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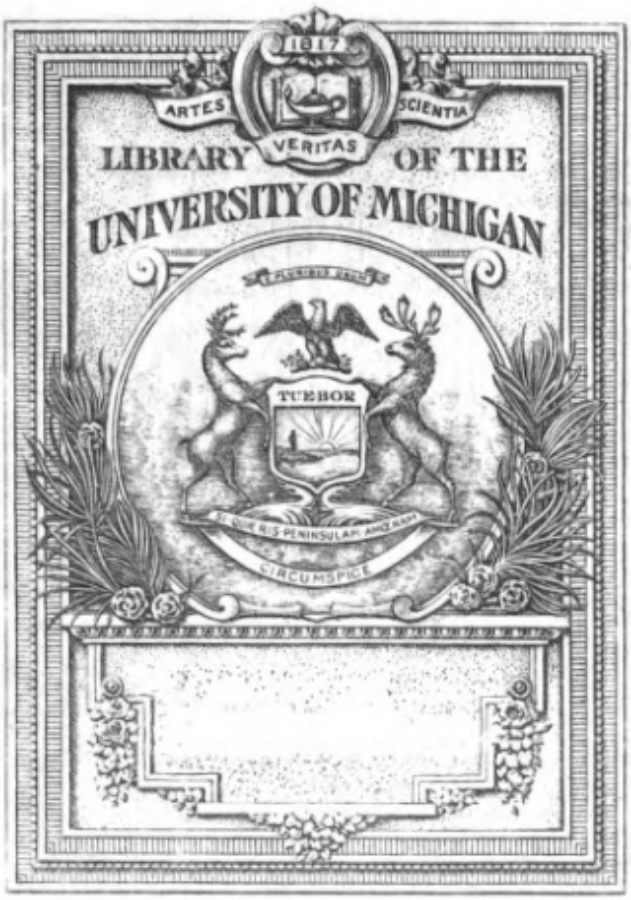

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TRACKS IN THE SNOW

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TRACKS IN THE SNOW

Basil Rathbone
Godfrey Benson, 1st baron

(LORD) CHARNWOOD

Author of "Abraham Lincoln," etc.

LINCOLN MAC VEAGH
THE DIAL PRESS
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TRACKS IN THE SNOW

CHAPTER I

ON the morning of a certain 29th of January, Eustace Peters was found murdered in his bed at his house, Grenvile Combe, in the parish of Long Wilton, of which I was then rector.

Much mystery attached to the circumstances of his death. It was into my hands that chance threw the clue to this mystery, and it is for me, if for any one, to relate the facts.

To the main fact of all, the death of my own friend on the eve, as I sometimes fancy, of a fuller blossoming of his powers, my writing cannot give the tragic import due to it, for it touched my own life too nearly. I had come—I speak of myself, for they tell me a narrator must not thrust himself quite into the background—I had come to Long Wilton, three years before, from a college tutorship

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at Oxford, to occupy the rectory till, as happened not long after, the son of the patron became qualified to hold it. Country-bred, fond of country people and of country pastimes, I had not imagined, when I came, either the difficulties of a country parson's task or the false air of sordidness which those difficulties would at first wear to me; still less was I prepared for the loneliness which at first befell me in a place where, though many of my neighbours were wise men and good men, none ever showed intellectual interests or talked with any readiness of high things. The comradeship of Peters, who settled there a few months after me, did more than to put an end to my loneliness; by shrewd, casual remarks, which were always blunt and unexpected but never seemed intrusive or even bore the semblance of advice, he had, without dreaming of it—for he cared very little about the things of the Church—shown me the core of most of my parish difficulties and therewith the way to deal with them. So it was that with my growing affection for the man there was mingled an excessive feeling of mental dependence upon him. So it was that upon that January morning a great blank entered into my life. Matters full of interest, in my pursuits of the weeks

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and months that went before, are gone from my memory like dreams. My whole sojourn at Long Wilton, important as it was to me, is a thing dimly remembered, like a page of some other man's biography. Even as I call to mind that actual morning I cannot think of the immediate horror, only of the blank that succeeded and remains. I believe that no one, upon whom any like loss has come suddenly, will wonder if I take up my tale in a dry-eyed fashion. I can use no other art in telling it but that of letting the facts become known as strictly as may be in the order in which they became known to me.

Eustace Peters, then, was a retired official of the Consular Service, and a man of varied culture and experience—too much varied, I may say. He had been at Oxford shortly before my time. I gathered from the school prizes on his library shelves that he went there with considerable promise; but he left without taking his degree or accomplishing anything definite except rowing in his college Eight (a distinction of which I knew not from his lips but from his rather curious wardrobe). He had learnt, I should say, unusually little from Oxford, except its distinctive shyness, and had, characteristically, begun the studies of his later years in sur-

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roundings less conducive to study. He left Oxford upon getting some appointment in the East. Whether this first appointment was in a business house or in the Consular Service, where exactly it had been and what were the later stages of his career, I cannot tell, for he talked very little of himself. Evidently, however, his Eastern life had been full of interest for him, and he had found unusual enjoyment in mingling with and observing the strange types of European character which he met among his fellow-exiles, if I may so call them. He had ultimately left the Consular Service through illness or some disappointment, or both. About that time an aunt of his died and left him the house, Grenvile Combe, at Long Wilton, in which a good deal of his boyhood had been spent. He came there, as I have said, soon after my own arrival, and stayed on, not, as it seemed to me, from any settled plan. There he passed much of his time in long country rambles (he had been, I believe, a keen sportsman, and had now become a keen naturalist), much of it in various studies, chiefly philosophic or psychological. He was writing a book on certain questions of psychology, or, perhaps I should say, preparing to write it, for the book did

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not seem to me to progress. My wife and I were convinced that he had a love story, but we gathered no hint of what it may have been. He was forty-three when he died.

This is, I think, all that I need now set down as to the personality of the murdered man. But I cannot forbear to add that, while his interrupted career and his somewhat desultory pursuits appeared inadequate to the reputation which he had somehow gained for ability, he certainly gave me the impression of preserving an uncompromisingly high standard, a keenly if fitfully penetrating mind and a latent capacity for decisive action. As I write these words it occurs to me that he would be living now if this impression of mine had not been shared by a much cleverer man than I.

On the 28th my wife was away from home, and I had supper at Grenvile Combe, going there about seven o'clock. There were three other guests at supper, James Callaghan, C.I.E., William Vane-Cartwright, and one Melchior Thalberg. Callaghan was an old school-fellow of Peters, and the two, though for years they must have seen each other seldom, appeared to have always kept up some sort of friendship. I knew Callaghan well by this time,

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for he had been staying three weeks at Grenvile Combe, and he was easy to know, or rather easy to get on with. I should say that I liked the man, but that I am seldom sure whether I like an Irishman, and that my wife, a far shrewder judge than I, could not bear him. He was a great, big-chested Irishman, of the fair-haired, fresh-coloured type, with light blue eyes. A weather-worn and battered countenance (contrasting with the youthful erectness and agility of his figure), close-cut whiskers and a heavy greyish moustache, a great scar across one cheek-bone and a massive jaw, gave him at first a formidable appearance. The next moment this might seem to be belied by something mobile about his mouth and the softness of his full voice; but still he bore the aspect of a man prone to physical violence. He was plausible; very friendly (was it, one asked, a peculiarly loyal sort of friendliness or just the reverse); a copious talker by fits and starts, with a great wealth of picturesque observation—or invention. Like most of my Irish acquaintance he kept one in doubt whether he would take an exceptionally high or an exceptionally low view of any matter; unlike, as I think, most Irishmen, he was the possessor of real imaginative power. He had

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(as I gathered from his abundant anecdotes) been at one time in the Army and later in the Indian Civil Service. In that service he seemed to have been concerned with the suppression of crime, and to have been lately upon the North-West Frontier. He was, as I then thought, at home on leave, but, as I have since learned, he had retired. Some notable exploit or escapade of his had procured him the decoration which he wore on every suitable and many unsuitable occasions, but it had also convinced superior authorities that he must on the first opportunity be shelved.

Vane-Cartwright, with nothing so distinctive in his appearance, was obviously a more remarkable man. Something indescribable about him would, I think, if I had heard nothing of him, have made me pick him out as a man of much quiet power. He was in the City, a merchant (whatever that large term may mean) who had formerly had something to do with the far East, and now had considerable dealings with Italy. He had acquired, I knew, quickly but with no whisper of dishonour, very great wealth; and he was about, as I gathered from some remark of Peters, to marry a very charming young lady, Miss Denison, who was then absent on

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the Riviera. He had about a fortnight before come down to the new hotel in our village for golf, and had then accidentally met Peters who was walking with me. I understood that he had been a little junior to Peters at Oxford, and had since been acquainted with him somewhere in the East. Peters had asked him to dinner at his house, where Callaghan was already staying. I had heard Peters tell him that if he came to those parts again he must stay with him. I had not noted the answer, but was not surprised afterwards to find that Vane-Cartwright, who had returned to London the day after I first met him, had since come back rather suddenly, and this time to stay with Peters. He now struck me as a cultured man, very different from Peters in all else but resembling him in the curious range and variety of his knowledge, reserved and as a rule silent but incisive when he did speak.

Thalberg, though not the most interesting of the company, contributed, as a matter of fact, the most of my enjoyment on that occasion. I tried hard some days later to recall my impressions of that evening, of which every petty incident should by rights have been engraven on my memory, but the recollection, which, so to speak, put all the

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rest out, was that of songs by Schubert and Schumann which Thalberg sang. I drew him out afterwards on the subject of music, on which he had much to tell me, while Vane-Cartwright and our host were, I think, talking together, and Callaghan appeared to be dozing. Thalberg was of course a German by family, but he talked English as if he had been in England from childhood. He belonged to that race of fair, square-bearded and square-foreheaded German business men, who look so much alike to us, only he was smaller and looked more insignificant than most of them, his eyes were rather near together, and he did not wear the spectacles of his nation. He told me that he was staying at the hotel, for golf he seemed to imply. He too was something in the City, and I remembered having for some reason puzzled myself as to how Vane-Cartwright regarded him.

I must at this point add some account of the other persons who were in or about Peter's house. There were two female servants in the house; an elderly cook and housekeeper, Mrs. Travers, who was sharp-visaged and sharp-tongued, but who made Peters very comfortable, and a housemaid, Edith Summers, a plain, strong and rather lumpish

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country girl, who was both younger and more intelligent than she looked. It subsequently appeared that these two were in the house the whole evening and night, and, for all that can be known, asleep all night in the servants' quarters, which formed an annex to the house connected with it by a short covered way. In a cottage near the gate into the lane lived a far more notable person, Reuben Trethewy, the gardener and doer of odd jobs, a short, sturdy, grizzled man, of severe countenance, not over clean. Peters was much attached to him for his multifarious knowledge and skill. He had been a seaman at some time, had been, it seemed, all sorts of things in all sorts of places, and was emphatically a handy man. He was as his name implies a Cornishman, and had come quite recently to our neighbourhood, to which in the course of a roving existence he was attracted by the neighbourhood of his uncle, Silas Trethewy, a farmer who lived some three miles off. He was now a man of Methodistical professions, and most days, to do him justice, of Methodistical practice; but I, who was perhaps prejudiced against him by his hostility to the Church, believed him to be subject to bitter and sullen moods, knew that he was given to outbursts

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of drinking, and heard from his neighbours that drink took him in a curious way, affecting neither his gait, nor his head, nor his voice, nor his wits, but giving him a touch of fierceness which made men glad to keep out of his way. With him lived his wife and daughter. The wife was, I thought, a decent woman, who kept her house straight and who came to church; but I had then no decided impression about her, though she had for some time taught in my Sunday school, and had once or twice favoured me with a long letter giving her views about it. The daughter was a slight, childish-looking girl, whom I knew well, because she was about to become a pupil teacher, and who was a most unlikely person to play a part in a story of this kind.

Our party that evening broke up when, about ten o'clock, I rose to go: and Thalberg, whose best way to the hotel lay through the village, accompanied me as far as the Rectory, which was a quarter of a mile off and was the nearest house in the village. We walked together talking of German poetry and what not, and I cannot forget the disagreeable sense which came upon me in the course of our talk, that a layer of stupidity or

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of hard materialism, or both, underlay the upper crust of culture which I had seemed to find in the man when he had spoken of music. However, we parted good friends at the Rectory gate, and I was just going in when I recollected some questions about the character of a candidate for Confirmation, on which I had meant to have spoken to Peters that night. I returned to his house and found him still in his library. The two guests who were staying in the house had already gone to bed. I got the information and advice which I had wanted —it was about a wild but rather attractive young fellow who had once looked after a horse which Peters had kept, but who was now a groom in the largest private stables in the neighbourhood. As I was leaving, Peters took up some book, saying that he was going to read in bed. He stood with me for a moment at the front door looking at the frosty starlight. It was a clear but bitterly cold night. I well remember telling him as we stood there that he must expect to be disturbed by unusual noises that night, as a great jollification was taking place at the inn up the road, and my parishioners, who realised the prelate's aspiration for a free rather than a sober England, would return past his house

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in various stages of riotous exhilaration. He said that he had more sympathy with them than he ought to have, and that in any case they should not disturb him. Very likely, he added, he would soon be asleep past rousing.

And so about a quarter to eleven, I parted from him, little dreaming that no friendly eyes would ever meet his again.

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CHAPTER II

I WAS up early on the 29th. Snow lay thick on the ground but had ceased falling, and it was freezing hard, when, while waiting for breakfast, I walked out as far as my gate on the village street to see what the weather was like. Suddenly Peters' housemaid came running down to the village on her way, as it proved, to the police-station. Before passing she paused, and breathlessly told me the news. I walked quickly to Peters' house. Several neighbours were already gathering about the gate of the drive but did not enter. I rang the bell, was admitted by the housekeeper and walked straight up to Peters' bedroom. Callaghan and Vane-Cartwright were there already, the former half-dressed, unshaved and haggard-looking, the latter a neat figure in bedroom slippers and dressing-gown. We had only exchanged a few words when the police-sergeant entered, followed a minute or two later by a tall and pleasant-faced young constable, who brought with him the village doctor,

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an ambitious, up-to-date youth who had lately come to those parts.

I have some little difficulty in saying what I then observed; for indeed, though I looked intently enough on the dead face and figure, and noticed much about them that is not to my present purpose, I took in for myself very little that bore on that problem of detection which has since interested me so much. I cannot now distinguish the things which I really saw upon hearing the others mention them from the things which I imagine myself seeing because I knew they were mentioned then or later. In fact I saw chiefly with the eyes of the Sergeant, who set about his inquiries with a quiet promptitude that surprised me in one whom I knew only as a burly, steady, slow-speaking, heavy member of the force.

There was little to note about the barely furnished room which showed no traces of disorder. On the top of some drawers on the left of the bed-head lay a curious, old-fashioned gold watch with the watchkey by it, a pocket-knife, a pencil, a ring of keys and a purse, the last containing a good deal of money. On a small table on the other side of the bed stood a candlestick, the candle burnt to

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the socket (the electric light had not yet come to Long Wilton); by it lay an open book. Under the table near the bed lay, as if it had fallen from the dead man's hand or off his bed, a book with several leaves crumpled and torn, as if, in his first alarm, or as he died, Peters had caught them in a spasmodic clutch. I looked to see what it was, merely from the natural wish to know what had occupied my friend's mind so near the end. It was Borrow's *Bible in Spain*. When I saw the title an indistinct recollection came to me of some very recent mention of the book by some one, and with it came a faint sense that it was important I should make this recollection clear. But either I was too much stunned as yet to follow out the thought, or I put it aside as a foolish trick of my brain, and the recollection, whatever it was, is gone. The position of the body and the arrangement of the pillows gave no sign of any struggle having taken place. They looked as if when he was murdered he had been sitting up in bed to read. He could hardly have fallen asleep so, for his head would have found but an uncomfortable rest on the iron bedstead. But I repeat, I did not observe this myself, and I

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cannot be sure that anybody noted it accurately at the time.

The surgeon stepped quickly to the body, slightly raised the left arm, drew aside the already open jacket of the sleeping suit, and silently indicated the cause of death. This was a knife, a curious, long, narrow, sharp knife for surgical use, which the murderer had left there, driven home between two of his victim's ribs. I say "the murderer," for the surgeons first words were, "Not suicide." I had no suspicion of suicide, but thought that he pronounced this judgment rather hastily, and that the Sergeant was right when he asked him to examine the posture of the body more closely. He did so, still, as I thought, perfunctorily, and gave certain reasons which did not impress either my judgment or my memory. I was more interested by his remark that he had studied in Berlin and was familiar with the appearance of suicide. I may say at once that it appeared afterwards, at the inquest, that there was reason to think that Peters had not had such a knife, for he never locked up drawers or cupboards, and his servants knew all his few possessions well. It appeared, too, that the owner

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of the knife had taken precautions against being traced, by carefully obliterating the maker's name and the other marks on it with a file.

In the midst of our observations in the room a vexatious interruption happened. I have forgotten to say that the servants had been sent out of the room by the police-sergeant, and that, almost immediately after, the constable who brought the doctor had been sent down to examine the outside of the house. For some reason he was slow in setting about this; it is possible that he stopped to talk to the servants, but in any case, he went out through the kitchen, and explored first the back of the house, where he thought he knew of an easy way of making an entrance. Meanwhile the neighbours, who had collected about the gate, had been drawn by their curiosity into the garden, and by the time the constable had got round to the front of the house several were wandering about the drive and the lawn which lay between it and the road. They had no more harmful intention than that of gazing and gaping at the windows, but it led to the very serious consequence that a number of tracks had now been made in the snow which might very possibly frustrate a search for the traces of

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the criminal. This the Sergeant now noticed from the window.

As for the actual carriage-drive I was fortunately able to remember (and it was the only useful thing that I did observe for myself) that when I had arrived there had been no foot-marks between the gate and the front door except the unmistakable print of the goloshes worn by the housemaid on her way to call the police. But the tracks on the lawn and elsewhere about the house might cause confusion.

Upon seeing what was happening the Sergeant asked Vane-Cartwright, Callaghan and myself to await him in Peters' study, while he went out to drive away the intruders, to make the constable keep others out and to pursue his own investigations. While we waited Vane-Cartwright, who had spoken little but seemed to watch all proceedings very attentively, made the sensible suggestion that we should look for Peters' will, as we ought to know who were his executors. We consulted the housekeeper, who pointed out the drawer in which the few papers of importance were kept, and there we soon found a will in a sealed envelope. The first few lines, which were all that we read, showed me that,

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as I had expected, I was Peters' executor along with an old friend of his whom I had never met but who, I believed, as was the fact, now lived in America.

The Sergeant now rejoined us; he had discovered nothing outside, and, though the tracks of the intruders made it difficult to be certain, he believed that there was nothing to discover; he thought that the murderer had approached the house before the snow began to fall, and he found no sign that he had entered the house in the manner of a housebreaker. He had, I must say, taken a very short time about his search. He wished now that the servants should be summoned, as of course it was necessary to make inquiries about the movements of all persons connected with the house. But he was here delayed by Callaghan who had matters of importance to relate.

He and Vane-Cartwright had been disturbed during the night in a notable manner. They had actually had an alarm of murder, and curiously enough a false and even ludicrous alarm. About 11.30 o'clock they had been roused by loud shouting outside the house, amid which Callaghan declared that he had distinguished a cry of "murder." He

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had come tumbling out of his room, calling Vane-Cartwright, who slept in the next room, and who immediately joined him in the passage. Without waiting to call Peters, whose room was some distance from theirs and from the staircase by which they descended (for there were two staircases in the main part of the house), they went to the front door and opened it. The flash of a policeman's torch in the road, the policeman's voice quietly telling some revellers to go home and the immediate cessation of the noise, showed them that they had been roused by nothing more serious than the drunken uproar which I had predicted to Peters would disturb him. The two men had returned to their rooms after locking the front door again; they had noticed that the library door was open and the lights out in that room; they had noticed also as they went upstairs (this time by the other staircase) light shining through the chink under Peters' bedroom door; and they had heard him knock out the ashes of a pipe against the mantelpiece. The pipe now lay on the mantelpiece; and, of course, that particular noise is unmistakable. They concluded that, though he was awake and probably reading, he had not thought the noise outside worth noticing. Callaghan

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added that he himself had lain awake some time, and that for half an hour afterwards there had been occasionally sounds of talking or shouting in the lane, once even a renewal of something like the first uproar.

The report subsequently received from the constable who had been on duty along the road that night confirmed the above, and a little reflection made it appear that the disturbance outside had nothing to do with the murder. In fact the only thing connected with this incident which much impressed me at the time was Callaghan's manner in relating it. He had up to now been very silent, he now began to talk with furious eagerness. He readily saw and indeed suggested that the disturbance which he related was of little consequence. But having to tell of it he did so with a vividness which was characteristic of him, so that one saw the scene as he described it, saw indeed more than there was to see, for he spoke of the ground already white and the snow falling in thick flakes, when he was pulled up by the Sergeant who said that the snow had not begun to fall till three o'clock that morning. Callaghan began angrily persisting, and the Sergeant appealed to Vane-Cartwright, who up till

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now had said little, merely confirming Callaghan's narrative at various points with a single syllable or with a nod of his head, but who now said that Callaghan was wrong about the snow. He added the benevolent explanation that Callaghan, who was really much excited, had combined the impressions of their false alarm over night with those of their all too real alarm in the morning.

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CHAPTER III

HEREUPON Callaghan, who had a more important matter to relate, changed the subject abruptly by saying, "Sergeant, have your eye on that man Trethewy." He told us that, ten days before, Trethewy had quarrelled with his master. Peters, he said, had met Trethewy in the drive, at a point which he indicated, and, noticing a smell of spirits, had firmly but quietly taken him to task, telling him that his occasional drinking was becoming a serious matter. Callaghan had come up at the moment and had heard Trethewy, who was by his account dangerous with drink at the time, answer with surly insolence, making some malicious counter-insinuation against his master's own habits, exploding for a moment into wild anger, in which he seemed about to strike his master, but to refrain upon catching sight of Callaghan's powerful frame beside him, then subsiding again into surliness and finally withdrawing to his own cottage with muttered curses and a savage threat. This was the sub-

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stance of Callaghan's statement. But there was a great deal in it besides substance; the whole of the conversation, from the moment at which Callaghan came up, was professedly repeated word for word with a slight but dramatic touch of mimicry, and the tone and temper of master and man were vividly rendered. I can never myself remember the words of any conversation, and for that reason I am unable now to set out Callaghan's narrative, and was unable at the time to put faith in its accuracy. Here and there a phrase was presumably given truly because it was given in Trethewy's own dialect, but once at least the unhappy Trethewy was made responsible for a remark which he surely never made, for it was pure Irish, and indeed I think it was the very threat of picturesque vengeance which I had myself heard Callaghan address to a big boy in the street who was on the point of thrashing a little boy. One detail of the description was a manifest mistake. Callaghan indicated (truly, I have some reason to think) the spot in the drive where such altercation as did happen took place, but he added that Peters stood watching Trethewy with his hand upon a young tree. Now Peters had planted that tree with Trethewy several days later,

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just before the frost set in; and other details in the story seemed equally incredible. "Ever since then," concluded Callaghan, "I have seen murder in that fellow's eye. Mind you, I have had to do with murderers in India. Three times have I marked that look in a man's eye, and each time the event has proved me right, though in one case it was long after. I tell you this man Trethewy——" But here Vane-Cartwright stopped him. He had already disconcerted Callaghan a little by pointing out the Hibernicisms that adorned the alleged remarks of Trethewy; and now he quelled him with the just, but, as I thought, unseasonably expressed, sarcasm, that if he had seen murder portended in Trethewy's glance it would have been a kind attention to have given his host warning of the impending doom. He went on to insist warmly on the totally different impression he had himself gathered from Trethewy's demeanour to his master. He was not apt to say more than was needed, but this time he ran on, setting forth his own favourable view of Trethewy, till he in turn was stopped by the Sergeant who said, "Really, sir, I do not think I ought to listen now to what any gentleman thinks of a man's manner of speaking, not if it is nothing more than that."

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The Sergeant then sent for Trethewy. I had wondered that we had not seen him before. The explanation was that he had been away at night, had returned home very late, and so had come late to the house in the morning and was still doing the pumping when the Sergeant sent for him. However, he seemed at last to have slept off the effect of whatever his nocturnal potion had been, and he gave a clear account of his movements without hesitation and with a curiously impressive gravity. He had suddenly made up his mind at dusk on the previous evening to go to his uncle's house, where there was a gathering of friends and kinsfolk, which he had at first intended to avoid. They had made a night of it. He had started home, as several, whom he named, could testify, at four o'clock in the morning (the church clock near his uncle's was then striking), and the violence of the snowstorm was abating. He had come across the moor by a track of which he knew the bearings well. This track struck into the grass lane which passed near the back of the house at the other side of the pasture, and which curved round into the road, joining it close by Trethewy's cottage. As he came along the lane a man on horseback leading a second horse

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had overtaken him and exchanged greetings with him. He had seen the man before, but could not tell his name or dwelling or where he was going. The snow had done falling when he reached his cottage. Once home, he had turned in and slept sound till he was aroused soon after eight by his wife with the news of the murder. He had seen nothing, heard nothing, guessed nothing which could throw light on the dreadful deed of the night. Trethewy was dismissed with a request from the Sergeant to keep in his house, where he could instantly be found if information was wanted from him. This he did.

The two servants were now summoned, and the Sergeant had a number of questions to ask them. The housekeeper in particular had a good deal to say about her master's ways, the household arrangements and so forth, and seemed to find satisfaction in saying it at length. So a lot of trivial details came forth, which I, who was by this time becoming exhausted, had little patience to follow. Was the candle which was found burnt out a new candle the evening before, or a candle-end, or what? The question was asked of the housekeeper, but the housemaid answered with promptitude that it was a full new candle which she had herself put there

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last evening, shortly before the master went to bed. We learnt also that Peters was very irregular about going to bed; sometimes he would take a fit of sitting up, working or reading, night after night, and sometimes he would go to bed early, but always he had a book with him and lay awake for a while (often for hours and hours, as he had confessed to her) reading it after he went to bed. Sometimes it would be a story book, but more often one of those dull books of his; and much more on the same subject would have been forthcoming if the housekeeper had not at last been stopped, without, as I thought, having told us anything of importance.

At last I went home, to find the churchwarden irate at my lateness for an appointed interview about the accounts of the dole charities, and to have a forgotten but much-needed breakfast pressed upon me. I would rather have been alone, but Callaghan gave me his company as far as my house, and expounded his view about Trethewy all the way. He left me at my door to go in search of Thalberg, whom up to that moment we had all forgotten.

In about three-quarters of an hour Callaghan

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burst in on me. Where he had breakfasted, if at all, I neglected to ascertain, but he had contrived to get shaved at the village barber's, and he now looked fresh and seemed keen. He was this time in a state of great indignation against Thalberg. He had been unable to see him, but had ascertained that he was still at the hotel, and that he had heard the news of Peters' murder, but had seemed little interested in it, and had rejected the landlady's suggestion that he might like to go up to the house to learn the last news of his unhappy friend. It appeared that Thalberg had shut himself up in his room ever since, but had ordered a cab to drive him to the afternoon train at the station five miles off. The landlady and Callaghan seemed to have agreed that there was something peculiarly heartless in his omission to call at Peters' or to make any inquiries.

Callaghan soon left me, returning, as I thought, to Grenvile Combe, while I endeavoured to settle myself to prepare my sermon for the next day, Sunday, with a mind hardly indeed awake as yet to the horror of the morning or to the loss I had sustained, much less able in any connected way to think over the meaning of our observations, but mechanically asking over and over again whether

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it was reasonable that my now confirmed aversion from Thalberg was somehow associated in my mind with the object of our investigations.

I say "our" investigations; as a matter of fact I had no intention whatever at that time of busying myself with investigation at all. In the first place I was quite aware that I had no aptitude for such work, and in the second, and far more important place, I, who hold it most undesirable that a clergyman should be a magistrate, could not but feel it still less fitting that he should be a detective in his own parish. But I could not escape altogether. About 2.45 I received a visit from the Sergeant, a much-embarrassed man now, for he brought with him the Superintendent, who had driven over in hot haste to take charge of the inquiry. The Sergeant had zealously endeavoured to rise to the occasion, and to my unpractised judgment seemed to have shown much sense. Perhaps his zeal did not endear him the more to the keen, and as I guessed, ambitious gentleman who now took over the inquiry, but any way he had been guilty of real negligence in allowing the snow round the house to be trampled over by trespassers, and at this the Superintendent, who had rapidly gathered nearly

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all that the Sergeant had to tell, seemed greatly exasperated; moreover, the Superintendent had noticed, if the reader has not, that the public-house had been open very late the previous night. His present errand was to ask me to come to the house, not because I was the deceased man's legal personal representative, but because he foresaw possible explorations in which my topographical knowledge of my large and scattered parish might be of use.

We returned to Grenvile Combe, and the Superintendent went straight to the death-chamber where he remained some minutes with the Sergeant and me, taking note with much minuteness and astonishing rapidity of all the details which I have already mentioned. Suddenly he opened the door and called up the housemaid; she arrived at length, the housekeeper, who fetched her, being refused admittance. "Why," said the Superintendent pointing to one window, of which the latch was unfastened so that it sagged perceptibly, "is that window latch unfastened and the other fastened?" The housemaid said shyly but quite decidedly that she did not know, but this she did know, that both had been fastened by her last night, that one of the few matters in which her master showed any fussi-

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ness was insisting that a window should be latched whenever it was shut, and that he never neglected this himself, though, she added, he generally opened his own window wide last thing at night. Why had the Sergeant not noticed this in the morning? Poor Sergeant Speke, already crest-fallen, had no answer; at least he made none. Our stay in the room was short. The Superintendent, I believe, returned there that evening and spent an hour or two in searching microscopically for traces of the criminal; but now he was in haste to search the garden. "I shall begin," he said, "at the point under that window. It is past three already. Come on, there is not a minute of daylight to be lost." At the point under the unlatched window he made a startling discovery, startling in that it had not been made before.

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