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The Yellow Streak

by

Valentine Williams

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THE YELLOW STREAK

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THE YELLOW STREAK

BY

VALENTINE WILLIAMS

AUTHOR OF "THE MAN WITH THE CLUB FOOT"

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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1922

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THE YELLOW STREAK

CHAPTER I

THE MASTER OF HARKINGS

Of all the luxuries of which Hartley Parrish's sudden rise to wealth gave him possession, Bude, his butler, was the acquisition in which he took the greatest delight and pride. Bude was a large and comfortable-looking person, triple-chinned like an archdeacon, bald-headed except for a respectable and saving edging of dark down, clean-shaven, benign of countenance, with a bold nose which to the psychologist bespoke both ambition and inborn cleverness. He had a thin, tight mouth which in itself alone was a symbol of discreet reticence, the hall-mark of the trusted family retainer.

Bude had spent his life in the service of the English aristocracy. The Earl of Tipperary, Major-General Lord Bannister, the Dowager Marchioness of Wiltshire, and Sir Herbert Marcobrunner, Bart., had in turn watched his gradual progress from pantry-boy to butler.

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Bude was a man whose maxim had been the French saying, "*Je prends mon bien où je le trouve.*"

In his thirty years' service he had always sought to discover and draw from those sources of knowledge which were at his disposal. From Mac-Tavish, who had supervised Lord Tipperary's world-famous gardens, he had learnt a great deal about flowers, so that the arrangement of the floral decorations was always one of the features at Hartley Parrish's *soigné* dinner-parties. From Brun, the unsurpassed *chef*, whom Lord Bannister had picked up when serving with the Guards in Egypt, he had gathered sufficient knowledge of the higher branches of the *cuisine* to enable Hartley Parrish to leave the arrangement of the menu in his butler's hands.

Bude would have been the first to admit that, socially speaking, his present situation was not the equal of the positions he had held. There was none of the staid dignity about his present employer which was inborn in men like Lord Tipperary or Lord Bannister, and which Sir Herbert Marcobrunner, with the easy assimilative faculty of his race, had very successfully acquired. Below middle height, thick-set and powerfully built, with a big head, narrow eyes, and a massive chin, Hartley Parrish, in his absorbed concentration

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on his business, had no time for the acquisition or practice of the Eton manner.

It was characteristic of Parrish that, seeing Bude at a dinner-party at Marcobrunner's, he should have engaged him on the spot. It took Bude a week to get over his shock at the manner in which the offer was made. Parrish had approached him as he was supervising the departure of the guests. Waving aside the footman who offered to help him into his overcoat, Parrish had asked Bude point-blank what wages he was getting. Bude mentioned the generous remuneration he was receiving from Sir Herbert Marcobrunner, whereupon Parrish had remarked:

"Come to me and I'll double it. I'll give you a week to think it over. Let my secretary know!"

After a few discreet enquiries, Bude, faithful to his maxim, had accepted Parrish's offer. Marcobrunner was furiously angry, but, being anxious to interest Parrish in a deal, sagely kept his feelings to himself. And Bude had never regretted the change. He found Parrish an exacting, but withal a just and a generous master, and he was not long in realizing that, as long as he kept Harkings, Parrish's country place where he spent the greater part of his time, running

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smoothly according to Parrish's schedule, he could count on a life situation.

The polish of manner, the sober dignity of dress, acquired from years of acute observation in the service of the nobility, were to be seen as, at the hour of five, in the twilight of this bleak autumn afternoon, Bude moved majestically into the lounge-hall of Harkings and leisurely pounded the gong for tea.

The muffled notes of the gong swelled out brazenly through the silent house. They echoed down the softly carpeted corridors to the library where the master of the house sat at his desk. For days he had been immersed in the figures of the new issue which Hornaway's, the vast engineering business of his creation, was about to put on the market. They reverberated up the fine old oak staircase to the luxurious Louis XV bedroom, where Lady Margaret Trevert lay on her bed idly smiling through an amusing novel. They crashed through the thickly padded baize doors leading to the servants' hall, where, at sixpence a hundred, Parrish's man, Jay, was partnering Lady Margaret's maid against Mrs. Heever, the housekeeper, and Robert, the chauffeur, at a friendly game of bridge. And they even boomed distantly into the far-away billiard-room

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and broke into the talk which Robin Greve was having with Mary Trevert.

"Damn!" exclaimed Greve savagely, as the distant gonging came to his ears.

"It's the gong for tea," said Mary demurely.

She was sitting on one of the big leather sofas lining the long room. Robin, as he gazed down at her from where he stood with his back against the edge of the billiard-table, thought what an attractive picture she made in the half-light.

The lamps over the table were lit, but the rest of the room was almost dark. In that lighting the thickly waving dark hair brought out the fine whiteness of the girl's skin. There was love, and a great desire for love, in her large dark eyes, but the clear-cut features, the well-shaped chin, and the firm mouth, the lips a little full, spoke of ambition and the love of power.

"I've been here three whole days," said Robin, "and I've not had two words with you alone, Mary. And hardly have I got you to myself for a quiet game of pills when that rotten gong goes . . ."

"I'm sorry you're disappointed at missing your game," the girl replied mischievously, "but I expect you will be able to get a game with Horace or one of the others after tea . . ."

Robin kicked the carpet savagely.

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"You know perfectly well I don't want to play billiards . . ."

He looked up and caught the girl's eye. For a fraction of a second he saw in it the expression which every man at least once in his life looks to see in the eyes of one particular woman. In the girl's dark-blue eyes fringed with long black lashes he saw the dumb appeal, the mute surrender, which, as surely as the white flag on the battlements in war, is the signal of capitulation in woman.

But the expression was gone on the instant. It passed so swiftly that, for a second, Robin, seeing the gently mocking glance that succeeded it, wondered whether he had been mistaken.

But he was a man of action — a glance at his long, well-moulded head, his quick, wide-open eye, and his square jaw would have told you that — and he spoke.

"It's no use beating about the bush," he said. "Mary, I've got so fond of you that I'm just miserable when you're away from me . . ."

"Oh, Robin, please . . ."

Mary Trevert stood up and remained standing, her head turned a little away from him, a charming silhouette in her heather-blue shooting-suit.

The young man took her listless hand.

"My dear," he said, "you and I have been pals

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all our lives. It was only at the front that I began to realize just how much you meant to me. And now I know I can't do without you. I've never met any one who has been to me just what you are. And, Mary, I must have you as my wife . . ."

The girl remained motionless. She kept her face averted. The room seemed very still.

"Oh, Robin, please . . ." she murmured again.

Resolutely the young man put an arm about her and drew her to him. Slowly, reluctantly, she let him have his way. But she would not look at him.

"Oh, my dear," he whispered, kissing her hair, "don't you care a little?"

She remained silent.

"Won't you look at me, Mary?"

There was a hint of huskiness in his voice. He raised her face to his.

"I saw in your eyes just now that you cared for me," he whispered; "oh, my Mary, say that you do!"

Then he bent down and kissed her. For a brief instant their lips met and he felt the caress of the girl's arm about his neck.

"Oh, Robin!" she said.

That was all.

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But then she drew away.

Reluctantly the man let her go. The colour had faded from his cheeks when she looked at him again as he stood facing her in the twilight of the billiard-room.

"Robin, dear," she said, "I'm going to hurt you."

The young man seemed to have had a premonition of what was coming, for he betrayed no sign of surprise, but remained motionless, very erect, very pale.

"Dear," said the girl with a little despairing shrug, "it's hopeless! We can't afford to marry!"

"Not yet, I know," said Robin, "but I'm getting on well, Mary, and in another year or two . . ."

The girl looked down at the point of her little brogue shoe.

"I don't know what you will think of me," she said, "but I can't accept . . . I can't face . . . I . . ."

"You can't face the idea of being the wife of a man who has his way to make. Is that it?"

The voice was rather stern.

The girl looked up impulsively.

"I can't, Robin. I should never make you happy. Mother and I are as poor as church-mice.

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All the money in the family goes to keep Horace in the Army and pay for my clothes."

She looked disdainfully at her pretty suit.

"All this," she went on with a little hopeless gesture indicating her tailor-made, "is Mother's investment. No, no, it's true . . . I can tell you as a friend, Robin, dear, we are living on our capital until I have caught a rich husband . . ."

"Oh, my dear," said Robin softly, "don't say things like that . . ."

The girl laughed a little defiantly.

"But it's true," she answered. "The war has halved Mother's income and there's nothing between us and bankruptcy but a year or so . . . unless I get married!"

Her voice trembled a little and she turned away.

"Mary," said the young man hoarsely, "for God's sake, don't do that!"

He moved a step towards her, but she drew back.

"It's all right," she said with the tears glistening wet on her face, and dabbed at her eyes with her tiny handkerchief, "but, oh, Robin boy, why couldn't you have held your tongue?"

"I suppose I had no right to speak . . ." the young man began.

The girl sighed.

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"I oughtn't to say it . . . now," she said slowly, and looked across at Robin with shining eyes, "but, Robin dear, I'm . . . I'm glad you did!"

She paused a moment as though turning something over in her mind.

"I've . . . I've got something to tell you, Robin," she began. "No, stay where you are! We must be sensible now."

She paused and looked at him.

"Robin," she said slowly, "I've promised to marry somebody else . . ."

There was a moment's silence.

"Who is it?" Robin asked in a hard voice.

The girl made no answer.

"Who is it? Do I know him?"

Still the girl was silent, but she gave a hardly perceptible nod.

"Not . . . ? No, no, Mary, it isn't true? It can't be true?"

The girl nodded, her eyes to the ground.

"It's a secret still," she said. "No one knows but Mother. Hartley doesn't want it announced yet!"

The sound of the Christian name suddenly seemed to infuriate Greve.

"By God!" he cried, "it shan't be! You must be mad, Mary, to think of marrying a man like

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Hartley Parrish. A fellow who's years older than you, who thinks of nothing but money, who stood out of the war and made a fortune while men of his own age were doing the fighting for him! It's unthinkable . . . it's . . . it's damnable to think of a gross, ill-bred creature like Parrish . . ."

"Robin!" the girl cried, "you seem to forget that we're staying in his house. In spite of all you say he seems to be good enough for you to come and stay with . . ."

"I only came because you were to be here. You know that perfectly well. I admit one oughtn't to blackguard one's host, but, Mary, you must see that this marriage is absolutely out of the question!"

The girl began to bridle up.

"Why?" she asked loftily.

"Because . . . because Parrish is not the sort of man who will make you happy . . ."

"And why not, may I ask? He's very kind and very generous, and I believe he likes me . . ."

Robin Greve made a gesture of despair.

"My dear girl," he said, trying to control himself to speak quietly, "what do you know about this man? Nothing. But there are beastly stories circulating about his life . . ."

Mary Trevert laughed cynically.

"My dear old Robin," she said, "they tell

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stories about every bachelor. And I hardly think you are an unbiassed judge . . ."

Robin Greve was pacing up and down the floor.

"You're crazy, Mary," he said, stopping in front of her, "to dream you can ever be happy with a man like Hartley Parrish. The man's a ruthless egoist. He thinks of nothing but money and he's out to buy you just exactly as you . . ."

"As I am ready to sell myself!" the girl echoed. "And I *am* ready, Robin. It's all very well for you to stand there and preach ideals at me, but I'm sick and disgusted at the life we've been leading for the past three years, hovering on the verge of ruin all the time, dunned by tradesmen and having to borrow even from servants . . . yes, from old servants of the family . . . to pay Mother's bridge debts. Mother's a good sort. Father spent all her money for her and she was brought up in exactly the same helpless way as she brought up me. I can do absolutely nothing except the sort of elementary nursing which we all learnt in the war, and if I don't marry well Mother will have to keep a boarding-house or do something ghastly like that. I'm not going to pretend that I'm thinking only of her, because I'm not. I can't face a long engagement with no prospects except castles in

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Spain. I don't mean to be callous, Robin, but I expect I am naturally hard. Hartley Parrish is a good sort. He's very fond of me, and he will see that Mother lives comfortably for the rest of her life. I've promised to marry him because I like him and he's a suitable match. And I don't see by what right you try and run him down to me behind his back! If it's jealousy, then it shows a very petty spirit!"

Robin Greve stepped close up to Mary Trevert. His eyes were very angry and his jaw was set very square.

"If you are determined to sell yourself to the highest bidder," he said, "I suppose there's no stopping you. But you're making a mistake. If Parrish were all you claim for him, you might not repent of his marriage so long as you did not care for somebody else. But I know you love me, and it breaks my heart to see you blundering into everlasting unhappiness . . ."

"At least Hartley will be able to keep me," the girl flashed out. Directly she had spoken she regretted her words.

A red flush spread slowly over Robin Greve's face.

Then he laughed drily.

"You won't be the first woman he's kept!"

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he retorted, and stamped out of the billiard-room.

The girl gave a little gasp. Then she reddened with anger.

"How dare he?" she cried, stamping her foot; "how dare he?"

She sank on the lounge and, burying her face in her hands, burst into tears.

"Oh, Robin, Robin, dear!" she sobbed — incomprehensibly, for she was a woman.

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CHAPTER II

AT TWILIGHT

THERE is a delicious snugness, a charming lack of formality, about the ceremony of afternoon tea in an English country-house — it is much too indefinite a rite to dignify it by the name of meal — which makes it the most pleasant reunion of the day. For English country-house parties consist, for the most part, of a succession of meals to which the guests flock the more congenially as, in the interval, they have contrived to avoid one another's companionship.

And so, scarcely had the last reverberation of Bude's measured gonging died away than the French window leading from the lounge-hall on to the terrace was pushed open and two of Hartley Parrish's guests emerged from the falling darkness without into the pleasant comfort of the firelit room.

They were an oddly matched pair. The one was a tubby little man with short bristly grey hair and a short bristly grey moustache to match. His stumpy legs looked ridiculous in his baggy golf knickers of rough tweed, which he wore with gaiters extending half-way up his short, stout

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calves. As he came in, he slung off the heavy tweed shooting-cloak he had been wearing and placed it with his Homburg hat on a chair.

This was Dr. Romain, whose name thus written seems indecently naked without the string of complementary initials indicative of the honours and degrees which years of bacteriological research had heaped upon him. His companion was a tall, slim, fair-haired young man, about as good a specimen of the young Englishman turned out by the English public school as one could find. He was extremely good-looking with a proud eye and finely chiselled features, but the suggestion of youth in his face and figure was countered by a certain poise, a kind of latent seriousness which contrasted strangely with the general cheery *insouciance* of his type.

A soldier would have spotted the symptoms at once. "Five years of war!" would have been his verdict — that long and strange entry into life of so many thousands of England's manhood which impressed the stamp of premature seriousness on all those who came through. And Captain Sir Horace Trevert, Bart., D.S.O., had gone from his famous school straight into a famous regiment, had won his decoration before he was twenty-one, and been twice wounded into the bargain.

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"Where's everybody?" queried the doctor, rubbing his hands at the blazing log-fire.

"Robin and Mary went off to play billiards," said the young man, "and I left old Parrish after lunch settling down for an afternoon's work in the library . . ."

He crossed the room to the fire and stood with his back to the flame.

"What a worker that man is!" ejaculated the doctor. "He had one of his secretaries down this morning with a car full of portfolios, blue-prints, specifications, and God knows what else. Parrish polished the whole lot off and packed the fellow back to London before mid-day. Some of Horn-away's people who were waiting went in next, and he was through with them by lunch-time!"

Trevert wagged his head in admiration.

"And he told me he wanted to have a quiet week-end!" he said. "That's why he has no secretary living in the house."

"A quiet week-end!" repeated Romain drily. "Ye gods!"

"He's a marvel for work," said the young man.

"He certainly is," replied the doctor. "He's done wonders with Hornaway's. When he took the place over at the beginning of the war, they were telling me, it was a little potty concern

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making toy air guns or lead soldiers or something of the sort. And they never stop coining money now, it seems. Parrish must be worth millions . . ."

"Lucky devil!" said Trevert genially.

"Ah!" observed the doctor sententiously, "but he's had to work for it, mark you! He's had the most extraordinary life, they tell me. He was at one period of his career a bartender on the Rand, a man was saying at the club the other day. But most of his life he's lived in Canada, I gather. He was telling us the other evening, before you and Mary came down, that he was once a brakeman on the Canadian Pacific Railway. He said he invested all his savings in books on engineering and read them in his brakeman's van on his trips across the Dominion. Ah! he's a fine fellow!"

He lowered his voice discreetly.

"And a devilish good match, eh, Horace?"

The young man flushed slightly.

"Yes," he said unwillingly.

"A dam' good match for somebody," urged the doctor with a malicious twinkle in his eye.

"Here, Doc," said Horace, suddenly turning on him, "you stick to your bugs and germs. What do you know about matchmaking, anyway?"

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Dr. Romain chuckled.

"We bacteriologists are trained observers. One learns a lot watching the life and habits of the bacillus, Horace, my boy. And between ourselves, Parrish would be a lucky fellow if . . ."

Trevert turned to him. His face was quite serious, and there was a little touch of hauteur in his voice. He was the 17th Baronet.

"My dear Doc," he said, "aren't you going a bit fast? Parrish is a very good chap, but one knows nothing about him . . ."

Sagely the doctor nodded his grizzled head.

"That's true," he agreed. "He appears to have no relatives and nobody over here seems to have heard of him before the war. A man was saying at the Athenæum the other day . . ."

Trevert touched his elbow. Bude had appeared, portly, imperturbable, bearing a silver tray set out with the appliances for tea.

"Bude," cried Trevert, "don't tell me there are no tea-cakes again!"

"On the contrairey, sir," answered the butler in the richly sonorous voice pitched a little below the normal register which he employed abovestairs, "the cook has had her attention drawn to it. There are tea-cakes, sir!"

With a certain dramatic effect — for Bude was a trifle theatrical in everything he did — he

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whipped the cover off a dish and displayed a smoking pile of deliciously browned scones.

"Bude," said Trevert, "when I'm a Field Marshal, I'll see you get the O.B.E. for this!"

The butler smiled a nicely regulated three-by-one smile, a little deprecatory as was his wont. Then, like a tank taking a corner, he wheeled majestically and turned to cross the lounge. To reach the green baize door leading to the servants' quarters he had to cross the outer hall from which led corridors on the right and left. That on the right led to the billiard-room; that on the left to the big drawing-room with the library beyond.

As Bude reached the great screen of tooled Spanish leather which separated a corner of the lounge from the outer hall, Robin Greve came hastily through the glass door of the corridor leading from the billiard-room. The butler with a pleasant smile drew back a little to allow the young man to pass, thinking he was going into the lounge for tea.

"Tea is . . ." he began, but abruptly ended the sentence on catching sight of the young man's face. For Robin, habitually so self-possessed, looked positively haggard. His face was set and there was a weary look in his eyes. The young

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man appeared so utterly different from his wonted self that Bude fairly stared at him.

But Robin, without paying the least attention either to the butler or to the sound of voices in the lounge, strode across the outer hall and disappeared through the glass door of the corridor leading to the great drawing-room and the library.

Bude stood an instant gazing after him in perplexity, then moved across the hall to the servants' quarters.

In the meantime in the lounge the little doctor snapped the case of his watch and opined that he wanted his tea.

"Where on earth has everybody got to? What's become of Lady Margaret? I haven't seen her since lunch . . ."

That lady answered his question by appearing in person.

Lady Margaret was tall and hard and glittering. Like so many Englishwomen of good family, she was so saturated with the traditions of her class that her manner was almost indistinguishable from that of a man. Well-mannered, broad-minded, wholly cynical, and absolutely fearless, she went through life exactly as though she were following a path carefully taped out for her by a suitably instructed Providence. Somewhere

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beneath the mask of smiling indifference she presented so bravely to a difficult world, she had a heart, but so carefully did she hide it that Horace had only discovered it on a certain grey November morning when he had started out for the first time on active service. For ever afterwards a certain weighing-machine at Waterloo Station, by which he had had a startling vision of his mother standing with heaving bosom and tear-stained face, possessed in his mind the attributes of some secret and sacred shrine.

But now she was cool and well-gowned and self-contained as ever.

"What a perfectly dreadful day!" she exclaimed in her pleasant, well-bred voice. "Horace, you must positively go and see Henry What's-his-name in the Foreign Office and get me a passport for Cannes. The weather in England in the winter is incredibly exaggerated!"

"At least," said the doctor, rubbing his back as he warmed himself at the fire, "we have fuel in England. Give me England, climate and all, but don't take away my fire. The sun doesn't shine on the Riviera at night, you know!"

Lady Margaret busied herself at the tea-table with its fine Queen Anne silver and dainty yellow cups. It was the custom at Harkings to serve tea in the winter without other illumination than the

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light of the great log-fire that spat and leaped in the open hearth. Beyond the semi-circle of ruddy light the great lounge was all in darkness, and beyond that again was the absolute stillness of the English country on a winter's evening.

And so with a gentle clatter of teacups and the accompaniment of pleasantly modulated voices they sat and chatted — Lady Margaret, who was always surprising in what she said, the doctor who was incredibly opinionated, and young Trevert, who like all of the younger generation was daringly flippant. He was airing his views on what he called "Boche music" when he broke off and cried:

"Hullo, here's Mary! Mary, you owe me half a crown. Bude has come up to scratch and there are tea-cakes after . . . but, I say, what on earth's the matter?"

The girl had come into the room and was standing in the centre of the lounge in the ruddy glow of the fire. Her face was deathly pale and she was shuddering violently. She held her little cambric handkerchief crushed up into a ball to her lips. Her eyes were fixed, almost glazed, like one who walks in a trance.

She stood like that for an instant surveying the group — Lady Margaret, a silver tea-pot in one hand, looking at her with uplifted brows. Horace, who in his amazement had taken a step

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forward, and the doctor at his side scrutinizing her beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"My dear Mary"—it was Lady Margaret's smooth and pleasant voice which broke the silence—"whatever is the matter? Have you seen a ghost!"

The girl swayed a little and opened her lips as if to speak. A log, crashing from the fire into the grate, fell upon the silence of the darkening room. It seemed to break the spell.

"Hartley!"

The name came hoarsely from the girl. Everybody, except Lady Margaret, sprang to his feet. It was the doctor who spoke first.

"Miss Mary," he said, "you seem frightened, what . . ."

His voice was very soothing.

Mary Trevert made a vague gesture towards the shadows about the staircase.

"There . . . in the library . . . he's got the door locked . . . there was a shot . . ."

Then she suddenly screamed aloud.

In a stride both the doctor and her brother were by her side. But she motioned them away.

"I'm frightened about Hartley," she said in a low voice, "please go at once and see what . . . that shot . . . and he doesn't answer!"

"Come on, Doctor!"

Horace Trevert was halfway to the big screen

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separating the lounge from the outer hall. As he passed the bell, he pressed it.

"Send Bude to us, Mother, when he comes, please!" he called as he and the doctor hurried away.

Lady Margaret had risen and stood, one arm about her daughter, on the Persian rug spread out before the cheerful fire. So the women stood in the firelight in Hartley Parrish's house, surrounded by all the treasures which his wealth had bought, and listened to the footsteps clattering away through the silence.

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CHAPTER III

A DISCOVERY

HARKINGS was not a large house. Some three hundred years ago it had been a farm, but in the intervening years successive owners had so altered it by pulling down and building on, that, when it passed into the possession of Hartley Parrish, little else than the open fireplace in the lounge remained to tell of the original farm. It was a queer, rambling house of only two stories whose elongated shape was accentuated by the additional wing which Hartley Parrish had built on.

For the decoration of his country-house, Parrish had placed himself unreservedly in the hands of the firm entrusted with the work. Their architect was given *carte blanche* to produce a house of character out of the rather dingy, out-of-date country villa which Harkings was when Hartley Parrish, attracted by the view from the gardens, first discovered it.

The architect had gone to his work with a zest. He had ripped up walls and ceilings and torn down irrational matchwood partitions, discovering some fine old oak wainscot and the black-

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ened roof-beams of the original farmstead. In the upshot he transformed Harkings into a very fair semblance of a late Jacobean house, fitted with every modern convenience and extremely comfortable. Furnished throughout with genuine "period" furniture, with fine dark oak panelling and parquet floors, it was altogether picturesque. Neither within nor without, it is true, would a connoisseur have been able to give it a date.

But that did not worry Hartley Parrish. He loved a bargain and he had bought the house cheap. It was situated in beautiful country and was within easy reach by car of his town-house in St. James's Square where he lived for the greater part of the week. Last but not least Harkings was the casket enshrining a treasure, the realization of a lifelong wish. This was the library, Parrish's own room, designed by himself and furnished to his own individual taste.

It stood apart from the rest of the house at the end of the wing which Parrish had constructed. The wing consisted of a single ground floor and contained the drawing-room — which was scarcely ever used, as both Parrish and his guests preferred the more congenial surroundings of the lounge — and the library. A long corridor panelled in oak led off the hall to the new wing. On to this corridor both the drawing-room

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and the library gave. Halfway down the corridor a small passage ran off. It separated the drawing-room from the library and ended in a door leading into the gardens at the back of the house.

It was to the new wing that Horace Trevert and Dr. Romain now hastened. They hurried across the hall, where the big lamp of dulled glass threw a soft yellow light, and entered the corridor through the heavy oak door which shut it off from the hall. The corridor was wrapt in silence. Halfway down, where the small passage ran to the garden door, the electric light was burning.

Horace Trevert ran down the corridor ahead of the doctor and was the first to reach the library door. He knocked sharply, then turned the handle. The door was locked.

"Hartley!" he cried and rapped again. "Ha-a-artley! Open the door! It's me, Horace!"

Again he knocked and rattled the handle. Not a sound came from the locked room. There was an instant's silence. Horace and the doctor exchanged an interrogatory look.

From behind the closed door came the steady ticking of a clock. The silence was so absolute that both men heard it.

Then the door at the end of the corridor was flung open and Bude appeared. He was running

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at a quick ambling trot, his heavy tread shaking the passage.

"Oh, sir," he cried, "whatever is it? What has happened?"

Horace spoke quickly, incisively.

"Something's happened to Mr. Parrish, Bude," he said. "The door's locked and he doesn't answer. We'll have to break the door down."

Bude shook his head.

"It's solid oak, sir," he began.

Then he raised his hand.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, as though an idea had struck him. "If we were to go out by the garden door here, we might get in through the window. We could break the glass if needs be!"

"That's it!" exclaimed Horace. "Come on, Doctor!"

He dashed down the corridor towards the little passage. The doctor laid a hand on Bude's arm.

"One of us had better stay here," he said with a meaning glance at the closed door.

The butler raised an affrighted face to his.

"Go with Sir Horace, Bude," said the doctor. "I'll stay!"

Outside in the gardens of Harkings it was a raw, damp evening, pitch-black now, with little gusts of wind which shook the naked bushes of the rosery. The garden door led by a couple of

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shallow steps on to a gravel path which ran all along the back of the house. The path extended right up to the wall of the house. On the other side it flanked the rosery.

The glass door was banging to and fro in the night wind as Bude, his coat-collar turned up, hurried out into the darkness. The library, which formed the corner of the new wing, had two windows, the one immediately above the gravel path looking out over the rosery, the other round the corner of the house giving on the same path, beyond which ran a high hedge of clipped box surrounding the so-called Pleasure Ground, a plot of smooth grass with a sundial in the centre.

A glow of light came from the library window, and in its radiance Bude saw silhouetted the tall, well-knit figure of young Trevert. As the butler came up, the boy raised something in his hand and there was a crash of broken glass.

The curtains were drawn, but with the breaking of the window they began to flap about. With the iron grating he had picked up from the drain below the window young Trevert smashed the rest of the glass away, then thrust an arm through the empty window-frame, fumbling for the window-catch.

"The catch is not fastened," he whispered, and with a resolute thrust he pushed the window up.

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The curtains leapt up wildly, revealing a glimpse of the pleasant, book-lined room. Both men from the darkness without saw Parrish's desk littered with his papers and his habitual chair beyond it, pushed back empty.

Trevert turned an instant, a hand on the window-sill.

"Bude," he said, "there's no one there!"

"Best look and see, sir," replied the butler, his coat-tails flapping in the wind.

Trevert hoisted himself easily on to the window-sill, knelt there for an instant, then thrust his legs over the sill and dropped into the room. As he did so he stumbled, cried aloud.

Then the heavy grey curtains were flung back and the butler saw the boy's face, rather white, at the open window.

"My God," he said slowly, "he's dead!"

A moment later Dr. Romain, waiting in the corridor, heard the key turn in the lock of the library door. The door was flung open. Horace Trevert stood there, silhouetted in a dull glow of light from the room. He was pointing to the open window, beneath which Hartley Parrish lay on his back motionless.

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CHAPTER IV

BETWEEN THE DESK AND THE WINDOW

HARTLEY PARRISH'S library was a splendid room, square in shape, lofty and well proportioned. It was lined with books arranged in shelves of dark brown oak running round the four walls, but sunk level with them and reaching up to a broad band of perfectly plain white plasterwork.

It was a cheerful, comfortable, eminently modern room, half library, half office. The oak was solid, but uncompromisingly new. The great leather armchairs were designed on modern lines —for comfort rather than for appearance. There were no pictures; but vases of chrysanthemums stood here and there about the room. A dictaphone in a case was in a corner, but beside it was a little table on which were set out some rare bits of old Chelsea. There was also a gramophone, but it was enclosed in a superb case of genuine old black-and-gold lacquer. The very books in their shelves carried on this contrast of business with recreation. For while one set of shelves contained row upon row of technical works, company reports, and all manner of busi

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ness reference books bound in leather, on another were to be found the vellum-bound volumes of the Kelmscott Press.

A sober note of grey or mole colour was the colour scheme of the room. The heavy pile carpet which stretched right up to the walls was of this quiet neutral shade: so were the easy-chairs, and the colour of the heavy curtains, which hung in front of the two high windows, was in harmony with the restful decorative scheme of the room.

The massive oaken door stood opposite the window overlooking the rosery—the window through which Horace Trevert had entered. Parrish's desk was in front of this window, between it and the door in consequence. By the other window, which, as has been stated, looked out on the clipped hedge surrounding the Pleasure Ground, was the little table with the Chelsea china, the dictaphone, and one of the easy-chairs. The centre of the room was clear so that nothing lay between the door and the carved mahogany chair at the desk. Here, as they all knew, Parrish was accustomed to sit when working, his back to the door, his face to the window overlooking the rosery.

The desk stood about ten feet from the window. On it was a large brass lamp which cast a brilliant circle of light upon the broad flat top of the

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desk with its orderly array of letter-trays, its handsome silver-edged blotter and silver and tortoise-shell writing appurtenances. By the light of this lamp Dr. Romain, looking from the doorway, saw that Hartley Parrish's chair was vacant, pushed back a little way from the desk. The rest of the room was wrapt in unrevealing half-light.

"He's there by the window!"

Horace was whispering to the doctor. Romain strode over to the desk and picked up the lamp. As he did so, his eyes fell upon the pale face of Hartley Parrish. He lay on his back in the space between the desk and the window. His head was flung back, his eyes, bluish-grey, — the narrow, rather expressionless eyes of the successful business man, — were wide open and fixed in a sightless stare, his rather full mouth, with its clean-shaven lips, was rigid and stern. With the broad forehead, the prominent brows, the bold, aggressive nose, and the square bony jaw, it was a fighter's face, a fine face save for the evil promise of that sensuous mouth. So thought the doctor with the swift psychological process of his trade.

From the face his gaze travelled to the body. And then Romain could not repress an involuntary start, albeit he saw what he had half expected to see. The fleshy right hand of Hartley Parrish grasped convulsively an automatic pis-

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tol. His clutching index finger was crooked about the trigger and the barrel was pressed into the yielding pile of the carpet. His other hand with clawing fingers was flung out away from the body on the other side. One leg was stretched out to its fullest extent and the foot just touched the hem of the grey window curtains. The other leg was slightly drawn up.

The doctor raised the lamp from the desk and, dropping on one knee, placed it on the ground beside the body. With gentle fingers he manipulated the eyes, opened the blue serge coat and waistcoat which Parrish was wearing. As he unbuttoned the waistcoat, he laid bare a dark red stain on the breast of the fine silk shirt. He opened shirt and under-vest, bent an ear to the still form, and then, with a little helpless gesture, rose to his feet.

"Dead?" queried Trevert.

Romain nodded shortly.

"Shot through the heart!" he said.

"He looked so . . . so limp," the boy said, shrinking back a little, "I thought he was dead. But I never thought old Hartley would have done a thing like that . . ."

The doctor pursed up his lips as if to speak. But he remained silent for a moment. Then he said:

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"Horace, the police must be informed. We can do that on the telephone. This room must be left just as it is until they come. I can do nothing more for poor Hartley. And we shall have to tell the others. I'd better do that myself. I wonder where Greve is? I haven't seen him all the afternoon. As a barrister he should be able to advise us about — er, the technicalities: the police and all that . . ."

Rapid footsteps reverberated down the corridor. Robin Greve appeared at the door. The fat and frightened face of Bude appeared over his shoulder.

"Good God, Doctor!" he cried, "what's this Bude tells me?"

The doctor cleared his throat.

"Our poor friend is dead, Greve," he said.

"But how? How?"

Greve stood opposite the doctor in the centre of the library. He had switched on the light at the door as he had come in, and the room was flooded with soft light thrown by concealed lamps set around the cornice of the ceiling.

"Look!" responded the doctor by way of answer and stepped aside to let the young man come up to the desk. "He has a pistol in his hand!"

Robin Greve took a step forward and stopped

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dead. He gazed for an instant without speaking on the dead face of his host and rival.

"Suicide!"

It was an affirmation rather than a question, and the little doctor took it up. He was not a young man and the shock and the excitement were beginning to tell on his nerves.

"I am not a police surgeon," he said with some asperity; "in fact, I may say I have not seen a dead body since my hospital days. I . . . I . . . know nothing about these things. This is a matter for the police. They must be summoned at once. Where's Bude?"

Robin Greve turned quickly.

"Get on to the police station at Stevenish at once, Bude," he ordered. "Do you know the Inspector?"

"Yessir," the butler answered in a hollow voice. His hands were trembling violently, and he seemed to control himself with difficulty. "Mr. Humphries, sir!"

"Well, ring him up and tell him that Mr. Parrish . . . Hullo, what do all these people want?"

There was a commotion at the door. Frightened faces were framed in the doorway. Outside there was the sound of a woman whimpering. A tall, dark young man in a tail coat came in quickly. He stopped short when he saw the solemn faces

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of the group at the desk. It was Parrish's man, Jay. He stepped forward to the desk and in a frightened sort of way peered at the body as it lay on the floor.

"Oh, sir," he said breathlessly, addressing Greve, "what ever has happened to Mr. Parrish? It can't be true . . ."

Greve put his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"I'm sorry to say it is true, Jay," he answered.

"He was very good to us all," the valet replied in a broken voice. He remained by the desk staring at the body in a dazed fashion.

"Who is that crying outside?" Greve demanded. "This is no place for women . . ."

"It's Mrs. Heever, the housekeeper," Bude answered.

"Well, she must go back to her room. Send all those servants away. Jay, will you see to it? And take care that Lady Margaret and Miss Trevert don't come in here, either."

"Sir Horace is with them, sir, in the lounge," said Jay and went out.

"I'll go to them. I think I'd better," exclaimed the doctor. "I shall be in the lounge when they want me. A dreadful affair! Dreadful!"

The little doctor bustled out, leaving Greve and the butler alone in the room with the mortal re-

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mains of Hartley Parrish lying where he had fallen on the soft grey carpet.

"Now, Bude," said Greve incisively, "get on to the police at once. You'd better telephone from the servant's hall. I'll have a look round here in the meantime!"

Bude stood for an instant irresolute. He glanced shrewdly at the young man.

"Go on," said Robin quickly; "what are you waiting for, man? There's no time to lose."

Slowly the butler turned and tiptoed away, his ungainly body swaying about as he stole across the heavy pile carpet. He went out of the room, closing the door softly behind him. He left Greve sunk in a reverie at the desk, gazing with unseeing eyes upon the dead face of the master of Harkings.

That sprawling corpse, the startled realization of death stamped for ever in the wide, staring eyes, was indeed a subject for meditation. There, in the midst of all the evidences of Hartley Parrish's meteoric rise to affluence and power, Greve pondered for an instant on the strange pranks which Fate plays us poor mortals.

Parrish had risen, as Greve and all the world knew, from the bottom rung of the ladder. He had had a bitter fight for existence, had made his money, as Greve had heard, with a blind and

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ruthless determination which spoke of the stern struggle of other days. And Robin, who, too, had had his own way to make in the world, knew how the memory of earlier struggles went to sweeten the flavour of ultimate success.

Yet here was Hartley Parrish, with his vast financial undertakings, his soaring political ambitions, his social aims which, Robin realized bitterly, had more than a little to do with his project for marrying Mary Trevert, stricken down suddenly, without warning, in the very heyday of success.

"Why should he have done it?" he whispered to himself, "why, my God, why?"

But the mask-like face at his feet, as he bent to scan it once more, gave no answer to the riddle. Determination, ambition, was portrayed on the keen, eager face even in death.

With a little hopeless gesture the young barrister glanced round the room. His eye fell upon the desk. He saw a neat array of letter-trays, costly silver and tortoise-shell writing appointments, a couple of heavy gold fountain pens, and an orderly collection of pencils. Lying flat on the great silver-edged blotter was a long brown envelope which had been opened. Propped up against the large crystal ink-well was a letter addressed

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simply "Miss Mary Trevert" in Hartley Parrish's big, vigorous, and sprawling handwriting.

The letter to Mary Trevert, Robin did not touch. But he picked up the long brown envelope. On the back it bore a printed seal. The envelope contained a document and a letter. At the sight of it the young man started. It was Hartley Parrish's will. The letter was merely a covering note from Mr. Bardy, of the firm of Jerringham, Bardy and Company, a well-known firm of solicitors, dated the previous evening. Robin replaced letter and document in their envelope without reading them.

"So that's it!" he murmured to himself. "Suicide? But why?"

All the letter-trays save one were empty. In this was a little heap of papers and letters. Robin glanced through them. There were two or three prospectuses, a notice of a golf match, a couple of notes from West End tradesmen enclosing receipts and an acknowledgement from the bank. There was only one personal letter — a business communication from a Rotterdam firm. Robin glanced at the letter. It was typewritten on paper of a dark slatey-blue shade. It was headed, "ELIAS VAN DER SPYCK & CO., GENERAL IMPORTERS, ROTTERDAM," and dealt with steel shipments.

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Robin dropped the letter back into the tray and turned to survey the room. It was in perfect order. Except for the still form lying on the floor and the broken pane of glass in the window, there was nothing to tell of the tragedy which had been enacted there that afternoon. There were no papers to hint at a crisis save the prosaic-looking envelope containing the will, and Parrish's note for Mary. The waste-paper basket, a large and business-like affair in white wicker, had been cleared.

Robin walked across to the fireplace. The flames leapt eagerly about a great oak log which hissed fitfully on top of the glowing coals contained in the big iron fire-basket. The grate was bare and tidy. As the young man looked at the fire, a little whirl of blue smoke whisked out of the wide fireplace and eddied into the room. Robin sniffed. The room smelt smoky. Now he remembered he had noticed it as he came in.

He stood an instant gazing thoughtfully at the blazing and leaping fire. He threw a quick glance at the window where the curtains tossed fitfully in the breeze coming through the broken pane. Suddenly he stepped quickly across the room and, lifting the reading-lamp from the table, bore it over to the window which he scrutinized narrowly by its light. Then he dropped on one knee beside

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the dead body, placing the lamp on the floor beside him.

He lifted the dead man's left hand and narrowly examined the nails. Without touching the right hand which clasped the revolver, he studied its nails too. He rose and took the gold-mounted reading-glass from the desk and scrutinized the nails of both hands through the glass.

Then he rose to his feet again and, having replaced lamp and reading-glass on the desk, stood there thoughtfully, his brown hands clasped before him. His eyes wandered from the desk to the window and from the window to the corpse. Then he noticed on the carpet between the dead body and the desk a little ball of slatey-blue paper. He bent down and picked it up. He had begun to unroll it when the library door was flung open. Robin thrust the scrap of paper in his pocket and turned to face the door.

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CHAPTER V

IN WHICH BUDE LOOKS AT ROBIN GREVE

THE library door opened. A large, square-built, florid man in the braided uniform of a police inspector stood on the threshold of the room. Beside him was Bude who, with an air of dignity and respectful mourning suitably blended, waved him into the room.

"The — ahem! — body is in here, Mr. Humphries, sir!"

Inspector Humphries stepped quickly into the room. A little countryfied in appearance and accent, he had the careful politeness, the measured restraint, and the shrewd eye of the typical police officer. In thirty years' service he had risen from village constable to be Inspector of county police. Slow to anger, rather stolid, and with an excellent heart, he had a vein of shrewd common sense not uncommonly found in that fast disappearing species, the English peasant.

He nodded shortly to Greve, and with a tread that shook the room strode across to where Hartley Parrish was lying dead. In the meantime a harassed-looking man with a short grey beard, wearing a shabby frock coat, had slipped into the

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room behind the Inspector. He approached Greve.

"Dr. Romain?" he queried, peering through his gold spectacles, "the butler said . . ."

"No, my name is Greve," answered Robin. "I am staying in the house. This is Dr. Romain."

He motioned to the door. Dr. Romain came bustling into the room.

"Glad to see you here so promptly, Inspector," he said. "A shocking business, very. Is this the doctor? I am Dr. Romain . . ."

Dr. Redstone bowed with alacrity.

"A great privilege, sir," he said staidly. "I have followed your work . . ."

But the other did not let him finish.

"Shot through the heart . . . instantaneous death . . . severe hæmorrhage . . . the pistol is there . . . in his hand. A man with everything he wanted in the world . . . I can't understand it. 'Pon my soul, I can't!"

The Inspector, who had been kneeling by the corpse, motioned with his head to the village doctor. Dr. Redstone went to him and began a cursory examination of the body. The Inspector rose.

"I understand from the butler, gentlemen," he said, "that it was Miss Trevert, a lady staying in the house, who heard the shot fired. I should like to see her, please. And you, sir, are you a relation of . . ."

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Greve, thus addressed, hastily replied.

"Only a friend, Inspector. I am staying in the house. I am a barrister. Perhaps I may be able to assist you . . ."

Humphries shot a slow, shrewd glance at him from beneath his shaggy blond eyebrows.

"Thank you, sir, much obliged, I'm sure. Now" — he thrust a hand into his tunic and produced a large leather-bound notebook — "do you know anything as would throw a light on this business?"

Greve shook his head.

"He seemed perfectly cheerful at lunch. He left the dining-room directly after he had taken his coffee."

"Where did he go?"

"He came here to work. He told us at lunch that he was going to shut himself up in the library for the whole afternoon as he had a lot of work to get through."

The Inspector made a note or two in his book. Then he paused thoughtfully tapping the end of his pencil against his teeth.

"It was Miss Trevert, you say, who found the body?"

"No," Greve replied. "Her brother, Sir Horace Trevert. It was Miss Trevert who heard the shot fired."

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"The door was locked, I think?"

"On the inside. But here is Sir Horace Trevert. He will tell you how he got through the window and discovered the body."

Horace Trevert gave a brief account of his entry into the library. Again the Inspector scribbled in his notebook.

"One or two more questions, gentlemen, please," he said, "and then I should wish to see Miss Trevert. Firstly, who saw Mr. Hartley Parrish last: and at what time?"

Horace Trevert looked at Greve.

"It would be when he left us after lunch, wouldn't it?" he said.

"Certainly, certainly," Dr. Romain broke in. "He left us all together in the dining-room, you, Horace and Robin and Lady Margaret and Mary . . . Miss Trevert and her mother, you know," he added by way of explanation to the Inspector.

"And he went straight to the library?"

"Straight away, Mr. Humphries, sir," broke in Bude. "Mr. Parrish crossed me in the hall and gave me particular instructions that he was not to be disturbed."

"That was at what time?"

"About two-thirty, sir."

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"Then you were the last person to see him before . . ."

"Why, no . . . that is, unless . . ."

The butler hesitated, casting a quick glance round his audience.

"What do you mean?" rapped out the Inspector, looking up from his notebook. "Did anybody else see Mr. Parrish in spite of his orders?"

Bude was silent. He was looking at Greve.

"Come on," said Humphries sternly. "You heard my question? What makes you think anybody else had access to Mr. Parrish before the shot was heard?"

Bude made a little resigned gesture of the hands.

"Well, sir, I thought . . . I made sure that Mr. Greve . . ."

There was a moment's tense silence.

"Well?" snapped Humphries.

"I was going to say I made certain that Mr. Greve was going to Mr. Parrish in the library to tell him tea was ready. Mr. Greve passed me in the hall and went down the library corridor just after I had served the tea."

All eyes turned to Robin.

"It's perfectly true," he said. "I went out into the gardens for a mouthful of fresh air just before tea. I left the house by the side door off the

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corridor here. I didn't go to the library, though. It is an understood thing in this house that no one ever disturbs Mr. Parrish when he . . ."

He broke off sharply.

"My God, Mary," he cried, "you mustn't come in here!"

All turned round at his loud exclamation. Mary Trevert stood in the doorway. Dr. Romain darted forward.

"My dear," he said soothingly, "you mustn't be here . . ."

Passively she let him lead her into the corridor. The Inspector continued his examination.

"At what time did you come along this corridor, sir?" he asked Robin.

"It was not long after the tea gong went," answered Robin, "about ten minutes past five, I should say . . ."

"And you heard nothing?"

Robin shook his head.

"Absolutely nothing," he replied. "The corridor was perfectly quiet. I stepped out into the grounds, went for a turn round the house, but it was raining, so I came in almost at once."

"At what time was that?"

"When I came in . . . oh, about two or three minutes later, say about a quarter past five."

Humphries turned to Horace Trevert.

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"What time was it when Miss Trevert heard the shot?"

Horace puckered up his brow.

"Well," he said, "I don't quite know. We were having tea. It wasn't much after five — I should say about a quarter past."

"Then the shot that Miss Trevert heard would have been fired just about the time that you, sir," he turned to Robin, "were coming in from your stroll."

"Somewhere about that time, I should say!" Robin answered rather thoughtfully.

"Did you hear it?" queried the Inspector.

"No," said Robin.

"But surely you must have been at or near the side door at the time as you were coming in . . ."

"I came in by the front door," said Robin, "on the other side of the house . . ."

Very carefully the Inspector closed his note-book, thrust the pencil back in its place along the back, fastened the elastic about the book, and turned to Horace Trevert.

"And now, sir, if I might speak to Miss Trevert alone for a minute . . ."

"I say, though," expostulated Horace, "my sister's awfully upset, you know. Is it absolutely necessary?"

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"Aye, sir, it is!" said the Inspector. "But there's no need for me to see her in here. Perhaps in some other room . . ."

"The drawing-room is next to this," the butler put in; "they'd be nice and quiet in there, Sir Horace."

The Inspector acquiesced. Dr. Redstone drew him aside for a whispered colloquy.

The Inspector came back to Robin and Horace.

"The doctor would like to have the body taken upstairs to Mr. Parrish's room," he said. "He wishes to make a more detailed examination if Dr. Romain would help him. If one of you gentlemen could give orders about this . . . I have two officers outside who would lend a hand. And this room must then be shut and locked. Sergeant Harris!" he called.

"Sir!"

A stout sergeant appeared at the library door.

"As soon as the body has been removed, you will lock the room and bring the key to me. And you will return here and see that no one attempts to get into the room. Understand?"

"Yessir!"

"Inspector!"

Robin Greve called Inspector Humphries as the latter was preparing to follow Bude to the drawing-room.

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"Mr. Parrish seems to have written a note for Miss Trevert," he said, pointing at the desk. "And in that envelope you will find Mr. Parrish's will. I discovered it there on the desk just before you arrived!"

Again the Inspector shot one of his swift glances at the young man. He went over to the desk, shook the document and letter from their envelope, glanced at them, and replaced them.

"I don't rightly know that this concerns me, gentlemen," he said slowly. "I think I'll just take charge of it. And I'll give Miss Trevert her letter."

Taking the two envelopes, he tramped heavily out of the room.

Then in a little while Bude and Jay and two bucolic-looking policemen came to the library to move the body of the master of Harkings. Robin stood by and watched the little procession pass slowly with silent feet across the soft pile carpet and out into the corridor. But his thoughts were not with Parrish. He was haunted by the look which Mary Trevert had given him as she had stood for an instant at the library door, a look of fear, of suspicion. And it made his heart ache.

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CHAPTER VI

THE LETTER

The great drawing-room of Harkings was ablaze with light. The cluster of lights in the heavy crystal chandelier and the green-shaded electric lamps in their gilt sconces on the plain white-panelled walls coldly lit up the formal, little-used room with its gilt furniture, painted piano, and huge marble fireplace.

This glittering Louis Seize environment seemed altogether too much for the homely Inspector. Whilst waiting for Mary Trevert to come to him, he tried several attitudes in turn. The empty hearth frightened him away from the mantelpiece, the fragile appearance of a gilt settee decided him against risking his sixteen stone weight on its silken cushions, and the vastness of the room overawed him when he took up his position in the centre of the Aubusson carpet. Finally he selected an ornate chair, rather more solid-looking than the rest, which he drew up to a small table on the far side of the room. There he sat down, his large red hands spread out upon his knees in an attitude of singular embarrassment.

But Mary Trevert set him quickly at his ease when presently she came to him. She was pale,

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but quite self-possessed. Indeed, the effort she had made to regain her self-control was so marked that it would have scarcely escaped the attention of the Inspector, even if he had not had a brief vision of her as she had stood for that instant at the library door, pale, distraught, and trembling. He was astonished to find her cool, collected, almost business-like in the way she sat down, motioned him to his seat, and expressed her readiness to tell him all she knew.

The phrases he had been laboriously preparing—"This has been a bad shock for you, ma'am"; "You will forgive me, I'm sure, ma'am, for calling upon you at a moment such as this"—died away on his lips as Mary Trevert said:

"Ask me any questions you wish, Inspector. I will tell you everything I can."

"That's very good of you, ma'am, I'm sure," answered the Inspector, unstrapping his note-book, "and I'll try and not detain you long. Now, then, tell me what you know of this sad affair . . ."

Mary Trevert plucked an instant nervously at her little cambric handerchief in her lap. Then she said:

"I went to the library from the billiard-room . . ."

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"A moment," interposed the Inspector. "What time was that?"

"A little after five. The tea gong had gone some time. I was going to the library to tell Mr. Parrish that tea was ready . . ."

Mr. Humphries made a note. He nodded to show he was listening.

"I crossed the hall and went down the library corridor. I knocked on the library door. There was no reply. Then I heard a shot and a sort of thud."

Despite her effort to remain calm, the girl's voice shook a little. She made a little helpless gesture of her hands. A diamond ring she was wearing on her finger caught the light and blazed for an instant.

"Then I got frightened. I ran back along the corridor to the lounge where the others were and told them."

"When you knocked at the door, you say there was no reply. I suppose, now, you tried the handle first."

"Oh, yes . . ."

"Then Mr. Parrish would have heard the two sounds? The turning of the handle and then the knocking on the door? That's so, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so . . ."

"Yet you say there was no reply?"

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"No. None at all."

The Inspector jotted a word or two in his note-book as it lay open flat upon the table.

"The shot, then, was fired immediately after you had knocked? Not while you were knocking?"

"No. I knocked and waited, expecting Mr. Parrish to answer. Instead of him answering, there came this shot . . ."

"I see. And after the shot was fired there was a crash?"

"A sort of thud — like something heavy falling down."

"And you heard no groan or cry?"

The girl knit her brows for a moment.

"I . . . I . . . was frightened by the shot. I . . . I . . . don't seem able to remember what happened afterwards. Let me think . . . let me think . . ."

"There, there," said the Inspector paternally, "don't upset yourself like this. Just try and think what happened after you heard the shot fired . . ."

Mary Trevert shuddered, one slim white hand pressed against her cheek.

"I do remember now," she said, "there *was* a cry. It was more like a sharp exclamation . . ."

"And then you heard this crash?"

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"Yes . . ."

The girl had somewhat regained her self-possession. She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief quickly as though ashamed of her weakness.

"Now," said Humphries, clearing his throat, as though to indicate that the conversation had changed, "you and Lady Margaret Trevert knew Mr. Parrish pretty well, I believe, Miss Trevert. Have you any idea why he should have done this thing?"

Mary Trevert shook her dark head rather wearily.

"It is inconceivable to me . . . to all of us," she answered.

"Do you happen to know whether Mr. Parrish had any business worries?"

"He always had a great deal of business on hand and he has had a great deal to do lately over some big deal."

"What was it, do you know?"

"He was raising fresh capital for Hornaway's — that is the big engineering firm he controls . . ."

"Do you know if he was pleased with the way things were shaping?"

"Oh, yes. He told me last night that everything would be finished this week. He seemed quite satisfied."

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The Inspector paused to make a note.

Then he thrust a hand into the side-pocket of his tunic and produced Hartley Parrish's letter.

"This," he said, eyeing the girl as he handed her the letter, "may throw some light on the affair!"

Open-eyed, a little surprised, she took the plain white envelope from his hand and gazed an instant without speaking, on the bold sprawling address —

"Miss Mary Trevert."

"Open it, please," said the Inspector gently.

The girl tore open the envelope. Humphries saw her eyes fill, watched the emotion grip her and shake her in her self-control so that she could not speak when, her reading done, she gave him back the letter.

Without asking her permission, he took the sheet of fine, expensive paper with its neat engraved heading and postal directions, and read Hartley Parrish's last message.

My dear [it ran], I signed my will at Bardy's office yesterday, and he sent it back to me to-day. Just this line to let you know you are properly provided for should anything happen to me. I wanted to fix things so that you and Lady Margaret would not have to worry any more. I just had to *write*. I guess you understand why.

H.

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There was a long and impressive silence while the Inspector deliberately read the note. Then he looked interrogatively at the girl.

"We were engaged, Inspector," she said. "We were to have been married very soon."

A deep flush crept slowly over Mr. Humphries's florid face and spread into the roots of his tawny fair hair.

"But what does he mean by 'having to write'?" he asked.

The girl replied hastily, her eyes on the ground.

"Mr. Parrish was under the impression that . . . that . . . without his money I should not have cared for him. That is what he means . . ."

"You knew he had provided for you in his will?"

"He told me several times that he intended to leave me everything. You see, he has no relatives!"

"I see!" said the Inspector in a reflective voice.

"Had he any enemies, do you know? Anybody who would drive him to a thing like this?"

The girl shook her head vehemently.

"No!"

The monosyllable came out emphatically. Again the Inspector darted one of his quick, shrewd glances at the girl. She met his scrutiny with her habitual serene and candid gaze. The In-

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spector dropped his eyes and scribbled in his book.

"Was his health good?"

"He smoked far too much," the girl said, "and it made him rather nervy. But otherwise he never had a day's illness in his life."

Humphries ran his eye over the notes he had made.

"There is just one more question I should like to ask you, Miss Trevert," he said, "rather a personal question."

Mary Trevert's hands twisted the cambric handkerchief into a little ball and slowly unwound it again. But her face remained quite calm.

"About your engagement to Mr. Parrish . . . when did it take place?"

"Some days ago. It has not yet been announced."

The Inspector coughed.

"I was only wondering whether, perhaps, Mr. Parrish was not quite . . . whether he was, maybe, a little disturbed in his mind about the engagement . . ."

The girl hesitated. Then she said firmly:

"Mr. Parrish was perfectly happy about it. He was looking forward to our being married in the spring."

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Mr. Humphries shut his notebook with a snap and rose to his feet.

"Thank you very much, ma'am," he said with a little formal bow. "If you will excuse me now. I have the doctor to see again and there's the Coroner to be warned . . ."

He bowed again and tramped towards the door with a tread that made the chandelier tinkle melodiously.

The door closed behind him and his heavy footsteps died away along the corridor. Mary Trevert had risen to her feet calm and impassive. But when he had gone, her bosom began to heave and a spasm of pain shot across her face. Again the tears welled up in her eyes, brimmed over and stole down her cheeks.

"If I only *knew!*" she sobbed, "if I only *knew!*"

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CHAPTER VII

VOICES IN THE LIBRARY

THE swift tragedy of the winter afternoon had convulsed the well-organized repose of Hartley Parrish's household. Nowhere had his master grasp of detail been seen to better advantage than in the management of his country home. Overwhelmed with work though he constantly was, accustomed to carry his business and often part of his business staff to Harkings with him for the week-ends, there was never the least confusion about the house. The methodical calm of Harkings was that of a convent.

Hartley Parrish was wont to say that he paid his butler and housekeeper well to save himself from worry. It was rather to ensure his orders being punctiliously and promptly carried out. His was the mind behind the method which ensured that meals were punctually served and trains at Stevenish Station never missed.

But it was into a house in turmoil that Mary Trevert stepped when she left the drawing-room and passed along the corridor to go to her room. Doors slammed and there was the heavy thud of footsteps on the floor above. The glass door lead-

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ing into the gardens was open, as Mary passed it, swinging in the gusts of cold rain. In the gardens without there was a confused murmur of voices and the flash of lanterns.

In the hall a knot of servants were gossiping in frightened whispers with a couple of large, rather bovine country constables who, bareheaded, without their helmets, which they held under their arms, looked curiously undressed.

The whispers died away as Mary crossed the hall. All eyes followed her with interest as she went. It was as though an echo of her talk with the Inspector had by some occult means already spread through the little household. Through the half-open green baize door leading to the servants' quarters some unseen person was bawling down the telephone in a heated controversy with the exchange about a long-distance call to London. And but an hour since, the girl reflected sadly, as she mounted the oaken staircase, the house had been wrapt in its wonted evening silence in response to that firm and dominating personality who had passed out in the gloom of the winter twilight.

When, about six months before, Mary and her mother had begun to be regular visitors at Harkings, Hartley Parrish had insisted on giving Mary a boudoir to herself. This, in response to

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a chance remark of Mary's in admiration of a Chinese room she had seen at a friend's house, Parrish had had decorated in the Chinese style with black walls and black-and-gold lacquer furniture. The room had been transformed from a rather prosaic morning-room with old oak and chintz in the space of three days as a surprise for Mary. She remembered now how Parrish had left her to make the discovery of the change for herself. She loved colour and line, and the contrast between this quaint and delightful room with her rather shabby bedroom in her mother's small house in Brompton had made this surprise one of the most delightful she had ever experienced.

She rang the bell and sat down listlessly in a charmingly lacquered Louis Seize armchair in front of the log-fire blazing brightly in the fireplace. She was conscious that a great disaster had overtaken her, but only dimly conscious. For more poignantly than this dull sense of tragedy she was aware of a great aching at her heart, and her thoughts, after hovering over the events of the afternoon, settled down upon her talk that afternoon . . . already how far off it seemed . . . with Robin Greve in the library.

Robin had always been her hero. She could see him now in the glow of the fire as he had been

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when in the holidays he had come and snatched her away from a home already drab and difficult for a matinée and an orgy of cream cakes at Gunter's afterwards. He was then a long, slim, handsome boy of irrepressible spirits and impulsive generosity which usually left him, after the first few days of his holidays, in a state of lamentable impecuniosity. All their lives, it seemed to her, they had been friends, but with no stronger feeling between them until Robin, having joined the Army on the outbreak of war, had come to say good-bye on being ordered to France.

But by that time money troubles at home with which, as it seemed to her, she had been surrounded all her life, had grown so pressing that, apart from Lady Margaret's reiterated counsels, she herself had come to recognize that a suitable marriage was the only way out of their ever-increasing embarrassment.

She and Robin, she recalled with a feeling of relief, had never discussed the matter. He, too, had understood and had sailed for France without seeking to take advantage of the circumstance.

Outside in the black night a car throbbed. Footsteps crunched the gravel beneath her window. The sounds brought her back to the present with a sudden pang. She began to think of Hartley

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Parrish. All her life she had been so very poor that, until she had met this big, vigorous, intensely vital man, she had never known what a lavish command of money meant. Hartley Parrish did things in a big way. If he wanted a thing he bought it, as he had bought Bude, as he had bought a car he had seen standing outside a Pall Mall club and admired. He had rooted the owner out, bade him name his price, and had paid it, there and then, by cheque, and driven Mary off to a lawn tennis tournament at Queen's, hugely delighted by her bewilderment.

She did not love him. She could never have learnt to love him. There was a gleeful zest in his enjoyment of his money, an ostentatious parade of his riches which repelled her. And there was a look in his face, those narrow eyes, that hard mouth, which revealed to her womanly intuition a ruthlessness which she guessed he kept for his business. But she liked him, especially his reverent and chivalrous devotion to her, and the thought that his dominating and vital personality was extinguished for ever made her conscious of a great void in her life.

And now she was rich. Hartley Parrish's idea of "proper provision" for her, she knew, meant wealth for her beyond anything she had ever dreamed. The perpetual debasing struggle with

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poverty which she and her mother had carried on for years was a thing of the past. Money meant freedom, freedom to live . . . and to love.

She stretched her hands out to the blaze. Was she free to love? What had driven Hartley Parrish to suicide? Or who? She went over in her mind her interview with Robin Greve in the billiard-room. He had spoken of other women in connection with Hartley Parrish. Had he used that knowledge to threaten his rival? What had Robin done after he had left her that afternoon with his final taunt?

She felt the blood rise to her cheeks as she thought of it. Mary Trevert had all the pride of her ancient race. The recollection of that taunt galled her. Her loyalty to the man from whom she had received nothing but chivalry, whose fortune was to banish a hideous nightmare from her life, rose up in arms. What had Robin done? She must know the truth . . .

A tap came at the door. Bude appeared.

"I think you rang, Miss," he said in his quiet, deep voice. "I was with the Inspector, Miss, and I couldn't come before. Was there anything? . . ."

The girl turned in her chair.

"Come in and shut the door, Bude," she said. "I want to speak to you."

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The butler obeyed and came over to where she sat. He seemed ill at ease and rather apprehensive.

"Bude," said the girl, "I want you to tell me why you were certain that Mr. Greve was going to Mr. Parrish in the library when he passed you in the hall this afternoon!"

The butler smoothed his hands down his trousers in embarrassment.

"I thought he . . . Mr. Greve . . . would be sure to be going to fetch Mr. Parrish in to tea, Miss . . ." he replied, eyeing the girl anxiously.

Mary Trevert continued gazing into the fire.

"You know it is a rule in this house, Bude," she said, "that Mr. Parrish is never disturbed in the library . . ."

The butler changed his position uneasily.

"Yes, Miss, but I thought . . ."

Slowly Mary Trevert turned and looked at the man.

"Bude,"—her voice was very calm,—"I want you to tell me the truth. You know that Mr. Greve went in to Mr. Parrish . . ."

Bude looked uneasily about him.

"Oh, Miss," he answered, almost in a whisper, "whatever are you saying?"

"I want your answer, Bude," the girl said coldly.

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Bude did not speak. He rubbed his hands up and down his trousers in desperation.

"I wish to know why Mr. Parrish did this thing, Bude. I mean to know. And I think you are keeping something back!"

The challenge resounded clearly, firmly.

"Miss Trevert, ma'am," the butler said in a low voice, "I wouldn't take it upon me to say anything as would get anybody in this house into trouble . . ."

"You saw Mr. Greve go into Mr. Parrish?"

The butler raised his hands in a quick gesture of denial.

"God forbid, Miss!" he ejaculated in horror.

"What, then, do you know that is likely to get anybody here into trouble?"

The butler hesitated an instant. Then he spoke.

"That Inspector Humphries has been asking me questions, Miss, in a nasty, suspicious sort o' way. I told him, what I told him already, that just after I'd done serving the tea Mr. Greve crossed the hall and went down the library corridor . . ."

"You didn't tell him everything, Bude?"

The butler took a step nearer.

"Oh, Miss," he said, lowering his voice, "if you'll pardon my frankness, but I know as how you and Mr. Greve are old friends, and I wouldn't

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take it upon me to tell the police anything as might . . ."

Mary Trevert stood up and faced the man.

"Bude," said she, "Mr. Parrish was your master, a kind and generous master as he was kind and generous to every one in this house. We must clear up the mystery of his . . . of his death. Neither you nor I nor Mr. Greve nor anybody must stand in the way. Now, tell me the truth!"

She dropped back into her chair. She gave the order imperiously like the mistress of the house. The butler, trained through life to receive orders, surrendered.

"There's nothing much to tell, Miss. When Mr. Humphries asked me if I were the last person to see Mr. Parrish alive, I made sure that Mr. Greve would say he had been in to tell him tea was ready. But Mr. Greve, who heard the Inspector's question and my answer, said nothing. So I thought, maybe, he had his reasons and I did not feel exactly as how it was my place . . ."

Mary Trevert tapped with her foot impatiently.

"But what grounds have you for saying that Mr. Greve went in to Mr. Parrish? Mr. Greve declared quite positively that he went out by the side door and did not go into the library at all."

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"But, Miss, I heard him speaking to Mr. Parrish . . ."

The girl turned round and the man saw fear in her wide-open eyes.

The butler put his hand on the back of her chair and leaned forward.

"Better leave things where they are, Miss," he said in a low voice. "Mr. Parrish, I dare say, had his reasons. He's gone to his last account now. What does it matter why he done it . . ."

The man was agitated, and in his emotion his carefully studied English was forsaking him.

But the girl broke in incisively.

"Please explain what you mean!" she commanded.

"Why, Miss," replied the butler, "we know that Mr. Greve had no call to like Mr. Parrish seeing how things were between you and the master . . ."

"You mean the servants know that Mr. Parrish and I were engaged . . ."

Bude made a deprecatory gesture.

"Know, Miss? I wouldn't go so far as to say 'know.' But there has been some talk in the servants' 'all, Miss. You know what young female servants are, Miss . . ."

"And you think that Mr. Greve went to Mr. Parrish to talk about . . . me?"

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Mary Trevert's voice faltered a little. She looked eagerly at the other's fat, smooth face.

"I presoomed as much, Miss, I must confess!"

"But what did you hear Mr. Greve say?"

"I heard nothing, Miss, except just only the sound of voices. After Mr. Greve had crossed me in the hall, I took the salver I was carrying into the butler's pantry. I stayed there a minute or two, and then I remembered I had not collected the letters from the box in the hall for the chauffeur to take to the post, the same as he does every evening. I went back to the hall, and just as I opened the green baize door I heard voices from the library . . ."

"Was it Mr. Greve's voice?"

"I cannot say, Miss. It was just the sound of voices, rather loud-like. I caught the sound because the door leading from the hall to the library corridor was ajar. Mr. Greve must have forgotten to shut it."

"What did you do?"

"Well, Miss, I closed the corridor door . . ."

"Why did you do that?"

"Well, Miss, seeing the voices sounded angry-like, I thought perhaps it would be better not to let any one else hear . . . And Mr. Greve looked upset-like when he passed me. He gave me quite

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a turn, he did, when I saw his face under the hall lamp . . ."

"Did you stay there . . . and listen?"

Bude drew himself up.

"That is not my 'abit, Miss, not 'ere nor in hany of the 'ouses where I 'ave seen service . . ."

The butler broke off. The *h*'s were too much for him in his indignation.

"I didn't mean to suggest anything underhand," the girl said quickly. "I mean, did you hear any more?"

"No, Miss. I emptied the letter-box and took the letters to the servants' hall."

"But," said Mary in a puzzled way, "why do you say it was Mr. Greve if you didn't hear his voice?"

Bude spread out his hands in bewilderment.

"Who else should it have been, Miss? Sir Horace and the doctor were in the lounge at tea. Jay and Robert were in the servants' hall. It could have been nobody else . . ."

The girl's head sank slowly on her breast. She was silent. The butler shifted his position.

"Was there anything more, Miss?" he asked after a little while.

"There is nothing further, thank you, Bude," replied Mary. "About Mr. Greve, I am sure there must be some mistake. He cannot have under-

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stood Mr. Humphries's question. I'll ask him about it when I see him. I don't think I should say anything to the Inspector about it, at any rate, not until I've seen Mr. Greve. He'll probably speak to you about it himself . . ."

Bude made a motion as though he were going to say something. Then apparently he thought better of it, for he made a little formal bow and in his usual slow and dignified manner made his exit from the room.

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CHAPTER VIII

ROBIN GOES TO MARY

THE house telephone, standing on the long and gracefully designed desk with its elaborately lacquered top, whirred. Mary started from her reverie in her chair by the fire. By the clock on the mantelshelf she saw that it was a quarter past eight. She remembered that once her mother had knocked at her door and bidden her come down to dinner. She had refused the invitation, declining to unlock the door.

She lifted the receiver.

"That you, Mary?"

Robin was speaking.

"May I come up and see you? Or would you rather be left alone?"

His firm, pleasant voice greatly comforted her. Only then she realized how greatly she craved sympathy. But the recollection of Bude's story suddenly interposed itself like a barrier between them.

"Yes, come up," she said, "I want to speak to you!"

Her voice was dispirited.

"I don't want to see him," she told herself as

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she replaced the receiver, got up, and unlocked the door, "but I must *know!*"

A gentle tap came at the door. Robin came in quickly and crossed to where she stood by the fire.

"My dear!" he said and put out his two hands.

Her hands were behind her back, the fingers nervously intertwining. She kept them there and made no sign that she had observed his gesture.

He looked at her in surprise.

"This has been terrible for you, Mary," he said. "I wish to God I could make you realize how very, very much I feel for you in what you must be going through . . ."

The phrase was formal and he brought it out irresolutely, chilled as he was by her reception. She was looking at him dispassionately, her forehead a little puckered, her eyes a trifle hard.

"Won't you sit down," she said. "There is something I wanted to say!"

He was looking at her now in a puzzled fashion. With rather feigned deliberation he chose a chair and sat down facing the fire. A lamp on the mantelpiece — the only light in the room — threw its rays on his face. His chin was set rather more squarely than his wont and his eyes were shining.

"Mary," — he leant forward towards her, — "please forget what I said this afternoon. It was

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beastly of me, but I hardly knew what I was doing . . ."

She made a little gesture as if to wave his apology aside. Then, with her hands clasped in front of her, scanning the nails, she asked, almost casually:

"What did you say to Hartley Parrish in the library this afternoon?"

Robin stared at her in amazement.

"But I was not in the library!" he answered.

The girl dropped her hands sharply to her side.

"Don't quibble with me, Robin," she said. "What did you say to Hartley Parrish after you left me this afternoon in the billiard-room?"

He was still staring at her, but now there was a deep furrow between his brows. He was breathing rather hard.

"I did not speak to Parrish at all after I left you."

His answer was curt and incisive.

"Do you mean to tell me," Mary said, "that, after you left me and went down the corridor towards the library, you neither went in to Hartley nor spoke to him!"

"I do!"

"Then how do you account for the fact that, almost immediately after you had crossed Bude

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in the hall, he heard the sound of voices in the library?"

Robin Greve stood up abruptly.

"Bude, you say, makes this statement?"

"Certainly!"

"To whom, may I ask?"

He spoke sharply and there was a challenging ring in his voice. It nettled the girl.

"Only to me," she said quickly, and added: "You needn't think he has told the police!"

Very deliberately Robin plucked his handkerchief from his sleeve, wiped his lips, and replaced it. The girl saw that his hands were trembling.

"Why do you say that to me?" he demanded rather fiercely.

Mary Trevert shrugged her shoulders.

"This afternoon," she said, "when I told you of my engagement to Hartley, you began by abusing him to me, you rushed from the room making straight for the library where we all know that Hartley was working, and a few minutes after Bude hears voices raised in anger proceeding from there. The next thing we know is that Hartley has . . ."

She broke off and looked away.

"Mary,"—Robin's voice was grave, and he had mastered all signs of irritation,—"you and I have known one another all our lives. You

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ought to know me well enough by now to understand that I don't tell you lies. When I say I haven't seen or spoken to Hartley Parrish since lunch this afternoon, that is the truth!"

"How can it be the truth?" the girl insisted. "Horace and Dr. Romain were both in the lounge-hall, Bude was in the hall, the other men-servants were in the servants' hall. You are the only man in the house not accounted for, and a minute before Bude heard these voices you go down the corridor towards the library. I can understand you wanting to keep it from the police, but why do you want to deceive *me*?"

"Mary," answered the young man sternly, "I know you're upset, but that's no justification for persisting in this stupid charge against me. I tell you I never saw Parrish or spoke to him, either, between lunch and when I saw him lying dead in the library. I am not going to repeat the denial. But you may as well understand now that I am not in the habit of allowing my friends to doubt my word!"

Mary flamed up at his tone.

"If you are my friend," she cried, "why can't you trust me? Why should I find this out from Bude? Why should I be humiliated by hearing from the butler that he kept this evidence from the police in order to please me because you and

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I are friends? I am only trying to help you, to shield you . . ."

"That will do, Mary," he said. "No, you must hear what I have to say. If you insist on disbelieving me, you must. But I don't want you to help me. I don't want you to shield me. I shall make it my business to see that Bude's evidence is brought before the detective inspector from Scotland Yard who is being brought down here to handle the case . . ."

"A detective from Scotland Yard?" the girl repeated.

"Yes, a detective. Humphries is puzzled by several points about this case and has asked for assistance from London. He is right. Neither the circumstances of Parrish's death nor the motive of his act are clear. Bude's evidence is sufficient proof that somebody did gain access to the library this afternoon. In that case . . ."

"Yes . . ."

"In that case," said Greve slowly, "it may not be suicide . . ."

Mary put one hand suddenly to her face as women do when they are frightened. She shrank back.

"You mean . . ."

He nodded.

"Murder!"

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The girl gave a little gasp. Then she stretched out her hand and touched his arm.

"But, Robin," she spoke in quick gasps, — "you can't give the police this evidence of Bude's. Don't you see it incriminates *you*? Don't you realize that every scrap of evidence points to you as being the man that visited Mr. Parrish in the library this afternoon? You're a lawyer, Robin. You understand these things. Don't you see what I mean?"

He nodded curtly.

"Perfectly," he replied coldly.

"Bude will do what I tell him," the girl hurried on. "There is no need for the police to know . . ."

"On the contrary," said the other imperturbably, "it is essential they should be told at once."

The girl grasped the lapels of his coat in her two hands. Her breath came quickly and she trembled all over.

"Are you mad, Robin?" she cried. "Who could have wanted to kill poor Hartley? Why should you put these ideas into the heads of the police? Bude may have imagined everything. Now, you'll be sensible, promise me . . ."

Very gently he detached the two slim hands that held his coat. His mouth was set in a firm line.

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"We are going to sift this thing to the bottom, Mary," he said, "no matter what are the consequences. You owe it to Parrish and you owe it to me . . ."

The telephone trilled suddenly.

Robin picked up the receiver.

"Yes, Bude," he said.

There was a moment's silence in the room broken as the clock on the mantelpiece chimed nine times. Then Robin said into the telephone:

"Right! Tell him I'll be down immediately!"

He put down the receiver and turned to Mary.

"A detective inspector has arrived from London. He is asking to see me. I must go downstairs."

Mary, her elbows on the mantelpiece, was staring into the fire. At the sound of his voice she swung round quickly.

"Robin!" she cried.

But she spoke too late.

Robin Greve had left the room.

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CHAPTER IX

MR. MANDERTON

A QUALITY which had gone far to lay the foundations of the name which Robin Greve was rapidly making at the bar was his strong intuitive sense. He had the rare ability of correctly 'sensing' an atmosphere, an uncanny *flair* for driving instantly at the heart of a situation, which rendered him in the courts a dexterous advocate and a redoubtable opponent.

Now, as he came into the lounge from the big oak staircase, he instantly realized that he had entered an unfriendly atmosphere. The concealed lights which were set all round the cornice of the room were turned on, flooding the pleasantly snug room with soft reflected light. A little group stood about the fire, Bude, Jay, Hartley Parrish's man, and a stranger. Jay was engaged in earnest conversation with the stranger. But at the sound of Greve's foot upon the staircase, the conversation ceased and a silence fell on the group.

Greve's attention was immediately attracted towards the stranger, whom he surmised to be the detective from Scotland Yard. He was a big, burly man with a heavy dark moustache, straight and

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rather thin black hair, and coarse features. He looked a full-blooded, plethoric person with reddish-blue veins on his florid face, and a heavy jowl which over-feeding, Robin surmised, had made fullish. He was very neatly dressed in his black overcoat with velvet collar carefully brushed, his natty black tie with its pearl pin, and well-polished boots. His black bowler hat, with a pair of heavy dogskin gloves, neatly folded, lay on the table.

"This Mr. Greve?"

Bude and Jay fell back as Robin joined the group. The detective bent his gaze on the young barrister as he put his question, and Robin for the first time noticed his eyes. Keen and clear, they were ill-suited, he thought, to the rather gross features of the man. By right he should have had either the small and roguish or the pale and expressionless eyes which are habitually found in individuals of the sanguine temperament.

The detective had a trick of dropping his eyes to his boots. When he raised them, the effect was to alter his whole expression. His eyes, well-open, keenly observant, in perpetual motion, lent an air of alertness, of shrewdness, to his heavy, florid countenance.

"That is my name," said Robin, answering his

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question. "I am a barrister. I have met some of your people at the Yard, but I don't think . . ."

"Detective-Inspector Manderton," interjected the big man, and paused as though to say, "Let that sink in!"

Robin knew him well by repute. His qualities were those of the bull-dog, slow-moving, obstinately brave, and desperately tenacious. His was a name to conjure with among the criminal classes, and his career was starred with various sensational tussles with desperate criminals, for Detective-Inspector Manderton, when engaged on a case, invariably "took a hand himself," as he phrased it, when an arrest was to be made. A bullet-hole in his right thigh and an imperfectly knitted right collar-bone remained to remind him of this propensity of his. His motto, as he was fond of saying, was, "What I have I hold!"

"Well, Mr. Greve," said the detective in a loud, hectoring voice, "perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what you know of this affair?"

Robin flushed angrily at the man's manner. But there was no trace of resentment in his voice as he replied. He told Manderton what he had already told Humphries: how he had gone from the billiard-room across the hall and down the library corridor to the side-door into the grounds, intending to have a stroll before tea, but, finding

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that it was threatening rain, had returned to the house by the front door.

The detective scanned the young man's face closely as he spoke. When Robin had finished, the other dropped his eyes and seemed to be examining the brilliant polish of his boots. He said nothing, and again Robin became aware of the atmosphere of hostility towards him which this man radiated.

"It is dark at five o'clock?"

Manderton turned to Bude.

"Getting on that way, sir," the butler agreed.

"Are you in the habit, sir," — the detective turned to Robin now, — "of going out for walks in the dark?"

Greve shrugged his shoulders.

"I had been sitting in the billiard-room. It was rather stuffy, so I thought I'd like some air before tea!"

"You left Miss Trevert in the billiard-room?"

"Yes!"

"Why?"

Greve put a hand to his throat and eased his collar.

"The gong had sounded for tea," the detective went on imperturbably; "surely it would have been more natural for you to have brought Miss Trevert with you?"

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"I didn't wish to!"

Mr. Manderton cleared his throat.

"Ah!" he grunted. "You didn't wish to. I should like you to be frank with me, Mr. Greve, please. Was it not a fact that you and Miss Trevert had words?"

He looked up sharply at him with contracted pupils.

"You took a certain interest in this young lady?"

"Mr. Manderton," — Robin spoke with a certain *hauteur*, — "don't you think we might leave Miss Trevert's name out of this?"

"Mr. Greve," replied the detective bluntly, "I don't!"

Robin made a little gesture of resignation.

"Before the servants . . ."

"Come, come, sir," the detective broke in, "with all respect to the young lady and yourself, it was a matter of common knowledge in the house that she and you were . . . well, old friends. It was remarked, Mr. Greve, I may remind you, that you looked very upset-like when you left the billiard-room to" — he paused perceptibly — "to go for your stroll in the dark."

Robin glanced quickly round the group. Jay averted his eyes. As for Bude, he was the picture of embarrassment.

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"You seem to be singularly well posted in the gossip of the servants' hall, Mr. Manderton!" said Robin hotly.

It was a foolish remark, and Robin regretted it the moment the words had left his mouth.

"Well, yes," commented the detective slowly, "I am. I shall be well posted on the whole of this case, presently, I hope, sir!"

His manner was perfectly respectful, but reserved almost to a tone of menace.

"In that case," said Robin, "I'll tell you something you don't know, Mr. Manderton. Has Bude told you what he heard after I had passed him in the hall?"

Interest flashed at once into the detective's face. He turned quickly to the butler. Robin felt he had scored.

"What did you hear?" he said sharply.

Bude looked round wildly. His large, fish-like mouth twitched, and he made a few feeble gestures with his hands.

"It was only perhaps an idea of mine, sir," he stammered, — "just a sort of idea . . . I dare say I was mistaken. My hearing ain't what it was, sir . . ."

"Don't you try to hoodwink me," said Manderton, with sudden ferocity, knitting his brows and frowning at the unfortunate butler. "Come on

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and tell us what you heard. Mr. Greve knows and I mean to. Out with it!"

Bude cast a reproachful glance at Robin. Then he said:

"Well, sir, a minute or two after Mr. Greve had passed me, I went back to the hall and through the open door of the corridor leading to the library, I heard voices!"

"Voices, eh? Did you recognize them?"

"No, sir. It was just the sound of talking!"

"You told Miss Trevert they were loud voices, Bude!" Robin interrupted.

"Yes, sir," replied the butler, "they were loud-ish in a manner o' speaking, else I shouldn't have heard them!"

"Why not?"

The detective rapped the question out sharply.

"Why, because the library door was locked, sir!"

"How do you know that?"

"Because Miss Trevert and Dr. Romain both tried the handle and couldn't get in!"

"Ah!" said Manderton, "you mean the door was locked *when the body was found!* Now, as to these voices. Were they men's voices?"

"Yes, sir, I should say so."

"Why?"

"Because they were deep-like!"

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"Was Mr. Hartley Parrish's voice one of them?"

The butler spread out his hands.

"That I couldn't say! I just heard the murmur-like, then shut the passage door quickly . . ."

"Why?"

"Well, sir, I thought . . . I didn't want to listen . . ."

"You thought one of the voices was Mr. Greve's, eh? Having a row with Mr. Parrish, eh? About the lady, isn't that right?"

"Aren't you going rather too fast?" said Robin quietly.

But the detective ignored him.

"Come on and answer my question, my man," he said harshly. "Didn't you think it was Mr. Hartley Parrish and Mr. Greve here having a bit of a dust-up about the young lady being engaged to Mr. Parrish?"

"Well, perhaps I did, but . . ."

Like a flash the detective turned on Robin.

"What do you know about this?" he demanded fiercely.

"Nothing," said Greve. "As I have told you already, I did not see Mr. Parrish alive again after lunch, nor did I speak to him. What I would suggest to you now is that upon this evidence of Bude's depends the vitally important question

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of how Mr. Parrish met his death. Though he was found with a revolver in his hand, none of us in this house know of any good motive for his suicide. I put it to you that the man who can furnish us with this motive is the owner of the voice heard by Bude in conversation with Mr. Parrish, since obviously nobody other than Mr. Parrish and possibly this unknown person was in the library block at the time. And I would further remark, Mr. Manderton, that, until the bullet has been extracted, we do not know that Mr. Parrish killed *himself* . . ."

"No," said the detective significantly, "we don't!"

He had dropped his eyes to the ground now and was studying the pattern of the hearth-rug.

"You say you heard no shot?" he suddenly asked Robin.

"No!"

"No one other than Miss Trevert, I gather, heard the shot?"

"That is so!"

Mr. Manderton consulted a slip of paper which he drew from his pocket.

"Inspector Humphries," he said, "has drawn up a rough time-table of events leading up to Mr. Parrish's death, based on the evidence he has

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taken here this evening. You will tell me if it tallies."

He read from the slip:

5 P.M. Bude sounds the gong for tea.
5.10 Mr. Greve passes Bude in the hall and goes down the corridor leading to the library. Mr. Greve states he went straight out by the side door into the gardens.

The detective looked up from his reading.

"At 5.12, let us say, Bude comes back from the servants' quarters to the hall and hears voices from the library. He closes the passage door. Is that right?"

Bude nodded.

"It would be about two minutes after I saw Mr. Greve the first time," he agreed.

"Very well!"

The detective resumed his reading.

5.15 P.M. Miss Trevert goes to fetch Mr. Parrish in to tea. She finds the library door locked. Tries the handle and hears a shot.
5.18 (say) Miss Trevert comes into the lounge hall and gives the alarm.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Manderton briskly, "I should like to ask you one or two further questions. Firstly, how long were you out on your stroll in the dark?"

"I should think about two or three minutes."

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