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At One-Thirty

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"Cain!"

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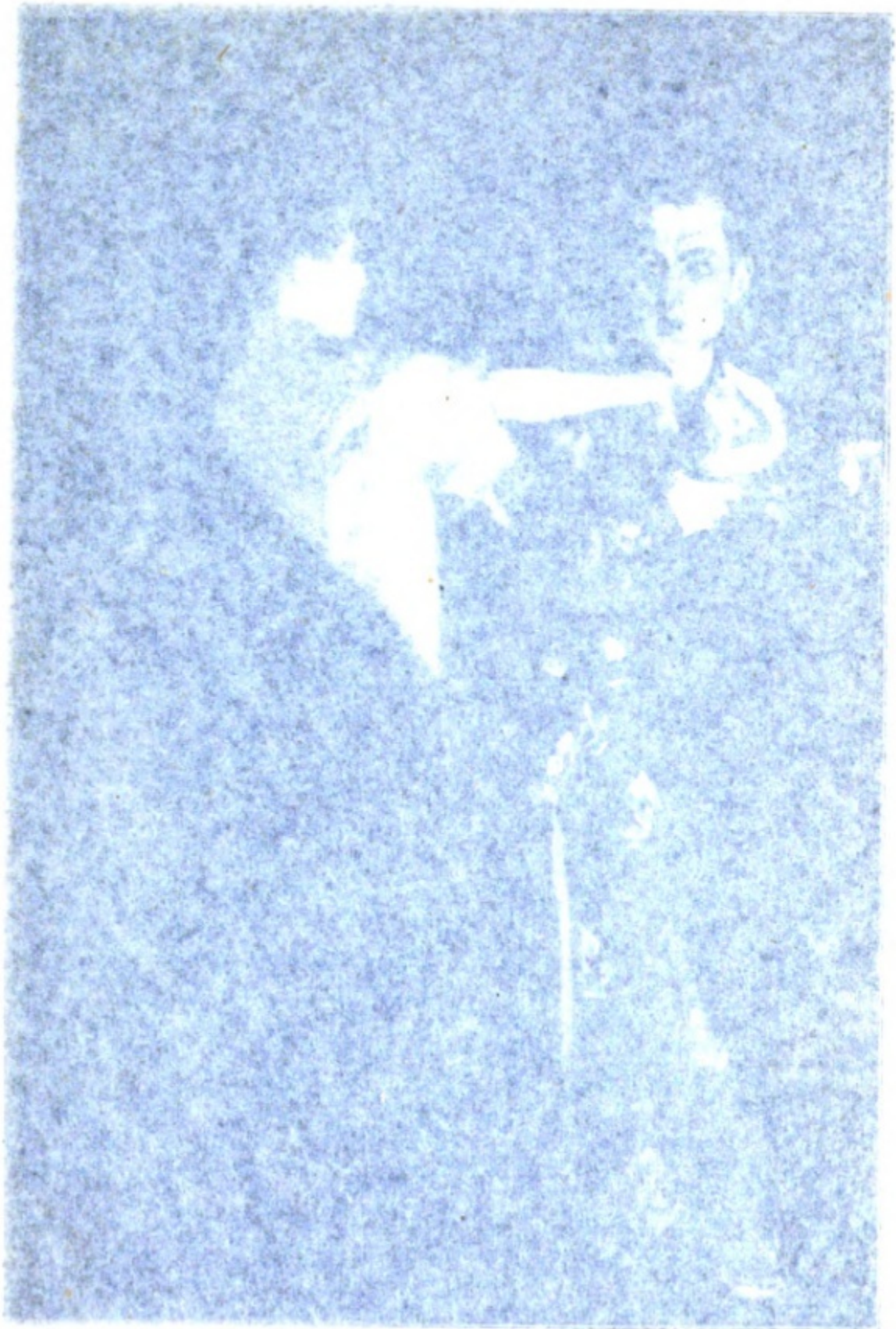

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At One-Thirty

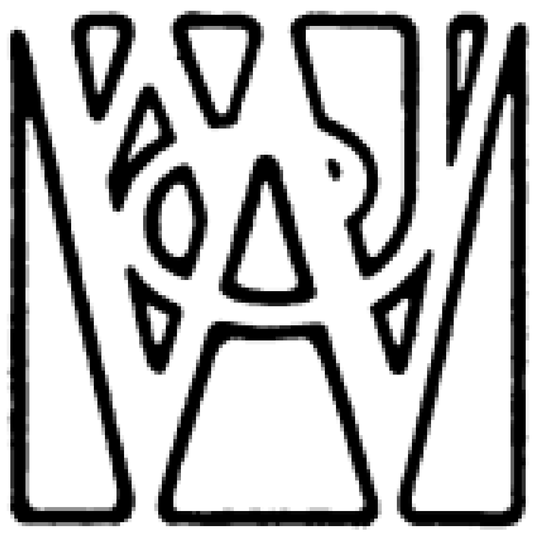
A MYSTERY

BY

ISABEL OSTRANDER

Illustrations by

W. W. FAWCETT



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AT ONE-THIRTY

CHAPTER I

THE PASSING OF GARRET APPLETON

RISING from his chair, Damon Gaunt crossed the library to the window, and flung it wide, drinking in the sultry air of early autumn as though he loved it, listening to the familiar noises of the street with ears eagerly attuned. Although, in passing, he had touched the different articles of furniture in his path casually and lightly, with those long, slim, wonderfully sensitive fingers of his, it had been but absent-mindedly, not gropingly hesitant, and it was not until one looked straight and level into his soft, deep-brown eyes that one realized they were sightless.

He sighed deeply as he stood at the window, his fingertips touching delicately here and there the trailing tendrils of ivy that reached out boldly from the trellised vine, which clambered over the brick walls of the house. No man loved life—vibrant, pulsating life—more than Damon Gaunt, nor more deeply yearned to know it to the full.

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But he had never permitted himself to regret the sight, which from birth had been denied to him, save in his life-work, the detection of crime.

The man's condition and his career would seem in themselves to be paradoxical. How a being deprived of one of the senses—by the majority considered the most essential—could engage, and successfully, in a profession that required every attribute, every resource, known to mankind, developed to the *n*th degree, seemed inexplicable. Yet Damon Gaunt had never lost a case.

He turned suddenly from the window, and stood expectant, although no sound audible to the normal ear had broken the stillness within the house. In a moment, however, a softly treading footfall might have been heard on the carpeted hall; there was a moment's hesitation, and then a quick tap at the door, accompanied by an involuntary deferential cough.

Damon Gaunt smiled slightly to himself. He had never been able to break Jenkins of that unnecessary note of warning.

"Come in!" he said.

Jenkins entered, with a small salver in his hand.

"Card, sir. Gentleman to see you."

Gaunt approached, and took the card from the salver. The corners of his mobile, smooth-shaven mouth twitched again. He had at least succeeded in breaking Jenkins of the habit of shoving things into his hand.

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His fingertips traveled over the heavily engraved card; but the lettering upon it was too elaborate for his sense of touch to spell for him. He turned to a large writing-desk in a corner.

"Miss Barnes, the name, please."

A tall, angular, precise young woman came forward, and took the card from his hand.

"Mr. Yates Appleton."

"Yates Appleton?" What was it that the name seemed vaguely to convey? Oh, yes! Something his secretary, Miss Barnes, had read to him in the morning papers, lately. The man had tried unsuccessfully to break a will, or something of the sort. He must be looked up later, perhaps.

"Show him up, please, Jenkins."

"Yes, sir."

Without a word, Miss Barnes gathered up her papers, and passed into an inner room, and Gaunt seated himself in a deep leather chair, and waited. Presently, returning footfalls could be heard—Jenkin's regular, cat-like tread, and shorter, nervous, uneven steps accompanying him. Both paused at the door.

"Come in, Mr. Appleton. That will do, Jenkins. I'll ring if we need you."

Mr. Appleton crossed the threshold, dropped the cane he was carrying with a clatter upon the floor, retrieved it, and stood before Gaunt's chair. He was a man of perhaps the early thirties, slightly thick of neck and girth, slightly bald, with a round,

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puffy pink face, and round, staring blue eyes. Just now, the face was mask-like with horror, and the eyes were telescoped, like those of a defunct crab; but of these indications Gaunt was, of course, in ignorance.

"Sit down, Mr. Appleton," he said, composedly, "and tell me what I can do for you."

Mr. Appleton laid his hat and stick upon the writing-table, sniffing nervously as he did so, and seated himself.

"Mr. Gaunt, I've come on a terrible affair. My brother, Garret Appleton, was found dead this morning, in his den, with a bullet in his heart! He'd been murdered in the night!"

The young man shuddered, and licked his dry lips, his nostrils twitching.

"Murdered! Did anyone hear the shot fired?"

"No. That's the strangest part of it, although it's a huge house, and the servants all sleep away up-stairs, above the rooms of the family and guests, and the den is on the ground floor, at the back. It's an awful thing Mr. Gaunt, awful! It's just about going to kill my mother—the notoriety, and all!"

"Notoriety! And—grief?"

"Oh, yes, grief, of course. That was what I meant." He sniffed again, as he spoke, and rubbed his blunt, snout-like nose with his gloved finger.

"Was the weapon found?"

"No, certainly not! How would it be? It was

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murder, I tell you—murder! The man—whoever it was—carried the revolver away with him, of course. The motive was robbery, that was plain—the window was open and my brother's watch, purse, and jewelry gone." Mr. Appleton sniffed. "My mother wanted me to come at once for you, before the police get trying to rake up family scandal. My car is outside—"

"I understand. Very well, then, Mr. Appleton, we will go at once." Gaunt rose, and pressed a button in the wall. "But just a word, first, before we start. I say this for your own good. You will need all your wits about you, and all your nerve, if I'm not mistaken. Take some disinterested advice, and go a little light on that cocaine for the next few days."

Young Mr. Appleton gave a violent start, and drew in his breath sharply.

"I don't know what you mean!" he blustered.

"Your constant sniffing and rubbing your nose gave you away," Gaunt explained, quietly.

Mr. Appleton crumpled.

"Oh, well, it isn't a habit with me, anyway. I started in my college days, just for a lark. I can give it up whenever I want to, without the slightest trouble in the world!"

"Then I should advise you to do so speedily. Jenkins, my hat and coat."

Speeding up-town in the fast motor, Gaunt turned to his new client.

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"Mr. Appleton, in undertaking your case, you must know that I demand the absolute confidence of those by whom I am employed. There must be no retaining of facts, no half-measures. The questions I ask must be answered, whether they seem relevant or not, fully and truthfully, with no reservations. Is that understood?"

"Why, y-yes, of course, Mr. Gaunt; that goes without saying. We want you to find out the t-truth!"

"How many are there in the family—the immediate family?"

"The household, you mean? My mother, my brother and his wife, his wife's sister, and myself. But my mother and I are staying there only temporarily, while our own house is being done over."

"That is all except the servants? No guests?"

"None staying in the house. There were some people there last evening, old family friends. The police are at the house, now," he added with nervous irrelevance. "Infernal nuisance, this whole terrible affair! My mother relies upon you to prevent as much of the fuss and bother as you can."

"The fuss and bother, as you term it, are, I am forced to tell you, indispensable in a case of sudden and violent death, from whatever cause—doubly so when crime is in question. They are very necessary to the cause of justice. Mr. Appleton, you speak of the possibility of the police raking

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up family scandal. What scandal is there for them to discover?"

"None, really." Mr. Appleton sniffed hastily. "The only thing is, one doesn't care to have family jars and unpleasantness brought to light. My mother and I dislike—that is, we don't get on at all with Garret's wife and her sister, and there have been dissensions lately—rows, if you like that better—which the police might try to make mountains out of. That's all. Every family has that sort of thing—rows. But the police are so stupid they might try to look beyond the very obvious cause."

"I understand, perfectly. By whom was the body discovered, and when?"

"At about half-past six this morning." Mr. Appleton replied to the last part of the question first. "Katie, the housemaid, came down to straighten the room, and found my brother lying dead on the floor, and her screams aroused the whole house."

"You awakened with the rest, and rushed down?"

"No-o. The fact is, Mr. Gaunt, I'm not a light sleeper at any time, and I'd been out pretty late last night. It was some time after Katie found my brother's body before the commotion wakened me, and quite awhile before I roused from my sleepy stupor enough to realize that something unusual was going on. When I did get downstairs, I found all the household collected in the

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den, and most of the servants crowded in the doorway. Mother had sent for the doctor; but anyone could have seen it would be of no use. Natalie, my brother's wife, was in a state of collapse, and Barbara, her sister, was attending her. Garret was leaning back in his chair, with his face all distorted and gray, and his eyes staring, and there was a great splashing blood-stain on his shirt-front. But I'll never forget the look on his face. It was the most horrible I have ever seen. . . . Here we are now, Mr. Gaunt," he added, as the car slowed down, and then stopped, with a jerk. "This way."

He led the detective swiftly through the lines of police, sternly holding back the curious rabble of morbid sight-seers, up the great stone steps, and the massive vestibule doors closed behind them. There was a subdued, soundless stir, a tenseness in the air of the silent house, which led unmistakably in one direction, and was more acutely manifest to the detective than to the drug-dulled perceptions of his companion.

At the door of the den, they paused, and young Mr. Appleton hung back, his breath coming in great gasps, his hand clutching Gaunt's arm in a sudden, involuntary grip of nervous terror and dread, only to be as quickly withdrawn.

"Mr. Gaunt! How does it happen that you are here? I'm glad you've come."

A man's step sounded, and a large, powerful hand gripped the detective's in a hearty grasp.

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"Coroner Hildebrand!" Gaunt's exclamation of pleasure at a well known voice, with a certain admixture of relief at the scarcely expected presence of a friend and former ally on more than one difficult case, was interrupted by a woman's voice—the coldest, most implacably hardened, that he had ever heard.

"I sent for Mr. Gaunt, Coroner," the voice said. "I wish him to represent my interests and those of my family in this most shocking, most terrible affair." There was the rustle of a silk garment, and the voice sounded again, this time close to Gaunt's side. "I am Mrs. Appleton, Mrs. Finlay Appleton, the mother—" The voice broke oddly, and there was a strained silence. It was not the break of emotion, of uncontrollable maternal emotion face to face with tragedy. There was more an element of craft in it, as if a sudden thought, an excess of caution, had sealed her lips. Yet her sentence seemed to have been, on the face of it, simple enough: she had started to say that she was the mother of the dead man. Why had she checked herself?

"I am glad to have come, if I can be of any assistance, Mrs. Appleton." Gaunt said, after waiting vainly an appreciable moment for her to continue. "I shall want to have a little talk with you later, as well as with the other members of your family and the servants; but just now my business lies with Coroner Hildebrand. Coroner, you've

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stretched a point before this for me. May I examine the body, if I disarrange nothing?"

"Why, yes, I think so, Mr. Gaunt. The body is still here in the chair. Nothing has been disturbed except by the physician's cursory examination—nothing more was necessary. The man's been dead for hours, shot through the heart."

"Oh, I knew the body was still here." Gaunt smiled. "There is a certain slight, but unmistakable, odor about death, even when so short a time has elapsed after it has taken place, which is plainly evident to a nose trained for it."

"To your nose, you mean," returned the Coroner, as the two men moved toward the grim chair with its silent occupant.

Now a new sound broke upon the significant stillness. It was a woman's heart-rending sob, long drawn out, as if pent up beyond the limit of human endurance, and rising in the crescendo of ungovernable hysteria.

"Oh-h-!" the moan ended in a shriek of despair. "This is horrible—I cannot bear it another moment! I shall go mad—mad!"

"Natalie!" the calm, cutting voice of the elder Mrs. Appleton fell like a dash of icy water on the agonized wail. "If you have no respect for the living, at least try to show some for the dead. This is no fitting time and place to indulge your undisciplined, selfish emotions."

"Oh, hush, dearest—please, please hush!" It

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was a third woman's voice, low, slightly husky, vibrant with the deepest tenderness and a controlled passion. If the voice of the elder Mrs. Appleton had impressed Gaunt as being the most rigidly unfeeling he had ever heard, that of the last speaker was the most eloquent of the music of the soul. He had never in all his career heard a human voice with so subtle and poignant an appeal. Here was a woman who would be true and loyal to the core, and who had a capacity for loving, if her low, throbbing tones did not belie her, to the uttermost abnegation of self. He had no difficulty in his own mind in placing the two voices. The one, raised high and shrill in an abandonment of hysterical despair, had yet in its cadence the drawling sweetness of the lower, more vibrant tones. They were the sisters, the two with whom the elder Mrs. Appleton and her living son did not "get on"; the one trembling in hysteria was the widow of the murdered man, and the other was the sister-in-law, whom Yates Appleton had called Barbara.

There was a sudden whirl, a soft rustle, and something hurled itself violently between Gaunt and the Coroner, laying a small icy hand on each, implor-ingly.

"Oh, you will let me go to my room?" the hysterical voice sobbed, plaintively. "I can't stand any more—indeed, indeed, I cannot! How can I be expected to endure it here another moment, with his eyes staring at me so horribly?"

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"It will be best for her to go, if you please," put in the low, vibrant tones. "There are reasons why my sister's strength must not be over-taxed any more than necessary, just now. I will answer for her presence when you wish to question her."

"And I desire my daughter-in-law to remain. Her proper place is beside the body of her husband. You are beginning early, Miss Ellerslie, to issue orders in my son's house!" The voice of the elder Mrs. Appleton did not tremble, but it vibrated harshly with her unconcealable animosity, like jangling wires.

"This is my sister's house now, Mrs. Appleton." The low, soft tones, with the little drawl, were courteous; but there was now an undertone of the passion of which Gaunt had felt the possibility, although it was under admirable control. "My sister has been tortured enough. Have we your permission to retire, Coroner Hildebrand?"

"Yes, Miss Ellerslie, I wish you would all do so, please—you, Mrs. Appleton and Mr. Appleton, also. I wish to make a thorough examination of this room, with Mr. Gaunt and the Inspector. We will interview you later."

Mrs. Finlay Appleton opened her lips to protest; but, realizing that she was endangering her dignity by a further exhibition of ill-nature, she led the way haughtily from the room, her son following with evident relief in her wake, and the group of

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open-mouthed servants clustered at the door disappearing like chaff in her path.

The four men were alone; the quiet, spare figure of Gaunt, the Coroner, and a burly Inspector, and stolid-looking officer, who had stood silently at one side during the preceding scene.

"Who is it—Inspector Hanrahan?" asked Gaunt, with a swift smile.

"Yes, Mr. Gaunt. How are you, sir?"

"I thought I recognized the brand of your tobacco—and isn't Officer Dooley here? I know that asthmatic breathing of his."

Officer Dooley grinned and shifted from one foot to another like a bashful boy.

"If you don't train down, Dooley, you will be too fat for the force, before you know it. Now for business, Coroner. Any possible idea at what time Mr. Garret Appleton met his death?"

"No, Mr. Gaunt. I should say, in the neighborhood of one o'clock, but of course we can't be absolutely certain."

Gaunt had approached the body, and was passing his fingers lightly and thoroughly over it.

"No doubt about robbery being the motive?" he asked, as he worked.

"Oh, no," the Inspector put in, easily. "No weapon found, window open, tracks before window in the carpet and on the curtains, and Mr. Appleton's jewelry and money gone."

"I understand." Gaunt bent and sniffed the

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powder-blackened shirt about the wound. "Looks as if Mr. Appleton might have recognized, or thought he recognized, the thief, doesn't it, when he let him get as near as he did to shoot him, without attempting to get on his feet, or make any outcry?"

"Maybe he did jump to his feet, and fell back again when he was shot?" suggested the Inspector, thoughtfully.

"Hardly, seeing the way he was clutching the arms of the chair. Even death didn't release that vise-like grip. He might have clutched his breast when the shot tore its way through him, if he had had time. No, it looks as if he's been sitting there a long time, grasping the arms of his chair, and the end found him without the movement of a muscle. Then there's another thing."

Gaunt was talking very fast now, but his fingers were working faster, darting with lightning-like rapidity over the dead man's clothing.

"Whoever robbed him, made a pretty thorough job of it. They evidently weren't afraid of being disturbed at their work, and that seems strange, when a revolver presumably lay smoking on the table and the reverberations of its explosion must still be echoing through the sleeping house. They didn't tear out the vest- or cuff-buttons, or the shirt-studs, but removed them carefully, although with bungling fingers, as you can feel, here, and

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here. And—wait! That's a curious thing about the inside of the vest-pocket."

"What is?" asked Coroner Hildebrand.

"Never mind, I'll look into that later. Got a list of the missing jewelry, money, watch, and all that?"

"Inspector Hanrahan has, of course. He—"

"Well, I don't want it now. This the window which was found open after the bird had flown?"

Gaunt felt his way over to the window, felt the sill and the fastenings, and the velvet and lace hangings, and the rich pile of the carpet at his feet. When he encountered there some sticky, congealed wet places, he knealt and smelt them, kneading his hands in the damp velvet.

When he rose and turned, his usually impassive face was alive with interest—a very different interest from that which had glowed upon it when he stood in his library window in the early morning. Now, it was keener, more poignant, and there was nothing in it of pleasurable sensation—rather, a sharp mental interest. He came slowly back to that figure in the chair, wiping his hands carefully on his handkerchief as he did so, while the other men watched him in a sort of fascination, as silent as it was intent.

Then he took the cold head in his hands, feeling its shape with the trained, sure delicacy of a surgeon, a phrenologist. His deft fingers passed downward more softly, more gently over the dead

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features, tracing each strained muscle each curve and angle, seeing, with his ten marvelous eyes of the fifth sense, the expression on the face of the murdered man.

At length, he turned to where the others stood.

"Well?" the Inspector's voice grated with suspense in the silence. "Found out anything, Mr. Gaunt?"

"A little, though I haven't begun to examine the room thoroughly yet. There are a lot of queer features about this case, which you mayn't have found time to go into. In the first place, those tracks over there at the window were not made by muddy feet, but bloody hands."

"Of course," the Coroner returned, impatiently, "we know that. Those traces were left by the murderer, going out."

"How about coming in? He didn't leave any traces then, although it rained hard last night, and there's soft loam and top soil in the garden beneath this window. I can smell the late autumn flowers. Again, the window was opened from the inside, not out, and the person who opened it was afraid, not of taking his time about it, but of making a noise; for he opened the catch of the window in the proper way, and then painstakingly bent and twisted it with some blunt instrument to give it the appearance of having been forced, though, had he dared make any noise, he could have shattered it with a single blow. And moreover, gentlemen,

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that blood about the window was not fresh blood, wiped from the murderer's red hands in making good his escape. It was stale, congealed blood when it was applied to the carpet and curtains. When the window was forced and the semblance of robbery and escape given to the scene of murder in this room, Garret Appleton had already been dead for some hours."

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CHAPTER II

THE INSTRUMENT OF DEATH

THE men looked at one another.

"How do you know that—about the blood, I mean?" demanded the Inspector, bluntly. "How can you tell?"

"Feel it, man, feel it!" returned Gaunt. "It's dried in thick, raised, sticky clots. And, unless I'm mistaken, it wasn't brushed there by the hand of the murderer, but was deliberately wiped there, placed there hours after the murder."

The Coroner strode to the window.

"Mr. Gaunt is right," he cried. "Come here, Inspector! It looks like a deliberate and very clumsy attempt to brand the crime as an outside job. It must have been for robbery, of course; one of the servants, probably. But why the fellow should have waited for hours before preparing his alibi, running the risk of some one discovering the crime in the meantime, is beyond me. Also, what has become of the jewels and the weapon—but they'll come to light, of course."

"I'll have the house searched at once, and the servants questioned; put through the third degree, if necessary!" Inspector Hanrahan replied, excitedly.

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Gaunt had been stooping, feeling about on the floor before the chair in which the dead man sat, and, at the Inspector's words, he rose, his long fingers slipping for an instant into his waistcoat-pocket. He had discovered upon the floor before the chair three tiny hard globules, like irregular pearls.

"I wouldn't do that, Inspector," he suggested, mildly. "At least, searching the house won't do any harm; but don't question the servants in such a manner that you'll lead any of them to suspect that you don't think this was an outside job. If you do, you may defeat your own ends." He turned to the Coroner. "You'll have an autopsy performed immediately, I suppose? I'd like to know at once, if you'll tell me, what caliber and make cartridge was used."

"I'll let you know gladly. You'll be here all day?"

"Yes. I want to make a more thorough examination of the room now, and then I should like to speak to some members of the family. That robbery theory still looks good, of course, Coroner Hildebrand, if it weren't for one thing."

"What's that?" the Inspector turned sharply from the window.

"The dead man's face. Look at his expression. Blank horror and craven fear are stamped upon it!"

"Look here, Mr. Gaunt, I don't see what you can

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tell about his expression!" Inspector Hanrahan's voice held a good-natured, easy contempt.

"By feeling the drawn, contracted muscles," Gaunt said, tersely. He resented bitterly any reference to the handicap nature had placed upon him, yet he realized the justice of the implication.

"It may be only the death-agony, the shock, you know, which has distorted his face," the Coroner broke in hastily, soothingly.

"Look at him yourself, Coroner Hildebrand. Does he look like a man suddenly attacked without warning, or like one who recognized his assailant, and read his approaching fate in the other's eyes, but felt powerless to avert it?"

The Coroner was silent, and, with a slight shrug, Gaunt turned away, and bent over the writing-table, his hands playing lightly among the papers and ornaments it contained. From there, he made a circuit of the room, passing swiftly from one article of furniture to another, more as if to orient himself than with any idea of a thorough examination.

Suddenly he paused before a low, swinging lamp of ancient brass, and felt carefully of its jangling pendant ornaments. From one of these, a tiny strand of hair hung, as if caught from the unwary head of some feminine Absalom, in passing beneath it. It was a long strand of but two or three fine, silky hairs, and the detective wound

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them carefully around his finger, then placed them in the vest-pocket with the tiny white globules.

Meanwhile, the other men went about their gruesome task of removing the body to an adjoining room for the autopsy, and Gaunt heard their heavy, subdued tread down the hall. With silent haste, he approached the door and closed it softly, then returned to the library-table in the center of the room, beside which the body of the murdered man had been seated, and opened drawer after drawer, his hands searching feverishly among the papers they contained, as if seeking some object he fully anticipated finding. If Garret Appleton really had known his assailant, and might actually have feared for his life, it was logical to suppose that he might have kept some weapon with which to protect and, if necessary, defend himself. If that weapon should happen to be a revolver, of the same caliber as that with which he had been shot—

The detective's fingers closed over a cold steel object in the lowest drawer, and with an exultant exclamation he drew it forth. It was a revolver. He placed it hastily to his nose, and sniffed it, then, with a satisfied air, he thrust it into his hip-pocket, and, when the Inspector reappeared, he was fingering and smelling the hangings and pillows of the large, richly-upholstered divan, about which a peculiar heavy perfume seemed to cling.

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"Well, I've finished here," he announced. "I'd like to see my client now."

"Found anything more?" the Inspector asked, with a grin.

"No, nothing. Guess your robbery theory goes. Interviewed any of the servants yet?"

"Yes; and, between you and me, Mr. Gaunt, I think I'm on the right trail. From all accounts, Mr. Garret Appleton wasn't a very pleasant customer. Dissipated, he was, and overbearing, and a bully. He led his wife and everyone else pretty much of a dog's life, and about a month ago he drove his valet, Louis, out of the house, and the man was heard to vow that he'd get even. This Louis was a Frenchman, a hot-headed man himself, and he was very friendly with one of the maids. She might have let him in last night, and he, only meaning to rob the master, might have murdered him without premeditation. Of course, this morning, seeing what he'd done, the maid would be afraid to admit he was here. Anyway, that's my theory. Where are you going?"

"To interview Mrs. Appleton."

Gaunt found the object of his search ensconced in her morning-room, and, if the reaction of her hour of silence and composure after the shock of the discovery of her son's body, and the ensuing scene in the den, had unnerved her, had brought with it any flood of tenderness and natural grief,

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there was no evidence of it in her voice or manner, or the steadiness of her hand.

"You have discovered anything, Mr. Gaunt—any clue to the thief who killed my son?"

"Only that he was a most uncommon thief, Mrs. Appleton—that the manner of your son's death presents some very unusual features. As I have already informed Mr. Yates Appleton, in undertaking your investigation for you, I must make one condition—"

"Your fee—" the elderly lady interrupted him, coldly.

"My fee has nothing whatever to do with it. That can be arranged later. My condition is that of absolute confidence. My questions must be freely and fully answered, with no quibbling, no half-truths. If I ask you to go into family history, your common sense will tell you that it is through no idle curiosity, but a necessary measure, if I am to help you. I need not tell you that any communications will be strictly confidential."

"I am quite prepared to answer any questions you may ask, Mr. Gaunt; although I cannot see what bearing family history, as you call it, may have upon a case of robbery and murder so obviously perpetrated by a common thief." Mrs. Appleton's voice was steady and frigid; but there was an underlying note of uneasiness not lost upon the quick ears of the detective.

"You must allow me to be the best judge of that,"

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he returned quietly. "Mrs. Appleton, how long has your son been married?"

"Three years."

"And his wife, before her marriage, was—"

"A Miss Ellerslie—Miss Natalie Ellerslie."

"Of New York?"

"No, of the South; from Louisville, Kentucky."

"And, since his marriage, he and his wife have lived here?"

"Yes, in this house. My husband built and gave it to them for a wedding-gift."

"Mrs. Appleton, in your opinion, was your son's married life happy?"

"Quite the reverse. Understand, I am not defending my son. He has not been a model husband by any means; but the blame for that lies with his wife alone. You know, you must have heard, what these spoiled penniless Southern beauties are. Had my son married a woman of the world, a woman of his own set, I may say his own station, she would have known how to make him happy, to hold his interest. But I fail to see what all this has to do with his murder."

"She is beautiful, then, young Mrs. Appleton?" Gaunt asked quietly, ignoring her last remark.

"She is considered so." The older woman's tone was bitter. "A certain blond, doll-like type of prettiness."

"And you disapproved of this marriage?"

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"Most heartily, I recognized its unsuitability from the first. And you see how it has ended!"

"But, surely, my dear Mrs. Appleton, you do not consider the fact of your son's marriage to be in any way connected with his death?"

There was a pause, and the detective could hear her rapid breathing, her effort to regain her iron control of herself. At length she spoke:

"I do not, Mr. Gaunt. I have been unable, since you started this line of inquiry, to connect it with the matter in hand."

"I am simply trying in my own mind to comprehend the relations the members of your son's household bear to one another. He and his wife were unhappy. Was that due in part, do you think, to the presence of your daughter-in-law's sister?"

"In great part. I see that you fully understood the significance of the scene in the den, beside my son's body this morning. Barbara Ellerslie is an interloper. She made her home here in my son's house, at her sister's invitation, and she has been the cause of many unpleasant, disgraceful domestic scenes, humoring Natalie, aiding and abetting her in her senseless quarrels and accusations against Garret, and constantly stirring up strife between them. My son could not oust her; for Natalie would not give her up. Naturally, Barbara made herself indispensable to her sister, in order to enjoy the advantages, social and other-

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wise, of living here, instead of in the dull, shabby-genteel surroundings of her Southern home."

"Miss Ellerslie spoke just a little while ago of there being a reason why young Mrs. Appleton's strength should not be overtaxed just now. Am I to infer that—"

"Natalie will in a few months become a mother."

A silence followed the terse statement, a silence in which the concentrated bitterness, and thwarted impotent hatred, expressed unconsciously in the tone of the few words, sank deep into the detective's mind. It told him volumes, which before he had only suspected, and cleared the way before him.

"Mrs. Appleton, your younger son's name has been in the papers lately, in connection with some effort to break a will. I can, of course, learn all about it in detail by having my secretary look over my newspaper files, but I prefer to hear about it from you. Will you give me the particulars?"

There was a stiff, silken rustle, as the lady moved restlessly, uneasily, in her chair, and then a new sound smote upon the detective's ears; a sharp, staccato tattoo. Mrs. Appleton was nervously tapping the broad mahogany arms of her chair, with the rounded tips of her finger nails. At last, she spoke quickly, imperiously; but the pause after his question had been so lengthy as to rob her words of their desired significance, and betray her real state of mind—her reluctance to discuss the new topic he had introduced.

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"Mr. Gaunt, my son's murderer may be making good his escape, may be getting forever beyond our reach, while you are wasting time by delving into wholly extraneous matters. The matter of my late husband's will can have no possible connection with my son's murder." The cold, forbidding voice trembled at the end with suppressed anger and latent agitation.

Gaunt shrugged.

"Then, you will not tell me?" he insisted. "You will permit me to use your telephone? I must get my secretary on the wire."

There was an exclamation of annoyance from Mrs. Appleton, and the nervous tapping on the chair-arms quickened for a moment, then ceased abruptly, as, after a moment's pause, she spoke:

"Of course, if you insist, Mr. Gaunt, I will tell you. It is nothing but what all the world knows, and it is a maddening waste of time; but I presume you must pursue your own method. My husband was an old-fashioned man, and the mode of life adopted by our two sons angered him to the extreme. I disapprove most strongly, of course, of the looseness of the lives of young men nowadays; but I knew that my sons were merely wild, not evil, and would in time marry suitably and settle down. My husband took an opposite view, and vowed he would leave his fortune in trust for them, that they might never have an opportunity to squander the principal. When, however, my eldest

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son, Garret, became infatuated with Natalie Ellerslie, and married her, my husband took an absurd fancy to her, and felt that Garret's future was safe in her hands; that she would, as he expressed, 'make a man of him.'

"My own fortune was assured by an ante-nuptial agreement, and my husband left a miserable pittance—considering his great wealth—to Yates, and that in trust for him for life, with the Mammoth Trust Company, that he might never touch any part of it but the interest. The rest of his estate my husband divided into halves, giving one share to Garret ourtight, the other portion to be held in trust by the Mammoth Company, together with its accruing interest for ten years. If, at the end of that period, Natalie had borne no child, that portion was to be divided, and one-half of it given outright to each of the brothers. If, on the other hand, Natalie had given birth to a child, or children, the Mammoth Company was to hold that part of the estate, not its interest, until the children were twenty-one, and then divide it among them. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly."

"It was a most unfair arrangement, as you can see, and naturally Yates resented it. A few months ago, when it became an assured fact that there was to be a child, Yates brought suit—an entirely friendly suit, I assure you, Mr. Gaunt—jointly against his brother and the Trust Company, to

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obtain his rightful share of the property and full control of it. It was merely to test the validity of the will, of course, and Yates lost. That is absolutely all there is in the story."

"The suit was entirely friendly? There had been no serious quarrels preceding it?"

"Oh, little discussions, of course; but only such as occur in all families over money matters. The suit was brought as a perfectly amicable arrangement of them. You can understand that we—Yates and I—would not be living here under my eldest son's roof had it been otherwise."

"Ah! Then, you sided with your youngest son in the matter, Mrs. Appleton?"

There was a rustle as the lady gave a start of annoyance at her involuntary slip, and the rapid rat-tat of the finger-tips upon the polished wood was resumed.

"I sided with neither—there was no need. I have told you repeatedly that it was a perfectly amicable family arrangement."

"Has this sudden tragedy affected your plans for the immediate future, Mrs. Appleton?"

Again the tapping ceased.

"Naturally, in the face of the attitude adopted by my daughter-in-law and her sister, my son and I will not remain another night under this roof. This afternoon, I shall go to the Blenheim Hotel, to remain there until my own house is ready to receive me. An hour ago, my son made arrange-

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ments, by means of the telephone, to take over the bachelor apartments of a friend, in the Calthorp."

"Ah! Mrs. Appleton, you approve of this move of your son's?"

"I? Approve?" the lady's voice was almost shrill in her astonishment at the sudden question; but her fingers unconsciously began for the third time their agitated betrayal upon the sounding-boards of the chair-arms. "I cannot understand your question, Mr. Gaunt. My son is no longer a child. His personal plans are his own. Whether he chooses to go to the Calthorp, or elsewhere, is of small moment to me."

"Then, it is because of another reason that your son is the cause of some particular anxiety to you, just now?"

"Mr. Gaunt, your line of questioning is not only senselessly irrelevent, it is impertinent!" Her indignation was growing beyond the bounds of her studied self-control.

But the detective returned, imperturbably.

"Every time, during our present interview, Mrs. Appleton, when my 'line of questioning,' as you term it, has led toward your youngest son, you have unmistakably betrayed your agitation."

"My agitation? Would I, would any mother, not be agitated at such a time as this, when her eldest son lies dead, foully murdered, almost at her feet? But you are laboring under a strange

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delusion, if you imagine that I am especially perturbed at the mention of my youngest son. Why should such a thought have entered your mind?"

For answer, he tapped lightly, but with sharp insistence, on the arms of his own chair, and, after an instant, she comprehended.

"How absurd!" she ejaculated, with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders; but there was a little running note of apprehension in her voice. "You are super-analytical, Mr. Gaunt. Are there any further questions you desired to ask me? I need scarcely remind you again that time presses."

If he could only have seen her knuckles whiten, as she clasped her hands in her lap, so convulsively that the heavy rings cut cruelly into her wrinkled fingers, he might perhaps have pressed the matter in spite of her evident displeasure, but instead, he branched off upon a new subject of inquiry.

"Mrs. Appleton, was your eldest son ever, to your knowledge, in fear of his life? Had he any active enemy?"

Mrs. Appleton opened her lips for an indignant denial, when there came an unexpected interruption. There was a sudden commotion in the hall, the door was flung open, and a girl's voice was heard in a shrill cry of horror. The next moment, someone entered precipitately, with a swirl of silken skirts, and flung herself upon the elder woman.

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At the same instant, a whiff of cloying Oriental perfume, like incense, was wafted to the sensitive nostrils of Gaunt.

"What is this we have heard?" the same sharp young voice cried out. "Mrs. Appleton, what is it that has happened? We have heard horrible rumors—they cannot be true! Is Garret—"

"My dear child! My dear Doris!" the voice held more a warning than an appeal for sympathy. "Garret is dead! He was found, shot, in his den this morning! I know how badly you feel for us all, but you must calm yourself. You see how I am bearing up under the blow. This is no time for breaking down." The cautious note seemed suddenly to deepen in significance. "I am talking to Mr. Gaunt, whom I have retained to investigate this terrible affair for us. Mr. Gaunt, this young lady is the daughter of an old family friend, Judge Carhart."

"Garret dead!" The girl's voice trembled. "I cannot believe it! I cannot realize it! Dead! And only last night—" The voice ceased, with a little, quick catch of the breath. Had she paused because of the fear that she would break down under the stress of shock and sympathetic emotion, or because of a warning gesture, a pressure of the arm, perhaps, from Mrs. Appleton?

"Judge Carhart and his daughter dined with us last evening," the elder woman's smooth, hard voice explained carefully. "Garret was well and

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in the best of spirits. It is difficult for the young to realize—"

"My dear Catherine! My poor old friend!" a rich, full-toned fatherly voice sounded from the doorway. "We have come, Doris and I, to utter what consolation we may, and give you and yours what aid lies in our power!"

"Ah, Judge Carhart, I am so very glad to see you!" Mrs. Appleton's tones for the first time rang with a warm human note. "Come in, please, This is Mr. Gaunt, of whom you have doubtless heard. I called him in at once."

"Mr. Gaunt!" The detective's hand was grasped cordially. "My old friend is fortunate to have obtained your services. Your work, sir, in the Marbridge case, and the Delamater murders, came under my judicial notice, and commanded my admiration. But you were in consultation with Mrs. Appleton. My daughter and I will withdraw."

"By no means, Judge Carhart. My interview was almost at an end, and I should like to put a question or so to you, if I may. I understand you and Miss Carhart dined here last evening."

"We did, sir."

"There were other guests?"

"No." It was Mrs. Appleton who replied. "Only our family, the Judge, and his daughter."

"Did you notice anything unusual in Mr. Appleton's—Mr. Garret Appleton's—appearance, or manner, during the evening, Judge Carhart?"

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"No, nothing whatever," the Judge's tone held a hint of astonishment at the question. "Did you, Doris?"

The girl caught her breath suddenly, with a little hiss, then replied in a low, studiously controlled tone.

"No, daddy, of course not. Why should there have been?"

"Mr. Gaunt, Coroner Hildebrand would like to speak to you." It was Yates Appleton's voice, breaking in upon them.

"Ask him to come in here—and you, too, Mr. Appleton." Gaunt leaned forward in his chair.

Young Mr. Appleton entered, followed by the Coroner, who remained standing just within the door, eying the detective somewhat doubtfully.

"Coroner, the autopsy has been performed?" Gaunt asked, sharply. "You have abstracted the bullet? I should like to know at once in the presence of Judge Carhart and these members of the family."

"It was fired from a thirty-two-caliber revolver, Mr. Gaunt."

"A thirty-two—a thirty-two!" the detective repeated, thoughtfully. Then, he wheeled suddenly toward where the younger son was standing.

"Mr. Appleton, did your brother possess a revolver?"

"Certainly not!" the mother cut in harshly, before her son could answer. "What could lead you

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to suppose that Garret should have such a thing in his possession?"

"Did he?" Gaunt persisted quietly, of the young man. "It is not uncommon, you know, for gentlemen to keep such a weapon in their homes, to guard against burglars and the like. Have you ever seen a revolver in your brother's hands?"

"I—I believe he did have one somewhere, now that I think of it," Yates Appleton admitted, sullenly. There was a quick sharp exclamation from his mother; but no one, save perhaps the detective, noted it.

"Was it of thirty-two caliber?"

"I don't know. I—I never noticed it particularly."

"Did your brother ever fire it?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did anyone else ever handle it?"

"I never saw anybody. My brother had it a long time. I don't know why he got it—probably for protection against burglars, as you say. I don't even know that it was ever loaded."

"Where did he keep it?"

"I haven't the least idea. It's months since I saw it."

"Where did you see it last?"

The questions were pelted pitilessly at him, and he was visibly writhing about under them. At the last one, he blurted out desperately:

"In the—the den."

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"Will you go, please, and bring it here?"

"I don't know where it is, I tell you!" he almost shouted, the perspiration standing out in great beads on his forehead.

"Will you go to the den, and look for it?" Then, as the young man seemed to hesitate, he added: "Mr. Appleton's body has been removed."

With a sudden movement, Yates Appleton turned and bolted from the room, and those within it sat in a tense silence, waiting.

Finally, there was an exclamation, almost a shout, from down the hall, and the young man rushed in.

"It's gone!" he cried. "Someone's taken it! It's gone from the drawer, where he always kept it!"

Damon Gaunt reached in his hip-pocket, and drew forth something, which he held out.

"Is this it?" he asked, quietly.

Yates Appleton snatched it from his hands.

"Let me see!" he bent, trembling, over it. Then, he turned roughly upon the detective. "Yes, by gad, it is! And you're a fool if you think it had anything to do with the murder! It's fully loaded! Here! You can see for yourself!" He thrust it into the Coroner's hands.

"Yes, it's fully loaded," Grant conceded, steadily. "But it has been lately fired, and reloaded—within a few hours, perhaps. An attempt has been made to clean it, but not thoroughly. It still reeks of powder."

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"Where did you get it?" Yates Appleton demanded, furiously.

"In the drawer in the library table, where you say your brother always kept it; in the drawer where it was placed in the early hours of this morning, by the hand which reloaded and cleaned it—the same hand which pried open the catch of the window from the inside, and smeared the curtains with the blood of a man long dead. The weapon which was the instrument of death was Garret Appleton's own revolver!"

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CHAPTER III

LIES

THERE was a moment of electrified silence, and then Mrs. Finlay Appleton arose majestically to her feet.

"Mr. Gaunt, do you mean to imply that my son committed suicide, and that someone else, coming upon his body hours afterward, attempted to conceal the evidence of his act, and to create a false impression of theft and murder? You go too far, sir! Such a deduction is that of a mind, to say the least, gone astray!"

"I imply nothing of the sort, Mrs. Appleton. I assert that your son was killed by some person, at present unknown, who did not enter by way of the window; and that the murderer, or someone else, coming by chance upon the body, sought to convey a false impression of the manner of your son's death. That is the case as it stands now."

"I cannot believe it! It is preposterous—unthinkable! Why should anyone do such a thing? What motive could there be? No one in my household could be capable of it! I trust my servants implicitly!" The dominant woman had forgotten

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for the moment that it was of her daughter-in-law's house she spoke, her daughter-in-law's servants.

"Good God!" Yates Appleton ejaculated in a low tone. He was wiping his forehead, and staring at the detective with something akin to horror in his eyes.

"Mr. Appleton," Gaunt turned to him, "your mother tells me that you and she are planning to leave this house today; I should like a word in private with you before you go."

"Y-yes, Mr. Gaunt. Perhaps you'll come to my room? My man is packing there now; but I'll dismiss him—"

"I'll come presently, when I've had a word with the Coroner."

The Judge had turned to Mrs. Appleton, and was saying softly:

"You are leaving this house—leaving Natalie in her grief?"

"Her grief is not overwhelming, my dear friend. There is no need of pretense to you. She's merely hysterical now, and Barbara is taking care of her."

"But, Catherine, is it wise? Is it—politic?"

"I don't know. I know the house is horrible to me; that I could not spend another night in it!"

The Judge sighed.

"Could I speak to Natalie for a moment, do you think?"

"I'll see." Mrs. Appleton swept from the room

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as if glad to escape even momentarily from Gaunt's presence, and the Judge turned to where his daughter, with white, set face and staring eyes, crouched in the window-seat.

Meanwhile, the Coroner said in a low, excited tone:

"You're sure of what you said, Mr. Gaunt? That was a pretty strong statement you made. After all, you know, you've the merest circumstantial evidence to go on."

"Good heavens, man! Don't the facts bear me out so far? And I made that statement as openly as I did, for a good and sufficient reason. Be sure you keep that revolver from being handled too much. You'll need the powder-traces on it as evidence, later."

"Judge Carhart, if you will come with me—" Mrs. Appleton's voice came from just behind them, "Natalie would like to see you for a moment."

When the Judge had left the room, the Coroner, too, departed, and Gaunt crossed to where the slim, still figure was seated among the cushions.

"You—you're blind aren't you, Mr. Gaunt?" the girl asked curiously, but not unkindly. "How did you know where I was sitting?"

"By your perfume, Miss Carhart," he replied, with a smile. "You know, we who are bereft of one sense must train the others to act for us in place of the one we have lost. That perfume is very strange, unusual."

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"Yes. My father has it sent from India. He used to get it for my mother. It has an unpronounceable name, meaning 'The Rose in Death.' She shivered a little at the last word, then went on hurriedly: "It is supposed to be very, very old. I believe it was first distilled for the queen in whose memory the Taj-Mahal was built. . . . But tell me, Mr. Gaunt, is it really true that Garret—that Mr. Appleton was—murdered? Even after hearing what you have all just said, I cannot believe it."

" He is dead," Gaunt answered, gently. "By whose hand we have yet to learn. Try to recall everything that happened last evening, every little, trivial incident, which may have slipped your memory. There was nothing—not a word or a look from anyone out of the ordinary?"

"I can't think—you frighten me so, Mr. Gaunt! You make me feel as if you suspected every one of us! Surely, it was a burglar, was it not? Mr. Appleton's money and jewelry are also gone, they say. Oh, what does it all mean? Who can have done it?"

"Try to calm yourself, Miss Carhart, and collect your thoughts, and tell me exactly what happened last evening—everything which you can remember."

"Why, we dined—just a simple family dinner—you know, we're all awfully old friends—Mrs. Appleton, and my father, and Garret and his wife, and Miss Ellerslie, and Yates, and I. And

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then, afterward—let me see. Oh, yes, Miss Ellerslie went to a wedding with a party of friends, who called for her—"

"A wedding?"

"Yes. An old friend from the South, I believe. And Yates went out, too. Mrs. Appleton and father played double-dummy bridge, and Garret and his wife and I chatted for awhile. Then Garret's wife said she wasn't feeling very well, and excused herself and went up-stairs, and Garret and I sat and talked until father and Mrs Appleton finished their game, and we went home. That is all."

"What time did you leave?"

"Oh, early—between eleven and half-past, I think."

"And on your arrival home?"

"Father went to his study for a last cigar, and I went right up to bed, and read for an hour or two before I fell asleep. We weren't going on anywhere else. It's too early in the season for dances and that sort of thing, you know."

"I understand. Miss Carhart," he bent forward suddenly, as if to look into her face through his sightless eyes, and shot the question at her, "at what hour during the evening, and with whom, were you in the den?"

She shrank from him, her breath coming in great gasps.

"The—den?" she faltered, through dry lips.

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"The room in which Garret Appleton was afterward murdered," he persisted, inexorably.

"The—den!" she repeated. "Why, never—not once—not for an instant! I swear it!"

The detective drew back.

"Oh!" he muttered. "You said that you and young Mrs. Appleton and her husband sat chatting, while your father and the elder Mrs. Appleton played bridge. I thought perhaps you were in the den."

Miss Carhart drew a deep breath.

"Oh, no!" she said, hastily. "We were in the library."

He could feel her eyes upon him, deep and bright with suspicion.

"You say that young Mrs. Appleton was not well. Did she seem depressed, or unhappy?"

The sudden change of topic had the desired effect.

"How should I know?" the girl drew herself up coldly. "I did not notice her particularly. She seemed quite as usual."

"I thought perhaps you would have noticed. I understood you were great friends."

"I meant that my father and I were great friends of the Appleton family. I only know Garret's wife and her sister casually, not intimately."

"Well, Miss Carhart, I must leave you. No doubt Mrs. Appleton will return almost immediately with your father, and I must interview the servants. Thank you for replying to my questions."

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He turned gropingly, with outstretched hands, as if feeling for the door from which he had come to her with such unerring precision, and his hand came in contact with her head just where her hair billowed out from under her hat. He withdrew it at once, with a deprecatingly murmured apology, and, with an odd lack of his usual accuracy, fumbled for the door. On the sill, he paused, stopped, and picked up a filmy square of lace, so tiny that it had lain unnoticed in the general excitement by those who had passed over it. He turned, and walked straight back to where the girl sat watching him, with curious, fascinated eyes.

"Your handkerchief, I believe?" he asked, smilingly presenting it. "You must have dropped it when you entered."

Miss Carhart took it from his hand, glanced at it, and then swiftly back to his face, and her eyes were dark with apprehension.

"Thank you, it is mine," she said quietly. "But —how did you know?"

"The perfume," he explained, with courteous, but wearied, patience. "Wherever you are, wherever any personal article of yours lies, that individual, penetrating scent of yours would lead unmistakably to you. And then, too, if I am not mistaken, I felt the monogram D. C. in a corner of the handkerchief. Mrs. Appleton called you 'Doris.' It is quite simple, you see. Good-morning, Miss Carhart."

As he made his way slowly along the unfamiliar

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hall, he pondered. She had been in the den sometime the previous evening. The lingering, cloying perfume was unmistakable. Why had she denied it?

A man-servant passed through the hall, and, seeing him, approached deferentially.

"Mr. Gaunt, sir? Were you going to Mr. Appleton's room? He expects you. I'm his man, sir. Shall I show you the way?"

"If you will, please. But where were you going just now?"

"To the kitchen, sir, with this tray."

"Tray?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Yates Appleton's breakfast-tray."

The man's perceptible pause before the word "breakfast" was illuminating, but unnecessarily so to Gaunt.

"That is not a breakfast-tray, my man, unless your master partook of a most injudicious meal. He'd better not have anything more to drink today, if you can keep it away from him."

"Drink, sir? How—how did you know?" the valet stammered, the shaking tray almost slipping from his hands.

"From the tinkle of ice in the glass, and that purring sound of gas in the siphon. If that tray had been more heavily laden—with dishes, for instance—I should have heard them clink together, also, as you came toward me down the hall. What is your name?"

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"James, sir."

"Well, James, at what hour did your master return home last night, or, rather, this morning?"

"At about three o'clock, sir."

"How do you know? Did you wait up for him?"

"Yes, sir. I mostly do, sir. It—it isn't often that he can get to bed by himself, sir." The man spoke apologetically, but with eager frankness. Evidently, he stood much in awe of his inquisitor.

"I understand. And in what condition was your master when he returned this morning?"

"About as usual. Quite—quite under the weather, so to speak, but not what you might call bad, sir. . . . This is his door."

James coughed discreetly, and knocked, and an irritable, highly strung voice bade him enter.

"Mr. Gaunt, sir," announced James, and departed swiftly and noiselessly.

"Oh!" said Yates Appleton, with a noticeable change of tone. "Come in, Mr. Gaunt. What is it you want to ask me? I'm afraid I've told you everything I know."

"I'd like to know what jewelry was taken from your brother's body," was the opening remark, which evidently surprised the younger man by its tenor.

"Oh, I've already given a list to Inspector Hanrahan, as nearly as I can remember, and Garret's man can tell me."

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"Still, I should like to have you repeat it to me," the detective reiterated, patiently.

"Pearl studs, pearl and mother-of-pearl vest-buttons and cuff-buttons, a small gold watch, thin gold cigarette-case, and a small seal purse. That's all, I think."

"All? No small jeweled pin, or insignia of some sort?"

Yates Appleton's knuckles cracked suddenly, as he gripped the back of a high carved chair upon which he was leaning.

"Pin? I never thought of that! He did have some such thing, I believe. Frat' pin, from his university days, I imagine, although I never inquired. He was superstitious about it, and wouldn't go without it; but in dinner-clothes—"

"He wore it pinned inside his vest-pocket, in evening-clothes, didn't he?"

"Yes," Yates Appleton gasped, and looked his perturbed astonishment. "By Jove! I remember now, I've seen him pin it there once or twice, or under the lapel of his coat. Silly of him; but, as I say, he was superstitious about it. I'd like to know how you found it out, Mr. Gaunt. Hardly anybody knew about it."

"The thief did," Gaunt observed, quietly. "Rather unusual, wasn't it? The man who robbed and murdered him evidently was someone who knew him and his habits thoroughly—or else had nerve enough, after firing a shot, which, had it

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been heard, would have brought the whole house about his ears, to search his victim's clothes with the most minute detail."

"Hum-m! I never thought of that," the young man answered, thoughtfully.

"What did you do last evening, Mr. Appleton? You went out immediately after dinner, did you not?"

"Almost immediately. Family parties always bore me."

"Where did you go?"

"To the club first—the Patriarch's, for awhile. Met some chaps I knew, and played cards, and had a few drinks. Then, I drove around in the car for awhile, and—and—"

"And then?"

"Then, I went to the rooms of a fellow I know, and he came out with me."

"Where?"

"Oh, we rode around some more in the car, and stopped at various places for drinks. Then, I left him at his rooms, and came home to bed myself."

"At what time did you leave the club?"

"The club? Oh, I don't know—at about half-past twelve."

"And when did you reach your friend's rooms?"

"About one."

"Your friend can verify that?"

"Yes, and the door-man at the club can verify

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the time I left there, if necessary, as you very well know. Good heavens, man! you don't suspect me of murdering my own brother, do you?" He spoke with the irritability of nerves worn to the breaking point.

"My dear Mr. Appleton, this is merely a matter of form, you know. No one suspects you, of course; but the police will go into this much more rigorously, if I don't. They must know where every member of this household was at every moment last night. . . . Are your friend's rooms near the club?"

"Within five minutes, in the motor car." The young man spoke sullenly, but more quietly.

"So that, after leaving the club, you only drove around by yourself for about twenty minutes?"

"Yes. I was coming home, and then I—changed my mind."

"At what time did you finally reach home?"

"I don't know—about three, I suppose."

"And you heard or saw nothing unusual?"

"No. James was waiting up for me, in my dressing-room, and I went straight to bed. I was feeling a—a little tight."

"I understand. Now, Mr. Appleton, will you give me your friend's name and address, please?"

"Maurice Livingston, Bryant Chambers," the young man returned, sullenly.

"Mr. Appleton, what is that strong odor of witch-hazel I smell?"

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"My hand—I hurt it. My man's been dressing it for me."

"How did you hurt it?"

"Bruised it—got caught in the door of the car last night."

"When?"

"I don't know. I was tight, I tell you—intoxicated, if you like that better! I only noticed it this morning."

"Well, Mr. Appleton, I won't keep you much longer. I wonder if you know of any enemies your brother may have made—if he feared anyone, feared an attack of some sort?"

"Lord, no! He wasn't man enough to make enemies," the affectionate brother returned, "not bad enough enemies to want to take his life; although there were lots who hated him, and a few who would have been glad to have him out of the way."

"Out of the way? Whom do you mean by that, Mr. Appleton?" the detective spoke peremptorily, and the other man squirmed uneasily.

"Oh, I don't know!" he blundered. "There's a chap whose rather gone on Natalie. Not that she's ever given him any encouragement, that I've noticed; but you never can tell about these sly ones. She was jealous, and always rowing Garret, you know, and playing the ill-used wife, and bleating to Barbara about it, and maybe she worked on this fellow's sympathies. He's one of the intense, quiet kind. Perhaps he'll think there's

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a chance for him, now. I fancy he won't be sorry, for one, that Garret's gone."

"What is the man's name?"

"Harmon Witherspoon. He lives down in the old Witherspoon Mansion, on Washington Square."

"Well, Mr. Appleton, I won't detain you any longer." Gaunt rose. "If I need you again, I shall find you at your rooms—the Calthorp, isn't it?"

"Yes. I am going straight there. This house is getting on my nerves."

"Will you please ring for a servant, and have me conducted to the drawing-room or library? I want to interview Miss Ellerlsie."

"I'll take you myself. The library'd be best." Yates Appleton pressed the button in the wall with alacrity, as if glad the searching interview was over. "James," he added, when the man appeared, "send someone to tell Miss Ellerslie that Mr. Gaunt would like to speak to her in the library."

In the great entrance-hall, at the foot of the stairs, however, they were halted by the Inspector.

"Mr. Gaunt, I'd like to speak to you for a minute please. Were you going anywhere, special?"

"To the library, to interview Miss Ellerslie," the detective replied.

"Then, if you don't mind, I'll show you the way myself, after I've had a word with you."

Inspector Hanrahan waited until Mr. Yates Appleton was up the stairs and well out of earshot, before he spoke again.

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"It's about the autopsy, Mr. Gaunt. They found the bullet, as you know; but they found something else, too. It is a bruise on the left shoulder, high up near the neck, as if it was a blow aimed at the heart, and wide of the mark. As sure as you're alive, Mr. Gaunt, someone hit him a blow! That looks like a struggle, don't it? That looks as if he'd tried to defend himself, and been worsted. Sort of knocks your theory that he just sat still and let himself be done to death, don't it?"

"It looks like it, Inspector," Gaunt answered with a slight smile, which gave no hint of the tumult of his thoughts. "Any other marks on the body?"

"None but the bullet-wound," the Inspector returned, briefly. "But this is the darndest case I ever struck in my life, Mr. Gaunt. Who killed him, and why did they come back hours later and fix up that window stunt?"

"That's what we're here to find out. Been after any more of the servants?"

"Yes; but it's no good. Katie, the housemaid that was stuck on Louis, Mr. Appleton's man, won't admit a thing, and Maggie, the blatherskite of a cook, won't do anything but weep, and wail, and bemoan the day she left Ireland. I'm going to get after Dakers, the butler, again. He's smooth and polite, and slick as they come; but I have an idea that fellow's got something up his sleeve."

"All right, Inspector. By the way, would you

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mind telling me what color hair this is? It's golden, isn't it?" He pulled the strand of hair from his vest-pocket as he spoke.

"Sure, it's golden, right enough." The Inspector's tone was full of honest wonder. "How'd you know?"

"By the texture. I can tell the color of most hair by the feel of it between my fingers—not the difference between the finer shadings, perhaps, but the general tone."

"It beats me how you do it! But where did you get it?"

"Never mind that now. I'll tell you if it turns out to be important. Here comes Miss Ellerslie. Let me know later if you learn anything."

"Miss Ellerslie? She ain't coming yet, Mr. Gaunt. There ain't a soul in sight."

"I hear her footstep in the hall above. There! She's just at the head of the stairs."

The Inspector glanced up involuntarily, and saw a slight, gray-clad figure.

"Holy Virgin!" he muttered to himself, stepping back, with round eyes full of wonder on the man before him. "This is the library, here on your right," he added hurriedly, and departed, all but crossing himself as he went.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Gaunt?" the low, sweet, pulsing voice sounded upon his ears, and Barbara Ellerslie led the way into the library. "I shall be glad to tell you anything I can."

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"Your sister, Mrs. Appleton—how is she?" Gaunt asked, for once at a loss how to lead up to the subject he must inquire into. The nearness of this strange, magnetic woman, the poignancy of her, was as oddly disturbing as the vibrations of the violin-like tones. She seemed to radiate a suggestion of limitless power in her perfect self-containment, of glowing health, of body and mind, and soul, in her easy poise and control.

"She is better. The first reaction from the shock has gone, and she is quieter. She will be able to see you later, for a few moments, if you wish. But, please, be very gentle with her, Mr. Gaunt." The low voice sank even lower, as he was later to know was its wont, when anything that touched her very deeply was uttered. "She is not well, not over-strong at best, and now she is in a delicate condition. She has had much to endure, and it culminated in the shock of this morning's tragedy. Please, be very—kind to her."

"I will," the detective found himself promising, almost vehemently. "I shall not annoy her any more than I can possibly help, and I shall try to say nothing to grieve or excite her."

"Thank you." The voice was a mere tremulous breath; but she must have leaned toward him, involuntarily, for the clean, pure fragrance of her hair and body, free from the taint of cloying scents and acrid perfumes, stole over his senses, and seemed to numb them. With an effort of his will,

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he pulled himself together, and spoke in a tone more stern than he had meant, to cover his own confusion and bewilderment at himself.

"But in order to spare your sister, Miss Ellerslie, I must ask you to answer my questions without reservation. You went out immediately after dinner, last evening?"

"Yes, to a wedding—a very quiet one, that of an old schoolmate. I went with friends, and returned quite late."

"At what time?"

"About one o'clock."

"Did you retire at once?"

"No. My sister's maid and mine—an old mammy, whom we brought with us from our home—was waiting up for me, and she said that Natalie was awake, and very nervous. Without waiting to disrobe, I went in and talked with her for some time, until she quieted down, and almost slept. Then, I returned to my room."

"You retired immediately?"

"Yes."

"You were, therefore, not in or near the den from the time dinner was over, either before you went out, or after your return, until this morning, when the discovery of Mr. Appleton's body aroused the house?"

"No, Mr. Gaunt."

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CHAPTER IV

THE SISTERS

"YOU are sure?" the detective asked, slowly.

The girl turned, and regarded him deliberately, as if she could read in his sightless eyes the thoughts that were passing through his mind.

"Why do you ask me that so persistently, Mr. Gaunt? I was not in or near the den yesterday, or last night. Had I been, I should have no reason for concealing the fact from you."

"I thought that perhaps you might have forgotten," he replied, with unusual hesitancy. "It is important that I should know who of this household visited that room, on no matter how innocent an errand, during the hours preceding Garret Appleton's death. You heard nothing unusual on your return, nor at any time during the night?"

"No, Mr. Gaunt; and I am a very light sleeper, as is my sister. I cannot understand why the—sound of that revolver-shot did not arouse someone, at least, in all this house."

"That is not unusual. The police records are full of murder and suicide cases in crowded apartment houses and tenements, where no one happens to hear the shot fired, or, if they are awakened

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