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The HOUSE of CARDS

HANNAH GARTLAND

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THE HOUSE OF CARDS

BY

HANNAH GARTLAND

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THE WARRIOR-MONK

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RAHWAY NEW JERSEY

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TO

LEE THAYER

WITH ADMIRATION AND AFFECTION

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THE HOUSE OF CARDS

CHAPTER I

THE TRAGEDY

PATROLMAN DOOLEY detached himself from his squad at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty —— Street. He stood for a moment and watched the shifting scene on the Avenue, and then, following his accustomed beat, reluctantly turned into the side street leading from that more interesting thoroughfare.

On Fifty —— Street there were no visible signs of life except a milkman in the distance discharging his morning duties, and about midway of the block an old darkey perfunctorily sweeping the steps of one of the long row of brown stone houses that flanked either side of the street.

"It's a wonder to me," Dooley grumbled to himself, "that the Sergeant puts a young man like me on a beat where there's never anything doing. There's plenty of men on the force just

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doddering to their pensions and it's here the likes of them ought to be."

He was suddenly interrupted in these reflections. The door of one of the houses near the middle of the block opened swiftly, and a woman flung herself precipitately down the steps. She paused an instant on the lower step, glanced eastward toward Madison Avenue and then turned her head in the direction from which he was coming. Catching sight of the uniform, she darted toward Dooley, while he quickened his pace to meet her.

"Officer," she panted, with a quick intake of the breath, "there's been an accident!"

She was a middle-aged woman, apparently of the domestic service class. She was dressed in a badly fitting serge suit and wore an unbecoming hat.

Dooley forgot his ill-humor and became alert and businesslike at once.

"What's the trouble?" he asked the woman, eagerly.

She swallowed hard several times before she managed to reply:

"Mr. Barwood—he's been shot."

"And who shot him?" rather ineptly inquired the policeman, catching her by the arm.

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"I don't know," she gasped. "I've only just come, and I found him just like he is."

She turned quickly and led the way with hurried steps to the house from which she had just emerged, Dooley, now thoroughly aroused, following close at her heels. They mounted the steps and threw open the door which stood slightly ajar. Indicating a door at the right of the hall, she shrank back and allowed Dooley to enter the room alone.

With eyes dazzled by the cheerful morning sunlight, he did not, in the contrasting gloom of the interior, at once perceive that the room held an occupant. A faint, low, rough sound of heavily drawn breath immediately caught his attention, and Dooley swung swiftly to the left. There, seated close beside the door, facing the center of the room, was the figure of a man clad in a rough tweed suit. He was leaning slightly to one side, his stertorous breath making the only break in the silence.

Dooley went to the window and pushed back the heavy curtains. The unsparing morning sun fell full upon the face. It caused no change in the set, staring eyes. Never again would those pupils contract to earthly light. That the man was still breathing seemed a miracle, for

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directly in the center of the forehead, just at the edge of the graying hair, was an ugly, round, dark crimson wound.

With a horrified ejaculation, Dooley turned swiftly in search of the woman who had brought him there. He found her clinging to the door-jamb, her still, white face averted.

"Why haven't you called the family?" he asked.

"There's no family to call," she replied, in a hushed voice. "He lives alone."

"It's the ambulance that's needed the first thing anyway," said Dooley, eyeing her curiously. "Where's your telephone?"

Without a word she conducted him along the hall to the telephone which was just out of sight in a turn of the hall.

Dooley took down the receiver and put in his call, then with a sharp glance from narrowed eyes, proceeded to question the woman at his side.

"Where did you tell me you were when it happened?"

"I don't know when it happened," she declared. "I come here every morning from my home on Second Avenue, and when I came this morning, this is the way I found him," and she

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picked nervously at the folds of her coarse serge dress.

"But you don't mean to tell me there's no one at all in the house besides himself!" exclaimed Dooley.

"There's nobody at all, I tell you. He doesn't keep any servants in the house, and he has no family."

"How did you get in then, I'd like to know?" queried the puzzled policeman. "Was the door unlocked?"

"No, sir. It was locked as usual. I had my own key, and I let myself in with it." She was trembling with nervousness, but manifestly endeavoring to control herself. Though she answered all his questions promptly, Dooley felt vaguely repelled by an equivocal something in her attitude.

"Who else has keys?" Dooley queried.

"Nobody but myself and Mr. Barwood," she asserted, firmly.

"He must have shot himself, then," muttered Dooley. "I'll take a look around for the gun."

With an uneasy feeling of reluctance, but mindful of his imperative duty, Dooley softly traversed the length of the hall and again found himself in the awesome presence of the dying

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man. There was something so disturbing in the fact that the man still breathed that Dooley, with difficulty, compelled himself to go near the body. His examination of the floor was somewhat perfunctory, but it was sufficient to assure him beyond question that there was no weapon there.

"Well, anyhow, he didn't do it himself unless somebody swiped the gun," concluded Dooley.

He straightened slowly and glanced curiously about him.

The apartment was rather smaller than one would expect to find in a house of its apparent size from the outside. It was furnishel elegantly, but rather stiffly, after the manner of a reception room used only for formal visitors. The rug was a costly Persian whose prevailing color was a faded rose. The chairs were of gilt and pale blue satin damask. A console table against the wall opposite the door supported on its carved and gilded legs a polished top, which, in its turn, held a fragile jardinière of old Sèvres.

The walls were frescoed panels with garlands of pink roses framing landscapes of shady green trees and sparkling blue fountains, where charmingly dressed ladies walked with gallant

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gentlemen in costumes of delicate shades of satin and flowing sleeves of lace.

"It's up to date anyway," soliloquized Dooley. "It's just like the curtain at the new movie theayter on Grand Street."

In grim contrast to these scenes of joyous, pulsing life, the unconscious figure in the chair sat under the black shadow of Death.

"This don't look right to me," said Dooley. "I'll call up the precinct."

He again sought the telephone, and was just replacing the receiver on the hook after delivering his message, when the sound of an ambulance clanging noisily up to the curb, brought him to the door. He admitted the young interne, and together they entered the room of the tragedy.

The labored breathing could not now be heard, but the position of the body remained unchanged. The eyes were still open and staring. Around the mouth the muscles had relaxed giving the appearance of a mocking smile. The doctor touched the stiffening wrist, and bent his head to the breast for a moment. Rising, he answered the question in Dooley's eyes by a shake of the head.

"All over," he said. "How did it happen?"

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"That I can't tell you, sir. I found him sitting here breathing hard when I was called in. There's no one living here but himself, so I am told by the woman who calls herself his housekeeper, and she claims she was not here when it happened. The door was locked, she claims, when she got here. But the queer part of it is, there's no gun about, so he couldn't have done it himself," Dooley explained.

"Looks like an interesting job for the police," commented the young doctor, indifferently.

"Tell me, Doctor," said Dooley, moving away from the uncanny eyes that seemed to follow him, "is there any truth in the saying that you can see the picture of the last person he looked on in a dead man's eyes? Because if there is, and you being a doctor might have the nerve to look, you might find out who shot him."

The doctor smiled indulgently and shook his head.

"Mere superstition, officer. There's nothing in it. I'll report the case to the coroner. This is his job, now. Don't touch the body, or disturb anything. But, of course I needn't tell you that."

The perfunctory visit being over, Dooley

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closed the door after his departing visitor, and not wishing to return to the reception room, he proceeded to familiarize himself with the rest of the ground floor.

At the far end of the hall, a broad stairway went half way up to the floor above, and turned on a landing. Back of the reception room, where the hall widened, a door led into a room having more the appearance of a clubroom than a drawing room in a private house. Huge chairs and heavy club lounges were upholstered in brown leather. Beside the chairs were smoking stands. A feeble light penetrated the room through two windows in the rear, heavily draped in brown velour. The air was oppressive and ominous. Dooley was glad to seek the hall again, but there, too, the air seemed stifling, and he opened the front door for relief.

"Hello, Dooley," a cheery voice called. "Housebreaking so early in the morning?"

"Is that you, Mr. Macoy?" called back Dooley, a note of relief in his voice, as he recognized in the man before him, a very youthful newspaper reporter. "It's a great nose for news you have. It's a wonder to me you didn't get here before it happened!"

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The reporter bounded up the steps, and ostentatiously whipped out a note book.

"Has something happened?" he asked eagerly. "I'm in great luck this morning. Give me the dope, Dooley, and I'll get it in the ten o'clock edition." His young face was alight with excitement.

"It's going too fast you are, Mr. Macoy. I'll give you no news until the coroner comes, so put up your note book. It's all alone in the house with him I am—barrin' the housekeeper, as she calls herself, and she gives me the creeps worse nor two dead men."

"Oh, it's a case for the coroner, is it?" exclaimed the reporter. "Let me come in, then, Dooley, and hear what the coroner says. Be a good fellow, do, and I'll put your name all over the city before twelve o'clock," he pleaded.

"It's against regulations, but you can come in and keep me company, if it gets me broke. Who wants to stay alone in a house wid a sittin' up corpse, and a woman that keeps you wid your fingers crossed," and he stepped aside, and allowed the reporter to enter.

A few minutes later an automobile bearing the police headquarters shield, drew up to the

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curb, and Dooley stepped down to meet it. From it alighted Inspector Kane, a uniformed policeman, and two plain clothes men.

"Well, Dooley, what is this you're after having here? I thought you never had anything happen on your beat!" said the big, alert, blue-eyed Inspector as Dooley piloted them to the door.

"Well, I got it comin' and goin' this time, sir." Dooley replied ruefully. "A man shot dead betune his own four walls, and nobody widin' to shoot him, and nothing to shoot him wid."

"What are you giving us Dooley? You're talking like we had no Dry Laws," retorted the Inspector.

"You can see for yourself, sir, and make out of it what you can. Indeed, it's no fairy tale I'm tellin' you," and he threw open the door of the reception room and stood back to allow his superior to enter first.

An oppressive silence reigned in the room where the dead man sat with wide-open, staring eyes. A pedestal clock chiming the half hour, broke upon their ears with almost alarming clamor. The Inspector instinctively lowered his voice.

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"He was still living when you phoned me, you said?"

"He was, but he was dead before the doctor got here," replied Dooley.

"I suppose the doctor will notify the coroner?"

"He said he was going to send him immediately," responded Dooley.

"Well, now, begin at the beginning, and tell me all about it," said the Inspector, glancing about the room, and taking in its contents in a swift, comprehensive survey.

Dooley glanced apprehensively at the upright body.

"You're right, Dooley," agreed the Inspector, comprehending the other's meaning. "We'll find pleasanter quarters," and he led the way into the hall.

"There's no place you might call just exactly pleasant," said Dooley, "but there's a room back here that hasn't got any corpses in it, please God," and he led the way to the room with the brown leather upholstery.

At sight of the room in such striking contrast to the one they had just left, the Inspector elevated his eyebrows.

"Doesn't look much like a family room, does

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it? I've seen rooms like this before, but not in private houses," he soliloquized, his eyes noting thoughtfully every detail of the room.

When he completed his inspection, he turned to Dooley, and motioned to chairs as he seated himself.

"Well, now, Dooley, let's hear all about it."

"I had just come on duty," began the patrolman, "and was grumbling because there is never anything to be seen on this street until the limousines come rolling up after the theayter and the opera, when a woman came flying out of the door of this house, looking first wan way and then the other for an officer. When she laid her eyes on my uniform she came toward me with her eyes big and staring, and entirely out of breath like she had been running hard, though, sure, it was only a few steps she had run. 'Officer,' she says, 'Mr. Barwood has been shot.' 'And who shot him'? I says. Then she tells me that she just came and unlocked the door with her own key,—she's the cook or something—and she found him sitting there with a bullet in his brain, and that's all I can get out of her. It's queer acting she is, but whether it's because of the fear that's on her, or something else, I can't rightly say," he concluded.

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"Where is this woman now?" inquired the Inspector.

"I don't mind having seen her since the doctor left, but she's not left the house, I made sure of that. Shall I find her for you?"

"Yes, the sooner I question her, the better," said the Inspector briskly.

Dooley found the woman on the stair-landing leading to the second floor. She had apparently recovered from her fright, and she accompanied Dooley with extreme self-possession. She returned the Inspector's keen, appraising gaze with level, expressionless eyes.

"I'll work for all I get out of you, my lady," commented the Inspector to himself.

He seated himself again in the brown leather chair from which he had risen, and allowed her to remain standing. She met the brevity of his questions with replies equally brief.

"You are the housekeeper here?" he began.

"Yes, sir," she admitted in a tone just short of aggressive.

"What is your name?"

"Mary Cox."

"Are there any other servants?"

"No, sir."

"Do you live here?"

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"No, sir, I live with my husband on Second Ave, and come in by the day."

"How long have you been housekeeper here?"

"Nearly five years."

"And you have the entire care of this large house?"

"Yes, sir, only Jerry, the furnace man."

"Did you see Jerry this morning?"

"No, sir."

"What time did you get here?"

"I opened the door at just half past eight."

"How do you know it was just half past eight?"

"The clock in the hall struck the half hour just as I came in the door."

"And when did you discover Mr. Barwood?"

"Just as soon as I came in."

"Did you give the alarm at once?"

"Yes, sir, just as fast as I could go."

"Do you have a key to this house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was the door locked when you arrived this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who else has keys?"

"No one but Mr. Barwood. The house was burglarized a couple of months ago, and the

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locksmith came and put on new locks. There were only two keys."

"Have you ever lost your key?"

"No, sir."

"Ever lent it?"

"No, sir."

"Where do you keep it when you're home?"

She shot a suspicious glance at her questioner.

"I wear it around my neck, for fear I may forget it and have to go back for it, as I did once or twice when I first came, or else ring Mr. Barwood up, and he doesn't like that." To corroborate her statement, she pulled the key out of her bosom showing it suspended from a stout leather cord.

"When did you last see Mr. Barwood?"

"He came in about five o'clock yesterday."

"How did he appear? Troubled about anything."

"No, sir, he appeared about as usual."

How long were you in the house this morning before you called Officer Dooley?"

"Not a minute, sir, I hadn't taken off my hat," and, indeed, she had not yet removed it.

"Did Mr. Barwood dine at home last evening?"

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"No, sir, he seldom did."

"Where did he dine?"

"I don't know, sir, he never told me where he was going to dine."

"What time did you leave?"

"At my usual time, half past five. My work was done and I locked up the house and went home."

The Inspector jotted down a few notes in his note book, and replaced it in his pocket.

"Mrs. Cox, I shall need you again. Don't leave the house without permission from the police." He shot a significant look at one of the detectives he had brought with him, who followed the enigmatic Mrs. Cox from the room.

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CHAPTER II

THE CHAUFFEUR TELLS TALES

"I DON'T care much about that woman," the Inspector remarked when Mrs. Cox had passed out of the room, "whatever she knows she's not going to give it to the police till it's dragged out of her. Of that I'm certain. But what have we here?"

He had stepped into the hall just in time to see patrolman Dooley open the front door and admit a young man in a chauffeur's uniform. Through the open door he glimpsed a handsome limousine drawn up at the curb.

Dooley looked at the Inspector for instructions. The chauffeur gazed about him in evident astonishment at the unexpected group in the hall.

"Who are you, young man?" the Inspector inquired abruptly.

"My name is Turner. I am Mr. Barwood's chauffeur," he replied, his eyes roving about as if in search of the meaning of this unusual as-

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sembly. "He told me to bring the car around at ten o'clock, and I'd like him to know I'm on time."

"When did Mr. Barwood give you orders to bring the car around at this time?" the Inspector asked.

"Last night," replied the chauffeur.

"Where was he when he gave the order?"

"Here at his house," said Turner.

"What time was that?"

The chauffeur's manner stiffened. "I don't care to blab about Mr. Barwood's business while I'm in his service," he answered with some dignity.

"You are no longer in his service," the Inspector grimly remarked. "He is lying dead in there with a bullet in his brain. Perhaps you would like to see for yourself," and he motioned with his hand to the door of the reception room.

The chauffeur hesitated about entering, and the Inspector led the way. He watched Turner with the closest scrutiny while he gazed upon the lifeless body of his late employer. Turner's manner indicated surprise and curiosity, but he did not betray the slightest agitation.

"Now will you answer my question?" asked the Inspector.

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"Yes, sir, but not in here. Let's get out of this," he proposed.

The Inspector conducted him to the large room farther down the hall where he had held his interview with Mrs. Cox.

"Now are you ready, Turner?"

"What was your question, Officer?" Turner asked.

"I asked you what time it was last night when Mr. Barwood gave you the order to bring the car here at ten o'clock."

"It was about one o'clock," Turner replied promptly.

"Did you bring him home in his car at that time?"

"I certainly did," he affirmed.

"Do you usually work as late as that and report again at ten o'clock in the morning?"

"I have no regular hours. Mr. Barwood usually engages taxicabs at night unless he—" he hesitated.

"Well, go on. Unless he—what?" urged Kane.

"Well, taxi drivers sometimes talk, and garages can keep tabs on a man," Turner explained.

"You imply that Mr. Barwood didn't want

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any one to know what he did at night. Is that what you mean?" asked the Inspector.

"Well, you know," Turner went on easily, "Mr. Barwood was very careful not to involve any of the ladies in scandal."

"What occasion was there for scandal?" The Inspector felt himself on the verge of a discovery of a motive for the crime.

Turner shrugged his shoulders and made an expressive gesture with his hands, but did not reply. The Inspector regarded him with growing interest.

"Turner," he said in a changed tone, "how long have you been in Mr. Barwood's service?"

"A little over a year," Turner replied.

"Were you deeply attached to him?"

Turner again shrugged his shoulders. "Not so you could notice it," he replied indifferently. "He paid me well. Always gave big tips for extra night service. Well, I won't say he bribed me to keep my mouth shut, but he made it worth while. He didn't shoot himself, did he? He wasn't that kind." Turner asked as if struck by a sudden thought.

"Apparently not," replied Kane. "Looks as though he was shot by some unknown person about eight-thirty this morning."

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"Look like a woman's job?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because I brought a woman here with him last night."

The Inspector glowed with inward satisfaction at the ease with which he was picking up important clues. Indeed, it was almost too easy to furnish him with any zest. He did not, however, betray his gratification. His tone was almost casual as he said: "Indeed, and what was she like?"

"She was a medium sized woman dressed all in black. She had on a long straight cloak that hung in folds around her, and she wore one of those long floating veils that gets in your eyes when a woman sits on the front seat with you when you're driving."

"You have no idea who she was? Didn't Mr. Barwood call her by name?"

Turner laughed amusedly. "Oh, yes, she had a name. They all have. She was Miss Johnson," he chuckled.

"What is there funny about that? Have you ever seen Miss Johnson before?"

"Oh, yes, lots of times," he replied meaningly. Sometimes she was short and plump, and sometimes tall and slim. Sometimes she

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had black hair and again it was yellow, and occasionally it was red. You see he called them all Miss Johnson. You'd be surprised to know the real names of some of these people. It was no cheap joint, I'll tell the world."

"Do you know their real names?"

"Not on your life! I was paid good money not to know them," Turner asserted emphatically.

"I see, I see," mused the Inspector, "then this one didn't remind you of any one you had ever seen before?"

"Oh, I didn't say she didn't remind me of any one," he corrected. "She did."

"Who did she remind you of?"

"It was a woman I used to see around with Mr. Barwood at various places—Long Branch and Seabright and other nearby places, outside of New York."

"What makes you think it was the same woman?"

"Well, I used to drive them around together a good deal. Her husband and Mr. Barwood were pretty good friends at one time. He wasn't exactly in Mr. Barwood's class. He was only a curb broker, but he was a crackerjack at choosing the right time to sell short. I've heard

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'em talk. He made a pot of money last winter in a promotion scheme, too, and if you ask me, I think Barwood got a good haul out of it, himself, although his name didn't appear in the deal.''

"If you know all about these people, Turner, you must know their names," declared the Inspector.

"Of course I know their names," admitted Turner.

"Well, then, come across with it, man, and don't hold it up any longer," said the Inspector.

Turner began to grow cautious. "Of course I don't care much about going on a witness stand and giving away all my employer's secrets. It wouldn't help me much on my next job, but that's all I care about it. But look here! I couldn't swear that the woman I drove here last night was the same woman."

"No, of course you couldn't be expected to see distinctly in that light, but who did she remind you of?" The Inspector's voice was persuasive in the extreme, as he felt Turner wavering.

"She made me think of Mrs. Jack Dalrymple and I'm dead sure that's who it was, but I don't

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want to run into any trouble swearing to it," he protested.

"Have you any idea where these people are now?"

"No, I haven't heard anything about them since we left Bar Harbor a month or more ago. They were down there then."

"Where did you go to get Mr. Barwood last night?"

"He was on 40th St., near 7th Avenue."

"Have you any idea where he came from to the car, whether it was a theater, or club, or a private house?"

"Not the sneakingest notion, but it probably wasn't from any place in that neighborhood. He wasn't any angel I reckon, but he was a good scout about covering up the ladies' tracks," he affirmed loyally.

"What time was it when he telephoned you?"

"It was before one o'clock. I waited some time at the corner where he told me to be."

The Inspector made a sign to the detective who had been standing partially hidden by the folds of the window draperies, and they both stepped into the hall.

"Blake," said the Inspector, "find out where

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Barwood telephoned from at one o'clock this morning. Then find Mrs. Jack Dalrymple and her husband. We have struck a hot trail. Find out where they both were and what they were doing the last twenty-four hours, and hustle like the devil before those rubber-neck reporters get a beat on us."

Blake departed with his instructions, and Inspector Kane returned to resume his very satisfactory examination of the chauffeur.

"Turner, you must know the names of a good many of Mr. Barwood's acquaintances," he began.

"Oh, yes, a good many but I'd have to be a regular telephone directory to tell them all. They were all kinds, howling swells on the Avenue and Riverside Drive, and sporting people, and school teachers taking lessons in bridge—you'll be going some if you catch up with them all," he laughed.

"Didn't you catch any of the conversation between Mr. Barwood and the woman last night?"

"Mr. Barwood is too old a bird for that, I'll say. He seemed to have some unusual deal on, though. They were in the deuce of a hurry."

Their conversation was interrupted by Dooley announcing the arrival of a man from

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the coroner's office. The Inspector wished to be present at the examination of the body. Before leaving the room, he turned back to Turner and spoke significantly:

"Well, Turner," he said, "you will probably be wanted again; for, so far as I can see, you were the last person to see Mr. Barwood alive."

"Except for the woman in black, Inspector," corrected Turner.

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CHAPTER III

THE INSPECTOR CONGRATULATES HIMSELF

THE Coroner was already in the reception room when Kane entered, and was making the usual perfunctory examination of the body.

Kane regarded the dead man with interest. The pallid face was finely modeled, the glossy brown hair was graying a little about the temples, but waved in becoming lines above the forehead. A handsome face, Kane thought, before the ghastly wound had destroyed its beauty. Kane had heard of Mr. Barwood. He knew that he was the foremost authority on bridge whist in America; knew that he was a teacher of that game; and that his pupils were drawn from exclusive circles of society. He knew, too, that it had been hinted, and was becoming a conviction in police quarters, that something more than innocent games sometimes took place in the house of the famous teacher. In the background of his memory some other knowledge of the man was

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struggling for expression, but he could not, at the present moment, bring it to the surface. It seemed, however, not contradictory to his impression that a woman should accompany Barwood to his house late at night, and that morning should find an avenging bullet in his brain.

A good detective does not jump to conclusions, however. He was willing to appear to consider the theory of suicide, in spite of the absence of the weapon, and to this end he questioned the Coroner.

"What do you think, Coroner, about Mr. Barwood shooting himself? The gun isn't here, of course, but it isn't beyond the bounds of possibility that some one may have come in after the shot was fired, and carried it off."

"Judging from the nature of the wound, I don't think he could possibly have done it himself," the Coroner declared with conviction. "See the direction the shot took—downward. A man would have to hold the gun in an almost impossible position to shoot that bullet. No man would have risked missing the mark by holding it in that position." The Coroner illustrated the position. "There would be only one chance in a hundred•that he would hit a vital spot."

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"Then you think he was sitting in the chair and some one stood over him?"

"Precisely, like this," and he illustrated again.

"Do you think the person who shot him stood as close to him as that?" Kane asked doubtfully.

"He must have stood close to him, and over him, to give the bullet that downward trend," the Coroner asserted positively. "A man would have to be eight feet tall if he fired from this spot," the Coroner indicated the spot, "or ten feet high from this position," and he moved farther away from the body.

"You must be right," Kane admitted, "but there doesn't seem to have been any struggle. Do you think a visitor took him by surprise?"

"Undoubtedly, but to find out who and why is up to the police. If the jury should render an open verdict, I shall watch with a good deal of interest for your results."

"I think that I can promise you that you won't have to wait long, Coroner, a week at latest," the Inspector confidently assured him.

"Good luck to you, Inspector," the Coroner replied with a suspicion of a smile.

"Thank you, sir." Kane ignored the sugges-

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tion in the smile. "There's one thing more I'd like to ask you. He was alive when the housekeeper came in at eight thirty—and couldn't have lived more than fifteen minutes after that. Could you make a guess from that about the approximate time he was shot?"

"With such a wound he would immediately become unconscious. The shot must have been fired not more than ten or fifteen minutes before her arrival, if she came the time she says she did. A half hour is the extreme limit I would give a man to live with that kind of a wound."

"Hm, hm," said Kane thoughtfully, "half an hour. Speaking of that housekeeper, I'd like to have you take a look at her, Coroner. Dooley, call her in."

Mrs. Cox came in again, and Kane questioned her in the presence of the Coroner, but nothing could shake her story as she had previously told it. She repeated it for the third time with such exact similarity that Dooley was moved to remark, sotto voce, "Sounds like a record on the phonygraft."

"Do you mean to tell me," the Inspector incredulously inquired of no one in particular, "that any one could anywhere in New York

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City, enter a house, shoot a man, and leave again by the front door in broad daylight, and nobody see him? Wasn't there a milkman, a delivery boy, or a janitor anywhere on this block?"

"There was an old colored man cleaning the steps of a house a couple of doors away when I got here," answered Dooley.

"Why didn't you detain him? He's the very man we want," the Inspector impatiently demanded.

"I did so," said Dooley, "but he is that scared, I misdoubt me if you can get very much out of him. He thinks we are accusing him of the crime."

"Bring him in and we will see what he has to offer," Kane ordered.

Dooley disappeared, and presently a commotion was heard in the hall. "Fo' Gawd, I's innocent, Mr. Policeman. Don't take me in there," a voice wailed. "Turn me loose, man, turn me loose."

"Come on wid ye," Dooley's voice broke in, "Sure no harrum is coming to ye. Come on, now," he urged.

Kane and the Coroner, the latter's work being finished for the time being, followed the sounds of the controversy into the hall, where

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they saw Dooley, holding firmly in his grasp a struggling and wild-eyed old darkey.

"Here's Jerry, the furnace man, Inspector," Dooley explained rather superfluously.

Jerry was a pathetic object of fear. His eyes were rolling in their sockets, and his old gray woolly cap shook in his trembling hands.

"Now, Jerry, don't be scared," began the Inspector soothingly, "we haven't anything on you. We just want to find out who came into Mr. Barwood's house this morning, or who went out of it. You know Mr. Barwood's house, don't you?"

"Yas, sah, I knows it," admitted the frightened darkey.

"Did you clean the steps this morning?" the Inspector continued persuasively.

"Yas, sah, I done clean the steps," he pleaded, "but I didn't do no hahm. I b'longs to de Rise and Shine Baptis' church, an' I's in good an' reglar standin'."

"Why, of course, you are, Jerry, we all know that," Kane assured him, "but you could see if anybody went in or out of this house this morning, couldn't you? How long had you been here when Mrs. Cox came?"

"How come I know how long I bin? I doesn't

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carry no watch.'' He twirled the cap round and round in his hands.

''Did you see Mrs. Cox when she came?'' the Inspector went on.

''Yas, sah, I sees Mrs. Cox when she done come,'' he admitted.

''Did you see this officer go in with Mrs. Cox?'' indicating Dooley. At sight of the uniform his fears returned.

''Yas, sah, I reckon I did,'' he fairly wailed, which brought a laugh at Dooley's expense.

''Just one more question, Jerry,'' the Inspector urged, ''and then I'll let you go home and I won't bother you any more. Now, think hard. Did you see anybody go in or out of this house this morning while you were cleaning the steps?''

''No, sah,'' Jerry emphatically asserted, gaining confidence from the laughter and the promise to let him go, ''nobody come out o' disaway house de whole endurin' time I was heah. I never 'lows nobody to step on my clean steps while I's washin' 'em. No, sah, if angel Gabel come to me and says, 'Jerry, I's gwine step plumb on you-all's clean steps,' I'd say, 'Scusen me, angel Gabel, but isn't you-all got nice shiny stahs o' your own to step your golden slippers

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on, lessen you-all come a mussin' up a pore ole niggah's steps!' no, sah, scusen me for sayin' it, sah, but I's some ticklah niggah 'bout dem steps.'' He was edging his way to the door during this speech, and, as nothing more was to be obtained from him, the Inspector said, "All right, Jerry, you can go."

Dooley opened the door, and the relieved janitor hurried away as fast as his short bowlegs could carry him.

The Coroner presently took his departure. Members of the ubiquitous fraternity of reporters stood about and waited for the last unpleasant details of removing the body. The police took possession of the house, and, indeed, of the street; for curiosity seekers were already blocking the way when the perfunctory cortege passed out. Inspector Kane went back to headquarters to await the report of the detective he had sent to look up the record of the Dalrymples.

"Dead easy," he said to himself, as he filled a pipe and let himself down into his desk chair to record the results of his morning's work.

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CHAPTER IV

JAMES MACOY, REPORTER

JAMES MACOY, the young newspaper reporter, who had slipped so unobtrusively into the Barwood house on the morning of the murder, was really possessed of practical common sense; but this quality was so often obscured by an overworked and very youthful imagination that it was often difficult to assort the two for any practical use. He was young—let us pardon him for that—and only just emerging from the stage where he himself, as the captor of Raffles, was his favorite hero. It was not so long ago that he had pursued that famous criminal into ladies' boudoirs, gentlemen's strongly guarded treasure vaults, over house tops, hanging breathlessly suspended at dizzying heights between tall buildings, puffing fascinating rings of smoke from his favorite Sullivan into the face of the Chief of Police, swimming impossible distances, "and getting away with it every time."

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"He couldn't get away from me," he used to think. Many a time had he laid his hand on that cock-sure gentleman at the exact moment when he had eluded the keenest of picked detectives. At sight of his captor, Raffles would make a courtly bow and say, "The game is up. I have known for months that my doom was sealed. You are the only man I ever feared. Be kind to Bunny." And then would ensue the fascinating pursuit of Bunny. Sometimes they were captured together. At other times he would trail him through interminable labyrinths, which always led ultimately to Bunny's arrest. And Bunny would weep and say, "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served Raffles—" Macoy couldn't remember the rest of the quotation; but meant to look it up in Poole's Index, or Who's Who, or somewhere if he ever wanted to use it for his newspaper.

With this so very recent background, it is not strange that his ambition placed detective work as his highest goal. In all detective stories he had read, the road to this exalted position lay through newspaper reporting; and thus he sought a job and found it as a space writer for the *Rising Star*.

He still had day dreams which occasionally

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interfered with the strict facts in his reports, but they were taking on a little more substantial form. Just at this time, the detective fraternity welcomed with great enthusiasm the theft of the Peruso diamonds which were stolen from a Long Island country house at the opportune moment when New York hadn't a real sensation on hand. Macoy had taken the initial steps to the recovery of the diamonds, the capture of the thief, and an immense reward, when chance led him to the neighborhood of Fifty —— Street on the morning of the Barwood murder.

Taking instant advantage of the opportunity gained through his chance acquaintance with Dooley, he lost no time in beginning an inspection of the house. Dooley indicated to him the room where the body lay, but had no mind to accompany him. Macoy, left alone, began to employ traditional detective methods. He paid little attention to the body, but began a search for clues. The room with its stilted, gorgeous furnishings afforded few hiding places. There was no sign of disorder. The windows were closed and fastened. No one was in hiding behind the satin curtains. The young reporter began to feel aggrieved over this trick of fate, and was about to leave the room when his eye

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caught a glint of light at the edge of the rug. He stooped and picked up a small, iridescent glass bead.

"Not much," he muttered, "but who knows what it may lead to?"

He placed it carefully in a compartment of his bill book, and returned the book to his pocket. He went carefully over the room again, but failing to find anything further, he returned to the hall. There he glanced at the telephone in the angle, and passed on to the room beyond with the brown leather furniture. Finding nothing in the nature of clues here, he passed on beyond the stairs where he discovered a small room elegantly fitted up as a ladies' dressing room. The toilet articles on the Empire dressing table were of gold, ivory, and crystal. The doors were fitted with full length mirrors. An Aubusson carpet of dull rose blended with hangings of uncut velvet of the same color.

"Good night! Looks like a hangout for classy dames, all righty right!" ejaculated the amateur detective. He searched carefully through this room, but found nothing to add to his single clue. Being satisfied that his search had been thorough, he was about to leave the

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room and ascend the stairs, when a noise at the front door attracted his attention. It was the moment of the Inspector's entrance on the scene. Fearing that his presence would be questioned and its discovery be followed by his instant dismissal, Macoy stepped back and concealed himself behind the heavy drapery which hung at the door of the dressing room.

Luckily for him, this door was in such close proximity to the lounging room in which the Inspector conducted his examinations, that he could hear practically everything which transpired.

After Mrs. Cox's dismissal, fearing from the sounds within the room that his position was becoming untenable, he slipped unobserved up the stairway, his detective instinct not yet appeased.

On the first landing he paused an instant and glanced down on the hall below, then continued on his way to the upper landing. This brought him to a large square hall from which only one door opened. It was closed, and he stood before it in some hesitation, for he was not yet inured to penetrating the privacy of strangers' bed rooms and boudoirs. He had to remind himself that he was on detective duty before he could

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summon the courage to turn the brass knob, and boldly push himself in. When he did so, he found himself in the most extraordinary apartment he had ever seen.

It was a very large room, evidently occupying the whole second floor of the house. The light was obscured by heavy velvet curtains which fell in thick, golden folds before the windows. His footsteps fell soundlessly on the long pile of a velvet carpet as he moved to the windows to let in light. Pushing back the heavy folds, he found the windows covered with ornamental iron grill work, elaborately wrought, but very strong, as he found when he tested them. "Gee! this would be no paradise to a second story man," he murmured, and turned about to view the room by the entering light.

Suspended from the ceiling hung a huge crystal chandelier, its dangling prisms reflecting brilliant colors where the rays of sunlight touched them. Numerous crystal sconces were placed on the pilasters of the wall paneled in the French manner in gold brocade. Many square tables occupied the room, upon which were placed packs of cards and bridge scores. From the rug near one of these tables Macoy picked up a tortoise-shell hairpin. Occasional smok-

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ing stands were in evidence. At the farther end of the room stood a long table which had no apparent use, its polished top quite bare and empty. At the end of the table, a door stood partly open. Macoy crossed the room, pushed it wide open, and looked about him. The use of the long table was now quite apparent. A green cloth with all the other accessories of a complete faro layout was revealed. A roulette wheel, shelves piled with packs of cards, boxes of dice, and neatly arranged poker chips met his eye. A closed safe, set in a space evidently meant to be concealed by a panel, stood exposed to view, the panel not drawn before it.

"Looks as though somebody got away from that safe in a hurry," he commented, and tried the door only to find it securely locked.

On leaving the room, he attempted to place the door by which he had entered ajar precisely as he had found it. In adjusting it, he discovered that the door was one of the brocade panels with which the entire room was fitted, and when closed made a continuous wall without apparent break.

"Some joint this, I'll tell the world!" he exclaimed in surprised admiration of the scheme.

He was just about to leave the room when

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he ran into two of the men who had come with Inspector Kane.

"Holy Crickets!" cried Harding, the plain clothes man, "if here isn't Jimmie, the Sleuth. No chance for us, Flynn, he has the criminal mugged already."

"You're laying pipes to have trouble, young man," warned Flynn, the uniformed officer.

"Do you think you have found another life insurance fraud?" said Harding in a bantering tone.

Macoy winced, for he had made a ludicrously absurd deduction in the case to which Harding referred, and had not yet forgotten the resulting interview with his editor.

"Had we better frisk him, Harding? He may have the gat," said Flynn with mock seriousness.

"Caught red-handed with the goods," replied Harding in the same tone; and he stretched out his arm and took from Macoy's hand the tortoise-shell hairpin which he had been unconsciously carrying. He held it up between his thumb and forefinger.

"Gentlemen of the Jury," he declaimed mockingly, "we have here the indirect weapon that killed Cock Robin. The crime was committed

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by an auburn haired vamp. Note the color of the pin—not auburn, you observe. Careless, or she would have screwed her hairpins to her head. The last woman to leave the room, or some other woman would have pinched the jool. Lucky at cards, too, or she would have cut and run when her money gave out. She had a past, or she wouldn't have been present. She—''

"Oh, cut it out, Harding, cut it out. Can't you see you are giving the sleuth all your points?'' interrupted Flynn.

"By the heathen gods, Kid, if you put my stuff in your paper, I'll skin you alive,'' threatened Harding; and the two men after another laugh at Macoy's expense began a serious search of the room entirely ignoring the youthful reporter, Harding, however, retaining the hairpin and nonchalantly placing it in his own pocket.

Macoy's face flushed, and he then and there made a vow that come what would, he would not give the police the benefit of any more clues he might find.

Still smarting under the ridicule, he descended the stairs and again entered the reception room. Other reporters had arrived during his absence and, drawn a little apart at some

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distance from the body, were discussing the affair with an entire lack of formality, the absence of any family evidently rendering delicate reserve unnecessary.

The body had not been removed. The inscrutable smile of the dead man guarded his secret. His arm farthest from the door hung straight down from the body. The hand was clenched, as Macoy had previously observed when he had stooped down to look for the revolver. But his eyes now discerned what he had failed to see before. Closed in under the tight fingers was a tiny bit of paper. Glancing swiftly about to make sure that he was unobserved he gently loosened the fingers, and drew forth a piece of mottled, gray green paper, obviously the corner of a bank check.

Presently the voices of Flynn and Harding were heard descending the stairs. Macoy waited until they were well within the room, and without undue haste made his way into the hall.

He was just in time to see a shadowy figure disappear on the upper landing. He followed softly, but by the time he reached the landing there was no one in sight. He secreted himself in a linen closet and waited. Presently he saw

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Mrs. Cox come rapidly and stealthily down from the third floor concealing something in the folds of her dress and pass through a door in the rear of the hall. Allowing a little time to elapse, he followed until she reached the basement. He could not follow further, but secreted himself again until she returned, now with her hands free.

He was elated with his good fortune, and lost no time in beginning a search for the object she had left. At the end of half an hour, he emerged, hot and triumphant, and tried not to appear conscious of a slight bulge in his pocket. Fearing that he might again be intercepted he hurriedly left the house, and turned toward the Avenue.

He walked for some time, turning over in his mind the experiences of the morning, when suddenly it occurred to him that he had a problem on his hands. He began to question the importance of the clues he had. He hesitated to give them to his paper after the rebuff he had received in his last essay in detective work. He was "sore" at the police, and he began to wonder if he had any right to take anything away from the house. He began to feel creepy, and to fear that instead of his figuring in the rôle of detective, he might occupy the ignominious

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position of prisoner at the bar. He grew more and more disturbed after he attended the inquest in the afternoon. Chance, however, solved his problem for him. On the street, he almost fell over a newsboy shouting, "Huxtry, Mister, all about the Barwood murder, huxtry!" He purchased a paper and read the headlines:

"The District Attorney will make an independent investigation of the Barwood mystery." "Gee! that's what I'll do," he decided, "I'll go to the District Attorney."

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CHAPTER V

THE REPORTER BECOMES DETECTIVE

THE day after the inquest, the District Attorney sat in his office reading the newspaper accounts of the Barwood murder. He read steadily and with concentration, and then reread, as if he sought for some covert meaning between the lines. When he finished, he laid down his paper, and touched one of several ivory disks on his desk.

The door of an adjoining office opened, and a woman, not of the type usually found in a lawyer's office, entered the room. She moved with ease and grace as she approached the lawyer's desk, and looked down upon him out of dark, sorrow-laden eyes. Her abundant hair was plentifully sprinkled with silver, and framed a face whose expression was too sad for the years she must have numbered. There was no listlessness in her manner, however, and she took the seat proffered her with businesslike alacrity.

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Stephen Wallace looked at her thoughtfully a moment.

"Nathalie," he began, "this Barwood case promises to absorb all my attention. I didn't leave the office last night until after one o'clock. I listened to stories of the night life of respectable people playing so close to the danger line that they have become involved in this case to a degree that alarms them. This man Barwood was a cold-blooded, scheming villain, posing as a gentleman, and there is more than one person in New York to-day who is relieved to know that he can tell no tales. It is a complicated case, and I must take personal charge of the investigation. I have asked Beardsley to take over the Larkin case, and Cummings can handle most of the other affairs. I shall concentrate on the Barwood case."

"Oh, Stephen," she objected, "why do you burden yourself with all this? You look so tired and worn. If you throw yourself into this case as you did in that Lewis affair your wife will soon be a very young widow."

At the mention of his wife, his face clouded. "It looks quite the contrary now," he said, "she is in the hands of a trained nurse to-day."

Mrs. Grayson's brow contracted slightly, but

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she suppressed something she was on the verge of saying.

"I never should have gone to Albany on that Larkin affair," he continued. "It took twice as long as I expected, and Beardsley could have got every bit of that evidence as well as I. Sidney begged me not to go. She had set her heart on my going with her down to Longport with the Garrett Lamberts. But where would my business be, Nathalie, if I kept up with Sidney's social activities?"

"You have just admitted that you could have gone to Longport with her just as well as not," Mrs. Grayson reminded him. "She is young and loves a good time. Everybody invites her, and there are so many times she can't go without you without violating the proprieties. And she is very, very beautiful, Stephen. Don't you think there is some danger in neglecting a young and beautiful wife who is as fond of the social whirl as Sidney is?" she cautioned.

"Neglect her! I adore her. It is more for her sake than my own that I want to get on. Where will her pretty clothes and her good times come from if I don't stick to business?" he protested warmly.

"But you do attend to details that you could

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just as well delegate," she insisted. "You simply exhausted yourself on that Larkin case, and then had a heart attack that nearly finished you. This Albany business has left you a perfect wreck. You are looking ghastly this morning. Why don't you take Sidney and run away for a few days, and let the police look after the Barwood case? You will be all the more fit for it when you come back."

"I have no choice in the matter, Nathalie, I must look after this case myself. I shall need all my batteries in action too," he added, the lines tightening about his mouth.

"It does promise to be an interesting case," she conceded reluctantly, "but all you men are like a pack of hounds. Once you get the scent, you are fierce for the chase, and nothing can hold you back. I don't think I like District Attorneys," she concluded slowly.

A faint smile lighted his fatigued face. "Would that all my enemies were as frank and fair," he said.

He regarded her for a long moment as if weighing her in the balance; then with a changed manner he began to clear his desk for action. He swept the newspapers aside, and gave his attention to the pile of letters before

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him which Mrs. Grayson had already opened and annotated. He glanced through them and dispatched them with an efficiency born of custom. Some were dwelt upon and a few cabalistic notes made upon their margins. Others were passed by with a mere check of a blue pencil. When all were finished, he gave Mrs. Grayson some verbal directions concerning them, and then asked abruptly: "Who has been here this morning?"

"A good many people have been here, but most of them have gone. Mr. Lambert was in and said he would come back at two o'clock. Here is a list of the others." She placed a paper before him.

He glanced swiftly down the list, and then asked abruptly: "Who is this 'Mr. James Macoy, Reporter'? What does he want with me?"

"I don't know," she replied with a smile, "he is a funny looking chap and most persistent in his determination to see you. He says that nobody else will do. He must see you personally."

"Send him in, then. I'll relieve his overstrained mind at once," said Wallace.

"But, Stephen," Mrs. Grayson objected, "Judge Howard is here, and is in a hurry."

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"Never mind. If Macoy came first, I will see him first. Let the lion wait," Wallace replied decidedly.

Mrs. Grayson made no attempt to conceal her surprise and disapproval, as she gathered up the letters and left the office.

Mr. Wallace scrutinized curiously the young man who now presented himself, and what he saw was not reassuring. If the fairies had been present at his birth, they had surely been sparse with their gifts to Mr. James Macoy. Standing less than five feet four on a pair of feet whose toes slightly turned in, arms a bit long for his curtailed body, hair of the Traddles type, with very bushy eyebrows to match the hair, he was, at first sight, far from prepossessing. He had fine eyes, however, and his manner of addressing the District Attorney was more free from embarrassment than one would expect from his personal appearance.

"My name is James Macoy," he began without any greetings. "I have been a space writer on the *Rising Star* for a few months now, and I have learned something in that time of the methods of crooks. I have nosed around after news, and got it, too, when other fellows have failed. I am so young, and so darned queer

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looking that nobody takes me seriously. Now, Mr. Wallace, won't you take me on this Barwood case? I can ferret out things. I know some things already the police don't know." He waited anxiously for the other's verdict.

"What things do you know that you haven't told the police?" sharply inquired the District Attorney.

Macoy stared fixedly a moment over the head of his interlocutor at a picture of Abraham Lincoln hanging on the wall beyond. Then he brought his gaze to bear directly on the other's face.

"Are you employing me, Mr. Wallace? If so, I'm your man."

"Have you told anybody what you are withholding from me?" parried Mr. Wallace.

"No, sir, not a blamed soul," said Macoy heartily.

Wallace considered a moment. "I will put you on this case, Mr. Macoy, on one condition."

"Name it," urged Macoy eagerly.

"The condition is, that every bit of evidence you get, no matter how apparently trivial it seems to you, you bring it directly to me—and to me only. And before you give anything to your paper for publication, you will show it

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to me—and that you don't talk about these conditions,'' he added meaningly.

"I agree to that, Mr. Wallace. I'll work like the devil for you. I look so darn stupid nobody is afraid of me, and I can nose around a good bit without arousing suspicion." He was beaming with satisfaction.

"Very well, then," said Wallace, "sit down and tell me what you know."

"It is this way," he began, seating himself in the proffered chair, "I happened around to the Barwood house yesterday morning after the murder, and I snooped around quite a bit. The whole of the second floor was thrown into one large room, and it was full of card tables where the swells had been going to learn bridge. It all looked very innocent, but do you know, the sly old guy had a whole gambling outfit there—cards, dice, chips, a roulette wheel, and a faro layout? Just press a button, and biff! along slides a panel in the wall, and there's the whole business, neat and tidy. Nice, respectable people happen along, and back slides the panel. Nothing doing! Regular Sunday school room. Nice old ladies learned to play bridge in the morning, and Mr. Barwood was as dignified as a grandfather. Swell young

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married ladies a little later playing for a cent a point and a little squeamish at that. Barwood scrupulously punctilious, la-di-da. And then, when little old New York closed its tired eyes, and the night watchmen were asleep on their jobs, the third bunch met there, and made Monte Carlo look like a game of jackstraws. Gee! but wouldn't I like to see the nice old ladies' faces when they read about it, and learn how very close to the World, the Flesh, and the Devil they have been." Macoy slapped his knee and laughed heartily.

"But I thought you had some evidence the police haven't got hold of," urged Wallace impatiently.

"I am coming to that," Macoy responded. "The police think that these three bunches, like parallel lines, never met, and Barwood had a sort of triple personality—Dr. Jekyll, and Mr. Hyde, and just plain Barwood."

"And you found some evidence that makes you think they are mistaken?" The District Attorney waited with suppressed eagerness the other's reply.

"Lord! no. I guess that he was all they think he was, and then some," ejaculated Macoy.

"What made them think there were different

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classes of people there? Did they find a list of names, or any clue to the identity of these people?"

"Not a scrap. Not a name on anything in the whole blooming house," replied Macoy cheerfully.

"And the housekeeper? Didn't she know any of them?" pursued the District Attorney.

"No, they put her through her paces, but she didn't know a thing. Now I'm going to tell you about her, too. I was there yesterday with both feet and then some as quick as the police got on the job. I was there when they were looking for the weapon, and examining the doors and windows; and I was most particularly there when they forgot to keep an eye on the housekeeper."

"Well—what then?" prompted the District Attorney.

"Well, I didn't like the actions of that woman," continued Macoy. "She didn't tell all she knew, not by a gun shot. She said she came in at eight-thirty, but who saw her come in? I was at the inquest, and that medical expert said the shot hadn't been fired more than ten or fifteen minutes before she called the police. Why didn't somebody see her? Because she

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didn't go in at that time, that's why." The searching eyes of Wallace were riveted on the other's face.

"You have found a witness who did see her enter before eight-thirty?"

"No, but I'm going to. You can't tell me that anybody can walk into a house and shoot a man, and walk out again just as if he was going for a hair cut, and nobody see him. No, sir, the person who did that shooting was in the house long before that, and he never left the house."

Macoy pronounced these words with an air of supreme conviction and paused to observe their effect. He was a little disappointed in the lack of enthusiasm the District Attorney displayed over this ingenious deduction.

"That is a plausible theory, Macoy, but not very original; and without some proof, your deduction isn't worth much."

"Excuse me, sir, but you haven't heard the whole story yet. The Inspector winked to a plain clothes dick to keep an eye on her, but he seemed to think that keeping her from leaving the house was all that was necessary. Dooley was in the front hall, and a man outside, and she couldn't get away; so the blooming dick let her out of his sight, and spent his time guying

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me, and taking away from me the clue I had found. When he and his running mate had chased me out of the card room, I caught sight of Mrs. Cox's skirts disappearing on the landing of the stairway leading to the third floor. I waited a minute and slipped up after her, and hid in a linen closet that opened out of the hall. I left the door open a crack. Pretty soon she came out and looked over the railing and listened. Then she went cautiously down the stairs, and I knew she was up to mischief. I followed her and had a regular Hide and Seek game clear to the basement. I know she went there to hide something. I waited in a dark corner for her to come out, and when she was quite gone, I jumped out and got on to my job."

Macoy dearly loved a dramatic situation. His eyes kindled as he warmed to his subject. "It wasn't a very large object she was carrying. I thought I knew what it was all right, 'She'll likely hide it in the coal,' I said to myself; but the coal didn't seem to be disturbed. Then I took a look in the furnace; all cleaned out for the summer and nothing there. I meant to find that revolver if it took a leg. So I began to look over, and under, and around every blamed thing in the basement. Finally I reached away down

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behind a laundry tub and my hand struck something. I pulled it up and here's what I found.''

From his inner pocket he withdrew a brown paper parcel. He began to untie the string with the deliberation he judged due to the occasion, then he opened the paper and laid before the District Attorney a long, flame colored chiffon scarf, the ends embroidered in threads of heavy black silk, and the rich pattern outlined with fine gold sequins.

He produced an effect that exceeded his expectations. The District Attorney had listened with flattering attention to his recital; and Macoy fancied that his hands trembled slightly as he seized the scarf and eagerly began a minute examination of it.

"Gee, but he's anxious to make the first scoop,'' thought Macoy. "There's some pep in him; not much like that codfish, Griswold. Lawyers and editors are sure different.''

Wallace laid the scarf on the desk before him and regarded it for a long time without speaking. "I suppose,'' he said, finally, speaking half to himself, "we ought to turn this over to the police. If it throws any light on the crime, we must undoubtedly do so; but if it merely means the exposure of some foolish, infatuated

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woman that cold-blooded villain got into his power, what's the use, Macoy? What's the use?"

"Yours truly won't give it to the police for two reasons. The first is they'd pinch me for taking it from the house; and the second is that while I'm on this trail, I want them to think I'm the same damn fool they've always thought me."

"Well, then, we'll make this Exhibit A in our private collection," said Wallace, gravely, "and keep it until it is actually needed to serve the ends of justice."

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CHAPTER VI

FAILURE

IN spite of the District Attorney's lukewarmness towards Macoy's theory, the latter held persistently to the belief that Mrs. Cox knew something about the murder, if she were not actually guilty herself. He assumed that the scarf belonged to some one that she knew; that that person was in the house when she arrived and surprised them; and that she had allowed the woman to go, and then shot Barwood with his own gun. True, she had testified that he never had a gun in the house; and none of his acquaintances who had been questioned by the police had ever known of his owning one. But, he argued, he *was* shot, and in that house, and with some sort of a gun—there was no controverting that. Furthermore, Mrs. Cox was there and ten minutes after the shot was fired she was the only one there. "Why, it ought to be a cinch to construct the happenings of ten

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minutes," he thought. "Just find the gun, trace up the owner, and there you are."

He regretted that he had not made a more thorough search of the coal bin. When he returned to do so, detectives had been there and sifted the coal, sounded panels, and searched every hidden nook but had found no weapon.

Thoroughly discomfited, he reluctantly abandoned his carefully built-up theory. Mrs. Cox could not possibly have spirited the revolver away under the eyes of the police, he knew.

He was moodily walking away from the house when farther along the street he caught sight of the old colored man whom he had heard questioned on the morning of the murder; and who had denied seeing anybody enter or leave the house before Mrs. Cox arrived. He was sweeping the steps of a house the exact counterpart of Barwood's.

"Hello!" Macoy saluted, "aren't you the man that takes care of the Barwood house?" The old man continued to sweep vigorously.

"Hello! I say," repeated Macoy, speaking in a louder tone, "Don't you take care of the Barwood house?"

"No, sah, I doesn't," he declared, moving away with his broom.

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"Who does do it?" Macoy persisted, following the retreating darkey.

"Dey isn't no Barwood house, not as I knows on." He jabbed a refractory piece of paper with his broom, and intimated by his manner that the interview was over.

"Hm, I see," said Macoy, determined to make the old man talk. "Now would you be so kind and accommodating as to tell me who did take care of it when there was one?"

"How come I know who-all took care of it? I's no inf'mation buah," sullenly replied the darkey, without looking up from his work.

Macoy couldn't determine whether his reticence came from natural disinclination to talk, in which case he was a racial anomaly, or whether he had been questioned until he was tired of it, or whether he knew something he didn't want to reveal. The detective in Macoy chose to entertain the latter assumption, but all attempts to ingratiate himself with Jerry failed.

The case didn't seem to be "getting any furtherer," as Macoy heard a girl in the subway regretfully remark that morning as she threw down her paper after avidly reading every detail of the murder.

He walked rather aimlessly along Fifty ——

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Street towards Lexington Avenue, and presently entered a kiosk of the subway. He mechanically purchased a ticket, and dropped it into the chopper just as a down-town express came thundering in. He seated himself and became occupied with his own thoughts. Presently he found himself at Brooklyn Bridge. He emerged from the tunnel and made his way to the street. He was not far from the District Attorney's office and made a sudden resolve to go there.

The District Attorney was not in, so he made bold to ask for Mrs. Grayson, who had shown him much friendliness on his former visits to the office. She was in her small inner office engaged in filing some papers, and she looked up with an encouraging smile when she saw her visitor. "I have come to unburden my mind to you," he said.

"Well, Pilgrim, lay your burden down," she smilingly invited, motioning him to a chair beside her. He suddenly discovered that his mind was singularly free from any burden. He even longed for one to fill the vacuum existing there. But he had to say something, so he rather vacuously repeated the remark of the girl in the subway, whereupon they both laughed.

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This broke down the reserve between them, and without knowing it, he was talking unrestrainedly to his gracious listener. As he talked her woman's eye took note of him—his ill-fitting clothes, his tasteless necktie, his unmanageable hair; and because she had come to like him, she hoped for an opportunity to help him remedy these needless deficiencies. He was quite unaware that she was gently leading him on to speak of himself, his ill success at reporting, and his present perplexities. As she listened, she knew him for a gentle, loving, lonely soul; and she surprised herself when she heard her voice saying:

"Mr. Macoy, we are wasting the city's time. How would you like to come to my little apartment in Irving Place this evening and finish our interview?"

The dull red rose in his neck, and mounted to his ears and forehead. An instinctive feeling of self-defense rose in him. Was she ridiculing him? He might have known it. But her eyes were smiling kindly into his, and held the gracious invitation. She was saying: "It's a tiny place, and I have very few visitors." The whitening hair framing her lovely face looked

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like a halo to Macoy; and he almost choked as he gratefully accepted her invitation.

Her apartment proved to be not so tiny as Macoy expected. He had a hall bedroom mind; and the word tiny, translated in terms of his experience, meant something very different from this charming apartment, with room for a piano, a huge divan, comfortable chairs, a tea table, a library table, bookcases filled with inviting books, still leaving a feeling of space. He immediately felt the indefinable charm that a room always has when occupied by well-bred people of refined tastes.

She met him cordially. "And so you came? I thought for a moment you were going to decline my poor little hospitality."

He shifted his hat to his other hand and bluntly replied: "Honestly, I thought you were making fun of me, Mrs. Grayson, and I'm like a Ouija board, if you make fun of me, I don't work."

The merriest laugh she had indulged in for many a day pealed from her throat at this unconventional and surprising reply. Nothing could have more quickly put him at ease. His hands and feet took care of themselves when

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he sat down, and it was with more curiosity than embarrassment that he watched her go through some unfamiliar movements. On a tea table rested a massive silver tray; and on that stood an array of teacups, silver spoons, sugar bowl, and tongs. In an electric kettle water presently began to boil. From a lacquered Japanese box she extracted tea; and placing it in a silver tea pot she poured the boiling water on it. Macoy watched her hands and movements with fascinated interest. She poured tea into a shell of a cup, and pausing with a lump of sugar in the tongs, she uttered the usual formula: "One lump or two?" and waited for his reply.

"What are you going to do with it?" he inquired.

Again she laughed and he laughed with her. "I am going to give it to you; now don't tell me you don't drink tea."

"I'd drink poison hemlock for you. Go the limit!" he answered heartily.

After they had tea, she let him choose his own topics for conversation. He talked well and intelligently, and she decided that she liked him. Though innately refined, he lacked the outward expressions of sophisticated society. She resolved to make a friend of him, and when

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she closed the door behind him at his departure, she found that some of the chill had departed from her own heart. Just before retiring that night, her hand fell upon a volume of "Sesame and Lilies." She opened it and read:

"Let heart sickness pass beyond a certain bitter point, and the heart loses its life forever."

"Perhaps he may save me from that," she murmured.

And the Fates, unknown to them both, were spinning the threads which were to weave them into the all-absorbing mystery which Macoy was bent upon unraveling.

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CHAPTER VII

THE INSPECTOR STRIKES A SNAG

THERE were others besides Macoy who believed that Mrs. Cox was withholding something of vital importance to the inquiry. She had been kept under strict surveillance for two days, and had been repeatedly questioned. Under the continued badgering of the police, she had finally admitted that her first story was not strictly true. On the third day she was brought to the Criminal Courts building to testify before a council of police officials and assistant district attorneys. The formality of the proceeding was too much for her, and she signified her willingness to tell the whole truth.

"Now, then, Mrs. Cox," Inspector Kane began, "you admit that your first statements were false?"

"Yes, sir," she admitted.

"Just why were you telling untruths, Mrs. Cox?"

"I did it to shield a woman who happened to

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be in the house at the time, but had nothing to do with the murder—if it was murder—and didn't know anything about it until I told her."

"Who was this woman?"

"I don't know. I had never seen her before."

The inspector made an impatient exclamation. "That kind of talk is stupid, Mrs. Cox. Moreover, it's dangerous. Do you know what perjury means?"

"Yes, sir," the woman's eyes snapped.

"You are under oath now, and by God, you'd better tell the truth," said Kane, bringing his closed fist down on the desk with a resounding thwack, and fastening eyes upon her which held in them a dangerous glint.

The woman stood unmoved, and since he had not asked a question, she did not speak.

"I ask you once more who that woman was," Kane threatened.

"I don't know who she was. I never saw her before," Mrs. Cox replied evenly.

"Then what in the name of the devil were you shielding her for?" Kane was growing more and more exasperated.

The woman's eyes held the glint now as she turned them full on the inspector.

"Because," she said slowly, "I'm tired of

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seeing women get the heavy end of the deal every time. Just because a woman makes a misstep, and does a foolish thing, it's no reason for mixing her up with a crime she didn't commit."

"How do you know she didn't commit the crime?" In his irritation Kane almost shouted the words.

"Because—," she looked at her questioner tranquilly, "she told me so."

The inspector reddened with annoyance. "Who are you, woman, that you should be the judge of whether or not she committed the crime?"

"Nobody. It's none of my business who committed the crime. I'm not a policeman," she replied in an unruffled tone.

"Don't you know that you can be held as an accessory after the fact for letting that woman go?" Kane made no attempt to conceal his vexation.

"It wasn't up to me to arrest the woman. I didn't see her commit the crime any more than you did. Why didn't the police arrest her themselves? She walked out right under their noses."

An assistant district attorney, seeing Mrs.

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Cox getting rather the better of the inspector by preserving her temper while he was losing his, inquired pleasantly if he might ask Mrs. Cox a few questions. His tone was conciliatory and courteous, and he succeeded in drawing out, bit by bit, a fairly connected story of the incidents of the fateful morning.

When she arrived at Barwood's house, she said, she entered by the front door as usual and closed it behind her. She was about to pass on to the rear of the house when she noticed the figure of a man sitting just inside the door of the reception room. Mr. Barwood often came down for his mail in the morning, and on these occasions she usually took orders for his breakfast. She stopped at the door, and as he did not speak to her, she thought he had fallen asleep in his chair. Somewhat mystified by this unusual occurrence, she stepped into the room and looked at him. When she discovered that he had been shot and was unconscious, she was alarmed and ran to the front door, both to escape a like fate that might be in store for her if she lingered, and to raise an alarm. Just as she was about to open the door, a woman wrapped in a long black evening coat came hurriedly down the stairs.

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"Oh, what has happened?" she cried. Her face was ashen white and her eyes dilated with fear.

"Don't you know what has happened?" Mrs. Cox inquired.

"No," the strange woman said breathlessly, "the door bell rang and Mr. Barwood thought it was the postman. After a long time, I thought I heard a shot and the closing of the front door. What is it? Did Mr. Barwood shoot somebody? Do tell me, and be quick about it," she urged.

"Somebody has shot Mr. Barwood," I told her.

"Is he—is he dead?" she whispered.

"No, but he is unconscious. I'm going out to raise an alarm."

"Oh, please let me get away before you do," she begged. "I swear to you I don't know anything about it. I don't know who came in, and I mustn't, *mustn't* be found here. You are a woman—you understand—I am not a criminal." And I knew she wasn't. She was scared about being found there.

"You seem to know the symptoms," put in the inspector somewhat sarcastically.

"I have had good reasons to," she grimly replied.

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"And then what did you do?" continued the Assistant District Attorney.

"I told her to hurry and I would wait for her to get to the corner before I called any one."

"Don't you realize, Mrs. Cox," her questioner continued, "that you have committed a very grave offense, if not a criminal one? Didn't you know that Mr. Barwood was in a very critical condition, and a minute or two might make the difference in saving his life? You held his life in your hands."

"I didn't think of it just that way at the time," she said slowly.

"But you did provide for the woman's safety," he reminded her.

"That's different," she said. Her tone conveyed a world of meaning, and her eyes held in their unfathomable depths secrets of tragedies which had not seared her soul, but had filled it with unutterable compassion for the fragile woman.

There was silence for a moment. This plain, almost repellent woman, had removed them for a moment from the sordid, ugly atmosphere to something finer and rarer.

Inspector Kane broke the silence, and his tone was unconsciously gentler.

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"Mrs. Cox, where were you when I came to the house on the morning of the murder?"

"I was in Mr. Barwood's living room on the third floor."

"What were you doing there?"

"I was tidying up the room. I knew people would soon be coming up there."

"Did you take anything away or conceal anything?"

"Yes, sir. The woman had left a scarf there, and I took it away and hid it. I thought there was no use in having a scandal on the house as well as a murder."

"What did you do with it?"

"I hid it in the basement behind the laundry tubs, afterwards."

"What do you mean by 'afterwards'—after I left the house?"

"No, sir, it was while you were still in the house talking to all those people. I was almost sure I was followed when I went down there, and when I looked for it afterwards it was gone."

"How about that, Harding?" the Inspector sharply inquired of the detective. Did you and Flynn search the basement that morning?"

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