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THAT AFFAIR NEXT DOOR

ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

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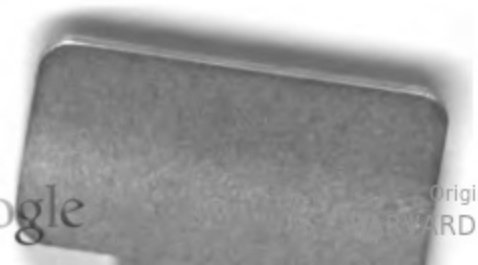

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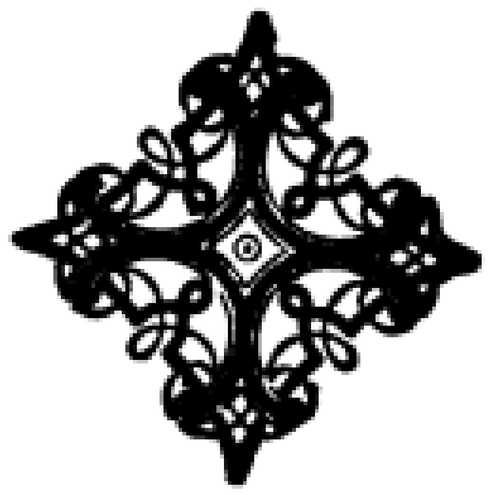
That Affair Next Door

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN Rohlfs.

Author of "The House Of The Whispering Pines," "Initials Only," "Dark Hollow," Etc.



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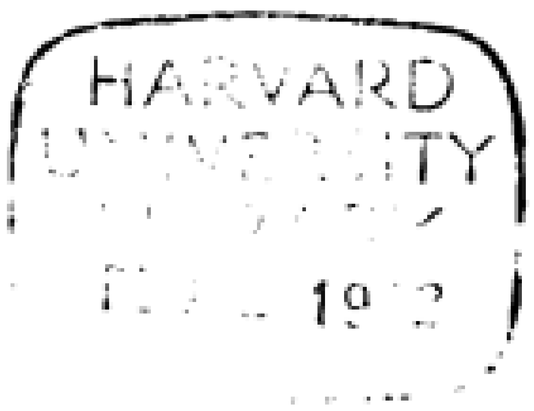

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THAT AFFAIR NEXT DOOR.

BOOK I.

MISS BUTTERWORTH'S WINDOW.

I.

A DISCOVERY.

I AM not an inquisitive woman, but when, in the middle of a certain warm night in September, I heard a carriage draw up at the adjoining house and stop, I could not resist the temptation of leaving my bed and taking a peep through the curtains of my window.

First: because the house was empty, or supposed to be so, the family still being, as I had every reason to believe, in Europe; and secondly: because, not being inquisitive, I often miss in my lonely and single life much that it would be both interesting and profitable for me to know.

Luckily I made no such mistake this evening. I rose and looked out, and though I was far from realiz-

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ing it at the time, took, by so doing, my first step in a course of inquiry which has ended——

But it is too soon to speak of the end. Rather let me tell you what I saw when I parted the curtains of my window in Gramercy Park, on the night of September 17, 1895.

Not much at first glance, only a common hack drawn up at the neighboring curb-stone. The lamp which is supposed to light our part of the block is some rods away on the opposite side of the street, so that I obtained but a shadowy glimpse of a young man and woman standing below me on the pavement. I could see, however, that the woman—and not the man—was putting money into the driver's hand. The next moment they were on the stoop of this long-closed house, and the coach rolled off.

It was dark, as I have said, and I did not recognize the young people,—at least their figures were not familiar to me; but when, in another instant, I heard the click of a night-key, and saw them, after a rather tedious fumbling at the lock, disappear from the stoop, I took it for granted that the gentleman was Mr. Van Burnam's eldest son Franklin, and the lady some relative of the family; though why this, its most punctilious member, should bring a guest at so late an hour into a house devoid of everything necessary to make the least exacting visitor comfortable, was a mystery that I retired to bed to meditate upon.

I did not succeed in solving it, however, and after some ten minutes had elapsed, I was settling myself again to sleep when I was re-aroused by a fresh sound from the quarter mentioned. The door I had so lately heard shut, opened again, and though I had to rush

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for it, I succeeded in getting to my window in time to catch a glimpse of the departing figure of the young man hurrying away towards Broadway. The young woman was not with him, and as I realized that he had left her behind him in the great, empty house, without apparent light and certainly without any companion, I began to question if this was like Franklin Van Burnam. Was it not more in keeping with the recklessness of his more easy-natured and less reliable brother, Howard, who, some two or three years back, had married a young wife of no very satisfactory antecedents, and who, as I had heard, had been ostracized by the family in consequence ?

Whichever of the two it was, he had certainly shown but little consideration for his companion, and thus thinking, I fell off to sleep just as the clock struck the half hour after midnight.

Next morning as soon as modesty would permit me to approach the window, I surveyed the neighboring house minutely. Not a blind was open, nor a shutter displaced. As I am an early riser, this did not disturb me at the time, but when after breakfast I looked again and still failed to detect any evidences of life in the great barren front beside me, I began to feel uneasy. But I did nothing till noon, when going into my rear garden and observing that the back windows of the Van Burnam house were as closely shuttered as the front, I became so anxious that I stopped the next policeman I saw going by, and telling him my suspicions, urged him to ring the bell.

No answer followed the summons.

"There is no one here," said he.

"Ring again!" I begged.

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And he rang again but with no better result.

"Don't you see that the house is shut up?" he grumbled. "We have had orders to watch the place, but none to take the watch off."

"There is a young woman inside," I insisted. "The more I think over last night's occurrence, the more I am convinced that the matter should be looked into."

He shrugged his shoulders and was moving away when we both observed a common-looking woman standing in front looking at us. She had a bundle in her hand, and her face, unnaturally ruddy though it was, had a scared look which was all the more remarkable from the fact that it was one of those wooden-like countenances which under ordinary circumstances are capable of but little expression. She was not a stranger to me; that is, I had seen her before in or about the house in which we were at that moment so interested; and not stopping to put any curb on my excitement, I rushed down to the pavement and accosted her.

"Who are you?" I asked. "Do you work for the Van Burnams, and do you know who the lady was who came here last night?"

The poor woman, either startled by my sudden address or by my manner which may have been a little sharp, gave a quick bound backward, and was only deterred by the near presence of the policeman from attempting flight. As it was, she stood her ground, though the fiery flush, which made her face so noticeable, deepened till her cheeks and brow were scarlet.

"I am the scrub-woman," she protested. "I have come to open the windows and air the house,"—ignoring my last question.

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"Is the family coming home?" the policeman asked.

"I don't know; I think so," was her weak reply.

"Have you the keys?" I now demanded, seeing her fumbling in her pocket.

She did not answer; a sly look displaced the anxious one she had hitherto displayed, and she turned away.

"I don't see what business it is of the neighbors," she muttered, throwing me a dissatisfied scowl over her shoulder.

"If you 've got the keys, we will go in and see that things are all right," said the policeman, stopping her with a light touch.

She trembled; I saw that she trembled, and naturally became excited. Something was wrong in the Van Burnam mansion, and I was going to be present at its discovery. But her next words cut my hopes short.

"I have no objection to *your* going in," she said to the policeman, "but I will not give up my keys to *her*. What right has she in our house any way." And I thought I heard her murmur something about a meddlesome old maid.

The look which I received from the policeman convinced me that my ears had not played me false.

"The lady 's right," he declared; and pushing by me quite disrespectfully, he led the way to the basement door, into which he and the so-called cleaner presently disappeared.

I waited in front. I felt it to be my duty to do so. The various passers-by stopped an instant to stare at me before proceeding on their way, but I did not flinch from my post. Not till I had heard that the young

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woman whom I had seen enter these doors at midnight was well, and that her delay in opening the windows was entirely due to fashionable laziness, would I feel justified in returning to my own home and its affairs. But it took patience and some courage to remain there. Several minutes elapsed before I perceived the shutters in the third story open, and a still longer time before a window on the second floor flew up and the policeman looked out, only to meet my inquiring gaze and rapidly disappear again.

Meantime three or four persons had stopped on the walk near me, the nucleus of a crowd which would not be long in collecting, and I was beginning to feel I was paying dearly for my virtuous resolution, when the front door burst violently open and we caught sight of the trembling form and shocked face of the scrub-woman.

"She's dead!" she cried, "she's dead! Murder!" and would have said more had not the policeman pulled her back, with a growl which sounded very much like a suppressed oath.

He would have shut the door upon me had I not been quicker than lightning. As it was, I got in before it slammed, and happily too; for just at that moment the house-cleaner, who had grown paler every instant, fell in a heap in the entry, and the policeman, who was not the man I would want about me in any trouble, seemed somewhat embarrassed by this new emergency, and let me lift the poor thing up and drag her farther into the hall.

She had fainted, and should have had something done for her, but anxious though I always am to be of help where help is needed, I had no sooner got within range of the parlor door with my burden, than I beheld

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a sight so terrifying that I involuntarily let the poor woman slip from my arms to the floor.

In the darkness of a dim corner (for the room had no light save that which came through the doorway where I stood) lay the form of a woman under a fallen piece of furniture. Her skirts and distended arms alone were visible ; but no one who saw the rigid outlines of her limbs could doubt for a moment that she was dead.

At a sight so dreadful, and, in spite of all my apprehensions, so unexpected, I felt a sensation of sickness which in another moment might have ended in my fainting also, if I had not realized that it would never do for me to lose my wits in the presence of a man who had none too many of his own. So I shook off my momentary weakness, and turning to the policeman, who was hesitating between the unconscious figure of the woman outside the door and the dead form of the one within I cried sharply:

"Come, man, to business ! The woman inside there is dead, but this one is living. Fetch me a pitcher of water from below if you can, and then go for whatever assistance you need. I 'll wait here and bring this woman to. She is a strong one, and it won't take long."

"You 'll stay here alone with that ——" he began.

But I stopped him with a look of disdain.

"Of course I will stay here ; why not ? Is there anything in the dead to be afraid of ? Save me from the living, and I undertake to save myself from the dead."

But his face had grown very suspicious.

"You go for the water," he cried. "And see here ! Just call out for some one to telephone to Police Head-

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quarters for the Coroner and a detective. I don't quit this room till one or the other of them comes."

Smiling at a caution so very ill-timed, but abiding by my invariable rule of never arguing with a man unless I see some way of getting the better of him, I did what he bade me, though I hated dreadfully to leave the spot and its woful mystery, even for so short a time as was required.

"Run up to the second story," he called out, as I passed by the prostrate figure of the cleaner. "Tell them what you want from the window, or we will have the whole street in here."

So I ran upstairs,—I had always wished to visit this house, but had never been encouraged to do so by the Misses Van Burnam,—and making my way into the front room, the door of which stood wide open, I rushed to the window and hailed the crowd, which by this time extended far out beyond the curb-stone.

"An officer!" I called out, "a police officer! An accident has occurred and the man in charge here wants the Coroner and a detective from Police Head-quarters."

"Who 's hurt?" "Is it a man?" "Is it a woman?" shouted up one or two; and "Let us in!" shouted others; but the sight of a boy rushing off to meet an advancing policeman satisfied me that help would soon be forthcoming, so I drew in my head and looked about me for the next necessity—water.

I was in a lady's bed-chamber, probably that of the eldest Miss Van Burnam; but it was a bed-chamber which had not been occupied for some months, and naturally it lacked the very articles which would have been of assistance to me in the present emergency. No

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eau de Cologne on the bureau, no camphor on the mantel-shelf. But there was water in the pipes (something I had hardly hoped for), and a mug on the wash-stand ; so I filled the mug and ran with it to the door, stumbling, as I did so, over some small object which I presently perceived to be a little round pin-cushion. Picking it up, for I hate anything like disorder, I placed it on a table near by, and continued on my way.

The woman was still lying at the foot of the stairs. I dashed the water in her face and she immediately came to.

Sitting up, she was about to open her lips when she checked herself ; a fact which struck me as odd, though I did not allow my surprise to become apparent.

Meantime I stole a glance into the parlor. The officer was standing where I had left him, looking down on the prostrate figure before him.

There was no sign of feeling in his heavy countenance, and he had not opened a shutter, nor, so far as I could see, disarranged an object in the room.

The mysterious character of the whole affair fascinated me in spite of myself, and leaving the now fully aroused woman in the hall, I was half-way across the parlor floor when the latter stopped me with a shrill cry:

"Don't leave me! I have never seen anything before so horrible. The poor dear! The poor dear! Why don't he take those dreadful things off her?"

She alluded not only to the piece of furniture which had fallen upon the prostrate woman, and which can best be described as a cabinet with closets below and shelves above, but to the various articles of *bric-a-brac*

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which had tumbled from the shelves, and which now lay in broken pieces about her.

"He will do so; they will do so very soon," I replied. "He is waiting for some one with more authority than himself; for the Coroner, if you know what that means."

"But what if she 's alive! Those things will crush her. Let us take them off. I 'll help. I 'm not too weak to help."

"Do you know who this person is?" I asked, for her voice had more feeling in it than I thought natural to the occasion, dreadful as it was.

"I?" she repeated, her weak eyelids quivering for a moment as she tried to sustain my scrutiny. "How should I know? I came in with the policeman and have n't been any nearer than I now be. What makes you think I know anything about her? I 'm only the scrub-woman, and don't even know the names of the family."

"I thought you seemed so very anxious," I explained, suspicious of her suspiciousness, which was of so sly and emphatic a character that it changed her whole bearing from one of fear to one of cunning in a moment.

"And who would n't feel the like of that for a poor creature lying crushed under a heap of broken crockery!"

Crockery! those Japanese vases worth hundreds of dollars! that ormulu clock and those Dresden figures which must have been more than a couple of centuries old!

"It 's a poor sense of duty that keeps a man standing dumb and staring like that, when with a lift

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of his hand he could show us the like of her pretty face, and if it 's dead she be or alive."

As this burst of indignation was natural enough and not altogether uncalled for from the standpoint of humanity, I gave the woman a nod of approval, and wished I were a man myself that I might lift the heavy cabinet or whatever it was that lay upon the poor creature before us. But not being a man, and not judging it wise to irritate the one representative of that sex then present, I made no remark, but only took a few steps farther into the room, followed, as it afterwards appeared, by the scrub-woman.

The Van Burnam parlors are separated by an open arch. It was to the right of this arch and in the corner opposite the doorway that the dead woman lay. Using my eyes, now that I was somewhat accustomed to the semi-darkness enveloping us, I noticed two or three facts which had hitherto escaped me. One was, that she lay on her back with her feet pointing towards the hall door, and another, that nowhere in the room, save in her immediate vicinity, were there to be seen any signs of struggle or disorder. All was as set and proper as in my own parlor when it has been undisturbed for any length of time by guests; and though I could not see far into the rooms beyond, they were to all appearance in an equally orderly condition.

Meanwhile the cleaner was trying to account for the overturned cabinet.

"Poor dear! poor dear! she must have pulled it over on herself! But however did she get into the house? And what was she doing in this great empty place?"

The policeman, to whom these remarks had evidently been addressed, growled out some unintelligible

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reply, and in her perplexity the woman turned towards me.

But what could I say to her? I had my own private knowledge of the matter, but she was not one to confide in, so I stoically shook my head. Doubly disappointed, the poor thing shrank back, after looking first at the policeman and then at me in an odd, appealing way, difficult to understand. Then her eyes fell again on the dead girl at her feet, and being nearer now than before, she evidently saw something that startled her, for she sank on her knees with a little cry and began examining the girl's skirts.

"What are you looking at there?" growled the policeman. "Get up, can't you! No one but the Coroner has right to lay hand on anything here."

"I 'm doing no harm," the woman protested, in an odd, shaking voice. "I only wanted to see what the poor thing had on. Some blue stuff, is n't it?" she asked me.

"Blue serge," I answered; "store-made, but very good; must have come from Altman's or Stern's."

"I—I 'm not used to sights like this," stammered the scrub-woman, stumbling awkwardly to her feet, and looking as if her few remaining wits had followed the rest on an endless vacation. "I—I think I shall have to go home." But she did not move.

"The poor dear 's young, is n't she?" she presently insinuated, with an odd catch in her voice that gave to the question an air of hesitation and doubt.

"I think she is younger than either you or myself," I deigned to reply. "Her narrow pointed shoes show she has not reached the years of discretion."

"Yes, yes, so they do!" ejaculated the cleaner,

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eagerly — too eagerly for perfect ingenuousness. "That 's why I said 'Poor dear!' and spoke of her pretty face. I am sorry for young folks when they get into trouble, aint you? You and me might lie here and no one be much the worse for it, but a sweet lady like this——"

This was not very flattering to me, but I was prevented from rebuking her by a prolonged shout from the stoop without, as a rush was made against the front door, followed by a shrill peal of the bell.

"Man from Headquarters," stolidly announced the policeman. "Open the door, ma'am; or step back into the further hall if you want me to do it."

Such rudeness was uncalled for; but considering myself too important a witness to show feeling, I swallowed my indignation and proceeded with all my native dignity to the front door.

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II.

QUESTIONS.

AS I did so, I could catch the murmur of the crowd outside as it seethed forward at the first intimation of the door being opened; but my attention was not so distracted by it, loud as it sounded after the quiet of the shut-up house, that I failed to notice that the door had not been locked by the gentleman leaving the night before, and that, consequently, only the night latch was on. With a turn of the knob it opened, showing me the mob of shouting boys and the forms of two gentlemen awaiting admittance on the door-step. I frowned at the mob and smiled on the gentlemen, one of whom was portly and easy-going in appearance, and the other spare, with a touch of severity in his aspect. But for some reason these gentlemen did not seem to appreciate the honor I had done them, for they both gave me a displeased glance, which was so odd and unsympathetic in its character that I bridled a little, though I soon returned to my natural manner. Did they realize at the first glance that I was destined to prove a thorn in the sides of every one connected with this matter, for days to come?

"Are you the woman who called from the window?" asked the larger of the two, whose business here I found it difficult at first to determine.

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"I am," was my perfectly self-possessed reply. "I live next door and my presence here is due to the anxious interest I always take in my neighbors. I had reason to think that all was not as it should be in this house, and I was right. Look in the parlor, sirs."

They were already as far as the threshold of that room and needed no further encouragement to enter. The heavier man went first and the other followed, and you may be sure I was not far behind. The sight meeting our eyes was ghastly enough, as you know; but these men were evidently accustomed to ghastly sights, for they showed but little emotion.

"I thought this house was empty," observed the second gentleman, who was evidently a doctor.

"So it was till last night," I put in; and was about to tell my story, when I felt my skirts jerked.

Turning, I found that this warning had come from the cleaner who stood close beside me.

"What do you want?" I asked, not understanding her and having nothing to conceal.

"I?" she faltered, with a frightened air. "Nothing, ma'am, nothing."

"Then don't interrupt me," I harshly admonished her, annoyed at an interference that tended to throw suspicion upon my candor. "This woman came here to scrub and clean," I now explained; "it was by means of the key she carried that we were enabled to get into the house. I never spoke to her till a half hour ago."

At which, with a display of subtlety I was far from expecting in one of her appearance, she let her emotions take a fresh direction, and pointing towards the dead woman, she impetuously cried:

"But the poor child there! Aint you going to

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take those things off of her? It 's wicked to leave her under all that stuff. Suppose there was life in her!"

"Oh! there 's no hope of that," muttered the doctor, lifting one of the hands, and letting it fall again.

"Still—" he cast a side look at his companion, who gave him a meaning nod—"it might be well enough to lift this cabinet sufficiently for me to lay my hand on her heart."

They accordingly did this; and the doctor, leaning down, placed his hand over the poor bruised breast.

"No life," he murmured. "She has been dead some hours. Do you think we had better release the head?" he went on, glancing up at the portly man at his side.

But the latter, who was rapidly growing serious, made a slight protest with his finger, and turning to me, inquired, with sudden authority:

"What did you mean when you said that the house had been empty till last night?"

"Just what I said, sir. It was empty till about midnight, when two persons——" Again I felt my dress twitched, this time very cautiously. What did the woman want? Not daring to give her a look, for these men were only too ready to detect harm in everything I did, I gently drew my skirt away and took a step aside, going on as if no interruption had occurred. "Did I say persons? I should have said a man and a woman drove up to the house and entered. I saw them from my window."

"You did?" murmured my interlocutor, whom I had by this time decided to be a detective. "And this is the woman, I suppose?" he proceeded, pointing to the poor creature lying before us.

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"Why, yes, of course. Who else can she be? I did not see the lady's face last night, but she was young and light on her feet, and ran up the stoop gaily."

"And the man? Where is the man? I don't see him here."

"I am not surprised at that. He went very soon after he came, not ten minutes after, I should say. That is what alarmed me and caused me to have the house investigated. It did not seem natural or like any of the Van Burnams to leave a woman to spend the night in so large a house alone."

"You know the Van Burnams?"

"Not well. But that don't signify. I know what report says of them; they are gentlemen."

"But Mr. Van Burnam is in Europe."

"He has two sons."

"Living here?"

"No; the unmarried one spends his nights at Long Branch, and the other is with his wife somewhere in Connecticut."

"How did the young couple you saw get in last night? Was there any one here to admit them?"

"No; the gentleman had a key."

"Ah, he had a key."

The tone in which this was said recurred to me afterwards, but at the moment I was much more impressed by a peculiar sound I heard behind me, something between a gasp and a click in the throat, which came I knew from the scrub-woman, and which, odd and contradictory as it may appear, struck me as an expression of satisfaction, though what there was in my admission to give satisfaction to this poor creature I could not

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conjecture. Moving so as to get a glimpse of her face, I went on with the grim self-possession natural to my character :

"And when he came out he walked briskly away. The carriage had not waited for him."

"Ah!" again muttered the gentleman, picking up one of the broken pieces of china which lay haphazard about the floor, while I studied the cleaner's face, which, to my amazement, gave evidences of a confusion of emotions most unaccountable to me.

Mr. Gryce may have noticed this too, for he immediately addressed her, though he continued to look at the broken piece of china in his hand.

"And how come you to be cleaning the house?" he asked. "Is the family coming home?"

"They are, sir," she answered, hiding her emotion with great skill the moment she perceived attention directed to herself, and speaking with a sudden volubility that made us all stare. "They are expected any day. I did n't know it till yesterday—was it yesterday? No, the day before—when young Mr. Franklin —he is the oldest son, sir, and a very nice man, a *very* nice man—sent me word by letter that I was to get the house ready. It is n't the first time I have done it for them, sir, and as soon as I could get the basement key from the agent, I came here, and worked all day yesterday, washing up the floors and dusting. I should have been at them again this morning if my husband had n't been sick. But I had to go to the infirmary for medicine, and it was noon when I got here, and then I found this lady standing outside with a policeman, a very nice lady, a very *nice* lady indeed, sir, I pay my respects to her"—and she actually dropped

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me a curtsey like a peasant woman in a play—" and they took my key from me, and the policeman opens the door, and he and me go upstairs and into all the rooms, and when we come to this one——"

She was getting so excited as to be hardly intelligible. Stopping herself with a jerk, she fumbled nervously with her apron, while I asked myself how she could have been at work in this house the day before without my knowing it. Suddenly I remembered that I was ill in the morning and busy in the afternoon at the Orphan Asylum, and somewhat relieved at finding so excellent an excuse for my ignorance, I looked up to see if the detective had noticed anything odd in this woman's behavior. Presumably he had, but having more experience than myself with the susceptibility of ignorant persons in the presence of danger and distress, he attached less importance to it than I did, for which I was secretly glad, without exactly knowing my reasons for being so.

" You will be wanted as a witness by the Coroner's jury," he now remarked to her, looking as if he were addressing the piece of china he was turning over in his hand. " Now, no nonsense !" he protested, as she commenced to tremble and plead. " You were the first one to see this dead woman, and you must be on hand to say so. As I cannot tell you when the inquest will be held, you had better stay around till the Coroner comes. He 'll be here soon. You, and this other woman too."

By other woman he meant *me*, Miss Butterworth, of Colonial ancestry and no inconsiderable importance in the social world. But though I did not relish this careless association of myself with this poor scrub-

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woman, I was careful to show no displeasure, for I reasoned that as witnesses we were equal before the law, and that it was solely in this light he regarded us.

There was something in the manner of both these gentlemen which convinced me that while my presence was considered desirable in the house, it was not especially wanted in the room. I was therefore moving reluctantly away, when I felt a slight but peremptory touch on the arm, and turning, saw the detective at my side, still studying his piece of china.

He was, as I have said, of portly build and benevolent aspect; a fatherly-looking man, and not at all the person one would be likely to associate with the police. Yet he could take the lead very naturally, and when he spoke, I felt bound to answer him.

"Will you be so good, madam, as to relate over again, what you saw from your window last night? I am likely to have charge of this matter, and would be pleased to hear all you may have to say concerning it."

"My name is Butterworth," I politely intimated.

"And my name is Gryce."

"A detective?"

"The same."

"You must think this matter very serious," I ventured.

"Death by violence is always serious."

"You must regard this death as something more than an accident, I mean."

His smile seemed to say: "You will not know to-day how I regard it."

"And you will not know to-day what I think of it

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either," was my inward rejoinder, but I said nothing aloud, for the man was seventy-five if he was a day, and I have been taught respect for age, and have practised the same for fifty years and more.

I must have shown what was passing in my mind, and he must have seen it reflected on the polished surface of the porcelain he was contemplating, for his lips showed the shadow of a smile sufficiently sarcastic for me to see that he was far from being as easy-natured as his countenance indicated.

"Come, come," said he, "there is the Coroner now. Say what you have to say, like the straightforward, honest woman you appear."

"I don't like compliments," I snapped out. Indeed, they have always been obnoxious to me. As if there was any merit in being honest and straightforward, or any distinction in being told so!

"I am Miss Butterworth, and not in the habit of being spoken to as if I were a simple countrywoman," I objected. "But I will repeat what I saw last night, as it is no secret, and the telling of it won't hurt me and may help you."

Accordingly I went over the whole story, and was much more loquacious than I had intended to be, his manner was so insinuating and his inquiries so pertinent. But one topic we both failed to broach, and that was the peculiar manner of the scrub-woman. Perhaps it had not struck him as peculiar and perhaps it should not have struck me so, but in the silence which was preserved on the subject I felt I had acquired an advantage over him, which might lead to consequences of no small importance. Would I have felt thus or congratulated myself quite so much upon my fancied superiority,

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if I had known he was the man who managed the Leavenworth case, and who in his early years had experienced that very wonderful adventure on the staircase of the Heart's Delight? Perhaps I would; for though I have had no adventures, I feel capable of them, and as for any peculiar acumen he may have shown in his long and eventful career, why that is a quality which others may share with him, as I hope to be able to prove before finishing these pages.

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III.

AMELIA DISCOVERS HERSELF.

THERE is a small room at the extremity of the Van Burnam mansion. In this I took refuge after my interview with Mr. Gryce. As I picked out the chair which best suited me and settled myself for a comfortable communion with my own thoughts, I was astonished to find how much I was enjoying myself, notwithstanding the thousand and one duties awaiting me on the other side of the party-wall.

Even this very solitude was welcome, for it gave me an opportunity to consider matters. I had not known up to this very hour that I had any special gifts. My father, who was a shrewd man of the old New England type, said more times than I am years old (which was not saying it as often as some may think) that Araminta (the name I was christened by, and the name you will find in the Bible record, though I sign myself Amelia, and insist upon being addressed as Amelia, being, as I hope, a sensible woman and not the piece of antiquated sentimentality suggested by the former cognomen)— that Araminta would live to make her mark; though in what capacity he never informed me, being, as I have observed, a shrewd man, and thus not likely to thoughtlessly commit himself.

I now know he was right; my pretensions dating

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from the moment I found that this affair, at first glance so simple, and at the next so complicated, had aroused in me a fever of investigation which no reasoning could allay. Though I had other and more personal matters on my mind, my thoughts would rest nowhere but on the details of this tragedy; and having, as I thought, noticed some few facts in connection with it, from which conclusions might be drawn, I amused myself with jotting them down on the back of a disputed grocer's bill I happened to find in my pocket.

Valueless as explaining this tragedy, being founded upon insufficient evidence, they may be interesting as showing the workings of my mind even at this early stage of the matter. They were drawn up under three heads.

First, was the death of this young woman an accident?

Second, was it a suicide?

Third, was it a murder?

Under the first head I wrote:

My reasons for not thinking it an accident.

1. If it had been an accident and she had pulled the cabinet over upon herself, she would have been found with her feet pointing towards the wall where the cabinet had stood.

(But her feet were towards the door and her head under the cabinet.)

2. The decent, even precise, arrangement of the clothing about her feet, which precludes any theory involving accident.

Under the second:

Reason for not thinking it suicide.

She could not have been found in the position ob-

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served without having lain down on the floor while living and then pulled the shelves down upon herself.

(A theory obviously too improbable to be considered.)

Under the third:

Reason for not thinking it murder.

She would need to have been held down on the floor while the cabinet was being pulled over on her; something which the quiet aspect of the hands and feet made appear impossible.

To this I added:

Reasons for accepting the theory of murder.

1. The fact that she did not go into the house alone; that a man entered with her, remained ten minutes, and then came out again and disappeared up the street with every appearance of haste and an anxious desire to leave the spot.

2. The front door, which he had unlocked on entering, was not locked by him on his departure, the catch doing the locking. Yet, though he could have reentered so easily, he had shown no disposition to return.

3. The arrangement of the skirts, which show the touch of a careful hand after death.

Nothing clear, you see. I was doubtful of all; and yet my suspicions tended most toward murder.

I had eaten my luncheon before interfering in this matter, which was fortunate for me, as it was three o'clock before I was summoned to meet the Coroner, of whose arrival I had been conscious some time before.

He was in the front parlor where the dead girl lay, and as I took my way thither I felt the same sensations of faintness which had so nearly overcome me on the

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previous occasion. But I mastered them, and was quite myself before I crossed the threshold.

There were several gentlemen present, but of them all I only noticed two, one of whom I took to be the Coroner, while the other was my late interlocutor, Mr. Gryce. From the animation observable in the latter, I gathered that the case was growing in interest from the detective standpoint.

"Ah, and is this the witness?" asked the Coroner, as I stepped into the room.

"I am Miss Butterworth," was my calm reply. "*Amelia* Butterworth. Living next door and present at the discovery of this poor murdered body."

"Murdered," he repeated. "Why do you say murdered?"

For reply I drew from my pocket the bill on which I had scribbled my conclusions in regard to this matter.

"Read this," said I.

Evidently astonished, he took the paper from my hand, and, after some curious glances in my direction, condescended to do as I requested. The result was an odd but grudging look of admiration directed towards myself and a quick passing over of the paper to the detective.

The latter, who had exchanged his bit of broken china for a very much used and tooth-marked lead-pencil, frowned with a whimsical air at the latter before he put it in his pocket. Then he read my hurried scrawl.

"Two Richmonds in the field!" commented the Coroner, with a sly chuckle. "I am afraid I shall have to yield to their allied forces. Miss Butterworth, the cabinet is about to be raised; do you feel as if you could endure the sight?"

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"I can stand anything where the cause of justice is involved," I replied.

"Very well, then, sit down, if you please. When the whole body is visible I will call you."

And stepping forward he gave orders to have the clock and broken china removed from about the body.

As the former was laid away on one end of the mantel some one observed:

"What a valuable witness that clock might have been had it been running when the shelves fell!"

But the fact was so patent that it had not been in motion for months that no one even answered; and Mr. Gryce did not so much as look towards it. But then we had all seen that the hands stood at three minutes to five.

I had been asked to sit down, but I found this impossible. Side by side with the detective, I viewed the replacing of that heavy piece of furniture against the wall, and the slow disclosure of the upper part of the body which had so long lain hidden.

That I did not give way is a proof that my father's prophecy was not without some reasonable foundation; for the sight was one to try the stoutest nerves, as well as to awaken the compassion of the hardest heart.

The Coroner, meeting my eye, pointed at the poor creature inquiringly.

"Is this the woman you saw enter here last night?"

I glanced down at her dress, noted the short summer cape tied to the neck with an elaborate bow of ribbon, and nodded my head.

"I remember the cape," said I. "But where is her hat? She wore one. Let me see if I can describe it." Closing my eyes I endeavored to recall the

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dim silhouette of her figure as she stood passing up the change to the driver ; and was so far successful that I was ready to announce at the next moment that her hat presented the effect of a soft felt with one feather or one bow of ribbon standing upright from the side of the crown.

" Then the identity of this woman with the one you saw enter here last night is established," remarked the detective, stooping down and drawing from under the poor girl's body a hat, sufficiently like the one I had just described, to satisfy everybody that it was the same.

" As if there could be any doubt," I began.

But the Coroner, explaining that it was a mere formality, motioned me to stand aside in favor of the doctor, who seemed anxious to approach nearer the spot where the dead woman lay. This I was about to do when a sudden thought struck me, and I reached out my hand for the hat.

" Let me look at it for a moment," said I.

Mr. Gryce at once handed it over, and I took a good look at it inside and out.

" It is pretty badly crushed," I observed, " and does not present a very fresh appearance, but for all that it has been worn but once."

" How do you know ?" questioned the Coroner.

" Let the other Richmond inform you," was my grimly uttered reply, as I gave it again into the detective's hand.

There was a murmur about me, whether of amusement or displeasure, I made no effort to decide. I was finding out something for myself, and I did not care what they thought of me.

" Neither has she worn this dress long," I continued;

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"but that is not true of the shoes. They are not old, but they have been acquainted with the pavement, and that is more than can be said of the hem of this gown. There are no gloves on her hands; a few minutes elapsed then before the assault; long enough for her to take them off."

"Smart woman!" whispered a voice in my ear; a half-admiring, half-sarcastic voice that I had no difficulty in ascribing to Mr. Gryce. "But are you sure she wore any? Did you notice that her hand was gloved when she came into the house?"

"No," I answered, frankly; "but so well-dressed a woman would not enter a house like this, without gloves."

"It was a warm night," some one suggested.

"I don't care. You will find her gloves as you have her hat; and you will find them with the fingers turned inside out, just as she drew them from her hand. So much I will concede to the warmth of the weather."

"Like these, for instance," broke in a quiet voice.

Startled, for a hand had appeared over my shoulder dangling a pair of gloves before my eyes, I cried out, somewhat too triumphantly I own:

"Yes, yes, just like those! Did you pick them up here? Are they hers?"

"You say that this is the way hers should look."

"And I repeat it."

"Then allow me to pay you my compliments. These *were* picked up here."

"But where?" I cried. "I thought I had looked this carpet well over."

He smiled, not at me but at the gloves, and the thought crossed me that he felt as if something more

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than the gloves was being turned inside out. I therefore pursed my mouth, and determined to stand more on my guard.

"It is of no consequence," I assured him; "all such matters will come out at the inquest."

Mr. Gryce nodded, and put the gloves back in his pocket. With them he seemed to pocket some of his geniality and patience.

"All these facts have been gone over before you came in," said he, which statement I beg to consider as open to doubt.

The doctor, who had hardly moved a muscle during all this colloquy, now rose from his kneeling position beside the girl's head.

"I shall have to ask the presence of another physician," said he. "Will you send for one from your office, Coroner Dahl?"

At which I stepped back and the Coroner stepped forward, saying, however, as he passed me:

"The inquest will be held day after to-morrow in my office. Hold yourself in readiness to be present. I regard you as one of my chief witnesses."

I assured him I would be on hand, and, obeying a gesture of his finger, retreated from the room; but I did not yet leave the house. A straight, slim man, with a very small head but a very bright eye, was leaning on the newel-post in the front hall, and when he saw me, started up so alertly I perceived that he had business with me, and so waited for him to speak.

"You are Miss Butterworth?" he inquired.

"I am, sir."

"And I am a reporter from the New York *World*. Will you allow me——"

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Why did he stop? I had merely looked at him. But he did stop, and that is saying considerable for a reporter from the New York *World*.

"I certainly am willing to tell you what I have told every one else," I interposed, considering it better not to make an enemy of so judicious a young man; and seeing him brighten up at this, I thereupon related all I considered desirable for the general public to know.

I was about passing on, when, reflecting that one good turn deserves another, I paused and asked him if he thought they would leave the dead girl in that house all night.

He answered that he did not think they would. That a telegram had been sent some time before to young Mr. Van Burnam, and that they were only awaiting his arrival to remove her.

"Do you mean Howard?" I asked.

"Is he the elder one?"

"No."

"It is the elder one they have summoned; the one who has been staying at Long Branch."

"How can they expect him then so soon?"

"Because he is in the city. It seems the old gentleman is going to return on the *New York*, and as she is due here to-day, Franklin Van Burnam has come to New York to meet him."

"Humph!" thought I, "lively times are in prospect," and for the first time I remembered my dinner and the orders which had not been given about some curtains which were to have been hung that day, and all the other reasons I had for being at home.

I must have shown my feelings, much as I pride myself upon my impassibility upon all occasions, for he

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immediately held out his arm, with an offer to pilot me through the crowd to my own house; and I was about to accept it when the door-bell rang so sharply that we involuntarily stopped.

"A fresh witness or a telegram for the Coroner," whispered the reporter in my ear.

I tried to look indifferent, and doubtless made out pretty well, for he added, after a sly look in my face:

"You do not care to stay any longer?"

I made no reply, but I think he was impressed by my dignity. Could he not see that it would be the height of ill-manners for me to rush out in the face of any one coming in?

An officer opened the door, and when we saw who stood there, I am sure that the reporter, as well as myself, was grateful that we listened to the dictates of politeness. It was young Mr. Van Burnam—Franklin; I mean the older and more respectable of the two sons.

He was flushed and agitated, and looked as if he would like to annihilate the crowd pushing him about on his own stoop. He gave an angry glance backward as he stepped in, and then I saw that a carriage covered with baggage stood on the other side of the street, and gathered that he had not returned to his father's house alone.

"What has happened? What does all this mean?" were the words he hurled at us as the door closed behind him and he found himself face to face with a half dozen strangers, among whom the reporter and myself stood conspicuous.

Mr. Gryce, coming suddenly from somewhere, was the one to answer him.

"A painful occurrence, sir. A young girl has been

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found here, dead, crushed under one of your parlor cabinets."

"A young girl!" he repeated. (Oh, how glad I was that I had been brought up never to transgress the principles of politeness.) "Here! in this shut-up house? What young girl? You mean old woman, do you not? the house-cleaner or some one——"

"No, Mr. Van Burnam, we mean what we say, though possibly I should call her a young lady. She is dressed quite fashionably."

"The ——" Really I cannot repeat in this public manner the word which Mr. Van Burnam used. I excused him at the time, but I will not perpetuate his forgetfulness in these pages.

"She is still lying as we found her," Mr. Gryce now proceeded in his quiet, almost fatherly way. "Will you not take a look at her? Perhaps you can tell us who she is?"

"I?" Mr. Van Burnam seemed quite shocked. "How should I know her! Some thief probably, killed while meddling with other people's property."

"Perhaps," quoth Mr. Gryce, laconically; at which I felt so angry, as tending to mislead my handsome young neighbor, that I irresistibly did what I had fully made up my mind not to do, that is, stepped into view and took a part in this conversation.

"How can you say that," I cried, "when her admittance here was due to a young man who let her in at midnight with a key, and then left her to eat out her heart in this great house all alone."

I have made sensations in my life, but never quite so marked a one as this. In an instant every eye was on me, with the exception of the detective's. His was on

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the figure crowning the newel-post, and bitterly severe his gaze was too, though it immediately grew wary as the young man started towards me and impetuously demanded:

"Who talks like that? Why, it 's Miss Butterworth. Madam, I fear I did not fully understand what you said."

Whereupon I repeated my words, this time very quietly but clearly, while Mr. Gryce continued to frown at the bronze figure he had taken into his confidence. When I had finished, Mr. Van Burnam's countenance had changed, so had his manner. He held himself as erect as before, but not with as much bravado. He showed haste and impatience also, but not the same kind of haste and not quite the same kind of impatience. The corners of Mr. Gryce's mouth betrayed that he noted this change, but he did not turn away from the newel-post.

"This is a remarkable circumstance which you have just told me," observed Mr. Van Burnam, with the first bow I had ever received from him. "I don't know what to think of it. But I still hold that it 's some thief. Killed, did you say? Really dead? Well, I 'd have given five hundred dollars not to have had it happen in this house."

He had been moving towards the parlor door, and he now entered it. Instantly Mr. Gryce was by his side.

"Are they going to close the door?" I whispered to the reporter, who was taking this all in equally with myself.

"I 'm afraid so," he muttered.

And they did. Mr. Gryce had evidently had enough of my interference, and was resolved to shut me out,

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but I heard one word and caught one glimpse of Mr. Van Burnam's face before the heavy door fell to. The word was: "Oh, so bad as that! How can any one recognize her——" And the glimpse—well, the glimpse proved to me that he was much more profoundly agitated than he wished to appear, and any extraordinary agitation on his part was certainly in direct contradiction to the very sentence he was at that moment uttering.

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IV.

SILAS VAN BURNAM.

"HOWEVER much I may be needed at home, I cannot reconcile it with my sense of duty to leave just yet," I confided to the reporter, with what I meant to be a proper show of reason and self-restraint; "Mr. Van Burnam may wish to ask me some questions."

"Of course, of course," acquiesced the other. "You are very right; always are very right, I should judge."

As I did not know what he meant by this, I frowned, always a wise thing to do in an uncertainty; that is, —if one wishes to maintain an air of independence and aversion to flattery.

"Will you not sit down?" he suggested. "There is a chair at the end of the hall."

But I had no need to sit. The front door-bell again rang, and simultaneously with its opening, the parlor door unclosed and Mr. Franklin Van Burnam appeared in the hall, just as Mr. Silas Van Burnam, his father, stepped into the vestibule.

"Father!" he remonstrated, with a troubled air; "could you not wait?"

The elder gentleman, who had evidently just been driven up from the steamer, wiped his forehead with an

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irascible air, that I will say I had noticed in him before and on much less provocation.

"Wait, with a yelling crowd screaming murder in my ear, and Isabella on one side of me calling for salts, and Caroline on the opposite seat getting that blue look about the mouth we have learned to dread so in a hot day like this? No, sir, when there is anything wrong going on I want to know it, and evidently there is something wrong going on here. What is it? Some of Howard's——"

But the son, seizing me by the hand and drawing me forward, put a quick stop to the old gentleman's sentence. "Miss Butterworth, father! Our next-door neighbor, you know."

"Ah! hum! ha! Miss Butterworth. How do you do, ma'am? What the —— is she doing here?" he grumbled, not so low but that I heard both the profanity and the none too complimentary allusion to myself.

"If you will come into the parlor, I will tell you," urged the son. "But what have you done with Isabella and Caroline? Left them in the carriage with that hooting mob about them?"

"I told the coachman to drive on. They are probably half-way around the block by this time."

"Then come in here. But don't allow yourself to be too much affected by what you will see. A sad accident has occurred here, and you must expect the sight of blood."

"Blood! Oh, I can stand that, if Howard——"

The rest was lost in the sound of the closing door.

And now, you will say, I ought to have gone. And you are right, but would you have gone yourself, espe-

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cially as the hall was full of people who did not belong there?

If you would, then condemn me for lingering just a few minutes longer.

The voices in the parlor were loud, but they presently subsided; and when the owner of the house came out again, he had a subdued look which was as great a contrast to his angry aspect on entering, as was the change I had observed in his son. He was so absorbed indeed that he did not notice me, though I stood directly in his way.

"Don't let Howard come," he was saying in a thick, low voice to his son. "Keep Howard away till we are sure——"

I am confident that his son pressed his arm at this point, for he stopped short and looked about him in a blind and dazed way.

"Oh!" he ejaculated, in a tone of great displeasure. "This is the woman who saw——"

"Miss Butterworth, father," the anxious voice of his son broke in. "Don't try to talk; such a sight is enough to unnerve any man."

"Yes, yes," blustered the old gentleman, evidently taking some hint from the other's tone or manner. "But where are the girls? They will be dead with terror, if we don't relieve their minds. They got the idea it was their brother Howard who was hurt; and so did I, but it 's only some wandering waif—some——"

It seemed as if he was not to be allowed to finish any of his sentences, for Franklin interrupted him at this point to ask him what he was going to do with the girls. Certainly he could not bring them in here.

"No," answered the father, but in the dreamy, in-

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consequential way of one whose thoughts were elsewhere. "I suppose I shall have to take them to some hotel."

Ah, an idea! I flushed as I realized the opportunity which had come to me and had to wait a moment not to speak with too much eagerness.

"Let me play the part of a neighbor," I prayed, "and accommodate the young ladies for the night. My house is near and quiet."

"But the trouble it will involve," protested Mr. Franklin.

"Is just what I need to allay my excitement," I responded. "I shall be glad to offer them rooms for the night. If they are equally glad to accept them——"

"They must be!" the old gentleman declared. "I can't go running round with them hunting up rooms to-night. Miss Butterworth is very good; go find the girls, Franklin; let me have them off my mind, at least."

The young man bowed. I bowed, and was slipping at last from my place by the stairs when, for the third time, I felt my dress twitched.

"Are you going to keep to that story?" a voice whispered in my ear. "About the young man and woman coming in the night, you know."

"Keep to it!" I whispered back, recognizing the scrub-woman, who had sidled up to me from some unknown quarter in the semi-darkness. "Why, it 's true. Why should n't I keep to it."

A chuckle, difficult to describe but full of meaning, shook the arm of the woman as she pressed close to my side.

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"Oh, you are a good one," she said. "I did n't know they made 'em so good!" And with another chuckle full of satisfaction and an odd sort of admiration I had certainly not earned, she slid away again into the darkness.

Certainly there was something in this woman's attitude towards this affair which merited attention.

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V.

"THIS IS NO ONE I KNOW."

I WELCOMED the Misses Van Burnam with just enough good-will to show that I had not been influenced by any unworthy motives in asking them to my house.

I gave them my guest-chamber, but I invited them to sit in my front room as long as there was anything interesting going on in the street. I knew they would like to look out, and as this chamber boasts of a bay with two windows, we could all be accommodated. From where I sat I could now and then hear what they said, and I considered this but just, for if the young woman who had suffered so untimely an end was in any way connected with them, it was certainly best that the fact should not lie concealed; and one of them, that is Isabella, is such a chatterbox.

Mr. Van Burnam and his son had returned next door, and so far as we could observe from our vantage-point, preparations were being made for the body's removal. As the crowd below, driven away by the policemen one minute, only to collect again in another, swayed and grumbled in a continual expectation that was as continually disappointed, I heard Caroline's voice rise in two or three short sentences.

"They can't find Howard, or he would have been

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here before now. Did you see her that time when we were coming out of Clark's? Fanny Preston did, and said she was pretty."

"No, I did n't get a glimpse——" A shout from the street below.

"I can't believe it," were the next words I heard, "but Franklin is awfully afraid——"

"Hush! or the ogress——" I am sure I heard her say ogress; but what followed was drowned in another loud murmur, and I caught nothing further till these sentences were uttered by the trembling and over-excited Caroline: "If it is she, pa will never be the same man again. To have her die in our house! O, there 's Howard now!"

The interruption came quick and sharp, and it was followed by a double cry and an anxious rustle, as the two girls sprang to their feet in their anxiety to attract their brother's attention or possibly to convey him some warning.

But I did not give much heed to them. My eyes were on the carriage in which Howard had arrived, and which, owing to the ambulance in front, had stopped on the other side of the way. I was anxious to see him descend that I might judge if his figure recalled that of the man I had seen cross the pavement the night before. But he did not descend. Just as his hand was on the carriage door, a half dozen men appeared on the adjoining stoop carrying a burden which they hastened to deposit in the ambulance. He sank back when he saw it, and when his face became visible again, it was so white it seemed to be the only face in the street, though fifty people stood about staring at the house, at the ambulance, and at him.

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Franklin Van Burnam had evidently come to the door with the rest; for Howard no sooner showed his face the second time than we saw the former dash down the steps and try to part the crowd in a vain attempt to reach his brother's side. Mr. Gryce was more successful. He had no difficulty in winning his way across the street, and presently I perceived him standing near the carriage exchanging a few words with its occupant. A moment later he drew back, and addressing the driver, jumped into the carriage with Howard, and was speedily driven off. The ambulance followed and some of the crowd, and as soon as a hack could be obtained, Mr. Van Burnam and his son took the same road, leaving us three women in a state of suspense, which as far as one of us was concerned, ended in a nervous attack that was not unlike heart failure. I allude, of course, to Caroline, and it took Isabella and myself a good half hour to bring her back to a normal condition, and when this was done, Isabella thought it incumbent upon her to go off into hysterics, which, being but a weak simulation of the other's state, I met with severity and cured with a frown. When both were in trim again I allowed myself one remark.

"One would think," said I, "that you knew the young woman who has fallen victim to her folly next door."

At which Isabella violently shook her head and Caroline observed:

"It is the excitement which has been too much for me. I am never strong, and this is such a dreadful home-welcoming. When will father and Franklin come back? It was very unkind of them to go off without one word of encouragement."

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"They probably did not consider the fate of this unknown woman a matter of any importance to you."

The Van Burnam girls were unlike in appearance and character, but they showed an equal embarrassment at this, casting down their eyes and behaving so strangely that I was driven to wonder, without any show of hysterics I am happy to say, what would be the upshot of this matter, and how far I would become involved in it before the truth came to light.

At dinner they displayed what I should call their best society manner. Seeing this, I assumed my society manner also. It is formed on a different pattern from theirs, but is fully as impressive, I judge.

A most formal meal was the result. My best china was in use, but I had added nothing to my usual course of viands. Indeed, I had abstracted something. An *entrée*, upon which my cook prides herself, was omitted. Was I going to allow these proud young misses to think I had exerted myself to please them? No; rather would I have them consider me niggardly and an enemy to good living; so the *entrée* was, as the French say, suppressed.

In the evening their father came in. He was looking very dejected, and half his bluster was gone. He held a telegram crushed in his hand, and he talked very rapidly. But he confided none of his secrets to me, and I was obliged to say good-night to these young ladies without knowing much more about the matter engrossing us than when I left their house in the afternoon.

But others were not as ignorant as myself. A dramatic and highly exciting scene had taken place that evening at the undertaker's to which the unknown's

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body had been removed, and as I have more than once heard it minutely described, I will endeavor to transcribe it here with all the impartiality of an outsider.

When Mr. Gryce entered the carriage in which Howard sat, he noted first, that the young man was frightened; and secondly, that he made no effort to hide it. He had heard almost nothing from the detective. He knew that there had been a hue and cry for him ever since noon, and that he was wanted to identify a young woman who had been found dead in his father's house, but beyond these facts he had been told little, and yet he seemed to have no curiosity nor did he venture to express any surprise. He merely accepted the situation and was troubled by it, showing no inclination to talk till very near the end of his destination, when he suddenly pulled himself together and ventured this question:

"How did she—the young woman as you call her—kill herself?"

The detective, who in his long career among criminals and suspected persons, had seen many men and encountered many conditions, roused at this query with much of his old spirit. Turning from the man rather than toward him, he allowed himself a slight shrug of the shoulders as he calmly replied:

"She was found under a heavy piece of furniture; the cabinet with the vases on it, which you must remember stood at the left of the mantel-piece. It had crushed her head and breast. Quite a remarkable means of death, don't you think? There has been but one occurrence like it in my long experience."

"I don't believe what you tell me," was the young man's astonishing reply. "You are trying to frighten

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me or to make game of me. No lady would make use of any such means of death as that."

"I did not say she was a lady," returned Mr. Gryce, scoring one in his mind against his unwary companion.

A quiver passed down the young man's side where he came in contact with the detective.

"No," he muttered; "but I gathered from what you said, she was no common person; or why," he flashed out in sudden heat, "do you require me to go with you to see her? Have I the name of associating with any persons of the sex who are not ladies?"

"Pardon me," said Mr. Gryce, in grim delight at the prospect he saw slowly unfolding before him of one of those complicated affairs in which minds like his unconsciously revel; "I meant no insinuations. We have requested you, as we have requested your father and brother, to accompany us to the undertaker's, because the identification of the corpse is a most important point, and every formality likely to insure it must be observed."

"And did not they—my father and brother, I mean—recognize her?"

"It would be difficult for any one to recognize her who was not well acquainted with her."

A horrified look crossed the features of Howard Van Burnam, which, if a part of his acting, showed him to have genius for his *rôle*. His head sank back on the cushions of the carriage, and for a moment he closed his eyes. When he opened them again, the carriage had stopped, and Mr. Gryce, who had not noticed his emotion, of course, was looking out of the window with his hand on tne handle of the door.

"Are we there already?" asked the young man,

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with a shudder. "I wish you had not considered it necessary for me to see her. I shall detect nothing familiar in her, I know."

Mr. Gryce bowed, repeated that it was a mere formality, and followed the young gentleman into the building and afterwards into the room where the dead body lay. A couple of doctors and one or two officials stood about, in whose faces the young man sought for something like encouragement before casting his eyes in the direction indicated by the detective. But there was little in any of these faces to calm him, and turning shortly away, he walked manfully across the room and took his stand by the detective.

"I am positive," he began, "that it is not my wife——" At this moment the cloth that covered the body was removed, and he gave a great start of relief. "I said so," he remarked, coldly. "This is no one I know."

His sigh was echoed in double chorus from the doorway. Glancing that way he encountered the faces of his father and elder brother, and moved towards them with a relieved air that made quite another man of him in appearance.

"I have had my say," he remarked. "Shall I wait outside till you have had yours?"

"We have already said all that we had to," Franklin returned. "We declared that we did not recognize this person."

"Of course, of course," assented the other. "I don't see why they should have expected us to know her. Some common suicide who thought the house empty— But how did she get in?"

"Don't you know?" said Mr. Gryce. "Can it be

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that I forgot to tell you? Why, she was let in at night by a young man of medium height"—his eye ran up and down the graceful figure of the young *élégant* before him as he spoke—" who left her inside and then went away. A young man who had a key——"

" A *key*? Franklin, I——"

Was it a look from Franklin which made him stop? It is possible, for he turned on his heel as he reached this point, and tossing his head with quite a gay air, exclaimed: " But it is of no consequence! The girl is a stranger, and we have satisfied, I believe, all the requirements of the law in saying so, and may now drop the matter. Are you going to the club, Franklin?"

" Yes, but——" Here the elder brother drew nearer and whispered something into the other's ear, who at that whisper turned again towards the place where the dead woman lay. Seeing this movement, his anxious father wiped the moisture from his forehead. Silas Van Burnam had been silent up to this moment and seemed inclined to continue so, but he watched his younger son with painful intentness.

" Nonsense!" broke from Howard's lips as his brother ceased his communication; but he took a step nearer the body, notwithstanding, and then another and another till he was at its side again.

The hands had not been injured, as we have said, and upon these his eyes now fell.

" They are like hers! O God! they are like hers!" he muttered, growing gloomy at once. " But where are the rings? There are no rings to be seen on these fingers, and she wore five, including her wedding-ring."

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"Is it of your wife you are speaking?" inquired Mr. Gryce, who had edged up close to his side.

The young man was caught unawares.

He flushed deeply, but answered up boldly and with great appearance of candor:

"Yes; my wife left Haddam yesterday to come to New York, and I have not seen her since. Naturally I have felt some doubts lest this unhappy victim should be she. But I do not recognize her clothing; I do not recognize her form; only the hands look familiar."

"And the hair?"

"Is of the same color as hers, but it 's a very ordinary color. I do not dare to say from anything I see that this is my wife."

"We will call you again after the doctor has finished his autopsy," said Mr. Gryce. "Perhaps you will hear from Mrs. Van Burnam before then."

But this intimation did not seem to bring comfort with it. Mr. Van Burnam walked away, white and sick, for which display of emotion there was certainly some cause, and rejoining his father tried to carry off the moment with the *aplomb* of a man of the world.

But that father's eye was fixed too steadily upon him; he faltered as he sat down, and finally spoke up, with feverish energy:

"If it is she, so help me, God, her death is a mystery to me! We have quarrelled more than once lately, and I have sometimes lost my patience with her, but she had no reason to wish for death, and I am ready to swear in defiance of those hands, which are certainly like hers, and the nameless something which Franklin calls a likeness, that it is a stranger who lies there, and that her death in our house is a coincidence."

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"Well, well, we will wait," was the detective's soothing reply. "Sit down in the room opposite there, and give me your orders for supper, and I will see that a good meal is served you."

The three gentlemen, seeing no way of refusing, followed the discreet official who preceded them, and the door of the doctor's room closed upon him and the inquiries he was about to make.

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VI.

NEW FACTS.

MR. VAN BURNAM and his sons had gone through the formality of a supper and were conversing in the haphazard way natural to men filled with a subject they dare not discuss, when the door opened and Mr. Gryce came in.

Advancing very calmly, he addressed himself to the father:

"I am sorry," said he, "to be obliged to inform you that this affair is much more serious than we anticipated. This young woman was dead before the shelves laden with *bric-à-brac* fell upon her. It is a case of murder; obviously so, or I should not presume to forestall the Coroner's jury in their verdict."

Murder! it is a word to shake the stoutest heart!

The older gentleman reeled as he half rose, and Franklin, his son, betrayed in his own way an almost equal amount of emotion. But Howard, shrugging his shoulders as if relieved of an immense weight, looked about with a cheerful air, and briskly cried:

"Then it is not the body of my wife you have there. No one would murder Louise. I shall go away and prove the truth of my words by hunting her up at once."

The detective opened the door, beckoned in the doc-

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tor, who whispered two or three words into Howard's ear.

They failed to awake the emotion he evidently expected. Howard looked surprised, but answered without any change of voice :

" Yes, Louise had such a scar; and if it is true that this woman is similarly marked, then it is a mere coincidence. Nothing will convince me that my wife has been the victim of murder."

" Had you not better take a look at the scar just mentioned ? "

" No. I am so sure of what I say that I will not even consider the possibility of my being mistaken. I have examined the clothing on this body you have shown me, and not one article of it came from my wife's wardrobe; nor would my wife go, as you have informed me this woman did, into a dark house at night with any other man than her husband."

"And so you absolutely refuse to acknowledge her."

" Most certainly."

The detective paused, glanced at the troubled faces of the other two gentlemen, faces that had not perceptibly altered during these declarations, and suggestively remarked:

" You have not asked by what means she was killed."

" And I don't care," shouted Howard.

"It was by very peculiar means, also new in my experience."

" It does not interest me," the other retorted.

Mr. Gryce turned to his father and brother.

" Does it interest *you* ? " he asked.

The old gentleman, ordinarily so testy and so per-

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emptory, silently nodded his head, while Franklin cried:

"Speak up quick. You detectives hesitate so over the disagreeables. Was she throttled or stabbed with a knife?"

"I have said the means were peculiar. She was stabbed, but not—with a knife."

I know Mr. Gryce well enough now to be sure that he did not glance towards Howard while saying this, and yet at the same time that he did not miss the quiver of a muscle on his part or the motion of an eye-lash. But Howard's assumed *sang froid* remained undisturbed and his countenance imperturbable.

"The wound was so small," the detective went on, "that it is a miracle it did not escape notice. It was made by the thrust of some very slender instrument through——"

"The heart?" put in Franklin.

"Of course, of course," assented the detective; "what other spot is vulnerable enough to cause death?"

"Is there any reason why we should not go?" demanded Howard, ignoring the extreme interest manifested by the other two, with a determination that showed great doggedness of character.

The detective ignored *him*.

"A quick stroke, a sure stroke, a fatal stroke. The girl never breathed after."

"But what of those things under which she lay crushed?"

"Ah, in them lies the mystery! Her assailant must have been as subtle as he was sure."

And still Howard showed no interest.

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"I wish to telegraph to Haddam," he declared, as no one answered the last remark. Haddam was the place where he and his wife had been spending the summer.

"We have already telegraphed there," observed Mr. Gryce. "Your wife has not yet returned."

"There are other places," defiantly insisted the other. "I can find her if you give me the opportunity."

Mr. Gryce bowed.

"I am to give orders, then, for this body to be removed to the Morgue."

It was an unexpected suggestion, and for an instant Howard showed that he had feelings with the best. But he quickly recovered himself, and avoiding the anxious glances of his father and brother, answered with offensive lightness :

"I have nothing to do with that. You must do as you think proper."

And Mr. Gryce felt that he had received a check, and did not know whether to admire the young man for his nerve or to execrate him for his brutality. That the woman whom he had thus carelessly dismissed to the ignominy of the public gaze was his wife, the detective did not doubt.

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VII.

MR. GRYCE DISCOVERS MISS AMELIA.

TO return to my own observations. I was almost as ignorant of what I wanted to know at ten o'clock on that memorable night as I was at five, but I was determined not to remain so. When the two Misses Van Burnam had retired to their room, I slipped away to the neighboring house and boldly rang the bell. I had observed Mr. Gryce enter it a few minutes before, and I was resolved to have some talk with him.

The hall-lamp was lit, and we could discern each other's faces as he opened the door. Mine may have been a study, but I am sure his was. He had not expected to be confronted by an elderly lady at that hour of night.

"Well!" he dryly ejaculated, "I am sensible of the honor, Miss Butterworth." But he did not ask me in.

"I expected no less," said I. "I saw you come in, and I followed as soon after as I could. I have something to say to you."

He admitted me then and carefully closed the door. Feeling free to be myself, I threw off the veil I had tied under my chin and confronted him with what I call the true spirit.

"Mr. Gryce," I began, "let us make an exchange of civilities. Tell me what you have done with How-

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ard Van Burnam, and I will tell you what I have observed in the course of this afternoon's investigation."

This aged detective is used to women, I have no doubt, but he is not used to *me*. I saw it by the way he turned over and over the spectacles he held in his hand. I made an effort to help him out.

"I have noted something to-day which I think has escaped *you*. It is so slight a clue that most women would not speak of it. But being interested in the case, I will mention it, if in return you will acquaint me with what will appear in the papers to-morrow."

He seemed to like it. He peered through his glasses and at them with the smile of a discoverer. "I am your very humble servant," he declared; and I felt as if my father's daughter had received her first recognition.

But he did not overwhelm me with confidences. O, no, he is very sly, this old and well-seasoned detective; and while appearing to be very communicative, really parted with but little information. He said enough, however, for me to gather that matters looked grim for Howard, and if this was so, it must have become apparent that the death they were investigating was neither an accident nor a suicide.

I hinted as much, and he, for his own ends no doubt, admitted at last that a wound had been found on the young woman which could not have been inflicted by herself; at which I felt such increased interest in this remarkable murder that I must have made some foolish display of it, for the wary old gentleman chuckled and ogled his spectacles quite lovingly before shutting them up and putting them into his pocket.

"And now what have you to tell me?" he inquired, sliding softly between me and the parlor door.

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"Nothing but this. Question that queer-acting house-cleaner closely. She has something to tell which it is your business to know."

I think he was disappointed. He looked as if he regretted the spectacles he had pocketed, and when he spoke there was an edge to his tone I had not noticed in it before.

"Do you know what that something is?" he asked.

"No, or I should tell you myself."

"And what makes you think she is hiding anything from us?"

"Her manner. Did you not notice her manner?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It conveyed much to me," I insisted. "If I were a detective I would have the secret out of that woman or die in the attempt."

He laughed; this sly, old, almost decrepit man laughed outright. Then he looked severely at his old friend on the newel-post, and drawing himself up with some show of dignity, made this remark:

"It is my very good fortune to have made your acquaintance, Miss Butterworth. You and I ought to be able to work out this case in a way that will be satisfactory to all parties."

He meant it for sarcasm, but I took it quite seriously, that is to all appearance. I am as sly as he, and though not quite as old—now *I* am sarcastic—have some of his wits, if but little of his experience.

"Then let us to work," said I. "You have your theories about this murder, and I have mine; let us see how they compare."

If the image he had under his eye had not been made of bronze, I am sure it would have become petrified by

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the look he now gave it. What to me seemed but the natural proposition of an energetic woman with a special genius for his particular calling, evidently struck him as audacity of the grossest kind. But he confined his display of astonishment to the figure he was eying, and returned me nothing but this most gentlemanly retort:

"I am sure I am obliged to you, madam, and possibly I may be willing to consider your very thoughtful proposition later, but now I am busy, very busy, and if you will await my presence in your house for a half hour——"

"Why not let me wait here," I interposed. "The atmosphere of the place may sharpen my faculties. I already feel that another sharp look into that parlor would lead to the forming of some valuable theory."

"You —" Well, he did not say what I was, or rather, what the image he was apostrophizing, was. But he must have meant to utter a compliment of no common order.

The prim courtesy I made in acknowledgment of his good intention satisfied him that I had understood him fully; and changing his whole manner to one more in accordance with business, he observed after a moment's reflection:

"You came to a conclusion this afternoon, Miss Butterworth, for which I should like some explanation. In investigating the hat which had been drawn from under the murdered girl's remains, you made the remark that it had been worn but once. I had already come to the same conclusion, but by other means, doubtless. Will you tell me what it was that gave point to your assertion?"

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"There was but one prick of a hat-pin in it," I observed. "If you have been in the habit of looking into young women's hats, you will appreciate the force of my remark."

"The deuce!" was his certainly uncalled for exclamation. "Women's eyes for women's matters! I am greatly indebted to you, ma'am. You have solved a very important problem for us. A hat-pin! humph!" he muttered to himself. "The devil in a man is not easily balked; even such an innocent article as that can be made to serve, when all other means are lacking."

It is perhaps a proof that Mr. Gryce is getting old, that he allowed these words to escape him. But having once given vent to them, he made no effort to retract them, but proceeded to take me into his confidence so far as to explain:

"The woman who was killed in that room owed her death to the stab of a thin, long pin. We had not thought of a hat-pin, but upon your mentioning it, I am ready to accept it as the instrument of death. There was no pin to be seen in the hat when you looked at it?"

"None. I examined it most carefully."

He shook his head and seemed to be meditating. As I had plenty of time I waited, expecting him to speak again. My patience seemed to impress him. Alternately raising and lowering his hands like one in the act of weighing something, he soon addressed me again, this time in a tone of banter:

"This pin—if pin it was—was found broken in the wound. We have been searching for the end that was left in the murderer's hand, and we have not found it. It is not on the floors of the parlors nor in this hallway.

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What do you think the ingenious user of such an instrument would do with it?"

This was said, I am now sure, out of a spirit of sarcasm. He was amusing himself with me, but I did not realize it then. I was too full of my subject.

"He would not have carried it away," I reasoned shortly, "at least not far. He did not throw it aside on reaching the street, for I watched his movements so closely that I would have observed him had he done this. It is in the house then, and presumably in the parlor, even if you do not find it on the floor."

"Would you like to look for it?" he impressively asked. I had no means of knowing at that time that when he was impressive he was his least candid and trustworthy self.

"Would I," I repeated; and being spare in figure and much more active in my movements that one would suppose from my age and dignified deportment, I ducked under his arms and was in Mr. Van Burnam's parlor before he had recovered from his surprise.

That a man like him could look foolish I would not have you for a moment suppose. But he did not look very well satisfied, and I had a chance to throw more than one glance around me before he found his tongue again.

"An unfair advantage, ma'am; an unfair advantage! I am old and I am rheumatic; you are young and sound as a nut. I acknowledge my folly in endeavoring to compete with you and must make the best of the situation. And now, madam, where is that pin?"

It was lightly said, but for all that I saw that my opportunity had come. If I could find this instrument of murder, what might I not expect from his gratitude.

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Nerving myself for the task thus set me, I peered hither and thither, taking in every article in the room before I made a step forward. There had been some attempt to rectify its disorder. The broken pieces of china had been lifted and laid carefully away on newspapers upon the shelves from which they had fallen. The cabinet stood upright in its place, and the clock which had tumbled face upward, had been placed upon the mantel shelf in the same position. The carpet was therefore free, save for the stains which told such a woful story of past tragedy and crime.

"You have moved the tables and searched behind the sofas," I suggested.

"Not an inch of the floor has escaped our attention, madam."

My eyes fell on the register, which my skirts half covered. It was closed; I stooped and opened it. A square box of tin was visible below, at the bottom of which I perceived the round head of a broken hat-pin.

Never in my life had I felt as I did at that minute. Rising up, I pointed at the register and let some of my triumph become apparent; but not all, for I was by no means sure at that moment, nor am I by any means sure now, that he had not made the discovery before I did and was simply testing my pretensions.

However that may be, he came forward quickly and after some little effort drew out the broken pin and examined it curiously.

"I should say that this is what we want," he declared, and from that moment on showed me a suitable deference.

"I account for its being there in this way," I argued. "The room was dark: for whether he lighted

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it or not to commit his crime, he certainly did not leave it lighted long. Coming out, his foot came in contact with the iron of the register and he was struck by a sudden thought. He had not dared to leave the head of the pin lying on the floor, for he hoped that he had covered up his crime by pulling the heavy cabinet over upon his victim; nor did he wish to carry away such a memento of his cruel deed. So he dropped it down the register, where he doubtless expected it would fall into the furnace pipes out of sight. But the tin box retained it. Is not that plausible, sir?"

"I could not have reasoned better myself, madam. We shall have you on the force, yet."

But at the familiarity shown by this suggestion, I bridled angrily. "I am Miss Butterworth," was my sharp retort, "and any interest I may take in this matter is due to my sense of justice."

Seeing that he had offended me, the astute detective turned the conversation back to business.

"By the way," said he, "your woman's knowledge can help me out at another point. If you are not afraid to remain in this room alone for a moment, I will bring an article in regard to which I should like your opinion."

I assured him I was not in the least bit afraid, at which he made me another of his anomalous bows and passed into the adjoining parlor. He did not stop there. Opening the sliding-doors communicating with the dining-room beyond, he disappeared in the latter room, shutting the doors behind him. Being now alone for a moment on the scene of crime, I crossed over to the mantel-shelf, and lifted the clock that lay there.

Why I did this I scarcely know. I am naturally very orderly (some people call me precise) and it prob-

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ably fretted me to see so valuable an object out of its natural position. However that was, I lifted it up and set it upright, when to my amazement it began to tick. Had the hands not stood as they did when my eyes first fell on the clock lying face up on the floor at the dead girl's side, I should have thought the works had been started since that time by Mr. Gryce or some other officious person. But they pointed now as then to a few minutes before five and the only conclusion I could arrive at was, that the clock had been in running order when it fell, startling as this fact appeared in a house which had not been inhabited for months.

But if it had been in running order and was only stopped by its fall upon the floor, why did the hands point at five instead of twelve which was the hour at which the accident was supposed to have happened? Here was matter for thought, and that I might be undisturbed in my use of it, I hastened to lay the clock down again, even taking the precaution to restore the hands to the exact position they had occupied before I had started up the works. If Mr. Gryce did not know their secret, why so much the worse for Mr. Gryce.

I was back in my old place by the register before the folding-doors unclosed again. I was conscious of a slight flush on my cheek, so I took from my pocket that perplexing grocer-bill and was laboriously going down its long line of figures, when Mr. Gryce reappeared.

He had to my surprise a woman's hat in his hand.

"Well!" thought I, "what does this mean!"

It was an elegant specimen of millinery, and was in the latest style. It had ribbons and flowers and bird wings upon it, and presented, as it was turned about by Mr. Gryce's deft hand, an appearance which some

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might have called charming, but to me was simply grotesque and absurd.

"Is that a last spring's hat?" he inquired.

"I don't know, but I should say it had come fresh from the milliner's."

"I found it lying with a pair of gloves tucked inside it on an otherwise empty shelf in the dining-room closet. It struck me as looking too new for a discarded hat of either of the Misses Van Burnam. What do you think?"

"Let me take it," said I.

"O, it 's been worn," he smiled, "several times. And the hat-pin is in it, too."

"There is something else I wish to see."

He handed it over.

"I think it belongs to one of them," I declared. "It was made by La Mole of Fifth Avenue, whose prices are simply—wicked."

"But the young ladies have been gone—let me see—five months. Could this have been bought before then?"

"Possibly, for this is an imported hat. But why should it have been left lying about in that careless way? It cost twenty dollars, if not thirty, and if for any reason its owner decided not to take it with her, why did n't she pack it away properly? I have no patience with the modern girl; she is made up of recklessness and extravagance."

"I hear that the young ladies are staying with you," was his suggestive remark.

"They are."

"Then you can make some inquiries about this hat; also about the gloves, which are an ordinary street pair."

"Of what color?"

"Grey; they are quite fresh, size six."

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"Very well; I will ask the young ladies about them."

"This third room is used as a dining-room, and the closet where I found them is one in which glass is kept. The presence of this hat there is a mystery, but I presume the Misses Van Burnam can solve it. At all events, it is very improbable that it has anything to do with the crime which has been committed here."

"Very," I coincided.

"So improbable," he went on, "that on second thoughts I advise you not to disturb the young ladies with questions concerning it unless further reasons for doing so become apparent."

"Very well," I returned. But I was not deceived by his second thoughts.

As he was holding open the parlor door before me in a very significant way, I tied my veil under my chin, and was about to leave when he stopped me.

"I have another favor to ask," said he, and this time with his most benignant smile. "Miss Butterworth, do you object to sitting up for a few nights till twelve o'clock?"

"Not at all," I returned, "if there is any good reason for it."

"At twelve o'clock to-night a gentleman will enter this house. If you will note him from your window I will be obliged."

"To see whether he is the same one I saw last night? Certainly I will take a look, but——"

"To-morrow night," he went on, imperturbably, "the test will be repeated, and I should like to have you take another look; without prejudice, madam; remember, without prejudice."

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"I have no prejudices——" I began.

"The test may not be concluded in two nights," he proceeded, without any notice of my words. "So do not be in haste to spot your man, as the vulgar expression is. And now good-night—we shall meet again to-morrow."

"Wait!" I called peremptorily, for he was on the point of closing the door. "I saw the man but faintly; it is an impression only that I received. I would not wish a man to hang through any identification I could make."

"No man hangs on simple identification. We shall have to prove the crime, madam, but identification is important; even such as you can make."

There was no more to be said; I uttered a calm good-night and hastened away. By a judicious use of my opportunities I had become much less ignorant on the all-important topic than when I entered the house.

It was half past eleven when I returned home, a late hour for me to enter my respectable front door alone. But circumstances had warranted my escapade, and it was with quite an easy conscience and a cheerful sense of accomplishment that I went up to my room and prepared to sit out the half hour before midnight.

I am a comfortable sort of person when alone, and found no difficulty in passing this time profitably. Being very orderly, as you must have remarked, I have everything at hand for making myself a cup of tea at any time of day or night; so feeling some need of refreshment, I set out the little table I reserve for such purposes and made the tea and sat down to sip it.

While doing so, I turned over the subject occupying my mind, and endeavored to reconcile the story told by

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the clock with my preconceived theory of this murder; but no reconcilement was possible. The woman had been killed at twelve, and the clock had fallen at five. How could the two be made to agree, and which, since agreement was impossible, should be made to give way, the theory or the testimony of the clock? Both seemed incontrovertible, and yet one must be false. Which?

I was inclined to think that the trouble lay with the clock; that I had been deceived in my conclusions, and that it was not running at the time of the crime. Mr. Gryce may have ordered it wound, and then have had it laid on its back to prevent the hands from shifting past the point where they had stood at the time of the crime's discovery. It was an unexplainable act, but a possible one; while to suppose that it was going when the shelves fell, stretched improbability to the utmost, there having been, so far as we could learn, no one in the house for months sufficiently dexterous to set so valuable a timepiece; for who could imagine the scrub-woman engaging in a task requiring such delicate manipulation.

No! some meddlesome official had amused himself by starting up the works, and the clue I had thought so important would probably prove valueless.

There was humiliation in the thought, and it was a relief to me to hear an approaching carriage just as the clock on my mantel struck twelve. Springing from my chair, I put out my light and flew to the window.

The coach drew up and stopped next door. I saw a gentleman descend and step briskly across the pavement to the neighboring stoop. The figure he presented was not that of the man I had seen enter the night before.

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VIII.

THE MISSES VAN BURNAM.

LATE as it was when I retired, I was up betimes in the morning—as soon, in fact, as the papers were distributed. The *Tribune* lay on the stoop. Eagerly I seized it; eagerly I read it. From its head-lines you may judge what it had to say about this murder:

A STARTLING DISCOVERY IN THE VAN BURNAM MANSION IN GRAMERCY PARK.

A YOUNG GIRL FOUND THERE, LYING DEAD UNDER AN OVERTURNED CABINET.

EVIDENCES THAT SHE WAS MURDERED BEFORE IT WAS PULLED DOWN UPON HER.

THOUGHT BY SOME TO BE MRS. HOWARD VAN BURNAM.

A FEARFUL CRIME INVOLVED IN AN IMPENETRABLE MYSTERY.

WHAT MR. VAN BURNAM SAYS ABOUT IT: HE DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE WOMAN AS HIS WIFE.

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So, so, it was his wife they were talking about. I had not expected that. Well! well! no wonder the girls looked startled and concerned. And I paused to recall what I had heard about Howard Van Burnam's marriage.

It had not been a fortunate one. His chosen bride was pretty enough, but she had not been bred in the ways of fashionable society, and the other members of the family had never recognized her. The father, especially, had cut his son dead since his marriage, and had even gone so far as to threaten to dissolve the partnership in which they were all involved. Worse than this, there had been rumors of a disagreement between Howard and his wife. They were not always on good terms, and opinions differed as to which was most in fault. So much for what I knew of these two mentioned parties.

Reading the article at length, I learned that Mrs. Van Burnam was missing; that she had left Haddam for New York the day before her husband, and had not since been heard from. Howard was confident, however, that the publicity given to her disappearance by the papers would bring immediate news of her.

The effect of the whole article was to raise grave doubts as to the candor of Mr. Van Burnam's assertions, and I am told that in some of the less scrupulous papers these doubts were not only expressed, but actual surmises ventured upon as to the identity between the person whom I had seen enter the house with the young girl. As for my own name, it was blazoned forth in anything but a gratifying manner. I was spoken of in one paper—a kind friend told me this—as

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the prying Miss Amelia. As if my prying had not given the police their only clue to the identification of the criminal.

The New York *World* was the only paper that treated me with any consideration. That young man with the small head and beady eyes was not awed by me for nothing. He mentioned me as the clever Miss Butterworth whose testimony is likely to be of so much value in this very interesting case.

It was the *World* I handed the Misses Van Burnam when they came downstairs to breakfast. It did justice to me and not too much injustice to him. They read it together, their two heads plunged deeply into the paper so that I could not watch their faces. But I could see the sheet shake, and I noticed that their social veneer was not as yet laid on so thickly that they could hide their real terror and heart-ache when they finally confronted me again.

"Did you read—have you seen this horrible account?" quavered Caroline, as she met my eye.

"Yes, and I now understand why you felt such anxiety yesterday. Did you know your sister-in-law, and do you think she could have been beguiled into your father's house in that way?"

It was Isabella who answered.

"We never have seen her and know little of her, but there is no telling what such an uncultivated person as she might do. But that our good brother Howard ever went in there with her is a lie, is n't it, Caroline?—a base and malicious lie?"

"Of course it is, of course, of course. You don't think the man you saw was Howard, do you, dear Miss Butterworth?"

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Dear! O dear!

"I am not acquainted with your brother," I returned. "I have never seen him but a few times in my life. You know he has not been a very frequent visitor at your father's house lately."

They looked at me wistfully, *so* wistfully.

"Say it was not Howard," whispered Caroline, stealing up a little nearer to my side.

"And we will never forget it," murmured Isabella, in what I am obliged to say was not her society manner.

"I hope to be able to say it," was my short rejoinder, made difficult by the prejudices I had formed. "When I see your brother, I may be able to decide at a glance that the person I saw entering your house was not he."

"Yes, oh, yes. Do you hear that, Isabella? Miss Butterworth will save Howard yet. O you dear old soul. I could almost love you!"

This was not agreeable to me. I a dear old soul! A term to be applied to a butter-woman not to a Butterworth. I drew back and their sentimentalities came to an end. I hope their brother Howard is not the guilty man the papers make him out to be, but if he is, the Misses Van Burnam's fine phrase, *We could almost love you*, will not deter me from being honest in the matter.

Mr. Gryce called early, and I was glad to be able to tell him that the gentleman who visited him the night before did not recall the impression made upon me by the other. He received the communication quietly, and from his manner I judged that it was more or less expected. But who can be a correct judge of a detective's manner, especially one so foxy and imperturbable

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as this one? I longed to ask who his visitor was, but I did not dare, or rather—to be candid in little things that you may believe me in great—I was confident he would not tell me, so I would not compromise my dignity by a useless question.

He went after a five minutes' stay, and I was about to turn my attention to household affairs, when Franklin came in.

His sisters jumped like puppets to meet him.

"O," they cried, for once thinking and speaking alike, "have you found her?"

His silence was so eloquent that he did not need to shake his head.

"But you will before the day is out?" protested Caroline.

"It is too early yet," added Isabella.

"I never thought I would be glad to see that woman under any circumstances," continued the former, "but I believe now that if I saw her coming up the street on Howard's arm, I should be happy enough to rush out and—and——"

"Give her a hug," finished the more impetuous Isabella.

It was not what Caroline meant to say, but she accepted the emendation, with just the slightest air of deprecation. They were both evidently much attached to Howard, and ready in his trouble to forget and forgive everything. I began to like them again.

"Have you read the horrid papers?" and "How is papa this morning?" and "What shall we do to save Howard?" now flew in rapid questions from their lips; and feeling that it was but natural they should have their little say, I sat down in my most uncomfortable

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chair and waited for these first ebullitions to exhaust themselves.

Instantly Mr. Van Burnam took them by the arm, and led them away to a distant sofa.

"Are you happy here?" he asked, in what he meant for a very confidential tone. But I can hear as readily as a deaf person anything which is not meant for my ears.

"O she 's kind enough," whispered Caroline, "but so stingy. Do take us where we can get something to eat."

"She puts all her money into china! Such plates! —*and so little on them!*"

At these expressions, uttered with all the emphasis a whisper will allow, I just hugged myself in my quiet corner. The dear, giddy things! But they should see, they should see.

"I fear"—it was Mr. Van Burnam who now spoke— "I shall have to take my sisters from under your kind care to-day. Their father needs them, and has, I believe, already engaged rooms for them at the Plaza."

"I am sorry," I replied, "but surely they will not leave till they have had another meal with me. Postpone your departure, young ladies, till after luncheon, and you will greatly oblige me. We may never meet so agreeably again."

They fidgeted (which I had expected), and cast secret looks of almost comic appeal at their brother, but he pretended not to see them, being disposed for some reason to grant my request. Taking advantage of the momentary hesitation that ensued, I made them all three my most conciliatory bow, and said as I retreated behind the portière:

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"I shall give my orders for luncheon now. Meanwhile, I hope the young ladies will feel perfectly free in my house. All that I have is at their command." And was gone before they could protest.

When I next saw them, they were upstairs in my front room. They were seated together in the window and looked miserable enough to have a little diversion. Going to my closet, I brought out a band-box. It contained my best bonnet.

"Young ladies, what do you think of this?" I inquired, taking the bonnet out and carefully placing it on my head.

I myself consider it a very becoming article of headgear, but their eyebrows went up in a scarcely complimentary fashion.

"You don't like it?" I remarked. "Well, I think a great deal of young girls' taste; I shall send it back to Madame More's to-morrow."

"I don't think much of Madame More," observed Isabella, "and after Paris——"

"Do you like La Mole better?" I inquired, bobbing my head to and fro before the mirror, the better to conceal my interest in the venture I was making.

"I don't like any of them but D'Aubigny," returned Isabella. "She charges twice what La Mole does——"

Twice! What are these girls' purses made of, or rather their father's!

"But she has the *chic* we are accustomed to see in French millinery. I shall *never* go anywhere else."

"We were recommended to her in Paris," put in Caroline, more languidly. Her interest was only half engaged by this frivolous topic.

"But did you never have one of La Mole's hats?" I

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pursued, taking down a hand-mirror, ostensibly to get the effect of my bonnet in the back, but really to hide my interest in their unconscious faces.

"Never!" retorted Isabella. "I would not patronize the thing."

"Nor you?" I urged, carelessly, turning towards Caroline.

"No; I have never been inside her shop."

"Then whose is——" I began and stopped. A detective doing the work I was, would not give away the object of his questions so recklessly.

"Then who is," I corrected, "the best person after D'Aubigny? I never can pay *her* prices. I should think it wicked."

"O don't ask us," protested Isabella. "We have never made a study of the best bonnet-maker. At present we wear hats."

And having thus thrown their youth in my face, they turned away to the window again, not realizing that the middle-aged lady they regarded with such disdain had just succeeded in making them dance to her music most successfully.

The luncheon I ordered was elaborate, for I was determined that the Misses Van Burnam should see that I knew how to serve a fine meal, and that my plates were not always better than my viands.

I had invited in a couple of other guests so that I should not seem to have put myself out for two young girls, and as they were quiet people like myself, the meal passed most decorously. When it was finished, the Misses Caroline and Isabella had lost some of their consequential airs, and I really think the deference they have since showed me is due more to the surprise

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they felt at the perfection of this dainty luncheon, than to any considerate appreciation of my character and abilities.

They left at three o'clock, still without news of Mrs. Van Burnam; and being positive by this time that the shadows were thickening about this family, I saw them depart with some regret and a positive feeling of commiseration. Had they been reared to a proper reverence for their elders, how much more easy it would have been to see earnestness in Caroline and affectionate impulses in Isabella.

The evening papers added but little to my knowledge. Great disclosures were promised, but no hint given of their nature. The body at the Morgue had not been identified by any of the hundreds who had viewed it, and Howard still refused to acknowledge it as that of his wife. The morrow was awaited with anxiety.

So much for the public press!

At twelve o'clock at night, I was again seated in my window. The house next door had been lighted since ten, and I was in momentary expectation of its nocturnal visitor. He came promptly at the hour set, alighted from the carriage with a bound, shut the carriage-door with a slam, and crossed the pavement with cheerful celerity. His figure was not so positively like, nor yet so positively unlike, that of the supposed murderer that I could definitely say, "This is he," or, "This is not he," and I went to bed puzzled, and not a little burdened by a sense of the responsibility imposed upon me in this matter.

And so passed the day between the murder and the inquest.

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IX.

DEVELOPMENTS.

MR. GRYCE called about nine o'clock next morning.

"Well," said he, "what about the visitor who came to see me last night?"

"Like and unlike," I answered. "Nothing could induce me to say he is the man we want, and yet I would not dare to swear he was not."

"You are in doubt, then, concerning him?"

"I am."

Mr. Gryce bowed, reminded me of the inquest, and left. Nothing was said about the hat.

At ten o'clock I prepared to go to the place designated by him. I had never attended an inquest in my life, and felt a little flurried in consequence, but by the time I had tied the strings of my bonnet (the despised bonnet, which, by the way, I did not return to More's), I had conquered this weakness, and acquired a demeanor more in keeping with my very important position as chief witness in a serious police investigation.

I had sent for a carriage to take me, and I rode away from my house amid the shouts of some half dozen boys collected on the curb-stone. But I did not allow myself to feel dashed by this publicity. On the contrary, I held my head as erect as nature intended, and my

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back kept the line my good health warrants. The path of duty has its thorny passages, but it is for strong minds like mine to ignore them.

Promptly at ten o'clock I entered the room reserved for the inquest, and was ushered to the seat appointed me. Though never a self-conscious woman, I could not but be aware of the many eyes that followed me, and endeavored so to demean myself that there should be no question as to my respectable standing in the community. This I considered due to the memory of my father, who was very much in my thoughts that day.

The Coroner was already in his seat when I entered, and though I did not perceive the good face of Mr. Gryce anywhere in his vicinity, I had no doubt he was within ear-shot. Of the other people I took small note, save of the honest scrub-woman, of whose red face and anxious eyes under a presposterous bonnet (which did *not come* from La Mole's), I caught vague glimpses as the crowd between us surged to and fro.

None of the Van Burnams were visible, but this did not necessarily mean that they were absent. Indeed, I was very sure, from certain indications, that more than one member of the family could be seen in the small room connecting with the large one in which we witnesses sat with the jury.

The policeman, Carroll, was the first man to talk. He told of my stopping him on his beat and of his entrance into Mr. Van Burnam's house with the scrub-woman. He gave the details of his discovery of the dead woman's body on the parlor floor, and insisted that no one—here he looked very hard at me—had been allowed to touch the body till relief had come to him from Headquarters.

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Mrs. Boppert, the scrub-woman, followed him; and if she was watched by no one else in that room, she was watched by me. Her manner before the Coroner was no more satisfactory, according to my notion, than it had been in Mr. Van Burnam's parlor. She gave a very perceptible start when they spoke her name, and looked quite scared when the Bible was held out towards her. But she took the oath notwithstanding, and with her testimony the inquiry began in earnest.

"What is your name?" asked the Coroner.

As this was something she could not help knowing, she uttered the necessary words glibly, though in a way that showed she resented his impertinence in asking her what he already knew.

"Where do you live? And what do you do for a living?" rapidly followed.

She replied that she was a scrub-woman and cleaned people's houses, and having said this, she assumed a very dogged air, which I thought strange enough to raise a question in the minds of those who watched her. But no one else seemed to regard it as anything but the embarrassment of ignorance.

"How long have you known the Van Burnam family?" the Coroner went on.

"Two years, sir, come next Christmas."

"Have you often done work for them?"

"I clean the house twice a year, fall and spring."

"Why were you at this house two days ago?"

"To scrub the kitchen floors, sir, and put the pantries in order."

"Had you received notice to do so?"

"Yes, sir, through Mr. Franklin Van Burnam."

"And was that the first day of your work there?"

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"No, sir; I had been there all the day before."

"You don't speak loud enough," objected the Coroner; "remember that every one in this room wants to hear you."

She looked up, and with a frightened air surveyed the crowd about her. Publicity evidently made her most uncomfortable, and her voice sank rather than rose.

"Where did you get the key of the house, and by what door did you enter?"

"I went in at the basement, sir, and I got the key at Mr. Van Burnam's agent in Dey Street. I had to go for it; sometimes they send it to me; but not this time."

"And now relate your meeting with the policeman on Wednesday morning, in front of Mr. Van Burnam's house."

She tried to tell her story, but she made awkward work of it, and they had to ply her with questions to get at the smallest fact. But finally she managed to repeat what we already knew, how she went with the policeman into the house, and how they stumbled upon the dead woman in the parlor.

Further than this they did not question her, and I, Amelia Butterworth, had to sit in silence and see her go back to her seat, redder than before, but with a strangely satisfied air that told me she had escaped more easily than she had expected. And yet Mr. Gryce had been warned that she knew more than appeared, and by one in whom he seemed to have placed some confidence!

The doctor was called next. His testimony was most important, and contained a surprise for me and

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more than one surprise for the others. After a short preliminary examination, he was requested to state how long the woman had been dead when he was called in to examine her.

"More than twelve and less than eighteen hours," was his quiet reply.

"Had the rigor mortis set in?"

"No; but it began very soon after."

"Did you examine the wounds made by the falling shelves and the vases that tumbled with them?"

"I did."

"Will you describe them?"

He did so.

"And now"—there was a pause in the Coroner's question which roused us all to its importance, "which of these many serious wounds was in your opinion the cause of her death?"

The witness was accustomed to such scenes, and was perfectly at home in them. Surveying the Coroner with a respectful air, he turned slowly towards the jury and answered in a slow and impressive manner:

"I feel ready to declare, sirs, that none of them did. She was not killed by the falling of the cabinet upon her."

"Not killed by the falling shelves! Why not? Were they not sufficiently heavy, or did they not strike her in a vital place?"

"They were heavy enough, and they struck her in a way to kill her if she had not been already dead when they fell upon her. As it was, they simply bruised a body from which life had already departed."

As this was putting it very plainly, many of the crowd who had not been acquainted with these facts

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previously, showed their interest in a very unmistakable manner; but the Coroner, ignoring these symptoms of growing excitement, hastened to say:

"This is a very serious statement you are making, doctor. If she did not die from the wounds inflicted by the objects which fell upon her, from what cause did she die? Can you say that her death was a natural one, and that the falling of the shelves was merely an unhappy accident following it?"

"No, sir; her death was not natural. She was killed, but not by the falling cabinet."

"Killed, and not by the cabinet? How then? Was there any other wound upon her which you regard as mortal?"

"Yes, sir. Suspecting that she had perished from other means than appeared, I made a most rigid examination of her body, when I discovered under the hair in the nape of the neck, a minute spot, which, upon probing, I found to be the end of a small, thin point of steel. It had been thrust by a careful hand into the most vulnerable part of the body, and death must have ensued at once."

This was too much for certain excitable persons present, and a momentary disturbance arose, which, however, was nothing to that in my own breast.

So! so! it was her neck that had been pierced, and not her heart. Mr. Gryce had allowed us to think it was the latter, but it was not this fact which stupefied me, but the skill and diabolical coolness of the man who had inflicted this death-thrust.

After order had been restored, which I will say was very soon, the Coroner, with an added gravity of tone, went on with his questions:

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"Did you recognize this bit of steel as belonging to any instrument in the medical profession?"

"No; it was of too untempered steel to have been manufactured for any thrusting or cutting purposes. It was of the commonest kind, and had broken short off in the wound. It was the end only that I found."

"Have you this end with you,—the point, I mean, which you found imbedded at the base of the dead woman's brain?"

"I have, sir"; and he handed it over to the jury. As they passed it along, the Coroner remarked:

"Later we will show you the remaining portion of this instrument of death," which did not tend to allay the general excitement. Seeing this, the Coroner humored the growing interest by pushing on his inquiries.

"Doctor," he asked, "are you prepared to say how long a time elapsed between the infliction of this fatal wound and those which disfigured her?"

"No, sir, not exactly; but some little time."

Some little time, when the murderer was in the house only ten minutes! All looked their surprise, and, as if the Coroner had divined this feeling of general curiosity, he leaned forward and emphatically repeated:

"More than ten minutes?"

The doctor, who had every appearance of realizing the importance of his reply, did not hesitate. Evidently his mind was quite made up.

"*Yes; more than ten minutes.*"

This was the shock *I* received from his testimony.

I remembered what the clock had revealed to me, but I did not move a muscle of my face. I was learning self-control under these repeated surprises.

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"This is an unexpected statement," remarked the Coroner. "What reasons have you to urge in explanation of it?"

"Very simple and very well known ones; at least, among the profession. There was too little blood seen, for the wounds to have been inflicted before death or within a few minutes after it. Had the woman been living when they were made, or even had she been but a short time dead, the floor would have been deluged with the blood gushing from so many and such serious injuries. But the effusion was slight, so slight that I noticed it at once, and came to the conclusions mentioned before I found the mark of the stab that occasioned death."

"I see, I see! And was that the reason you called in two neighboring physicians to view the body before it was removed from the house?"

"Yes, sir; in so important a matter, I wished to have my judgment confirmed."

"And these physicians were——"

"Dr. Campbell, of 110 East —— Street, and Dr. Jacobs, of —— Lexington Avenue."

"Are these gentlemen here?" inquired the Coroner of an officer who stood near.

"They are, sir."

"Very good; we will now proceed to ask one or two more questions of this witness. You told us that even had the woman been but a few minutes dead when she received these contusions, the floor would have been more or less deluged by her blood. What reason have you for this statement?"

"This; that in a few minutes, let us say ten, since that number has been used, the body has not had time

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to cool, nor have the blood-vessels had sufficient opportunity to stiffen so as to prevent the free effusion of blood."

"Is a body still warm at ten minutes after death?"

"It is."

"So that your conclusions are logical deductions from well-known facts?"

"Certainly, sir."

A pause of some duration followed.

When the Coroner again proceeded, it was to remark:

"The case is complicated by these discoveries; but we must not allow ourselves to be daunted by them. Let me ask you, if you found any marks upon this body which might aid in its identification?"

"One; a slight scar on the left ankle."

"What kind of a scar? Describe it."

"It was such as a burn might leave. In shape it was long and narrow, and it ran up the limb from the ankle-bone."

"Was it on the right foot?"

"No; on the left."

"Did you call the attention of any one to this mark during or after your examination?"

"Yes; I showed it to Mr. Gryce the detective, and to my two coadjutors; and I spoke of it to Mr. Howard Van Burnam, son of the gentleman in whose house the body was found."

It was the first time this young gentleman's name had been mentioned, and it made my blood run cold to see how many side-long looks and expressive shrugs it caused in the motley assemblage. But I had no time for sentiment; the inquiry was growing too interesting.

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"And why," asked the Coroner, "did you mention it to this young man in preference to others?"

"Because Mr. Gryce requested me to. Because the family as well as the young man himself had evinced some apprehension lest the deceased might prove to be his missing wife, and this seemed a likely way to settle the question."

"And did it? Did he acknowledge it to be a mark he remembered to have seen on his wife?"

"He said she had such a scar, but he would not acknowledge the deceased to be his wife."

"Did he see the scar?"

"No; he would not look at it."

"Did you invite him to?"

"I did; but he showed no curiosity."

Doubtless thinking that silence would best emphasize this fact, which certainly was an astonishing one, the Coroner waited a minute. But there was no silence. An indescribable murmur from a great many lips filled up the gap. I felt a movement of pity for the proud family whose good name was thus threatened in the person of this young gentleman.

"Doctor," continued the Coroner, as soon as the murmur had subsided, "did you notice the color of the woman's hair?"

"It was a light brown."

"Did you sever a lock? Have you a sample of this hair here to show us?"

"I have, sir. At Mr. Gryce's suggestion I cut off two small locks. One I gave him and the other I brought here."

"Let me see it."

The doctor passed it up, and in sight of every one

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present the Coroner tied a string around it and attached a ticket to it.

"That is to prevent all mistake," explained this very methodical functionary, laying the lock aside on the table in front of him. Then he turned again to the witness.

"Doctor, we are indebted to you for your valuable testimony, and as you are a busy man, we will now excuse you. Let Dr. Jacobs be called."

As this gentleman, as well as the witness who followed him, merely corroborated the statements of the other, and made it an accepted fact that the shelves had fallen upon the body of the girl some time after the first wound had been inflicted, I will not attempt to repeat their testimony. The question now agitating me was whether they would endeavor to fix the time at which the shelves fell by the evidence furnished by the clock.

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X.

IMPORTANT EVIDENCE.

EVIDENTLY not; for the next words I heard were: "Miss Amelia Butterworth!"

I had not expected to be called so soon, and was somewhat flustered by the suddenness of the summons, for I am only human. But I rose with suitable composure, and passed to the place indicated by the Coroner, in my usual straightforward manner, heightened only by a sense of the importance of my position, both as a witness and a woman whom the once famous Mr. Gryce had taken more or less into his confidence.

My appearance seemed to awaken an interest for which I was not prepared. I was just thinking how well my name had sounded uttered in the sonorous tones of the Coroner, and how grateful I ought to be for the courage I had displayed in substituting the genteel name of Amelia for the weak and sentimental one of Araminta, when I became conscious that the eyes directed towards me were filled with an expression not easy to understand. I should not like to call it admiration and will not call it amusement, and yet it seemed to be made up of both. While I was puzzling myself over it, the first question came.

As my examination before the Coroner only brought out the facts already related, I will not burden you

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with a detailed account of it. One portion alone may be of interest. I was being questioned in regard to the appearance of the couple I had seen entering the Van Burnam mansion, when the Coroner asked if the young woman's step was light, or if it betrayed hesitation.

I replied: "No hesitation; she moved quickly, almost gaily."

"And he?"

"Was more moderate; but there is no signification in that; he may have been older."

"No theories, Miss Butterworth; it is facts we are after. Now, do you know that he was older?"

"No, sir."

"Did you get any idea as to his age?"

"The impression he made was that of being a young man."

"And his height?"

"Was medium, and his figure slight and elegant. He moved as a gentleman moves; of this I can speak with great positiveness."

"Do you think you could identify him, Miss Butterworth, if you should see him?"

I hesitated, as I perceived that the whole swaying mass eagerly awaited my reply. I even turned my head because I saw others doing so; but I regretted this when I found that I, as well as others, was glancing towards the door beyond which the Van Burnams were supposed to sit. To cover up the false move I had made—for I had no wish as yet to centre suspicion upon anybody—I turned my face quickly back to the crowd and declared in as emphatic a tone as I could command:

"I have thought I could do so if I saw him under

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the same circumstances as those in which my first impression was made. But lately I have begun to doubt even that. I should never dare trust to my memory in this regard."

The Coroner looked disappointed, and so did the people around me.

"It is a pity," remarked the Coroner, "that you did not see more plainly. And, now, how did these persons gain an entrance into the house?"

I answered in the most succinct way possible.

I told them how he had used a door-key in entering, of the length of time the man stayed inside, and of his appearance on going away. I also related how I came to call a policeman to investigate the matter next day, and corroborated the statements of this official as to the appearance of the deceased at time of discovery.

And there my examination stopped. I was not asked any questions tending to bring out the cause of the suspicion I entertained against the scrub-woman, nor were the discoveries I had made in conjunction with Mr. Gryce inquired into. It was just as well, perhaps, but I would never approve of a piece of work done for me in this slipshod fashion.

A recess now followed. Why it was thought necessary, I cannot imagine, unless the gentlemen wished to smoke. Had they felt as much interest in this murder as I did, they would not have wanted bite or sup till the dreadful question was settled. There being a recess, I improved the opportunity by going into a restaurant near by where one can get very good buns and coffee at a reasonable price. But I could have done without them.

The next witness, to my astonishment, was Mr.

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Gryce. As he stepped forward, heads were craned and many women rose in their seats to get a glimpse of the noted detective. I showed no curiosity myself, for by this time I knew his features well, but I did feel a great satisfaction in seeing him before the Coroner, for now, thought I, we shall hear something worth our attention.

But his examination, though interesting, was not complete. The Coroner, remembering his promise to show us the other end of the steel point which had been broken off in the dead girl's brain, limited himself to such inquiries as brought out the discovery of the broken hat-pin in Mr. Van Burnam's parlor register. No mention was made by the witness of any assistance which he may have received in making this discovery; a fact which caused me to smile: men are so jealous of any interference in their affairs.

The end found in the register and the end which the Coroner's physician had drawn from the poor woman's head were both handed to the jury, and it was interesting to note how each man made his little effort to fit the two ends together, and the looks they interchanged as they found themselves successful. Without doubt, and in the eyes of all, the instrument of death had been found. But what an instrument!

The felt hat which had been discovered under the body was now produced and the one hole made by a similar pin examined. Then Mr. Gryce was asked if any other pin had been picked up from the floor of the room, and he replied, no; and the fact was established in the minds of all present that the young woman had been killed by a pin taken from her own hat.

"A subtle and cruel crime; the work of a calculating intellect," was the Coroner's comment as he allowed

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the detective to sit down. Which expression of opinion I thought reprehensible, as tending to prejudice the jury against the only person at present suspected.

The inquiry now took a turn. The name of Miss Ferguson was called. Who was Miss Ferguson? It was a new name to most of us, and her face when she rose only added to the general curiosity. It was the plainest face imaginable, yet it was neither a bad nor unintelligent one. As I studied it and noted the nervous contraction that disfigured her lip, I could not but be sensible of my blessings. I am not handsome myself, though there have been persons who have called me so, but neither am I ugly, and in contrast to this woman—well, I will say nothing. I only know that, after seeing her, I felt profoundly grateful to a kind Providence.

As for the poor woman herself, she knew she was no beauty, but she had become so accustomed to seeing the eyes of other people turn away from her face, that beyond the nervous twitching of which I have spoken, she showed no feeling.

"What is your full name, and where do you live?" asked the Coroner.

"My name is Susan Ferguson, and I live in Haddam, Connecticut," was her reply, uttered in such soft and beautiful tones that every one was astonished. It was like a stream of limpid water flowing from a most unsightly-looking rock. Excuse the metaphor; I do not often indulge.

"Do you keep boarders?"

"I do; a few, sir; such as my house will accommodate."

"Whom have you had with you this summer?"

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I knew what her answer would be before she uttered it; so did a hundred others, but they showed their knowledge in different ways. I did not show mine at all.

"I have had with me," said she, "a Mr. and Mrs. Van Burnam from New York. Mr. Howard Van Burnam is his full name, if you wish me to be explicit."

"Any one else?"

"A Mr. Hull, also from New York, and a young couple from Hartford. My house accommodates no more."

"How long have the first mentioned couple been with you?"

"Three months. They came in June."

"Are they with you still?"

"Virtually, sir. They have not moved their trunks; but neither of them is in Haddam at present. Mrs. Van Burnam came to New York last Monday morning, and in the afternoon her husband also left, presumably for New York. I have seen nothing of either of them since."

(It was on Tuesday night the murder occurred.)

"Did either of them take a trunk?"

"No, sir."

"A hand-bag?"

"Yes; Mrs. Van Burnam carried a bag, but it was a very small one."

"Large enough to hold a dress?"

"O no, sir."

"And Mr. Van Burnam?"

"He carried an umbrella; I saw nothing else."

"Why did they not leave together? Did you hear any one say?"

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"Yes; I heard them say Mrs. Van Burnam came against her husband's wishes. He did not want her to leave Haddam, but she would, and he was none too pleased at it. Indeed they had words about it, and as both our rooms overlook the same veranda, I could not help hearing some of their talk."

"Will you tell us what you heard?"

"It does not seem right" (thus this honest woman spoke), "but if it 's the law, I must not go against it. I heard him say these words: 'I have changed my mind, Louise. The more I think of it, the more disinclined I am to have you meddle in the matter. Besides, it will do no good. You will only add to the prejudice against you, and our life will become more unbearable than it is now.'"

"Of what were they speaking?"

"I do not know."

"And what did she reply?"

"O, she uttered a torrent of words that had less sense in them than feeling. She wanted to go, she would go, *she* had not changed *her* mind, and considered that her impulses were as well worth following as his cool judgment. She was not happy, had never been happy, and meant there should be a change, even if it were for the worse. But she did not believe it would be for the worse. Was she not pretty? Was she not very pretty when in distress and looking up thus? And I heard her fall on her knees, a movement which called out a grunt from her husband, but whether this was an expression of approval or disapproval I cannot say. A silence followed, during which I caught the sound of his steady tramping up and down the room. Then she spoke again in a petulant way.

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'It may seem foolish to *you*,' she cried, 'knowing me as you do, and being used to seeing me in all my moods. But to him it will be a surprise, and I will so manage it that it will effect all we want, and more, too, perhaps. I—I have a genius for some things, Howard; and my better angel tells me I shall succeed.' "

"And what did he reply to that?"

"That the name of her better angel was Vanity; that his father would see through her blandishments; that he forbade her to prosecute her schemes; and much more to the same effect. To all of which she answered by a vigorous stamp of her foot, and the declaration that she was going to do what she thought best in spite of all opposition; that it was a lover, and not a tyrant that she had married, and that if he did not know what was good for himself, she did, and that when he received an intimation from his father that the breach in the family was closed, then he would acknowledge that if she had no fortune and no connections, she had at least a plentiful supply of wit. Upon which he remarked: 'A poor qualification when it verges upon folly!' which seemed to close the conversation, for I heard no more till the sound of her skirts rustling past my door assured me she had carried her point and was leaving the house. But this was not done without great discomfiture to her husband, if one may judge from the few brief but emphatic words that escaped him before he closed his own door and followed her down the hall."

"Do you remember those words?"

"They were swear words, sir; I am sorry to say it, but he certainly cursed her and his own folly. Yet I always thought he loved her."

"Did you see her after she passed your door?"

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"Yes, sir, on the walk outside."

"Was she then on the way to the train?"

"Yes, sir."

"Carrying the bag of which you have spoken?"

"Yes, sir; another proof of the state of feeling between them, for he was very considerate in his treatment of ladies, and I never saw him do anything ungallant before."

"You say you watched her as she went down the walk?"

"Yes, sir; it is human nature, sir; I have no other excuse to offer."

It was an apology I myself might have made. I conceived a liking for this homely matter-of-fact woman.

"Did you note her dress?"

"Yes, sir; that is human nature also, or, rather, woman's nature."

"Particularly, madam; so that you can describe it to the jury before you?"

"I think so."

"Will you, then, be good enough to tell us what sort of a dress Mrs. Van Burnam wore when she left your house for the city?"

"It was a black and white plaid silk, very rich——"

Why, what did this mean? We had all expected a very different description.

"It was made fashionably, and the sleeves—well, it is impossible to describe the sleeves. She wore no wrap, which seemed foolish to me, for we have very sudden changes sometimes in September."

"A plaid dress! And did you notice her hat?"

"O, I have seen the hat often. It was of every con-

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ceivable color. It would have been called bad taste at one time, but now-a-days——"

The pause was significant. More than one man in the room chuckled, but the women kept a discreet silence.

"Would you know that hat if you saw it?"

"I should think I would!"

The emphasis was that of a countrywoman, and amused some people notwithstanding the melodious tone in which it was uttered. But it did not amuse me; my thoughts had flown to the hat which Mr. Gryce had found in the third room of Mr. Van Burnam's house, and which was of every color of the rainbow.

The Coroner asked two other questions, one in regard to the gloves worn by Mrs. Van Burnam, and the other in regard to her shoes. To the first, Miss Ferguson replied that she did not notice her gloves, and to the other, that Mrs. Van Burnam was very fashionable, and as pointed shoes were the fashion, in cities at least, she probably wore pointed shoes.

The discovery that Mrs. Van Burnam had been differently dressed on that day from the young woman found dead in the Van Burnam parlors, had acted as a shock upon most of the spectators. They were just beginning to recover from it when Miss Ferguson sat down. The Coroner was the only one who had not seemed at a loss. Why, we were soon destined to know.

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XI.

THE ORDER CLERK.

A LADY well known in New York society was the next person summoned. She was a friend of the Van Burnam family, and had known Howard from childhood. She had not liked his marriage; indeed, she rather participated in the family feeling against it, but when young Mrs. Van Burnam came to her house on the preceding Monday, and begged the privilege of remaining with her for one night, she had not had the heart to refuse her. Mrs. Van Burnam had therefore slept in her house on Monday night.

Questioned in regard to that lady's appearance and manner, she answered that her guest was unnaturally cheerful, laughing much and showing a great vivacity; that she gave no reason for her good spirits, nor did she mention her own affairs in any way,—rather took pains not to do so.

"How long did she stay?"

"Till the next morning."

"And how was she dressed?"

"Just as Miss Ferguson has described."

"Did she bring her hand-bag to your house?"

"Yes, and left it there. We found it in her room after she was gone."

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"Indeed! And how do you account for that?"

"She was preoccupied. I saw it in her cheerfulness, which was forced and not always well timed."

"And where is that bag now?"

"Mr. Van Burnam has it. We kept it for a day and as she did not call for it, sent it down to the office on Wednesday morning."

"Before you had heard of the murder?"

"O yes, before I had heard anything about the murder."

"As she was your guest, you probably accompanied her to the door?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you notice her hands? Can you say what was the color of her gloves?"

"I do not think she wore any gloves on leaving; it was very warm, and she held them in her hand. I remembered this, for I noticed the sparkle of her rings as she turned to say good-bye."

"Ah, you saw her rings!"

"Distinctly."

"So that when she left you she was dressed in a black and white plaid silk, had a large hat covered with flowers on her head, and wore rings?"

"Yes, sir."

And with these words ringing in the ears of the jury, the witness sat down.

What was coming? Something important, or the Coroner would not look so satisfied, or the faces of the officials about him so expectant. I waited with great but subdued eagerness for the testimony of the next witness, who was a young man by the name of Callahan.

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I don't like young men in general. They are either over-suave and polite, as if they condescended to remember that you are elderly and that it is their duty to make you forget it, or else they are pert and shallow and disgust you with their egotism. But this young man looked sensible and business-like, and I took to him at once, though what connection he could have with this affair I could not imagine.

His first words, however, settled all questions as to his personality : He was the order clerk at Altman's.

As he acknowledged this, I seemed to have some faint premonition of what was coming. Perhaps I had not been without some vague idea of the truth ever since I had put my mind to work on this matter ; perhaps my wits only received their real spur then ; but certainly I knew what he was going to say as soon as he opened his lips, which gave me quite a good opinion of myself, whether rightfully or not, I leave you to judge.

His evidence was short, but very much to the point. On the seventeenth of September, as could be verified by the books, the firm had received an order for a woman's complete outfit, to be sent, C.O.D., to Mrs. James Pope at the Hotel D——, on Broadway. Sizes and measures and some particulars were stated, and as the order bore the words *In haste* underlined upon it, several clerks had assisted him in filling this order, which when filled had been sent by special messenger to the place designated.

Had he this order with him ?

He had.

And could he identify the articles sent to fill it ?

He could.

At which the Coroner motioned to an officer and

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a pile of clothing was brought forward from some mysterious corner and laid before the witness.

Immediately expectation rose to a high pitch, for every one recognized, or thought he did, the apparel which had been taken from the victim.

The young man, who was of the alert, nervous type, took up the articles one by one and examined them closely.

As he did so, the whole assembled crowd surged forward and lightning-like glances from a hundred eyes followed his every movement and expression.

"Are they the same?" inquired the Coroner.

The witness did not hesitate. With one quick glance at the blue serge dress, black cape, and battered hat, he answered in a firm tone:

"They are."

And a clue was given at last to the dreadful mystery absorbing us.

The deep-drawn sigh which swept through the room testified to the universal satisfaction; then our attention became fixed again, for the Coroner, pointing to the under-garments accompanying the articles already mentioned, demanded if they had been included in the order.

There was as little hesitation in the reply given to this question as to the former. He recognized each piece as having come from his establishment. "You will note," said he, "that they have never been washed, and that the pencil marks are still on them."

"Very good," observed the Coroner, "and you will note that one article there is torn down the back. Was it in that condition when sent?"

"It was not, sir."

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"All were in perfect order?"

"Most assuredly, sir."

"Very good, again. The jury will take cognizance of this fact, which may be useful to them in their future conclusions. And now, Mr. Callahan, do you notice anything lacking here from the list of articles forwarded by you?"

"No, sir."

"Yet there is one very necessary adjunct to a woman's outfit which is not to be found here."

"Yes, sir, the shoes; but I am not surprised at that. We sent shoes, but they were not satisfactory, and they were returned."

"Ah, I see. Officer, show the witness the shoes that were taken from the deceased."

This was done, and when Mr. Callahan had examined them, the Coroner inquired if they came from his store. He replied no.

Whereupon they were held up to the jury, and attention called to the fact that, while rather new than old, they gave signs of having been worn more than once; which was not true of anything else taken from the victim.

This matter settled, the Coroner proceeded with his questions.

"Who carried the articles ordered, to the address given?"

"A man in our employ, named Clapp."

"Did he bring back the amount of the bill?"

"Yes, sir; less the five dollars charged for the shoes."

"What was the amount, may I ask?"

"Here is our cash-book, sir. The amount received

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from Mrs. James Pope, Hotel D——, on the seventeenth of September, is, as you see, seventy-five dollars and fifty-eight cents."

"Let the jury see the book; also the order."

They were both handed to the jury, and if ever I wished myself in any one's shoes, save my own very substantial ones, it was at that moment. I did so want a peep at that order.

It seemed to interest the jury also, for their heads drew together very eagerly over it, and some whispers and a few knowing looks passed between them. Finally one of them spoke:

"It is written in a very odd hand. Do you call this a woman's writing or a man's?"

"I have no opinion to give on the subject," rejoined the witness. "It is intelligible writing, and that is all that comes within my province."

The twelve men shifted on their seats and surveyed the Coroner eagerly. Why did he not proceed? Evidently he was not quick enough to suit them.

"Have you any further questions for this witness?" asked that gentleman after a short delay.

Their nervousness increased, but no one ventured to follow the Coroner's suggestion. A poor lot, I call them, a very poor lot! I would have found plenty of questions to put to him.

I expected to see the man Clapp called next, but I was disappointed in this. The name uttered was Henshaw, and the person who rose in answer to it was a tall, burly man with a shock of curly black hair. He was the clerk of the Hotel D——, and we all forgot Clapp in our eagerness to hear what this man had to say

His testimony amounted to this:

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That a person by the name of Pope was registered on his books. That she came to his house on the seventeenth of September, some time near noon. That she was not alone; that a person she called her husband accompanied her, and that they had been given a room, at her request, on the second floor overlooking Broadway.

"Did you see the husband? Was it his handwriting we see in your register?"

"No, sir. He came intc the office, but he did not approach the desk. It was she who registered for them both, and who did all the business in fact. I thought it queer, but took it for granted he was ill, for he held his head very much down, and acted as if he felt disturbed or anxious."

"Did you notice him closely? Would you be able to identify him on sight?"

"No, sir, I should not. He looked like a hundred other men I see every day: medium in height and build, with brown hair and brown moustache. Not noticeable in any way, sir, except for his hang-dog air and evident desire not to be noticed."

"But you saw him later?"

"No, sir. After he went to his room he stayed there, and no one saw him. I did not even see him when he left the house. His wife paid the bill and he did not come into the office."

"But you saw her well; you would know her again?"

"Perhaps, sir; but I doubt it. She wore a thick veil when she came in, and though I might remember her voice, I have no recollection of her features for I did not see them."

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"You can give a description of her dress, though; surely you must have looked long enough at a woman who wrote her own and her husband's name in your register, for you to remember her clothes."

"Yes, for they were very simple. She had on what is called a gossamer, which covered her from neck to toe, and on her head a hat wrapped all about with a blue veil."

"So that she might have worn any dress under that gossamer?"

"Yes, sir."

"And any hat under that veil?"

"Any one that was large enough, sir."

"*Very* good. Now, did you see her hands?"

"Not to remember them."

"Did she have gloves on?"

"I cannot say. I did not stand and watch her, sir."

"That is a pity. But you say you heard her voice."

"Yes, sir."

"Was it a lady's voice? Was her tone refined and her language good?"

"They were, sir."

"When did they leave? How long did they remain in your house?"

"They left in the evening; after tea, I should say."

"How? On foot or in a carriage?"

"In a carriage; one of the hacks that stand in front of the door."

"Did they bring any baggage with them?"

"No, sir."

"Did they take any away?"

"The lady carried a parcel."

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"What kind of a parcel?"

"A brown-paper parcel, like clothing done up."

"And the gentleman?"

"I did not see him."

"Was she dressed the same in going as in coming?"

"To all appearance, except her hat. That was smaller."

"She had the gossamer on still, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"And a veil?"

"Yes, sir."

"Only that the hat it covered was smaller?"

"Yes, sir."

"And now, how did you account to yourself for the parcel and the change of hat?"

"I did n't account for them. I did n't think anything about them at the time; but, since I have had the subject brought to my mind, I find it easy enough. She had a package delivered to her while she was in our house, or rather packages; they were quite numerous, I believe."

"Can you recall the circumstances of their delivery?"

"Yes, sir; the man who brought the packages said that they had not been paid for, so I allowed him to carry them to Mrs. James Pope's room. When he went away, he had but one small parcel with him; the rest he had left."

"And this is all you can tell us about this singular couple? Had they no meals in your house?"

"No, sir; the gentleman—or I suppose I should say the lady, sir, for the order was given in her voice—sent for two dozen oysters and a bottle of ale, which

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were furnished to them in their rooms ; but they did n't come to the dining-room."

"Is the boy here who carried up those articles ?"

"He is, sir."

"And the chambermaid who attended to their rooms ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you may answer this question, and we will excuse you. How was the gentleman dressed when you saw him ?"

"In a linen duster and a felt hat."

"Let the jury remember that. And now let us hear from Richard Clapp. Is Richard Clapp in the room ?"

"I am, sir," answered a cheery voice ; and a lively young man with a shrewd eye and a wide-awake manner popped up from behind a portly woman on a side seat and rapidly came forward.

He was asked several questions before the leading one which we all expected ; but I will not record them here. The question which brought the reply most eagerly anticipated was this :

"Do you remember being sent to the Hotel D—— with several packages for a Mrs. James Pope ?"

"I do, sir."

"Did you deliver them in person ? Did you see the lady ?"

A peculiar look crossed his face and we all leaned forward. But his answer brought a shock of disappointment with it.

"No, I did n't, sir. She would n't let me in. She bade me lay the things down by the door and wait in the rear hall till she called me."

"And you did this ?"

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"Yes, sir."

"But you kept your eye on the door, of course?"

"Naturally, sir."

"And saw——"

"A hand steal out and take in the things."

"A woman's hand?"

"No; a man's. I saw the white cuff."

"And how long was it before they called you?"

"Fifteen minutes, I should say. I heard a voice cry 'Here!' and seeing their door open, I went toward it. But by the time I reached it, it was shut again, and I only heard the lady say that all the articles but the shoes were satisfactory, and would I thrust the bill in under the door. I did so, and they were some minutes counting out the change, but presently the door opened slightly, and I saw a man's hand holding out the money, which was correct to the cent. 'You need not receipt the bill,' cried the lady from somewhere in the room. 'Give him the shoes and let him go.' So I received the shoes in the same mysterious way I had the money, and seeing no reason for waiting longer, pocketed the bills and returned to the store."

"Has the jury any further questions to ask the witness?"

Of course not. They were ninnies, all of them, and—— But, contrary to my expectation, one of them did perk up courage, and, wriggling very much on his seat, ventured to ask if the cuff he had seen on the man's hand when it was thrust through the doorway had a button in it.

The answer was disappointing. The witness had not noticed any.

The juror, somewhat abashed, sank into silence, at

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which another of the precious twelve, inspired no doubt by the other's example, blurted out :

" Then what was the color of the coat sleeve ? You surely can remember that."

But another disappointment awaited us.

" He did not wear any coat. It was a shirt sleeve I saw."

A shirt sleeve ! There was no clue in that. A visible look of dejection spread through the room, which was not dissipated till another witness stood up.

This time it was the bell-boy of the hotel who had been on duty that day. His testimony was brief, and added but little to the general knowledge. He had been summoned more than once by these mysterious parties, but only to receive his orders through a closed door. He had not entered the room at all.

He was followed by the chambermaid, who testified that she was in the room once while they were there ; that she saw them both then, but did not catch a glimpse of their faces ; Mr. Pope was standing in the window almost entirely shielded by the curtains, and Mrs. Pope was busy hanging up something in the wardrobe. The gentleman had on his duster and the lady her gossamer ; it was but a few minutes after their arrival.

Questioned in regard to the state of the room after they left it, she said that there was a lot of brown paper lying about, marked B. Altman, but nothing else that did not belong there.

" Not a tag, nor a hat-pin, nor a bit of memorandum, lying on bureau or table ? "

" Nothing, sir, so far as I mind. I was n't on the look-out for anything, sir. They were a queer couple,

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but we have lots of queer couples at our house, and the most I notices, sir, is those what remember the chambermaid and those what don't. This couple was of the kind what don't."

"Did you sweep the room after their departure?"

"I always does. They went late, so I swept the room the next morning."

"And threw the sweepings away, of course?"

"Of course; would you have me keep them for treasures?"

"It might have been well if you had," muttered the Coroner. "The combings from the lady's hair might have been very useful in establishing her identity."

The porter who has charge of the lady's entrance was the last witness from this house. He had been on duty on the evening in question and had noticed this couple leaving. They both carried packages, and had attracted his attention first, by the long, old-fashioned duster which the gentleman wore, and secondly, by the pains they both took not to be observed by any one. The woman was veiled, as had already been said, and the man held his package in such a way as to shield his face entirely from observation.

"So that you would not know him if you saw him again?" asked the Coroner.

"Exactly, sir," was the uncomprising answer.

As he sat down, the Coroner observed: "You will note from this testimony, gentlemen, that this couple, signing themselves Mr. and Mrs. James Pope of Philadelphia, left this house dressed each in a long garment eminently fitted for purposes of concealment,—he in a linen duster, and she in a gossamer. Let us now follow this couple a little farther and see what became of

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these disguising articles of apparel. Is Seth Brown here?"

A man, who was so evidently a hackman that it seemed superfluous to ask him what his occupation was, shuffled forward at this.

It was in his hack that this couple had left the D——. He remembered them very well as he had good reason to. First, because the man paid him before entering the carriage, saying that he was to let them out at the northwest corner of Madison Square, and secondly—— But here the Coroner interrupted him to ask if he had seen the gentleman's face when he paid him. The answer was, as might have been expected, No. It was dark, and he had not turned his head.

"Did n't you think it queer to be paid before you reached your destination?"

"Yes, but the rest was queerer. After I had taken the money—I never refuses money, sir—and was expecting him to get into the hack, he steps up to me again and says in a lower tone than before: 'My wife is very nervous. Drive slow, if you please, and when you reach the place I have named, watch your horses carefully, for if they should move while she is getting out, the shock would throw her into a spasm.' As she had looked very pert and lively, I thought this mighty queer, and I tried to get a peep at his face, but he was too smart for me, and was in the carriage before I could clap my eye on him."

"But you were more fortunate when they got out? You surely saw one or both of them then?"

"No, sir, I did n't. I had to watch the horses' heads, you know. I should n't like to be the cause of a young lady having a spasm."

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"Do you know in what direction they went?"

"East, I should say. I heard them laughing long after I had whipped up my horses. A queer couple, sir, that puzzled me some, though I should not have thought of them twice if I had not found next day——"

"Well?"

"The gentleman's linen duster and the neat brown gossamer which the lady had worn, lying folded under the two back cushions of my hack; a present for which I was very much obliged to them, but which I was not long allowed to enjoy, for yesterday the police——"

"Well, well, no matter about that. Here is a duster and here is a brown gossamer. Are these the articles you found under your cushions?"

"If you will examine the neck of the lady's gossamer, you can soon tell, sir. There was a small hole in the one I found, as if something had been snipped out of it; the owner's name, most likely."

"Or the name of the place where it was bought," suggested the Coroner, holding the garment up to view so as to reveal a square hole under the collar.

"That 's it!" cried the hackman. "That 's the very one. Shame, I say, to spoil a new garment that way."

"Why do you call it new?" asked the Coroner.

"Because it has n't a mud spot or even a mark of dust upon it. We looked it all over, my wife and I, and decided it had not been long off the shelf. A pretty good haul for a poor man like me, and if the police——"

But here he was cut short again by an important question:

"There is a clock but a short distance from the place

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where you stopped. Did you notice what time it was when you drove away?"

"Yes, sir. I don't know why I remember it, but I do. As I turned to go back to the hotel, I looked up at this clock. It was half-past eleven."

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XII.

THE KEYS.

WE were all by this time greatly interested in the proceedings; and when another hackman was called we recognized at once that an effort was about to be made to connect this couple with the one who had alighted at Mr. Van Burnam's door.

The witness, who was a melancholy chap, kept his stand on the east side of the Square. At about twenty minutes to twelve, he was awakened from a nap he had been taking on the top of his coach, by a sharp rap on his whip arm, and looking down, he saw a lady and gentleman standing at the door of his vehicle.

"We want to go to Gramercy Park," said the lady. "Drive us there at once."

"I nodded, for what is the use of wasting words when it can be avoided; and they stepped at once into the coach."

"Can you describe them—tell us how they looked?"

"I never notice people; besides, it was dark; but he had a swell air, and she was pert and merry, for she laughed as she closed the door."

"Can't you remember how they were dressed?"

"No, sir; she had on something that flapped about

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her shoulders, and he had a dark hat on his head, but that was all I saw."

"Did n't you see his face?"

"Not a bit of it; he kept it turned away. He did n't want nobody looking at *him*. She did all the business."

"Then you saw *her* face?"

"Yes, for a minute. But I would n't know it again. She was young and purty, and her hand which dropped the money into mine was small, but I could n't say no more, not if you was to give me the town."

"Did you know that the house you stopped at was Mr. Van Burnam's, and that it was supposed to be empty?"

"No, sir, I 'm not one of the swell ones. My acquaintances live in another part of the town."

"But you noticed that the house was dark?"

"I may have. I don't know."

"And that is all you have to tell us about them?"

"No, sir; the next morning, which was yesterday, sir, as I was a-dusting out the coach I found under the cushions a large blue veil, folded and lying very flat. But it had been slit with a knife and could not be worn."

This was strange too, and while more than one person about me ventured an opinion, I muttered to myself, "James Pope, his mark!" astonished at a coincidence which so completely connected the occupants of the two coaches.

But the Coroner was able to produce a witness whose evidence carried the matter on still farther. A policeman in full uniform testified next, and after explaining that his beat led him from Madison Avenue to Third on Twenty-seventh Street, went on to say that as he

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was coming up this street on Tuesday evening some few minutes before midnight, he encountered, somewhere between Lexington Avenue and Third, a man and woman walking rapidly towards the latter avenue, each carrying a parcel of some dimensions; that he noted them because they seemed so merry, but would have thought nothing of it, if he had not presently perceived them coming back without the parcels. They were chatting more gaily than ever. The lady wore a short cape, and the gentleman a dark coat, but he could give no other description of their appearance, for they went by rapidly, and he was more interested in wondering what they had done with such large parcels in such a short time at that hour of night, than in noting how they looked or whither they were going. He did observe, however, that they proceeded towards Madison Square, and remembers now that he heard a carriage suddenly drive away from that direction.

The Coroner asked him but one question:

"Had the lady no parcel when you saw her last?"

"I saw none."

"Could she not have carried one under her cape?"

"Perhaps, if it was small enough."

"As small as a lady's hat, say?"

"Well, it would have to be smaller than some of them are now, sir."

And so terminated this portion of the inquiry.

A short delay followed the withdrawal of this witness. The Coroner, who was a somewhat portly man, and who had felt the heat of the day very much, leaned back and looked anxious, while the jury, always restless, moved in their seats like a set of school-boys, and seemed to long for the hour of adjournment, notwith-

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standing the interest which everybody but themselves seemed to take in this exciting investigation.

Finally an officer, who had been sent into the adjoining room, came back with a gentleman, who was no sooner recognized as Mr. Franklin Van Burnam than a great change took place in the countenances of all present. The Coroner sat forward and dropped the large palm-leaf fan he had been industriously using for the last few minutes, the jury settled down, and the whispering of the many curious ones about me grew less audible and finally ceased altogether. A gentleman of the family was about to be interrogated, and such a gentleman !

I have purposely refrained from describing this best known and best reputed member of the Van Burnam family, foreseeing this hour when he would attract the attention of a hundred eyes and when his appearance would require our special notice. I will therefore endeavor to picture him to you as he looked on this memorable morning, with just the simple warning that you must not expect me to see with the eyes of a young girl or even with those of a fashionable society woman. I know a man when I see him, and I had always regarded Mr. Franklin as an exceptionally fine-looking and prepossessing gentleman, but I shall not go into raptures, as I heard a girl behind me doing, nor do I feel like acknowledging him as a paragon of all the virtues—as Mrs. Cunningham did that evening in my parlor.

He is a medium-sized man, with a shape not unlike his brother's. His hair is dark and so are his eyes, but his moustache is brown and his complexion quite fair. He carries himself with distinction, and though his

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countenance in repose has a precise air that is not perfectly agreeable, it has, when he speaks or smiles, an expression at once keen and amiable.

On this occasion he failed to smile, and though his elegance was sufficiently apparent, his worth was not so much so. Yet the impression generally made was favorable, as one could perceive from the air of respect with which his testimony was received.

He was asked many questions. Some were germane to the matter in hand and some seemed to strike wide of all mark. He answered them all courteously, showing a manly composure in doing so, that served to calm the fever-heat into which many had been thrown by the stories of the two hackmen. But as his evidence up to this point related merely to minor concerns, this was neither strange nor conclusive. The real test began when the Coroner, with a certain bluster, which may have been meant to attract the attention of the jury, now visibly waning, or, as was more likely, may have been the unconscious expression of a secret if hitherto well concealed embarrassment, asked the witness whether the keys to his father's front door had any duplicates.

The answer came in a decidedly changed tone. "No. The key used by our agent opens the basement door only."

The Coroner showed his satisfaction. "No duplicates," he repeated; "then you will have no difficulty in telling us where the keys to your father's front door were kept during the family's absence."

Did the young man hesitate, or was it but imagination on my part—"They were usually in my possession."

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"Usually!" There was irony in the tone; evidently the Coroner was getting the better of his embarrassment, if he had felt any. "And where were they on the seventeenth of this month? Were they in your possessiou then?"

"No, sir." The young man tried to look calm and at his ease, but the difficulty he felt in doing so was apparent. "On the morning of that day," he continued, "I passed them over to my brother."

Ah! here was something tangible as well as important. I began to fear the police understood themselves only too well; and so did the whole crowd of persons there assembled. A groan in one direction was answered by a sigh in another, and it needed all the Coroner's authority to prevent an outbreak.

Meanwhile Mr. Van Burnam stood erect and unwavering, though his eye showed the suffering which these demonstrations awakened. He did not turn in the direction of the room where we felt sure his family was gathered, but it was evident that his thoughts did, and that most painfully. The Coroner, on the contrary, showed little or no feeling; he had brought the investigation up to this critical point and felt fully competent to carry it farther.

"May I ask," said he, "where the transference of these keys took place?"

"I gave them to him in our office last Tuesday morning. He said he might want to go into the house before his father came home."

"Did he say why he wanted to go into the house?"

"No."

"Was he in the habit of going into it alone and during the family's absence?"

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"No."

"Had he any clothes there? or any articles belonging to himself or his wife which he would be likely to wish to carry away?"

"No."

"Yet he wanted to go in?"

"He said so."

"And you gave him the keys without question?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Was that not opposed to your usual principles—to your way of doing things, I should say?"

"Perhaps; but principles, by which I suppose you mean my usual business methods, do not govern me in my relations with my brother. He asked me a favor, and I granted it. It would have to have been a much larger one for me to have asked an explanation from him before doing so."

"Yet you are not on good terms with your brother; at least you have not had the name of being, for some time?"

"We have had no quarrel."

"Did he return the keys you lent him?"

"No."

"Have you seen them since?"

"No."

"Would you know them if they were shown you?"

"I would know them if they unlocked our front door."

"But you would not know them on sight?"

"I don't think so."

"Mr. Van Burnam, it is disagreeable for me to go into family matters, but if you have had no quarrel with your brother, how comes it that you and he have had so little intercourse of late?"

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"He has been in Connecticut and I at Long Branch. Is not that a good answer, sir?"

"Good, but not good enough. You have a common office in New York, have you not?"

"Certainly, the firm's office."

"And you sometimes meet there, even while residing in different localities?"

"Yes, our business calls us in at times and then we meet, of course."

"Do you talk when you meet?"

"Talk?"

"Of other matters besides business, I mean. Are your relations friendly? Do you show the same spirit towards each other as you did three years ago, say?"

"We are older; perhaps we are not quite so voluble."

"But do you feel the same?"

"No. I see you will have it, and so I will no longer hold back the truth. We are not as brotherly in our intercourse as we used to be; but there is no animosity between us. I have a decided regard for my brother."

This was said quite nobly, and I liked him for it, but I began to feel that perhaps it had been for the best after all that I had never been intimate with the family. But I must not forestall either events or my opinions.

"Is there any reason"—it is the Coroner, of course, who is speaking—"why there should be any falling off in your mutual confidence? Has your brother done anything to displease you?"

"We did not like his marriage."

"Was it an unhappy one?"

"It was not a suitable one."

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"Did you know Mrs. Van Burnam well, that you say this?"

"Yes, I knew her, but the rest of the family did not."

"Yet they shared in your disapprobation?"

"They felt the marriage more than I did. The lady —excuse me, I never like to speak ill of the sex—was not lacking in good sense or virtue, but she was not the person we had a right to expect Howard to marry."

"And you let him see that you thought so?"

"How could we do otherwise?"

"Even after she had been his wife for some months?"

"We could not like her."

"Did your brother—I am sorry to press this matter —ever show that he felt your change of conduct towards him?"

"I find it equally hard to answer," was the quick reply. "My brother is of an affectionate nature, and he has some, if not all, of the family's pride. I think he did feel it, though he never said so. He is not without loyalty to his wife."

"Mr. Van Burnam, of whom does the firm doing business under the name of Van Burnam & Sons consist?"

"Of the three persons mentioned."

"No others?"

"No."

"Has there ever been in your hearing any threat made by the senior partner of dissolving this firm as it stands?"

"I have heard"—I felt sorry for this strong but far from heartless man, but I would not have stopped the

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inquiry at this point if I could ; I was far too curious—"I have heard my father say that he would withdraw if Howard did not. Whether he would have done so, I consider open to doubt. My father is a just man and never fails to do the right thing, though he sometimes speaks with unnecessary harshness."

"He made the threat, however?"

"Yes."

"And Howard heard it?"

"Or of it ; I cannot say which."

"Mr. Van Burnam, have you noticed any change in your brother since this threat was uttered?"

"How, sir ; what change?"

"In his treatment of his wife, or in his attitude towards yourself?"

"I have not seen him in the company of his wife since they went to Haddam. As for his conduct towards myself, I can say no more than I have already. We have never forgotten that we are children of one mother."

"Mr. Van Burnam, how many times have you seen Mrs. Howard Van Burnam?"

"Several. More frequently before they were married than since."

"You were in your brother's confidence, then, at that time ; knew he was contemplating marriage?"

"It was in my endeavors to prevent the match that I saw so much of Miss Louise Stapleton."

"Ah! I am glad of the explanation! I was just going to inquire why you, of all members of the family, were the only one to know your brother's wife by sight."

The witness, considering this question answered,

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made no reply. But the next suggestion could not be passed over.

"If you saw Mrs. Van Burnam so often, you are acquainted with her personal appearance?"

"Sufficiently so; as well as I know that of my ordinary calling-acquaintance."

"Was she light or dark?"

"She had brown hair."

"Similar to this?"

The lock held up was the one which had been cut from the head of the dead girl.

"Yes, somewhat similar to that." The tone was cold; but he could not hide his distress.

"Mr. Van Burnam, have you looked well at the woman who was found murdered in your father's house?"

"I have, sir."

"Is there anything in her general outline or in such features as have escaped disfigurement to remind you of Mrs. Howard Van Burnam?"

"I may have thought so—at first glance," he replied, with decided effort.

"And did you change your mind at the second?"

He looked troubled, but answered firmly: "No, I cannot say that I did. But you must not regard my opinion as conclusive," he hastily added. "My knowledge of the lady was comparatively slight."

"The jury will take that into account. All we want to know now is whether you can assert from any knowledge you have or from anything to be noted in the body itself, that it is not Mrs. Howard Van Burnam?"

"I cannot."

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And with this solemn assertion his examination closed.

The remainder of the day was taken up in trying to prove a similarity between Mrs. Van Burnam's handwriting and that of Mrs. James Pope as seen in the register of the Hotel D—— and on the order sent to Altman's. But the only conclusion reached was that the latter might be the former disguised, and even on this point the experts differed.

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XIII.

HOWARD VAN BURNAM.

THE gentleman who stepped from the carriage and entered Mr. Van Burnam's house at twelve o'clock that night produced so little impression upon me that I went to bed satisfied that no result would follow these efforts at identification.

And so I told Mr. Gryce when he arrived next morning. But he seemed by no means disconcerted, and merely requested that I would submit to one more trial. To which I gave my consent, and he departed.

I could have asked him a string of questions, but his manner did not invite them, and for some reason I was too wary to show an interest in this tragedy superior to that felt by every right-thinking person connected with it.

At ten o'clock I was in my old seat in the court-room. The same crowd with different faces confronted me, amid which the twelve stolid countenances of the jury looked like old friends. Howard Van Burnam was the witness called, and as he came forward and stood in full view of us all, the interest of the occasion reached its climax.

His countenance wore a reckless look that did not serve to prepossess him with the people at whose mercy he stood. But he did not seem to care, and waited for

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the Coroner's questions with an air of ease which was in direct contrast to the drawn and troubled faces of his father and brother just visible in the background.

Coroner Dahl surveyed him a few minutes before speaking, then he quietly asked if he had seen the dead body of the woman who had been found lying under a fallen piece of furniture in his father's house.

He replied that he had.

"Before she was removed from the house or after it?"

"After."

"Did you recognize it? Was it the body of any one you know?"

"I do not think so."

"Has your wife, who was missing yesterday, been heard from yet, Mr. Van Burnam?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir."

"Had she not—that is, your wife—a complexion similar to that of the dead woman just alluded to?"

"She had a fair skin and brown hair, if that is what you mean. But these attributes are common to too many women for me to give them any weight in an attempted identification of this importance."

"Had they no other similar points of a less general character? Was not your wife of a slight and graceful build, such as is attributed to the subject of this inquiry?"

"My wife was slight and she was graceful, common attributes also."

"And your wife had a scar?"

"Yes."

"On the left ankle?"

"Yes."

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"Which the deceased also has?"

"That I do not know. They say so, but I had no interest in looking."

"Why, may I ask? Did you not think it a remarkable coincidence?"

The young man frowned. It was the first token of feeling he had given.

"I was not on the look-out for coincidences," was his cold reply. "I had no reason to think this unhappy victim of an unknown man's brutality my wife, and so did not allow myself to be moved by even such a fact as this."

"You had no reason," repeated the Coroner, "to think this woman your wife. Had you any reason to think she was not?"

"Yes."

"Will you give us that reason?"

"I had more than one. First, my wife would never wear the clothes I saw on the girl whose dead body was shown to me. Secondly, she would never go to any house alone with a man at the hour testified to by one of your witnesses." *

"Not with any man?"

"I did not mean to include her husband in my remark, of course. But as I did not take her to Gramercy Park, the fact that the deceased woman entered an empty house accompanied by a man, is proof enough to me that she was not Louise Van Burnam."

"When did you part with your wife?"

"On Monday morning at the depot in Haddam."

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* Why could he not have said Miss Butterworth? These Van Burnams are proud, most vilely proud as the poet has it.—A.B.

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"Did you know where she was going?"

"I knew where she said she was going."

"And where was that, may I ask?"

"To New York, to interview my father."

"But your father was not in New York?"

"He was daily expected here. The steamer on which he had sailed from Southampton was due on Tuesday."

"Had she an interest in seeing your father? Was there any special reason why she should leave you for doing so?"

"She thought so; she thought he would become reconciled to her entrance into our family if he should see her suddenly and without prejudiced persons standing by."

"And did you fear to mar the effect of this meeting if you accompanied her?"

"No, for I doubted if the meeting would ever take place. I had no sympathy with her schemes, and did not wish to give her the sanction of my presence."

"Was that the reason you let her go to New York alone?"

"Yes."

"Had you no other?"

"No."

"Why did you follow her, then, in less than five hours?"

"Because I was uneasy; because I also wanted to see my father; because I am a man accustomed to carry out every impulse; and impulse led me that day in the direction of my somewhat headstrong wife."

"Did you know where your wife intended to spend the night?"

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"I did not. She has many friends, or at least I have, in the city, and I concluded she would go to one of them—as she did."

"When did you arrive in the city? before ten o'clock?"

"Yes, a few minutes before."

"Did you try to find your wife?"

"No. I went directly to the club."

"Did you try to find her the next morning?"

"No; I had heard that the steamer had not yet been sighted off Fire Island, so considered the effort unnecessary."

"Why? What connection is there between this fact and an endeavor on your part to find your wife?"

"A very close one. She had come to New York to throw herself at my father's feet. Now she could only do this at the steamer or in——"

"Why do you not proceed, Mr. Van Burnam?"

"I will. I do not know why I stopped,—or in his own house."

"In his own house? In the house in Gramercy Park, do you mean?"

"Yes, he has no other."

"The house in which this dead girl was found?"

"Yes,"—impatiently.

"Did you think she might throw herself at his feet there?"

"She said she might; and as she is romantic, foolishly romantic, I thought her fully capable of doing so."

"And so you did not seek her in the morning?"

"No, sir."

"How about the afternoon?"

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This was a close question ; we saw that he was affected by it though he tried to carry it off bravely.

" I did not see her in the afternoon. I was in a restless frame of mind, and did not remain in the city."

" Ah ! indeed ! and where did you go ? "

" Unless necessary, I prefer not to say."

" It is necessary."

" I went to Coney Island."

" Alone ? "

" Yes."

" Did you see anybody there you know ? "

" No."

" And when did you return ? "

" At midnight."

" When did you reach your rooms ? "

" Later."

" How much later ? "

" Two or three hours."

" And where were you during those hours ? "

" I was walking the streets."

The ease, the quietness with which he made these acknowledgments were remarkable. The jury to a man honored him with a prolonged stare, and the awe-struck crowd scarcely breathed during their utterance. At the last sentence a murmur broke out, at which he raised his head and with an air of surprise surveyed the people before him. Though he must have known what their astonishment meant, he neither quailed nor blanched, and while not in reality a handsome man, he certainly looked handsome at this moment.

I did not know what to think ; so forbore to think anything. Meanwhile the examination went on.

" Mr. Van Burnam, I have been told that the locket

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I see there dangling from your watch-chain contains a lock of your wife's hair. Is it so?"

"I have a lock of her hair in this; yes."

"Here is a lock clipped from the head of the unknown woman whose identity we seek. Have you any objection to comparing the two?"

"It is not an agreeable task you have set me," was the imperturbable response; "but I have no objection to doing what you ask." And calmly lifting the chain, he took off the locket, opened it, and held it out courteously toward the Coroner. "May I ask you to make the first comparison," he said.

The Coroner, taking the locket, laid the two locks of brown hair together, and after a moment's contemplation of them both, surveyed the young man seriously, and remarked:

"They are of the same shade. Shall I pass them down to the jury?"

Howard bowed. You would have thought he was in a drawing-room, and in the act of bestowing a favor. But his brother Franklin showed a very different countenance, and as for their father, one could not even see his face, he so persistently held up his hand before it.

The jury, wide-awake now, passed the locket along, with many sly nods and a few whispered words. When it came back to the Coroner, he took it and handed it to Mr. Van Burnam, saying:

"I wish you would observe the similarity for yourself. I can hardly detect any difference between them."

"Thank you! I am willing to take your word for it," replied the young man, with most astonishing *aplomb*. And Coroner and jury for a moment looked

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baffled, and even Mr. Gryce, of whose face I caught a passing glimpse at this instant, stared at the head of his cane, as if it were of thicker wood than he expected and had more knotty points on it than even his accustomed hand liked to encounter.

Another effort was not out of place, however; and the Coroner, summoning up some of the pompous severity he found useful at times, asked the witness if his attention had been drawn to the dead woman's hands.

He acknowledged that it had. "The physician who made the autopsy urged me to look at them, and I did; they were certainly very like my wife's."

"Only like."

"I cannot say that they were my wife's. Do you wish me to perjure myself?"

"A man should know his wife's hands as well as he knows her face."

"Very likely."

"And you are ready to swear these were not the hands of your wife?"

"I am ready to swear I did not so consider them."

"And that is all?"

"That is all."

The Coroner frowned and cast a glance at the jury. They needed prodding now and then, and this is the way he prodded them. As soon as they gave signs of recognizing the hint he gave them, he turned back, and renewed his examination in these words:

"Mr. Van Burnam, did your brother at your request hand you the keys of your father's house on the morning of the day on which this tragedy occurred?"

"He did."

"Have you those keys now?"

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"I have not."

"What have you done with them? Did you return them to your brother?"

"No; I see where your inquiries are tending, and I do not suppose you will believe my simple word; but I lost the keys on the day I received them; that is why——"

"Well, you may continue, Mr. Van Burnam."

"I have no more to say; my sentence was not worth completing."

The murmur which rose about him seemed to show dissatisfaction; but he remained imperturbable, or rather like a man who did not hear. I began to feel a most painful interest in the inquiry, and dreaded, while I anxiously anticipated, his further examination.

"You lost the keys; may I ask when and where?"

"That I do not know; they were missing when I searched for them; missing from my pocket, I mean."

"Ah! and when did you search for them?"

"The next day—after I had heard—of—of what had taken place in my father's house."

The hesitations were those of a man weighing his reply. They told on the jury, as all such hesitations do; and made the Coroner lose an atom of the respect he had hitherto shown this easy-going witness.

"And you do not know what became of them?"

"No."

"Or into whose hands they fell?"

"No, but probably into the hands of the wretch——"

To the astonishment of everybody he was on the verge of vehemence; but becoming sensible of it, he controlled himself with a suddenness that was almost shocking.

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"Find the murderer of this poor girl," said he, with a quiet air that was more thrilling than any display of passion, "and ask *him* where he got the keys with which he opened the door of my father's house at midnight."

Was this a challenge, or just the natural outburst of an innocent man. Neither the jury nor the Coroner seemed to know, the former looking startled and the latter nonplussed. But Mr. Gryce, who had moved now into view, smoothed the head of his cane with quite a loving touch, and did not seem at this moment to feel its inequalities objectionable.

"We will certainly try to follow your advice," the Coroner assured him. "Meanwhile we must ask how many rings your wife is in the habit of wearing?"

"Five. Two on the left hand and three on the right."

"Do you know these rings?"

"I do."

"Better than you know her hands?"

"As well, sir."

"Were they on her hands when you parted from her in Haddam?"

"They were."

"Did she always wear them?"

"Almost always. Indeed I do not ever remember seeing her take off more than one of them."

"Which one?"

"The ruby with the diamond setting."

"Had the dead girl any rings on when you saw her?"

"No, sir."

"Did you look to see?"

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"I think I did in the first shock of the discovery."

"And you saw none?"

"No, sir."

"And from this you concluded she was not your wife?"

"From this and other things."

"Yet you must have seen that the woman was in the habit of wearing rings, even if they were not on her hands at that moment?"

"Why, sir? What should I know about her habits?"

"Is not that a ring I see now on your little finger?"

"It is; my seal ring which I always wear."

"Will you pull it off?"

"Pull it off!"

"If you please; it is a simple test I am requiring of you, sir."

The witness looked astonished, but pulled off the ring at once.

"Here it is," said he.

"Thank you, but I do not want it. I merely want you to look at your finger."

The witness complied, evidently more nonplussed than disturbed by this command.

"Do you see any difference between that finger and the one next it?"

"Yes; there is a mark about my little finger showing where the ring has pressed."

"Very good; there were such marks on the fingers of the dead girl, who, as you say, had no rings on. I saw them, and perhaps you did yourself?"

"I did not; I did not look closely enough."

"They were on the little finger of the right hand,

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on the marriage finger of the left, and on the forefinger of the same. On which fingers did your wife wear rings?"

"On those same fingers, sir, but I will not accept this fact as proving her identity with the deceased. Most women do wear rings, and on those very fingers."

The Coroner was nettled, but he was not discouraged. He exchanged looks with Mr. Gryce, but nothing further passed between them and we were left to conjecture what this interchange of glances meant.

The witness, who did not seem to be affected either by the character of this examination or by the conjectures to which it gave rise, preserved his *sang-froid*, and eyed the Coroner as he might any other questioner, with suitable respect, but with no fear and but little impatience. And yet he must have known the horrible suspicion darkening the minds of many people present, and suspected, even if against his will, that this examination, significant as it was, was but the forerunner of another and yet more serious one.

"You are very determined," remarked the Coroner in beginning again, "not to accept the very substantial proofs presented you of the identity between the object of this inquiry and your missing wife. But we are not yet ready to give up the struggle, and so I must ask if you heard the description given by Miss Ferguson of the manner in which your wife was dressed on leaving Haddam?

"I have."

"Was it a correct account? Did she wear a black and white plaid silk and a hat trimmed with various colored ribbons and flowers?"

"She did."

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"Do you remember the hat? Were you with her when she bought it, or did you ever have your attention drawn to it in any particular way?"

"I remember the hat."

"Is this it, Mr. Van Burnam?"

I was watching Howard, and the start he gave was so pronounced and the emotion he displayed was in such violent contrast to the self-possession he had maintained up to this point, that I was held spell-bound by the shock I received, and forebore to look at the object which the Coroner had suddenly held up for inspection. But when I did turn my head towards it, I recognized at once the multi-colored hat which Mr. Gryce had brought in from the third room of Mr. Van Burnam's house on the evening I was there, and realized almost in the same breath that great as this mystery had hitherto seemed it was likely to prove yet greater before its proper elucidation was arrived at.

"Was that found in my father's house? Where—where was that hat found?" stammered the witness, so far forgetting himself as to point towards the object in question.

"It was found by Mr. Gryce in a closet off your father's dining-room, a short time after the dead girl was carried out."

"I don't believe it," vociferated the young man, paling with something more than anger, and shaking from head to foot.

"Shall I put Mr. Gryce on his oath again?" asked the Coroner, mildly.

The young man stared; evidently these words failed to reach his understanding.

"*Is* it your wife's hat?" persisted the Coroner with

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very little mercy. "Do you recognize it for the one in which she left Haddam?"

"Would to God I did not!" burst in vehement distress from the witness, who at the next moment broke down altogether and looked about for the support of his brother's arm.

Franklin came forward, and the two brothers stood for a moment in the face of the whole surging mass of curiosity-mongers before them, arm in arm, but with very different expressions on their two proud faces. Howard was the first to speak.

"If that was found in the parlors of my father's house," he cried, "then the woman who was killed there was my wife." And he started away with a wild air towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked the Coroner, quietly, while an officer stepped softly before him, and his brother compassionately drew him back by the arm.

"I am going to take her from that horrible place; she is my wife. Father, you would not wish her to remain in that spot for another moment, would you, while we have a house we call our own?"

Mr. Van Burnam the senior, who had shrunk as far from sight as possible through these painful demonstrations, rose up at these words from his agonized son, and making him an encouraging gesture, walked hastily out of the room; seeing which, the young man became calmer, and though he did not cease to shudder, tried to restrain his first grief, which to those who looked closely at him was evidently very sincere.

"I would not believe it was she," he cried, in total disregard of the presence he was in, "I *would not* believe

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it ; but now——" A certain pitiful gesture finished the sentence, and neither Coroner nor jury seemed to know just how to proceed, the conduct of the young man being so markedly different from what they had expected. After a short pause, painful enough to all concerned, the Coroner, perceiving that very little could be done with the witness under the circumstances, adjourned the sitting till afternoon.

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XIV.

A SERIOUS ADMISSION.

I WENT at once to a restaurant. I ate because it was time to eat, and because any occupation was welcome that would pass away the hours of waiting. I was troubled; and I did not know what to make of myself. I was no friend to the Van Burnams; I did not like them, and certainly had never approved of any of them but Mr. Franklin, and yet I found myself altogether disturbed over the morning's developments, Howard's emotion having appealed to me in spite of my prejudices. I could not but think ill of him, his conduct not being such as I could honestly commend. But I found myself more ready to listen to the involuntary pleadings of my own heart in his behalf than I had been prior to his testimony and its somewhat startling termination.

But they were not through with him yet, and after the longest three hours I ever passed, we were again convened before the Coroner.

I saw Howard as soon as anybody did. He came in, arm in arm as before, with his faithful brother, and sat down in a retired corner behind the Coroner. But he was soon called forward.

His face when the light fell on it was startling to most of us. It was as much changed as if years,

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instead of hours, had elapsed since last we saw it. No longer reckless in its expression, nor easy, nor politely patient, it showed in its every lineament that he had not only passed through a hurricane of passion, but that the bitterness, which had been its worst feature, had not passed with the storm, but had settled into the core of his nature, disturbing its equilibrium forever. My emotions were not allayed by the sight; but I kept all expression of them out of view. I must be sure of his integrity before giving rein to my sympathies.

The jury moved and sat up quite alert when they saw him. I think that if these especial twelve men could have a murder case to investigate every day, they would grow quite wide-awake in time. Mr. Van Burnam made no demonstration. Evidently there was not likely to be a repetition of the morning's display of passion. He had been iron in his impassibility at that time, but he was steel now, and steel which had been through the fiercest of fires.

The opening question of the Coroner showed by what experience these fires had been kindled.

"Mr. Van Burnam, I have been told that you have visited the Morgue in the interim which has elapsed since I last questioned you. Is that true?"

"It is."

"Did you, in the opportunity thus afforded, examine the remains of the woman whose death we are investigating, attentively enough to enable you to say now whether they are those of your missing wife?"

"I have. The body is that of Louise Van Burnam; I crave your pardon and that of the jury for my former obstinacy in refusing to recognize it. I thought my-

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self fully justified in the stand I took. I see now that I was not."

The Coroner made no answer. There was no sympathy between him and this young man. Yet he did not fail in a decent show of respect; perhaps because he did feel some sympathy for the witness's unhappy father and brother.

"You then acknowledge the victim to have been your wife?"

"I do."

"It is a point gained, and I compliment the jury upon it. We can now proceed to settle, if possible, the identity of the person who accompanied Mrs. Van Burnam into your father's house."

"Wait," cried Mr. Van Burnam, with a strange air, "*I acknowledge I was that person.*"

It was coolly, almost fiercely said, but it was an admission that wellnigh created a hubbub. Even the Coroner seemed moved, and cast a glance at Mr. Gryce which showed his surprise to be greater than his discretion.

"You acknowledge," he began—but the witness did not let him finish.

"I acknowledge that I was the person who accompanied her into that empty house; but I do not acknowledge that I killed her. She was alive and well when I left her, difficult as it is for me to prove it. It was the realization of this difficulty which made me perjure myself this morning."

"So," murmured the Coroner, with another glance at Mr. Gryce, "you acknowledge that you perjured yourself. Will the room be quiet!"

But the lull came slowly. The contrast between the

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appearance of this elegant young man and the significant admissions he had just made (admissions which to three quarters of the persons there meant more, much more, than he acknowledged), was certainly such as to provoke interest of the deepest kind. I felt like giving rein to my own feelings, and was not surprised at the patience shown by the Coroner. But order was restored at last, and the inquiry proceeded.

"We are then to consider the testimony given by you this morning as null and void?"

"Yes, so far as it contradicts what I have just stated."

"Ah, then you will no doubt be willing to give us your evidence again?"

"Certainly, if you will be so kind as to question me."

"Very well; where did your wife and yourself first meet after your arrival in New York?".

"In the street near my office. She was coming to see me, but I prevailed upon her to go up-town."

"What time was this?"

"After ten and before noon. I cannot give the exact hour."

"And where did you go?"

"To a hotel on Broadway; you have already heard of our visit there."

"You are, then, the Mr. James Pope, whose wife registered in the books of the Hotel D—— on the seventeenth of this month?"

"I have said so."

"And may I ask for what purpose you used this disguise, and allowed your wife to sign a wrong name?"

"To satisfy a freak. She considered it the best

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way of covering up a scheme she had formed ; which was to awaken the interest of my father under the name and appearance of a stranger, and not to inform him who she was till he had given some evidence of partiality for her."

" Ah, but for such an end was it necessary for her to assume a strange name before she saw your father, and for you both to conduct yourselves in the mysterious way you did all that day and evening ? "

" I do not know. She thought so, and I humored her. I was tired of working against her, and was willing she should have her own way for a time."

" And for this reason you let her fit herself out with clothes down to her very undergarments ? "

" Yes ; strange as it may seem, I was just such a fool. I had entered into her scheme, and the means she took to change her personality only amused me. She wished to present herself to my father as a girl obliged to work for her living, and was too shrewd to excite suspicion in the minds of any of the family by any undue luxury in her apparel. At least that was the excuse she gave me for the precautions she took, though I think the delight she experienced in anything romantic and unusual had as much to do with it as anything else. She enjoyed the game she was playing, and wished to make as much of it as possible."

" Were her own garments much richer than those she ordered from Altman's ? "

" Undoubtedly. Mrs. Van Burnam wore nothing made by American seamstresses. Fine clothes were her weakness."

" I see, I see ; but why such an attempt on your part to keep yourself in the background ? Why let your

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wife write your assumed names in the hotel register, for instance, instead of doing it yourself?"

"It was easier for her; I know no other reason. She did not mind putting down the name Pope. I did."

It was an ungracious reflection upon his wife, and he seemed to feel it so; for he almost immediately added: "A man will sometimes lend himself to a scheme of which the details are obnoxious. It was so in this case; but she was too interested in her plans to be affected by so small a matter as this."

This explained more than one mysterious action on the part of this pair while they were at the Hotel D——. The Coroner evidently considered it in this light, for he dwelt but little longer on this phase of the case, passing at once to a fact concerning which curiosity had hitherto been roused without receiving any satisfaction.

"In leaving the hotel," said he, "you and your wife were seen carrying certain packages, which were missing from your arms when you alighted at Mr. Van Burnam's house. What was in those packages, and where did you dispose of them before you entered the second carriage?"

Howard made no demur in answering.

"My wife's clothes were in them," said he, "and we dropped them somewhere on Twenty-seventh Street near Third Avenue, just as we saw an old woman coming along the sidewalk. We knew that she would stop and pick them up, and she did, for we slid into a dark shadow made by a projecting stoop and watched her. Is that too simple a method for disposing of certain encumbering bundles, to be believed, sir?"

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"That is for the jury to decide," answered the Coroner, stiffly. "But why were you so anxious to dispose of these articles? Were they not worth some money, and would it not have been simpler and much more natural to have left them at the hotel till you chose to send for them? That is, if you were simply engaged in playing, as you say, a game upon your father, and not upon the whole community?"

"Yes," Mr. Van Burnam acknowledged, "that would have been the natural thing, no doubt; but we were not following natural instincts at the time, but a woman's *bizarre* caprices. We did as I said; and laughed long, I assure you, over its unqualified success; for the old woman not only grabbed the packages with avidity, but turned and fled away with them, just as if she had expected this opportunity and had prepared herself to make the most of it."

"It was very laughable, certainly," observed the Coroner, in a hard voice. "*You* must have found it very ridiculous"; and after giving the witness a look full of something deeper than sarcasm, he turned towards the jury as if to ask them what they thought of these very forced and suspicious explanations.

But they evidently did not know what to think, and the Coroner's looks flew back to the witness who of all the persons present seemed the least impressed by the position in which he stood.

"Mr. Van Burnam," said he, "you showed a great deal of feeling this morning at being confronted with your wife's hat. Why was this, and why did you wait till you saw this evidence of her presence on the scene of death to acknowledge the facts you have been good enough to give us this afternoon?"

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"If I had a lawyer by my side, you would not ask me that question, or if you did, I would not be allowed to answer it. But I have no lawyer here, and so I will say that I was greatly shocked by the catastrophe which had happened to my wife, and under the stress of my first overpowering emotions had the impulse to hide the fact that the victim of so dreadful a mischance was my wife. I thought that if no connection was found between myself and this dead woman, I would stand in no danger of the suspicion which must cling to the man who came into the house with her. But like most first impulses, it was a foolish one and gave way under the strain of investigation. I, however, persisted in it as long as possible, partially because my disposition is an obstinate one, and partially because I hated to acknowledge myself a fool; but when I saw the hat, and recognized it as an indisputable proof of her presence in the Van Burnam house that night, my confidence in the attempt I was making broke down all at once. I could deny her shape, her hands, and even the scar, which she might have had in common with other women, but I could not deny her hat. Too many persons had seen her wear it."

But the Coroner was not to be so readily imposed upon.

"I see, I see," he repeated with great dryness, "and I hope the jury will be satisfied. And they probably will, unless they remember the anxiety which, according to your story, was displayed by your wife to have her whole outfit in keeping with her appearance as a working girl. If she was so particular as to think it necessary to dress herself in store-made undergarments, why make all these precautions void by carrying

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into the house a hat with the name of an expensive milliner inside it?"

"Women are inconsistent, sir. She liked the hat and hated to part with it. She thought she could hide it somewhere in the great house, at least that was what she said to me when she tucked it under her cape."

The Coroner, who evidently did not believe one word of this, stared at the witness as if curiosity was fast taking the place of indignation. And I did not wonder. Howard Van Burnam, as thus presented to our notice by his own testimony, was an anomaly, whether we were to believe what he was saying at the present time or what he had said during the morning session. But I wished I had had the questioning of him.

His next answer, however, opened up one dark place into which I had been peering for some time without any enlightenment. It was in reply to the following query:

"All this," said the Coroner, "is very interesting; but what explanation have you to give for taking your wife into your father's empty house at an hour so late, and then leaving her to spend the best part of the dark night alone?"

"None," said he, "that will strike you as sensible and judicious. But we were not sensible that night, neither were we judicious, or I would not be standing here trying to explain what is not explainable by any of the ordinary rules of conduct. She was set upon being the first to greet my father on his entrance into his own home, and her first plan had been to do so in her own proper character as my wife, but afterwards the freak took her, as I have said, to personify the housekeeper whom my father had cabled us to have in waiting at

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his house,—a cablegram which had reached us too late for any practical use, and which we had therefore ignored,—and fearing he might come early in the morning, before she could be on hand to make the favorable impression she intended, she wished to be left in the house that night ; and I humored her. I did not foresee the suffering that my departure might cause her, or the fears that were likely to spring from her lonely position in so large and empty a dwelling. Or rather, I should say, *she* did not foresee them ; for she begged me not to stay with her, when I hinted at the darkness and dreariness of the place, saying that she was too jolly to feel fear or think of anything but the surprise my father and sisters would experience in discovering that their very agreeable young housekeeper was the woman they had so long despised."

"And why," persisted the Coroner, edging forward in his interest and so allowing me to catch a glimpse of Mr. Gryce's face as he too leaned forward in his anxiety to hear every word that fell from this remarkable witness,—"why do you speak of her fear? What reason have you to think she suffered apprehension after your departure?"

"Why?" echoed the witness, as if astounded by the other's lack of perspicacity. "Did she not kill herself in a moment of terror and discouragement? Leaving her, as I did, in a condition of health and good spirits, can you expect me to attribute her death to any other cause than a sudden attack of frenzy caused by terror?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Coroner in a suspicious tone, which no doubt voiced the feelings of most people present ; "then you think your wife committed suicide?"

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"Most certainly," replied the witness, avoiding but two pairs of eyes in the whole crowd, those of his father and brother.

"*With* a hat-pin," continued the Coroner, letting his hitherto scarcely suppressed irony become fully visible in voice and manner, "thrust into the back of her neck at a spot young ladies surely would have but little reason to know is peculiarly fatal! Suicide! when she was found crushed under a pile of *bric-à-brac*, which was thrown down or fell upon her hours after she received the fatal thrust!"

"I do not know how else she could have died," persisted the witness, calmly, "unless she opened the door to some burglar. And what burglar would kill a woman in that way, when he could pound her with his fists? No; she was frenzied and stabbed herself in desperation; or the thing was done by accident, God knows how! And as for the testimony of the experts—we all know how easily the wisest of them can be mistaken even in matters of as serious import as these. *If all the experts in the world*"—here his voice rose and his nostrils dilated till his aspect was actually commanding and impressed us all like a sudden transformation —"*If all the experts in the world were to swear that those shelves were thrown upon her after she had lain there for four hours dead, I would not believe them. Appearances or no appearances, blood or no blood, I here declare that she pulled that cabinet over in her death-struggle; and upon the truth of this fact I am ready to rest my honor as a man and my integrity as her husband.*"

An uproar immediately followed, amid which could be heard cries of "He lies!" "He 's a fool!" The attitude taken by the witness was so unexpected that

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the most callous person present could not fail to be affected by it. But curiosity is as potent a passion as surprise, and in a few minutes all was still again and everybody intent to hear how the Coroner would answer these asseverations.

"I have heard of a blind man denying the existence of light," said that gentleman, "but never before of a sensible being like yourself urging the most untenable theories in face of such evidence as has been brought before us during this inquiry. If your wife committed suicide, or if the entrance of the point of a hat-pin into her spine was effected by accident, how comes the head of the pin to have been found so many feet away from her and in such a place as the parlor register?"

"It may have flown there when it broke, or, what is much more probable, been kicked there by some of the many people who passed in and out of the room between the time of her death and that of its discovery."

"But the register was found closed," urged the Coroner. "Was it not, Mr. Gryce?"

That person thus appealed to, rose for an instant. "It was," said he, and deliberately sat down again.

The face of the witness, which had been singularly free from expression since his last vehement outbreak, clouded over for an instant and his eye fell as if he felt himself engaged in an unequal struggle. But he recovered his courage speedily, and quietly observed:

"The register may have been closed by a passing foot. I have known of stranger coincidences than that."

"Mr. Van Burnam," asked the Coroner, as if weary of subterfuges and argument, "have you considered

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