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# The Daffodil Murder

EDGAR WALLACE

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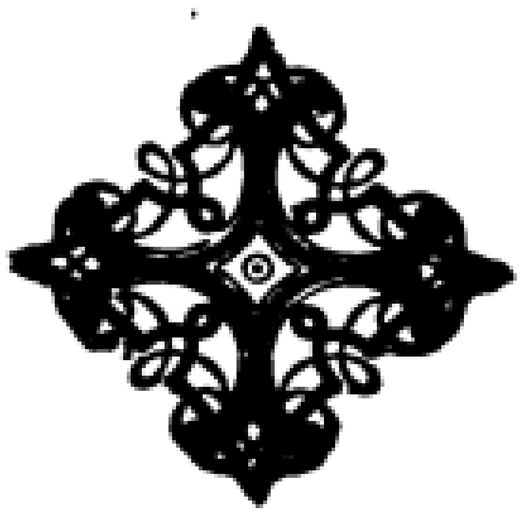
# THE DAFFODIL MURDER

## By EDGAR WALLACE

*Author of*

"Diana of Kara-Kara," "The Fellowship of the Frog," "The Squealer," "Angel Esquire," "Jack O' Judgment," "The Ringer," "The Four Just Men," "The Sinister Man," "The Hairy Arm," etc.



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## CHAPTER I

### AN OFFER REJECTED

"I don't understand you, Mr. Lyne."

The girl who looked down at Thornton Lyne was something more than pretty. Her clear skin was tinted with the faintest pink, and there was in the sober depths of her grey eyes a light which would have warned a man less satisfied with his own genius and power of persuasion than the proprietor of Lyne's Stores.

He was not looking at her face. His eyes were running approvingly over her perfect figure, noting the straightness of the back, the fine poise of the lovely head, the shapeliness of the slender hands.

He pushed back his long black hair from his forehead and smiled. It pleased him to believe that his face was cast in an intellectual mould, and that the somewhat unhealthy pastiness of his skin might be described as the "pallor of thought."

Presently he looked away from her through the big bay window which overlooked the crowded floor of the Stores.

He had had this office built in the entresol and the



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big windows had been put in so that he might at any time overlook the most important department of the great establishment which it was his good fortune to control.

Now and again, as he saw, a head would be turned in his direction, and he knew that the attention of all the girls was concentrated upon the little scene, plainly visible from the floor below, in which an unwilling employee was engaged.

She too was conscious of the fact, and her discomfort and anger increased. She made a little movement as if to go, but he stopped her.

"You don't understand, Odette," he said. His voice was soft and melodious, and held the hint of a caress. "Did you read my little book?" he asked suddenly. "I suppose you thought it rather curious that a man in my position should bother his head to write poetry; eh?" he asked. "Most of it was written before I came into this beastly shop, my dear — before I developed into a tradesman!"

She made no reply and he looked at her curiously.

"What did you think of them?" he asked presently.

Her lips were trembling and again he mistook the symptoms.

"I did not want to discuss your book," she said, her indignation rising, "but since it was evidently given to me for a purpose, I will say that only a degenerate could have written it and only a diseased mind could enjoy reading it!"

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He went red. The vanity of the man was touched in its tenderest spot.

"How very middle class you are, Miss Rider!" he sneered. "Those verses have been acclaimed by some of the best critics in the country as reproducing all the beauties of the old Hellenic poetry."

She went to speak, but stopped herself and stood with lips compressed.

"May I go now, Mr. Lyne?" she asked.

"Not yet," he replied coolly. "You said just now you didn't understand what I was talking about. I'll put it plainer this time. You're a very beautiful girl, as you probably know, and you are destined, in all probability, to be the mate of a very average suburban minded person, who will give you a life tantamount to slavery. That is the life of the middle-class woman, as you probably know. And why would you submit to this bondage? Simply because a person in a black coat and a white collar has mumbled certain passages over you — passages which have neither meaning nor, to an intelligent person, significance. I would not take the trouble of going through such a foolish ceremony, but I would take a great deal of trouble to make you happy."

He walked towards her slowly and laid one hand upon her shoulder. Instinctively she shrank back and he laughed.

"What do you say?"

She swung round on him, her eyes blazing.

"I say I would sooner be the wife of a clean-minded

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labourer than be associated with a man like you!" she cried. "You have no right in the world to insult me because I am in your employ — nobody but a cad would make such a proposal!"

His face went livid.

"Do you know whom you are talking to?" he asked, raising his voice.

"I am talking to Thornton Lyne," said she, breathing quickly, "known as the proprietor of Lyne's Stores, the employer of Odette Rider who draws three pounds every week from him —"

He was breathless with anger.

"Be careful!" he gasped. "Be careful!"

"I am speaking to a man whose whole life is a reproach to the very name of man!" she went on, speaking rapidly. "A man who is sincere in nothing, who is living on the brains and reputation of his father, and the money that has come through the hard working of better men.

"You can't scare me," she continued scornfully, as he took a step towards her. "Oh yes, I know I'm going to leave your employment, and I'm leaving tonight. There are other places in London where decency is respected and where men like you get the treatment they deserve!"

The man was hurt, humiliated, almost crushed by her scorn. He was incapable of speech and could only shake his head and point with unsteady fingers to the door.

"Get out," he whispered.

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Odette Rider walked out of the room, but the man did not move. Presently, however, he crossed to the window and, looking down upon the floor, saw her trim figure move slowly through the crowd of customers and assistants and mount the three steps which led to the chief cashier's office.

"You shall pay for this, you little fool!" he muttered.

He was wounded beyond forgiveness. He was a rich man's son and had lived a sheltered life. He had been denied the advantage which a public school would have brought to him and had gone to college surrounded by sycophants and poseurs as blatant as himself, and never once had the cold breath of criticism been directed at him.

He licked his dry lips, and, walking to his desk, pressed a bell. After a short wait — for he had purposely sent his secretary away — a girl came in.

"Has Mr. Tarling arrived?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, he's in the board-room. He has been waiting a quarter of an hour."

He nodded.

"Thank you," he said.

"Shall I tell him —"

"I will go to him myself," said Lyne.

He took a cigarette out of his gold case, struck a match and lit the weed. His nerves were shaken, his hands were trembling, but the storm in his heart was soothing down under the influence of this great thought. Tarling! What an inspiration! Tarling,

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with his reputation for ingenuity, his almost sublime uncanny cleverness. Tarling, whom he had never seen, was a relation, too, and would do things to oblige him if he paid him well.

He passed with quick steps along the corridor, which connected his private den with the board-room, and came into that spacious apartment still seething with rage.

. . . . . .

The man who turned to greet him might have been twenty-seven or thirty-seven. He was tall but lithe, rather than broad. His face was the colour of mahogany, and the blue eyes turned to Lyne were unwinking and expressionless. That was the first impression which Lyne received.

He took Lyne's hand in his — it was as soft as a woman's. As they shook hands Lyne noticed a third figure in the room. He was below middle height and sat in the shadow thrown by a wall pillar. He too rose, but bowed his head.

"A Chinaman, eh?" said Lyne, looking at this unexpected apparition with curiosity. "Oh, of course, Tarling, I had almost forgotten that you've almost come straight from China. Won't you sit down?"

He followed the other's example, threw himself into a chair and offered his cigarette case.

"The work I am going to ask you to do I will discuss later," he said. "But I must explain that I was partly attracted to you by the description I read in one

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of the newspapers of how you had recovered the Duchess of Henley's jewels and partly by the stories I heard of you when I was in China. By-the-way, we're related, cousins or something, aren't we?"

"I believe we are — distantly," said the other quietly. He might have added that the relationship had not been particularly beneficial to himself.

Lyne nodded.

"You're not attached to Scotland Yard, I understand?"

Tarling shook his head.

"No," he said quietly. "I was regularly attached to the police in Shanghai, and I had intended joining up with Scotland Yard; in fact, I came over for that purpose. But several things happened which made me open my detective agency, the most important of which happenings, was that Scotland Yard refused to give me the free hand I require!"

The other nodded quickly.

China rang with the achievements of Jack Oliver Tarling, or, as the Chinese criminal world had named him in parody of his name, "Lieh Jen," "The Hunter of Men."

Lyne judged all people by his own standard, and saw in this unemotional man a possible tool, and in all probability a likely accomplice.

The detective force in Shanghai did curious things, by all accounts. There were even rumours that "The Hunter of Men" was not above torturing his prisoners, if by so doing he could elicit confessions which

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would implicate some greater criminal. Lyne did not and could not know all the legends which had grown around the name of "The Hunter" nor could he be expected in reason to differentiate between the truth and the fable.

"I pretty well know why you've sent for me," Tarling went on. He spoke slowly and had a decided drawl. "You gave me a rough outline in your letter. You suspect a member of your staff of having consistently robbed the firm for many years. A Mr. Milburgh, your chief manager."

Lyne stopped him with a gesture and lowered his voice.

"I want you to forget that for a little while, Tarling," he said. "In fact, I am going to introduce you to Milburgh, and maybe, Milburgh can help us in my scheme. I do not say that Milburgh is honest, or that my suspicions were unfounded. But for the moment I have a much greater business on hand, and you will oblige me if you forget all the things I have said about Milburgh. I will ring for him now."

He walked to a long table which ran half the length of the room, took up a telephone which stood at one end, and spoke to the operator.

"Tell Mr. Milburgh to come to me in the board-room, please," he said.

Then he went back to his visitor.

"That matter of Milburgh can wait," he said. "I'm not so sure that I shall proceed any farther with it. Milburgh may be a thief —"

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"Did you send for me, sir?"

He turned round quickly. The door had opened without noise, and a man stood on the threshold of the room, an ingratiating smile on his face, his hands twining and intertwining ceaselessly as though he were washing them with invisible soap.

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# CHAPTER II

## THE HUNTER DECLINES HIS QUARRY

"This is Mr. Milburgh," said Lyne awkwardly.

If Mr. Milburgh had heard the last words of his employer, his face did not betray the fact. His smile was set, and not only curved the lips but filled the large, lustreless eyes. Tarling gave him a rapid survey and drew his own conclusions. The man was a born lackey, plump of face, bald of head and bent of shoulder, as though he lived in a perpetual gesture of abasement.

"Shut the door, Milburgh, and sit down. This is Mr. Tarling. Er — Mr. Tarling is — er — a detective."

"Indeed, sir?"

Milburgh bent a deferential head in the direction of Tarling, and the detective, watching for some change in colour, some twist of face — any of those signs which had so often betrayed to him the convicted wrongdoer — looked in vain.

"A dangerous man," he thought.

He glanced out of the corner of his eye to see what impression the man had made upon Ling Chu. To the ordinary eye Ling Chu remained an impassive observer. But Tarling saw that faint curl of lip, an



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almost imperceptible twitch of the nostrils, which invariably showed on the face of his attendant when he "smelt" a criminal.

"Mr. Tarling is a detective," repeated Lyne. "He is a gentleman I heard about when I was in China — you know I was in China for three months, when I made my tour round the world?" he asked Tarling.

Tarling nodded.

"Oh yes, I know," he said. "You stayed at the Bund Hotel. You spent a great deal of time in the native quarter, and you had rather an unpleasant experience as the result of making an experiment in opium smoking."

Lyne's face went red, and then he laughed.

"You know more about me than I know about you, Tarling," he said, yet with a note of asperity in his voice, and turned again to his subordinate.

"I have reason to believe that there has been money stolen in this business by one of my cashiers," he said.

"Impossible, sir!" said the shocked Mr. Milburgh. "Wholly impossible!"

Mr. Lyne smiled complacently.

"It will interest you to know, Mr. Tarling," he said, "that I myself have some knowledge of and acquaintance with the criminal classes. In fact, there is one unfortunate protégé of mine whom I have tried very hard to reform for the past four years, who is coming out of prison in a couple of days. I took up this work," he said modestly, "because I feel it is the duty of those of us who are in a more fortunate posi-

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tion to help those who have not had a chance in the cruel competition of the world."

Tarling was not impressed.

"Do you know the person who has been robbing you?" he asked.

"I have reason to believe it is a girl whom I have summarily dismissed tonight, and whom I wish you to watch."

The detective nodded.

"That is rather a primitive business," he said, with the first faint hint of a smile he had shown. "Haven't you your own shop detective who could take that job in hand? Petty larceny is hardly in my line. I understood that this was bigger work—"

He stopped, because it was obviously impossible to explain just why he had thought as much, in the presence of the man whose conduct, originally, had been the subject of his enquiries.

"To you it may seem a small matter. To me, it is very important," said Mr. Lyne profoundly. "Here is a girl, highly respected by all her companions and consequently a great influence on their morals, who, as I have reason to believe, has steadily and persistently falsified my books, taking money from the firm, and at the same time has secured the goodwill of all with whom she has been brought into contact.

"I want you clearly to understand, Tarling, that I have not sufficient evidence to convict her; otherwise, I would not have called you in."

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"You want me to get the evidence, eh?" said Tarling curiously.

"Who is the lady, may I venture to ask, sir?"

It was Milburgh who interposed the question.

"Miss Rider," replied Lyne.

"Miss Rider!"

Milburgh's face took on a look of blank surprise, as he gasped the words.

"Miss Rider — oh no, impossible!"

"Why impossible?" demanded Mr. Lyne sharply.

"Well, sir, I meant —" stammered the manager, "it is so unlikely — she is such a nice girl —"

Thornton Lyne shot a suspicious glance at him.

"You have no particular reason for wishing to shield Miss Rider, have you?" he asked coldly.

"No, sir, not at all. I beg of you not to think that," appealed the agitated Mr. Milburgh, "only it seems so — extraordinary."

"All things are extraordinary that are out of the common," snapped Lyne. "It would be extraordinary if you were accused of stealing, Milburgh. It would be very extraordinary indeed, for example, if we discovered that you were living a five thousand pounds life on a nine hundred pounds salary, eh?"

Only for a second did Milburgh lose his self-possession. The hand that went to his mouth shook, and Tarling, whose eyes had never left the man's face, saw the tremendous effort which he was making to recover his equanimity.

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"Yes, sir, that would be extraordinary," said Milburgh steadily.

Lyne had lashed himself again into the old fury, and if his vitriolic tongue was directed at Milburgh his thoughts were centred upon that proud and beautiful face which had looked down upon him in his office.

"It would be extraordinary if you were sent to penal servitude as the result of my discovery that you had been robbing the firm for years," he growled, "and I suppose everybody else in the firm would say the same as you — how extraordinary!"

"I daresay they would, sir," said Mr. Milburgh, his old smile back, the twinkle again returning to his eyes, and his hands rubbing together in ceaseless ablutions. "It would sound extraordinary, and it would be extraordinary, and nobody here would be more surprised than the unfortunate victim — ha, ha!"

"Perhaps not," said Lyne coldly. "Only I want to say a few words in your presence, and I would like you to give them every attention. You have been complaining to me for a month past," he said speaking with deliberation, "about small sums of money being missing from the cashier's office."

It was a bold thing to say, and in many ways a rash thing. He was dependent for the success of his hastily-formed plan, not only upon Milburgh's guilt, but upon Milburgh's willingness to confess his guilt. If the manager agreed to stand sponsor to this lie, he admitted his own peculations, and Tarling, to whom

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the turn of the conversation had at first been unintelligible, began dimly to see the drift it was taking.

"I have complained that sums of money have been missing for the past month?" repeated Milburgh dully.

The smile had gone from lips and eyes. His face was haggard — he was a man at bay.

"That is what I said," said Lyne watching him. "Isn't that the fact?"

There was a long pause, and presently Milburgh nodded.

"That is the fact, sir," he said in a low voice.

"And you have told me that you suspected Miss Rider of defalcations?"

Again the pause and again the man nodded.

"Do you hear?" asked Lyne triumphantly.

"I hear," said Tarling quietly. "Now what do you wish me to do? Isn't this a matter for the police? I mean the regular police."

Lyne frowned.

"The case has to be prepared first," he said. "I will give you full particulars as to the girl's address and her habits, and it will be your business to collect such information as will enable us to put the case in the hands of Scotland Yard."

"I see," said Tarling and smiled again. Then he shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't come into this case, Mr. Lyne."

"Can't come in?" said Lyne in astonishment. "Why not?"

"Because it's not my kind of job," said Tarling.

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"When I met you I had a feeling that you were heading me for one of the biggest cases I had ever undertaken. It shows you how one's instincts can lead one astray," he smiled again, and picked up his hat.

"What do you mean? You're going to throw up a valuable client and, and a relation!"

"I don't know how valuable you're likely to be," said Tarling, "and I don't think the fact that our fathers were cousins need come into account. I tell you I do not wish to be associated with this case, Mr. Lyne, and I think there the matter can end."

"You don't think it's worth while, eh?" sneered Lyne. "Yet when I tell you that I am prepared to give you a fee of five hundred guineas —"

"If you gave me a fee of five thousand guineas, or fifty thousand guineas, I should still decline to be associated with this matter," said Tarling and his words had the metallic quality which precludes argument.

"And I'll tell you why, here and now," he continued. "I decline to be associated with so palpable a frame-up. I daresay you know what that means — I will put the matter more plainly and within your understanding. For some reason or other you have a sudden grudge against a member of your staff. I read your face, Mr. Lyne, and the weakness of your chin and the appetite of your mouth suggest to me that you are not over scrupulous with the women who are in your charge. I guess, rather than know, that you have been turned down with a dull, sickening thud by a decent girl, and in your mortification you are attempt-

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ing to invent a charge which has no substance and no foundation.

"Mr. Milburgh," he turned to the other, and again Mr. Milburgh ceased to smile, "has his own reasons for complying with your wishes. He is your subordinate, and moreover, the side threat of penal servitude for life, if he refuses, has carried some weight."

Thornton Lyne's face was distorted with fury.

"I will take care that your behaviour is widely advertised," his voice was trembling with passion. "You have brought a most monstrous charge against me, and I shall proceed against you for slander. The truth is that you are not equal to the job I intended giving you and you are finding an excuse for getting out."

"The truth is," replied Oliver Tarling, biting off the end of a cigar he had taken from his pocket, "that my reputation is too good to be risked in associating with such a dirty business as yours. I hate to be rude, and I hate just as much to throw away good money. But I can't take good money for bad work, Mr. Lyne, and if you will be advised by me, you will drop this stupid scheme for vengeance which your hurt vanity has suggested — it is the clumsiest kind of 'frame-up' that was ever invented — and I suggest also you apologise to the young lady, whom, I have no doubt, you have grossly insulted."

He beckoned to his Chinese satellite and walked leisurely to the door. Incoherent with rage, shaking in every limb with a weak man's sense of his own impo-

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tence, Lyne watched him until the door was half closed, then, springing forward with a strangled cry, he wrenched the door open and leapt at the detective.

Two hands gripped his arm and lifting him bodily back into the room, pushed him down into a chair. A not unkindly face blinked down at him, a face relieved from utter solemnity by the tiny laughter lines about the eyes.

"Mr. Lyne," said the mocking voice of Tarling, "you are setting an awful example to the criminal classes. It is a good job your convict friend is in gaol."

Without another word he left the room.

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# CHAPTER III



Two days later Thornton Lyne sat in his big limousine which was drawn up on the edge of Wandsworth Common facing the gates of the gaol.

Poet and poseur he was, not the strangest combination seen in man. He was rich, he had opportunities and life might have gone on being pleasant if every man and woman he had met had let him have his own way. Only there were at least two people with whom Thornton Lyne's millions carried no weight.

It was warm in his limousine, which was electrically heated. But outside, on that raw April morning, it was bitterly cold, and the shivering little group of women who stood at a respectful distance from the prison gates drew their shawls tightly about them as errant flakes of snow whirled across the open. The common was covered with a white powder, and the early flowers looked supremely miserable in their wintry setting.

The prison clock struck eight, and a wicket gate opened. A man slouched out, his jacket buttoned up to his neck, his cap pulled over his eyes. At sight of him, Lyne dropped the newspaper he had been read-



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ing, opened the door of the car and jumped out, walking towards the released prisoner.

"Well, Sam," he said genially, "you didn't expect me?"

The man stopped as if he had been shot, and stood staring at the fur-coated figure. Then:

"Oh, Mr. Lyne," he said brokenly. "Oh, guv'nor!" he choked, and tears streamed down his face, and he gripped the outstretched hand in both of his, unable to speak.

"You didn't think I'd desert you, Sam, eh?" said Mr. Lyne, all aglow with consciousness of his virtue.

"I thought you'd given me up, sir," said Sam Stay huskily. "You're a gentleman, you are, sir, and I ought to be ashamed of myself!"

"Nonsense, nonsense, Sam! Jump into the car, my lad. Go along. People will think you're a millionaire."

The man gulped, grinned sheepishly, opened the door and stepped in, and sank with a sigh of comfort into the luxurious depths of the big brown cushions.

"Gawd! To think that there are men like you in the world, sir! Why, I believe in angels, I do!"

"Nonsense, Sam. Now you come along to my flat, and I'm going to give you a good breakfast and start you fair again."

"I'm going to try and keep straight, sir, I am, s'help me!"

It may be said in truth that Mr. Lyne did not care very much whether Sam kept straight or not. He

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might indeed have been very much disappointed if Sam had kept to the straight and narrow path. He "kept" Sam as men keep chickens and prize cows, and he "collected" Sam as other men collect stamps and china. Sam was his luxury and his pose. In his club he boasted of his acquaintance with this representative of the criminal classes — for Sam was an expert burglar and knew no other trade — and Sam's adoration for him was one of his most exhilarating experiences.

And that adoration was genuine. Sam would have laid down his life for the pale-faced man with the loose mouth. He would have suffered himself to be torn limb from limb, if in his agony he could have brought ease or advancement to the man, who, to him, was one with the gods.

Originally, Thornton Lyne had found Sam whilst that artist was engaged in burgling the house of his future benefactor. It was a whim of Lyne's to give the criminal a good breakfast and to evince an interest in his future. Twice had Sam gone down for a short term, and once for a long term of imprisonment, and on each occasion Thornton Lyne had made a parade of collecting the returned wanderer, driving him home, giving him breakfast and a great deal of worldly and unnecessary advice, and launching him forth again upon the world with ten pounds — a sum just sufficient to buy Sam a new kit of burglar's tools.

Never before had Sam shown such gratitude; and never before had Thornton Lyne been less disinter-

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ested in his attentions. There was a hot bath — which Sam Stay could have dispensed with, but which, out of sheer politeness, he was compelled to accept, a warm and luxurious breakfast; a new suit of clothes, with not two, but four, five-pound notes in the pocket.

After breakfast Lyne had his talk.

"It's no good, sir," said the burglar, shaking his head. "I've tried everything to get an honest living, but somehow I can't get on in the straight life. I drove a taxicab for three months after I came out, till a busy-fellow [1] tumbled to me not having a license and brought me up under the Prevention of Crimes Act. It's no use my asking you to give me a job in your shop, sir, because I couldn't stick it, I couldn't really! I'm used to the open air life; I like being my own master. I'm one of those fellows you've read about — the word begins with A."

"Adventurers?" said Lyne with a little laugh. "Yes, I think you are, Sam, and I'm going to give you an adventure after your own heart."

And then he began to tell a tale of base ingratitude — of a girl he had helped, had indeed saved from starvation and who had betrayed him at every turn. Thornton Lyne was a poet. He was also a picturesque liar. The woman he had desired was now the most hateful creature in the world. He would have maimed her, torn her beauty from her, trampled her in the slime in his mortification.

His voice rose and his vehemence increased as he

[1] Detective.

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saw the eyes of the criminal blazing with the reflection of his rage. The lie came as easily to his lips as the truth, and easier, since there was a certain crudeness about truth which revolted his artistic soul. And as the tale was unfolded of Odette Rider's perfidy, Sam's responses grew more and more husky.

Presently Thornton Lyne stopped, his eyes fixed on the other to note the effect.

"Show me," said Sam, his voice trembling. "Show me a way of getting even with her, sir, and I'll go through hell to do it!"

"That's the kind of stuff I like to hear," said Lyne, and poured out from the long bottle which stood on the coffee-tray a stiff tot of Sam's favourite brandy. "Now, I'll give you my idea."

For the rest of the morning the two men sat almost head to head, plotting woe for the girl, whose chief offence had been against the dignity of Thornton Lyne, and whose virtue had so incited his hate!

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# CHAPTER IV

## MURDER

Jack Tarling lay stretched upon his hard bed, a long cigarette holder between his teeth, a book on Chinese metaphysics balanced on his chest, at peace with the world. The hour was eight o'clock, and it was the day that Sam Stay had been released from gaol.

It had been a busy day for Tarling, for he was engaged in a bank fraud case which would have occupied the whole of his time had he not had a little private business to attend to. This private matter was wholly unprofitable, but his curiosity had been piqued.

He lay the book flat on his chest as the soft click of the opening door announced the coming of his retainer. The impassive Ling Chu came noiselessly into the room, carrying a tray, which he placed upon a low table by the side of his master's bed. The Chinaman wore a blue silk pyjama suit — a fact which Tarling noticed.

"You are not going out tonight, then, Ling Chu?"

"No, Lieh Jen," said the man.

They both spoke in the soft, sibilant language of the Middle Kingdom.

"You have been to the Man with the Cunning Face?"



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For answer the other took an envelope from an inside pocket and laid it in the other's hand. Tarling glanced at the address.

"So this is where the young lady lives, eh? 'Miss Odette Rider, 27, Carrymore Buildings, Edgware Road.'"

"It is a clan house, where many people live," said Ling Chu. "I myself went, in your honourable service, and saw people coming in and going out interminably, and never the same people did I see twice."

"It is what they call in English a 'flat building,' Ling," said Tarling with a little smile. "What did the Man with the Cunning Face say to my letter?"

"Master, he said nothing. He just read and read, and then he made a face like this." Ling gave an imitation of Mr. Milburgh's smile. "And then he wrote as you see."

Tarling nodded. He stared for a moment into vacancy, then he turned on his elbow and lifted the cup of tea which his servant had brought him.

"What of Face-White-and-Weak man, Ling?" he asked in the vernacular. "You saw him?"

"I saw him, master," said the Chinaman gravely. "He is a man without a heaven."

Again Tarling nodded. The Chinese use the word "heaven" instead of "God," and he felt that Ling had very accurately sized up Mr. Thornton Lyne's lack of spiritual qualities.

He finished the tea, and swung his legs over the edge of the bed.

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"Ling," he said, "this place is very dull and sad. I do not think I shall live here."

"Will the master go back to Shanghai?" asked the other, without any display of emotion.

"I think so," nodded Tarling. "At any rate, this place is too dull. Just miserable little taking-money-easily cases, and wife-husband-lover cases, and my soul is sick."

"These are small matters," said Ling philosophically. "But The Master—" this time he spoke of the great Master, Confucius—"has said that all greatness comes from small things, and perhaps some small-piece man will cut off the head of some big-piece man, and then they will call you to find the murderer."

Tarling laughed.

"You're an optimist, Ling," he said. "No, I don't think they'll call me in for a murder. They don't call in private detectives in this country."

Ling shook his head.

"But the master must find murderers, or he will no longer be Lieh Jen, the Hunter of Men."

"You're a bloodthirsty soul, Ling," said Tarling, this time in English, which Ling imperfectly understood, despite the sustained efforts of eminent missionary schools. "Now I'll go out," he said with sudden resolution. "I am going to call upon the small-piece woman whom White-Face desires."

"May I come with you?" asked Ling.

Tarling hesitated.

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"Yes, you may come," he said, "but you must trail me."

Carrymore Mansions is a great block of buildings sandwiched between two more aristocratic and more expensive blocks of flats in the Edgware Road. The ground floor is given up to lock-up shops which perhaps cheapened the building, but still it was sufficiently exclusive a habitation for the rents, as Tarling guessed, to be a little too high for a shop assistant unless she were living with her family. The explanation, as he was to discover, lay in the fact that there were some very undesirable basement flats which were let at a lower rental.

He found himself standing outside the polished mahogany door of one of these, wondering exactly what excuse he was going to give to the girl for making a call so late at night. And that she needed some explanation was clear from the frank suspicion which showed in her face when she opened the door to him.

"Yes, I am Miss Rider," she said.

"Can I see you for a few moments?"

"I'm sorry," she said, shaking her head, "but I am alone in the flat, so I can't ask you to come in."

This was a bad beginning.

"Is it not possible for you to come out?" he asked anxiously, and in spite of herself she smiled.

"I'm afraid it's quite impossible for me to go out with somebody I have never met before," she said, with just a trace of amusement in her eyes.

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"I recognise the difficulty," laughed Tarling. "Here is one of my cards. I'm afraid I am not very famous in this country, so you will not know my name."

She took the card and read it.

"A private detective?" she said in a troubled voice. "Who has sent you? Not Mr.—"

"Not Mr. Lyne," he said.

She hesitated a moment, then threw open the door wider.

"You must come in. We can talk here in the hall. Do I understand, Mr. Lyne has not sent you?"

"Mr. Lyne was very anxious that I should come," he said. "I am betraying his confidence, but I do not think that he has any claim upon my loyalty. I don't know why I've bothered you at all, except that I feel that you ought to be put on your guard."

"Against what?" she asked.

"Against the machinations of a gentleman to whom you have been —" he hesitated for a word.

"Very offensive," she finished for him.

"I don't know how offensive you've been," he laughed, "but I gather you have annoyed Mr. Lyne for some reason or other, and that he is determined to punish you. I do not ask your confidence in this respect, because I realise that you would hardly like to tell me. But what I want to tell you is this, that Mr. Lyne is probably framing up a charge against you — that is to say, inventing a charge of theft."

"Of theft?" she cried in indignant amazement.

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"Against me? Of theft? It's impossible that he could be so wicked!"

"It's not impossible that anybody could be wicked," said Tarling of the impassive face and the laughing eyes. "All that I know is that he even induced Mr. Milburgh to say that complaints have been made by Milburgh concerning thefts of money from your department."

"That's absolutely impossible!" she cried emphatically. "Mr. Milburgh would never say such a thing. Absolutely impossible!"

"Mr. Milburgh didn't want to say such a thing, I give him credit for that," said Tarling slowly, and then gave the gist of the argument, omitting any reference, direct or indirect, to the suspicion which surrounded Milburgh.

"So you see," he said in conclusion, "that you ought to be on your guard. I suggest to you that you see a solicitor and put the matter in his hands. You need not move against Mr. Lyne, but it would strengthen your position tremendously if you had already detailed the scheme to some person in authority."

"Thank you very, very much, Mr. Tarling," she said warmly, and looked up into his face with a smile so sweet, so pathetic, so helpless, that Tarling's heart melted towards her.

"And if you don't want a solicitor," he said, "you can depend upon me. I will help you if any trouble arises."

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"You don't know how grateful I am to you, Mr. Tarling. I didn't receive you very graciously!"

"If you will forgive my saying so, you would have been a fool to have received me in any other way," he said.

She held out both her hands to him, he took them and there were tears in her eyes. Presently she composed herself, and led him into her little drawing-room.

"Of course, I've lost my job," she laughed, "but I've had several offers, one of which I shall accept. I am going to have the rest of the week to myself and take a little holiday."

Tarling stopped her with a gesture. His ears were superhumanly sensitive.

"Are you expecting a visitor?" he asked softly.

"No," said the girl in surprise.

"Do you share this flat with somebody?"

"I have a woman who sleeps here," she said. "She is out for the evening."

"Has she a key?"

The girl shook her head.

The man rose, and Odette marvelled how one so tall could move so swiftly and without so much as a sound across the uncarpeted hallway. He reached the door, turned the knob of the patent lock and jerked it open. A man was standing on the mat and he jumped back at the unexpectedness of Tarling's appearance. The stranger was a cadaverous looking man, in a brand-new suit of clothes, evidently ready-made, but he still

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wore on his face the curious yellow tinge which is the special mark of the recently liberated gaol-bird.

"Beg pardon," he stammered, "but is this No. 87?"

Tarling shot out a hand and gripping him by the coat, drew the helpless man towards him.

"Hullo, what are you trying to do? What's this you have?"

He wrenched something from the man's hand. It was not a key but a flat-toothed instrument of strange construction.

"Come in," said Tarling and jerked his prisoner into the hall.

A swift turning back of his prisoner's coat pinioned him, and then with dexterousness and in silence he proceeded to search. From two pockets he took a dozen jewelled rings, each bearing the tiny tag of Lyne's Stores.

"Hullo!" said Tarling sarcastically, "are these intended as a loving gift from Mr. Lyne to Miss Rider?"

The man was speechless with rage. If looks could kill, Tarling would have died.

"A clumsy trick," said Tarling, shaking his head mournfully. "Now go back to your boss, Mr. Thornton Lyne, and tell him that I am ashamed of an intelligent man adopting so crude a method," and with a kick he dismissed Sam Stay to the outer darkness.

The girl, who had been a frightened spectator of the scene, turned her eyes imploringly upon the detective.

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"What does it mean?" she pleaded. "I feel so frightened. What did that man want?"

"You need not be afraid of the man, or any other man," said Tarling briskly. "I'm sorry you were scared."

He succeeded in calming her by the time her servant had returned, and then took his leave.

"Remember, I have given you my telephone number and you will call me up if there is any trouble. Particularly," he said emphatically, "if there is any trouble tomorrow."

But there was no trouble on the following day, though at three o'clock in the afternoon she called him up.

"I am going away to stay in the country," she said. "I was frightened last night."

"Come and see me when you get back," said Tarling who had found it difficult to dismiss the girl from his mind. "I am going to see Lyne tomorrow. By-the-way, the person who called last night is a protégé of Mr. Thornton Lyne's, a man who is devoted to him body and soul, and he's the fellow we've got to look after. By Jove! It almost gives me an interest in life!"

He heard the faint laugh of the girl.

"Must I be butchered to make a detective's holiday?" she mocked and he grinned sympathetically.

"Anyway, I'll see Lyne tomorrow," he said.

The next morning, in fulfilment of his promise he walked to the mammoth building which housed Lyne's

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Stores. His route brought him to Oxford Street and he noted idly that the newsboys were unusually busy. Then his eye caught the staring black letters of a bill.

THE DAFFODIL MURDER

"Daffodil murder?" he repeated to himself and bought a newspaper.

The news, widely spaced, was brief. An early worker taking a short cut through Hyde Park, had found the body of a man lying by the side of a carriage drive. He was fully dressed, save that his coat and waistcoat had been removed. Wound about his body was a woman's silk nightdress, stained with blood. The hands of the figure were crossed on the breast and upon them lay a handful of daffodils.

Tarling read the short paragraph again, then turned to the stop-press column for any later news. There were two lines in the space, but they were sensational.

"DAFFODIL MURDER

BODY IDENTIFIED AS MR. THORNTON LYNE, WELL-KNOWN MILLIONAIRE"

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# CHAPTER V

## FOUND IN LYNE'S POCKET

"The London police are confronted with a new mystery, which has features so remarkable, that it would not be an exaggeration to describe this crime as the Murder Mystery of the Century. A well-known figure in London society, Mr. Thornton Lyne, head of an important commercial organisation, a poet of no mean quality, and a millionaire, renowned for his philanthropic activities, was found dead in Hyde Park in the early hours of this morning, in circumstances which admit of no doubt that he was most brutally murdered.

"At half-past five, Thomas Savage, a bricklayer's labourer employed by the Cubitt Town Construction Company, was making his way across Hyde Park en route to his work. He had crossed the main drive which runs parallel with the Bayswater Road, when his attention was attracted to a figure lying on the grass near to the sidewalk. He made his way to the spot and discovered a man, who had obviously been dead for some hours. The body had neither coat nor waistcoat, but about the breast, on which his two hands were laid, was a silk garment tightly wound about the body, and obviously designed to staunch a wound on the left side above the heart.



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"The extraordinary feature is that the murderer must not only have composed the body, but had laid upon its breast a handful of daffodils. The police were immediately summoned and the body was removed. The police theory is that the murder was not committed in Hyde Park, but the unfortunate gentleman was killed elsewhere and his body conveyed to the Park in his own motor-car, which was found abandoned a hundred yards from the scene of the discovery. We understand that the police are working upon a very important clue, and an arrest is imminent."

Mr. J. O. Tarling, late of the Shanghai Detective Service, read the longer account in the evening newspaper, and was unusually thoughtful.

Lyne murdered! It was an extraordinary coincidence that he had been brought into touch with this young man only a few days before.

Tarling knew nothing of Lyne's private life, despite the fact that the man had been a distant relative of his. He had been too busy in China to bother his head about the vagaries of a tourist, even a cousin, but he remembered dimly some sort of scandal which had attached to the visitor's name, and puzzled his head to recall all the circumstances.

He put down the newspaper with a little grimace, indicative of regret. If he had only been attached to Scotland Yard, what a case this would have been for him! Here was a mystery which promised unusual interest.

His mind wandered to the girl, Odette Rider. What

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would she think of it? She would be shocked, he thought — horrified. It hurt him to feel that she might be indirectly, even remotely associated with such a public scandal, and he realised with a sudden sense of dismay that nothing was less unlikely than that her name would be mentioned as one who had quarrelled with the dead man.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, shrugging off the possibility as absurd, and, walking to the door, called his Chinese servant.

Ling Chu came silently at his bidding.

"Ling Chu," he said, "the white-faced man is dead."

Ling Chu raised his imperturbable eyes to his master's face.

"All men die some time," he said calmly. "This man quick die. That is better than long die."

Tarling looked at him sharply.

"How do you know that he quick die?" he demanded.

"These things are talked about," said Ling Chu without hesitation.

"But not in the Chinese language," replied Tarling, "and, Ling Chu, you speak no English."

"I speak a little, master," said Ling Chu, "and I have heard these things in the streets."

Tarling did not answer immediately and the Chinaman waited.

"Ling Chu," he said after a while, "this man came to Shanghai whilst we were there, and there was

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trouble-trouble. Once he was thrown out from Wing Fu's tea-house where he had been smoking opium. Also there was another trouble — do you remember?"

The Chinaman looked him straight in the eyes.

"I am forgetting," he said. "This white-face was a bad man. I am glad he is dead."

"Humph!" said Tarling, and dismissed his retainer.

Ling Chu was the cleverest of all his sleuths, a man who never lifted his nose from the trail once it was struck, and he had been the most loyal and faithful of Tarling's native trailers. But the detective never pretended that he understood Ling Chu's mind, or that he could pierce the veil which the native dropped between his own private thoughts and the curious foreigner. Even native criminals were baffled in their interpretation of Ling Chu's views, and many a man had gone to the scaffold puzzling the head, which was soon to be snicked from his body, over the method by which Ling Chu had detected his crime.

Tarling went back to the table and picked up the newspaper, but had hardly begun to read when the telephone bell rang. He picked up the receiver and listened. To his amazement it was the voice of Crasswell, the Assistant-Commissioner of Police, who had been instrumental in persuading Tarling to come to England.

"Can you come to the Yard for five minutes, Tarling?" said the voice. "I want to talk to you about this murder."

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"Surely," said Tarling, "I'll be with you in ten minutes."

In five minutes he was at Scotland Yard and was ushered into the office of Assistant Commissioner Cresswell. The white-haired man who came across to meet him with a smile of pleasure in his eyes disclosed the object of the summons.

"I'm going to bring you into this case, Tarling," he said. "It has certain aspects which seem outside the humdrum experience of our own people. It is not unusual, as you know," he said, as he motioned the other to a chair, "for Scotland Yard to engage outside help, particularly when we have a crime of this character to deal with. The facts you know," he went on, as he opened a thin folder. "These are the reports, which you can read at your leisure. Thornton Lyne was, to say the least, eccentric. His life was not a particularly wholesome one, and he had many undesirable acquaintances, amongst whom was a criminal and ex-convict who was only released from gaol a few days ago."

"That's rather extraordinary," said Tarling, lifting his eyebrows. "What had he in common with the criminal?"

Commissioner Cresswell shrugged his shoulders.

"My own view is that this acquaintance was rather a pose of Lyne's. He liked to be talked about. It gave him a certain reputation for character amongst his friends."

"Who is the criminal?" asked Tarling.

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"He is a man named Stay, a petty larcenist, and in my opinion a much more dangerous character than the police have realised."

"Is he—" began Tarling. But the Commissioner shook his head.

"I think we can rule him out from the list of people who may be suspected of this murder," he said. "Sam Stay has very few qualities that would commend themselves to the average man, but there can be no doubt at all that he was devoted to Lyne body and soul. When the detective temporarily in charge of the case went down to Lambeth to interview Stay, he found him lying on his bed prostrate with grief, with a newspaper containing the particulars of the murder by his side. The man is beside himself with sorrow, and threatens to 'do in' the person who is responsible for this crime. You can interview him later. I doubt whether you will get much out of him, because he is absolutely incoherent. Lyne was something more than human in his eyes, and I should imagine that the only decent emotion he has had in his life is this affection for a man who was certainly good to him, whether he was sincere in his philanthropy or otherwise. Now, here are a few of the facts which have not been made public."

Cresswell settled himself back in his chair and ticked off on his fingers the points as he made them.

"You know that around Lyne's chest a silk night-dress was discovered?"

Tarling nodded.

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"Under the nightdress, made into a pad, evidently with the object of arresting the bleeding, were two handkerchiefs, neatly folded, as though they had been taken from a drawer. They were ladies' handkerchiefs, so we may start on the supposition that there is a woman in the case."

Tarling nodded.

"Now another peculiar feature of the case, which happily has escaped the attention of those who saw the body first and gave particulars to the newspapers, was that Lyne, though fully dressed, wore a pair of thick felt slippers. They were taken out of his own store last evening, as we have ascertained, by Lyne himself, who sent for one of his assistants to his office and told him to get a pair of very soft-soled slippers.

"The third item is that Lyne's boots were discovered in the deserted motor-car which was drawn up by the side of the road a hundred yards from where the body was lying.

"And the fourth feature — and this explains why I have brought you into the case — is that in the car was discovered his bloodstained coat and waistcoat. In the right-hand pocket of the latter garment," said Cresswell, speaking slowly, "was found this."

He took from his drawer a small piece of crimson paper two inches square, and handed it without comment to the detective.

Tarling took the paper and stared. Written in thick black ink were four Chinese characters —"*tzu chao fan nao*"—"He brought this trouble upon himself."

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# CHAPTER VI

## THE MOTHER OF ODETTE RIDER

The two men looked at one another in silence.

"Well?" said the Commissioner at last.

Tarling shook his head.

"That's amazing," he said, and looked at the little slip of paper between his finger and thumb.

"You see why I am bringing you in," said the Commissioner. "If there is a Chinese end to this crime, nobody knows better than you how to deal with it. I have had this slip translated: It means 'He brought this trouble upon himself.'"

"Literally, 'self look for trouble,'" said Tarling. "But there is one fact which you may not have noticed. If you will look at the slip, you will see that it is not written, but printed."

He passed the little red square across the table, and the Commissioner examined it.

"That's true," he said in surprise. "I did not notice that. Have you seen these slips before?"

Tarling nodded.

"A few years ago," he said. "There was a very bad outbreak of crime in Shanghai, mostly under the leadership of a notorious criminal whom I was instru-



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mental in getting beheaded. He ran a gang called 'The Cheerful Hearts'— you know the fantastic titles which these Chinese gangs adopt. It was their custom to leave on the scene of their depredations, the *Hong*, or sign-manual of the gang. It was worded exactly as this slip, only it was written. These visiting cards of The Cheerful Hearts were bought up as curios, and commanded high prices until some enterprising Chinaman started printing them, so that you could buy them at almost any stationer's shop in Shanghai — just as you buy picture post-cards."

The Commissioner nodded.

"And this is one of those?"

"This is such a one. How it came here, heaven knows," he said. "It is certainly the most remarkable discovery."

The Commissioner went to a cupboard, unlocked it and took out a suit-case, which he placed upon the table and opened.

"Now," said the Commissioner, "look at this, Tarling."

"This" was a stained garment, which Tarling had no difficulty in recognising as a nightdress. He took it out and examined it. Save for two sprays of forget-me-nots upon the sleeves it was perfectly plain and was innocent of lace or embroidery.

"It was found round his body, and here are the handkerchiefs." He pointed to two tiny squares of linen, so discoloured as to be hardly recognisable.

Tarling lifted the flimsy garment, with its evi-

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dence of the terrible purpose for which it had been employed, and carried it to the light.

"Are there laundry marks?"

"None whatever," said the Commissioner.

"Or on the handkerchiefs?"

"None," replied Mr. Cresswell.

"The property of a girl who lived alone," said Tarling. "She is not very well off, but extremely neat, fond of good things but not extravagant, eh?"

"How do you know that?" asked the Commissioner, surprised.

Tarling laughed.

"The absence of laundry marks shows that she washes her silk garments at home, and probably her handkerchiefs also, which places her amongst the girls who aren't blessed with too many of this world's goods. The fact that it is silk, and good silk, and that the handkerchiefs are good linen, suggests a woman who takes a great deal of trouble, yet whom one would not expect to find over-dressed. Have you any other clue?"

"None," said the Commissioner. "We have discovered that Mr. Lyne had rather a serious quarrel with one of his employees, a Miss Odette Rider —"

Tarling caught his breath. It was, he told himself, absurd to take so keen an interest in a person whom he had not seen for more than ten minutes, and who a week before was a perfect stranger. But, somehow, the girl had made a deeper impression upon him than he had realised. This man, who had spent his life in the investigation of crime and in the study of crim-

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inals, had found little time to interest himself in womanhood, and Odette Rider had been a revelation to him.

"I happen to know there was a quarrel. I also know the cause," he said, and related briefly the circumstances under which he himself had met Thornton Lyne. "What have you against her?" he asked, with an assumption of carelessness which he did not feel.

"Nothing definite," said the Commissioner. "Her principal accuser is the man Stay. Even he did not accuse her directly, but he hinted that she was responsible, in some way which he did not particularise, for Thornton Lyne's death. I thought it curious that he should know anything about this girl, but I am inclined to think that Thornton Lyne made this man his confidant."

"What about the man?" asked Tarling. "Can he account for his movements last night and early this morning?"

"His statement," replied the Commissioner, "is that he saw Mr. Lyne at his flat at nine o'clock and that Mr. Lyne gave him five pounds in the presence of Lyne's butler. He said he left the flat and went to his lodgings in Lambeth, where he went to bed very early. All the evidence we have been able to collect supports his statement. We have interviewed Lyne's butler, and his account agrees with Stay's. Stay left at five minutes past nine, and at twenty-five minutes to ten — exactly half-an-hour — Lyne himself left the

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house, driving his two-seater. He was alone, and told the butler he was going to his club."

"How was he dressed?" asked Tarling.

"That is rather important," nodded the Commissioner. "For he was in evening dress until nine o'clock — in fact, until after Stay had gone — when he changed into the kit in which he was found dead."

Tarling pursed his lips.

"He'd hardly change from evening into day dress to go to his club," he said.

He left Scotland Yard a little while after this, a much puzzled man. His first call was at the flat in Edgware Road which Odette Rider occupied. She was not at home, and the hall porter told him that she had been away since the afternoon of the previous day. Her letters were to be sent on to Hertford. He had the address because it was his business to intercept the postman and send forward the letters.

"Hillington Grove, Hertford."

Tarling was worried. There was really no reason why he should be, he told himself, but he was undoubtedly worried. And he was disappointed too. He felt that, if he could have seen the girl and spoken with her for a few minutes, he could have completely dissociated her from any suspicion which might attach. In fact, that she was away from home, that she had "disappeared" from her flat on the eve of the murder, would be quite enough, as he knew, to set the official policemen nosing on her trail.

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"Do you know whether Miss Rider has friends at Hertford?" he asked the porter.

"Oh, yes, sir," said the man nodding. "Miss Rider's mother lives there."

Tarling was going, when the man detained him with a remark which switched his mind back to the murder and filled him with a momentary sense of hopeless dismay.

"I'm rather glad Miss Rider didn't happen to be in last night, sir," he said. "Some of the tenants upstairs were making complaints."

"Complaints about what?" asked Tarling and the man hesitated.

"I suppose you're a friend of the young lady's, aren't you?" and Tarling nodded.

"Well, it only shows you," said the porter confidentially, "how people are very often blamed for something they did not do. The tenant in the next flat is a bit crotchety; he's a musician, and rather deaf. If he hadn't been deaf, he wouldn't have said that Miss Rider was the cause of his being wakened up. I suppose it was something that happened outside."

"What did he hear?" asked Tarling quickly and the porter laughed.

"Well, sir, he thought he heard a shot, and a scream like a woman's. It woke him up. I should have thought he had dreamt it, but another tenant, who also lives in the basement, heard the same sound, and the rum thing was they both thought it was in Miss Rider's flat."

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"What time was this?"

"They say about midnight, sir," said the porter; "but, of course, it couldn't have happened, because Miss Rider had not been in, and the flat was empty."

Here was a disconcerting piece of news for Tarling to carry with him on his railway journey to Hertford. He was determined to see the girl and put her on her guard, and though he realised that it was not exactly his duty to put a suspected criminal upon her guard, and that his conduct was, to say the least of it, irregular, such did not trouble him very much.

He had taken his ticket and was making his way to the platform when he espied a familiar figure hurrying as from a train which had just come in, and apparently the man saw Tarling even before Tarling had recognized him, for he turned abruptly aside and would have disappeared into the press of people had not the detective overtaken him.

"Hullo, Mr. Milburgh!" he said. "Your name is Milburgh, if I remember aright?"

The manager of Lyne's Stores turned, rubbing his hands, his habitual smile upon his face.

"Why, to be sure," he said genially, "it's Mr. Tarling, the detective gentleman. What sad news this is, Mr. Tarling! How dreadful for everybody concerned!"

"I suppose it has meant an upset at the Stores, this terrible happening?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Milburgh in a shocked voice. "Of course, we closed the Stores for the day. It is

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dreadful — the most dreadful thing within my experience. Is anybody suspected, sir?" he asked.

Tarling shook his head.

"It is a most mysterious circumstance, Mr. Milburgh," he said. And then: "May I ask if any provision has been made to carry on the business in the event of Mr. Lyne's sudden death?"

Again Milburgh hesitated, and seemed reluctant to reply.

"I am, of course, in control," he said, "as I was when Mr. Lyne took his trip around the world. I have received authority also from Mr. Lyne's solicitors to continue the direction of the business until the Court appoints a trustee."

Tarling eyed him narrowly.

"What effect has this murder had upon you personally?" he asked bluntly. "Does it enhance or depreciate your position?"

Milburgh smiled.

"Unhappily," he said, "it enhances my position, because it gives me a greater authority and a greater responsibility. I would that the occasion had never arisen, Mr. Tarling."

"I'm sure you do," said Tarling drily, remembering Lyne's accusations against the other's probity.

After a few commonplaces the men parted.

Milburgh! On the journey to Hertford Tarling analysed that urbane man, and found him deficient in certain essential qualities; weighed him and found him

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wanting in elements which should certainly form part of the equipment of a trustworthy man.

At Hertford he jumped into a cab and gave the address.

"Hillington Grove, sir? That's about two miles out," said the cabman. "It is Mrs. Rider you want?"

Tarling nodded.

"You ain't come with the young lady she was expecting?" said the driver.

"No," replied Tarling in surprise.

"I was told to keep my eyes open for a young lady," explained the cabman vaguely.

A further surprise awaited the detective. He expected to discover that Hillington Grove was a small suburban house, bearing a grandiose title. He was amazed when the cabman turned through a pair of impressive gates, and drove up a wide drive of some considerable length, turning eventually on to a gravelled space before a large mansion. It was hardly the kind of home he would have expected for the parent of a cashier at Lyne's Stores, and his surprise was increased when the door was opened by a footman.

He was ushered into a drawing-room, beautifully and artistically furnished. He began to think that some mistake had been made, and was framing an apology to the mistress of the house, when the door opened and a lady entered.

Her age was nearer forty than thirty, but she was still a beautiful woman and carried herself with the

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air of a grand dame. She was graciousness itself to the visitor, but Tarling thought he detected a note of anxiety both in her mien and in her voice.

"I'm afraid there's some mistake," he began. "I have probably found the wrong Mrs. Rider — I wanted to see Miss Odette Rider."

The lady nodded.

"That is my daughter," she said. "Have you any news of her? I am quite worried about her."

"Worried about her?" said Tarling quickly. "Why, what has happened? Isn't she here?"

"Here?" said Mrs. Rider, wide-eyed, "of course she is not."

"But hasn't she been here?" asked Tarling. "Didn't she arrive here two nights ago?"

Mrs. Rider shook her head.

"My daughter has not been," she replied. "But she promised to come and spend a few days with me, and last night I received a telegram — wait a moment, I will get it for you."

She was gone a few moments and came back with a little buff form, which she handed to the detective. He looked and read:

"My visit cancelled. Do not write to me at flat. I will communicate with you when I reach my destination."

The telegram had been handed in at the General Post Office, London, and was dated nine o'clock — three hours, according to expert opinion, before the murder was committed!

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# CHAPTER VII



"May I keep this telegram?" asked Tarling.

The woman nodded. He saw that she was nervous, ill at ease and worried.

"I can't quite understand why Odette should not come," she said. "Is there any particular reason?"

"That I can't say," said Tarling. "But please don't let it worry you, Mrs. Rider. She probably changed her mind at the last moment and is staying with friends in town."

"Then you haven't seen her?" asked Mrs. Rider anxiously.

"I haven't seen her for several days."

"Is anything wrong?" Her voice shook for a second, but she recovered herself. "You see," she made an attempt to smile, "I have been in the house for two or three days, and I have seen neither Odette nor — nor anybody else," she added quickly.

Who was she expecting to see, wondered Tarling, and why did she check herself? Was it possible that she had not heard of the murder? He determined to test her.

"Your daughter is probably detained in town owing to Mr. Lyne's death," he said, watching her closely.



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She started and went white.

"Mr. Lyne's death?" she stammered. "Has he died? That young man?"

"He was murdered in Hyde Park yesterday morning," said Tarling, and she staggered back and collapsed into a chair.

"Murdered! Murdered!" she whispered. "O God! Not that, not that!"

Her face was ashen white, and she was shaking in every limb, this stately woman who had walked so serenely into the drawing-room a few minutes before.

Presently she covered her face with her hands and began to weep softly, and Tarling waited.

"Did you know Mr. Lyne?" he asked after a while.

She shook her head.

"Have you heard any stories about Mr. Lyne?"

She looked up.

"None," she said listlessly, "except that he was — not a very nice man."

"Forgive my asking you, but are you very much interested —" He hesitated, and she lifted her head.

He did not know how to put this question into words. It puzzled him that the daughter of this woman, who was evidently well off, should be engaged in a more or less humble capacity in Lyne's Stores. He wanted to know whether she knew that the girl had been dismissed, and whether that made much difference to her. Then again, his conversation with Odette Rider had not led him to the conclusion that she could afford to throw up her work. She spoke of finding another

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job, and that did not sound as though her mother was in a good position.

"Is there any necessity for your daughter working for a living?" he asked bluntly and she dropped her eyes.

"It is her wish," she said in a low voice. "She does not get on — with people about here," she added hastily.

There was a brief silence, then he rose and offered his hand.

"I do hope I haven't worried you with my questions," he said, "and I daresay you wonder why I have come. I will tell you candidly that I am engaged in investigating this murder, and I was hoping to hear that your daughter, in common with the other people who were brought into contact with Mr. Lyne, might give me some thread of a clue which would lead to more important things."

"A detective?" she asked, and he could have sworn there was horror in her eyes.

"A sort of detective," he laughed, "but not a formidable one, I hope, Mrs. Rider."

She saw him to the door, and watched him as he disappeared down the drive, then walked slowly back to the room and stood against the marble mantelpiece, her head upon her arms, weeping softly.

Jack Tarling left Hertford more confused than ever. He had instructed the fly driver to wait for him at the gates, and this worthy he proceeded to pump.

Mrs. Rider had been living in Hertford for four

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years, and was greatly respected. Did the cabman know the daughter? Oh, yes, he had seen the young lady once or twice, but: "She don't come very often," he explained. "By all accounts she doesn't get on with her father."

"Her father? I did not know she had a father," said Tarling in surprise.

Yes, there was a father. He was an infrequent visitor, and usually came up from London by the late train and was driven in his own brougham to the house. He had not seen him — indeed, very few people had, but by all accounts he was a very nice man, and well-connected in the City.

Tarling had telegraphed to the assistant who had been placed at his disposal by Scotland Yard, and Detective Inspector Whiteside was waiting for him at the station.

"Any fresh news?" asked Tarling.

"Yes, sir, there's rather an important clue come to light," said Whiteside. "I've got the car here, sir, and we might discuss it on the way back to the Yard."

"What is it?" asked Tarling.

"We got it from Mr. Lyne's manservant," said the Inspector. "It appears that the butler had been going through Mr. Lyne's things, acting on instructions from headquarters, and in a corner of his writing desk a telegram was discovered. I'll show it you when I get to the Yard. It has a very important bearing upon the case, and I think may lead us to the murderer."

On the word "telegram" Tarling felt mechanically

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in his pockets for the wire which Mrs. Rider had given him from her daughter. Now he took it out and read it again. It had been handed in at the General Post Office at nine o'clock exactly.

"That's extraordinary, sir." Detective Inspector Whiteside, sitting by his side, had overlooked the wire.

"What is extraordinary?" asked Tarling with an air of surprise.

"I happened to see the signature to that wire — Odette, isn't it?" said the Scotland Yard man.

"Yes," nodded Tarling. "Why? What is there extraordinary in this?"

"Well, sir," said Whiteside, "it is something of a coincidence that the telegram which was found in Mr. Lyne's desk, and making an appointment with him at a certain flat in the Edgware Road, was also signed 'Odette' and," he bent forward, looking at the wire still in the astonished Tarling's hand, "and," he said in triumph, "it was handed in exactly at the same time as this!"

An examination of the telegram at Scotland Yard left no doubt in the detective's mind that Whiteside had spoken nothing but the truth. An urgent message was despatched to the General Post Office, and in two hours the original telegrams were before him. They were both written in the same hand. The first to her mother, saying that she could not come; the second to Lyne, running:

"Will you see me at my flat tonight at eleven o'clock? Odette Rider."

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Tarling's heart sank within him. This amazing news was stunning. It was impossible, impossible, he told himself again and again, that this girl could have killed Lyne. Suppose she had? Where had they met? Had they gone driving together, and had she shot him in making the circuit of the Park? But why should he be wearing list slippers? Why should his coat be off, and why should the nightdress be bound round and round his body?

He thought the matter out, but the more he thought, the more puzzled he became. It was a very depressed man who interviewed an authority that night and secured from him a search-warrant.

Armed with this and accompanied by Whiteside, he made his way to the flat in the Edgware Road, and, showing his authority, secured a pass-key from the hall porter, who was also the caretaker of the building. Tarling remembered the last time he had gone to the flat, and it was with a feeling of intense pity for the girl that he turned the key in the lock and stepped into the little hall, reaching out his hand and switching on the light as he did so.

There was nothing in the hall to suggest anything unusual. There was just that close and musty smell which is peculiar to all buildings which have been shut up, even for a few days.

But there was something else.

Tarling sniffed and Whiteside sniffed. A dull, "burnt" smell, some pungent "scorched" odour,

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which he recognised as the stale stench of exploded cordite. He went into the tiny dining-room; everything was neat, nothing displaced.

"That's curious," said Whiteside, pointing to the sideboard, and Tarling saw a deep glass vase half filled with daffodils. Two or three blossoms had either fallen or had been pulled out, and were lying, shrivelled and dead, on the polished surface of the sideboard.

"Humph!" said Tarling. "I don't like this very much."

He turned and walked back into the hall and opened another door, which stood ajar. Again he turned on the light. He was in the girl's bedroom. He stopped dead, and slowly examined the room. But for the disordered appearance of the chest of drawers, there was nothing unusual in the appearance of the room. At the open doors of the bureau a little heap of female attire had been thrown pell-mell upon the floor. All these were eloquent of hasty action. Still more was a small suit-case, half-packed, on the bed, also left in a great hurry.

Tarling stepped into the room, and if he had been half-blind, he could not have missed the last and most damning evidence of all. The carpet was of a biscuit colour, and covered the room flush to the wainscote. Opposite the fireplace was a big, dark, red irregular stain.

Tarling's face grew tense.

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"This is where Lyne was shot," he said.

"And look there!" said Whiteside excitedly, pointing to the chest of drawers.

Tarling stepped quickly across the room and pulled out a garment which hung over the edge of the drawer. It was a nightdress — a silk nightdress with two little sprays of forget-me-nots embroidered on the sleeves. It was the companion to that which had been found about Lyne's body. And there was something more. The removal of the garment from the drawer disclosed a mark on the white enamel of the bureau. It was a bloody thumb print!

The detective looked round at his assistant, and the expression of his face was set in its hardest mask.

"Whiteside," he said quietly, "swear out a warrant for the arrest of Odette Rider on a charge of wilful murder. Telegraph all stations to detain this girl, and let me know the result."

Without another word he turned from the room and walked back to his lodgings.

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# CHAPTER VIII

## THE SILENCING OF SAM STAY

There was a criminal in London, who was watched day and night. It was no new experience to Sam Stay to find an unconcerned-looking detective strolling along behind him; but for the first time in his life, the burglar was neither disconcerted nor embarrassed by these attentions.

The death of Thornton Lyne had been the most tragic blow which had ever overtaken him. And if they had arrested him he would have been indifferent. For this hang-dog criminal, with the long, melancholy face, lined and seamed and puckered so that he appeared to be an old man, had loved Thornton Lyne as he had loved nothing in his wild and barren life. Lyne to him had been some divine creature, possessed of gifts and qualities which no other would have recognised in him. In Sam's eyes Lyne could have done no wrong. By Sam's standard he stood for all that was beautiful in human nature.

Thornton Lyne was dead! Dead, dead, dead. Every footfall echoed the horrible, unbelievable word. The man was incapable of feeling — every other pain was deadened in this great suffering which was his.

And who had been the cause of it all? Whose



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treachery had cut short this wonderful life? He ground his teeth at the thought. Odette Rider! He remembered the name. He remembered all the injuries she had done to this man, his benefactor. He remembered that long conversation which Lyne and he had had on the morning of Sam's release from prison and the plannings which had followed.

He could not know that his hero was lying, and that in his pique and hurt vanity he was inventing grievances which had no foundation, and offences which had never been committed. He only knew that, because of the hate which lay in Thornton Lyne's heart, justifiable hate from Sam's view, the death of this great man had been encompassed.

He walked aimlessly westward, unconscious of and uncaring for his shadower, and had reached the end of Piccadilly when somebody took him gently by the arm. He turned, and as he recognised an acquaintance his thick lips went back in an ugly snarl.

"It's all right, Sam," said the plain-clothes policeman with a grin. "There's no trouble coming to you. I just want to ask you a few questions."

"You fellows have been asking questions day and night since — since that happened," growled Sam.

Nevertheless, he permitted himself to be mollified and led to a seat in the Park.

"Now, I'm putting it to you straight, Sam," said the policeman. "We've got nothing against you at the Yard, but we think you might be able to help us. You knew Mr. Lyne; he was very decent to you."

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"Here, shut up," said Sam savagely. "I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to think about it! D'ye hear? He was the grandest fellow that ever was, was Mr. Lyne, God bless him! O, my God! My God!" he wailed, and to the detective's surprise this hardened criminal buried his face in his hands.

"That's all right, Sam. I know he was a nice fellow. Had he any enemies — he might have talked to a chap like you where he wouldn't have talked to his friends."

Sam, red-eyed, looked up suspiciously.

"Am I going to get into any trouble for talking?" he said.

"None at all, Sam," said the policeman quickly. "Now, you be a good lad and do all you can to help us, and maybe, if you ever get into trouble, we'll put one in for you. Do you see? Did anybody hate him?"

Sam nodded.

"Was it a woman?" asked the detective with studied indifference.

"It was," replied the other with an oath. "Damn her, it was! He treated her well, did Mr. Lyne. She was broke, half-starving; he took her out of the gutter and put her into a good place, and she went about making accusations against him!"

He poured forth a stream of the foulest abuse which the policeman had ever heard.

"That's the kind of girl she was, Slade," he went on, addressing the detective, as criminals will, fa-

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miliarly by their surnames. "She ain't fit to walk the earth—"

His voice broke.

"Might I ask the name of this party?" demanded Slade.

Again Sam looked suspiciously around.

"Look here," he said, "leave me to deal with her. I'll settle with her, and don't you worry!"

"That would only get you into trouble, Sam," mused Slade. "Just give us her name. Did it begin with an R?"

"How the 'ell do I know?" growled the criminal. "I can't spell. Her name was Odette."

"Rider?" said the other eagerly.

"That's her. She used to be cashier in Lyne's Stores."

"Now, just quiet yourself down and tell me all Lyne told you about her, will you, my lad?"

Sam Stay stared at him, and then a slow look of cunning passed over his face.

"If it was her!" he breathed. "If I could only put her away for it!"

Nothing better illustrated the mentality of this man than the fact that the thought of "shopping" the girl had not occurred to him before. That was the idea, a splendid idea! Again his lips curled back, and he eyed the detective with a queer little smile.

"All right, sir," he said. "I'll tell the head-split. I'm not going to tell you."

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