hotel. Evidently this was the older portion of the building. “A man could swing his weight on that,” he reflected, “without pulling it down. Also—a man could climb it and get into Number 14 without the formalities of announcement.”

He unpacked his suit case, which had a false bottom for the transportation of such garments needed in detective work as were best hid from public view. To hang up a tramp's costume, for instance, for the inspection of the chambermaid, was not good policy. In this instance Dewitt ex-

tracted it from the case and donned it—after carefully locking his door.

Ascertaining that no windows were on the ground floor beneath his and that of No. 14, he took a last look around, and with the aid of the water pipe swung himself down as soon as the twilight, for which he had waited, was deep enough to cover his movements.

During the afternoon he had inquired where Mrs. Bender lived, found to his satisfaction that her cottage was on rather a lonely stretch of road just outside of the town, and thither he now directed his steps.

The place had evidently seen better days and was unkempt and uncared for; but Dewitt blessed the ragged lilac bushes that trailed their already budding branches against the panes of the kitchen window. One of these was missing and a piece of paper had been pasted over the aperture.

The sound of voices came to him as he made his way as deftly as a cat through the encroaching bushes and obtained his first glimpse of the kitchen where two people sat at supper, an elderly woman with a worried, querulous face, and the jaunty Bender himself, who seemed to be doing full justice to a meal of pork chops and potatoes. "Lucky I brought these," Dewitt heard him say, "long as you didn't expect me."

"Well, if you'd only send me word by someone comin' this way."

"I would, only I don't know more than you do when old Brock is goin' to turn me loose. Sometime he'll get the notion to cast me out just as he's dressin' for dinner, and yell, 'Get out of here, Bender. I'm sick of the sight of you. Go

home to your mother, and don't come back for a week.' "

"What do you do to make him act like that?" his mother asked.

"Nothin'—only wait on him too well. He says I get on his nerves because I never make a mistake. He's been worse since the Carfax murder."

The old woman leaned across the table. "I heard somethin' today, Hughey, that I didn't like a bit—but I couldn't speak 'cause you don't tell me nothin'—never."

"What was it? Spit it out."

"Folks was sayin' down at the store that Mister Brock knew more about that shootin' of young Harcourt than the defectives."

"Detectives, you mean, don't you?"

"Yes, defectives. They said Brock hired somebody to kill him."

"It's a damned lie!" Bender brought his fist down on the table with such force that the dishes rattled. His mother regarded him with round, frightened eyes.

"I was scared, Hughey. You have so much money all the time, I was scared. If you get arrested it would kill me."

"You think I did it, old lady? Don't worry. I was playin' chess with my esteemed master when that shot was fired. They can't break through my alibi, not even that he-devil, Dewitt."

Dewitt, in the covert of the lilac bushes, smiled to himself. The paper substitute for a window-pane was serving him in good stead, for not only did it conceal him, but it acted as a kind of sound transmitter, though the voices were generally loud enough to be heard through the ramshackle window sash.

“But where do you get all your money from?” the woman quavered.

“Get tips on the stock market from Brock, if you must know—and sell ’em. Sometimes he gives me information because he thinks I’m only a poor valet and can’t make use of it. Sometimes I listen at the door when he has friends. I heard more than I wanted to the night young Harcourt was shot. Heard ’em quarrelin’ like mad, he and old Brock! Told someone about it, and I’d a darn sight better held my tongue.”

Dewitt crouched closer. Here was a bit of evidence worth, indeed, the enterprise. Someone had made use of that quarrel with the hope of throwing suspicion upon Brock. Of course, it was the East Indian. But of what significance was the attack on Ray Harcourt to him, since the boy’s valuables had been untouched?

Suddenly across Dewitt’s mind flashed the theory which he had applied in more than one instance successfully, when seeking the motives of a crime, and which he had dubbed “the far-off intention theory.” Its basis was the fact that certain crimes are but links in a chain whose perfect forging may cover an extended period of many years, the perpetrators being, of course, of the fine flower of criminality, men or women who use brains, intelligence, cosmopolitanism—not for good but for evil; artisans of the weapons of darkness, who know that for the perfecting of evil as of good, patience is necessary, and long, steady vision down the avenues of time. To such people the gold watch of a victim is as likely to be thrown among the discards as his tie or his handkerchief. They are working for greater stakes. Yet what

were the stakes in the attempt to kill Raymond Harcourt?

As in the case of Martin Carfax, the inexplicable element was the absence of motive. Granted that Gordon Brent was guilty of the crime, could he do anything that more effectually divided him from Christine than the murder of her husband? Similarly, what was to be gained by the possible death of Ray?

Bender and his mother had sat some minutes in silence. At last he pushed away his plate, and rose heavily. "Well, I got to go."

"You never stay with me except to eat," quavered the woman. "Can't you stay while I wash up the dishes?"

"Can't, Ma. Got to see a man."

"That Injun fellow?"

"Yes—but hold your tongue about him. I've a hunch he's a rascal."

"Don't you have nothin' to do with rascals, Hughey."

He laughed. "The world's full of 'em. You don't want to die, do you? Here's a tenner for you! Get yourself somethin'."

"Is it honest money, Hughey?"

"'Taint blood money, if that's what you mean."

Dewitt slipped away, abandoning his intention to apply as a tramp for a scrap of supper from Mrs. Bender's table and to engage her in conversation. The son had revealed enough to direct Dewitt's efforts toward another quarter.

By back-ways of the town, after a wary survey of the hotel premises, he regained his room via the water pipe, closed the window, resumed his accustomed clothes, and sat down in the dark to

watch for the coming of the Indian by the same route he had employed.

“Hughey” arrived first with a great banging of doors, rattling of keys and other noises significant of the entry of the lord of the manor into his own. Dewitt heard the scratch of his match and the flaring up with a whistle and a roar of his acetylene gas which, to Dewitt’s satisfaction, showed in white high-lights on the embossed surfaces of his metal ceiling through the cracks where the partition had not quite plumbed with this common property of the two rooms.

Removing his shoes he climbed very softly on a chair and ascertained that at one spot there was enough of a slit, not, indeed, for seeing, but for very good hearing.

The acrid smoke of an old pipe drifted into him, and the occasional humming of one of the season’s battered tunes. If Bender had even the far-off shadow of attempted murder on his conscience it lay there lightly enough. Dewitt had ceased to value him except as he explained people of much greater importance in the case.

Taking up his position at the window, he was rewarded soon by the cat-like figure of the Indian, whom he had last seen fleeing from his shots at the Bostwick farm. With marvelous rapidity the fellow achieved the ascent of the water pipe, and was in the next room, saying in a soft, purring voice:

“Well, how about that Carson & Caldwell copper mine in Mexico?”

“Couldn’t get information,” was the answer, spoken, Dewitt thought, rather sulkily.

“Well, you must get it, my friend. I have large enterprises at stake, and I have constant need

for ready money—big money! Small sums are no use to me. I pay you often in jewels for that reason. For the information of the quarrel you were given a valuable chain which I—”

“Yes, and I wouldn’t have handed out that line of talk had I known you were going to try to kill—”

“H-u-s-h!”

Silence. Then movements and the whiff of a very delicate tobacco. Evidently the Indian was smoking his own pipe to overcome the fumes of Bender’s.

“Talk not of killing, my friend. You know no more than the silly detectives. I come from a land where life is measured by æons, not years; where persons are sacrificed to the greater good, to the ever-living Idea and Ideal.”

“Gosh!” ejaculated Bender, “go choke!”

Dewitt debated with himself whether he should cover the Indian with a pistol, bursting in upon him for that purpose; or let him stay at large until he had other fish for the same net. The possibility that Brock and not his valet had hired the Indian, crossing Dewitt’s mind, was waived as having no basis. It could not be true if the valet had been the medium through which the Indian knew of the quarrel between Brock and Harcourt.

“These copper mine shares—you are not yet sure that their value will increase?”

“Not enough for you to take chances; and, see here, Ghira Lora, I ain’t so sure I want to be mixed up any more with you. You stabbed that pal of yours, Elah Dann; and sooner or later the chair will yawn for you on that charge. Did you ever think what it would feel like to be strapped

into a chair waitin' the signal for the juice to be switched into you?"

"They will never get me!"

This was too much for Dewitt, who tiptoed to the door, out into the hall, and waiting for the conversation to begin again, softly turned the knob, only to find that the door was locked.

Evidently the incident passed unobserved, for there was no diminution of the talk inside. Dewitt returned to his room, gathered together a few articles and made his way outside, this time by the staircase. Then he took up his position beneath Bender's lighted window. Jerks of talk reached him faintly; but the wind was in the wrong direction for outdoor eavesdropping, and he could not be sure that he would not be observed within a certain range.

His vigil ended in discomfiture. Growing at last rather weary he re-entered the hotel, only to find that the East Indian had gone away by hall and staircase in normal fashion, and though the light still showed over the transom, nothing but silence reigned within. It grew later and later and the light still burned. Dewitt at last decided to peep over the transom, reassured for the enterprise by heavy snores from adjacent rooms. The hotel retired early.

Among the contents of his suit case was a very light, strong, fold-up stepladder of Lilliputian dimensions, but which he had found exceedingly useful for just such unconventional surveys as the one he now meditated. After turning the gas very low in the hall he mounted his perch and saw, not an empty room as he had expected, but Bender seated at the table, his eyes wide open, breathing quietly, apparently not asleep.



Rather he looked like one arrested, hypnotized, thrown into the trance state in the very middle of a sentence. Evidently the Indian was master of such tricks and could work them on men of untrained wills.

To test the reality and depth of his state Dewitt, after storing away the stepladder in his own room, softly turned the handle of Bender's door, which he found unlocked; and as softly entered. The first object that met his eyes was a string of beads lying on the floor.

The Buddhist rosary, of course. Appropriating it, he looked about for other finds, but saw nothing in his quick survey that seemed to have a bearing on the case. While he stood there Bender never moved; and the stare in his eyes was evidence enough that consciousness had retreated to some sub-cellar of the personality. Dewitt made no attempt to awaken him. If the Indian had stopped the normal mechanism temporarily, he would probably set it going again at his pleasure. Dewitt decided to sit up for the magician.

While waiting for Ghira Lora's possible return he compared the two beads already in his possession with the string that he found in Bender's room. They not only matched, but a broken end of chain showed where the two had parted from their fellows. Strange carelessness of a man able to do the kind of thing which was now holding the valet in a death-like suspension of the faculties!

Two o'clock and the sound of a stealthy foot-step in the hall. Bender's door was softly opened, and in another moment Bender's voice was saying:

"Hello, Lora! I must have dropped off."

"You did. I let you sleep!"

“What are you looking for?”

“My talisman! my rosary! My luck will change if I lose it.”

“What’s so all-fired precious about it?”

“It is a symbol. Two of the beads I have already lost, and now the chain itself, carried too carelessly at my girdle. You are sure you saw nothing of it? No value attached to it—mere bits of carved wood.”

“I’m no thief, I’d have you know,” Bender’s voice came sulkily.

“Well, I’m off. Remember, when I come back again I come for information.” A veiled threat was in the tone, and Bender’s reply was prompt.

“You’ll get it—don’t worry. Don’t tell me any of your hellish tricks, that’s all I ask of you!”

Would it be the window or the door? But almost while the thought flashed through his mind, infinitesimal sounds betrayed the exit. A flash of white in the hotel grounds—the man was off toward the brickyards.

Dewitt, after him, loping along through the semi-darkness, still kept in sight the swift, white figure that made its way with diabolic ease across a rather complicated stretch of territory where the town and the brickyards became entangled together. The detective had drawn his Colt’s revolver and meant to lame his prey the instant he could get within range; but this was easier planned than accomplished. The tortuous journey of the Indian slipped him in and out of sight very much as if he were making his passage across a motion picture screen. Probably he had a boat moored somewhere and meant to paddle down the river to his lurking place.

This supposition seemed borne out by a sudden

emergence into the open and a dash across a dimly lighted wharf. It was Dewitt's last chance, and he opened fire. A white lump fell.

Not even a watchman arrived to question the attack, and with the dank smell of river water in his nostrils Dewitt tiptoed to the recumbent mass of white, his revolver drawn in anticipation of a counter attack. But the object did not move. Softly he drew nearer, then suddenly sprang away with an exclamation of almost terror-stricken surprise. At his feet lay, not the Indian, but a great white dog; quite dead, shot very neatly through the brain.

For a moment Dewitt felt ill, as there rushed over him the peculiar horror that seizes a well-balanced individual when he has to doubt the evidence of his senses. What in heaven's name had he been chasing through the streets? To hunt a murderer and end by slaying a harmless white dog was a grotesque and unpleasant dénouement.

Yet he could have sworn that he had seen the Indian, dashing palely through the crepuscular gloom of a badly lighted little town. Had he been the victim of suggestion, as had Bender of hypnotism?

After taking the precaution to drag the poor dog's body to the edge of the wharf and dump it in the river, he made his way back to the hotel, pondering over the inexplicable affair. Once at an entertainment he had seen a hypnotist delude a whole audience into believing that they saw the four of hearts in a pack of cards, when, in reality, it was the only card missing, and this hypnotist had explained the matter as merely "mental suggestion." Had this accursed Indian played the same trick on his pursuer? Had he ever been

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pursuing an Indian? Had it always been the dog?

Too chagrined to answer his own questions, he sought his room and bed. From No. 14 came sounds of peaceful snoring.

## XIV

### THE MISSING ALIBI

Gordon Brent welcomed him eagerly. "I had begun to think that I should not see you again—that you had deserted me," he said with an accent of reproach.

Dewitt explained where he had been and what he had been up to. "I am still at Merion, though since I shot the dog thinking I had covered the Indian, I don't know what I'm lingering on for. But I have a queer hunch that the fellow who wrote our missing letter that was stolen out of Miss Almira's post office, and the Indian who tried to kill Ray Harcourt, have something to do with each other. Not that the beads mightn't help some as evidence—but the letter is all-important."

"How long did Bender stay at the hotel?" Brent asked.

"Only over night. Hasn't showed up since—back valeting, I guess. Can't get anything against him; seems he sells stock market tips, pickings from Brock's talk, to this Indian. I am perfectly convinced Brock had nothing to do with the shooting of Ray, nor Bender either, though Bender probably gave information that was criminally used."

"My alibi!" Brent broke in rather pitifully. "Mr. Dewitt, you must work on that. It's the

only thing in God's world that is going to save me—for her."

Dewitt felt the old twitch at his heart; and then a wave of gloom enveloped him.

"Gordon," he said gently, "neither your counsel, nor you, can prepare defence on the ground that you weren't at the quarry pit. Far better to work on the supposition that you were there and that you didn't know in the least what you were doing."

Brent's look of despair gave emphasis to his words as he replied: "But don't you see, Dewitt, you're pushing me toward the *impossible*? There's a ghost of a chance to prove my alibi; there's no chance at all to prove that I wasn't awake, or that I wasn't in my right mind when I was seen to push Martin Carfax into the quarry hole. Who's to establish the fact? From what nearby bed should I walk in my sleep?"

"The settee in the Bostwick farmhouse," Dewitt answered promptly. "Remember, old and dear associations would naturally direct you to that walk on her wedding day—that road to the farm!"

"You are no psychologist. On the contrary, I would keep away from it, as I've told you before. I say again, Dewitt, for God's sake get to work on the alibi. That's the only important work. Once prove that—and—"

"And three people—one a casual passerby—are written liars or mad. Don't you think the rocks are just as high that way?"

"No, I don't! A fact is a fact. The alibi proved, what's left, it stands to reason, can remain unproved and unexplained. Nobody one

way or another will be injured. Have you had any answers to those advertisements?"

"Not one of any use. The notices were inserted in seven different papers, three of them agricultural journals. Your counsel and I went over every reply; only the usual assortment of crank letters that come flooding in to anyone who seeks a public explanation of a strange occurrence. Sometimes I think these cranks are people who never have anything happen in their lives, and so try to live vicariously in the excitements of other fellows' existence.

"They're welcome to mine," Gordon said ruefully. "What do you think of the counsel the district attorney has assigned me?"

"Dunwood? Oh, he's a good, faithful little man. Picked for just such uncongenial jobs as your case must be to him. I don't know how he'll handle this somnambulistic automatism business, for he's shy of lugging the psychical into the law. Somehow thinks it can't be done. But he'll be conscientious. If I said to him, 'Dunwood, you must ring in as a witness one of the cherubim,' he'd look patient and say, 'Just as soon as I can locate him, Dewitt. Give me time.'"

"I suppose the prosecution is rummaging, too."

"Chalmers has turned your studio inside-out for letters that might incriminate you and Christine. Of course, what the prosecution wants to establish is that you and she cooked the whole thing up—though they'd have a hard time! Her shielding you did the most damage to the case."

Brent nodded. "And yet her doing it is the surest proof that she knows nothing! What fools people are—but the alibi, Dewitt. Couldn't you scour that whole region, stop at every farmhouse

and inquire, until you located the one? The woman would remember. I swear she would! The occurrence was too peculiar. You don't generally fall fast asleep in strange people's houses; and she knew I was asleep, for she came in once with the lunch and went away again."

Dewitt thought for a moment. "Brent, it's going to be difficult, but by Jove, I'll try it. I know some aspiring young fellows on the county detective force who'd be keen to ferret out your farm. I'll send 'em out at once. Now, write me down the details of every landscape feature you can remember in the Shawangunks."

Just outside the jail Dewitt encountered Christine, who had come over on some errand which she did not divulge. Mrs. Richards was with her in the car, and beckoned Dewitt to her, to say to him:

"Tong is anxious to see you. He thinks he has some evidence in Ray's case that might be of interest."

"Shall we run you over?" Christine asked. "How did you find Gordon today?"

"Fairly well. Still insists on his alibi," Dewitt answered as he seated himself in the car.

"Has any case been established against Brock?" she asked.

"Not enough to cause his arrest. Of course, the fact that the shot was fired from a Colt's revolver belonging to Brock is the trump card, if anybody wants to play it. Not likely, however, that they will. A palpable absurdity—Brock firing from his own Colt and then hanging it up in the bushes for evidence!"

"And yet I feel he is working against us all," she said with a shiver.



"I'm afraid he is not exactly sympathetic," Dewitt said. "He means the case to come to trial, anyway."

The aunt was in the way of further conversation, so Dewitt cut across her voluble solicitude for Christine on their arrival at The Towers, and requested a word with the latter in her own sitting room. To his astonishment the first thing she said when they were alone, was:

"I am the real criminal!"

"What do you mean?"

"If I had been faithful to the only genuine emotion of my life all this would not have happened. If I had never been jealous, exacting—"

Her voice broke, and she turned away to hide sudden tears.

"But think," Dewitt said gently, "what it will mean when all this is over and you are together and at peace."

"Do you mean when we are both dead and meet in those shadowy spirit-worlds of which poor Tong is always talking? I am afraid that is little comfort. I wish I had been struck blind," she added passionately, "before I had ever seen him as I did—whether he was sleeping or waking. Then at least I could say I never saw him do this thing."

"And he thinks you never did," Dewitt broke in. "Mr. Brent begs me to prove his alibi."

"Oh, poor boy!"

"I shall try to prove it, though the very effort opens me to derision. Not that I care, but you can see for yourself. A man is seen by three people to commit a certain act. How on earth is an alibi to be proved!"

"But we can try to prove it, nevertheless," she

said earnestly, her beauty for an instant heightened by the warm wave of her emotion. "I have a road map here of the Shawangunk Mountains. Let us portion out the whole region among a number of us—people that can be trusted. Spare no expense; engage as many cars and men as you like. I will go myself every day over the region allotted to me. Mrs. Richards and the chauffeur will go with me, and we will ask at every farmhouse, while you are doing the same on your routes, until we find the house."

"And when you find it," said Dewitt, "what is it that you saw at the quarry pit?"

A shiver went through her. "What did I see?" she counter-questioned.

"His exact double, of course. But to what unknown region has this double disappeared?"

She looked baffled, distressed. "You will at least leave no house in the Shawangunks unvisited?"

"I promise you that. Failing to find it, we must prove somehow or other that Gordon was temporarily insane."

She shook her head. "I hate the alienists coming in and taking possession of the case. If they think they have proved their point he will be sent to an asylum, and will be as lost to me as if the prison still held him. And what would his life mean to him under the shadow of insanity? He would become insane, sensitive and high-strung as he is!"

"Oh, if that letter had not been stolen!" Dewitt groaned, "though its contents might only leave confirmed this wild story. The name inside might have been Gordon Brent—and then, without the alibi, we'd be worse off than ever."

"Yes," she assented. "That chance makes me hope that the letter will never be found."

He left her to see what news Tong had for him. On the way to his old room where the East Indian was awaiting him, he passed the pretty housemaid, Grace, in the hall. She threw him a half-frightened, quizzical glance, and hurried by, only to pause and utter his name in a faint, beseeching voice. He turned back.

"What is it? Do you wish to speak to me?"

"No—yes! It's just this. People say you are a great detective; won't you please stop all this nonsense about Kid Bender? Lots of people think he shot Mr. Ray; but it is not so at all. Kid wouldn't hurt a fly. He's just—foolish," she added with a giggle.

"In that case I hope you are—wise."

Her face sobered. "What do you—mean?" she faltered.

"Just this. I'd give back that chain—"

She uttered a little scream, and placed her hand against the bosom of her dress.

"Ah," said Dewitt, "I see you carry your gray chamois jewel case around with you."

"How do you know?" she asked in a frightened voice.

"I see its dark outline under the white lawn of your dress. You'd better give me everything that your friend, Hugh Bender, presented to you, which is of Indian workmanship, if you don't want your friend Kid under suspicion of theft as well as attempted murder."

She gave a little gasp. "You spy on everybody," she flung at him.

"No, my child. I happened to be an accidental witness of the presentation of the necklace in the

garden the other evening. It's best for you not to have such trinkets! Your man probably did not shoot Mr. Raymond Harcourt; but he has accepted too much from the rogue who tried to. Do you want Hugh to turn over a new leaf?"

"Sure, I do," she half sobbed.

"Then make him give up this fooling with the stock market; and incidentally, with bad companions. Run along to your room and unpin that case, take out the trinkets and bring them to me."

"Yes, sir—and you promise not to let 'em say things about Kid that aren't true?"

"That's more in Kid's hands than mine. But I tell you frankly, I don't think they'll arrest either him or his master. I'm not so sure, however, he won't get into future trouble if he doesn't turn over a new leaf."

She flashed a grateful glance at him and tripped away, only to return in about five minutes, her face white as ashes.

"They're gone!" she whispered.

"What's gone?"

"The necklace, the ring, the bracelet. Those were the three things Hugh—"

She stopped short, evidently on the brink of betraying the fact of Hugh's dependence on another for the supplies of jewelry. "The three things Hugh received for giving valuable information," Dewitt finished. "Now, first, why didn't you miss this stuff from the bag? Didn't it feel lighter? different to the touch?"

"A common chain and ring and bracelet had been put in," she said, half crying as she displayed the flimsy articles in question. "There's thieves in this house, I guess!"

"Ah!"

Dewitt examined what she had brought him, then slipped them in his pocket. "Are you telling me the truth, Grace?" he said sternly.

"I just showed them to Tong—and told him the same thing! Tong never talks. He said it was right to give you what you asked for—only I couldn't, you see! I don't know where my grand, beautiful chain is. When I took out the case, this is what I found."

"I'll take your word for it. Now you can tell your man exactly what has happened, and make *yourself* the price of his keeping out of mischief. Insist on his giving up bad company!"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Dewitt."

## XV

### BENDER'S TRUNK

Dewitt went on to his own rooms, where he found Tong looking over one of his late master's books.

"The honorable gentleman is very good to give advice to a flighty housemaid," he began. "I have myself been lecturing the girl who is tormenting the faithful Hodgson into his grave by her coquetries. But I have not been able to extract from her for what piece of information Bender was paid so handsomely. She says it is stock market news; but that—is pretence."

"It may be for nothing in particular and for everything in general," Dewitt said. "The East Indian who escaped our bullets the other day and who, I believe, shot your young master, used Bender probably to gain access to a house where much useful information could be picked up—as well as Colt's revolvers. This man may follow the shooting by blackmailing Brock, whose revolver he used. He certainly didn't attack the poor boy upstairs for the savagery of it. You sent for me, I believe, to tell me something?"

"My conviction is now that those securities were stolen by Bender himself," Tong announced.

"How could that be? Was he ever trusted with errands that took him to Brock's safe?"

"Not that I know of."

“On what, then, are you building the supposition?” inquired Dewitt.

“The amount of money he is able to squander; his peculiar, confidential relationship with Mr. Brock—it all seems to hang together.”

“How are we to prove it?”

“Search his trunk at the hotel in Merion. I happen to know that he’s not going there for a few days.”

“Would he be likely to hide these securities in his trunk? Wouldn’t he have disposed of them by this time?”

“It’s worth investigating to clear poor Mr. Ray’s name,” Tong commented. “Suppose we go down there this afternoon; explain matters to the hotel keeper, and get into his room?”

Dewitt was not averse to this plan, for he meant to relinquish his own room at the hotel as not likely to serve him further. The East Indian having become aware of his presence there would, in all probability, abandon the place as a meeting-ground with Bender.

Tong and he motored over in the afternoon, and Dewitt confided his plan to him of scouring the Shawangunk Mountains for the farmhouse where Gordon Brent claimed to have fallen asleep on the afternoon of April first. “It seems hopeless—but Mrs. Carfax will be satisfied.”

“Yes,” Tong said, “it is like searching for the locality of a poet’s vision. You remember those great lines of De Quincy, ‘God smote Savannah-la-mar and in one night removed her—to the coral floors of ocean.’ That is not all the quotation, but it will serve. What diver would cast off to search for that empearled city through the bottomless blue of tropical seas? However, it will please my

lady. Restless and unhappy as she is, she needs some big enterprise to occupy her mind."

At the hotel Dewitt presented himself to the landlord in his own character, and showing his badge requested admission to Bender's room.

"He is giving it up," the landlord said. "However, his things are still there."

Soon they were in the shabby, dreary place, its dirty yellow woodwork marked all over with the scratches of innumerable matches. A strapped trunk stood in the corner. In the hanging closet nothing was revealed but a few wire hangers. The trunk seemed very light. It was locked and corded. Tong, drawing out a knife, cut the rope; then proceeded deftly to pick the lock. "Nothing at all to do," he commented, "it's a very ordinary lock."

Dewitt wondered over the range of his talents. It was quite understandable why the late Adrian Harcourt had leaned almost the whole weight of his life upon him.

The lock gave way. The raised lid revealed a neat layer of newspapers, and lying exactly in the middle was a long white envelope addressed "To whom it may concern." Dewitt, opening it while Tong looked on with an amused expression, found within a bundle of securities and a sheet of paper on which was written, "Ghira Lora may know where these came from—I don't! I'm through with him. I was afraid he'd play me some dirty trick. When it comes to putting papers in my trunk that someone else stole, I've had enough."

Dewitt ejaculated, "What nerve!"

Again the inscrutable smile passed over Tong's face. "Probably he anticipated this search. You see, there are only newspapers in the trunk. It



was clever to return what he was afraid to make use of. Well, I will take these to Mr. Brock, and the news to my dear lady."

"Barring the absence of motive, I should say this Ghira Lora shot Ray—unless these securities may be construed as motive," Dewitt said. "Maybe this East Indian, the real thief, was afraid of the boy's return to declare and prove his innocence. Tong, do you know many East Indians? Can you recollect anyone among your acquaintance who might have obtained useful information from you on some pretext, and passed it on to another countryman?"

Tong thought a while. "I know some students at Columbia University, over here to investigate American institutions. They are the sons of men I knew intimately in India; but they are gentlemen, honorable sir—as far removed from this obvious villain Ghira Lora, whoever he may be, as daylight from darkness. Riffraff of many lands, unfortunately, finds refuge here; and India is no exception."

"So it seems," Dewitt answered in an absent-minded tone. Certain strange aspects of the case were baffling his imagination. About Bender's note there was a ring of truth.

"Tong," he said, "what do you think of arresting the valet?"

The Indian shook his head. "That would be only to frighten away the birds. This Ghira Lora will describe smaller and smaller circles on his return to his old pal, especially if that pal is free and everything is going on as usual. Better let Bender forget his danger and then we can arrest them both."

"I suppose the Indian told this valet they were

being watched. He knew I was on the chase, and that probably I had spied on him from the hotel. He warned Bender—that's clear; and Bender warned Grace, who does her part in her woman's way to stand up for her lover."

When they returned, Hodgson admitted them with an expression of complete woe and hopelessness.

"Monsieur the butler, what has happened?" Tong inquired in a gentle, half-joking tone.

"Everything! She's gone!"

"Who? not our lady?"

"No, Grace. She and Bender have eloped. Read this note which she left in my pantry."

"Farewell notes seem fashionable," murmured Dewitt as Tong passed him the note to read. He opened it and read aloud:

"Dear old owl eyes—"

"Her name for me," groaned Hodgson, 'h'owl-h'eyes.' "

"You never had a chance, though I let you think you did; just to get a second help of ice cream. I always loved Kid. Folks think he's bad—he isn't. He's just natural. He likes fun and money—so do I. We're going away while the going's good. The house is too full of detectives; and that Chalmers man makes me tired. A detective with a white gardenia! He couldn't detect a whole Roquefort cheese in a small room with all the windows shut. The Dewitt fellow has more sense, and I think he's in love with—"

Dewitt gulped, then went on stoically:

"with Mrs. Carfax. Else he wouldn't be hanging around on a case that's already

proved. She'll never marry Gordon Brent. They'll send him to the chair. She should have stuck to her first story, hermit or no hermit. I don't blame anybody for pushing that Carfax man down a hole. I'm taking my man when I can get him—away from bad company. That East Indian fellow steals back what he gives. Most foreign people are rogues, all except Tong. When Bender and me gets settled out West, you must come and see us, Hodgson. I'll pick out a pretty girl for you!"

The butler groaned. "Oh, the deceitfulness of women."

"In the East we know better than to court them," Tong commented in his soft, musical voice. "We marry them first and court them afterwards. Cheer up, Hodgson! You shall come to my room tonight, and I will weave wonderful stories for you of beautiful ladies of the Far East—dark-eyed gazelles of a distant civilization; and I will give you a rare rose sirup brought from India, which gleams red as a ruby in the glass and breathes of a thousand gardens."

The butler's heavy face relaxed. "Ah, Tong, you are good for a sad heart," he murmured.

Dewitt did not follow Tong into the house. He wanted a word with Harold Brock, and an absolute verification of Bender's sudden leave-taking. So he crossed the grounds to the Brock place, with a side glance at the evergreen walk, half-expecting to see a lithe, turbaned figure rise from the greenery and salute him with a horrible grimace of derision. Dewitt had dealt with many

criminals, but never with the kind that could turn into white dogs, and be shot!

Brock's butler admitted him; and a moment later the heavy-browed Harold Brock swung into the room, with, "Now what? Come to tell me I'm under arrest? Come to tell me I can be in two places at once, like your friend Mr. Brent? You've lost me the best valet I ever had, between you all."

"It's true he's gone, then?"

"Skipped with that maid of Christine's he's been crazy about. And the fool's done nothing. I gave him plenty of tips about the stock market because it amused me to see what he'd do with them."

"Well, he got into bad company with 'em for one thing," said Dewitt, drawing the securities from his pocket. "I believe these are the documents which you accused Raymond Harcourt of stealing. They were found in Bender's trunk."

The start of surprise that Brock gave was unfeigned. "Lord! I never expected to see those again," he exclaimed. "But, see here! It's impossible."

"Now you know, perhaps, how Mr. Brent feels," commented Dewitt. "It is a fact that Tong and I have just extracted them from Bender's trunk."

"Where was it?"

"In his hotel room at Merion that he has just given up. Nothing in the trunk but newspapers and these securities, with a note to say that Ghira Lora, his pal, must have put them there. This Ghira Lora is evidently the Indian to whom Bender sold most of the stock market secrets."

Brock sat silent and thoughtful for a few

moments. "I'm trying to puzzle it out. Never in all his service here did Bender go to my office with my knowledge and consent. I didn't want him there—kept him to his own job. On the day that these were stolen no one but Martin Carfax, Raymond Harcourt and myself knew the combination of the safe, and only we three were in the inner office where the safe stands. The papers were put in and taken out again within a few hours. Is it possible—"

He broke off. "Raymond Harcourt may have had a confederate," he finished.

"And he may have had an enemy," Dewitt gave back sternly. "It was his own opinion that Martin Carfax stole the papers for the purpose of incriminating the brother of the woman he wanted to marry and over whom he wanted to get a blackmailer's hold—under guise of saving the erring boy, and so forth."

"It's a damned lie!" roared Brock; then suddenly fell back in his chair, his face very white.

"What's the matter?" asked Dewitt.

"I saw a face—there at the window, a dark, narrow face."

"You did!"

Dewitt waited to hear no more! Drawing his revolver, he had the sash open in a second and was scrambling over the sill just in time to see a tall, dark form disappear in the shrubbery. He fired upon it, and followed his shot as fast as his long legs could carry him over the lawn. Breathless he reached the shrubbery, only to find it still and deserted. No sign of anyone! not even a leaf stirring! Dewitt stood for a moment in utter amazement, then around the grounds he circled, drawing an ever-smaller circumference until he

was again at Brock's front door. The master of the house stood there giving directions to the white-faced butler.

"Call up the chauffeur at the stables, and tell him to let the dogs loose. Why don't you hop?" he added sharply.

The butler, looking unhappy, replied, "There's something queer, sir."

"Well, what is it?"

"The cook thinks it's the Indian that was killed. She thinks his ghost walks."

"Nonsense!" roared Brock.

"She told Tong—"

"Shut up!" commanded his master. "Shut up, you fool, and do as I tell you."

"Get the dogs loose—quick!" Dewitt called after the departing butler. "Brock, go in and telephone every house in town. I'm going to get Tong and a car."

The whole neighborhood was aroused, but hours of thrashing the countryside brought no results. At midnight Brock and Dewitt gave up the search and returned to the former's house to resume their interrupted discussion.

"I feel now as if I'd dreamed that face at the window," Brock said ruefully.

"You didn't. It's Ghira Lora, and he's the slipperiest creature on earth. How he managed to get entirely off the grounds while I had him covered with my gun is a mystery beyond me. But it's the same trick he played on me at Merion—or else he can run like greased lightning." He proceeded to tell Brock of his chase of the elusive Easterner. The broker nodded, giving grunts from time to time, but his mind did not seem to

be on the narrative. Suddenly he interrupted Dewitt.

“What do you believe *in your own mind?*”

“About what?”

“About the bunch that saw Martin killed. Do you believe they are all lying?”

“Mrs. Carfax is incapable of lying.”

“Yet she lied to save her lover,” Brock caught him up.

Dewitt leaped across his blunder with, “You have never been in love?”

“Not with the right kind of woman,” Brock answered heavily. “Say, I don’t understand how this guy you call Ghira Lora got hold of these securities if Bender’s tale’s true; that they were put in his trunk to intimidate, or incriminate him, rather.”

“They did the first, anyway. My theory is, Mr. Brock, that we have an evil genius in the neighborhood who stops at nothing in his road. He’s working for a Brotherhood, evidently, and what their aims are the Lord only knows. But we mustn’t rest until this region is cleared of an exceedingly dangerous and daring criminal.”

Brock regarded him with searching and suddenly sympathetic eyes. “Mr. Dewitt,” he said slowly, “I went a bit too far the day that the truth came out about Martin’s death. I was overwrought, I guess!”

“Don’t mention it,” said Dewitt.

“Well, I only mentioned it to get a fresh start. I want to say, right here, that I’m with you in the matter of ridding the country of the guy that’s getting us all in bad. I might have known Bender would link up with any plausible rascal, and yet, I give you my word, I think he’s as innocent of

any collusion in young Harcourt's shooting as I am. He liked the boy! Lord! how I shall miss Bender. And who's to play chess with me?"

"I can put up a game against you occasionally," Dewitt said.

Brock eyed him. "As a—friend?"

"As a friend!"

The broker reached out his hand and grasped his. "I knew I was coming to it, but I didn't think I'd get there so soon."

"No? Well, how far do you want to go? Do you want to help me on this case? You don't wish an innocent man to go to the chair?"

"Not I!"

"Can you forget your *friend* Carfax, and just remember Carfax the *clubman*?"

"I'll spare your bringing the details to my memory. You want to know if I ever had a lurking idea that his fellow-members might after all have been right. Well, I did," he answered fiercely, "but I was goin' to give him the benefit of the doubt. I had known him for years; fond of him, too, like my own brother; you know."

"I understand. Let us suppose that he was guilty. Let us suppose that when Mrs. Carfax was at outs with Gordon Brent, Carfax saw his big opportunity and used it. He knew well enough that she would never love him, but he knew he could force the marriage through her devotion to her brother—and as he cheated the club members, so he cheated you in the matter of the securities, to throw the blame on the boy and give him a chance to put Christine under eternal obligations to him. Does the situation present any plausible aspects to you?"

Brock was silent a few moments, then he said,



“I can’t answer you now. I’ve got to think. Will you be at Christine’s tonight?”

“Very late. I am starting down to Merion in a few minutes to fetch some things I left there.”

“Take care the Indian doesn’t get you.”

“Oh, he’ll never land me. I’m a fatalist, anyway. You can’t dodge death.”

“That’s true. What are you working on now—in particular?”

“The alibi of Gordon Brent.”

Brock’s face contracted with pain. “You’ll have a rare time proving it. A man can’t be in two places at the same time.”

“There are cases on record in the files of the Psychical Research Society.”

“Well, then, the ghost or second of Gordon Brent was in a farmhouse in the Shawangunk Mountains. No flimsy, astral what-you-call-’ems could give a heavy man like Carfax a push that would send him down a quarry hole. You’ll admit that something pushed him down.”

“He may have turned dizzy. It was his liability to dizziness, as I understand it, that constituted in a morbid way a part of the charm of these deep places for him. It is not an unusual phenomenon. I once knew a man at Cornell who always walked like lightning over the bridge that spans the Ithaca Falls ravine. He said if he stopped to glance down he’d be lost—jump over sure as shooting.

“Then how explain the emergence of this figure from the wood, the deliberate push it gave to Martin Carfax—an act which not only Tong and Christine saw, but that pious old hermit who wouldn’t tell a lie on the rack? He’s the guy that gives the real twist to the story. Tong is so

devoted to Christine that he'd say anything she wanted him to. But a stranger butting in with the same queer tale puts flavor in the cheese, so to speak. Lord! I'd welcome an alibi you could prove; I'd be glad to help you; but unless you're the angel Gabriel, with a *corner* on such strange matters, it passes me how you'll do it."

"As a detective I'm bound to do the impossible," Dewitt laughed. "Well, I must be off."

On his way to the garage, where he kept an old but serviceable car, he met Chalmers.

"Hello, Morgan, how are you getting on?"

Chalmers sniffed his inevitable posy. "Rottenly, thank you. Gordon Brent was a wise guy. Not one letter of a tender nature did we find in his desk. Nothing more incriminating than a pressed rose. He can paint—that man. After I had turned all the drawers in his studio inside-out, and even examined his paint tubes, I lit a cigarette, took his most comfortable chair and gazed at his paintings. He has his father's gift for color; but he has something even more visionary than the old man's romantics, that sixth-sense feeling of all big work."

"Well, go comfort him with the talk you've just handed out to me."

"Funny situation. The detective for the prosecution chats with the murderer in his cell concerning the Blacklock qualities of his art. Gosh!"

Chalmers strolled on. Dewitt went in the house a moment to see if Christine were still up. He found her in the library writing, and in the instant she was unaware of his approach he saw a picture that he never forgot. Her beautiful eyes seemed turned upon some inner vision. Against her cheek she was pressing the letter she had just

written. Still and brooding, she seemed rapt in the world of her imagination, and Dewitt knew who wandered there with her. He made a sign and she looked up half-startled, then with a smile she said:

“I’ve been waiting for news.”

“He escaped us again—that slippery Indian! But I have good tidings after all. Harold Brock has come over to our side. He’ll even help us to try establish Gordon’s alibi.”

She regarded him admiringly. “If we’ve made a friend it’s your work, Mr. Dewitt. He ought to turn out a good friend because he was such a thorough enemy.”

“Yes, he gets a good bulldog grip on anything he fastens to. Do you want your letter mailed?”

“It’s to Gordon,” she said simply as she held it out. “I try to keep his courage up. If you can prove his alibi, Mr. Dewitt—” she broke off, her voice trembling.

“We’ll all work together now to prove it,” he answered heartily, and hurried away, lest she should read in his face how uncertain he felt of the success of the enterprise.

## XVI

### THE HANDKERCHIEF

Arriving at the hotel at Merion, the landlord met Dewitt with much deference and informed him, among other matters, that his laundry had arrived and was on the bed up-stairs. Dewitt was soon packing, and was about to put the bundle of laundry in as it was, unopened, when he reflected that he had sent a favorite shirt to the wash, and it might be as well to know the worst at once.

The shirt was there, smoothed into that expression of humility which articles that are sent to a public laundry often wear on their return, as if they say, "Well, I've had the very devil of a time, but you wouldn't know it,—for it's all folded inside." Beneath the shirt was a pile of handkerchiefs, and Dewitt at once noticed one much larger than the rest, and of a different hemstitching. "Sent me some other fellow's," he muttered; only to follow his words with an exclamation. The heavily embroidered initials in the corner were "G. B."

He took the handkerchief to the light. The linen was of fine texture, the initials done in Old English letters. Obviously the handkerchief was one of a set.

"'G. B.' Gordon Brent? No! it's too good to be true."

He glanced at his watch—ten to nine. He could

not reach the county jail before closing time. Morning would do.

But the laundry might be open, as it was Saturday night. So, putting the handkerchief in his pocket, he strolled out into the main street to find the place. The proprietor was just closing up, and some husky girls were putting away their irons and ironing boards. Dewitt displayed the handkerchief.

"I would like to know to whose laundry this belongs. It isn't mine."

The man took it, examined it, and then called out to one of the girls: "Say, Helen, have you the list of that chap, Roger Hinkley—the drummer, you know—who's going to call for his wash next week when he's passin' through town again?"

The girl produced the list.

"Have you checked up the handkerchiefs? There's seven down here. Untie his bundle and see how many are there."

"Six," counted the girl.

"Well, then, this belongs to him."

"No more than to me," said Dewitt. "I'm an F. D.—lucky the letters didn't run the other way. This man's an R. H. and the handkerchief is marked G. B. Have you any G. B.'s among your customers?"

"Lemme see, Helen, have we?"

"Gimme the book. I'll soon tell you." She ran her fingers through the index. "Not a G. B. in the bunch—grand bounce that stands for—well, I should worry. No lady that can wash and iron ever gets the g. b."

"Right you are," said Dewitt. Then turning to the proprietor, "Who is Roger Hinkley?"

“Drummer for a candy house in New York. Sells to the river towns. He goes as far as Troy. We expect him back next week. He patronizes us because we do cheaper work and better than most of 'em. Why are you so interested in this handkerchief, if I may inquire?”

“It looks like one that belongs to a man I know; but how this Roger Hinkley got hold of it I can't imagine, except that handkerchiefs may go all over the United States via the laundry route.”

“Right you are! We got one once belonged 'way down in Texas. Do you want to take that along and show it to your friend?”

“I surely do. You needn't charge it to R. H. When do you expect him back?”

“Oh, about Tuesday.”

Dewitt decided not to tell anybody of this until he was quite sure that the handkerchief did belong to Gordon. If so, it might be most important in proving the alibi.

He was early at the jail; found Gordon, indeed, eating breakfast.

“Hasn't affected my appetite much,” he commented. “I suppose I *think* myself into hunger three times a day. My brain seems to race on and on from one supposition to another. What brings you so early?”

“This.”

He held out the handkerchief. Gordon's eyes grew big. “Where did you get that?”

“Is it yours?”

For answer Gordon seized it. “I should say so. It's one of six Christine embroidered for me when we were first engaged. I'm very choice of them—naturally. I knew one was missing. I have the rest of the set.”

He opened a table drawer, and out of a small, blue linen case took a neat pile of handkerchiefs, each an exact counterpart of the one Dewitt had brought from the laundry. "Now we've started something," the detective said. "Did you have one of these in your pocket on the day of your famous walk?"

"I must have had. I never went without one. I used to wash them myself, I was so afraid of the laundry's losing them."

"Do you remember taking out the handkerchief at the farmhouse?"

"I must have. I probably wiped my forehead with it, for I remember being in a perspiration, though I was chilly, too. I suppose I held it in my hand and when I dropped off to sleep it fell back of the sofa. I had one hand thrown over the back of the sofa, half holding myself on because of that slippery haircloth. The springs were queer, too, all one-sided."

Dewitt was taking down what he said, in shorthand in a note book. "And when you woke up you forgot all about the handkerchief?"

"Yes, I must have forgotten it. Now tell me how you got it."

Dewitt related the circumstances. "I shall go back to the hotel and stay there until Hinkley passes through town. The laundry people have promised to call me up. Don't get unduly elated, Gordon, but I think we may have in our hands the most important clue to the proving of your alibi. Yet it may be, remember, that you dropped it on that long rambling walk. Do you ever carry two handkerchiefs?"

"Sometimes—two of the set. That day I had one only, I am positive."

“If we can find the woman who picked this up behind the sofa, no matter how it was juggled to Roger Hinkley, you will be a free man in a week.”

Gordon covered his face with his hands, and a muffled sob came from him. “If I’m free I’ll live for but one aim—to make her happy,” he said when he was calmer.

Dewitt resolved to keep the matter of the handkerchief to himself, not even telling Christine and Tong. The very air seemed to him full of hostile eyes and menacing forces. Ghira Lora was still at large despite the wide circle the local and New York police, at Dewitt’s orders, were making in the effort to arrest him; and Ghira Lora, still free, was a force to be reckoned with.

At the hotel in Merion he changed his room to a front one, and requested the landlord to keep very quiet about his presence there. Three days went by which Dewitt employed in fitting the facts of his case together in every variety of combination. It was curiously like ordering a room in which there were many articles of different colors. The magenta shade might harmonize with the pale yellow curtain, but it absolutely shrieked at the red sofa pillow. Certain things fitted certain theories to a T, but they wouldn’t meet every aspect of the case. What Dewitt was looking for was the irreducible atom, the X that was the balancing base on which all other elements retained their equilibrium. He was in search of the supreme motive, the one consistent thread.

Most cases were bundles of inconsistencies unless that magic clue were discovered. According to Dewitt’s experience that clue was just as likely to be a watch key as an elephant, and back of the watch key and back of the elephant a motive quite



as purely distinct as the objects themselves. This was infallible in nearly all cold-blooded and premeditated crime; but in crimes of sudden passion a thousand elements might enter, some traceable back to remote ancestry.

Dewitt had been haunted of late by the conviction that both the shooting of Ray Harcourt and the killing of Martin Carfax were long premeditated deeds. In someone's brain they had been visualized long before their accomplishment. He realized this theory threw many parts out of gear in the case; but he held to it.

He was going over his facts, like little colored beads, for the hundredth time when Brock called him on the telephone, to tell him that old Mr. Carfax was anxious to have a talk with him.

"The old gentleman isn't quite as bright as he used to be," Brock said, "and he's lonely and grieves for his boy. Maybe it would brighten him up a bit if you'd see him."

"Of course I'll see him. What does he want to talk about?"

"Martin's death, I suppose. Let me give you a tip. He has no idea that Christine was not as devoted to his son, as his son to her; and he thinks you're working against Gordon Brent instead of for him. I don't know how he got the idea, but I can't dislodge it from his poor wandering wits."

"Let it stick if it's any comfort to him," Dewitt remarked. "I'll leave word at the laundry where to get me, and run over for a few minutes."

The Carfax house was a large, square brick one, topped with a cupola, the kind that prosperous business men erected for their families in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies. The long, narrow drawing-room with its large oil paintings and

heavy curtains of maroon velvet, its marble statues on onyx pedestals, and its enormous, many-branched, bronze chandelier,—all witnessed to the same period. Shuffling over the Axminster carpet came an old man who leaned on a cane; and muttered to himself as he advanced toward Dewitt.

“Well! Well! It’s you, is it? They say you’re a smart young man; smart enough to put the fellow in prison that killed Martin; smart enough to send him to the chair, eh?”

“I hope I’ll send the murderer to the chair—the real one, that is,” Dewitt answered.

“O, my boy, my boy—little Martin!” the old man mumbled. Dewitt helped him to a chair in the morning sunlight that streamed through the windows between the maroon curtains. “He hadn’t ought to gone to that hole—poor head he had, and I was always warnin’ him, ‘Martin, you’re all I got. You keep away from those spots.’ But he would go—even on his wedding trip. Well, dear, dear. Maybe he’ll come back again some day.”

He was off in a waking dream of reunion, mumbling and nodding. Dewitt reflected that this childishness was the saving feature of the situation; for at least he enjoyed moments of feeling his son near him or about to return.

Chalmers’ entrance brought the old man back again to reality, or at least to a sense of what had happened.

“Have they caught him?” he quavered, “the wretch that pushed my boy down that hole? Martin never harmed anybody.”

“No! No!” said Chalmers soothingly. “Well, Dewitt, it’s odd to see you here. I’ve just had a

queer word from the cook downstairs. She swears she saw Gordon Brent last night, near the evergreen walk in the Brock place—copper hair, blue suit and all; thought he'd been let out on bail. She was coming down the long walk—and she says she gave a scream, she was so astonished. He disappeared then as if the ground had swallowed him up. What do you make of that?"

"Simply that all the maids on these three properties are in a state of nervous hysteria, and it's not much wonder. I'll go down with you kitchenward, in a minute."

The old gentleman was examining the fringes of the chair on which he sat, with great interest. "Martin pulled some of 'em," he remarked. "His nurse'll whip him again. No, he's too grown up for that—why! why, he's gone!"

The poor old figure staggered to his feet, arms extended, pale blue eyes raised pitifully. He wailed his way thus to the door, pushing off the proffered arms of Chalmers and Dewitt; then his attendant met him, and spoke soothingly to him. The two detectives waited until he seemed quieted again; then made their passage through the big, gloomy house, opening many tall black walnut doors, and passing through ugly and expensive rooms, now forever a part of a shadowy past.

By contrast the large sunny kitchen seemed a very pleasant place. The cook, a fat country woman, was at the stove when they entered, a young fresh-cheeked girl assisting her. The first came forward with alacrity to greet her visitors and ordered her companion to bring chairs.

"I was telling Mr. Dewitt what you had seen, Mrs. Vanderwater."

"Sure as I'm talkin' to you, I saw him. He

looked kind o' pale, and his face was set-like, but it was Mr. Brent, I swear. Ruth, here, can say what I looked like when I come in. How did I look, Ruth?" she prompted.

"Just as white as them ashes."

"You couldn't have seen Mr. Brent," Dewitt said decidedly. "He is in the county jail."

"Then he has a double."

"That's what many of us think," Dewitt commented. "What time in the evening was this?"

"Oh, eight-thirty is near right, I guess. Was it about half-past eight, Ruth?"

"Just about," said the girl. "Mrs. Vanderwater came runnin' in all out of breath from the haste she made. 'Ruthy,' she says to me, 'fetch me a drop of currant wine. I've had such a turn.'"

Dewitt regarded her curiously. "What frightened you if you thought Mr. Brent was out on bail? Did you think he'd kill you next?"

"O, no, sir. It was his looks—so set-like. His mouth was just like this." She set her own lips in a close, hard line. "It was an awful face, a kind of a stare in it."

Chalmers and Dewitt exchanged glances; then the latter asked carelessly, "Are you ever troubled with nerves, Mrs. Vanderwater?"

She put her hands on her big hips. "Me? Nary a nerve. I get scared when there's somethin' to scare me."

"Have you heard of anyone else's seeing Mr. Brent's double?"

"Nobody at Brock's or Harcourt's saw him," said the cook. "They said I was dreamin'. The only fellow who believed me was old Haines."

‘Sure, you must have seen him,’ he said. ‘Ain’t he the one who can be in two places at once?’”

“Where did you see Haines?”

“Right here at the kitchen door. He stops by to get a cup of coffee sometimes when he’s in the village, and I always give it to him, poor old soul.”

“But how does he come all this distance?” Dewitt asked.

“Oh, he goes much farther than Highland Park. He has medicine he sells in the spring—makes it from roots and herbs. I like to get him to talk. It was him told me about the quarry hole; and I, like a fool, told master.”

“You did, eh?” broke in Chalmers. “Then your master must have planned to have a look at it some time before, and not at the minute.”

Mrs. Vanderwater reflected on this. “I’d hate to think so,” she said wholesomely. “I’d hate to believe I was as near connected with that dreadful affair. I worried about it for nights after the trouble, didn’t I, Ruth? She’ll tell you I never closed my eyes the first night; then at last I just put it out of my mind. I said to myself, ‘He was always doty on deep places, and if you hadn’t told him someone else would.’ That’s how I figure it out.”

“Probably you’re right,” Dewitt commented. “At least you meant no harm. Now, tell me again—was the figure coming out of the evergreen walk, or just about to go in?”

“Standing there—just standing there. I saw only his head and shoulders, for the hedge was between. The spot was pretty near where Mr. Ray was shot. That frightened me, too.”

Dewitt rose. “I wouldn’t talk much about this,

Mrs. Vanderwater. People would either think you were crazy or knew too much—more than the detectives, in fact. I'd be only too glad to be introduced to Mr. Brent's double."

Chalmers smiled significantly. "Dewitt, you won't get a chance. If you're working up the case on those lines it's a foredoomed failure,—and I'm sorry for you."

Dewitt laughed. "I think we're interfering with Mrs. Vanderwater's dinner. Let's step outside."

Chalmers was the first to speak when they had reached the evergreen walk toward which instinctively they directed their steps. "So you've changed your mind about the cook being hysterical. You think she saw something real?"

"Yes, real as you or I!"

"What was it?"

"That I don't know."

"Dewitt, old boy, you give me the creeps. Here I am trying to run to ground the sane, simple fact that a man committed a murder in the presence of reliable witnesses; and here are you keeping to a queer story cooked up by Brent."

Dewitt paused in the walk. "Chalmers, I'll bet you anything you want to name, that I'll prove my case before you prove yours!"

"Hoot, mon! I don't have to prove mine. The three most perfect people in the world: the impeccable majordomo, the perfectly charming Mrs. Carfax, and a saintly old hermit were witnesses of the horrid deed. Look at this grass; and here, see here, a footprint in this bare, soft place!"

They were down on their knees instantly, and Dewitt had whipped out his glass. "Looks as if

the man had worn overshoes; see that slightly roughened outline.”

“A ghost with overshoes!” exclaimed Chalmers.

Dewitt was drawing the outline of the print on transparent paper. “There’s some red-headed villain abroad—that’s evident. Now if the woman don’t chatter too much we may be able to find him!”

“Find him—in a hundred years!” laughed Chalmers. “Good-bye and good luck.”

Dewitt scarcely noticed his departure, so intent was he on solving a new problem. A certain elation was in his manner. Valuable as the clue of the pocket handkerchief was, this footprint was even better.

Returning to his car he drove to the county jail, and was at once allowed to see Gordon. Scarcely greeting him, he said, “Hold up your foot. No, wait. I’ll put this paper on the floor. Stand on the outline, please.”

Gordon obeyed. The penciled outline was at least a half-inch wider all around than his own shoe.

“What’s up?” he asked curiously, adding in rather a fretful tone, “I thought you’d be miles away by this, scouring the Shawangunks. Didn’t that Hinkley man turn up?”

“Not yet! But your double was seen last night at the evergreen walk,” and he proceeded to relate Mrs. Vanderwater’s story.

“O, thank God!” Brent ejaculated. “It proves I have a double, then! and you can find him.”

“You see the weak point of your story was just that we hadn’t anybody to put at that quarry hole to take your place. You had to be there accord-

ing to three people's word; and only on your own say-so could you be anywhere else."

"Have you told Christine?"

"I don't want to tell too many. It 'queers' it sometimes. I have my theory, and I shall follow it. Ghira Lora is, of course, deeply involved; but I doubt whether he's acting alone," he finished with a little smile.

"I wonder what I can ever do to repay you," Brent murmured.

"Wait until there's something to repay."

After leaving Gordon he went to a drug store and called up on the telephone the laundry at Merion. Ascertaining that Hinkley had not yet arrived on the scene, he turned his car toward East Burleigh and Miss Almira's post office.

He found her in the garden, Snooper at her heels; and she greeted him with enthusiasm. "Here comes the ekal of any of 'em," was her quaint expression.

"I hope so, I'm sure," Dewitt answered. "Any more letters arrived that nobody can claim?"

"My stars, no! One a year's enough! We didn't keep it long, neither!"

"No, unfortunately. If we had we'd be further on our way. Have you any news for me?"

She reflected. "Yes! Hercules can't keep that farmhouse shet up nohow. Somebody gets in! uses the place. It even smells queer, says Hercules."

"Like sandalwood?"

"Somethin' funny like that!"

"Ghira Lora, probably! But the man's a physical and spiritual eel. I haven't men enough to put in all the places he's likely to visit."

"There ought to be a guard up there. Her-



cules, he wanted old hermit Haines to move into the farmhouse; but he didn't seem to want to—'fraid, I reckon, or else he thinks he wouldn't make a good guard. He's away a good deal."

"Selling medicine?"

"Why, yes. How did you know? I bought some spring tonic of him a couple of days ago."

"I think we all need some. As a matter of fact, though, Miss Almira, I'm better since I plunged into this case head first."

"And how—is she, the beautiful lady?"

"She won't be very much better until some matters are cleared up. We have yet to prove that Gordon Brent wasn't at the quarry pit at four-thirty on the afternoon of April first."

"That queer Indian Tong ought to be able to tell you something," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"Tong seems to know such a lot; and doesn't it stand to reason that he and that other fellow should know each other, both comin' from the same place?"

"Do you think all Americans in Europe know each other?" Dewitt inquired.

She shook her head. "No, only it seems like furriners *should*."

"But we Americans are foreigners to some people," he laughed.

"Oh, if we only had that letter back. . . ." she lamented.

"Yes, that was too good a prize to let slip. We trusted too much to your locks and window-catches. It could only have been written, however, by a fourth onlooker of whose identity we are as yet ignorant. Perhaps the dead Indian! And the contents? Why speculate? They may

have been anything from an attack on Gordon Brent to a discussion of world politics. You never know where the lightning will hit in crank letters. Snooper," he concluded, addressing that feline now purring about his feet, "you are saved a good deal by being born a cat. Nothing to do all day but catch mice, visit your allotted saucer and dream drowsy reveries of the way the great tropical rats used to dash about the passages of the Pyramids. Well, good-bye, Miss Almira. My rest cure is curing me of some fancies, at least."

He swung off and down the street to his car. Far off the Shawangunks cut the sky with their sharp, fantastic outlines; and the Catskills lifted their broad, friendly backs through the fresh April air, as if emerging from winter sleep to breathe. "I wonder how she's making out over in those mountains?" he reflected, for Christine was in her car every day now, searching for the lost farm.

On his return to Merion a note was handed to him asking him to call at the laundry. There the proprietor informed him that they had received a night letter telegram from Roger Hinkley asking them to forward his laundry to Niagara Falls, where his firm had unexpectedly sent him on a business errand. The address of a hotel was given.

"All right," said Dewitt. "Has the laundry started?"

"We are just tying it up to mail."

"Give it to me. I'll take it to him."

The laundryman looked doubtful. Dewitt showed his badge. "This has nothing to do with Mr. Roger Hinkley personally," he said, "but

may be very important to people involved in a law case. I assure you Mr. Hinkley will be protected. Can you trust me?"

"Oh, give it to him," sung out the hearty voice of Helen. "It'll save me a walk to the post office."

Dewitt thanked her. An hour later he had crossed a ferry and was on his way to Albany, Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

## XVII

### AT THE FALLS

It was characteristic of him that he went to the bridge to view the Falls before seeking the hotel; and equally characteristic that while entranced by their beauty, they suggested to him remarkable opportunities for remarkable crimes. Among their rainbows and spray more than one horrid form of death was possible.

Yes, Mr. Hinkley was registered at the hotel; out just at present. Would the caller wait?

"I want a room myself."

He was assigned to one that overlooked the Falls. There he awaited the telephone call informing him that Mr. Hinkley had returned. But a knock came instead, and a freckle-faced, well-dressed youth presented himself with, "Hello! are you the dealer from Evansville?"

"Not much," replied Dewitt. "I'm the laundry boy from Merion."

"Well-grown for your age. You're kiddin' me, aren't you? The hotel clerk said a man in 47 wanted to see me. Are you the guy?"

"If you're Mr. Roger Hinkley, I am."

"That's me name."

"Well, as before stated, I've brought your laundry from Merion."

"Good work! Comin' this way and brought it with you? What's your line—soap and toilet?"

"No, my line is a mystery. Here's the package, and the list—minus one handkerchief."

Hinkley dumped the paper parcel on the bed and began picking at the knot. "If you don't mind, I'll count these here. Looks like a practical joke to me!"

"No joke! You'll find your linen all right."

The young man went straight for the pile of handkerchiefs. "Gosh dang the luck!" he exclaimed. "Of course they'd lose that one."

"Which one?"

"The one that's missing," growled the freckle-faced. "I'd rather they'd lost the whole bunch of stuff than that."

He glanced at the rest of the linen with much bitterness in his frank blue eyes. "It's hell the way they lose things. I'm going to wire 'em I won't pay no bill till they get that handkerchief."

"Was it valuable?"

"Not more than most."

"Well, then?"

"Me lady friend gave it to me, if you must know!" he blurted out.

"Oh, I see! worked your initials on it."

A wave of bright color swept over Mr. Hinkley's face. "The initials on it weren't mine," he said.

"G. B. by any chance?"

"Gosh! how did you know?"

"Is this the handkerchief?"

He held it out. Mr. Hinkley made a grab for it, but Dewitt deftly twitched it back. "No, I must tell you something first. This handkerchief was lost by a friend of mine who prizes it as much as you seem to. It came to me, by a piece of luck, in my laundry—I was stopping at Merion for a

few days—and I am very anxious to know where your lady friend found it. My friend may have lost it in any one of a dozen places.”

Mr. Hinkley settled himself in a chair, lit a cigarette and inquired, “Is this on the square?”

“Here’s another of the same set,” Dewitt said.

The drummer stared at the second handkerchief. “That looks like a straight story. I’ll return the compliment. The girl I’m goin’ to marry—Alice Wilson is her name—she and I went to visit her aunt, Mrs. Wilson, ‘Aunt Abby’ she calls her, up in the Highlands of the Hudson. We were invited to supper. That evening Aunt Abby shows us this handkerchief, says it was left there by a young fellow who acted queer.”

“Is that all she said?”

“Oh, there was sumpin’ else about his takin’ a nap on her best sofa; but I didn’t listen careful.”

Dewitt rose and took a turn or two about the room. He could not trust himself to speak for a minute. Then he said in a voice not quite steady, “Do you remember what day this was?”

“April Fool’s Day. I know it because Alice, she was playin’ jokes on me.”

“You say the Highlands of the Hudson, not the Shawangunks?”

Hinkley stared in mild astonishment. “The Highlands, sure! She lives about five miles back from the river; oh, no—nowhere near the old Shawangunks. What made you ask that?”

“You’ll know some day. Mr. Hinkley, I love you like a brother. What’s your brand of cigarettes? I’m going to stock you up for a year. I want you to take dinner with me tonight.”

“Gosh! I’m on velvet,” remarked Mr. Hinkley,

“that girl must sure be in love. And she isn’t your girl either?”

“No—and never will be! I am proving an alibi, Mr. Hinkley, and this is the little missing clue. Now give me Mrs. Wilson’s address, please. I want to see her tomorrow.”

Hinkley, much impressed, wrote it down. “There you are! She’ll tell you anything you want to know. She’s a regular old dear.”

“Widow?”

“Yes, lives all by her lonesome; hangs on to the poor old farm; does most of the work herself.”

“Is the house white—with green shutters?”

“Sure.”

“And trees about it?”

“Yes, mostly maples.”

“That’s the way my friend sketched it off. Mr. Hinkley, where does your friend, Miss Alice, live?”

“In Merion. Do you think I’d kick in to a one-horse burg like that if there wasn’t a dame there that has all the other skirts cross-eyed and hare-lipped?”

He went off in a dream of the fair Alice who dealt such disfigurements among her sisters by merely existing; and Dewitt envied him the simple formula of his romance. They would marry, and Alice would look like anybody else then; and he would sell candy harder than ever to bring up babies. But at least Roger had once had the joy of thinking Alice the supreme dame. Even poets didn’t always have such luck.

Hinkley finished his cigarette. “Did you say we were dining together? All right, see you at six-thirty.”

“Suppose we run in to Buffalo?” proposed Dewitt, “to some good restaurant, then go to the movies? My train doesn’t leave until eleven-thirty.”

“Right you are,” said Hinkley. “Say, do I ever get that *moushwore* back?”

“We’ll see. My friend’s friend did embroider those initials with her own fair fingers, and naturally—”

“O, yes! he’s got it bad, same as myself. Suppose I meet you at the station about six? So long.” He gathered up his laundry and departed, whistling.

Dewitt locked up the two handkerchiefs in his suit-case, then, changing his mind, extracted them again, sealed them up in a large envelope and requested the clerk to place the same in the office safe, standing by while this was done. Why he took such elaborate precautions he scarcely knew, except that he could scarcely endure the time that must elapse before he could deposit the linen in the district attorney’s office and tell him the tale that must secure Gordon’s release. He meant to do this before he obtained Mrs. Wilson’s verification. The district attorney could send one of his men to accompany him to the farmhouse and there get proof at first-hand.

He was elated! he walked on air! Gordon free, the task of finding the real murderer, however difficult, would not at least prey on his mind and sympathies; would seem almost child’s play in comparison with the tangle now unravelled. At least Gordon was vindicated. As for his locating the little farm in the *Shawangunks*—that mistake might easily be made by a man wandering around half-delirious and with no sense of direction.



Having an hour or so to put in he decided to view the Falls from every favorite angle, and came at last to the bridge where his first look of them had been obtained. He leaned upon the railing, gazing down into the still, deadly water that adds a touch of horror to the vast plunge of the Cataract. Down, down, beneath its deceptive glossy surface was the horrible tumult that broke loose in the Rapids.

The thrust of a hand in his pocket turned him sharply around only to see a fleeing figure, in its hand, like a white flag, a filched square of linen. With a bound he was after it, and then began a nightmare chase into the Canadian country on the other side of the bridge. Few people were about, and his gait was too rapid either for inquiries or the chance of joining. The Indian did not turn into a dog this time. Dewitt kept the fleeing figure in range, but, unfortunately, he had left his revolver at the hotel and could not cripple the fugitive.

Yet chance favored his capture. Crossing a field the Indian slipped. Before he could regain his feet, Dewitt had thrown himself on him, grabbing the handkerchief at the same time. The Indian's grip on it was like steel and the linen tore. The slight jar of the rent gave the Indian a free hand, which he used with such force that Dewitt knew only a steel-like pressure of convulsive fingers—then darkness.

When he regained consciousness he was alone in the field, not a sign of the Indian anywhere; and to his astonishment the ragged half of a handkerchief was still gripped in his fingers. He could only think that a third person had appeared on the horizon and the Indian had been frightened

off his garroting job too quickly to remember the other half of the handkerchief. This supposition was confirmed by the appearance at his side of an old farmer who gazed down at him with evident astonishment.

"Been robbed?" he inquired.

"Nothing much, but I was after the fellow. Which way did he run?"

"Toward them woods. I thought you was wrestling in fun at first; then I saw he was trying to choke you. Here's your hat. You're a mite untidy."

"Shouldn't wonder—thanks. Which way to the Falls?"

"Cross three fields. You'll hear 'em."

Dewitt made his way back, wondering how the omnipresent Ghira Lora could possibly have spied upon him during his interview with Hinkley. Yet he could not have witnessed the disposition of the handkerchiefs, the most important process of all. Evidently it had been a case of hearing, not seeing.

After a wash-up he asked the hotel clerk who had the rooms on either side of his, and was told that they were empty. Going upstairs he tried their doors; found one unlocked. To a passing chambermaid he said: "Will you stand in this room a minute while I talk in the next? I want to see how thick the partition is."

"Not very thick, sir. They do complain, the guests, of hearing each other snore."

He tried the experiment of using the same conversational tone he had employed with Hinkley. "Can you hear me?" he asked.

"Yes, I can," he heard her reply. "It's a shame to have such thin walls."

Naturally, the Indian, an invisible guest of the hotel, had secured information that way. Dewitt went to keep his appointment at the station, wishing with all his heart that he had pushed the wretch over the rail of the bridge, and held him there until he had frightened the truth out of him. But, of course, there had been no time. The Indian had to perfection the art of sudden attack. "At least he didn't get what he was after," Dewitt thought with satisfaction.

He wired his firm that he wanted all trains on the West Shore and New York Central, and on the D. L. & W., watched at the principal stations of their line. A full description of Ghira Lora went in this telegram. That dangerous animal must be put behind bars if the whole circle that included Christine and Gordon were to have any peace.

During the evening he told Roger Hinkley all that was necessary for him to know of the case, and obtained his promise to testify before the district attorney that the reported circumstances of the finding of the handkerchief were correct.

The next day at noon he was on his way alone to the farmhouse in the Highlands, having decided to take all risks and keep away from the district attorney's office until all the evidence was in his hands. Some near slip-up in a world of slip-ups might kill everything yet.

But before starting he had gone to Christine to tell her to discontinue her long motor rides over the Shawangunks. Tong only was present at their interview, his melancholy, high-bred face expressing more joy than Dewitt had ever seen written there. As he related the story of the handkerchief, Christine looked for a moment transfigured.

“I knew it! Yet what did I see? How could three of us be so terribly mistaken!”

“I don’t believe you were mistaken,” Dewitt said. “The simulacrum was there. The cause of it is still to be established. I have my suspicions—”

He noticed that Tong grew suddenly ashen.

Christine broke in. “Can you tell us?”

“No, but I should like to put some questions to Tong.”

“As many as you like, honorable sir.”

“You were many years in India with Doctor Adrian Harcourt?”

“All the time of his sojourn there, sir. I went out with him while he was an unmarried man.”

“He was then—wealthy?”

“He was always wealthy, sir; inherited wealth.”

“Did he marry out there?”

“Yes, and there the children were born.”

“My mother was an American—the daughter of a civil engineer,” Christine supplied. “Her maiden name was Christine Rittenhouse. My father met her in India.”

“In all your associations with Doctor Harcourt, Tong, are you able to look back to any incident that might have brought upon him the enmity of the natives?”

“I am afraid I could recall several,” Tong said with an apologetic glance at Christine. “Madame herself knows that her honorable father was deeply loved and deeply hated. He was quite fearless, but so modern and progressive that he would have turned the world into a sanitary ward, so clean, so sterilized were all his methods of work. He saved many Hindu babies, and the princeling

of a Rajah: for that he was loved, He made many changes, quick and sudden: for that he was hated in a land where the immobile is deified, where they brood years over the sheen of a jade elephant, or the sheer magic of a crystal. No, he was not always wise, my beloved master."

"Too wise to be wise," Christine broke in impulsively.

"Perhaps," Tong said with a smile, "understanding theories better than human nature. People are always friendly if you do not cross their little habits, their little prejudices, little superstitions. Take from them kingdoms, but leave them their unsalted butter, or their favorite purse, or their particular hobby. Yes, I recall one case—the profanation, or rather the destruction, of a Temple in the effort to drain a swampy garden which menaced the health of a village. The priests vowed vengeance, so the villagers told me; but we did not remain long in the place, and I had no opportunity to see whether the matter died out or not. There was something peculiar about this temple, something not orthodox or regular; and, as I remember it, there were rumors that black arts were practiced there. The idol on the shrine was very hideous, though the glimpse I had of it was a stolen one, and may not have done full justice to the workmanship."

"Didn't you lift Ray and me in your arms, Tong, to let us peep in that queer little window?" Christine asked. "It seems to me I can just see you—holding us up in turn, and trying to keep Ray quiet."

"Yes, it was that way. I had forgotten," he said quietly.

"And weren't the priests afraid of you because

you knew as much magic as they, only it was white, not black?"

Tong smiled. "I think they were more afraid of Madame's honorable father."

"How long after that time did Doctor Harcourt's illness develop?" Dewitt asked.

"Oh, long afterwards," Tong said. "There could have been no connection whatever."

"Some time you must show me your magic arts, Tong," Dewitt said.

"The honorable gentleman flatters me," said Tong, putting out a long, graceful hand to stroke the cat which as usual had come to him for petting. "I believe I am what you Westerners call mediumistic—a kind of lightning conductor for the forces which play around us; and which the Anglo-Saxon race is so tardy to recognize. In the East we have known these things from the beginning of time; acknowledge them—which is the first step to their right use. Nothing is surreptitious or silly in our dealing with the Unseen. Here giggling ladies inquire of the Ouija board if they will ever be wealthy or get married! Such childishness is the result, of course, of your in-born habits of materialistic thought. The dignity and solemnity, the intense reality of the spiritual world and its forces, are unknown. You are in danger if you do seek to use them because you are ignorant of their laws—as well turn a child loose among live wires and electric switches!"

It was the longest speech Dewitt had ever heard Tong make. He listened with the deepest interest. Christine now leaned across the table.

"Tong, show Mr. Dewitt what you can do."

The Indian looked grave. "I have no right to

take chances, either, Madame, but since you wish it."

He rose and stood towering above them, rather a magnificent figure. Dewitt thought, in his strength and simplicity. In a very soft voice he began to repeat sentences of a foreign tongue that seemed at last to attain a rhythmic swing and beat as of epic verse. All at once Dewitt felt a cold air against his forehead.

Christine whispered, "Look!"

On the table between them was an empty vase, which now seemed to be filled with curious interplaying colors like the iridescence of mother-of-pearl. All at once these thickened, and before Dewitt's astonished eyes a bouquet of roses formed themselves. Their delicate penetrating odor filled the room. Tong was smiling.

Dewitt sprang to his feet, reached for the flowers to test their reality, but as he did so they disintegrated. He found himself grasping an empty vase!

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated. "Were there flowers in that thing or not? Am I crazy?"

"I smell roses," Christine said. "I saw nothing."

"You asked for a demonstration for Mr. Dewitt, Madame. I have given one."

"I should say you had! What was it—suggestion?"

"Partly that," said Tong enigmatically, "partly—" but he did not finish.

On his way to the farm in the Highlands of the Hudson, Dewitt stopped in Merion to see Alice Wilson, whom he found behind the counter of a little notions shop, a pretty girl who was quite ready to tell him all she knew about the handker-

chief, and to promise that she would appear before the district attorney if necessary.

"Aunt Abby talked a lot about that young fellow," she said. "She seemed sorry for him, though she didn't tell us why. All she said was, 'I'm afraid he was in some trouble.' She's not one to like people quickly—so Roger and me thought the fellow must have been A-number-1. Aunt Abby will tell you all about him."

Dewitt thanked her and started on his journey southward. It gave him an odd sensation to be actually on his way to a farmstead which for many weeks he had believed to be the figment of a dream.

It lay high up in the hills, as lonely a spot as he had visited since his first trip to the Bostwick farm, and he wondered over the divagations by which Brent had ever found it. White and green it was, though faded as if in the autumn of its days. Its maples were still unbudded. As he drove his car in, an old dog came limping across the lawn.

The place looked deserted, but his knock at the kitchen door brought a woman of motherly appearance, whom Dewitt instantly identified as "Aunt Abby." Briefly he stated his errand, and she led him at once to the "best room," where she applied a match to the fire already laid in the stove, and begged him to be seated. On his refusing the rocker she took it herself, and apparently settled herself for a good talk. Nothing could have more perfectly met Dewitt's views.

He showed her the handkerchief. "That's it!" she exclaimed. "I picked it up in back of the sofa after he had gone. In all my born days I never had anyone so much on my mind!"



“Now, tell me everything,” Dewitt said. “First of all, you are quite positive that it was April Fool’s Day?”

“Oh, I’m sure of it. I remember, because I had asked Alice and Roger to supper. He was to be at Merion on one of his candy trips; and he was to bring her up in his car in the afternoon. That’s why I had the fire going in this room. It’s a big room and looks north, you see—takes a good while to get het up. Well, to go back to the day—I says to Rover, the old dog, in the mornin’, ‘Rover, there’s nobody to fool us until Alice comes.’ She’s always full of fun and tricks, you see.”

Dewitt nodded. “Then there’s no doubt whatever in your mind of the day. You would swear to it anywhere, in a court of law, for instance?”

“What I tell you is the truth,” she answered. “The law couldn’t get anything else out of me,” she continued firmly, as if it were even the business of the law to get anything *but* the truth out of people if it could. “I remember everything that happened that day because the young man’s coming was so queer; and all his actions likewise was so queer. Yet somehow I wasn’t afraid, and I didn’t think him crazy. I just thought he was in great trouble and distress of mind.”

“He was,” said Dewitt. “I’ll tell you about that side of it later. It’s lucky he wandered in where he was so well understood. I assure you he’s an innocent man, so you can speak freely.”

Aunt Abby—already her big, warm personality had fixed that name in his mind as most appropriate—beamed upon him. “I’m not often mistaken—sometimes, yes—but not with him. And yet what he said in his sleep comes back again and

again. I wake up nights thinking of it. I couldn't hitch it up with the whole look of him—kind of forlorn and friendless in spite of his good clothes. You've seen stray dogs. Well, he was like a stray dog, and fairly tuckered out when he reached the farm.

"I was tired, too, for I had been up since five, and on my feet. I was just thinkin' I'd doze off on the sitting-room sofa when his knock came. I opened the door. There he stood, his eyes very dark and burnin' as if he had a fever, and dark circles under them. But that wasn't all—he looked as if I was a dream and the house was a dream—and he walkin' in one himself. I don't know whether I can make it clear to you, but that was the queer effect it had on me. Then I noticed his hair. Red hair is common enough, but not his kind; not that queer red, kind of a cross between a real, settled coal fire and the copper kettle that's a-settin' on it."

Dewitt laughed. "His hair *is* an odd color."

'Odd as you ever see. Somehow I took to him at once, and when he asked me if I could give him somethin' hot to drink, tired as I was, I thought I could do anythin' better than refuse him. 'Have you been walkin' far,' " I asked.

" 'I guess so,' he said. 'I started early.' "

" 'Pretty cold day for a long walk,' " I said.

" 'Yes, it's cold,' he answered as if he didn't care whether it was zero or not. I thought to myself, 'I'd give a good deal to know what's on your mind. Somethin's on it all right!'" "

" 'What time was this?'" "

" 'About quarter of four. I showed him into the best room, and he asked if he could lie down on the sofa if he took off his overshoes. 'Sure, you

can,' I said. 'Make yourself at home.' He thanked me and I went to the kitchen to get hot milk and a sandwich for him. It took some time because my fire was low, and it must have been four-thirty before I started back with the steaming hot milk and the sandwich on a tray. The door of the best room was partly open, and I saw right away that he was sound asleep. I stood still for a minute, wondering whether I should wake him, when all of a sudden he called out in a hollow, dreadful voice that I'll remember until I die, 'My God! I've killed him.' It gave me such a turn I nearly dropped the tray. I stood looking at him to see if he'd wake up; but he didn't; only turned uneasily and moaned a little; then he was quiet again. I tiptoed back to the kitchen with the food, and I says to myself, 'Whatever has he done? Oh, what has he done!'

"Some people might have been frightened of him, but I wasn't. I knew something awful had happened and yet I couldn't connect him with it in my mind any more than if he'd been a two-year old. 'You're in some awful trouble,' I says, 'and I wish I was your mother to help you out of it.' I made up my mind that if he had killed anybody it was accident, not will. He couldn't hurt a fly, that fellow.

"Well, I didn't go to the room again for another half-hour. Then I found him awake, and he got up at once and took the tray from my hands with a little bow, as if I'd been a queen. Of course I didn't tell him what I'd jest heard; and he didn't say nothing about havin' a bad dream. When he had finished his lunch he wanted to pay me; but I couldn't take money from *him*.

"You know I hated to see him start off again.

I wanted to say, 'You have somethin' on your mind. Tell an old lady who's noted for keepin' her own counsel.' But you know how it is yourself; the words won't come through. So I let him go, and watched him down the road, Rover at his heels as if he was sorry, too. Once I almost called after him; then thought better of it, or worse. Now have I proved the alibi you're after?"

"You have, Mrs. Wilson, to the queen's taste. You've saved an innocent man from the chair. But would you like the details of the story?"

"Every one of 'em," she said solemnly. "Though, first, let me tell you that I never saw anything I was so glad to see as that handkerchief lying back of the sofa. It was a good one, I knew—and, thinks I, 'Mebbe it's one of a set; mebbe he'll stop back this way for it.' I went straight to the kitchen and washed and ironed it. Then when the young people come I was foolish enough to show it to 'em. Alice, she grabbed it and said, 'Roger must have this. He likes 'em big and fine.'"

"'But suppose the young man comes back for it?' Then Alice, she laughed and laughed, as if I was talkin' foolish. 'A man come back for a dropped handkerchief! Why, he won't know where he left it, Aunt Abby. You're dreamin'. Roger might as well have the use of it, all fresh and nice's it is now.'" Well, I wasn't very pleased, but there's no use arguin' with a girl in love. And she had her way, and promised jokingly to send 'my young man,' as she called him, another one if he ever turned up."

"Well, it's lucky she insisted," Dewitt said. "Otherwise we might never have been able to prove this alibi. You see, he thought he was in

the Shawangunks. Now do you want the story?"

"Do I!"

He told her the main features, and she listened like a Desdemona to the tale. From the varying expressions of her face he could almost hear her running mental comments. Baffled, puzzled, she was, but not incredulous. Here was that *rara avis* among humans, a woman who would suspend her verdict indefinitely to arrive at last at the truth. Dewitt was glad of the opportunity to get the light of her shrewd common-sense on the subject.

"You say three people saw him at the quarry pit?" she asked. "Now let me get 'em straight—the lady, her servant and that hermit."

"Right."

She pondered a moment. "It stands to reason they saw somethin' at the very moment he had a bad dream in my best room. That is, if it was along towards four-thirty."

"Just about that time."

"Now, agreein' that they saw somethin', just what'd they see?"

She paused, her serious gaze fixed upon him.

"I've exhausted my theories," said Dewitt.

"What are yours?"

"Well, grantin' they saw somethin'—three reliable people—what they saw was either a ghost or a man. It was either a real shape or it wasn't."

"Right you are, if by ghost you are willing to admit under that term illusion, second-sight, or even what might be called wireless photography; or the printing on the atmosphere by a force even more powerful than electricity—the mental impression of a dreamer at a distance."

“I’m willing to try anything once,” was her cheerful answer. “What’s that about wireless photography?”

“An art they’ve not yet perfected in the world of electrical experiment, but which may spontaneously manifest itself in unusual cases, such as the one we’re discussing. As I read the case so far—remember, I say so far—I see a man in a highly-wrought state projecting through space, by the medium of a dream, the material of that same dream so perfectly and vividly that it becomes real to three people many miles away. Gordon Brent never said anything to me of a dream. Perhaps it was lodged so deep in his sub-conscious self that on waking he could not recover it.

“But in that sub-conscious state he was intensely active, concentrated and forceful. I can speak freely to you. Remember that for months he had been brooding over the engagement of the woman he loved best to a man he mistrusted and disliked, that during this period he had fought intermittently against those impulses of murder and destruction which come to the best of us. Therefore, these impulses could have no escape in his conscious and waking state. But on her wedding day, a day of supreme pain to him, a day calculated to focus all the antagonism of his nature against the man who married her, this hatred, this desire for destruction, is released in a dream—and with such powerful an effect that it accomplishes at a distance what the dream itself presented. The subject calls out, ‘My God! I’ve killed him!’ ”

“The very words,” she confirmed solemnly.

“I think I read in them,” Dewitt said, “the

instant recoil of an essentially sound nature, even in sleep, from a dreadful deed. The real Gordon Brent did not consent to the act—or rather was seized with horror the second after its committal.”

Abby Wilson rocked a while as if rocking helped her to think. Then she rose and put a few sticks of wood on the fire. “He did commit murder, then,” she commented. “That is, if you hold the theory that the wireless-photography Gordon Brent was at the quarry pit. Could a ghost push a man in?”

“No jury would admit it,” said Dewitt, “and they would be right. Look what frightful confusion it would make: criminals everywhere could claim that their unconscious astral bodies had committed deeds; that they themselves were hundreds of miles away. Gordon Brent is the luckiest man in the world to get his alibi proved. No, a jury would be dead right in throwing out any such theory. Indeed, such a case would never go to the jury. The judge would rule it out. It couldn’t get inside a court room; and yet three people at the quarry hole saw Gordon Brent push Martin Carfax into it!”

“All reliable?”

“All reliable. But how could a lawyer stand up in court and tell a jury that Ramah Tong, one of the witnesses, was probably the sensitive-plate that made the vision visible to the others? As I told you a little while ago, Tong is a highly developed East Indian, mediumistic, impressible, eminently adapted to arrest and focus any such Marconi as flashed through the air from the depths of Gordon Brent’s troubled spirit.”

Aunt Abby’s bright eyes became meditative.

“Do you think,” she asked after a pause, “that this Indian is on the level?”

“Just what do you mean?”

“Would he have any object in getting rid of Martin Carfax and fixing a crime on Mr. Brent?”

Dewitt pondered a moment. “I’ve thought of that—heaven knows what I haven’t thought of—but, you see, no one could arrest Tong now any more than they could arrest Gordon Brent. Brent has his alibi. Who could prove that Tong’s machinations on the spiritual plane—granting there are any—were directed toward the accomplishment of a dreadful plot? It’s as nearly out of the question as murder in a dream. We worked on the theory, remember, that Brent did wander—fast asleep—to the quarry hole in a state of what is called somnambulistic automatism. That fortunately we are not called upon to verify; though two or three cases are on record of murder being committed in sleep.”

“It gets more tangled up every minute,” Aunt Abby complained.

“Looks that way. For the letter remains, the unclaimed and now lost letter directed to the man who committed the murder at the Bostwick farm. Either that was a haphazard joke perpetrated with astonishing coincidence a day after Martin Carfax was killed, or it was written by a fourth witness of whom we have no knowledge. The hermit couldn’t have written it. Tong couldn’t have written it. Christine could not have written it. Who did write it, and what was his motive? The recovery of that letter would mean everything to us now. Mr. Brent’s alibi is, of course, the all-essential matter; but there’s enough



mystery left to spur any normal detective into going on with the case. And I shall go on."

"Them Indians worry me," Aunt Abby said. "Are you sure this Tong doesn't know that other fellow with the queer name?"

"You mean Ghira Lora, I suppose. That's one of the trails I'm on; and it may trace back to an Indian temple in a town or village of whose very name I'm ignorant. It's perfectly possible, you know, that these Indians might be well acquainted with Tong, and yet Tong be ignorant of their very existence. The 'Brotherhood' is evidently in some way mixed up with the story."

"Suppose this," she went on, "suppose he had once been a member of the Brotherhood, too, was still a member, wanted to get money; perhaps get a whole family into his power as he seems to be doing, might have done but for this alibi. The father contracted a disease in India, you say, that killed him; the brother is shot; the young lady's bridegroom is killed and her lover thrown into jail. You say this servant Tong has almost the whole say-so in the young lady's house—looks dangerous to me."

"And dangerous also to me," Dewitt said earnestly. "That theory has come back to me again and again. The only person observed near the scene of the murder resembled Tong—the person who called Raymond Harcourt on the telephone to lure him to the death he just escaped knew the nickname, 'Buddha,' that Raymond had bestowed upon Tong. On the other hand, I have an Indian rosary, dropped by Ghira Lora. Two missing beads from it that I found proved Ghira Lora to have been the one who slept at the hermit's and the man who put the warning note to

me on the sleeping porch. The hermit himself identified Ghira Lora as the man who killed the other Indian. At least, Ghira Lora wore the gray ulster and soft hat of the unknown visitor who slept at the hermit fellow's."

He was telling her things so frankly and circumstantially with a very well-defined object. He had done it before when cases threatened by their intricacy to baffle minds often too hampered by their own technique for clear judgment. As Molière read his plays to his cook, representing the majority of mankind whose reactions he sought rather than those of the limited literary circle, so Dewitt related his cases at times to people possessed of shrewd mother-wit unhampered either by precedent or theory—two elements often more like stones in the road than lamps by the way.

Elwell, he remembered, played not too good a hand at Auction—entangled by his own principles. "Prove a *theory* once; then abandon it," had been Dewitt's motto for a good many years; and side by side he placed with it, "Seek council not of specialists, but of the man in the street." Of course, juries had been gathered together from time immemorial on that identical principle.

Aunt Abby rocked and reflected. At last she got up with some determination. "I'm going to make some strong coffee, and fry a chicken. We'll have dinner. Mebbe a good meal will clear our thoughts."

"Your psychology is excellent," Dewitt said. "While you're preparing it, I'll run the car to the nearest telegraph office. I want to wire the district attorney's office that I have established my alibi and have my witnesses."

“Good!” she ejaculated, “it will be a real pleasure to know that boy’s out of jail—poor fellow. He must have suffered a lot.”

“I don’t know. I think, rather, he was dazed, and no wonder, when he was miles away in the mountains at the time he was supposed to be committing a murder.”

He left the two handkerchiefs with her, the sample and its mate.

“I’ll hide ’em where no one’ll get ’em,” she said. “So don’t you worry.”

But he did worry, for on his way to send the telegram new difficulties presented themselves to his anxious mind—too far-fetched, however, to disturb him seriously. No double of Gordon’s, he answered himself, could have picked up that handkerchief and lost it again at the farmhouse, nor would it be lost again. Over that he need not speculate. He had the word of “Aunt Abby,” that rock of common sense and reliability, and he would take her that afternoon to the county jail for the final identification. They might pick up Alice on the way to tell her part of the story.

He dispatched his telegram and drove his car back to the farmhouse, through the peaceful landscape over which a very happy light now seemed to play. The thought of the dinner was a pleasant one, and it seemed, as he approached the farm, that he could smell the appetizing odor of frying chicken.

It surprised him that Rover did not come out to meet him, and, alighting from his car, he was aware of a strange stillness, that hush of suspension when events have happened and their discovery is yet to come. All at once he stopped short with a cry. Across the little brick walk that

led to the kitchen door lay the dog, dead, shot through the head. Poor Rover was stretched out limp and pitiful! Dewitt gave one glance at him, then with a bound was at the kitchen door.

A smell of burning fowl met his nostrils. The parts of a chicken on a broiler over the coals were nearly black. Dewitt snatched the broiler from the stove and looked wildly around. "Aunt Abby! Mrs. Wilson!" he cried.

Only the silence answered him. For a moment he was quite beside himself. If harm had come to her he would never forgive his laxness. He dashed through the house calling, but no one answered; then into the garden, the barn, the out-houses.

All at once a weak, far-off voice, "Mr. Dewitt!"

He traced it at last to an old springhouse. There he found her on her knees, her hair disheveled, dress torn, her face as gray as the dead; and she was bending over something. Dewitt saw before him a man in a familiar ulster, lying face downward on the grass.

"I've got the handkerchiefs," she gasped.

Then Dewitt became conscious that he was brandishing the broiler, wildly waving it, indeed, in his agitation. Dropping it, he knelt beside her.

"I—shot him—or he shot himself, I don't know," she wailed. "I saw him take out—a pistol—after he had dragged me here to tell him—When I saw the thing in his hand and tried to knock it—it went off. Oh, I am afraid—I am afraid he's dead."

"If he is, there's no harm done, I assure you." He turned the figure over and gave a start. The face was strikingly like Tong's. "It must be Ghira Lora," he said, "and he's dead, I guess—

but we'll get a doctor before we get a coroner."

"Yes—but I'm certain there's little hope," she lamented, the old, motherly look returning to her agitated countenance, and Dewitt felt the symptoms in her of a real desire to assist the man she had accidentally shot in the effort to defend herself. There was something magnificent in this phoenix-rising from a sudden dreadful incursion into her peaceful life, of a wild storm from the outer world, from India itself.

She rose tottering to her feet, gently pushing aside Dewitt's proffered hand, as if she wished to assure him that everything was right; and the housewifely instinct returning to her across the waves of the tragedy, she seized the broiler with the blackened portions of fowl, and announced that she was going right on getting dinner. "But it won't be chicken," she said tremulously. "I couldn't kill *anything* now."

He insisted on seeing her back to the house, then returned for an intimate survey of the body. There was no pulse. The man was to all appearances dead. He lay there with a certain great disdain in his face, as if the East even in death was contemptuous of this tragedy out of the West. Very long he was—surely a tall man, tall as Tong and resembling Tong somewhat, enough to excuse the maid's mistaking him for Christine's servant the night Ray was shot.

What had been the motive for his crimes? What his connection, if any, with the initial tragedy? What tremendous grudge had he brought from the Orient, that he should follow its logic so persistently and bitterly? Dewitt thought of Tong's tale of the profaned temple. But that must have been a matter of eighteen or twenty

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years ago. Why had the Brotherhood—if there were a Brotherhood—waited so long for their revenge, to bring death or misery upon the innocent children of Adrian Harcourt?

The cheap, ugly clothes of Western cut could not obscure the dignity of Ghira Lora, who had at least possessed the almost extinct virtue of a strong conviction—for evil, yes, but still a strong conviction. To one moving among the shadow-like moods of hesitancy and compromise a certain stimulus toward good itself might be obtained, Dewitt thought, from this dead man's unwavering quest toward evil.

But it was no time to moralize, and he set out to fetch a physician and a coroner. Passing the kitchen to reassure himself that Mrs. Wilson was still keeping her wonderful poise, he had a vision of her pale but determined face with its intention that dinner should go on if the heavens crashed. After a word to her of his plans he started for his car, stopping on the way to remove the body of Rover to where she could not easily find it. According to his experience people sometimes went all to pieces over side-issues of a tragedy, people who had walked self-possessed all through its central significance.

At the town she had indicated he found the men he was in quest of, and sent them on ahead, remaining to get off a few telegrams. He had reached the point in his case at last when its elements fell into the right relation. That almost automatic process could be scheduled to take place when the whole paraphernalia of the contradictory aspects received into the depths of his consciousness rose to the surface, correlated and cleared. Sudden discoveries, sudden intuitions

there were, of course, in every mystery, criminal or otherwise; but never unprepared discoveries, unprepared intuitions. The logic that sprang into the light had been slowly gathering strength and proportion in the dark.

Yes, he knew now who had killed Martin Carfax, though the task of elucidating his facts, cutting off the obscuring clay from the figure toward which he could point the finger of the law—this task was still before him, by no means a light one.

On his return to the farm he found it no longer lonely and deserted. Neighbors from miles around had heard the news, and the farm yard was full of mud-bespattered cars, indicating the haste with which neighbors had driven to the scene of the tragedy. "Aunt Abby" was evidently much beloved, and the concern over her was strong and sincere. Several women had already volunteered to stay with her until it was certain that the nervous shock she had sustained would have no after effects. Dewitt was glad of this. He had put her in his small but choice gallery of women who could rise to an emergency.

The coroner's jury was formed on the spot, and brought in a verdict at once of accidental death, on Aunt Abby's testimony that the pistol had been in the Indian's hand; and in the struggle had gone off and killed him. Dewitt had a curious feeling that no matter what Aunt Abby might have said, the verdict would have been the same. People knew her—and that was enough.

Her testimony finished, she beckoned Dewitt into the "best room," and there produced two wet handkerchiefs. "Where do you think I hid 'em?" she said triumphantly. "Right at the bottom of a tub o' clothes I'd put to soak. After

you left I had a queer feelin'—a feelin' of bein' watched. Yet I couldn't see anything, and I put it down to nerves account of the kind of talk we'd been havin'. 'Where *shall* I hide these?' I thought, and then, 'What's the use of hidin' 'em, nobody here to steal 'em but Rover.' I kind o' laughed at myself, and I said, 'Abby Wilson, you just want to play you're part of a detective mystery, don't you? You ain't got much to amuse you up here on this old farm, so you're kind o' actin' out the part of assistant to a genuine detective.' "

"All this time I had the two handkerchiefs tight in my hand; and still with that creepy feelin', I thought, 'I won't put 'em in any draw, though I'll let on to.' It kind of amused me all the while—calling myself a silly old woman. Then I started for the kitchen, after opening and shutting a bureau drawer or two; and while rinsing out some pieces of the soaking clothes, I slipped the handkerchiefs to the bottom of the tub.

"It couldn't have been two minutes later that I thought I heard someone walking through the front rooms. My heart was in my mouth, but I said, 'Nerves again, Abby,' and took the cut-up chicken from the pantry and put it on the broiler, and put the broiler over the fire. While I was watching the chicken cook, a hand was laid on my shoulder.

"I must've jumped a foot, heavy as I am, when I saw that tall man looking at me with such an awful expression, very calm, but as if he meant some dreadful business. And it didn't take long to show me what it was. I could hear Rover barking and growling outside, poor old fellow, though what he thought in his dog mind he could



do to defend me I don't know. The Indian turned, went to the door, and I heard a pistol shot. I screamed out then, 'If you think you're going to frighten me that way, you're mistaken,' and I rushed past him out of doors. Somehow, all I wanted was to get outdoors. He grabbed me by the arm when I had gone a little ways. 'I don't want to kill you,' he said, 'but I want the handkerchiefs. *Where are they?*'

"Thought I, 'If I can keep him guessin' and huntin' for a while, mebbe someone'll come along to frighten him away. He shan't have them handkerchiefs—if I die for it!'—and I 'most did."

"Plucky," Dewitt ejaculated.

"I'm a strong woman. You can't do farm work for years and not get muscle. I could see he meant what he said. He didn't want to kill me; but he was willing to half-kill me to get me t' tell what I had done with the handkerchiefs. We dragged and pushed each other over to beyond the springhouse. Then he drew his gun. I struck at his hand and—" All at once she began to sob violently. "Me, killin' a man! Killin' him!"

"It's all right, Aunt Abby," Dewitt said gently. "There, there, it's all right." He was talking to her as if she were a little child, as, indeed, most people are who have bigness of nature. "Now you're going to believe you did the only thing you could do under the circumstances; you're going to take a hot cup of coffee, and by and by you and I are going to have the pleasure of seeing an innocent man freed from jail. I have wired Mrs. Carfax that you will spend the night at her home. Will someone here iron out those handkerchiefs for you?"

"Not much! I'll iron 'em myself!"

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He saw he had unconsciously touched the right chord to restore her to her familiar personality and extract her from the horror of an Abby Wilson who had killed a man.

The coroner had turned the body of the East Indian over to those concerned with the final obsequies, Dewitt having directed that this man should receive interment similar to that accorded his fellow-countryman and victim. Nothing remained to do at the farm—but wait for Aunt Abby to complete her ironing!

## XVIII

### WHITE VIOLETS

Christine, walking as if on air, followed the prison attendant down the long corridor, which now seemed to her transfigured into a portico of paradise. Gordon was free!—her heart was singing the words over and over—Gordon had come back to her from that strange wilderness of contradictions, doubts, inexplicable circumstances, plots and counter-plots which had formed a sinister and threatening background to their love; and despite their mutual faith in each other had turned romance into darkest tragedy. Now the menace was over. In deep humility and thankfulness she could await the perfect hour when their feet should tread the same sure road.

She had insisted that Frederick Dewitt should be the first to tell Gordon that he was free, for she felt that he had earned that privilege by his keenness and devotion. But she was following close upon his and Aunt Abby's visit.

"Mr. Brent has been taken to the sheriff's quarters," the attendant explained, "because certain formalities have to be gone through before he is officially released, but," he added, casting a sympathetic glance at her, "it won't seem much like a prison."

Pausing before a door he knocked, then stood aside to allow her to enter, and did not follow her.

"Gordon! Gordon!"

She could only repeat his name, while he clasped her to him as if he meant never to let her go again. He felt her tears against his cheek. When they were calmer she drew away, and they gazed at each other with the glorious look of lovers who have become prophets, reading the future by the heart's light. The enchanted moment annulled so many hours of suffering and unrest.

"We shall go on together, dearest," he said softly, "always together."

"Yes, not even death—"

"Not even death can separate us now, Christine. God meant our love to be."

"He is with all true lovers," she whispered, "but I had to learn to be true. Gordon, you'll forgive—"

"Hush, dear. That's all behind us."

He kissed her; then drew her to a window which commanded a view of the pillars of a little nearby porch. "I've been watching that little phoebe-bird up there under the eaves of the roof," he said. "She has her nest in a perilous place, but she's not troubled. Dear, it's good to have gone through so much to win you. One feels safe—protected by the very things that once threatened."

"Yes! I feel that, too. I shall be so happy when you are really out in the spring sunshine. There never was such sunshine. Oh, Gordon, I almost forgot—I've brought you something you wanted!"

She took a box out of her hand-bag while he said eagerly, "I know! It's the white violets." He lifted them from their bed of tissue paper, held them to his lips. "I did not dream that when

they came I should be free. Tell me—how is poor Ray?"

"The doctor thinks the coma will be broken in a few days; and he is out of danger, quite."

"Thank God! Christine, there's one friend we want to keep all our lives."

"Frederick Dewitt!" she answered him. "Hasn't he been splendid? And he's seeing the thing to the finish. He says he has his man, but he's keeping it a secret to surprise us. Oh, Gordon, this time tomorrow you'll be really free!"

"You set me free—when you came to me that first time in prison. Dearest, you'll be careful of yourself," he added anxiously. "You do look awfully white and thin."

"So do you, Gordon. Oh, there's a pair of us! We both look as if we'd been drawn through straws." They laughed, regarding each other appraisingly. "And that hair of yours," she went on, a gleam of long-ago teasings in her manner that delighted him, "that remarkable hair—well, you just look like a thin angel with a rather tumbled halo."

"You'd look angelic to me, Christine, if you were all colors of the rainbow. I hope there's a rainbow about us both."

"There is! fine weather ahead! and full of sunshine."

As if to confirm her words the sun, which had been under a cloud, came out at that moment, April-wise, with a sudden warm glow that flooded the bare little room.

"Isn't it wonderful," she said, "isn't everything wonderful?"

"You most of all!" he added softly.

## XIX

### THE CABLE

Two weeks later Dewitt was on his way to the studio of Gordon Brent, whom he had visited every day since his release from prison, partly to talk over the case with him; partly to protect him from the morbid curiosity of people who came from all over the country to look at the man who had been the central figure in a murder case, not yet cleared up, but from which he had been exonerated. Letters had flooded in from cranks of every description; and Gordon had laughed over many of them, with Dewitt.

The late April day was mild and full of warm and verdant messages of spring. The doors of Gordon's studio—a made-over barn on the outskirts of the town—stood open, and in the garden Gordon and the hermit were talking together. Not wanting to interrupt, Dewitt waited, watching at a distance for their conversation to be finished. Studying them together, he was impressed by the fact that art and nature could work along similar lines in the molding of the bodies of men. Spare, ascetic figures might be equally produced by forces as dissimilar as those working in the lives of a painter and a mountain recluse.

The hermit at last moved away and came toward the spot where Dewitt was standing. The detective had a friendly greeting for him, and then he asked:

“You’ve been on the look-out for any strangers up on the Bostwick farm?”

“Yes, ever since you told me you were thinkin’ there was a third man to help those other two; but I ain’t seen anybody. The day you were at my house, and left a note on the table for me, I was on the track of a feller that didn’t look good to me. Hercules, he’s asked me to shoo everybody away from the farm, everybody that hasn’t a written order from him to go over the house. Takes most of my time. Them as doesn’t want to see the house wants to look down the quarry hole. I told Hercules he could make his livin’ this summer fencin’ off the quarry hole and chargin’ so much a head for a look-in. He says he don’t want to start nothin’. He’s havin’ an iron fence built around it; and it’s goin’ to cost him a pretty penny.”

“Poor Hercules!” Dewitt exclaimed. “His property has been hard hit. Well, report to me at once if you see any suspicious characters.”

“Sure thing! You don’t want any peppermint extract, do you? I boil it right from the leaves. Awful good for cramps or colic.”

Dewitt laughed. “Not today, Haines, thanks.”

Gordon met him with, “Was he trying to sell you something? He generally works off packages of lavender on me, and I give them to the ladies who throng to see my immortal works.”

He spoke lightly, but he looked tired and worn. He had kept up in jail; outside of it he seemed to droop under the very weight of his new-found freedom and happiness.

“How is Christine?” he asked—the daily question; for he had scrupulously kept away from The Towers and would, Dewitt knew, for many

months. When these two resumed their engagement it would be on an everlasting basis. They could afford to wait, to be patient.

"She seems better than in days. We are looking every hour for an answer to the cable I sent to my friend in India, the American consul at that place with the unpronounceable name. Not a thing may come of it; but it won't be for lack of asking questions. We sent a cable that cost Mrs. Carfax a small fortune. Of course, it will take time to answer it. The little village of Horostan is not on the map; and everyone may be dead there who remembers Dr. Harcourt's activities against the plague spot—the swampy garden of a temple which had a bad reputation in more ways than one. From what Tong tells me its priests were not Buddhists, but sun-worshippers; the sun as the source of fecundity rather than illumination."

"The device on the Indian's collar would bear that out," Brent commented.

"Ghira Lora's rosary was a curious note of discord in the theory," Dewitt said, "but religious articles are not always used for their lawful purpose. I suppose prayers to the forces of evil could be said on beads as well as true prayers."

"Exactly," said Gordon, leading the way indoors, and to an easel on which stood a half-finished picture. "I've begun to work as you advised me," he said wistfully, "yet I find it hard to keep my mind on it. I find myself going off into speculation. I want the matter cleared up. I want to know who took my place at that pit. The theory of the wireless photography—the actual photograph of a dream I must have had, imprinted on the consciousness of three people



miles away—is all very well. But it's too near that strange world we all theorize over but never quite admit."

Dewitt laid his hand on Brent's shoulder. "Gordon, this will be cleared up in a few days. I know it!"

The artist's face was illuminated for a moment. "Dewitt, are you really on the track of the murderer?"

"I am!"

"You are confident that you know who pushed Martin Carfax into that pit?"

"I am."

"Why don't you make an arrest?"

"I am waiting for the cable from India."

"How can you get your proof from India?"

"Perhaps I am not getting it from there; but the cable may elaborate my case—or it may not."

"Listen, Dewitt. You don't suspect Tong?"

"How could Tong do it? He is far above you in height, broader than you are."

"But as conspirator?"

Dewitt laughed. "Gordon, suppose we wait."

"I'm willing. I can wait for anything now. Let me show you a letter from Roger Hinkley I received this morning. He's terribly pleased over my letting him keep the handkerchief. He and Alice are going to have it framed like a sampler. Can you beat that?"

On his way back through the village Dewitt stopped to see Brock, who had been ill in bed with an attack of influenza, and who since Gordon's release from jail had completely changed his manner toward Dewitt. The old surliness was gone, even the few last traces of it that showed occasionally after they had agreed to work to-

gether on the case. He never spoke of Carfax now—seemed pondering over his own readjustment to a changed point of view. But Dewitt felt that he must bring up the matter of the securities to elucidate his own theory that Carfax had taken them from the safe himself and given them to Ghira Lora, who used them to divert attention from himself and throw blame on Bender.

As yet Dewitt had no positive proof, however, that Carfax and Ghira Lora had ever met. A number of his younger associates had been trying to ferret the dead Indian's life in New York, but without success.

Brock, propped up in bed, gave Dewitt's hand a warm grasp. "Has your cable come?"

"Not yet."

"Anything new?"

"No."

"Anything you want to ask me?" he said with sudden, sharp intuition.

"Yes, if you don't mind unpleasant questions."

"Fire away. I guess I can stand anything now. How I wish that fool Bender was back. Had a letter from him this morning. He and the girl seem to be of the same mind yet, which is a wonder. Maybe they were really in love. That question you wanted to ask?"

"Just this," said Dewitt reluctantly. "Did Martin Carfax ever show interest in fortune-tellers, astrologers, or any of those people who make a living off the credulity of humans?"

Brock was silent a moment, then, evidently with reluctance, he said: "Yes, he did. At least I know he had his horoscope cast—must have been a fraud, for it said nothing of violent death. I think he mentioned once going to a crystal gazer.

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I used to make fun of him, but he didn't seem to care. Why are you asking?"

"Because it is my most plausible theory of how he became acquainted with Ghira Lora. That class of Easterner sometimes goes in heavily for the sort of cheap magic that brings in quick money. The police run them down sometimes, but oftener they are allowed to flourish. Human nature is too much for the law; and the gullible prevail, as they succumb. Not that Carfax," he added with quick courtesy, "mightn't have fallen into Ghira Lora's acquaintance some other way."

"No, I believe you may be right," commented Brock brusquely. "Martin—I guess we won't—"

He broke off—turned his head away a moment, then said: "Well, the securities are back with the woman who owns them, and Ray's name is cleared. So far, so good!"

On this they dropped the subject. Dewitt, having an errand in East Burleigh, soon took his departure. But on his way to the garage he stopped to see Christine to take her the daily message he brought from Gordon. Tong met him at the door.

"A cable has come from India, honorable sir," he exclaimed with an air of excitement. "Madame is in the library."

He found Christine bending over a blue sheet of paper, evidently trying to decipher the code upon which they had agreed. "Oh, I'm so glad you've come! I can't quite make it out."

Dewitt examined it. "Why, it's easy," he said. "We have something now," he went on after a pause, "not much, but a bit of confirmation. Let me read it to you.

“ ‘Three families at Horostan remember temple; sun brotherhood existed; bad lot. One old man swears vengeance was vowed on Doctor by priests. All left Horostan fifteen years ago. One went to China. One founded temple somewhere in Egypt. No trace of others. Buddhist priests hostile to Brotherhood. Suspected of serious crimes. British Government aided in suppressing them after Harcourt’s attack on temple.’

(Signed) ‘Briggs.’

“Good boy,” Dewitt murmured.

“Does it help you?” Christine asked.

“Considerably. It strengthens my theory that money was not their primary object. They could use plenty—witness Ghira Lora’s buying of stock market tips from the valet Bender—but I do believe that revenge on your family was really their object. They attempted the life of your brother; they tried to involve you in a faked murder case, I mean *faked* as far as Gordon was concerned.”

“You still believe a murder was committed by one of them at the quarry pit?”

“I am not saying who committed the crime. But I believe it was not a vision.”

“You believe that a bona fide person, dressed to resemble Gordon, pushed—Mr. Carfax—into the pit?”

“Yes!”

“Who?”

Again he smiled. “That’s telling.”

“I suppose I’ll have to wait, like everyone else,” she sighed.

“Yes, but think in what peace you are waiting,”

he said gently. "All you have to do now is to go on quietly to a sure goal."

Her eyes filled with tears. "God bless you."

"I hope He'll bless us all! we have need of it on this distracted planet. By the way, have you seen our 'Aunt Abby' lately?"

"No. I am going to spend a Sunday with her soon."

"That's good. She's the real thing—goes back to the farm; accepts a happy puppy from the neighbors to bring up in place of Rover; resumes her life. Fine work!"

On his way out he encountered Hodgson, who looked the picture of despair. "Mr. Brock's cook, sir, tells me Grace is happy with that villain Bender. I say it ain't a fair world!"

"Hodgson, many women have been happy with villains. Maybe they're more entertaining. I don't know!"

It was cold comfort to give the poor butler, Dewitt thought, as he drove his car toward Miss Almira's post office. Half way there he passed another car in trouble on the side of the road and, recognizing it as Chalmers', slowed down and got out.

"Hello! what's up?"

"Busted tire," said Chalmers wearily.

"Thought you'd gone back to New York."

"Tried to. Couldn't overcome my disposition to stick around and find something that might pull me off in a blaze of glory from the Carfax case. You have two dead Indians and a dead dog to your credit, a threat from a Brotherhood and Lord knows what else! What has little Morgan Chalmers but his gardenia?"

"Chalmers, you old goat, why did you go bark-

ing up wrong trees? I've spotted the man while you've been furnishing mistaken headlines to the daily papers."

"Spotted him, have you! Why the devil don't you arrest him?"

"Give me time, give me time," Dewitt answered. "Now that Brent's out we can take our time. By the way, I wish you could have witnessed that identification scene in jail, when Aunt Abby was led up to Brent. She almost hugged him, she was so glad to see him; and I think he did hug her—and well he might."

"Well, the fair lady and the artist will be happy some day, I suppose."

"Looks likely. Can I help you? No? Well, so long."

He found Miss Almira in her little post office with Snooper, large and drowsy, ornamenting the glass show-case.

"Any more letters with strange addresses, Miss Almira?" he greeted her.

She shook her head. "Plenty of unclaimed letters, but not *our* unclaimed letter."

"Weren't we geese not to read it right away?" he ventured.

"Yes, and yet you couldn't blame us," she said. "Neither of us had committed a murder. We couldn't open it, now could we?"

"Of course not; but we ought to have put it in a safe or something. By the way, Miss Almira, do you remember our old theory that the fellow who mailed it, and the fellow who stole it, were working at cross purposes?"

"Indeed, I do," she exclaimed. "We decided that the man who posted it wanted something

known, and the man who stole it wanted something suppressed."

"Well, granted that the man who stole it must have known that it had been posted. Who told him? Naturally, not the fellow who mailed it."

Her eyes grew big with excitement. "No, he wouldn't—'course he wouldn't."

"Then we have only two theories left to choose from. A third person knew of the letter and spilled the beans; or someone was here in the post office that morning who caught a glimpse of the address and was resolved to get that letter by hook or crook."

She nodded, half frightened by the idea that she might have held the letter so carelessly that its address was visible to one person at least.

"No one inspired just by curiosity would take jail risk of breaking into the post office and tampering with the United States mail—would they?"

"No, indeed," she said in a shaky voice. "Nobody in the village would do such a thing, and there are more busybodies in East Burleigh than you can shake a stick at."

"Then," said Dewitt, "it must have been a criminal, an experienced criminal, vitally interested in obtaining possession of that letter because it would interfere with plans of his own."

"Seems so to me," she assented.

"He broke in then and got it. But that would not be likely to happen if what three people saw at the quarry were a mere vision cast on the atmosphere by a powerful force working at a distance. A letter could hardly be addressed to a ghost?"

She shook her head solemnly.

“Now let’s go back a bit. What seems to me very likely is, that when you were looking at that letter you attracted someone’s attention in the office by the interest it inspired in you, and he spied. Now can you remember, Miss Almira, who was in the post office that morning? Were there any people strange to you?”

She reflected a moment. “There was quite a crowd that mornin’, and of course they’s always strangers. Come to think of it, there *was* a tall, dark man. I thought he was a dago, we have so many of ’em around. But I didn’t give him two looks.”

Dewitt took a photograph from his pocket. “This is a picture of Ghira Lora, taken after death.”

“Why! it looks like Tong,” she cried.

“There’s a strong resemblance, I agree. Tong can’t see it, neither can Mrs. Carfax; but the modeling of the head is alike. Does this look like your man in the post office?”

She studied it awhile. “It looks like a dago, and I thought he was a dago, that tall man. He was dressed in a gray overcoat.”

“Enough,” Dewitt exclaimed joyfully. “It was Ghira Lora!”

“This dead man?”

“Yes, this East Indian. The gray overcoat was a clue we’ve been following. He saw the letter’s address somehow, and I suppose you were thinking more of the letter than of a possible on-looker.”

“Yes. I guess I was,” she said slowly. “To get such a thing—why, it was like finding one of them little dangerous field vipers in the mail. I wish I had locked it up tighter.”



For answer Dewitt drew the letter from his pocket and laid it on the desk before her. She gave a little scream. "Land's sakes! where'd you get it?"

"I can't tell you yet, Miss Almira. But I have it, and I'll keep it this time."

She stared at him. "Why, you're a wizard, Frederick Dewitt. Say, is your mother livin'? She'd be most awful proud."

"No, she isn't living. I'm alone in the world—yet always in a crowd."

"Have you read the letter?"

"No."

"Not even held it to the light?" she exclaimed, and then blushed over her innocent self-betrayal.

"Not even held it to the light," he repeated with a little smile. "I intend to deliver it intact to the man who committed the murder. Since, very sensibly, he didn't claim it, I shall put it into his hands."

"You must be awful careful," she warned him. "Think of all the guns that have gone off lately. We don't want you shot."

"Oh, I shall be safe enough. Don't worry. I'm on my way to get my warrant now."

"Hush!" she whispered, "here comes Hercules."

That discouraged owner of hoodooed real estate entered the post office with an air of one who expects only trouble to come out of the daily mail.

"Mornin'," he said to Dewitt. "Bizness a bit slack now, eh?"

"Yes, we're resting on our hoe for a few minutes, but we may resume and dig up something else," Dewitt answered. "Haines tells me you're

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putting an iron fence or railing around the quarry hole."

"Township made me do it," Hercules replied. "Since I can't fill the dang-blasted thing up, I suppose it's the best job to fence it now and get it over with. I sez to the workmen, I sez, 'If any of you falls in, don't come back on me for damages. I won't pay 'em.'"

"Right you are," laughed Dewitt, and was off on the errand which he hoped would bring into full light the elements of a case unduplicated in all his experience. Another visit to the quarry hole might be necessary before the changes made by Hercules' workmen had obliterated the features of the place as it was on the day of the Carfax murder.

## XX

### THE READING OF THE LETTER

He telephoned Gordon, asking him if he would like to take the walk to the quarry hole; and after a momentary hesitation the artist accepted and agreed to join Dewitt in the village of East Burleigh as soon as he could get a car to bring him.

"I am meeting Chalmers up there," Dewitt said. "He thinks the day is worth the trip. We might have dinner together somewhere afterward."

Gordon agreed, much to Dewitt's satisfaction. He had grown to like Brent very much, and meant to strengthen in a personal way the ties begun in his official capacity.

Spring had fully claimed the lower slopes of Outlook Mountain, hanging it in green, and filling its hollows full of little pale scentless flowers. In the soft sunshine they toiled up the long slopes, talking of everything but the murder case—Einstein's *Relativity*; Batik; the situation in Europe; present feminine tendencies; strikes, and the latest painter to astonish Paris.

"And then you go back to nature," said Brent, "and she's making spring flowers same as usual."

"The old lady outlives all novelties," assented Dewitt. "We have to go back to her to imbibe any real wisdom."

Today she had outdone herself in the display of vernal beauty. "Even the old quarry hole

ought to lose its horror under such a sky," Gordon said.

It had at least shaken off something of its deserted dreadfulness by the presence now of several men, and a hot little engine for the drilling of the holes that were to support the iron posts. Hercules had apparently determined to do a thorough job while he was about it.

Chalmers detached himself from a group that included the hermit and some farmers of the neighborhood, who were assembled under that strong instinct of human nature which delights in watching other people work. That Beau Brummell of the detective force, having got his car in order and preferring any mode of travel to pedestrianism, had arrived some time before. He waved a hand dramatically toward the field of operations.

"No murder mysteries here any more, unless they climb over a high-pointed fence. How surely the precautions of civilization ruin romance and tragedy! What would the Greeks have done with Orestes—pursued not by the furies, but a racing car. Soon we will all be so protected we'll be forced to flee to dreams, as you did, Mr. Brent, for melodrama."

"Don't be too sure," commented Dewitt. "They have cut down some trees here, haven't they?"

"Looks like it," Gordon said. "Snakes! what an ugly place that hole is. It seems worse with the sunshine pouring into it. Well, where do we go from here, boys?"

"Just a minute," said Dewitt. "I brought some mail up the mountain to save an acquaintance a walk."

He advanced to the hermit, held out the letter addressed "To the person who committed the murder at the old Bostwick farm," and said in a loud voice, "The sheriff has a warrant for your arrest, Haines, as the man who killed Martin Carfax on April first, and as an accessory to the shooting of Raymond Harcourt, on April third."

For a moment there was a silence as of the grave. Then a groan from the hermit, and an outcry from the group about him, as the sheriff emerged from the forest. The man sank on his knees.

"For God's sake, have mercy!" he cried. He was clutching the letter in his hands convulsively, his eyes rolled heavenward as if wildly looking for rescue from the firmament.

"Get up, Haines," Dewitt commanded. "You will go first to your cabin. I have evidence there which I wish to show these gentlemen." As he spoke he leaned forward and gave a twitch to the hermit's white beard, which fell off and with it at least fifteen years. Haines stood revealed, clean-shaven, with a lean, sharp face now blanched with unmistakable terror.

"Gosh!" a farmer exclaimed, "I used to wonder how Haines grew that beard in such a short time."

The hermit looked from one to the other with the glare of a trapped and feeble animal in his visionary eyes.

"I ain't guilty! You dare arrest me! you dare!" Then with a sudden change of tone he let the letter drop and clasped his hands together. "Ghira Lora could tell you the truth, and he's dead. Gentlemen, I'll convince you! Gentlemen, there's smoke, there's fire. I don't deny nothin'

—but gimme a chance—lemme speak—lemme tell my story.”

“You shall speak when we ask you to,” said Dewitt. “Now Sheriff, Chalmers, Brent, come along. I have important evidence in his cabin. We’ll go there first. No one else is invited,” he said with a smile, waving back an eager group that showed symptoms of forming a procession to the cabin. They fell back reluctantly, and the hermit and those named took up their march.

The old cabin in its bareness and desolation seemed to offer very little in the shape of tangible evidence against its owner. The dog, lying before the fire, rose when they entered and went whining to his master as if he scented trouble. Dewitt, who had picked up the letter when the hermit dropped it, now put it in his pocket and buttoned his coat over it.

“We shall read this,” he said, “when Haines has told his story. And the closer you stick to the truth, Haines, the better it will be for you.”

Chalmers lit a cigarette with his usual nonchalance, and tipped his chair comfortably back against the wall. The sheriff settled himself on a low seat with the air of a man who expects a long session. The hermit, his lips working convulsively, kept his eyes fastened on Gordon Brent, in whose face alone he saw a shadow of sympathy. Brent was restless, walked from the fireplace to the door and from the door back to the fireplace.

“Have a chair, Gordon,” Dewitt suggested.

“No, I’ll move around if nobody minds.”

“Now, Haines,” commanded Dewitt, “tell your story. Remember, we have evidence that *should* send you to the chair. But since you have begged for a chance to clear yourself, we’re going to give

it to you. Begin at the beginning—if it goes back ten years.”

“It goes back five,” the man quavered, “mebbe more than five years. They come here to work on the Ashokan reservoir. They was among the last employed.”

“Who’s they?”

“Ilah Dann and Ghira Lora.”

“Were they friends?”

“They was then.”

“Where did they come from?”

“India, but they told me first Italy, and I didn’t know no different. They looked like dagoes to me.”

“How did they happen on you—where did they meet you?”

“At a dago boarding house, when I was sellin’ lavender and pep’-mint essence for cramps. It was near the reservoir. We got talkin’ Scripture, and Ilah Dann he said he could tell me things that weren’t in the Bible ef I wanted to hear ’em—awful queer things about demons and spirits, and the worshippin’ of forces, and genii that would bring you precious stones. I hadn’t had nothin’ much in my life except work and livin’ alone, and I had seen queer things myself midnights and all. ‘Come along and tell me,’ I says. ‘Nobody up this way ever tells me anything.’”

“Well, they come, and for awhile it was awful pleasant. They told me not to tell anyone about their comin’, and I noticed they kept to themselves and never seemed to arrive by the path—just sprung out of the woods, like. They asked me a lot of questions about all the families on my herb-and-essence route, knowin’ I got as far as Highland Park. The servants told me a lot at every

house, so I told 'em what I knew. They mentioned the Harcourts some—not much—and after a while they didn't speak of anybody at all, and I used to think that they had found out a lot for themselves.

“That was the best time—before they told me what they'd come for and the land they set out from. It was India—not Italy. That was the best time,” he stumbled on, “for they kep' their word, Ilah Dann in partickler. Told me stories like that book they call 'Rabian Nights:' and he said he could do queer things ef he wanted—like drawin' lightnin' out of a cloud and seein' what was goin' on at a distance. Long after, he claimed he had seen the Harcourt boy leave California. I don't believe it. I think they had someone out there spyin' on the lad.

“Well, as I was sayin', it was the happiest time. They brought me things—”

At this juncture Dewitt interrupted him. “Sheriff,” he said, “will you keep guard while Chalmers, Brent and I bring down that big sailor's chest upstairs? I meant to do it before we began. I'll need the chest before very long and we might as well get it now.”

The interruption consumed several minutes, for the chest was heavy and the united efforts of the three could scarcely manage it, but it was placed in the center of the group, and the hermit was asked to proceed.

“I was sayin', they brought me things—queer oils in pretty bottles, knowin' I liked scent; and beads and silk stuffs they said I could sell for big sums. I never wanted to sell 'em, but I used to take 'em out of the chest and run my hand over 'em.



“I used to wonder why they was so friendly. Ilah Dann said he would teach me ‘black art,’ he called it, and then the world would be mine and all things therein. I wisht I’d sent him away then. Oh, I do wish it.”

He buried his face in his hands and rocked his thin body to and fro. The fanatic in him, the religious enthusiast whose curiosities had carried him into the power of strong men with masterful wills able to govern his weak spirit and unbridled imagination—these aspects of the man became clearer with every word he spoke.

“Well, by and by,” he continued when he was calmer, “that good time was over; and they tell me that they come from India, not Italy, and was great priests of a Brotherhood that served a terrible god with a queer name. They said Doctor Harcourt, the father of Mrs. Carfax, had profaned their temple; and they had vowed to kill him and all his race; but with slow, prolonged sufferin’s. What he done I don’t know.

“They hated Tong, though he didn’t know they lived. I guess they knew he was faithful and had as much knowledge as themselves, or more. Whether they was after money, too, was dark to me. Ghira Lora, he always seemed to have money --and that made the quarrel at last and the fight between him and Ilah Dann. Dann never seemed as fierce as Ghira Lora. . . . Well, I’m wanderin’ from the tale.

“After while they both tell me they’re goin’ to New York to open an astrologer’s office. They said it would have to be private because it was against the law; but they were goin’ to let some people know—”

“Martin Carfax among others,” Dewitt com-

mented quietly. The hermit turned an astonished face to him.

“You knew that? Well, it’s true. Ghira Lora, I think, wanted money out of him, and he knew the man had queer notions. Carfax came a good deal to Ghira, and they were friends. You see, Ghira wanted somethin’, and Carfax wanted somethin’; and Ghira was goin’ to help Carfax to get what he wanted, and then kill him. Carfax must have talked a lot to him about Mr. Brent, for Ghira talked of him a lot—used to say it was easy to get anything from men in love; easy to play ’em off against each other.

“By that time I sort o’ hated ’em both, and I’d have broke loose only I didn’t know where to go where they wouldn’t find me. I had a fear of ’em—and they knew I was afraid. They used to say, ‘You’re in as deep as us, and you got to go on now.’ They said they would take me to India when it was all over; and I would have gold and jewels, and be a king or a priest or sultan. I always wanted to see strange lands, and I used to dream nights of goin’ to India, but wishin’ it wasn’t with ’em.”

His head drooped. He seemed to have forgotten his auditors and to be far away in some dream of an ancient land. Dewitt, watching the expressions of his companions, saw that the sheriff and Chalmers at least believed the man half mad.

The hermit sighed and resumed. “One night Ghira come up from New York, alone. That was back in January. He sat over the fire very late with me, talkin’ in his purrin’ voice like a great cat. ‘Haines,’ he said, ‘this Carfax man is got to be put out of the way.’

“‘What do you mean?’ I asked, and a cold chill went over me.

“He sat smilin’ for some time, and then he opened a suitcase, a small, light one he used to carry.”

“Stop,” said Dewitt. “What he showed you is now in that chest.”

“How do you know?” asked Haines sullenly.

“Because I was all through the chest for evidence the day I left a note on your table here. I am not gifted with second sight like your Indians. That chest contains not only the gewgaws they bribed you with, but the other half of the handkerchief that was torn at Niagara Falls when Ghira Lora tried to get it from me, on the chance of its being Brent’s.”

As he spoke he raised the lid and took out a white fragment of linen. “I’ll match this for you, gentlemen,” he said. “But now, before I show you what Ghira Lora showed Haines, let me ask a question. Haines, when young Harcourt went West, did either Ilah Dann, or Ghira Lora, speak of his being charged with theft?”

The hermit shook his head. “No; but Ghira showed me some papers, bonds or suthin’, he said Carfax had asked him to keep for him; and he said that proud woman, Christine Harcourt, would have to marry Carfax now. You see, they didn’t tell me much after all. I pieced a good deal together.

“Well, he opened the suit-case, and he showed me—”

“I’ll show the gentlemen,” said Dewitt. Raising the lid of the chest, he took out a wig, the exact color of Brent’s hair, and a papier-maché mask—modelled and delicately tinted to a re-

markable reproduction of his face. At sight of it Brent stood stock-still, then exclaimed:

“That life mask a year ago!”

Dewitt wheeled about. “Was there a life mask taken of your face a year ago? Why on earth didn’t you mention it? Man alive!”

“Mention it! I’d forgotten all about it; and if I had remembered I probably wouldn’t have connected it with this trouble. There was a fellow that summer making life masks of the artists when we were all up at East Burleigh. He seemed dreadfully poor; so nearly everybody dug down in his pocket to help an allied fellow-craftsman who was down on his luck. I remember he made several, but I told him he could keep mine. I didn’t want the ghastly thing around.”

“What was this mask fellow like?” the sheriff asked.

“A melancholy, black-bearded object, rather glum.”

Dewitt handed the thin papier-maché mask around. All inspected it.

“Good job,” Chalmers commented. “Of course, you’ve got the face for it, Brent—clean-cut features, and so on—not like my round, ingenuous countenance.”

Haines waited patiently while they examined the thing. Dewitt meanwhile had taken a suit of clothes out of the chest, a suit of the particular blue Brent was accustomed to wear, “because of his copper head,” as he explained to his friends.

“Here we have the outfit, gentlemen. Stand up, Haines; stand back to back with Mr. Brent.”

The two figures were exactly of a height and of a suprisingly similar build. “I ask you all,” Dewitt said, “if Mrs. Carfax and Tong hadn’t

every reason to be deceived by so accurate a disguise on a figure so exactly similar in height, proportion—everything?”

“O, but I didn’t kill him—I didn’t throw him down!” the hermit wailed.

Dewitt turned sharply upon him. “Do you deny that you wore this disguise April first? Do you deny that you had it on several days after the Harcourt shooting, when you went to meet Ghira Lora on some unknown errand at the ever-green walk, where you were seen by the Carfax cook? You were in Highland Park that day, I know, selling your wares, for she told me so.”

“Yes, I went there that day to meet Ghira,” the hermit assented. “He kind o’ wanted me to be seen around; and after they were all talkin’ of ghosts and visions he thought it would be a likely plan of mystification to put on that dress, and let myself be seen by them who would talk but wouldn’t act.”

“Exactly,” said Dewitt. “I had just three strong clues to direct me to you. The fact that you said you witnessed the murder, and yet no one had seen you; nor did you, contrary to the reputation you always held of being a humane man, attempt to rescue the unfortunate victim—but slipped away, thinking it was ‘movies,’ you said. That was the first clue, Haines—”

“But I didn’t commit the murder,” he wailed. “Wait—let me tell you!”

“Let me speak,” Dewitt commanded sternly. “You have my first clue. My second was the cook’s testimony that Mr. Brent’s face had a fixed look. That could mean one of two things, as Mr. Brent was in jail miles away: either his exact double was there; or someone *dressed* to

resemble him. The fixed look suggested the second theory, for it favored the idea of a mask."

Chalmers was gazing at Dewitt with great admiration. "And your third clue, Dewitt?"

"The footprint at the evergreen walk—exactly the size of this man's shoes. I was fortunate enough to find a pair in the loft. Now go on, Haines. What did you say when Ghira Lora showed the mask and the suit to you?"

"I said, 'Who are these for?'"

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'For you.'"

The sepulchral tone in which the hermit uttered the words brought to Dewitt's mind the scene—the lonely cabin in that mountain wilderness; the plotting Indian, like a great black spider displaying the instruments of a diabolical scheme; and the fateful "For you" falling doom-like on the entangled hermit's ears.

"I said, 'What use have I for them?' Ghira didn't tell me at once. It was a way of his to begin talkin' of somethin' else when you ast him a question. So he says, 'It's queer how folks that have a fear are always runnin' after it, instead of away from it—lookin' for trouble, so to speak. I know a woman who's afraid of spiders, and goes regular to look at the big tropical specimens in the Natural History Museum of New York.'

"'What has that got to do with this dress?' I says, and my teeth chattered so I could scarcely speak.

"Ghira smiled. 'And snakes is the same way,' he says. 'People that hates 'em wants to look at 'em.'

"'You give me the shivers, Ghira,' I said. He

seemed like somethin' creepin', creepin' up to me—to spring at my throat.

“‘And some hates deep places,’ he went on. ‘And will go to look at ’em—even on a weddin’ day.’”

“‘Who likes a deep place?’ I asked.

“‘Do you know the quarry hole?’ he says.

“‘Do I know my own house?’ I says. ‘I’m neighbor to the quarry hole these many years.’”

“‘Mr. Martin Carfax wants to see it,’ he said.

“‘Well, what of it?’ I ask.

“‘You’re to push him in,’ he said.

“‘I cried out then, screamed out, for I was in mortal terror of him. He waited till I got quiet, then he said, ‘I’ve told Mr. Carfax often about the quarry hole. He’s lookin’ for a farm for himself and bride—a toy to play with. I’ve told him where he wants to go for his weddin’ trip, Outlook House. “That’s good,” he said. “Folks always expect you to go far away from home, honeymoonin’. We’ll fool ’em, be quite near.” You can look at the farm and the quarry hole on the way up there. It’s only a half mile or so off the main road, I suggested to him.’”

The hermit paused. He was shaking like a leaf, as if the whole scene were much too clear to him. “‘I asked him if he knew the lady, too. He said no. Martin never wanted her to know about his bein’ friendly with astrologers, and so on. Then he gives me the dreadful look again. ‘You wait, wait till they come along. The rocks is piled high, one side there. You can easy crouch behind ’em, thin as you are; and when he gets to the hole, you push him in. Then beat it.’”

“‘I tries to laugh. ‘Suppose they don’t come?’”

“‘They will,’ he cried. ‘If they don’t come that day, they’re sure to come some other.’

“‘How does he think you know so much about this neighborhood, Ghira?’ I asked, kind of exasperated and wantin’ to catch him, and he replied, ‘I told him I worked on the Ashokan. Astrologers aren’t wealthy. . . . Well, you better try on your clothes, Haines,’ he said then. ‘I won’t,’ I says. ‘What’s the man done—and what must I dress up for to kill him?’

“‘He told me that Carfax hasn’t done anything, but he was goin’ to hurt Mrs. Carfax by puttin’ the man she loved in jail. I was to represent him.

“‘But suppose they catch me?’ I said.

“‘They won’t,’ he says. ‘I’ll be watchin’, too, and if Tong pursues I’ll shoot him. Tong’s sure to be with ’em. He drives her always.’

“‘And you think,’ says I, ‘that she’d testify against her lover?’

“‘He laughed. ‘She’ll have to, sooner or later. For in a day or two you’ll wander into the village, and say’—well, gentlemen, just what I did say. He told me—every word.

Dewitt jumped in at this.

“‘And you still say you didn’t do this dreadful deed?’”

The hermit began to sob. “‘I swear it—oh, let me tell my story. Where was I—yes, he tells me I’m to see myself do the deed. Queer he should say just that. I am to see Gordon Brent do it—me, dressed like him and doin’ it.’”

“‘Where did Ilah Dann come in on this?’” asked Chalmers. “‘Wasn’t he going to help?’”

“‘Yes, he promised to keep watch for Ghira Lora, when Ghira was watchin’ me. They were



goin' to be convenient with a ladder and rope to help rescue, to keep suspicion right off 'em. They had the pistols. They had everything for any way events went. Ilah Dann would have never been killed, but he and Ghira quarreled over some money Martin Carfax had given Ghira. This was the night after the—the—”

“Say it,” commanded Dewitt, “say *murder.*”

“No!” shrieked the hermit.

Dewitt drew the letter from his pocket. “Will you open this?” he said sternly, “will you, as the person to whom it belongs, open this letter that I found slipped under the skins of the bed in the loft on which Ghira Lora slept? Remember, this isn't the only thing I have against you—this disguise. You were the one who slipped in and took Mr. Brock's pistol from his library drawer to throw suspicion on him or Bender, or even young Harcourt. You were not in your cabin that night. Ghira Lora had use for you in Highland Park.”

The hermit's face grew gray. “Lora sent for me. Ilah Dann had gone back on him because of this quarrel, and he'd found out, spyin' at the Harcourt place, that the young feller had come home—or mebbe he knew it from someone out West. I don't know,” he added drearily.

“You knew Bender and the other servants at the Brocks. You know the back way to the library, and you got what you went for.”

“Yes, I did,” the man admitted. “But I didn't try to kill young Harcourt any more than I killed Martin Carfax.”

The circle looked astonished. Chalmers tapped his forehead significantly. The hermit's own curiosity seemed to have been aroused, for he

asked sullenly, "How did you know it was me took the pistol?"

"Had you been selling or handling your bottles of peppermint essence that evening?"

The man nodded, his eyes wide with astonishment. "Yes, I was tryin' to sell to the cook. As long as Ghira made me do his dirty work I thought I'd turn a penny for myself."

"Well, the next time you steal anyone's gun, wash your hands if you've been handling anything with oil of peppermint in it. The odor of peppermint was quite apparent on the gun, if you smelled the handle; and it is a rule of mine to smell every object—"

There was a roar of laughter from Chalmers. "In future," he said, "I will smell other things beside my gardenia! Good work, Dewitt!"

The hermit gazed at the detective as if he almost thought him a reincarnation of the clever and omnipresent Ghira Lora. "I didn't do no shootin'," he quavered. "Ghira, he did it—was afraid that young feller, that brother of hers, might make trouble by comin' back sudden. That mornin' when we got back to the cabin—about two-thirty, it was—"

The sheriff, who had been looking reflectively into the fire, now tossed on a log and inquired, "Want to know how you covered these distances. Highland Park ain't no summer walk from East Burleigh."

"Ghira Lora had a motor-cycle he kep' at a garage somewheres over Bearsville way. Me an' him used it a good deal. That night he slep' at this cabin, but Ilah Dann didn't show up. He was sore over the quarrel, which seemed to have been brewin' for a long time. And Ghira Lora

says to me, 'If he betrays the Brotherhood, I'll kill him.'

"I was wishin' then I could betray it myself. I was sick of both jobs I had been mixed up in; and I says to him, 'Where's the rest of it? where do you all live?'

"He gave me a terrible look. 'We live where we're needed,' he says, 'and we punish crime if it takes us a hundred years. Doctor Harcourt ruined our Temple and dispersed our order.' I says, 'Wasn't he just tryin'—accordin' to Ilah—to drain a swamp or somethin'?'

"'He took from us our livin',' he replied, 'and profaned our altar, but his race will soon be extinct. Everything has gone as we planned.' 'No, not everything,' I says, 'for I didn't kill Martin Carfax.' 'You didn't?' he sez. 'Well, who did then? I saw you do it.' 'So did I!' was my answer. He glowered at me, and I didn't try to tell him what I've been tryin' to tell you for some time now, and you won't listen."

"We'll always listen to the truth," Dewitt said. "Stick to it, and we'll listen. But when you say you didn't kill Martin Carfax you are not telling the truth."

The man looked helplessly from one to the other of the group, groaned and buried his face in his hands. After a while he said in almost a threatening voice, "You'll hear it before you leave this here cabin."

Gordon Brent began again his restless walk between the table to the door. "Dewitt," he said, "I don't get motive enough in this whole thing. To plan the destruction of a family because the father of it encroached on the premises of a temple, in his effort to save the health of the neigh-

borhood, seems to me a terrible revenge, even for darkest India."

"Yet religious fanaticism there, especially among devotees of dark superstitions, can reach its claws far out," Dewitt replied. "I think lust of money as well as lust of revenge was a great element in the proceedings of the Brotherhood—witness the successful efforts of Ghira to get money from Carfax and to play the stock market. But I see your point. They kept a purpose in view for a surprising number of years." All at once he stopped and reflected. "Haines, did you ever hear Ghira speak of the furnishings of this temple—of confiscation or spoliation on the part of the authorities?"

"Yes, yes," he answered eagerly. "Sacred wine bowls were taken; gold and silver ones; and Ghira said the Doctor had bought them in, and Ghira meant to get 'em back when the family was extinct."

"You knew of these?" Chalmers asked Dewitt.

"Hodgson told me that the Doctor had brought quite a museum collection of gold and silver plate from India, and no doubt these so-called sacred vessels were among the objects over which Tong keeps guard. Perhaps he knew that they had come originally from the profaned Temple; but he seemed to know very little that was definite of the Brotherhood."

"They took care he shouldn't," interposed Haines. "Ilah used to say that Tong was of a different creed, and besides, he loved his master's family, so could not be an ally."

"Did this Brotherhood have any other title besides just 'The Brotherhood'?" Dewitt asked.

The hermit glanced fearfully about him. "Yes," he whispered, "it did."

"What was it?"

"The Brotherhood of the Dark Name."

"Some Eastern devil, I suppose," Chalmers commented. "In this day of telephones and airships it's hard to swallow even the fact of the existence of such superstitions."

"Now do you know how many of the Brotherhood are in this country? Are there any survivors of Ghira Lora and Ilah Dann?" Dewitt questioned.

The hermit shook his head. "I don't know for certain. Ghira said they were still scattered over India; and some day they'd build another temple when India had been restored to the East Indians."

"Oh, ho!" ejaculated Chalmers. "I scent political propaganda, as well as black magic. Race hatred of the excellent English may be back of the special grudge they had against Doctor Harcourt."

"Yes, there was politics, too," said the hermit. "Ilah and Ghira used to talk a sight about 'em; but I couldn't make out just what they was tryin' to do, or what their grievance was. They had so many grievances it was hard to keep track of 'em all."

Dewitt took the letter from his pocket again. "Haines, it's high time you read your letter to us," he said.

But the hermit held out protesting hands. "That ain't my letter. I tell you I didn't kill him! A man ought to know what he done, hisself, and what he didn't do!"

"Didn't kill him—with this disguise right here

before us!" Dewitt said impatiently, while the sheriff grunted, "Read it for him, then! The man's doty. Let's have it."

"He shall read it himself," Dewitt persisted. "I have a hunch that it's from Ilah Dann. He's the only fellow could have written it as far as I can see!"

"I know it's from Ilah," said the hermit. "The day you first come up to the quarry hole Ghira told me he'd seen the letter in the post office and he was afraid Ilah was up to tricks account of the quarrel. Ghira got the letter out of the post office—when, how, I don't know. There were lots of things he didn't tell me."

"Strange he didn't destroy it," Gordon commented. "Sheriff, will you throw on another stick? It's chilly here!"

"Mebbe he meant to—and forgot," the hermit quavered. "Or mebbe he didn't know it'd slipped in amongst the skins. Ghira used to sleep with all his clothes on. He had a lot on his mind, too—an awful lot. He didn't want no alibi proved for Mr. Brent—and I—I didn't think no alibi could be proved for him, when with my own eyes—"

He stopped short, for Gordon, with utter astonishment in his face, was confronting him. "What *are* you talking about? What do you mean?"

The hermit looked the picture of misery. "Nobody will believe me," he quavered. "Ghira Lora, he didn't believe me when I told him what I've been tryin' to tell you. 'Haines,' he said, 'do you mean to say to me that you never came out from behind that rock, nor stirred, nor lifted a finger?'"

Dewitt jumped to his feet. "What's that?" he exclaimed. "What are you saying?"

"Just what I've been tellin' you," said the hermit. "Ghira Lora didn't believe me, and I didn't believe Mr. Brent here could prove an alibi, for what . . . I . . . told . . . in the village . . . was *true*."

They were all on their feet now, staring at him in heavy silence that Gordon was the first to break. "Will you tell me, Haines, in plain language, what you mean?"

The hermit stood up, raised himself to his full height, with his arms high above his head. "I swear before heaven," he cried, "that whatever my sins and crimes these furriners brought me into, I did not push Martin Carfax into the quarry pit!"

"Who did?" almost screamed Dewitt.

"I'll tell you the truth! I'll tell you the truth!" wailed the hermit, "but you won't take my word. I know aforehand you won't take it—but it's gospel. Ghira Lora, he wouldn't believe me. Said I done a neat job all right, and he wouldn't believe my word that I never, never done it at all. He just laughed and said, 'Haines, you're dreamin'. I saw you do it, and do it neat, accordin' to instructions. And you won't—'"

"Tell us, tell us the plain word," commanded Dewitt. "Go on! quick!"

"I had been waitin' since two o'clock in the afternoon, gettin' cold and cramped, and sometimes walkin' out in my disguise when I was sure no car was a-comin.' I kep' listenin' and listenin' for their car, and hopin' it wouldn't come and hopin' it would never come, and the whole devil's plot would fall through. But Ghira, he seemed

to know what was in my thoughts, for he said, 'Ef they don't come today, they'll come tomorrow. He'll want to see the hole. He'll want to see the farm. He's got a notion he can do somethin' with the granite on this farm he's heard so much about. He sez to me only lately, "I could make them quarries pay again. I'll buy 'em, hole and all. I'll revive the industry."'

"Yet I kep' wishin' I wouldn't hear no noise of a car comin'. I didn't want to kill him—push him in that awful hole. I knowed how deep it was. I got one cold chill after another. 'I can't ever live through it,' I sez to myself. 'I'll die, too! I'll fall in with him, for I'll get all dizzy and sick.'

"I'd have run away, but I didn't know where to run to from that dreadful Indian, and in those clothes that were to make me look like Mr. Brent. So I shivered and shook, but I stuck. And then the time went on—each minute seemed as if I couldn't bear the next.

"By and by I heard the far-off noise of the car, and I got sick and faint, and crouched lower and lower behind the big boulder that was hidin' me. I shut my eyes, and I said, 'You've got to do it now! You've got to do it now! You'll do it, and jump in after him and end your miserable life. Then you'll be free of these fellows forever, and the story won't turn out as they planned.' It give me a kind of comfort to think I could cheat 'em after all—just at the end like that. They was worried about the alibi anyway; and they was relyin' on the fact that Mr. Brent, here, kep' to himself all the time and took long walks alone, and it would be hard for him to prove an alibi. 'Ef I get killed, and he turns up all right,' I



thought, 'then it will be known he didn't kill Martin Carfax.' They had banked on her not betrayin' him, too. Them devils knew a lot of human nature.

"Well, the car came nearer and nearer, and I got more and more desperate—thinkin' my own end near, which was what I had resolved on. The car came along and stopped, and I heard someone say, it must have been Mr. Carfax, 'Tong, will you go and inquire at the farmhouse, or see if it's open? I want to take Mrs. Carfax to look at somethin',' or words to that effect.

"I heard a woman's voice then, and it seemed as if she didn't want him to go up to the quarry hole. They was delay. But after a bit I peered out between the underbrush and saw 'em a-comin, and had the awful feelin' that Ghira was watchin' 'em, too, and watchin' for me to do as I'd agreed.

"He had hurried on ahead of her, or else her not wantin' him to go there kep' her walkin' slow and holdin' back. And soon he reached the edge of the pit, and I knew my dreadful hour had come.

"I was just goin' to rush out and do as it had all been planned . . . when . . . when—"

His terror-stricken eyes swept the circle. The pallor of his face turned a greenish-gray hue. He seemed living again through an appalling moment.

"—when I saw Mr. Brent, or somethin' dressed just as I was, somethin' with a face like my mask, somethin' with the queer reddish hair like his, dart out of the woods and push that man into the hole. I saw it, and I'd swear I saw it, ef I was dyin'!"

A deep silence followed his words. The amazed face of Gordon was turned to Dewitt, and Dewitt and the sheriff were staring at each other like

men in a dream. The sheriff was the first to speak.

“Do you persist in telling us, after Mr. Brent’s alibi has been established beyond all question, that you saw him dart out of the woods ahead of you and do this deed?”

“I saw him as plain as I see him now. It was like seein’ my twin, dressed up as I was to look like him; and the words of Ghira come to me, ‘You’ll say you saw him do it. It will be like seein’ yourself do it.’ And that queer, awful thing happened! I was lookin’ at Somethin’ that was like him and me both, dressed up just as I was then to look like him. I swear I never stirred from behind that rock, for I was scared to death, and my first thought was that Mr. Brent had really come to do the deed they wanted me to do, and was really the murderer they had planned with their wicked minds to make him out.

“Mr. Carfax had thrown up his arms with a yell as the Somethin’ pushed him into the quarry pit; and then I heard her cry of agony; and knew she was runnin’ back to Tong; and then, dodgin’ among the boulders and creepin’ back of trees, I made for a hidden spot in the quarries, known to me and Ghira. There I laid till all that tryin’ to rescue the body was over.”

“Tell us,” interrupted Dewitt, “how Ghira Lora and Ilah Dann managed to be on the main road with the ladder and rope so quickly?”

“Ghira Lora had the ladder and rope hid near the main road,” answered the hermit. “But, as I was sayin’, when that first attempt at rescue was over, I reached my cabin again by a round-about way. Ghira met me and said, ‘It was the neatest job I ever see done. You were so quick,

and soft and silent as a panther. And you made your get-away wonderful.' I told him I'd never stirred from the spot where they'd had me near the quarry pit; that I'd looked on at the murder just as he done. He wouldn't believe me. 'You got wild in your head, Haines,' he says, 'and you don't know what you're talkin' about. I saw you push him in.'

"'I saw him pushed in,' I answered him. 'I didn't do it!' And I say now to you all assembled here—I didn't do it! I saw Somethin' do it, a figure with red hair and dressed in a blue suit. Oh, that's the truth! the truth!"

Chalmers, a bewildered expression on his face, was staring out of the window. Dewitt and Gordon, in utter mystification, were gazing at each other. The sheriff coughed, spat into the fire, and at last ejaculated, "Hell—and Tommy!"

Dewitt followed this with, "How can you expect us to believe you? We don't. At least four people saw you do it, and one of them was responsible for the disguise you wore that deceived the others. Come now! Confess!"

"What they saw was a figure with red hair, and dressed in a blue suit. That wasn't me. It looked like Mr. Brent, just like my disguise. Maybe it wasn't either of us," he added in a hoarse whisper, and with a frightened glance over his shoulder.

"Nonsense!" ejaculated the sheriff. "You have bats in your belfry, Haines."

"I saw the murder. I wasn't the murderer," was the stubborn answer.

"Open that letter," commanded Dewitt, laying it on the table. The hermit reached his arm out, took it, and with a sly, swift gesture, was

about to throw it into the fire, when the sheriff struck down his arm and grabbed the letter.

“Not much, you won’t burn it up. I’ll read it for you—you sly, creeping object. After this performance don’t expect us to believe your crazy story. We couldn’t believe it, anyway. ’Tain’t in nature. Things like that don’t happen. Now, gentlemen, I’m opening the letter in behalf of the prisoner. I’m readin’ his own letter for him, seein’ he’s so obstinate.”

He carefully opened the envelope by slipping a penknife under the flap, took out the enclosed sheet and read:

“Hermit Haines:

“The public will get this before you do, and that is what I intend. I accuse you and Ghira Lora of the murder of Martin Carfax at the quarry pit on the Bostwick farm on April first. If this letter sends me to the chair with you and with him it will be worth the price. Ghira went too far last night. I have worked for him like any dog, and he holds from me constantly my rightful share of our earnings. He has deceived and defrauded me for years, and he can expect nothing from me in future but my efforts to bring him his just punishment, of which this letter is the first. Perhaps nothing more will be needed. You have been his tool as well as myself, and I am sorry for you, though no more than he did I swallow your story of seeing yourself or somebody exactly like the man you were fixed up to represent—in other words, Gordon Brent—push Martin Carfax down the

hole. We've stuffed your childish mind with stories of magic, I suppose, until you expect us to believe them when you hand us back one of the same kind. I do commend your agility, however. How you ever left that hole in the time you did, and made your get-away, is a mystery!

"Congratulations on a neat and marvelously swift job!"

"You see!" broke in Haines, "it puzzled even Ilah Dann. That night afore they quarreled he sez to me, 'You done it so swift,' he sez, 'that I could a'most have swore you was still crouching behind that boulder when Martin Carfax fell into the hole!' 'And yet you won't,' I sez 'take my word that I didn't do anything but crouch there!' 'Oh, you murdered him all right,' he sez, sort of laughin'. 'You just did it so quick you don't remember.' But, gentlemen, he was wrong, he was wrong!"

He began to rock himself backward and forward in another access of misery. Gordon reached for the epistle.

"Is that letter signed?" he said.

"No signature," replied the sheriff. "Well, gentlemen, we've got all the evidence we want to send this man to the chair a dozen times over, unless they try to prove he's out of his mind, which his lawyer may do if he gets handed out the same line of talk we've been treated to! The idea of tryin' to make us think he didn't commit this murder! It's scan'lous. It's gettin' late, gentlemen, and I propose we get on our way. It's almost supper time, and I don't like to keep the women folks waitin'. Hermit

Haines, you've told your story and none of us believes it. These rogues that taught you wickedness didn't believe it. Stands to reason you couldn't see yourself do that murder. Stands to reason you couldn't have seen Mr. Brent do it, for he was a good thirty or more miles away. Wouldn't do you much good anyway to prove you saw something else do it, for you were accessory after the fact to the attempted murder of Mr. Raymond Harcourt. Nothin's goin' to save you, unless they shut you up in a lunyctic asylum!"

The hermit rose—looked beseechingly at Gordon. "I hearn tell you dreamed somethin' that day," he said. "Could it 'a' been your dream I saw? And mebbe Martin Carfax just fell of his own accord as I was seein' your dream—got dizzy and fell in withouten anybody pushin' him. I hearn tell you had a dream, and called out somethin'."

Gordon looked pityingly at him. "Haines," he said gently, "I have the word of another person that I called out in my sleep, but I have no recollection of the dream that made me do it. I couldn't tell you what it was. I don't know myself."

The hermit clasped his hands high above his head. "Oh, if they'd 'a' let me alone!" he wailed. "If they'd never come temptin' me! I was happy here afore they came."

The dog crept to his feet, whining.

A fortnight later Dewitt stopped at Gordon's studio, found him with palette and easel under an apple tree sketching the orchard loveliness.

“You don’t look as if you’d ever had a carc in the world,” Dewitt greeted him.

Gordon laid down his brush. “When I’m painting I can’t realize I ever did—but it came back pretty sharp this morning when I took poor old hermit Haines a little fruit and some boughs of apple blossoms. I know what it is to be shut up, and he was a wild, simple, out-of-doors creature before those ghouls got hold of him and twisted him all out of shape with their deviltries.”

“Tong doesn’t believe the Brotherhood will attempt anything further now that so much publicity has been given the organization,” Dewitt said, “and I think it’s doubtful whether there are many of them left. Ilah Dann and Ghira Lora may have been the last, anyway, that had such initiative or who would take big risks to gain their own ends.”

“Listen, Dewitt,” Gordon said, taking up his brush again and putting in a few strokes. “Did you ever have the least suspicion that the hermit’s story might be true, he might have seen something, not exactly explainable by our usual formulas—our accepted rules?”

Dewitt smiled, shook his head doubtfully. “Who is to say? Certainly not the witnesses. They saw what they saw. Of course, the man for months had been under the influence of mystery-mongers, and his state of mind was overstrung and morbid to a degree. Who is to say, indeed? His lawyer is preparing a defense of insanity; will claim, I believe, that Haines has been for a long time half out of his mind; and the Indians finished the job, or he would never have committed the murder. It was evi-

dent it was much against the grain, at least.”

“Dewitt, has anybody thanked you?” Gordon said with a smile. “I mean just that, aside from the professional aspect of the work. You have been such a good friend—to us. I want to thank you now with all my heart.”

Dewitt looked towards the far-away Shawangunk Mountains, lying with the beauty of a dream along the southern horizon. “It was good to serve . . . . her . . . . and you,” he said simply. “And I had all the excitement of the chase.”

“Well, it was a queer case all around,” Gordon commented. “I don’t talk about it much, except to you and ‘Aunt Abby,’ as she likes us to call her—dear old lady! But I think about it a great deal; that is, when I am not thinking of—”

He paused, a bright flush overspreading his face. Dewitt at the same moment saw Christine driving by with Mrs. Richards, Tong, as usual, at the wheel. Christine waved her hand to them, and between her and Gordon there flashed a look of such perfect understanding and peace that it seemed to Dewitt a prophecy of the joy that was to companion their united lives in all the years to come.

THE END



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