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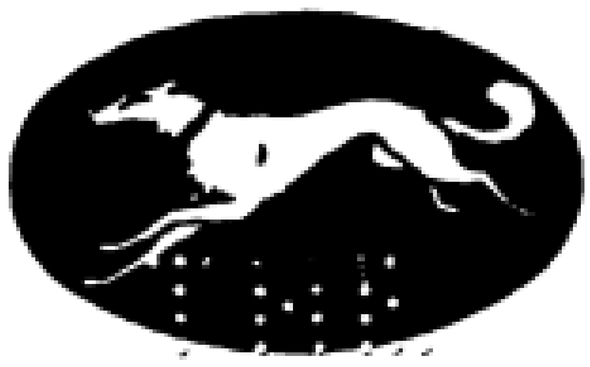
THE ORANGE - YELLOW DIAMOND

BY

J. S. FLETCHER



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CHAPTER ONE

THE PRETTY PAWNBROKER

On the southern edge of the populous parish of Paddington, in a parallelogram bounded by Oxford and Cambridge Terrace on the south, Praed Street on the north, and by Edgware Road on the east and Spring Street on the west, lies an assemblage of mean streets, the drab dulness of which forms a remarkable contrast to the pretentious architectural grandeurs of Sussex Square and Lancaster Gate, close by. In these streets the observant will always find all those evidences of depressing semi-poverty which are more evident in London than in any other English city. The houses look as if laughter was never heard within them. Where the window blinds are not torn, they are dirty; the folk who come out of the doors wear anxious and depressed faces. Such shops as are there are mainly kept for the sale of food of poor quality: the taverns at the corners are destitute of attraction or pretension. Whoever wanders into these streets finds their sordid shabbiness communicating itself: he escapes, cast down, wondering who the folk are who live in those grey, lifeless cages; what they do, what they think; how life strikes them. Even the very sparrows which fight in the gutters for garbage are less lively than London sparrows usually are; as for the children

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who sit about the doorsteps, they look as if the grass, the trees, the flowers, and the sunlight of the adjacent Kensington Gardens were as far away as the Desert of Gobi. Within this slice of the town, indeed, life is lived, as it were, in a stagnant backwash, which nothing and nobody can stir.

In an upper room of one of the more respectable houses in one of the somewhat superior streets of this neighbourhood, a young man stood looking out of the window one November afternoon. It was then five o'clock, and the darkness was coming: all day a gentle, never-ceasing rain had been bringing the soot down from the dark skies upon the already dingy roofs. It was a dismal and miserable prospect upon which the watcher looked out, but not so miserable nor so dismal as the situation in which he just then found himself. The mean street beneath him was not more empty of cheerfulness than his pockets were empty of money and his stomach of food. He had spent his last penny on the previous day: it, and two other coppers, had gone on a mere mouthful of food and drink: since their disappearance he had eaten nothing. And he was now growing faint with hunger—and to add to his pains, some one, downstairs, was cooking herrings. The smell of the frying-pan nearly drove him ravenous.

He turned from the window presently and looked round at the small room behind him. It was a poor, ill-furnished place—cleanliness, though of a dingy sort, its only recommendation. There was a bed, and a washstand, and a chest of drawers, and a couple of chairs—a few shillings would have purchased the lot

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at any second-hand dealer's. In a corner stood the occupant's trunk—all the property he had in the world was in it, save a few books which were carefully ranged on the chimney-piece, and certain writing materials that lay on a small table. A sharp eye, glancing at the books and the writing materials, and at a few sheets of manuscript scattered on the blotting-pad, would have been quick to see that here was the old tale, once more being lived out, of the literary aspirant who, at the very beginning of his career, was finding, by bitter experience, that, of all callings, that of literature is the most precarious.

A half-hesitating tap at the door prefaced the entrance of a woman—the sort of woman who is seen in those streets by the score—a tallish, thinnish woman, old before her time, perpetually harassed, always anxious, always looking as if she expected misfortune. Her face was full of anxiety now as she glanced at her lodger—who, on his part, flushed all over his handsome young face with conscious embarrassment. He knew very well what the woman wanted—and he was powerless to respond to her appeal.

"Mr. Lauriston," she said in a half whisper, "when do you think you'll be able to let me have a bit of money? It's going on for six weeks now, you know, and I'm that put to it, what with the rent, and the rates—"

Andrew Lauriston shook his head—not in denial, but in sheer perplexity.

"Mrs. Flitwick," he answered, "I'll give you your money the very minute I get hold of it! I told you

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the other day I'd sold two stories—well, I've asked to be paid for them at once, and the cheque might be here by any post. And I'm expecting another cheque, too—I'm surprised they aren't both here by this. The minute they arrive, I'll settle with you. I'm wanting money myself—as badly as you are!"

"I know that, Mr. Lauriston," assented Mrs. Flitwick, "and I wouldn't bother you if I wasn't right pressed, myself. But there's the landlord at me—he wants money tonight. And—you'll excuse me for mentioning it—but, till you get your cheques, Mr. Lauriston, why don't you raise a bit of ready money?"

Lauriston looked round at his landlady with an air of surprised enquiry.

"And how would I do that?" he asked.

"You've a right good gold watch, Mr. Lauriston," she answered. "Any pawnbroker—and there's plenty of 'em, I'm sure!—'ud lend you a few pounds on that. Perhaps you've never had occasion to go to a pawnbroker before? No?—well, and I hadn't once upon a time, but I've had to, whether or no, since I came to letting lodgings, and if I'd as good a watch as yours is, I wouldn't go without money in my pocket! If you've money coming in, you can always get your goods back—and I should be thankful for something, Mr. Lauriston, if it was but a couple o' pounds. My landlord's that hard—"

Lauriston turned and picked up his hat.

"All right, Mrs. Flitwick," he said quietly. "I'll see what I can do. I—I'd never even thought of it."

When the woman had gone away, closing the door

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behind her, he pulled the watch out of his pocket and looked at it—an old-fashioned, good, gold watch, which had been his father's. No doubt a pawnbroker would lend money on it. But until then he had never had occasion to think of pawnbrokers. He had come to London nearly two years before, intending to make name, fame, and fortune by his pen. He had a little money to be going on with—when he came. It had dwindled steadily, and it had been harder to replace it than he had calculated for. And at last there he was, in that cheap lodging, and at the end of his resources, and the cheque for his first two accepted stories had not arrived. Neither had a loan which, sorely against his will, he had been driven to request from the only man he could think of—an old schoolmate, far away in Scotland. He had listened for the postman's knock, hoping it would bring relief, for four long days—and not one letter had come, and he was despairing and heartsick. But—there was the watch!

He went out presently, and on the stair, feebly lighted by a jet of gas, he ran up against a fellow-lodger—a young Jew, whom he knew by the name of Mr. Melchior Rubinstein, who occupied the rooms immediately beneath his own. He was a quiet, affable little person, with whom Lauriston sometimes exchanged a word or two—and the fact that he sported rings on his fingers, a large pin in his tie, and a heavy watch-chain, which was either real gold or a very good imitation, made Lauriston think that he would give him some advice. He stopped him—with a shy look, and an awkward blush.

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"I say!" he said. "I—the fact is, I'm a bit hard up—temporarily, you know—and I want to borrow some money on my watch. Could you tell me where there's a respectable pawnbroker's?"

Melky—known to every one in the house by that familiar substitute for his more pretentious name—turned up the gas-jet and then held out a slender, long-fingered hand. "Let's look at the watch," he said curtly, in a soft, lisping voice. "I know more than a bit about watches, mister."

Lauriston handed the watch over and watched Melky inquisitively as he looked at it, inside and out, in a very knowing and professional way. Melky suddenly glanced at him. "Now, you wouldn't like to sell this here bit of property, would you, Mr. Lauriston?" he enquired, almost wheedlingly. "I'll give you three quid for it—cash down."

"Thank you—but I wouldn't sell it for worlds," replied Lauriston.

"Say four quid, then," urged Melky. "Here!—between friends, I'll give you four-ten! Spot cash, mind you!"

"No!" said Lauriston. "It belonged to my father. I don't want to sell—I want to borrow."

Melky pushed the watch back into its owner's hand.

"You go round into Praed Street, mister," he said, in business-like fashion. "You'll see a shop there with Daniel Multenius over it. He's a relation o' mine—he'll do what you want. Mention my name, if you like. He'll deal fair with you. And if you ever want to sell, don't forget me."

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Lauriston laughed, and went down the stairs, and out into the dismal evening. It was only a step round to Praed Street, and within five minutes of leaving Melky he was looking into Daniel Multenius's window. He remembered now that he had often looked into it, without noticing the odd name above it. It was a window in which there were all sorts of curious things, behind a grille of iron bars, from diamonds and pearls to old ivory and odds and ends of bric-á-brac. A collector of curiosities would have found material in that window to delay him for half-an-hour—but Lauriston only gave one glance at it before hastening down a dark side-passage to a door, over which was a faintly-illuminated sign, showing the words: PLEDGE OFFICE.

He pushed open that door and found himself before several small, boxed-off compartments, each just big enough to contain one person. They were all empty at that moment; he entered one, and seeing nobody about, tapped gently on the counter. He expected to see some ancient and Hebraic figure present itself—instead, light steps came from some recess of the shop, and Lauriston found himself gazing in surprise at a young and eminently pretty girl, who carried some fancy needle-work in her hand, and looked over it at him out of a pair of large, black eyes. For a moment the two gazed at each other, in silence.

"Yes?" said the girl at last. "What can I do for you?"

Lauriston found his tongue.

"Er—is Mr. Multenius in?" he asked. "I—the fact is, I want to see him."

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"Mr. Multenius is out," answered the girl. "But I'm in charge—if it's business."

She was quietly eyeing Lauriston over, and she saw his fresh-complexioned face colour vividly.

"I do my grandfather's business when he's out," she continued. "Do you want to borrow some money?"

Lauriston pulled out the watch, with more blushes, and pushed it towards her.

"That's just it," he answered. "I want to borrow money on that. A friend of mine—fellow-lodger—Mr. Melky Rubinstein—said I could borrow something here. That's a real good watch, you know."

The girl glanced at her customer with a swift and almost whimsical recognition of his innocence, and almost carelessly picked up the watch.

"Oh, Melky sent you here, did he?" she said, with a smile. "I see!" She looked the watch over, and snapped open the case. Then she glanced at Lauriston. "How much do you want on this?" she asked.

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CHAPTER TWO

MRS. GOLDMARK'S EATING-HOUSE

Lauriston thrust his hands in his pockets and looked at the girl in sheer perplexity. She was a very pretty, dark girl, nearly as tall as himself, slender and lissom of figure, and decidedly attractive. There was evident sense of fun and humour in her eyes, and about the corners of her lips: he suddenly got an idea that she was amused at his embarrassment.

"How much can you lend me?" he asked. "What —what's it worth?"

"No, that's not it!" she answered. "It's—what do you want to borrow? You're not used to pledging things, are you?"

"No," replied Lauriston. "This is the first time. Can—can you lend me a few pounds?"

The girl picked up the watch again, and again examined it.

"I'll lend you three pounds fifteen on it," she said suddenly, in business-like tones. "That do?"

"Thank you," replied Lauriston. "That'll do very well—I'm much obliged. I suppose I can have it back any time."

"Any time you bring the money, and pay the interest," replied the girl. "Within twelve calendar

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months and seven days.'' She picked up a pen and began to fill out a ticket. ''Got any copper?'' she asked presently.

''Copper?'' exclaimed Lauriston. ''What for?''

''The ticket,'' she answered. Then she gave him a quick glance and just as quickly looked down again. ''Never mind!'' she said. ''I'll take it out of the loan. Your name and address, please.''

Lauriston presently took the ticket and the little pile of gold, silver, and copper which she handed him. And he lingered.

''You'll take care of that watch,'' he said, suddenly. ''It was my father's, you see.''

The girl smiled, reassuringly, and pointed to a heavily-built safe in the rear.

''We've all sorts of family heirlooms in there,'' she observed. ''Make yourself easy.''

Lauriston thanked her, raised his hat, and turned away—unwillingly. He would have liked an excuse to stop longer—and he did not quite know why. But he could think of none, so he went—with a backward look when he got to the door. The pretty pawnbroker smiled and nodded. And the next moment he was out in the street, with money in his pocket, and a strange sense of relief, which was mingled with one of surprise. For he had lived for the previous four days on a two-shilling piece—and there, all the time, close by him, had been a place where you could borrow money, easily and very pleasantly.

His first thought was to hurry to his lodgings and pay his landlady. He owed her six weeks' rent, at ten

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shillings a week—that would take three pounds out of the money he had just received. But he would still have over fourteen shillings to be going on with—and surely those expected letters would come within the next few postal deliveries. He had asked the editor who had taken two short stories from him to let him have a cheque for them, and in his inexperience had expected to see it arrive by return of post. Also he had put his pride in his pocket, and had written a long letter to his old schoolmate, John Purdie, in far-away Scotland, explaining his present circumstances, and asking him, for old times' sake, to lend him some money until he had finished and sold a novel, which, he was sure, would turn out to be a small gold-mine. John Purdie, he knew, was now a wealthy young man—successor to his father in a fine business; Lauriston felt no doubt that he would respond. And meantime, till the expected letters came, he had money—and when you have lived for four days on two shillings, fourteen shillings seems a small fortune. Certainly, within the last half-hour, life had taken on a roseate tinge—all due to a visit to the pawnshop.

Hurrying back along Praed Street, Lauriston's steps were suddenly arrested. He found himself unconsciously hurrying by an old-fashioned eating-house, from whence came an appetizing odour of cooking food. He remembered then that he had eaten nothing for four-and-twenty hours. His landlady supplied him with nothing: ever since he had gone to her he had done his own catering, going out for his meals. The last meal, on the previous evening, had been a glass of milk and

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a stale, though sizable bun, and now he felt literally ravenous. It was only by an effort that he could force himself to pass the eating-house; once beyond its door, he ran, ran until he reached his lodgings and slipped three sovereigns into Mrs. Flitwick's hands.

"That'll make us right to this week end, Mrs. Flitwick," he said. "Put the receipt in my room."

"And greatly obliged I am to you, Mr. Lauriston," answered the landlady. "And sorry, indeed, you should have had to put yourself to the trouble, but—"

"All right, all right—no trouble—no trouble at all," exclaimed Lauriston. "Quite easy, I assure you!"

He ran out of the house again and back to where he knew there was food. He was only one-and-twenty, a well-built lad, with a healthy appetite, which, until very recently, had always been satisfied, and just then he was feeling that unless he ate and drank, something—he knew not what—would happen. He was even conscious that his voice was weakening, when, having entered the eating-house and dropped into a seat in one of the little boxes into which the place was divided, he asked the waitress for the food and drink which he was now positively aching for. And he had eaten a plateful of fish and two boiled eggs and several thick slices of bread and butter, and drunk the entire contents of a pot of tea before he even lifted his eyes to look round him. But by that time he was conscious of satisfaction, and he sat up and inspected the place to which he had hurried so eagerly. And in the same moment he once more saw Melky.

Melky had evidently just entered the little eating-

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house. Evidently, too, he was in no hurry for food or drink. He had paused, just within the entrance, at a desk which stood there, whereat sat Mrs. Goodmark, the proprietress, a plump, pretty young woman, whose dark, flashing eyes turned alternately from watching her waitresses to smiling on her customers as they came to the desk to pay their bills. Melky, his smart billy-cock hat cocked to one side, his sporting-looking over-coat adorned with a flower, was evidently paying compliments to Mrs. Goldmark as he leaned over her desk: she gave him a playful push and called to a waitress to order Mr. Rubinstein a nice steak. And Melky, turning from her with a well satisfied smile, caught sight of Lauriston, and sauntered down to the table at which he sat.

"Get your bit of business done all right?" he asked, confidentially, as he took a seat opposite his fellow-lodger and bent towards him. "Find the old gent accommodating?"

"I didn't see him," answered Lauriston. "I saw a young lady."

"My cousin Zillah," said Melky. "Smart girl, that, mister—worth a pile o' money to the old man—she knows as much about the business as what he does! You wouldn't think, mister," he went on in his soft, lisping tones, "but that girl's had a college education—fact! Old Daniel, he took her to live with him when her father and mother died, she being a little 'un then, and he give her—ah, such an education as I wish I'd had—see? She's quite the lady—is Zillah—but sticks to the old shop—not half, neither!"

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"She seems very business-like," remarked Lauriston, secretly pleased that he had now learned the pretty pawnbroker's name. "She soon did what I wanted."

"In the blood," said Melky, laconically. "We're all of us in that sort o' business, one way or another. Now, between you and me, mister, what did she lend you on that bit o' stuff?"

"Three pounds fifteen," replied Lauriston.

"That's about it," assented Melky, with a nod. He leaned a little nearer. "You don't want to sell the ticket?" he suggested. "Give you a couple o' quid for it, if you do."

"You seem very anxious to buy that watch," said Lauriston, laughing. "No—I don't want to sell the ticket—not I! I wouldn't part with that watch for worlds."

"Well, if you don't, you don't," remarked Melky. "And as to wanting to buy—that's my trade. I ain't no reg'lar business—I buy and sell, anything that comes handy, in the gold and silver line. And as you ain't going to part with that ticker on no consideration, I'll tell you what it's worth, old as it is. Fifteen quid!"

"That's worth knowing, any way," said Lauriston. "I shall always have something by me then, while I have that. You'd have made a profit of a nice bit, then, if I'd sold it to you?"

"It 'ud be a poor world, mister, if you didn't get no profit, wouldn't it?" assented Melky calmly. "We're all of us out to make profit. Look here!—between you and me—you're a lit'ry gent, ain't you? Write a bit, what? Do you want to earn a fiver—comfortable?"

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"I should be very glad," replied Lauriston.

"There's a friend o' mine," continued Melky, "wholesale jeweller, down Shoreditch way, wants to get out a catalogue. He ain't no lit'ry powers, d'you see? Now, he'd run to a fiver—cash down—if some writing feller 'ud touch things up a bit for him, like. Lor' bless you!—it wouldn't take you more'n a day's work! What d'ye say to it?"

"I wouldn't mind earning five pounds at that," answered Lauriston.

"Right-oh!" said Melky. "Then some day next week, I'll take you down to see him—he's away till then. And—you'll pay me ten per cent. on the bit o' business, won't you, mister? Business is business, ain't it?"

"All right!" agreed Lauriston. "That's a bargain, of course."

Melky nodded and turned to his steak, and Lauriston presently left him and went away. The plump lady at the desk gave him a smile as she handed him his change.

"Hope to see you again, sir," she said.

Lauriston went back to his room, feeling that the world had changed. He had paid his landlady, he had silver and copper in his pocket, he had the chance of earning five pounds during the coming week—and he expected a cheque for his two stories by every post. And if John Purdie made him the loan he had asked for, he would be able to devote a whole month to finishing his novel—and then, perhaps, there would be fame and riches. The dismal November evening disappeared in a dream of hope.

But by the end of the week hope was dropping to

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zero again with Lauriston. No letters had arrived—either from John Purdie or the editor. On the Sunday morning he was again face to face with the last half-crown. He laid out his money very cautiously that day, but when he had paid for a frugal dinner at a cheap coffee-shop, he had only a shilling left. He wandered into Kensington Gardens that Sunday afternoon, wondering what he had best do next. And as he stood by the railings of the ornamental water, watching the water-fowls' doings, somebody bade him good-day, and he turned to find the pretty girl of the pawnshop standing at his side and smiling shyly at him.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE DEAD MAN

Lauriston was thinking about Zillah at the very moment in which she spoke to him: the memory of her dark eyes and the friendly smile that she had given him as he left the pawnshop had come as a relief in the midst of his speculations as to his immediate future. And now, as he saw her real self, close to him, evidently disposed to be friendly, he blushed like any girl, being yet at that age when shyness was still a part of his character. Zillah blushed too—but she was more self-possessed than Lauriston.

"I've been talking to my Cousin Melky about you," she said quickly. "Or, rather, he's been talking to me. He says he's going to introduce you to a man who wants his catalogue put in shape—for five pounds. Don't you do it for five pounds! I know that man—charge him ten!"

Lauriston moved away with her down the walk.

"Oh, but I couldn't do that, now!" he said eagerly. "You see I promised I'd do it for five."

Zillah gave him a quick glance.

"Don't you be silly!" she said. "When anybody like Melky offers you five pounds for anything, ask them double. They'll give it. You don't know much about money matters, do you?"

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Lauriston laughed, and gaining confidence, gave the girl a knowing look.

"Not much," he admitted, "else I wouldn't have had to do that bit of business with you the other day."

"Oh—that!" she said indifferently. "That's nothing. You'd be astonished if you knew what sort of people just have to run round to us, now and then—I could tell you some secrets! But—I guessed you weren't very well up in money matters, all the same. Writing people seldom are."

"I suppose you are?" suggested Lauriston.

"I've been mixed up in them all my life, more or less," she answered. "Couldn't help being, with my surroundings. You won't think me inquisitive if I ask you something? Were you—hard up—when you came round the other night?"

"Hard up's a mild term," replied Lauriston, frankly. "I hadn't a penny!"

"Excepting a gold watch worth twelve or fifteen pounds," remarked Zillah, drily. "And how long had you been like that?"

"Two or three days—more or less," answered Lauriston. "You see, I've been expecting money for more than a week—that was it."

"Has it come?" she asked.

"No—it hasn't," he replied, with a candid blush. "That's a fact!"

"Will it come—soon?" she demanded.

"By George!—I hope so!" he exclaimed. "I'll be hard up again, if it doesn't."

"And then you offer to do for five what you might

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easily get ten for!" she said, almost reproachfully. "Let me give you a bit of advice—never accept a first offer. Stand out for a bit more—especially from anybody like my cousin Melky."

"Is Melky a keen one, then?" enquired Lauriston.

"Melky's a young Jew," said Zillah, calmly. "I'm not—I'm half-and-half—a mixture. My mother was Jew—my father wasn't. Well—if you want money to be going on with, and you've got any more gold watches, you know where to come. Don't you ever go with empty pockets in London while you've got a bit of property to pledge! You're not a Londoner, of course?"

"I'm a Scotsman!" said Lauriston.

"To be sure—I knew it by your tongue," asserted Zillah. "And trying to make a living by writing! Well, you'll want courage—and money. Have you had any luck?"

"I've sold two stories," answered Lauriston, who by that time was feeling as if the girl was an old friend. "They come to twenty pounds for the two, at the rate that magazine pays, and I've asked for a cheque—it's that I'm waiting for. It ought to come—any time."

"Oh, but I know that game!" said Zillah. "I've two friends—girls—who write. I know how they have to wait—till publication, or till next pay-day. What a pity that some of you writers don't follow some other profession that would bring in a good income—then you could do your writing to please yourselves, and not be dependent on it. Haven't you thought of that?"

"Often!" answered Lauriston. "And it wouldn't do—for me, anyway. I've made my choice. I'll stick to

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my pen—and swim or sink with it. And I'm not going to sink!"

"That's the way to talk—to be sure!" said the girl. "But—keep yourself in money, if you can. Don't go without money for three days when you've anything you can raise money on. You see how practical I am! But you've got to be in this world. Will you tell me something?"

"It strikes me," answered Lauriston, looking at her narrowly and bringing the colour to her cheeks, "that I'm just about getting to this—that I'd tell you anything! And so—what is it?"

"How much money have you left?" she asked softly.

"Precisely a shilling—and a copper or two," he answered.

"And—if that cheque doesn't arrive?" she suggested.

"Maybe I'll be walking round to Praed Street again," he said, laughing. "I've a bit of what you call property, yet."

The girl nodded, and turned towards a side-walk that led across the Gardens.

"All right," she said. "Don't think me inquisitive—I don't like to think of—of people like you being hard up: I'm not wrapped up in business as much as all that. Let's talk of something else—tell me what you write about."

Lauriston spent the rest of that afternoon with Zillah, strolling about Kensington Gardens. He had lived a very lonely life since coming to London, and it was a new and pleasant experience to him to have an intelli-

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gent companion to talk to. There was a decided sense of exhilaration within him when he finally left her; as for Zillah, she went homewards in a very thoughtful mood, already conscious that she was more than half in love with this good-looking lad who had come so strangely into her life. And at the corner of Praed Street she ran up against Mr. Melky Rubinstein, and button-holed him, and for ten minutes talked seriously to him. Melky, who had good reasons of his own for keeping in his cousin's favour, listened like a lamb to all she had to say, and went off promising implicit obedience to her commandments.

"Zillah ain't half gone on that chap!" mused Melky, as he pursued his way. "Now, ain't it extraordinary that a girl who'll come into a perfect fortune should go and fall head over ears in love with a red-headed young feller what ain't got a penny to bless hisself with! Not but what he ain't got good looks—and brains. And brains is brains, when all's said!"

That night, as Lauriston sat writing in his shabby little room, a knock came at his door—the door opened, and Melky slid in, laying his finger to the side of his large nose in token of confidence.

"Hope I ain't interrupting," said Melky. "I say, mister, I been thinking about that catalogue business. Now I come to sort of reflect on it, I think my friend'll go to ten pound. So we'll say ten pound—what? And I'll take you to see him next Friday. And I say, mister —if a pound or two on account 'ud be of any service—say the word, d'ye see?"

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With this friendly assurance, Melky plunged his hand into a hip-pocket, and drew out some gold, which he held towards Lauriston on his open palm.

"Two or three pound on account, now, mister?" he said, ingratiatingly. "You're welcome as the flowers in May!"

But Lauriston shook his head; he had already decided on a plan of his own, if the expected remittance did not arrive next morning.

"No, thank you," he answered. "It's uncommonly good of you—but I can manage very well indeed—I can, really! Next Friday, then—I'll go with you. I'm very much obliged to you."

Melky slipped his money into his pocket—conscious of having done his part. "Just as you like, mister," he said. "But you was welcome, you know. Next Friday, then—and you can reckon on cash down for this job."

The Monday morning brought neither of the expected letters to Lauriston. But he had not spoken without reason when he said to Zillah that he had a bit of property to fall back upon—now that he knew how ready money could easily be raised. He had some pledgeable property in his trunk—and when the remittances failed to arrive, he determined to avail himself of it. Deep down in a corner of the trunk he had two valuable rings—all that his mother had left him, with the exception of two hundred pounds, with which he had ventured to London, and on which he had lived up to then. He got the rings out towards the end of Monday afternoon, determining to take them round to Daniel Multenius and

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raise sufficient funds on them to last him for, at any rate, another month or two. He had little idea of the real value of such articles, and he had reasons of his own for not showing the rings to Melky Rubinstein; his notion was to wait until evening, when he would go to the pawnshop at about the same time as on his previous visit, in the hope of finding Zillah in charge again. After their meeting and talk of the afternoon before, he felt that she would do business with him in a sympathetic spirit—and if he could raise twenty pounds on the rings he would be free of all monetary anxiety for many a long week to come.

It was half-past five o'clock of that Monday evening when Lauriston, for the second time, turned into the narrow passage which led to the pawnshop door. He had already looked carefully through the street window, in the hope of seeing Zillah inside the front shop. But there was no Zillah to be seen; the front shop was empty. Nor did Zillah confront him when he stepped into the little boxed-in compartment in the pawnshop. There was a curious silence in the place—broken only by the quiet, regular ticking of a clock. That ticking grew oppressive during the minute or two that he waited expecting somebody to step forward. He rapped on the counter at last—gently at first, then more insistently. But nobody came. The clock—hidden from his sight—went on ticking.

Lauriston bent over the counter at last and craned his neck to look into the open door of a little parlour which lay behind the shop. The next instant, with no thought but of the exigencies of the moment, he had

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leapt over the partition and darted into the room. There, stretched out across the floor, his head lying on the hearthrug, his hands lying inert and nerveless at his sides, lay an old man, grey-bearded, venerable—Daniel Multenius, no doubt. He lay very still, very statuesque—and Lauriston, bending over and placing a trembling hand on the high, white forehead, knew that he was dead.

He started up—his only idea that of seeking help. The whole place was so still that he knew he was alone with the dead in it. Instinctively, he ran through the front shop to the street door—and into the arms of a man who was just entering.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE PLATINUM SOLITAIRE

The newcomer, an elderly, thick-set man, who, in spite of his plain clothes, looked as if he were an official of some sort and carried some documents in his hand, at which he was glancing as he entered, started and exclaimed as Lauriston, in his haste, ran up against him. "Hullo!" he said. "What's the matter? You seem in a hurry, young fellow!"

Lauriston, almost out of breath with excitement, turned and pointed to the open door of the little parlour.

"There's an old man—lying in there—dead!" he whispered. "A grey-bearded old man—is it the pawnbroker—Mr. Multenius?"

The man stared, craned his neck to glance in the direction which Lauriston's shaking finger indicated, and then started forward. But he suddenly paused, and motioned Lauriston to go first—and before following him he closed the street door.

"Now then, where?" he said. "Dead, do you say?" He followed Lauriston into the parlour, uttered a sharp exclamation as he caught sight of the recumbent figure, and, bending down, laid a hand on the forehead. "Dead, right enough, my lad!" he muttered. "Been dead some minutes, too. But—where's the girl—the grand-daughter? Have you seen anybody?"

"Not a soul!" answered Lauriston. "Since I came

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in, the whole place has been as still as—as it is now!"

The man stared at him for a second or two, silently; then, as if he knew the ins and outs of the establishment, he strode to an inner door, threw it open and revealed a staircase.

"Hullo there!" he called loudly. "Hullo! Miss Wildrose! Are you there?"

This was the first time Lauriston had heard Zillah's surname: even in the midst of that startling discovery, it struck him as a very poetical one. But he had no time to reflect on it—the man turned back into the parlour.

"She must be out," he said. "Do you say you found him?"

"Yes—I found him," answered Lauriston. "Just now."

"And what were you doing here?" asked the man. "Who are you?"

Lauriston fancied he detected a faint note of suspicion in these questions, and he drew himself up, with a flush on his face.

"My name's Andrew Lauriston," he answered. "I live close by. I came in on—business. Who are you?"

"Well, if it comes to that, my lad," said the man, "I'm Detective-Sergeant Ayscough—known well enough around these parts! I came to see the old gentleman about these papers. Now—what was your business, then?"

He was watching Lauriston very keenly, and Lauriston, suddenly realizing that he was in an awkward position, determined on candour.

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"Well, if you really want to know," he said, "I came to borrow some money—on these rings."

And he opened his left hand and showed the detective the two rings which he had taken from his trunk—not half-an-hour before.

"Your property?" asked Ayscough.

"Of course they're my property!" exclaimed Lauriston. "Whose else should they be?"

Ayscough's glance wandered from the rings to a table which stood, a little to one side, in the middle of the parlour. Lauriston turned in that direction, also. Two objects immediately met his eye. On the table stood a small tray, full of rings—not dissimilar in style and appearance to those which he held in his hand: old-fashioned rings. The light from the gas-brackets above the mantelpiece caught the facets of the diamonds in those rings and made little points of fire; here and there he saw the shimmer of pearls. But there was another object. Close by the tray of old rings lay a book—a beautifully bound book, a small quarto in size, with much elaborate gold ornament on the back and side, and gilt clasps holding the heavy leather binding together. It looked as if some hand had recently thrown this book carelessly on the table.

But Ayscough gave little, if any, attention to the book: his eyes were fixed on the rings in the tray—and he glanced from them to Lauriston's rings.

"Um!" he said presently. "Odd that you have a couple of rings, young man, just like—those! Isn't it?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Lauriston, flushing scarlet. "You don't suggest—"

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"Don't suggest anything—just now," answered the detective, quietly. "But you must stop here with me, until I find out more. Come to the door—we must have help here."

Lauriston saw there was nothing to do but to obey, and he followed Ayscough to the street door. The detective opened it, looked out, and waiting a few minutes, beckoned to a policeman who presently strolled along. After a whispered word or two, the policeman went away, and Ayscough beckoned Lauriston back into the shop.

"Now," he said, "there'll be some of our people and a surgeon along in a few minutes—before they come, just tell me your story. You're an honest-looking young chap—but you must admit that it looks a bit queer that I should find you running out of this shop, old Multenius dead inside his parlour, and you with a couple of rings in your possession which look uncommonly like his property! Just tell me how it came about."

Lauriston told him the plain truth—from the pawning of the watch to the present visit. Ayscough watched him narrowly—and at the end nodded his head.

"That sounds like a straight tale, Mr. Lauriston," he said. "I'm inclined to believe every word you say. But I shall have to report it, and all the circumstances, and you'll have to prove that these two rings were your mother's, and all that—and you must stay here till the doctor comes with our people. Queer that the old man should be alone! I wonder where his grand-daughter is?"

But just then the street door opened and Zillah came

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in, a big bunch of flowers under one arm, some small parcels in the other. At the sight of the two men she started; crimsoned as she saw Lauriston; paled again as she noticed that Ayscough was evidently keeping an eye on him.

"Mr. Ayscough!" she exclaimed. "What's this?—is something the matter? What are you doing here?" she went on hurriedly, turning to Lauriston. "Inside the shop! What's happened?—tell me, one of you?"

The detective purposely kept himself and Lauriston between Zillah and the open door at the rear of the shop. He made a kindly motion of his head towards her.

"Now, my dear!" he said. "Don't get upset—your grandfather was getting a very old man, you know—and we can't expect old gentlemen to live for ever. Take it quietly, now!"

The girl turned and laid her flowers and parcels on the counter. Lauriston, watching her anxiously, saw that she was nerving herself to be brave.

"That means—he's dead?" she said. "I am quiet—you see I'm quiet. Tell me what's happened—you tell me," she added, glancing at Lauriston. "Tell me—now!"

"I came in and found no one here, and I looked round through the door into the parlour there," answered Lauriston, "and I saw your grandfather lying on the floor. So I jumped over the counter and went to him."

Zillah moved forward as if to go into the parlour. But the detective stopped her, glancing from her to Lauriston.

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"You know this young man, Miss Wildrose?" he asked. "You've met him before?"

"Yes," replied Zillah, confidently. "He's Mr. Lauriston. Let me go in there, please. Can nothing be done?"

But Ayscough only shook his head. There was nothing to be done—but to await the arrival of the doctor. They followed the girl into the parlour and stood by while she bent over the dead man. She made no demonstration of grief, and when Ayscough presently suggested that she should go upstairs until the doctor had come, she went quietly away.

"Hadn't we better lift him on that sofa?" suggested Lauriston.

"Not till our people and the police-surgeon have seen him," answered Ayscough, shaking his head. "I want to know all about this—he may have died a natural death—a seizure of some sort—and again, he mayn't—They'll be here in a minute."

Lauriston presently found himself a passive spectator while a police-inspector, another man in plain clothes, and the doctor examined the body, after hearing Ayscough's account of what had just happened. He was aware that he was regarded with suspicion—the inspector somewhat brusquely bade him stay where he was: it would, indeed, have been impossible to leave, for there was a policeman at the door, in which, by his superior's orders, he had turned the key. And there was a general, uncomfortable sort of silence in the place while the doctor busied himself about the body.

"This man has been assaulted!" said the doctor, sud-

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denly turning to the inspector. "Look here!—he's not only been violently gripped by the right arm—look at that bruise—but taken savagely by the throat. There's no doubt of that. Old and evidently feeble as he was, the shock would be quite enough to kill him. But—that's how it's been done, without a doubt."

The inspector turned, looking hard at Lauriston.

"Did you see anybody leaving the place when you entered?" he asked.

"There was no one about here when I came in—either at the street door or at the side door," replied Lauriston, readily. "The whole place was quiet—deserted—except for him. And—he was dead when I found him."

The inspector drew Ayscough aside and they talked in whispers for a few minutes, eyeing Lauriston now and then; eventually they approached him.

"I understand you're known here, and that you live in the neighbourhood," said the inspector. "You'll not object if the sergeant goes round with you to your lodgings—you'll no doubt be able to satisfy him about your respectability, and so on. I don't want to suggest anything—but—you understand?"

"I understand," replied Lauriston. "I'll show or tell him anything he likes. I've told you the plain truth."

"Go with him now," directed the inspector; "you know what to do, Ayscough!"

Half an hour later, when the dead man had been carried to his room, and the shop and house had been closed, Melky Rubinstein, who had come in while the police were still there, and had remained when they

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had gone, stood talking to Zillah in the upstairs sitting-room. Melky was unusually grave: Zillah had already gathered that the police had some suspicion about Lauriston.

"I'll go round there and see what the detective fellow's doing with him," said Melky. "I ain't got no suspicion about him—not me! But—it's an awkward postion—and them rings, too! Now, if he'd only ha' shown 'em to me, first, Zillah—see?"

"Do go, Melky!" urged Zillah tearfully. "Of course, he'd nothing to do with it. Oh!—I wish I'd never gone out!"

Melky went downstairs. He paused for a moment in the little parlour, glancing meditatively at the place where the old man had been found dead. And suddenly his keen eyes saw an object which lay close to the fender, half hidden by a tassel of the hearthrug, and he stooped and picked it up—a solitaire stud, made of platinum, and ornamented with a curious device.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE TWO LETTERS

Once outside the shop, Lauriston turned sharply on the detective.

"Look here!" he said. "I wish you'd just tell me the truth. Am I suspected? Am I—in some way or other—in custody?"

Ayscough laughed quietly, wagging his head.

"Certainly not in custody," he answered. "And as to the other—well, you know, Mr. Lauriston, supposing we put it in this way?—suppose you'd been me, and I'd been you, half-an-hour ago? What would you have thought if you'd found me in the situation and under the circumstances in which I found you? Come, now!"

"Yes," replied Lauriston, after a moment's reflection. "I suppose it's natural that you should suspect me—finding me there, alone with the old man. But—"

"It's not so much suspicion in a case of this sort, as a wish to satisfy one's self," interrupted the detective. "You seem a gentleman-like young fellow, and you may be all right. I want to know that you are—I'd like to know that you are! It would be no satisfaction to me to fasten this business on you, I can assure you. And if you like to tell me about yourself, and how you came to go to Multenius's—why, it would be as well."

"There's not much to tell," answered Lauriston. "I came from Scotland to London, two years ago or there-

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abouts, to earn my living by writing. I'd a bit of money when I came—I've lived on it till now. I've just begun to earn something. I've been expecting a cheque for some work for these last ten or twelve days. but I was running short last week—so I went to that place to pawn my watch—I saw the young lady there. As my cheque hadn't arrived today, I went there again to pawn those rings I told you about and showed you. And—that's all. Except this—I was advised to go to Multenius's by a relation of theirs, Mr. Rubinstein, who lodges where I do. He knows me."

"Oh, Melky Rubinstein!" said Ayscough. "I know Melky—sharp chap he is. He sold me this pin I'm wearing. Well, that seems quite a straightforward tale, Mr. Lauriston. I've no doubt all will be satisfactory. You've friends in London, of course?"

"No—none," replied Lauriston. "And scarcely an acquaintance. I've kept to myself—working hard: I've had no time—nor inclination, either—to make friends. Here's the house where I lodge—it's not much of a place, but come in."

They had reached Mrs. Flitwick's house by that time, and Mrs. Flitwick herself was in the narrow, shabby passage as they entered. She immediately produced two letters.

"Here's two letters for you, Mr. Lauriston," she said, with a sharp glance at Ayscough. "One of 'em's a registered—I did sign for it. So I kept 'em myself, instead of sending 'em up to your room."

"Thank you, Mrs. Flitwick," said Lauriston. He took the letters, saw that the writing on the registered

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envelope was his old friend John Purdie's, and that the other letter was from the magazine to which he had sold his stories, and turned to Ayscough. "Come up to my room," he continued. "We'll talk up there."

Ayscough followed him up to his room—once inside, and the door shut, Lauriston tore open the letter from the magazine, and extracted a printed form and a cheque for twenty guineas. He took one look at them and thrust them into the detective's hands.

"There!" he said, with a sigh of mingled relief and triumph. "There's a proof of the truth of one statement I made to you! That's the expected cheque I told you of. Excuse me while I look at the other letter."

Out of the registered letter came a bank-note—for twenty pounds—and a hastily scribbled note which Lauriston eagerly read. "Dear old Andie," it ran, "I've only just got your letter, for I've been from home for a fortnight, and had no letters sent on to me. Of course you'll make me your banker until your book's finished—and afterwards, too, if need be. Here's something to be going on with—but I'm coming to London in a day or two, as it happens, and will go into matter—I'll call on you as soon as I arrive. Excuse this scrawl—post time. Always yours, John Purdie."

Lauriston thrust that letter, too, into Ayscough's hands.

"If I've no friends in London, there's proof of having one in my own country!" he exclaimed. "Ah!—if those letters had only come before I went off to Praed Street!"

"Just so!" agreed the detective, glancing the letters

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and their accompaniments over. "Well, I'm glad you're able to show me these, Mr. Lauriston, anyway. But now, about those rings—between you and me, I wish they hadn't been so much like those that were lying in that tray on the old man's table. It's an unfortunate coincidence!—because some folks might think, you know, that you'd just grabbed a couple of those as you left the place. Eh?"

"My rings have been in that trunk for two or three years," asserted Lauriston. "They were my mother's, and I believe she'd had them for many a year before she died. They may resemble those that we saw in that tray, but—"

"Well, I suppose you can bring somebody—if necessary—, that is—to prove that they were your mother's, can't you?" asked Ayscough. "That'll make matters all right—on that point. And as for the rest—it's very lucky you know Melky Rubinstein, and that the girl knew you as a customer. But, my faith!—I wish you'd caught a glimpse of somebody leaving that shop! For there's no doubt the old man met his death by violence."

"I know nothing of it," said Lauriston, "I saw no one."

Just then Melky came in. He glanced at the cheque and the bank-notes lying on the table, and nodded to Lauriston as if he understood their presence. Then he turned to Ayscough, almost anxiously.

"I say, Mr. Ayscough!" he said, deprecatingly. "You ain't going to be so unkind as to mix up this here young fellow in what's happened. S'elp me, Mr. Ayscough, I couldn't believe anything o' that sort about

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him, nohow—nor would my cousin, Zillah, what you know well enough, neither; he's as quiet as a lamb, Mr. Ayscough, is Mr. Lauriston—ain't I known him, lodging here as he does, this many a month? I'll give my word for him, anyway, Mr. Ayscough! And you police gentlemen know me. Don't you now, Mr. Ayscough?"

"Very well indeed, my boy!" agreed the detective, heartily. "And I'll tell you what—I shall have to trouble Mr. Lauriston to go round with me to the station, just to give a formal account of what happened, and a bit of explanation, you know—I'm satisfied myself about him, and so, no doubt, will our people be, but you come with us, Melky, and say a word or two—say you've known him for some time, d'ye see—it'll help."

"Anything to oblige a friend, Mr. Ayscough," said Melky. He motioned to Lauriston to put his money in his pocket. "Glad to see your letters turned up," he whispered as they went downstairs. "I say!—a word in your ear—don't you tell these here police chaps any more than you need—I'll stand up for you."

The detective's report, a little questioning of Lauriston, and Melky's fervent protestations on Lauriston's behalf, served to satisfy the authorities at the police-station, and Lauriston was allowed to go—admonished by the inspector that he'd be wanted at the inquest, as the most important witness. He went out into the street with Melky.

"Come and have a bit o' supper at Mrs. Goldmark's," suggested Melky. "I shall have my hands full tonight

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at the poor old man's, but I ain't had nothing since dinner.''

Lauriston, however, excused himself. He wanted to go home and write letters—at once. But he promised to look round at the pawnshop later in the evening, to see if he could be of any use, and to give Melky a full account of his finding of the old pawnbroker.

"Ah!" remarked Melky, as they pushed at the door of the eating-house. "And ain't it going to be a nice job to find the man that scragged him?—I don't think! But I'm going to take a hand at that game, mister!—let alone the police.''

Mrs. Goldmark was out. She had heard the news, said the waitress who was left in charge, and had gone round to do what she could for Miss Zillah. So Melky, deprived of the immediate opportunity of talk with Mrs. Goldmark, ordered his supper, and while he ate and drank, cogitated and reflected. And his thoughts ran chiefly on the platinum solitaire stud which he had carefully bestowed in his vest pocket.

It was Melky's firm belief—already—that the stud had been dropped in Daniel Multenius's back parlour by some person who had no business there—in other words by the old man's assaillant. And ever since he had found the stud, Melky had been wondering and speculating on his chances of finding its owner. Of one thing he was already certain that the owner, whoever he was, was no ordinary person. Ordinary, everyday persons do not wear studs or tie-pins on chains made of platinum—the most valuable of all the metals. How came a solitaire stud, made of a metal far more valuable than gold, and

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designed and ornamented in a peculiar fashion, to be lying on the hearthrug of old Daniel Multenius's room? It was not to be believed that the old man had dropped it there—no, affirmed Melky to himself, with conviction, that bit of personal property had been dropped there, out of a loose shirt-cuff by some man who had called on Daniel not long before Andie Lauriston had gone in, and who for some mysterious reason had scragged the old fellow. And now the question was—who was that man?

"Got to find that out, somehow!" mused Melky. "Else that poor chap'll be in a nice fix—s'elp me, he will! And that 'ud never do!"

Melky, in spite of his keenness as a business man, and the fact that from boyhod he had had to fight the world by himself, had a peculiarly soft heart—he tended altogether to verge on the sentimental. He had watched Lauriston narrowly, and had developed a decided feeling for him—moreover, he now knew that his cousin Zillah, hitherto adamant to many admirers, had fallen in love with Lauriston: clearly, Lauriston must be saved. Melky knew police ways and methods, and he felt sure that whatever Ayscough, a good-natured man, might think, the superior authorities would view Lauriston's presence in the pawnshop with strong suspicion. Therefore—the real culprit must be found. And he, Melky Rubinstein—he must have a go at that game.

He finished his supper, thinking hard all the time he ate and drank; finally he approached the desk to pay his bill. The young woman whom Mrs. Goldmark had left in charge lifted the lid of the desk to get some change —and Melky's astonished eyes immediately fell on an

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object which lay on top of a little pile of papers. That object was the duplicate of the platinum solitaire which Melky had in his pocket. Without ceremony—being well known there—he at once picked it up.

"What's this bit of jewellery?" he demanded.

"That?" said the waitress, indifferently. "Oh, one of the girls picked it up the other day off a table where a stranger had been sitting—we think he'd dropped it. Mrs. Goldmark says it's valuable, so she put it away, in case he comes again. But we haven't seen him since."

Melky took a good look at the second stud. Then he put it back in the desk, picked up his change, and went away—in significant silence.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE SPANISH MANUSCRIPT

Lauriston, walking back to his room after leaving Melky at the door of the eating-house, faced the situation in which an unfortunae combination of circumstances had placed him. Ayscough had been placable enough; the authorities at the police-station had heard his own version of things with attention—but he was still conscious that he was under a certain amount of suspicion. More than that, he felt convinced that the police would keep an eye on him that night. Ayscough, indeed, had more than hinted that that would probably be done. For anything he knew, some plain-clothes man might be shadowing him even then—anyway, there had been no mistaking the almost peremptory request of the inspector that he should report himself at the police station in the morning. It was no use denying the fact—he was suspected, in some degree.

He knew where the grounds of suspicion lay—in his possession of two rings, which were undoubtedly very similar to the rings which lay in the tray that he and the detective had found on the table in the back-parlour of the pawnshop. It needed no effort on the part of one who had already had considerable experience in the construction of plots for stories, to see how the police would build up a theory of their own. Here, they would

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say, is a young fellow, who on his own confession, is so hard up, so penniless, indeed, that he has had to pawn his watch. He has got to know something of this particular pawnshop, and of its keepers—he watches the girl leave; he ascertains that the old man is alone; he enters, probably he sees that tray of rings lying about; he grabs a couple of the rings; the old man interrupts him in the act; he seizes the old man, to silence his outcries; the old man, feeble enough at any time, dies under the shock. A clear, an unmistakable case!

What was he, Lauriston, to urge against the acceptance of such a theory? He thought over everything that could be said on his behalf. The friendliness of Zillah and her cousin Melky towards him could be dismissed—that, when it came to it, would weigh little against the cold marshalling of facts which a keen legal mind would put into the opposite scale. His own contention that it was scarcely probable that he should have gone to the pawnshop except to pledge something, and that that something was the rings, would also be swept aside, easily enough: his real object, the other side would say, had been robbery when the old man was alone: what evidence had he that the two rings which he had in his hand when Ayscough found him hurrying out of the shop were really his?

Here, Lauriston knew he was in a difficulty. He had kept these two rings safely hidden in his old-fashioned trunk ever since coming to London, and had never shown them to a single person—he had, indeed, never seen them himself for a long time until he took them out that afternoon. But where was his proof of that? He had no

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relations to whom he could appeal. His mother had possessed an annuity; just sufficient to maintain her and her son, and to give Lauriston a good education: it had died with her, and all that she had left him, to start life on, was about two hundred pounds and some small personal belongings, of which the rings and his father's watch and chain were a part. And he remembered now that his mother had kept those rings as securely put away as he had kept them since her death—until they came into his hands at her death he had only once seen them; she had shown them to him when he was a boy and had said they were very valuable. Was it possible that there was any one, far away in Scotland, who had known his mother and who would come forward—if need arose—and prove that those rings had been her property? But when he had put this question to himself, he had to answer it with a direct negative—he knew of no one.

There was one gleam of hope in this critical situation. John Purdie was coming to London. Lauriston had always felt that he could rely on John Purdie, and he had just received proof of the value of his faith in his old schoolmate. John Purdie would tell him what to do: he might even suggest the names of some of Mrs. Lauriston's old friends. And perhaps the need might not arise—there must surely be some clue to the old pawnbroker's assailant; surely the police would go deeper into the matter. He cheered up at these thoughts, and having written replies to the two welcome letters and asked John Purdie to see him immediately on his arrival in town, he went out again to the post-office and to fulfil his promise to Melky to call at the pawnshop.

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Lauriston was naturally of quick observation. He noticed now, as he stepped out into the ill-lighted, gloomy street that a man was pacing up and down in front of the house. This man took no notice of him as he passed, but before he had reached Praed Street, he glanced around, and saw that he was following him. He followed him to Spring Street post-office; he was in his rear when Lauriston reached the pawnshop. Idly and perfunctorily as the man seemed to be strolling about, Lauriston was sure that he was shadowing him—and he told Melky of the fact when Melky admitted him to the shop by the private door.

"Likely enough, mister," remarked Melky. "But I shouldn't bother myself about it if I were you. There'll be more known about this affair before long. Now, look here," he continued, leading the way into the little back-parlour where Lauriston had found Daniel Multenius lying dead, "here's you and me alone—Zillah, she's up-stairs, and Mrs. Goldmark is with her. Just you tell me what you saw when you came in here, d'you see, Mr. Lauriston—never mind the police—just give me the facts. I ain't no fool, you know, and I'm going to work this thing out."

Lauriston gave Melky a complete account of his connection with the matter: Melky checked off all the points on his long fingers. At the end he turned to the table and indicated the finely-bound book which Lauriston had noticed when he and the detective had first looked round.

"The police," said Melky, "made Zillah lock up that tray o' rings that was there in a drawer what she had to clear out for 'em, and they've put a seal on it till to-

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morrow. They've got those rings of yours, too, mister, haven't they?"

"They said it would be best for me to leave them with them," answered Lauriston. "Ayscough advised it. They gave me a receipt for them, you know."

"All right," remarked Melky. "But there's something they ain't had the sense to see the importance of —that fine book there. Mister!—that there book wasn't in this parlour, nor in this shop, nor in this house, at a quarter to five o'clock this afternoon, when my cousin Zillah went out, leaving the poor old man alone. She'll swear to that. Now then, who brought it here—who left it here? Between the time Zillah went out, mister, and the time you come in, and found what you did find, somebody—somebody!—had been in here and left that book behind him! And—mark you!—it wasn't pawned, neither. That's a fact! And—it's no common book, that. Look at it, Mr. Lauriston—you'd ought to know something about books. Look at it!—s'elp me if I don't feel there's a clue in that there volume, whoever it belongs to!"

Lauriston took the book in his hands. He had only glanced at it casually before; now he examined it carefully, while Melky stood at his elbow, watching. The mysterious volume was certainly worthy of close inspection—a small quarto, wonderfully bound in old dark crimson morocco leather, and ornamented on sides and back with curious gold arabesque work: a heavy clasp, also intricately wrought, held the boards together. Lauriston, something of a book lover, whose natural inclination was to spend his last shilling on a book rather

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than on beef and bread, looked admiringly at this fine specimen of the binder's art as he turned it over.

"That's solid gold, isn't it?" he asked as he unfastened the clasp. "You know."

"Solid gold it is, mister—and no error," assented Melky. "Now, what's inside? It ain't no blooming account-book, I'll bet!"

Lauriston opened the volume, to reveal leaves of old vellum, covered with beautiful fine writing. He had sufficient knowledge of foreign languages to know what he was looking at.

"That's Spanish!" he said. "An old Spanish manuscript—and I should say it's worth a rare lot of money. How could it have come here?"

Melky took the old volume out of Lauriston's hands, and put it away in a corner cupboard.

"Ah, just so, mister!" he said. "But we'll keep that question to ourselves—for awhile. Don't you say nothing to the police about that there old book—I'll give Zillah the tip. More hangs round that than we know of yet. Now look here!—there'll be the opening of the inquest tomorrow. You be careful! Take my tip and don't let 'em get more out of you than's necessary. I'll go along with you. I'm going to stop here tonight—watch-dog, you know. Mrs. Goldmark and another friend's going to be here as well, so Zillah'll have company. And I say, Zillah wants a word with you—stop here, and I'll send her down."

Lauriston presently found himself alone with Zillah in the little parlour. She looked at him silently, with

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eyes full of anxiety: he suddenly realized that the anxiety was for himself.

"Don't!" he said, moving close to her and laying his hand on her arm. "I'm not afraid!"

Zillah lifted her large dark eyes to his.

"Those rings!" she said. "You'll be able to account for them? The police, oh, I'm so anxious about you!"

"The rings are mine!" he exclaimed. "It doesn't matter what the police say or think, or do, either—at least, it shan't matter. And—you're not to be anxious. I've got a good friend coming from Scotland—Melky told you I'd had two lots of good news tonight, didn't he?"

A moment later Lauriston was in the street—conscious that, without a word spoken between them, he and Zillah had kissed each other. He went away with a feeling of exaltation—and he only laughed when he saw a man detach himself from a group on the opposite side of the street and saunter slowly after him. Let the police shadow him—watch his lodgings all night, if they pleased—he had something else to think of. And presently, not even troubling to look out of his window to see if there was a watcher there, he went to bed, to dream of Zillah's dark eyes.

But when morning came, and Lauriston realized that a fateful day was before him, his thoughts were not quite so rosy. He drew up his blind—there, certainly was a man pacing the opposite sidewalk. Evidently, he was not to escape surveillance; the official eye was on him! Supposing, before the day was out, the official hand was on him, too?

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He turned from the window as he heard his newspaper thrust under his door. He had only one luxury—a copy of the *Times* every morning. It was a three-penny *Times* in those days, but he had always managed to find his weekly eighteenpence for it. He picked it up now, and carelessly glanced at its front page as he was about to lay it aside. The next moment he was eagerly reading a prominent advertisement:

> "Lost in a Holborn to Chapel Street Omnibus, about 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon, a Spanish manuscript, bound in old crimson morocco. Whoever has found the same will be most handsomely rewarded on bringing it to Spencer Levendale, Esq., M.P., 591, Sussex Square, W."

Lauriston read this twice over—and putting the paper in his pocket, finished his dressing and went straight to the police-station.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Melky Rubinstein came out of the side-passage by Multenius's shop as Lauriston neared it; he, too, had a newspaper bulging from his coat pocket, and at sight of Lauriston he pulled it out and waved it excitedly.

"What'd I tell you, mister?" exclaimed Melky, as Lauriston joined him, the shadowing plain-clothes man in his rear. "D'ye see this?" He pointed to an advertisement in his own paper, which he had marked with blue pencil. "There y'are, Mr. Lauriston!—that identical old book what's inside the parlour—advèrtised for—handsome reward, too, in the *Daily Telegraph!* Didn't I say we'd hear more of it?"

Lauriston pulled out the *Times* and indicated the Personal Column.

"It's there, too," he said. "This man, Mr. Levendale, is evidently very anxious to recover his book. And he's lost no time in advertising for it, either! But—however did it get to Multenius's?

"Mister!" said Melky, solemnly. "We'll have to speak to the police—now. There's going to be a fine clue in that there book. I didn't mean to say nothing to the police about it, just yet, but after this here advertisement, t'ain't no use keeping the thing to ourselves. Come on round to the police-station."

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"That's just where I was going," replied Lauriston. "Let's get hold of Ayscough."

Ayscough was standing just inside the police-station when they went up the steps; he, too, had a newspaper in his hands, and at sight of them he beckoned them to follow him into an office in which two or three other police officials were talking. He led Lauriston and Melky aside.

"I say!" he said. "Here's a curious thing! That book we noticed on the table in Multenius's back room last night—that finely bound book—it's advertised for in the *Daily Mail*—handsome reward offered."

"Yes, and in the *Times*, too—and in the *Daily Telegraph*," said Lauriston. "Here you are—just the same advertisement. It's very evident the owner's pretty keen about getting it back."

Ayscough glanced at the two newspapers, and then beckoned to a constable who was standing near the door.

"Jim!" he said, as the man came up. "Just slip across to the newsagent's over there and get me the *News*, the *Chronicle*, the *Standard*, the *Morning Post*. If the owner's as keen as all that," he added, turning back to Lauriston, "he'll have put that advertisement in all the morning papers, and I'd like to make sure. What's known about that book at the shop?" he asked, glancing at Melky. "Does your cousin know anything?"

Melky's face assumed its most solemn expression.

"Mister!" he said earnestly. "There ain't nothing known at the shop about that there book, except this here. It wasn't there when my cousin Zillah left the old man

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alone at a quarter to five yesterday afternoon. It was there when this here gentleman found the old man. But it hadn't been pledged, nor yet sold, Mr. Ayscough—There'd ha' been an entry in the books if it had been taken in pawn, or bought across the counter—and there's no entry. Now then—who'd left it there?''

Another official had come up to the group—one of the men who had questioned Lauriston the night before. He turned to Lauriston as Melky finished.

"You don't know anything about this book?'' he asked.

"Nothing—except that Mr. Ayscough and I saw it lying on the table in the back room, close by that tray of rings,'' replied Lauriston. "I was attracted by the binding, of course.''

"Where's the book, now?'' asked the official.

"Put safe away, mister,'' replied Melky. "It's all right. But this here gentleman what's advertising for it—''

Just then the constable returned with several newspapers and handed them over to Ayscough, who immediately laid them on a desk and turned to the advertisements, while the others crowded round him.

"In every one of 'em,'' exclaimed Ayscough, a moment later. "Word for word, in every morning newspaper in London! He must have sent that advertisement round to all the offices last night. And you'll notice,'' he added, turning to the other official, "that this Mr. Levendale only lost this book about four o'clock yesterday afternoon: therefore, it must have been taken to Multenius's shop between then and when we saw it there.''

"The old man may have found it in the 'bus,'' sug-

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gested a third police officer who had come up. "Looks as if he had."

"No, mister," said Melky firmly. "Mr. Multenius wasn't out of the shop at all yesterday afternoon—I've made sure o' that fact from my cousin. He didn't find no book, gentlemen. It was brought there."

Ayscough picked up one of the papers and turned to Melky and Lauriston.

"Here!" he said. "We'll soon get some light on this. You two come with me—we'll step round to Mr. Levendale."

Ten minutes later, the three found themselves at the door of one of the biggest houses in Sussex Square; a moment more and they were being ushered within by a footman who looked at them with stolid curiosity. Lauriston gained a general impression of great wealth and luxury, soft carpets, fine pictures, all the belongings of a very rich man's house—then he and his companions were ushered into a large room, half study, half library, wherein, at a massive, handsomely carved desk, littered with books and papers, sat a middle-aged, keen-eyed man, who looked quietly up from his writing-pad at his visitors.

"S'elp me!—one of ourselves!" whispered Melky Rubinstein at Lauriston's elbow. "Twig him!"

Lauriston was quick enough of comprehension and observation to know what Melky meant. Mr. Spencer Levendale was certainly a Jew. His dark hair and beard, his large dark eyes, the olive tint of his complexion, the lines of his nose and lips all betrayed his Semitic origin.

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He was evidently a man of position and of character; a quiet-mannered, self-possessed man of business, not given to wasting words. He glanced at the card which Ayscough had sent in, and turned to him with one word.

"Well?"

Ayscough went straight to the point.

"I called, Mr. Levendale, about that advertisement of yours which appears in all this morning's newspapers," he said. "I may as well tell you that that book of yours was found yesterday afternoon, under strange circumstances. Mr. Daniel Multenius, the jeweller and pawnbroker, of Praed Street—perhaps you know him, sir?"

"Not at all!" answered Levendale. "Never heard of him."

"He was well known in this part of the town," remarked Ayscough, quietly. "Well, sir—Mr. Multenius was found dead in his back-parlour yesterday afternoon, about five-thirty, by this young man, Mr. Lauriston, who happened to look in there, and I myself was on the spot a few minutes later. Your book—for it's certainly the same—was lying on the table in the parlour. Now, this other young man, Mr. Rubinstein, is a relation of Mr. Multenius's—from enquiries he's made, Mr. Levendale, it's a fact that the book was neither pawned nor sold at Multenius's, though it must certainly have been brought there between the time you lost it and the time we found the old gentleman lying dead. Now, we—the police—want to know how it came there. And so—I've come round to you. What can you tell me, sir?"

Levendale, who had listened to Ayscough with great—

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and, as it seemed to Lauriston, with very watchful—attention, pushed aside a letter he was writing, and looked from one to the other of his callers.

"Where is my book?" he asked.

"It's all right—all safe, mister," said Melky. "It's locked up in a cupboard, in the parlour where it was found, and the key's in my pocket."

Levendale turned to the detective, glancing again at Ayscough's card.

"All I can tell you, sergeant," he said, "is—practically—what I've told the public in my advertisement. Of course, I can supplement it a bit. The book is a very valuable one—you see," he went on, with a careless wave of his hand towards his book-shelves. "I'm something of a collector of rare books. I bought this particular book yesterday afternoon, at a well-known dealer's in High Holborn. Soon after buying it, I got into a Cricklewood omnibus, which I left at Chapel Street—at the corner of Praed Street, as a matter of fact: I wished to make a call at the Great Western Hotel. It was not till I made that call that I found I'd left the book in the 'bus—I was thinking hard about a business matter—I'd placed the book in a corner behind me—and, of course, I'd forgotten it, valuable though it is. And so, later on, after telephoning to the omnibus people, who'd heard nothing, I sent that advertisement round to all the morning papers. I'm very glad to hear of it—and I shall be pleased to reward you," he concluded, turning to Melky. "Handsomely!—as I promised."

But Melky made no sign of gratitude or pleasure. He

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was eyeing the rich man before him in inquisitive fashion.

"Mister!" he said suddenly. "I'd like to ask you a question."

Levendale frowned a little.

"Well?" he asked brusquely. "What is it?"

"This here," replied Melky. "Was that there book wrapped up? Was it brown-papered, now, when you left it?"

It seemed to Lauriston that Levendale was somewhat taken aback. But if he was, it was only for a second: his answer, then, came promptly enough.

"No, it was not," he said. "I carried it away from the shop where I bought it—just as it was. Why do you ask?"

"It's a very fine-bound book," remarked Melky. "I should ha' thought, now, that if it had been left in a 'bus, the conductor would ha' noticed it, quick."

"So should I," said Levendale. "Anything else?" he added, glancing at Ayscough.

"Well, no, Mr. Levendale, thank you," replied the detective. "At least not just now. But—the fact is, Mr. Multenius appears to have come to his death by violence—and I want to know if whoever took your book into his shop had anything to do with it."

"Ah!—however, I can't tell you any more," said Levendale. "Please see that my book's taken great care of and returned to me, sergeant. Good-morning."

Outside, Ayscough consulted his watch and looked at his companions.

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"Time we were going on to the inquest," he remarked. "Come on—we'll step round there together. You're both wanted, you know."

"I'll join you at the Coroner's court, Mr. Ayscough," said Melky. "I've got a few minutes' business—shan't be long."

He hurried away by a short cut to Praed Street and turned into Mrs. Goldmark's establishment.

Mrs. Goldmark herself was still ministering to Zillah, but the young woman whom Melky had seen the night before was in charge. Melky drew her aside.

"I say!" he said, with an air of great mystery. "A word with you, miss!—private, between you and me. Can you tell me what like was that fellow what you believed to ha' lost that there cuff stud you showed me in Mrs. Goldmark's desk?—you know?"

"Yes!" answered the young woman promptly. "Tall—dark—clean-shaved—very brown—looked like one of those Colonials that you see sometimes—wore a slouch hat."

"Not a word to nobody!" warned Melky, more mysteriously than ever. And nodding his head with great solemnity, he left the eating-house, and hurried away to the Coroner's Court.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE INQUEST

Until he and Ayscough walked into this particular one, Lauriston had never been in a Coroner's Court in his life. He knew very little about what went on in such places. He was aware that the office of Coroner is of exceeding antiquity; that when any person meets his or her death under suspicious circumstances an enquiry into those circumstances is held by a Coroner, who has a jury of twelve men to assist him in his duties: but what Coroner and jury did, what the procedure of these courts was, he did not know. It surprised him, accordingly, to find himself in a hall which had all the outward appearance of a court of justice—a raised seat; on a sort of dais, for the Coroner; a box for the jury; a table for officials and legal gentlemen; a stand for witnesses, and accommodation for the general public. Clearly, it was evident that when any one died as poor old Daniel Multenius had died, the law took good care that everybody should know everything about it, and that whatever mystery there was should be thoroughly investigated.

The general public, however, had not as yet come to be greatly interested in the death of Daniel Multenius. Up to that moment the affair was known to few people beyond the police, the relations of the dead man, and his immediate neighbours in Praed Street. Consequently, be-

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yond the interested few, there was no great assemblage in the court that morning. A reporter or two, each with his note-book, lounged at the end of the table on the chance of getting some good copy out of whatever might turn up; some of the police officials whom Lauriston had already seen stood chatting with the police surgeon and a sharp-eyed legal looking man, who was attended by a clerk; outside the open door, a group of men, evidently tradesmen and householders of the district, hung about, looking as if they would be glad to get back to their businesses and occupations. Melky, coming in a few minutes after Lauriston had arrived, and sitting down by him, nudged his elbow as he pointed to these individuals.

"There's the fellows what sits on the jury, mister!" whispered Melky. "Half-a-crown each they gets for the job—and a nice mess they makes of it, sometimes. They've the power to send a man for trial for his life, has them chaps—all depends on their verdict. But lor' bless yer!—they takes their tip from the Coroner—he's the fellow what you've got to watch."

Then Melky looked around more narrowly, and suddenly espied the legal-looking man who was talking to the police. He dug his elbow into Lauriston.

"Mister!" he whispered. "You be careful what you say when you get into that there witness-box. See that man there, a-talking to the detectives?—him with the gold nippers on his blooming sharp nose? That's Mr. Parminter!—I knows him, well enough. He's a lawyer chap, what the police gets when there's a case o' this sort, to ask questions of the witnesses, d'ye see? Watch him, Mr. Lauriston, if he starts a-questioning you!—he's the

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sort that can get a tale out of a dead cod-fish—s'elp me, he is! He's a terror, he is!—the Coroner ain't in it with him—he's a good sort, the Coroner, but Parminter—Lord love us! ain't I heard him turn witnesses inside out—not half! And here is the Coroner."

Lauriston almost forgot that he was an important witness, and was tempted to consider himself nothing but a spectator as he sat and witnessed the formal opening of the Court, the swearing-in of the twelve jurymen, all looking intensely bored, and the preliminaries which prefaced the actual setting-to-work of the morning's business. But at last, after some opening remarks from the Coroner, who said that the late Mr. Daniel Multenius was a well-known and much respected tradesman of the neighbourhood, that they were all sorry to hear of his sudden death, and that there were circumstances about it which necessitated a careful investigation, the business began—and Lauriston, who, for professional purposes, had heard a good many legal cases, saw, almost at once, that the police, through the redoubtable Mr. Parminter, now seated with his clerk at the table, had carefully arranged the presenting of evidence on a plan and system of their own, all of which, so it became apparent to him, was intended to either incriminate himself, or throw considerable suspicion upon him. His interest began to assume a personal complexion.

The story of the circumstances of Daniel Multenius's death, as unfolded in the witness-box into which one person went after another, appeared to be the fairly plain one—looked at from one point of view: there was a certain fascination in its unfolding. It began with

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Melky, who was first called—to identify the deceased, to answer a few general questions about him, and to state that when he last saw him, a few hours before his death, he was in his usual good health: as good, at any rate, as a man of his years—seventy-five—who was certainly growing feeble, could expect to be in. Nothing much was asked of Melky, and nothing beyond bare facts volunteered by him: the astute Mr. Parminter left him alone. A more important witness was the police-surgeon, who testified that the deceased had been dead twenty minutes when he was called to him, that he had without doubt been violently assaulted, having been savagely seized by the throat and by the left arm, on both of which significant marks were plainly visible, and that the cause of death was shock following immediately on this undoubted violence. It was evident, said this witness, that the old man was feeble, and that he suffered from a weak heart: such an attack as that which he had described would be sufficient to cause death, almost instantly.

"So it is a case of murder!" muttered Melky, who had gone back to sit by Lauriston. "That's what the police is leading up to. Be careful, mister!"

But there were three witnesses to call before Lauriston was called upon. It was becoming a mystery to him that his evidence was kept back so long—he had been the first person to find the old man's dead body, and it seemed, to his thinking, that he ought to have been called at a very early stage of the proceedings. He was about to whisper his convictions on this point to Melky,

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when a door was opened and Zillah was escorted in by Ayscough, and led to the witness-box.

Zillah had already assumed the garments of mourning for her grandfather. She was obviously distressed at being called to give evidence, and the Coroner made her task as brief as possible. It was—at that stage—little that he wanted to know. And Zillah told little. She had gone out to do some shopping, at half-past-four on the previous afternoon. She left her grandfather alone. He was then quite well. He was in the front shop, doing nothing in particular. She was away about an hour, when she returned to find Detective-Sergeant Ayscough, whom she knew, and Mr. Lauriston, whom she also knew, in the shop, and her grandfather dead in the parlour behind. At this stage of her evidence, the Coroner remarked that he did not wish to ask Zillah any further questions just then, but he asked her to remain in court. Mrs. Goldmark had followed her, and she and Zillah sat down near Melky and Lauriston—and Lauriston half believed that his own turn would now come.

But Ayscough was next called—to give a brief, bald, matter-of-fact statement of what he knew. He had gone to see Mr. Multenius on a business affair—he was making enquiries about a stolen article which was believed to have been pledged in the Edgware Road district. He told how Lauriston ran into him as he entered the shop; what Lauriston said to him; what he himself saw and observed; what happened afterwards. It was a plain and practical account, with no indication

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of surprise, bias, or theory—and nobody asked the detective any questions arising out of it.

"Ain't nobody but you to call, now, mister," whispered Melky. "Mind your p's and q's about them blooming rings—and watch that Parminter!"

But Melky was mistaken—the official eye did not turn upon Lauriston but, upon the public benches of the court, as if it were seeking some person there.

"There is a witness who has volunteered a statement to the police," said the Coroner. "I understand it is highly important. We had better hear him at this point. Benjamin Hollinshaw!"

Melky uttered a curious groan, and glanced at Lauriston.

"Fellow what has a shop right opposite!" he whispered. "S'elp me!—what's he got to say about it?"

Benjamin Hollinshaw came forward. He was a rather young, rather self-confident, self-important sort of person, who strode up to the witness-box as if he had been doing things of importance and moment all his life, and was taking it quite as a matter of course that he should do another. He took the oath and faced the court with something of an air, as much as to imply that upon what he was about to say more depended than any one could conceive. Invited to tell what he knew, he told his story, obviously enjoying the telling of it. He was a tradesman in Praed Street: a dealer in second-hand clothing, to be exact; been there many years, in succession to his father. He remembered yesterday afternoon, of course. About half-past-five o'clock he was standing at the door of his shop. It was

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directly facing Daniel Multenius's shop door. The darkness had already come on, and there was also a bit of a fog in the street: not much, but hazy, as it were. Daniel Multenius's window was lighted, but the light was confined to a couple of gas-jets. There was a light in the projecting sign over the side entrance to the pawnshop, down the passage. For the first few minutes while he stood at his door, looking across to Multenius's, he did not see any one enter or leave that establishment. But he then saw a young man come along, from the Edgware Road direction, whose conduct rather struck him. The young man, after sauntering past Multenius's shop, paused, turned, and proceeded to peer in through the top panel of the front door. He looked in once or twice in that way. Then he went to the far end of the window and looked inside in the same prying fashion, as if he wanted to find out who was within. He went to various parts of the window, as if endeavouring to look inside. Finally, he stepped down the side-passage and entered the door which led to the compartments into which people turned who took things to pledge. He, Hollinshaw, remained at his shop door for some minutes after that—in fact, until the last witness came along. He saw Ayscough enter Multenius's front door and immediately pause—then the door was shut, and he himself went back into his own shop, his wife just then calling him to tea.

"You saw the young man you speak of quite clearly?" asked the Coroner.

"As clearly as I see you, sir," replied the witness.

"Do you see him here?"

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Hollinshaw turned instantly and pointed to Lauriston.

"That's the young man, sir," he answered, with confidence.

Amidst a general craning of necks, Melky whispered to Lauriston.

"You'd ought to ha' had a lawyer, mister!" he said. "S'elp me, I'm a blooming fool for not thinking of it! Be careful—the Coroner's a-looking at you!"

As a matter of fact, every person in the court was staring at Lauriston, and presently the Coroner addressed him.

"Do you wish to ask this witness any questions?" he enquired.

Lauriston rose to his feet.

"No!" he replied. "What he says is quite correct. That is, as regards myself."

The Coroner hesitated a moment; then he motioned to Hollinshaw to leave the box, and once more turned to Lauriston.

"We will have your evidence now," he said. "And—let me warn you that there is no obligation on you to say anything which would seem to incriminate you."

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CHAPTER NINE

WHOSE WERE THOSE RINGS?

Paying no attention to another attempted murmur of advice from Melky, who seemed to be on pins and needles, Lauriston at once jumped to his feet and strode to the witness-box. The women in the public seats glanced at him with admiring interest—such a fine-looking young fellow, whispered one sentimental lady to another, to have set about a poor old gentleman like Mr. Multenius! And everybody else, from the Coroner to the newspaper reporter—who was beginning to think he would get some good copy, after all, that morning—regarded him with attention. Here, at any rate, was the one witness who had actually found the pawnbroker's dead body.

Lauriston, his colour heightened a little under all this attention, answered the preliminary questions readily enough. His name was Andrew Carruthers Lauriston. His age—nearly twenty-two. He was a native of Peebles, in Scotland—the only son of the late Andrew Lauriston. His father was a minister of the Free Church. His mother was dead, too. He himself had come to London about two years ago—just after his mother's death. For the past few weeks he had lodged with Mrs. Flitwick, in Star Street—that was his present address. He was a writer of fiction—stories and novels. He had heard all the evidence already given, including

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