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The PEMBROKE·MASON AFFAIR

GEORGE·BARTON

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THE
PEMBROKE MASON AFFAIR

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By GEORGE BARTON

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"HER HANDS TREMBLED AS THE WHITE LIPS MOVED TO FRAME THE WORDS" *(See page 121)*

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The BROOKE MASON AFFAIR

BY

GEORGE BARTON

Author of "The Ambassador's Trunk," "The Mystery of the Red Flame," "The Strange Adventures of Beverley Barnes," "Celebrated Spies and Famous Mysteries of the Great War," "The World's Greatest Military Spies," etc.

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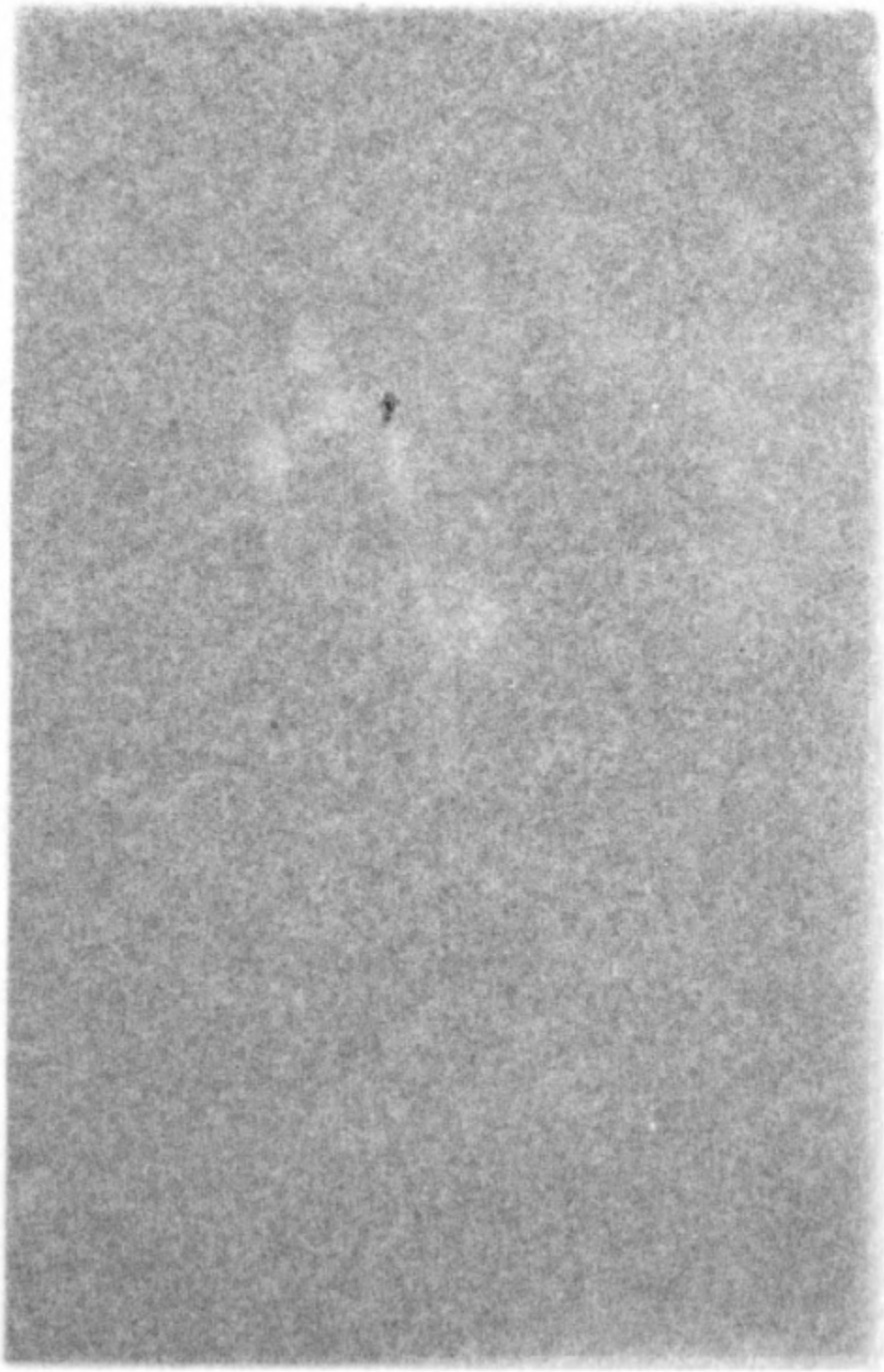

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TO

MY FRIEND

PETER J. HOBAN

AS A REMINDER OF THE OLD

NEWSPAPER DAYS

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	NOVEMBER THE NINTH	1
II	A FLASH OF LIGHTNING	16
III	BROMLEY BARNES	29
IV	THE SYMBOL	45
V	THE BARRIER	64
VI	FLOYD GRAVES	72
VII	A FAMILIAR QUOTATION	90
VIII	THE FACE IN THE MIRROR	108
IX	IN THE NET	122
X	THE WARNING	139
XI	MADAME THEBA	152
XII	MARIAN DECIDES	173
XIII	JOHN FAIRCHILD	189
XIV	THE THIRD PHOTOGRAPH	205
XV	BARNES SMOKES A CIGAR	219
XVI	THE MAN IN BLACK	230
XVII	MORE MYSTERY	244
XVIII	THE BONDS	255
XIX	THE TEST	263
XX	AT BAY	273
XXI	THE SUSPENDED SWORD	291
XXII	CRAIG'S SYSTEM	313
XXIII	WALTER MAKES A WISH	321

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"HER HANDS TREMBLED AS THE WHITE LIPS MOVED TO FRAME THE WORDS" *(see page 121)*	*Frontispiece*
"ENTERED THE LIBRARY OF THE HOUSE" . .	15
"THE YOUNG WOMAN CAST ASIDE ALL PRETENSE AT DIGNITY"	164
"PULLED OUT A LITTLE PEARL-HANDLED REVOLVER"	288
"THEY . . . WERE UTTERLY OBLIVIOUS OF THE PRESENCE OF THE OLD MAN" . . .	330

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THE PEMBROKE MASON AFFAIR

CHAPTER I

NOVEMBER THE NINTH

PEMBROKE MASON sat in the library of his handsome home in Washington, on the night of the ninth of November, studying the brief of a case which he was to argue before the Supreme Court of the United States on the following morning.

He was a notable man in many ways. Having won fame and fortune in the practice of the law, he was almost ready to retire, and to enjoy the autumn of his life in study and travel. The newspapers pictured him as the greatest corporation lawyer in the country and the leader of the American bar. He never made that claim, and when he heard it always shrugged his shoulders in good-natured pro-

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test. It is certain that he ranked among the ablest men in his profession and he had the peculiar distinction of having won eight successive cases before the highest legal tribunal in the land. The ninth was to be heard on the morning of the next day and the prominence of the advocate, and the circumstances surrounding it, combined to give it nation-wide prominence.

Pembroke Mason had led an eventful and stormy life. He had fought his way to the front with courage and shrewdness and all that he possessed of wealth and standing he owed to his own unaided efforts. Shortly after being admitted to the bar he entered politics and in the course of time became the District Attorney in the county of his birth. At the time there was a struggle going on between the chief railroad of that section and a secret organization of its employees. It was the world-old story of the fight between labor and capital, only in this instance a number of unscrupulous men had obtained control of the employees, and had incited them to violence and to murder.

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The newly-elected District Attorney was confronted with the task of finding the culprits and of bringing about their conviction. A less courageous man would have quailed before the job. The men suspected were his own constituents, men who had helped to elect him to office, and they had relatives and friends by the score who sympathized with them. To get their ill will might mean his banishment from office and end his public career. It would have been easy to have shut his eyes to the truth, or to have gone about the work in a half-hearted way. But Pembroke Mason was not that sort of a man. He plunged into the case with heart and soul, discovered the offenders, tried them and sent six of them to the electric chair. Others went to the penitentiary for long terms and several were dismissed for want of evidence.

After it was over he found himself famous. He voluntarily retired from office in order to take up a large and growing law practice. His accuracy and care in preparing his cases, and his ability to get at the heart of a legal problem won him a great reputa-

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tion. He soon abandoned criminal practice for the more congenial and more lucrative civil work, and in time became the accepted authority upon railroad and corporation law, founding the firm of Mason, Graves and Company. He was offered a seat upon the bench of the United States Supreme Court, and was invited to enter the cabinet of the President, but he declined both, saying in his whimsical way, that he could not afford to accept.

He was a widower, and without children. He lived in Washington because he liked the Capital City, and because his work was centered there. He was a man of domestic tastes and he purchased an old-fashioned and very comfortable house which he transformed into a real home. The housekeeper was an elderly and far removed relative, and the chief ornament, a favorite niece, was an orphan. The library was a large room on the second floor, filled with books and works of art. Standing by one of the windows it was easy to see the dome of the Capitol, rising majestically toward the sky, and looking in another direction, one could discern the

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city of magnificent distances spread out in all of its beauty and glory.

It was in this room that Pembroke Mason sat studying the papers in the famous Midland and Western railroad case. For the first time in his legal career he seemed to be in doubt concerning the result of a big case. For this undoubtedly ranked among the biggest cases that had come before the Supreme Court. If the court decided that the railroad did not have the legal right to operate the rich ore mines which it owned the results would be disastrous to the stockholders. If, on the contrary, Pembroke Mason won his case, the corporation would be in an unassailable position for all future time. Naturally a situation of this kind invited manipulation of the stock market, and the air was filled with rumors. The eyes of all were upon the great lawyer. Those who were trying to depress the stock and those who were endeavoring to sustain it felt that their fate lay in the hollow of this man's hand. No general, leading an army into battle, no diplomat negotiating a treaty between strug-

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gling nations, could have felt a greater sense of responsibility.

To add to his troubles he had heard conflicting stories regarding the good faith of those who were supposed to be interested in the outcome of the case. Pembroke Mason had always prided himself upon being eminently practical, and yet on the eve of the great struggle, his imagination threatened to rout his good sense. The night before he had dreamt that he had fallen into a great dark pool of water from which he vainly tried to escape. The borders of this pool were slippery and slimy and scores of malignant and grinning faces stared at him through the darkness. He tried to grasp at straws, but each time he secured what seemed to be a hold one of the demons pushed him back into the water. It was when he was going down for the last time that he awoke with a shiver and a scream.

The memory of this nightmare ran through his mind as he endeavored to fix his attention on the brief that had been prepared by Walter Miles, his assistant. Pembroke Mason had a strong, proud

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face, one that a sculptor would delight to reproduce, but the recollection of young Miles had the effect of bringing wrinkles to his smooth forehead. Only that day this young man had dared to dispute with him concerning a matter of law. He was indignant and there had been strong words between them. Miles had made an impossible demand. He frowned now, as he thought of it, and for the tenth time assured himself that he would win this case as he had won his preceding cases. Then he thought of his niece and his brow cleared. Marian Cooper, he felt, was born to shine in the world, and he intended that she should marry a man who had made his mark.

In the midst of his thoughts there came a gentle tap on the door and Marian Cooper entered the room. His gloom vanished at once. It was as though a ray of sunshine had penetrated his mind and dissipated all of his difficulties. Marian was of medium size, had black hair, a clear complexion, a pugnacious nose and bright, quick eyes. She hurried over to his side

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and placed her arms around his neck in affectionate style.

"Uncle," she exclaimed in the voice of one who is accustomed to command, "you must put away your work and go to bed! It is very, very late and you must have rest if you intend to make your great argument to-morrow."

Pembroke Mason smiled as he stroked her glossy black hair.

"Who said it was to be a great argument?" he retorted with twinkling eyes, and then, without waiting for an answer, he added: "besides, if it is to be worth listening to I must spend the night in preparation."

She shook her finger at him in affectionate admonition, and then pointed to the brief which lay on the table.

"You mustn't say you have not prepared, when you have it all before you in that paper."

"Oh, that," he answered carelessly, "that's the brief drawn up by Miles. I've got to master that before —"

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"Did he really do that?" she interrupted. "Why, I —"

But he cut her short, as if sorry he had mentioned the name.

"Now, now, my dear, if you really want to help me you will go right to bed, and promise me that I shall not be disturbed again to-night. I've got to work, and if necessary I'll stay up until midnight."

Just the suspicion of a pout appeared on her rosy lips, but she obeyed at once. She ran her fingers through his white hair, kissed him, and then grasped his hand in masculine fashion. It was her method of telling him that she wished him luck on the following day.

"Good night," she cried, as she retreated toward the door, "and promise me that you will not stay up any longer than you can help."

"I promise," he said, with a smile that lightened his fine face.

She stood there, with her hand on the knob of the door, leaning over and looking at him in elfish fashion.

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"There is something else," she cried; "tell me that this will be your last case — win or lose. That you will stop working yourself to death and take the rest you have been promising yourself for so many years."

His eyes glistened suspiciously. Her interest was so genuine. Everybody else wanted him to work. There were so many people in the world with axes to grind. But she thought only of his comfort and his happiness. He was touched and when he replied there was a break in his voice:

"I promise to do what you say — win or lose."

She smiled back at him with eyes that could melt as well as flash. The next moment the door closed softly, and he was alone with his thoughts.

He did not find these thoughts as pleasant as Marian had been. He picked up the brief again, but he could not concentrate his mind upon its contents. He glanced in the large mirror which covered half the side of the wall. What he saw was reassuring. A distinguished-looking gentleman with snow-white hair, and an undeniable air of

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authority. This was the great Pembroke Mason before whom the busy men of the world bowed with deference. The man who was looked upon as a tower of strength. He gave a gesture of impatience. How little the world really knew of the real man. He looked around at his well-filled bookshelves. He was a famous collector of rare and famous books, and he had been able to gratify his whims to the fullest extent. How much pleasure he had been able to get from these silent companions. Next to Marian they were his dearest friends. But this must not go on. He would have to get down to work. He pressed a button on the side of his desk. The door opened and a servant entered.

"Briggs," he said, "I do not think you need stay up any longer. I may be engaged for several hours. You may retire when you like."

Briggs was one of those most invaluable of men —a perfect servant. He bowed slightly and his face was expressionless. When he spoke it was in even measured tones.

"Very well, sir, but if you don't mind I will wait

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up for the next hour. There may be telegrams. You may remember that you said you expected something of the kind, sir."

"That's true, but it is almost too late for anything now. However, do as you please. Only remember that I'm not to be disturbed under any circumstance. I must work and I need perfect quiet."

"Very well, sir — but young Mr. Miles, if he should call?"

"Oh, yes, but if he should come it would be on important business, and, as you know, he has a latch key. But admit no one else."

"No one, sir."

"No one — unless it should be John Fairchild."

He smiled at his own witticism. Fairchild was the great multi-millionaire who lived in New York, and who never deigned to call upon any one, not even the famous lawyer to whom his legal interests were intrusted. Briggs knew this quite as well as his master, and the knowledge of it caused the ghost of a smile to flicker across his sedate countenance.

The door closed and once more Pembroke Mason

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turned to the brief which lay before him. He read it through this time and it seemed to satisfy him. But he was nervous and ill at ease, and the line of argument which ordinarily came to him with so much ease seemed to elude him in the most provoking manner. He laid it down and raising the palm of his hand he began to study it with the greatest attention. He looked at the lines of the hand time and again and then gave a deep sigh. For some reason he could not feel easy. His mind was troubled. He felt a presentiment of impending doom. After a time he turned out the lights, so that the only illumination came from the green-shaded lamp on the desk. Then he closed his eyes and tried to think.

Outside the wind began to howl. The weather had been threatening before, and now it turned into a fierce storm. It developed by degrees until it became a perfect gale. Presently came the rumble of thunder, followed by flashes of lightning. It was terrifying, and once it sounded as though the old-fashioned house had been struck by forked electric-

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ity. For hour after hour it continued as though another deluge had come to sweep the earth away, and all the while the house which contained the great lawyer was dark and silent. The only sign of light came from the green-covered table lamp in the library. There was something ominous and suggestive about that unexpected and almost unprecedented storm.

It was daylight when it abated, and then came that strange tranquillity which usually succeeds the fiercest outbursts of nature. It was the calm which follows the storm, that curious silence which comes after the upheaval of the elements.

Marian Cooper was not a timid girl, but the thunder and lightning had kept her awake during the greater part of the night. When the storm ceased she arose and looked out of the window of her room. The city was deserted. The inhabitants were sleeping peacefully. Most of them, no doubt, were unconscious of the fierce tumult of the night, as most of those who live routine and well-ordered lives are unconscious of the storms that rage in the

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"ENTERED THE LIBRARY OF THE HOUSE"

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hearts of their less fortunate neighbors. The girl dressed hastily and made her way to the second floor and entered the library of the house.

A moment later a loud shriek was heard from behind the closed door — a shriek that was both pitiful and tragic.

There were muffled sounds from different parts of the house and in a few minutes the servants were crowding into the library, with Mrs. Hanley, the housekeeper, in the lead. They found Marian Cooper, her arms clasped about the neck of the famous lawyer, sobbing convulsively. They gently disengaged her, and the sight that confronted them made the members of the little group draw back with terror.

For Pembroke Mason sat in his big armchair, holding the brief of his greatest case in his hand, cold and rigid in death.

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CHAPTER II

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING

THE news of the sudden death of Pembroke Mason swept across the country, as one reporter graphically described it, "like a prairie fire in an August clearing." The mere fact that the great man had passed away caused the nation to pause and catch its breath.

But, when it was hinted that foul play was suspected, shocked amazement took the place of regret. Stocks began to tumble and the securities of the Midland and Western dropped below par for the first time in its history. The case which Pembroke Mason was to have argued before the Supreme Court was postponed by request of a junior member of the firm of Mason, Graves and Company. That very natural proceeding was given a sinister significance by the bears on the Stock Exchange, and the

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credit of the big corporation was rocked to its very foundations.

But in the early morning before the news went out to the world a little group stood in the library of the big house in front of that huddled figure in the chair, and wondered what it all meant. Was it natural death, murder or suicide? None could answer, and while they gazed helplessly at one another Marian suddenly came to her senses and telephoned for Doctor Grim, the family physician.

When he came, a few minutes later, carrying his little black bag, the body had been laid on the large leather couch in the corner of the library. The moment he looked at that inanimate figure the doctor shook his head sadly. Pembroke Mason had passed beyond the reach of human aid.

But nevertheless the physician made a careful examination of the body, and when he concluded said that in his opinion death had been caused by a shock. There were no signs of actual violence but on the right side of the temple were several livid marks. At first they seemed like black and blue

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disfigurations — a sort of lead-colored imprint on the flesh. The doctor was puzzled.

"If he had fallen," he half mused to himself, "his head might have struck the open grate and caused these marks."

Mrs. Hanley, who had been trying to comfort the disconsolate Marian, looked up at these words. She prided herself upon being a very practical woman and she had a poor opinion of physicians in general and Dr. Grim in particular.

"Doctor," she said, "haven't you thought of a very obvious explanation?"

"What's that?" he asked sharply.

"A stroke of lightning," was the prompt response. "Those zig-zag marks look for all the world like lightning wounds. I had a nephew struck by lightning once and the marks were just like those on Mr. Mason's head."

The physician stared at her musingly — and said nothing.

"I've got another reason for thinking it was a flash of lightning," she continued with energy. "I

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couldn't sleep last night for the storm. It had me scared to death and I was afraid the house was going to be struck. It must have been one o'clock this morning when I heard an awful peal of thunder and a blinding flash of lightning. I was shaking with fear and I waited to see the house catch on fire. It was on this side of the library too, and it could easily have killed Mr. Mason as he sat there in his chair."

Dr. Grim was making a second examination of the discolored spot while the housekeeper was speaking. Presently he replied, in slow, measured, professional tones.

"From my experience I would say that this wound — if we can call it a wound — was not caused by a lightning flash. These things are not easily determined, but if it came from the lightning it would be likely to show something like a burn. You know what I mean, a sort of scorched substance. Now, I don't insist that this is positively the case because there have been instances of this kind where the skin was not broken."

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Mrs. Hanley sniffed audibly. Having conceived a theory she was not going to have it brushed aside by the mere opinion of an expert — especially when the expert did not seem very sure of himself.

"Well, all I've got to say," she declared, "is that if that isn't the mark of lightning no one was ever killed by lightning."

They were interrupted by a rattling at the front door, and from the sound of voices below it was evident that the police had arrived. The police, in this instance were represented by Jim Craig, a central station detective, and two of his assistants. He made his way up stairs without any ceremony, and once in the room, he looked about him in an accusing way, and said:

"Well, what seems to be the difficulty?"

The "difficulty" was explained to him as quickly and as clearly as possible. His red face became still more florid as the narrative proceeded, and at its conclusion he cleared his throat, and turning to Briggs — Briggs happened to be the nearest one to him — cried:

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"Why did you move the body before the police arrived? Don't you know that it's all wrong to do that? How do you expect us to apprehend the criminal if you destroy the evidence?"

Briggs, already pale from the excitement of the occasion, turned a shade paler at this tirade.

"No sir, I didn't know that, sir. I — I thought — we thought it might be better if the — if Mr. Mason was placed on the couch."

The detective evidently did not think it worth while to reply to this statement for he began to examine the room, to test the fastenings of the windows and to look around the floor. There were no signs of a struggle, and everything seemed to be in place, except that a book lay on the floor. It was a volume from a set of Shakespeare, and had evidently been taken from the bookcase which was partly open. The detective gave it a kick with the toe of his boot.

"What's that?" he inquired.

"It's one of Mr. Mason's books, sir," responded Briggs, who felt that he was called upon to answer,

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"I suppose that he must have been reading it."

"Humph!" grunted the central station man, "I don't suppose he could have been killed with a book, do you?"

The servant, who altogether missed the dry humor of the criminal hunter, shook his head:

"I hardly think so, sir; leastwise, I never heard of anything of the kind."

Craig looked up quickly and suspiciously. But the gravity of the man was unmistakable. He was not committing the unpardonable offense of making sport of the police. Craig cleared his throat again, after the manner of a vocalist who is about to sing, and said:

"I'll have to examine everybody in the house. I'll take you one at a time, and I want you to be perfectly frank with me. If you're not, you'll all be sorry."

"This is Miss Cooper, Captain," said Dr. Grim, indicating the girl, "and, as you probably know, she is a niece of Pembroke Mason."

Craig nodded amiably. The fact that he was not

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a captain did not abash him in the least. On the contrary, he felt that it was a very natural mistake and he felt kindly toward the doctor. He put out a large, hairy hand to Marian and said:

"Glad to meet you, Miss, and I'll try not to worry you any more than I can help. But you know if we're going to apprehend the criminal we've just got to ask questions."

The white-faced girl nodded, and arranged to give the detective a little room near the library where he could send for the witnesses and question them to his hearts content. Before entering the sanctum he turned to the two policemen:

"One of you guard the front and the other the back, and if any one leaves this house without my permission I'll hold you responsible."

Marian Cooper was the first one to be interrogated, and she told the little she had to tell without breaking down. When she had concluded, Craig sat in the room firing questions at the servants. He fingered the seal on his heavy watch chain, cleared his throat at the beginning of almost every

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question, and succeeded in arousing the anger and the fear of each of the witnesses by turn.

When he came out Dr. Grim was standing in the hallway.

"I suppose, Captain," said the physician pleasantly, "you haven't any objection to my going?"

Craig smiled heavily.

"Sure not, you've got professional duties to attend. I know what that means, Doc. You go ahead. I think we'll be able to get along without you."

"Very well," and the doctor started away, but returned in a moment to say, "might I ask if the servants were able to throw any light on the puzzle?"

"Not at all, not at all. They've got solid ivory for domes. I never met such a bunch of know-nothin's. I think I've examined all of 'em. You don't know of any one else, do you?"

"No," was the thoughtful reply, "unless you could count Walter Miles a member of the household."

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"Who's that?" asked Craig quickly, his little eyes twinkling with sudden interest. "I never heard of him before."

"I presume not," was the smiling reply. "Miles is a young lawyer who has been acting as an assistant to Mr. Mason for some time. He comes here — or did — frequently at night in order to consult with his chief regarding pending law cases. They tell me that Mr. Mason considered him invaluable. There was never any ceremony between them, and you may understand his intimacy when I tell you that he had a latch key to come and go whenever he felt like it."

"A latch key — to this house?"

"Why, yes, to this house. Is there anything strange about that?"

Craig smiled craftily.

"That depends upon how you look at it. But I'm mighty anxious to talk to that young man. I'll bet he can throw some light on this mystery. Do you think he'll be here this mornin'?"

"I haven't the slightest doubt of it," was the

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reply. "It's a wonder he isn't here now. Surely the news of this thing must be pretty well known by this time."

"It'll be better known when I clap my hands on the criminal. You can bet all you're worth that I'll apprehend him."

"How are you going to do it?"

"I've got my own way of doin' things," he said, with a trace of pride in his voice, "and if I do say it, I've never known it to fail."

"What is it?" asked the doctor curiously.

"It's to apprehend your man as soon as possible. Now, don't smile until I get through. I figger it out that where a crime has been committed there must be a criminal. And where there is a crime and a criminal there must be suspicion. Well, I keep my eyes and ears open and when the finger of suspicion points at a certain party — whether the party be male or female — I just go and naturally apprehend that party. Fair, of course it's fair. Nothin' could be fairer. Now, whenever a crime has been committed there is also an alibi. The

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question is whether the party who has been put under arrest can furnish an alibi. If he's innocent he can get one without any trouble. If he's guilty, why even then some of 'em can give you an alibi. But in the meantime the party that's been apprehended will struggle like a fish trying to get out of a net. And what's the result? We've stirred up the waters, and we're sure to get the guilty man."

"But," exclaimed the amazed doctor, "you mean to say you arrest your man before you get your evidence! Suppose you should convict the wrong man?"

Jim Craig smiled, as one smiles at the innocence of very young children.

"Doc," he said paternally, "that wouldn't happen once in a thousand times."

"All the same," murmured the listener, "I'd hate to be the thousandth man."

The detective smiled again in that indulgent fashion.

"I'm going to apprehend my man in this case,

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and you watch and see if my system isn't pretty nearly perfect."

The doctor nodded his assent, but the look of skepticism had not left his face as he reached the front door. He had his hand on the knob when he saw Marian Cooper in an alcove in the hallway. She beckoned to him.

"Doctor," she said in a whisper, "I have a feeling — a sort of an intuition that my uncle has been murdered."

"I feel that way, too," admitted the physician.

"In that case," she said, the dark eyes flashing dangerously, "I intend to do all in my power to discover the murderer. As proof of my determination I have just telephoned to Bromley Barnes, begging him to come and see me as soon as possible."

"But the detective — the man in the other room?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I — I suppose he will do all that he can. But I propose to pin my faith on the man who has never yet failed."

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CHAPTER III

BROMLEY BARNES

BROMLEY BARNES was lying on a couch in his cozy apartments overlooking the Capitol when he received the message from the bereaved home of Pembroke Mason. The old investigator had been chuckling over the humor of Artemus Ward, and he laid the book aside with a grimace of disgust. Would he never be permitted to enjoy himself in peace and quiet? Apparently not. But any disposition to shirk was overcome when he learned that his famous legal friend was dead, and that the niece of the dead man needed his help.

In a few minutes he was ready to step into his little plum-colored automobile. He was the same old Bromley Barnes, looking as trim and as carefully dressed as a banker, and with the energy and eagerness of a young college athlete. He did not

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seem hurried or flurried, even though he suspected that he was going out on what might prove to be the most interesting case of his professional career. The striped trousers were creased as usual, the opal in his green tie was in its accustomed place, and he carried the tightly rolled umbrella, which was his constant companion. To all intents and purposes he might have been going to make a formal and unimportant morning call.

The servant was at the door to admit him the moment he touched the electric push button at the Mason home, and the first man he met was the detective from the central station. Barnes gave him a look from his cold gray eyes, and there was a quizzical smile on his shrewd lips.

"I might have guessed that you would be here," he said amiably enough, "wherever there is crime we are sure to find Jimmy-on-the-spot."

Craig's sense of humor was not highly developed, and he did not reply in kind. He toyed with the seal on his watch chain and clearing his throat said:

"Who asked you to butt in on this business —

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don't you think the police are capable of handlin' the case?"

"Sure," retorted the veteran, "but I'm a friend of the family and — and they thought I might be of some assistance to you."

Craig did not know just how to take this statement. His little eyes blinked savagely, and then he said in a tone of heavy condescension.

"I guess there isn't anything you can do at present. I may call on you later. I've talked with all of the people in the house, and I've squeezed 'em as dry as oranges. It's an inside job all right, and I expect to apprehend my man within the next twenty-four hours."

"You don't mind my looking around, do you?"

The detective gave a grin, and rubbed the back of his big hand across the end of his nose.

"Go ahead and enjoy yourself," he laughed. "Get out your microscope and hunt for blood stains on the carpet, only in this case there ain't no blood stains. That's a puzzler, ain't it? An' try the kitchen? You'll find some bread crumbs on the

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floor. Most kitchens have 'em. See if you can tell whether they're from wheat bread or rye bread. That'll be a regular scientific stunt. Go the limit. Jim Craig won't stand in your way. This is a free for all. Only while you're doin' the story book business I expect to apprehend the criminal. I s'pose you get me? No offense intended."

Barnes chuckled.

"I get you, and I am not in the least offended. And I'm glad to see that you take such a cheerful view of the matter. I'm sure that in the wind-up there'll be glory enough to go round."

Craig stared at him for a moment, and then ponderously made his way out of the house. As the door closed, Barnes found himself being ushered into the drawing-room where he discovered Marian Cooper waiting for him. She was pale, but tearless, and gave him a clear and connected story of all that had happened. The veteran was touched. She seemed so small and so helpless and she was making such a brave effort to control her feelings. After she had concluded he expressed the sympathy

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he felt, and promised that he would do everything in his power to solve the mystery which surrounded the death of her uncle. His words helped her immensely, and when he arose she took his hand in a mute but eloquent way. He was pleased. The small hand had gripped his with unsuspected strength. There was character in that hand, and courage and constancy, and somehow he felt that she was going to be helpful in clearing away the seemingly insurmountable obstacles which stood in the way of a solution of the case.

His first move was to go to the library and make an examination of the body. He lifted the sheet which covered the remains, and gazed with something like reverence at the face of the man he had known for so many years. If anything, Pembroke Mason looked more impressive in death than he had in life. But the power with which he had swayed men was gone. The voice which had been raised to command was silent and the brain which had dominated the legal world had ceased its functions. Barnes was attracted by the livid marks on the fore-

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head, and he examined them carefully and at length. How could they have come there? And what did they mean? The flesh did not seem to be broken. And yet death had evidently come through those marks. A hundred questions flashed through his mind, but none of them brought satisfactory replies. Finally, with a sigh, he turned down the sheet, and began to consider how he should begin his inquiry.

He decided to examine the servants, and he resolved to do it in the room with the remains of the dead lawyer. That awful presence might have some effect upon the witnesses. At least it would have a tendency to bring forth truthful answers. He thought grimly of the ancient superstition which claimed that the body of the victim would bleed in the presence of its slayer, but he dismissed the idea as not worthy of serious consideration. Pulling himself together, he touched a bell, and when it was answered sent for Briggs.

The perfect servant entered the apartment with trepidation. He shivered as he glanced in the direction of the remains, and then by a gesture indi-

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cated that he was ready for the cross-examination. Barnes spoke to him kindly, but the man had already been through so many examinations, that he scarcely noticed the manner of the detective.

"Briggs," began Barnes, "I have been told of all the happenings of last night. I want to know what occurred after you last spoke to Mr. Mason."

Briggs rubbed his chin reflectively.

"The first thing I remember after that, sir, the the door bell rang and when I answered it I found Mr. Graves on the steps."

"Mr. Floyd Graves?"

"Yes, sir."

"He is Mr. Mason's law partner, if I am not mistaken."

"Yes, sir, the very same."

"Well, what happened?"

"He said he wanted to see Mr. Mason, but I begged his pardon and told him that it was not possible for him to see Mr. Mason. I was in a rather embarrassing position. Under ordinary circumstances I would have admitted the gentleman at

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once. You see, a partner has some rights, sir. But then I remembered my instructions and how I was not to admit any one under any circumstances. And if you will pardon me for saying it, sir, Mr. Mason was a man with a will of his own. When he said that no one was to be admitted he meant exactly what he said. I would not dare disobey his instructions; no sir, not if the King of England had applied in person. And that's what I told Mr. Floyd Graves."

"What did he say?"

"He seemed amused. He asked me what would happen if he insisted upon seeing Mr. Mason and I told him that the only man who could see Mr. Mason was Mr. John Fairchild because Mr. Mason had given me specific orders to that effect."

"What happened after that?"

"His whole manner changed at the mention of Mr. Fairchild's name and he asked me if we expected Mr. Fairchild. I told him we did not, and that the orders were only in case Mr. Fairchild should appear unexpectedly. He thought for a few

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moments and then became quite jovial, sir. He complimented me on my devotion to duty and said he would make it his business to inform Mr. Mason that he had a jewel of a servant. Those were his very words, sir,—'a jewel of a servant.'"

"Very good, Briggs," commented Barnes. "Now, tell me what else happened before you retired. I don't suppose you had any other visitors."

"Oh, yes, sir,— we had another visitor."

The detective was all attention. He looked at the perfect servant curiously as he talked.

"Who was the visitor?"

"Quite a distinguished gentleman, sir — no less a person than Mr. John Fairchild."

Barnes jumped from his chair at the mention of the name. He raised his finger to attract the attention of Briggs.

"Do you realize what you are saying? Are you certain that it was Mr. John Fairchild?"

"Just as certain as I am that I am Amos Briggs" was the complacent reply.

"How did you know it was Fairchild?"

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"From seeing his picture in the newspapers so often. I had never met the gentleman before, sir, but when I opened the door and saw him standing there it was as if he had stepped from the front page of one of the papers."

Barnes knew that Fairchild was one of the most snap-shotted men in America. But he wanted to test Briggs' memory.

"What did he look like?" he asked.

"He was a little taller than you, had a very pale face, and hardly any eyebrows. He had on a slouch felt hat, a long coat and carried an umbrella."

"You seem to have observed him pretty closely, Briggs."

"I did, sir. I was fairly burning up with curiosity. It was just as if the President of the United States would ring your bell at midnight."

Barnes smiled:

"That would be a very unusual procedure, indeed. But what did he say?"

"He said he would like to see Mr. Mason

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and began to search for a card. I said 'never mind, I know you, Mr. Fairchild.' He seemed quite pleased at my recognizing him, and after I had let him into the hallway I went up to the library and told Mr. Mason that Mr. Fairchild had arrived."

"What did Mr. Mason say?"

"Well, sir, when I entered the room I found him studying the palm of his hand. It gave me quite a start. It was so unlike Mr. Mason."

"How unlike him?"

"It's a little hard to explain, sir, unless you've lived with Mr. Mason. He was always so busy and so practical. And — and what he was doing seemed dreamy and child-like, if I may use the expression, sir."

"You may, Briggs," said the detective with the flicker of a smile, "and how did Mr. Mason take your announcement?"

"He seemed quite startled and asked me if I was sure it was Mr. Fairchild. I said yes and he told me to show him up. And as I did so Mr. Mason

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dismissed me for the night saying that he would not need me any more."

"Did you retire?"

"I did, knowing that it was Mr. Mason's wish."

"You did not hear what passed between them?"

Briggs hung his head and hesitated.

"I know you didn't listen," Barnes hastened to add, "but I thought you might have overheard their opening remarks."

"The library door was closed at once and I started for my room in the upper part of the house, sir. When I was half way up the stair case I could hear their voices, as though they were having a dispute."

"Could you catch any of the words?"

"Yes — yes, sir. I heard just one sentence. Mr. Mason's voice was pitched quite high and he said to Mr. Fairchild, 'You know my opinion of you. I regard you as a scoundrel.'"

"What else did you hear?"

"Oh, nothing, sir. I felt that I had heard too much already and I hurried to bed. And that's all I remember, sir."

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Barnes was silent for some moments after Briggs had concluded his narrative.

"Briggs," he said slowly, "what you teil me is very interesting — and important."

"Yes, sir, I felt that way about it myself."

"Did you tell Mr. Craig — the city detective — about Mr. Fairchild?"

"I did — all except about overhearing that strange sentence as I was going upstairs. When I told Mr. Craig about Mr. Fairchild's calling he smiled and said that Mr. Fairchild couldn't have killed Mr. Mason and so he could be dismissed from further consideration."

Barnes scratched the bald spot on the top of his head and smiled —

"That sounds just like Craig. Fairchild isn't the man he expects to apprehend."

"I didn't intend to conceal anything, Mr. Barnes," protested the servant, "and if I am put on my oath I'll repeat all that I have told you."

"I'm sure of that, Briggs" was the soothing re-

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ply, " and I'm going to depend upon you to help me if I need any further help."

Two tears glistened in the eyes of the perfect servant, and he tried to conceal the fact by pulling out his handkerchief and blowing his nose violently.

" I — I feel the death of Mr. Mason," he apologized, " he was very exacting and his orders had to be carried out to the letter, but I had great respect for him — and I shall miss him."

It did not take the detective very long to examine the other servants. Mrs. Hanley, the housekeeper, was very profuse and very irrelevant in her story. She stuck tenaciously to her theory that Pembroke Mason had been struck by lightning and insisted that it must be so because her own nephew had once met death in the same way.

After he had concluded the veteran had another talk with Marian Cooper and told her what he had learned from Briggs. She was not able to throw any light on that phase of the subject. She had never met John Fairchild but recalled that he had visited their house on one historic occasion. He

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was not the sort of man to call on any one. If he wanted to see people — no matter how distinguished — he sent for them. While they were talking there were sounds in the hall below and they heard the voice of Jim Craig, saying:

"I'd like to see Miss Cooper — and I haven't any time to spare."

Marian went down stairs, followed by Barnes, and they found the central station man pacing up and down the drawing-room, evidently laboring under great excitement.

"Well, Jim," exclaimed the investigator, "it looks as if you've discovered something."

"Discovered somethin'!" he snorted, his red face fairly glowing. "Well, I should say that I have discovered somethin'!"

"What is it?" asked Marian wearily.

Craig cleared his throat in order to make his announcement with the proper elocutionary effect:

"It's just this; some one broke into Mr. Mason's office in the Harding Buildin' last night and turned everything topsy-turvy. The door of the safe was

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open and books and papers was spilled all over the floor. They forced open his desk, too, and the contents of it were turned upside down. The queer part of the business is that they didn't pinch anything. But I've come to one conclusion."

"What's that?" asked Barnes.

"Just this, that the chap who broke into his offices and the fellow that killed Pembroke Mason are one and the same man."

Bromley Barnes rubbed his bald head with the palm of his hand and tried to think of John Fairchild breaking into the office of Pembroke Mason and afterwards murdering the lawyer.

But his imagination, vivid as it could be at times, was not equal to the task.

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CHAPTER IV

THE SYMBOL

EVENTS were beginning to move quickly. What with reporters calling for information, messenger boys with telegrams of condolence and officials from the coroner's office, the old-fashioned house was in a state of feverishness and turmoil such as it had never known in the precise, well-ordered time of its late owner.

The interview between Bromley Barnes and Jim Craig was interrupted by a servant who said that the policeman on the beat wished to say a word to one of the gentlemen. He was admitted at once, a gawky, honest-looking chap who began by saying how badly he felt over the death of Pembroke Mason, who had always been so cordial in his greetings in his comings and goings from the big house.

"But as I've heard hints of foul play," he added,

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"I thought I oughter come and tell all I know."

"What is it?" asked Craig eagerly. "What do you know?"

"Well, mebbe it's not so much after all, but as I was swinging along me beat last night I sees a fellow standing next to the tree box on the other side of the street. He was a lookin' up at the winder of the library of Mr. Mason's house — a lookin' as if he expected to see somethin' come out of it. Well, I pays no attention to him 'cause lots of tourists come along and look at the houses of great men. Even at night, too — why, honest, gents, you haven't the slightest idee-a how many nuts is in the world. Why —"

"Never mind that," interrupted Craig irritably, "tell us what happened?"

"Well, I was a-comin' to that," was the aggrieved response. "As I said, I didn't pay much attention to him. I goes on over me beat an' when I gets back I finds the nut still a-standin' there. I was just about to say somethin' to him when he makes a bee line for the door of the Mason house and rings

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the bell. One of the servants answers it and there is some talk and me fine feller shakes his head and goes away. When he got on the other side of the street he stops an' looks up at the winder again, an' shakes his head an' walks away."

"Did you get a good look at him? Could you recognize him if you saw him again?" asked Barnes.

"Well, you can just bet your last dollar I could. That's my business to spot guys like that. He was dressed all in black. He had on a black derby hat an' a black overcoat. Why, you just mighta thought he was a goin' to a funeral. He had a smooth face an' was dark-complexioned. An' that's about all I know."

Barnes was thinking deeply, but Craig seemed to be more irritated than pleased with what he had heard.

"You go back to your beat," he said to the policeman, "and if we want you we'll send for you."

"All right, Cap," said the officer, saluting stiffly, as he took his leave.

"These cops are all boneheads," growled Craig.

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"If he had the sense he was born with he'd have followed that man. But there's no use tellin' him that. He wouldn't know what you were talkin' about. But what I'd like to know is why Briggs didn't tell us about this man comin' to the door."

"Let's ask Briggs!" exclaimed Barnes, promptly. "That's the easiest way of finding out."

So Briggs was summoned again, and when he appeared he looked uneasily from Barnes to Craig and then back again. The central station detective almost barked as he demanded to know why the perfect servant had not mentioned the man in black.

"It was this way, sir," he began, "you didn't ask me anything about him."

"What do you mean — didn't ask you about him?"

"I mean, sir, that I was asked to tell who had called after I saw Mr. Mason for the last time. This man called about eight o'clock in the evening, and as Mr. Mason didn't see any one with whom he did not have an appointment, I told him so, and

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he left saying he would try and see him at his office. There were any number of callers early in the evening — that is to say, the ordinary run that Mr. Mason would not think of seeing. I thought you only wanted to know of those who came after Mr. Mason gave me his final orders."

"He's right, Craig," said Barnes amiably, "and his explanation is entirely reasonable."

"Maybe it is," grumbled the other, "anyhow, we'll have to take it. In the meantime, I'd like to get my hands on that fellow, Walter Miles, who was supposed to be Mason's assistant. I'll bet he's goin' to play a star part in this little drama."

"He's not supposed to be Mr. Mason's assistant. He was his assistant. I can vouch for that myself. I know the young man."

Craig was about to make some reply when he was halted by the sound of voices in the hallway. Barnes listened for a moment and then said smilingly:

"Talk about lawyers' assistants and they are bound to appear. That's Miles just come in. Now

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you can quiz the young man to your heart's content."

There was a mumbling of voices and both men realized that Walter Miles was talking to Marian Cooper, and trying to soothe her. The sight of the young man had evidently caused her grief to break out afresh and he was making a brave effort to offer her some consolation. After a while there was silence, and in a few moments the assistant to the dead lawyer was confronting the two investigators.

Walter Miles was of medium height, slender, wiry, quick in his movements and with an assertive manner. He had a prominent nose and a habit of lifting his eyebrows when he heard anything that was distasteful. He hurried in the direction of Barnes and put out a hand which the old man grasped in hearty style. The newcomer merely nodded to Craig and glanced at him in challenging style.

"This is Mr. Jim Craig, of the city detective department," said the veteran to the young man.

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He nodded again, but quite coldly, as much as to say that he did not especially care to meet Mr. Craig. The attitude aroused the hostility of the detective.

"I'm glad you came here," he said, "because it saves me the trouble of goin' after you. There are a few questions I want you to answer."

"Very well," he said calmly, "go ahead."

Jim Craig seated himself with the air of a man who needs all the support he can get. He fingered the seal on his watch chain, crossed and uncrossed his large feet, and then, clearing his throat, said:

"I understan' that you have a latch key to this house. Tell us somethin' about that."

"There isn't much to tell. Everybody knew of it. It was an idea of Mr. Mason's. I frequently came here at night, by appointment, to help him in the preparation of special cases. I was never announced, and always went right to the library."

Craig was silent for some seconds as if digesting this reply. Then he spoke again, slowly, and in a rather ponderous tone.

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"Did you help him with any of his briefs last night?"

"No, I didn't help him with anything last night."

"When did you last talk with him? Mind what you say, because this is serious business."

The young man lifted his eyebrows, indicating that the storm signals were up and that an outburst might be expected at any moment. Nevertheless he replied calmly:

"The last time I spoke to Mr. Mason was in his office at five o'clock yesterday afternoon. It was only for a few minutes and then I went home, leaving him there alone."

Craig thought for a few moments, and then he said in an insinuating tone:

"What did you talk to him about?"

The eyebrows shot up and the face of the young man flushed. He spoke angrily.

"I decline to tell you what we talked about. It was a purely personal matter."

Bromley Barnes walked over and put his hands

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on the shoulder of the young man in a fatherly manner.

"Come, Walter," he said gently, "you must not take that attitude. Craig is entirely within his rights in asking that question. It is true that you are not compelled to answer it unless you feel disposed to do so, but —"

"Oh," broke in the central station man, "he don't have to say anything that will incriminate himself."

Miles was on his feet now, his eyes blazing, and the veins on his forehead standing out. He moved in the direction of Craig.

"If you dare say that again, I'll punch your head. Do you understand, I'll punch your head!"

"Don't get excited, Sonny, don't get excited," was the irritating rejoinder.

Barnes looked troubled and he glanced at Miles appealingly. The young man caught the expression on the old man's face, calmed down and said in an emphatic way.

"I have nothing whatever to conceal, and I am willing to answer any proper questions. What you

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have asked can have no bearing on the case — as you call it."

"That's for me to say," was the cool retort, "and if you know your business you'll tell all you know. I ask again what was your pow-wow about?"

The young man looked troubled. He walked up and down the room, with his hands in his pockets and his brows knitted. He cast a furtive glance in the direction of Barnes, but received no help from that quarter.

"If you must know," he burst forth, "I asked Mr. Mason for the hand of his niece — Miss Cooper. Now, I hope you're satisfied with a thing that is purely personal."

Barnes looked surprised and startled. Craig was actually grinning. He spoke again in the manner of a cross-examiner.

"What did he say?"

Miles flushed to the roots of his hair. Both men looked at him expectantly. The reply came forth savagely:

"He refused his consent!"

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There was perfect stillness in the room. Barnes, who was distressed, could hear the ticking of his watch. Craig slowly crossed his legs.

"What followed?" he demanded.

"We had words," was the bitter response. "He said that he had higher aims for Miss Cooper, and said that I was never to mention the subject again. I lost my temper, and said that he would have to get another assistant, because I was through with him."

Craig fumbled with the charm on his watch chain for some moments. He was trying to frame his next question in the manner of a prosecuting attorney.

"Wasn't that a funny reason for leavin' Mr. Mason — for chuckin' your prospects as a lawyer?"

"No, we had some differences of opinion regarding my work."

"You mean that you'd squabbled before?"

"Yes, if you want to put it that way. Earlier in the day I had given him the brief in the Midland and Western case that he was to argue before the Supreme Court to-day. I had worked hard on that

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brief, just as I had worked hard on other briefs for him. I wanted him to take me in as a full member of the firm on the first of the year. I was entitled to that, and he knew that I was entitled to it. But he refused with a laugh and a sneer. I was tired and disgusted. He knew that I cared for his niece, and I determined to bring that matter to a head. You know the result."

"Still," persisted Craig, "don't you think you were askin' a lot from such a big man — such an able member of the bar?"

"Able man — able member of the bar!" burst forth the young man. "I'm getting sick and tired of hearing those words. He was able, yes. He had the ability to suck the last drop of brains and work from those who surrounded him. They did the grinding labor, they prepared the cases, and he got the glory and the advertising. He was a great mass of egotism, this great Pembroke Mason. He loved the limelight. He always kept the center of the stage, and to make himself shine all the more he never permitted any one else to have the slightest

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credit. That was the great Pembroke Mason — the great I AM. And when he was through with the instruments he needed he cast them aside cold-bloodedly. And when I asked for that to which I was entitled he was willing to throw me into the rubbish heap like a sucked orange. The world thought him the soul of honor, but beneath that mask of amiability there was a relentlessness of purpose that was heartlessness itself."

Bromley Barnes was greatly distressed at this outburst. Craig could scarcely conceal his satisfaction. Miles, once he had relieved his overpent feelings, sank on a chair, limp and dejected. The central station man was shrewd, and he was too well pleased with his own cleverness to thrust the probe any further at this juncture. He assumed a conciliatory tone.

"Thank you, Miles, for what you've told us. There is nothing more now. Maybe I'll quiz you again."

The youthful assistant arose wearily, and addressing the two men said:

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"I've promised to see Miss Cooper again, before leaving the house, and if there is nothing more I'll leave you."

He left the room, looking years older than when he had entered. Jim Craig tried to hide his jubilant feelings. He waved his big hand to Barnes, with an air of assumed indifference.

"Well, old man, I've got to leave you for awhile. I've got some work waiting for me at the office."

Left alone, Barnes tried to think calmly of the scene which had just taken place. Then his thoughts reverted to the lifeless body of Pembroke Mason which still lay on the couch in the library. He went to it again and lifting the covering made another careful study of the majestic head, silent and cold in death. The livid marks on the forehead engaged his attention. He looked at it through a magnifying glass and then he pulled out a sheet of paper, and a pencil, and made a rough drawing of the black and bluish marks. The result was something like this:

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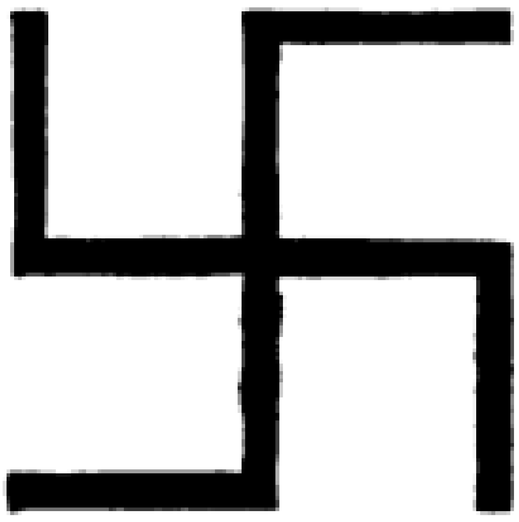

For two or three minutes the old man sat there looking at this hieroglyphic. He was sure that it contained some hidden meaning. But what was it? And how had it been so plainly imprinted upon the forehead of the dead man? As a matter of fact, it appeared like a tangle of half-blurred lines and the design he made had appeared to him only after great difficulty. There was something strangely familiar about the cabalistic sign. It was not the word painting of the ancient Egyptians although there were some points of resemblance.

Before he left the death chamber Bromley Barnes had reached one definite conclusion. It was that the solution of the mystery of the sudden death of Pembroke Mason was to be found through that curious mark.

He was busy all of that day but eight o'clock in

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the evening found him tapping at the door of the study of Professor Darlington, the world-famous authority upon symbols of all kinds. The little man with the iron-gray beard received the investigator with open arms.

"My dear Barnes," he declared, "the sight of your beaming countenance is a relief to my tired eyes."

Like most learned men, he was childlike in his simplicity. He admitted, with a sigh, that he spent too much of his time with inanimate things and too little with living men and women of the world. He insisted that a talk with Bromley Barnes was a tonic to his wearied mind.

"But I see you so seldom," he complained. "It seems to be my fate to have so little of the company of those I esteem the most."

The detective waved the compliment aside and offered the learned one a cigar. But he would have none of it.

"I find my pipe conducive to thought. Now, my friend, let me know your difficulty for I know you

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well enough to understand that you have come to me with what you consider an unsolvable problem."

Barnes laughed.

"I'll have to plead guilty. I have something here that is all Greek to me. But to you I suppose it will be as plain as the noon-day sun."

He produced his crude drawing and placed it in the hands of Professor Darlington. The old scholar glanced at the paper and smiled.

"That is easy, my friend. It's nothing more or less than the old Indian sign."

"The Indian sign?"

"Precisely. We call it the Swastika — the best known of all ancient symbols."

"What does it mean?"

The Professor shook his white head.

"Ah, now you ask me to tell you in a few words what has cost me years of study. This sign has been found on the doors of tombs, engraved on gems and even scratched on the barks of trees. Its origin is lost in the mists of antiquity. But it has been used in many of the ancient religions and is

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used particularly by the Indians. You will find a full account of it in my book on symbols."

"Yes, yes!" cried Barnes with a trace of impatience, "but I come to you to spare myself long study upon a subject that would be very hazy to me at the best."

The Professor nodded.

"I understand — but I think you underestimate your intelligence. What is it you wish to know?"

"Is it a sign of good or bad luck?"

The old scholar smiled again.

"That is just as you wish to take it. It has been used for both purposes. It has stood at different times, with different peoples, for Heaven and Hell, for good and evil. Some years ago I made a trip into the remotest part of Catalina Island and found there a cave temple used for solar worship. There painted on the rocks was the Swastika, in deepest vermilion."

Barnes listened to this with absorbed attention. He had touched on one of Professor Darlington's hobbies and it was not easy to stop the flow of in-

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formation that streamed from the mouth of the old gentleman. During a pause he managed to inject a query.

"Could this be used as a sign of revenge — could it be used, for instance, by a secret society?"

The Professor inclined his head in ready assent.

"It would be just the sort of thing for that purpose."

It was late when Barnes left the study of his learned friend. And all the way home he kept repeating to himself:

"Could Pembroke Mason have been the victim of an organization formed for the purpose of revenge?"

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CHAPTER V

MARIAN COOPER sat in the recess of a bay window commanding a view of the handsome street on which the Mason home was located and tried to think in a coherent way of the events of the last few days. The death of her uncle seemed more like a dream than an actual occurrence.

Curiously enough, every time she thought of Pembroke Mason her tear-dimmed vision seemed to be obscured by the sight of Walter Miles. The thought made her shudder. Why did she connect these two men so persistently? Yet it was natural. Her universe had toppled over in ruins and the only figures she could discern were those of the two men she had loved most.

Yes, she was compelled to admit, even in her bereavement, that she loved Walter Miles. There had

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been a growing affection during the course of the year or more in which they had come to know each other, but it was not until this moment that she fully realized how much he meant to her. She was in sorrow and she longed to be comforted and the only one with the power to do this was the young man who had come into her life so easily and naturally.

There had been no open avowal of love on either side. They had simply "liked" one another, but now Marian understood that this liking was soon to develop into an overmastering affection. She knew that her uncle was disposed to treat Walter Miles lightly and pretended to ignore him as a suitor for her hand, but she felt, with a pang, that if he had only been spared she would have brought him to her way of thinking.

But now, when she first discovered the intensity of her feeling for Walter, this murder had come between them like a barrier, an invisible barrier possibly, but something that could be felt if it could not be put in words. It began to dawn upon her

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numbed consciousness that the two men, in the last few days at least, had been at arm's length and the thought that she was the innocent cause of this hostility gave her a pang of sadness that was almost too much to bear. While she sat and mused there came a tap at the door and the ever-faithful Briggs announced that Walter Miles had called.

A moment later he hurried into the room in his quick impulsive way. His eyes caught hers and they held him with a sort of fascination. But the next moment that feeling gave way to one of deep compassion. She looked so sad and forlorn, such a pathetic little figure in her unaccustomed mourning. He noticed that her eyes were larger and more luminous than ever, that the fragile face seemed whiter and thinner. There were black rims under the eyes, too, and for the moment he scarcely knew what to do or say. She relieved his embarrassment by coming forward and shyly placing her hand in his.

"It — it was awfully kind of you to come to

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me," she half-whispered looking at him with misty eyes.

"It — was natural," he replied, trying to steady his own voice, "and I would give anything in the world if I could be of real service to you at this time."

They sat down and there was some disconnected, inconsequential talk. And amidst it all she felt the presence of the unseen barrier that had come between them. She tried to banish it as one would try to push aside the thing that threatens to shipwreck happiness. Miles, on his part, did not guess the thoughts that were passing through her mind. He saw only the curve of her lips, the wistfulness of her eyes and the pathos of her drooping figure.

"You must try to bear up," he counseled. "It's terrible, I know, but time will heal this as it heals all sorrows."

A gleam of hope came from her eyes. His voice was reassuring. She knew very well that she would become reconciled to the death of her uncle. But could she banish the specter which persisted in

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coupling Pembroke Mason and Walter Miles. There was a terrible something in the back of her head which she felt must be an illusion, a nightmare, anything but the truth. She smiled at the young man to regain her confidence. She believed in him.

"Walter," she said presently, "please tell me that there was nothing between my uncle and you."

He hesitated for a moment.

"Why, no," he said slowly, "nothing except that he did not encourage my feelings toward you."

"I know that — but was there anything that — that last night?"

Again he hesitated.

"I should say that we had a difference of opinion. I've already said that."

"But you quarreled?"

He felt an odd pang in his heart.

"Yes — we quarreled."

She looked at him searchingly for some moments. When she spoke it was in a subdued voice.

"You — quarreled. Was it in this house?"

He stared at her in a puzzled way.

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"No," he said finally, "it was not in this house."

Something between a sob and a laugh escaped from her lips. She rocked to and fro in the primitive way — the way of women in sorrow.

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that — so very glad!"

The weather had been uncertain that day and there was a fire in the grate to take the chill off the room. She leaned over now to warm her hands. The light fell on her hair and he could see the gleam of her white face. For the second time he felt that wave of compassion and something like a lump came into his throat. He took her hand and it was stone cold.

"Marian, dear," he said with great tenderness, "there isn't anything in the world I would not do to make you happy. I'm sorry if anything I may have done has added to your sorrow. But you must not dwell upon this tragedy. It will do you more harm than good. Try to forget it. The sun will shine again and you will be happy."

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She looked at him. She tried to speak and faltered.

"If I only could forget — if I could forget."

She had risen in her agitation and moved across the room. He followed her. He placed his hands on her shoulder. She looked at him over her shoulders. There was a strange light in her eyes — a gleam of happiness mixed with perplexity. The next moment he had his arms about her waist and had pressed his lips to hers.

Her face flushed but she said nothing — did nothing. He quickly released her and gave an apologetic murmur. There was no constraint upon her part. He prepared to depart. She took his hand:

"Walter," she said, "can you, will you tell me all that took place on that — that night?"

A look of pain contracted his face — he gave a sort of shiver.

"Marian," he said with intensity, "there is nothing I can say that will throw any light on this mystery. Say that you believe me."

"I believe you," she repeated in colorless tones.

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A minute later he had left the house and gone into the street. She stood in the bay window looking after him until he had disappeared from sight. She gave a shiver in spite of the fact that the fire in the grate was now burning brightly. The thought of Walter brought a tinge of color to her cheeks for a moment but when she thought of the mystery of that dreadful night she went pale again.

Was it to remain forever as a barrier between her and the man she loved?

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CHAPTER VI

THE law firm of which Pembroke Mason had been the shining light, occupied a suite of rooms on the tenth floor of the Harding Building. Bromley Barnes made his way there on the morning following his talk with the authority on symbols. It was early and the only person he found was Samuel Brown, the faithful bookkeeper of the firm, who had been in its employ since its formation. He was looking terribly distressed, but the sight of the veteran investigator brought a look of relief to his haggard face.

"Oh, Mr. Barnes," he exclaimed, "I'm so glad to see you! I'm almost beside myself over the dreadful news. It's so hard to realize what has happened. When I left Mr. Mason he was as well and as hearty as you are at this minute."

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The detective nodded.

"It's as much of a surprise to me as it is to you, Brown. But I understand that you have had a little excitement at the office."

"Yes, sir, some one broke into the place, and things have been upset in the queerest way. The strange part of it is that nothing is missing."

"That is queer," admitted the old man, "but are you all alone?"

"Yes, sir, but I'm expecting Mr. Graves here at any minute now. He just telephoned that he was coming. He wants to help if he can, although it will deprive him of the vacation he had planned."

"A vacation?"

"Yes. Probably you do not know about it, but Mr. Graves was about to leave the firm. He says that he was tired of the routine work he had to do, and that he was going to quit the law, and spend his time traveling. He must have reached this conclusion suddenly, because I did not know anything about it until a few days ago. Maybe — maybe the conditions here did not suit him. I — I hope you

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will not think I am disloyal, but Mr. Mason was not an easy man to get along with. Mr. Graves has great ability, and I imagine that he was getting tired of playing second fiddle."

"But I understand that Mr. Graves was an intimate friend of Mr. Mason as well as his partner."

"Yes, that is perfectly true. You may judge how close they were when I tell you that Mr. Graves was the guardian of Miss Cooper, the niece of Mr. Mason. He looked after all of her business. He was only saying the other day that he would be glad when she became of age, so that he would be relieved of the bother. This was the only thing that tied him down to the office. Otherwise he might have quit before. I think he was the sort of man who would like to make a reputation for himself, but, of course, that was impossible here, where Mr. Mason was the star, and where all of the others were subordinates."

Bromley Barnes scratched his head in perplexity. This was the second man who had voiced the same complaint against the dead lawyer. Truly a

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prophet was honored everywhere except in his own country. But while they were talking the door opened and Floyd Graves entered the room. Barnes knew him, but only in the most casual manner. He nodded to the bookkeeper and shook hands with the detective.

"Hello, Barnes," he said, "I suppose you're looking into this sad business. Well, I'm glad of it, for I do not know of another man in America who is better fitted for the task. You knew poor Mason intimately, and if any one can get at the bottom of this nasty business you are the one."

While the partner of the dead lawyer was speaking the detective had an opportunity of studying him in a new light.

He was an unusual man. That was quite evident. In the sunlight of the great personality of Pembroke Mason, all of those who were associated with him seemed drab and dim. But the man who now stood before him was certainly deserving of a second glance. He was tall, well built, and had a distinguished manner. He was dark complexioned

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and smooth-faced and the upstanding manner of the man gave him a sort of distinction. He had fierce black eyes, and there was something theatrical in his manner. It was no surprise to Barnes when he learned during the conversation that Graves had once aspired to be a thespian.

"That was when I was young," he laughingly said, "and before the law drew me into its clutches, and made itself my jealous mistress. Since then I have been a sedate, well behaved, middle-aged gentleman, acting as the conscience of the corporations. Many and many a time I have longed to throw aside the restraint and become an irresponsible Bohemian. But Brown, here, will tell you that we have had but little time for relaxation. Pembroke Mason has not been an easy boss, has he Brown?"

The aged bookkeeper shook his head and said guardedly:

"He was a very exact man, a very exact man."

Floyd Graves laughed blithely.

"Why not say exacting and have done with it —

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that he always demanded his pound of flesh. I hope I am not shocking you, Barnes, but I am not one of those who believe that we should slobber over the dead just because they are dead. If I can't speak well of a man during his life I'm not going to praise him after death. Pembroke Mason was a big man. There is no doubt about that. He was a great lawyer, but part of his greatness and a good deal of his reputation came at the expense of others. If you study his career, and notice the road along which he came, you will find it is strewn with the wrecks of other men who had to be crushed because they interfered with his masterful purpose. But forgive me, I really didn't intend to go off in a harangue like this. And I hope you won't get a mistaken impression about my feelings toward Mason. I have simply tried to explain why I would not accord him undiscriminating praise."

Barnes had not only listened carefully, but he watched Graves while he poured forth his feelings. It was a curious thing that those who were most intimately associated with the dead man were the

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ones that had the least to say in his behalf. The relations of the detective with the great lawyer had always been very cordial, and he had conceived a very high opinion of the man. But in the face of the testimony which was coming to him at first hand, he began to wonder if he had not overestimated the qualities of the famous one. At all events Barnes determined that he should not allow any preconceived notions to prevent him from learning the truth. He turned to Graves again.

"I hear that you were thinking of quitting the law?"

Graves bowed with much formality.

"For once Dame Rumor is correct. I did intend to quit the law. In fact I had made all arrangements for leaving the city, and had actually started when I heard the shocking news about Mason. That brought me back. Business is distasteful to me, but I would be less than a man if I did not place myself at the disposal of Miss Cooper at this time."

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"You are the administrator of her father's estate," interrupted Barnes.

"I have that honor. It was Pembroke Mason who induced me to accept that trust. So you will see that he had some confidence in me. I mention this, because I do not want you to misunderstand my critical words of a moment ago."

The veteran waved his hand as though dismissing that phase of their conversation.

"Mr. Graves," he said slowly, "I wish you would tell me all about your last talk with Mr. Mason, and about your call at his house on the night he — he died."

"With pleasure. Let me think, so that I may be perfectly exact."

As the partner of the deceased man said this he sat down and bowed his chin on his hand in a contemplative attitude. Barnes noticed that he was fashionably attired and that he wore a pair of dark kid gloves. The detective could not resist the impression that the man was posing, although his personality was so attractive, and

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his manner so pleasing that he could not find fault.

"I must begin by saying that my active relations with the law firm have been gradually growing less and less. You know that, Brown?"

The clerk bowed assent.

"On the afternoon of that fatal night," continued Graves, "I had a talk with Mason for the purpose of disposing of all the work that was in hand. I told him I wanted to leave the city the following day and he agreed that this could be done without inconvenience to the firm. Later in the evening some other matters occurred to me and I thought I would go over to the house and talk to him about them. Briggs answered the bell, and he said that Mr. Mason had instructed him to admit no one — that is, no one but John Fairchild. Well, I was amused. First at the idea of not being admitted to see my old partner, and second at the preposterous notion of John Fairchild coming to see Mason or any one else —"

"It may interest you," interrupted Barnes, "to

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know that Fairchild did actually call later in the evening."

Graves rose from his chair at this announcement. The look of incredulity upon his face was most pronounced. The detective laughed.

"I don't blame you for feeling that way about it, but Briggs tells me that Fairchild called and that he escorted him into the library."

"Wonders will never cease — I would just as soon expect a call from the late Czar of Russia."

"Maybe that would be more probable. But I am afraid that I interrupted your narrative."

"There really wasn't any more to say," resumed Graves, "for when Briggs told me that I left the house and went home. I remembered that Mason had this important case to argue before the Supreme Court and I felt that it would be wrong to take up his time on really trivial matters. That's all. The following morning I started on my trip and at Baltimore I heard of the death of Mason and immediately returned to Washington, and here I am."

Barnes thanked him for his information and then

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proceeded to tell him what he had learned of the death of his partner — all but the story of the Indian sign. That was a bit of special knowledge which he proposed to keep to himself for the time being. He did tell him of the admission of Walter Miles, and of the young man's love for Marian Cooper.

"I knew that Miles was sweet on Marian, but, of course, I did not know that he was going to broach the matter to Mason. You might have thought that he would have come to me about that subject. I rather sympathize with the young man."

"Craig suspects Miles of complicity in the death of Mason," continued the detective, "but I can't see it that way. He doesn't seem like that sort of a chap."

"He has a violent temper," commented the other, "and there is no telling what any of us might do under trying circumstances. But, still, I agree with you that he isn't the sort of a man who would be likely to commit murder."

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There was a pause for some moments and then Barnes said:

"Mr. Graves, do you know of any eccentricities of character in Mr. Mason that would be likely to give us a clew in this case?"

"I'm afraid I do not quite understand you," replied the lawyer with a smile.

"Probably I've expressed it badly. But do you think there was any one that wanted to be revenged on Mason? Any one that he might have wronged; for instance I've been told that he was the direct means of sending half a dozen men to the electric chair. It was entirely in the line of his duty, of course, and I'm not questioning that part of it. Only, as you know, men who have been convicted of crime sometimes have friends and relatives who thirst for vengeance."

Floyd Graves arose and paced up and down the floor. Finally he halted in front of the detective.

"You have given me a suspicion which I hesitate to put into words. It may be far — very far from the mark, and yet it would appeal powerfully to the

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mind of an imaginative man. I presume that detectives are such practical men that they would not listen to anything which savors of the romantic."

"Here is one who is quite willing to listen to anything — no matter how fantastic it may seem," retorted Barnes.

"Well," resumed Graves, "what you have said reminds me of certain incidents in connection with the men who were convicted of murder in the famous labor cases in which Mason was the prosecuting attorney."

"I would like very much to hear anything you know about those cases," said the detective.

Graves walked over to the window and looked out on Pennsylvania Avenue. Then he faced Barnes again and began.

"There was great bitterness over the results of those cases. It was claimed, probably without justice, that these men were the victims of the law. On the day they were sentenced to die the wife of one of the condemned men arose in court and poured forth maledictions upon the heads of all who were

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concerned in any way in their convictions. The poor woman was carried away by her relatives. But the scene made a deep impression upon all who witnessed it, and it was freely said at the time that those who were responsible would meet with tragic fates. The woman was taken ill soon after that and died."

"Well," exclaimed Barnes, who was deeply interested, "did anything happen?"

"Not for a long time. But a year after the trial the foreman of the jury was found dead in bed. It was supposed to be a natural death, but the superstitious ones immediately seized upon the event to say that the curse of the distracted woman was beginning to get in its deadly work."

"Well, was that all?"

"No, it was only the first of many strange occurrences. About six months later the chief witness for the prosecution was walking in the park when he was struck and killed by an automobile. The driver never stopped to see what had happened. Every effort was made to locate him, but to no

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avail. Again those who are inclined to look for the supernatural shook their heads and said that it was not at all surprising. I do not pretend to take stock in things of this kind, but my own impression is that it was not an accident."

Graves took another turn around the room, and then resumed his narrative. He stood in the middle of the floor and he spoke with much feeling and dramatic effect.

"Two years later the Judge who tried the case was struck by lightning and died almost instantly. Another year went by and the Sheriff who was charged with the electrocution of the men started off on the first vacation he had had in years. He told some of his friends that he felt oppressed. He was in good health and there was no domestic or financial difficulties that should cause him to worry. Nevertheless, he did worry. He was provoked with himself but that did not alter the situation. He got as far as Jersey City and took a ferry boat for New York. It was dark and he stood near the edge of the boat. On the way over some one heard a splash,

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but thought nothing of it at the time. When the boat reached the New York side the man was gone. Nothing has ever been heard of him since that time. Was he pushed overboard? Did he commit suicide? No one knows and probably no one ever will know."

Graves paused and Barnes stood looking at him spellbound. The way in which he had recited these simple facts was fascinating. His manner rather than his words caused a chill to course up and down the backbone of the detective. Bromley Barnes had gone through some thrilling experiences in his time, but he could not remember anything that had impressed him so profoundly as the recital of the story of the gruesome deaths of these four men. He gazed at Graves intently and uttered the one word.

"Well?"

"I've told you the story and you may make your own application," was the reply, "but if you want me to do so I'll try. Put yourself in the place of Pembroke Mason. He was aware of all of the facts

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that I have given you. Might he not have thought that his turn would come next? What I do know is that he was not himself for days before his death. He seemed to have lost his grip on himself. I noticed this, and I guess others did too, but I did not think much of it until this moment. Your mention of the District Attorney brings it all back. Was he brooding over that dramatic threat of vengeance? If so, try and imagine his state of mind. How would you feel under the same circumstances? Think of the sword suspended over your head constantly. You never go to bed at night or get up in the morning without wondering if the blade is about to fall on your neck. You never go out in the dark without wondering who is lurking behind the tree boxes, and you dread turning the corner for fear that some assassin may be lurking there in wait. Pembroke Mason was a brave man, but the suspense must have been nerve-racking and unendurable."

Bromley Barnes listened to this with the same keen interest with which he had heard the story of the strange deaths of the four men concerned in the

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prosecution of the murderers. He was deep in thought for some time and then he said to Graves.

"I'm glad we came together. I have a feeling that you are going to be of great help to me in this case."

The lawyer smiled.

"I do not want to seem conceited, but I can assure you that you could not have a man who is better fitted to go into this matter with you."

"Have you been to Mason's house yet?"

"No, I'm on my way there now, and only stopped in here to see if I could be of any assistance to Brown. I'll give you the next four or five days, but after that I want to be excused, because I really need to get away from Washington as soon as possible."

Barnes agreed to this and a few minutes later the two men started in the direction of the home of the late Pembroke Mason.

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CHAPTER VII

A FAMILIAR QUOTATION

When Barnes and Graves reached the Mason home Jim Craig was there putting Walter Miles through what the central station man called "a course of sprouts." The detective had been on the hunt of the man in black who stood on the sidewalk looking up at the library window on the night of the tragedy. He had not found him but had learned some things about him that were of interest.

"See here," he was saying to Miles, "did a fellow in a black suit call on Mr. Mason at his office on the day of the murder?"

"Such a man called," was the answer, "but he did not see Mr. Mason. I think he was out at the time. I asked him if I could be of any service to him and he said no, that his business with Mr. Mason was strictly personal."

Craig looked at Barnes who had taken a seat, and

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then from him to Floyd Graves. Presently he spoke to Graves.

"Were you wise to that case where Mason sent so many men to the chair?"

"Yes," he replied promptly, "I was just discussing the matter with Barnes here, and wondering if that case could have any possible connection with the death of Mason."

Craig tried to chew at the ends of his short-cropped gray mustache, as he often did in moments of perplexity. A forced smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"Suppose you leave the wondering to me, and just tell me the facts."

Floyd Graves ignored the rudeness and related what he had already told Barnes. But his narrative lacked the fire and dramatic force with which he had recited the same thing to the veteran investigator.

"Do you happen to know," continued Craig, "if there were any indictments in that case that were not tried?"

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"Just what do you mean —"

"I mean," interrupted the detective, "anything touchin' on and appertainin' to the cases that were tried."

"Why, yes," he answered, "now that you mention it there were indictments found against five or six other men that were never tried. If my memory serves me right there was not enough evidence to convict the men. Mason was the sort of man who would not go ahead unless he was sure of success. As a matter of fact they should have been discharged. They were out on bail, but these indictments hung over them like a cloud. I remember that the officials of one of the labor organizations asked Mason to have the indictments quashed, but he refused to do so. The man who succeeded him as District Attorney did not like to take the responsibility of making such a motion, because Mason always hinted that new evidence would come up that would be sufficient to convict the men. I always doubted this and felt that Mason was too obstinate to admit that he had made an

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error in having them indicted on insufficient evidence."

Craig was fingering the seal on his watch chain while Graves was talking. When he had concluded he said:

"Would a letter from Mason have done the business — that is, quash the indictments?"

"Yes, that would have settled the whole business."

The detective nodded, as if to say that was just the point at which he had been driving. Then he turned to Walter Miles, aggressively.

"Now, young fellow, I'll have a few minutes with you. I've got one or two more questions to ask you, and I want you to be on the level."

Miles' face flushed, and his eyebrows went up with the old storm-signal effect.

"From what you've said, and from what I've heard," continued Craig, "there wasn't much love lost between you and Pembroke Mason?"

"That's a matter I do not care to discuss," flung back the young man angrily.

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"Well," was the grinning reply, "it's a matter I want to discuss all right. So I'm goin' to ask you to humor me for a few minutes."

The hands of the young lawyer worked convulsively, as if he longed to twine them about the neck of the central station man.

"Now," resumed Craig, "isn't it a fact that you've had more than one dispute with Mason in the last few days?"

"I do not know what you mean by dispute," exclaimed Miles, "unless you mean a difference of opinion. It is true that we differed on some points of law in cases that were being considered during the week. It is also true that I asked him to let me go before the Supreme Court when there was a favorable chance. I was admitted to practice before that body more than a year ago, but Mason would never let me argue a case in that court. I asked him to let me argue the Midland and Western case."

"What did he say to that?"

"He laughed in my face, and that made me angry,

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and I probably said some things which I should not have said."

"Was it so very strange for a great lawyer to refuse to permit a kid to argue such an important case?"

"No," was the heated reply, "not under the circumstances. I had been slaving over that case for six months. I gathered all of the facts. I drew up the brief and I was so familiar with it that I could have argued it in my sleep. I felt that I could have distinguished myself. I might have made a reputation, but Mason wanted to hog all of the glory —"

"Maybe you'll have the chance to do it now," ventured Graves, in a soothing voice.

Craig laughed; a dry, uncomfortable laugh.

"I'm afraid the boy won't have time for anything of that kind for — for some time."

"What do you mean by that remark?" flashed Miles, his face reddening, and his hands working spasmodically.

"I'm not here to answer questions," snapped the detective. "I'm here to ask them. Now, isn't it

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a fact that on the day before this affair you made a threatenin' remark about Mr. Mason?"

"I — I don't know that I did," murmured the young man, faltering for the first time.

"Is it, or is it not a fact, that on the day I mention, you got off some rough stuff to Mason and then added: 'the world would be better off without such men.'"

Walter Miles' face became grayish and he sat there perfectly silent. Some moments passed. Craig's jowl was pressed forward:

"Answer my question," he thundered.

"I refuse," cried Miles in the tone of a man at bay, "I positively refuse."

The detective leaned back in his chair triumphantly.

"That's all," he announced, "that's all — for the present."

Miles arose heavily and left the room. The three men looked at one another and said nothing. Barnes, who felt unaccountably depressed, left the others and started up the stairway. He wanted to

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make a final examination of the death chamber. He walked slowly, pondering on what he had heard. About half-way up he noticed a white object in the semi-darkness. He stooped and picked it up. It was a small square card. When he reached the light he saw that it was one of the business cards of Pembroke Mason. He turned it over and saw some writing in lead pencil — the handwriting of the deceased lawyer.

Once in the library Barnes walked over to the window and made a second examination of the card. The writing on it was dim and scrawly as though it had been done hurriedly. The old man peered at it intently and then the writing became fairly legible.

It was only a line and it read:

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

That and nothing more. Yes, there were some other scrawls in the corner of the card. Just the numerals: III–I.

The investigator looked at the familiar quotation stupidly. He laid the card down and mopped the

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top of his bald head with his handkerchief, although the weather was very cold. He tried to think of some plausible explanation for this odd bit of writing, but nothing satisfactory presented itself. It was a puzzle, and like many other phases of the strange affair it threatened to baffle him.

He happened to glance in the large mirror on the rear wall of the library and he found himself staring into his own perplexed countenance. The cold gray eyes wrinkled with amusement and brought forth a quizzical smile. It was a reminder that he was taking himself too sadly and that if he was to accomplish anything it would have to be in his old touch-and-go fashion. While he was meditating upon his latest find he heard footsteps in the hall and the next moment Floyd Graves and Marian Cooper entered the room. They had evidently been talking about Mason because the man looked very sober and the girl's eyes were red, as if from weeping. Without a word Barnes handed the card to Graves. The lawyer looked at it with a startled air.

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"What is this?" he asked finally.

"That's what I'd like to know," was the dry response.

"Where did you get it?"

"I found it on the stairway as I came up a few minutes ago."

Graves shook his head.

"It's meaningless to me — I suppose it's of no importance."

"It's the handwriting of Pembroke Mason."

"So I see, but what significance does that give it? I have no doubt we can find all sorts of things in the handwriting of Mason."

"Yes, but to me, there's something cryptic about this."

Marian, looking over the lawyer's shoulder, studied the card.

"It looks like one of uncle's reminders. You know he had a poor memory and he was in the habit of carrying little cards in his pocket to call his mind to things which required his attention. That looks like one of them. Most of them were

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