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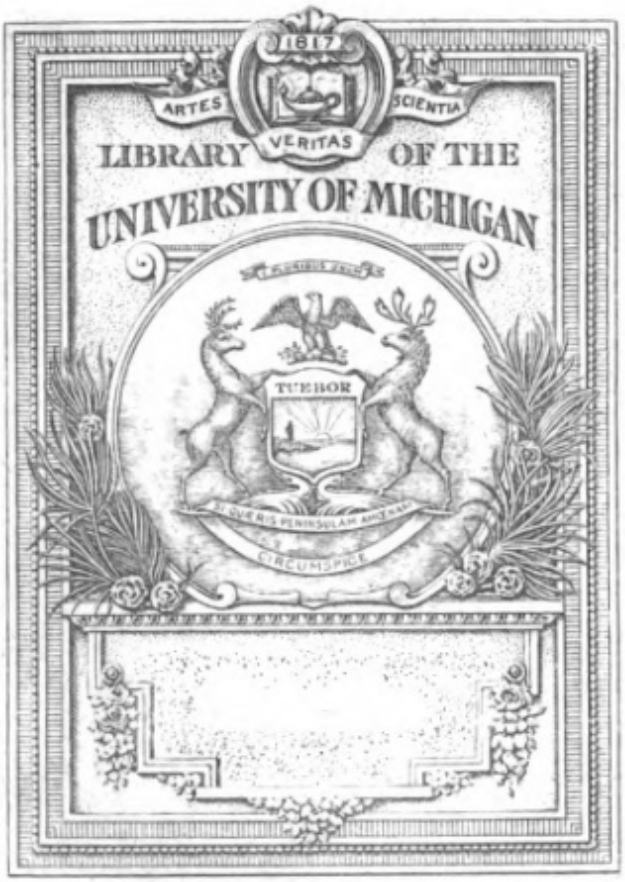

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Poison Case Number 10

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In Preparation

Murder Case Number 33

Kidnapping Case Number 7

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Poison Case Number 10

A detective novel from the files of the Michael Joyce Agency

By

LOUIS CORNELL

NEW YORK
Brentano's · Publishers
MCMXXXI

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CHAPTER ONE

Friday—The Incredible Client

INSPECTOR MICHAEL JOYCE settled his robust frame comfortably in his leather-upholstered desk chair, crossed his legs and threw a glance around the private office of his detective agency. He said:

"Kay, you're now going to write a letter that marks a milestone in the history of this outfit."

The red-haired girl with the shrewd gray eyes, whose status for some time had been much more that of an assistant than of a secretary, reached promptly for her note-book and pencil.

"All right, Inspector."

"Never mind about taking dictation. You can write a grand letter yourself without my slinging the words at you. Drop a line to Mr. Bischoff of the Standard Trust Company, and tell him that his terms are satisfactory. We'll guard his old bank for him, the main building and its four branches, as well as handle such confidential matters as may come up."

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Kay flashed a curious look straight into her chief's quizzical eyes.

"What's there so remarkable about a letter like that?" she challenged. "We've already got the Murray Hill National, the Gansevoort Trust, and a slew of other banks."

Inspector Joyce shook with an infectious Irish chuckle.

"I thought I'd have you guessing. Well, I'll tell you. With this new contract, my business goes into the three hundred thousand dollars a year class. It's the mark I've been shooting at for years. Three hundred grand, clear net profit, will keep the lot of us out of the poorhouse—so now, Kay, I'm getting old, and ready to loaf."

"I can't quite see you doing that," the girl answered, a trifle uneasily. "It doesn't fit in with my notion of your temperament at all. Besides, the agency would go to pieces without you."

"Don't you believe it. The Joyce Detective Agency can run itself now. My son Tom can sit in this chair —with Mr. Symes to coach him a little, now and then."

"Young Mr. Joyce has a great deal of ability," said Kay, an absurd touch of sadness in her voice.

"But he isn't a born detective, eh?" The chief's blue

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eyes clouded. "You got that from me. I've raised hell with him often enough, God knows. But you must have heard me tell him also, that fifty detectives are made by discipline and experience for every one that's born smart. I think Tom is close to a finished job now."

"I didn't mean even to hint at a criticism of him," the girl protested, flushing unreasonably.

"And I'd not be suspecting you of the same," Inspector Joyce bantered. "The question before the house, Kay, me darling, is my right to loaf. I've earned it, by God! and I drilled the boys out there, and they'll work hard for any one I place in charge. They're an able and loyal bunch."

He threw his arms wide, and indicated beyond the glass partitions of his private office a scattering of men engaged in one of three simple-seeming occupations. They were either writing at desks, telephoning, or consulting records among the serried squads of steel filing cases. The suite was not crowded, for the reason that most of the operatives were out covering assignments. An air of tenseness, hurry and impending drama was nevertheless conveyed by the stooped, busy forms. A newspaper office on the fringes of the rush hour is much like that. The men worked with their hats on.

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Poison Case Number 10

A girl employe had sat down in a corner to bang off a report on the typewriter, without taking the time to remove her coat.

Through the open windows could be glimpsed a drift of clouds against a blue September sky, and a distant view of the lumpy silhouette of the Statue of Liberty. The Joyce Agency occupied the twenty-fourth floor of a building on lower Broadway, overlooking the harbor.

"When I say loaf, I don't mean I'll go and sun myself on a front porch in Florida," boomed Michael Joyce, not waiting for an answer to his last remark. "But I'm sick of routine. I want time for my hobbies."

"Your museum of deadly weapons?" said Kay. "I've heard you tell that you found your best specimens, including the antiques, through working on queer cases. But even I didn't know you had any other hobbies."

"Several of them—at the back of my head. Things I've never had the leisure to follow up. Can't you figure the temptation to become one of those guys that call themselves moneyed connoisseurs? I can do it with the best of 'em."

"Not you, Inspector. Never!"

"Why not?"

"You'd miss the thrills of the game down here.

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There's not a day when something strange and exciting isn't brought to you for a solution, because you're the greatest private detective in America."

"Every single day? Three hundred and sixty-five real hot cases each year? Kay, me darling, you're exaggerating."

"Either a new case, or a development in some old one."

"There hasn't been one today."

"There may be," she insisted stoutly.

"Aw, you're a romantic girl, though I will say I prefer you to most men as a side-kick when there's a job of roping some white-collar crook. Talk about the detective instinct. You've got it, Kay." The grizzled detective's voice was rich with blarney, a sure sign, if Inspector Joyce were speaking to one he was fond of, that he meant what he said. "There's no girl can kid me out of retiring. I'll put it up to the Sheriff here."

He turned to a desk behind his own, where, throughout his conversation with Katharine Carey, commonly known as Kay, a man had been working on a bulging dossier of brown cardboard concerning the activities of a notorious safe-cracker. This operative had apparently seen nothing and heard nothing that his chief was doing. He had labored with a peculiar self-efface-

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ment, a preternatural silence, which had prevented the very papers under his hands from rustling.

As Joyce turned, however, the man also swung around automatically, so that they met each other half way, and it was obvious that not a word which had been spoken had fallen on deaf ears. The assistant was small of stature, and both in the matter of features and clothing he was so drab and inconspicuous that a reporter would have found it difficult to find words to describe him. He was typical of nine out of every ten men who ride beside one in the subway, or dine at the next table in a restaurant. If, later on, some untoward circumstance makes it important to mention traits that would help to identify such a person, one is at a complete loss to do so.

But, in addition to being typical of the herd, which gave him his protective coloration, so to speak, a quality invaluable to the Joyce Agency, G. Borden Symes had perfected a technique of evasiveness which extended even to the motions of his body. Two minutes after you had observed him in a certain spot, you were not sure that you had seen him at all. That he should be nicknamed the Sheriff seemed farcical, since that title is associated in the popular mind with bluff and hearty men from the West. But Symes had actually found

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his way into detective work through having served a term as sheriff of an upstate county.

"What's your answer, Sheriff?" asked Joyce. "Of course you heard what I was saying."

"You have earned a rest, if you want one, Inspector," murmured the Sheriff, in the most colorless tones imaginable.

"Aw, now, cut loose! Be a human being, for once, will you? Miss Carey thinks it's not in me to retire. She as good as claims I can't do it. You've known me long enough to have an opinion as to whether that's true or not."

The lack-lustre eyes of the Sheriff brightened a little.

"I'd say that idleness would make you very unhappy, Inspector. Don't you remember how you carried on when you were laid up with a sprained ankle, just as the Saunders kidnapping case was coming to a head? You ran the whole business from your sick bed. And you were hobbling through the dives of Red Hook on the trail of that Sicilian bombing plot, a week before the doctor discharged you. You're not the man to quit at fifty, Inspector."

Joyce reached for a cigar, and as he lighted it he straightened in his chair.

"Nonsense," he retorted, a little curtly. "I see every

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job through to the finish, of course. But I'm not a slave to this damned detective work. I've been dreaming all my life of things that have precious little to do with chasing murderers and the rest of it, and now thank God I can pay for my fancies."

The Sheriff's body flowed from the waist upward, rather than turned, back to its crouched position above the dossier relating to safe-cracking. His long fingers rearranged a couple of sheets without producing a sound. About the corners of his lips there hovered the phantom of a smile.

"Get off that letter to Mr. Bischoff, there's a good girl, Kay," pursued the chief. "But before you sit down to the typewriter, will you find Tom and send him in to me?"

"Okay, Inspector."

As Kay Carey went through the doorway, an office boy passed her, advanced to Joyce's desk and stood stiffly.

"There's an old gentleman outside wants to see you, sir," the boy said.

"What's his business, kid?"

"He wouldn't say, sir—wouldn't give me no name neither."

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"You ought to know better than to bother me with messages from cranks like that."

"He was very particular about seeing you, Mr. Joyce. And—he's a swell old gink—one of those rich guys in a tall hat."

"A handsome old 'gink' in a silk hat, eh?" chuckled Joyce whimsically. "He's probably lost his wife's favorite dog, and wants me to find it for him. Mr. Tom Joyce will take care of him in a few minutes. Savvy?"

"Yes, sir," the boy piped, and made a quick exit.

"Callers who won't send in their names are a nuisance, Sheriff," commented Joyce.

"Still—at a detective agency!" the Sheriff mumbled, deprecatingly. "Some of the best prospects act like nuts. I sort of hate to see you turn business away, Inspector."

"You have absolutely no temperament," groaned Joyce. "I should think I'd make it clear that I'm celebrating my liberty today. Prospects, from now on, are up to you and Tom."

A moment later, the office boy re-entered.

"The gentleman said I was to tell you, sir, that his father gave you your first job," he blurted out.

"My first job," Joyce repeated, his eyes lighting. "How come? Did he say any more than that?"

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The boy looked embarrassed, and shifted from one foot to the other.

"He—he just mentioned that you'd want to see him, 'cause of his father giving you your——"

"I heard you the first time," interrupted Joyce. He frowned and tapped with his finger-tips on the plate glass that covered his desk. "All right, bring him in."

He stood up, a muscular and soldierly figure, to receive his visitor. The latter, as he entered, created an amazing impression of elegance rescued from some bandbox of the early years of the century. He was dressed in a cutaway coat, ascot tie, pin-striped trousers and spatted shoes. He held in one hand a silk hat, fawn-colored gloves, and a polished malacca cane. The salient feature of his face was a heavy white mustache that curved in impeccably barbered horns. But at the second glance one noted that he had weak brown eyes, and that the folds into which the flesh of his aristocratic face had relapsed were drained of blood until they had the unwholesome appearance of wax.

"To whom have I the honor of speaking?" asked Joyce curiously.

The old gentleman looked from Joyce to the stooped back of the seated Sheriff, and visibly hesitated.

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"This is one of my most trusted assistants," Joyce gruffly explained.

"I understand, Inspector Joyce. I am Nicholas Van Zanten, of Van Zanten Manor."

"Where's that?"

"Van Zanten Manor? Why, Staten Island, of course!"

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Van Zanten. But—er—what's this about my having worked for your father?"

"Not precisely for him. In 1900 he was acting Treasurer of the United States, and it fell to him to cope with a conspiracy of counterfeiters. You were one of the young detectives on the case, and I remember his speaking highly of your talents."

"Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed Joyce, reverting to the informal manner that was most natural to him. "I remember that case. I started with the Pinkertons in 1900. They were hot on the affair of the cross-bones yellow-backs, so called because a flaw in the design of the false tens and twenties which flooded the country looked under the magnifying glass like a set of cross-bones. That *was* my first case. But I was only a cub, and it's great to know Treasurer Van Zanten took notice of me."

"He did, indeed. And I have followed your career

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with warm interest as a result. I admired your work in the New York Police Department, where you rose in less than ten years to be an Inspector."

"The title has stuck to me ever since," chuckled Joyce.

"I used it myself just now. Need I say more to prove that I am a devotee of the chronicles of your fascinating profession?"

"You're a sure enough fan. But you didn't come here to discuss that, I take it. Are you worried about anything?"

Van Zanten seated himself slowly in the nearest chair, crossed his hands over the head of his cane and rested his chin lightly upon them. His watery eyes roved the office. A look of the most dreadful apprehension and grief flitted across his features. Yet when he answered the detective, he did so with a forced laugh.

"I admit to having been worried, Inspector. I thought I needed your help. But I am almost ashamed now of the impulse that drove me to you. I fear I am nothing but a nervous old man, and I'm minded to let this be just a social visit after all."

Joyce was familiar with the reticence complex, which crops up at the last moment when certain men face

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their chosen confessors. Physicians, lawyers, dentists and priests encounter it, no less frequently than private detectives. It operates to suppress tragedies rather than trifles. In the case of a courtly weakling like Nicholas Van Zanten, it moved Joyce to keen curiosity.

"Suit yourself, sir. I may not be at this desk tomorrow. But I am today—and you're here. It wouldn't do you any harm to get my advice." He snapped out the words, launching them like darts against the armor that masked the other's timidity.

Notwithstanding, Van Zanten continued to temporize.

"Have you a son, Inspector?" he asked.

"Why, yes. My boy Tom is twenty-five years old."

"Is he in this work with you?"

"He is."

Van Zanten sighed.

"You are a fortunate man. A brilliant career which you have built up for yourself, and a son to share it with you! I should like to meet your Tom."

"That's easy. He's standing outside the door. I'd sent my secretary to fetch him, just before you called."

Joyce signaled through the glass partition with his right hand, and Tom and Kay Carey entered. He presented them briefly to Van Zanten.

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The old gentleman bowed with elaborate ceremony to the girl. One had the feeling that he restrained himself with difficulty from kissing the back of her hand. Then he turned and stared at Tom with cryptic intensity. Tears misted his eyes, and his lower lip trembled.

"A fine, upstanding young fellow," he said. "The double of my Jimmy. But you were wiser than I, Inspector. You married in time to have a grown son of this sort, before you were too old to be a companion and guide to him. I did not take a wife until I was nearly fifty."

Michael Joyce felt slightly irked by the display of sentiment. It struck an odd note in the precincts of a detective agency, and it was a form of time wasting in which it did not seem proper for an unheralded caller to indulge.

"You touch me in a soft spot there, Mr. Van Zanten," he muttered. "But I'm kind of anxious to get to the bottom of your business."

The other resumed his seat, threw back his head and said with unexpected firmness:

"Yes, I have decided to tell you the story and obtain your best judgment regarding it."

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"Perhaps you would prefer to have Tom and Miss Carey step outside?"

"It is not necessary. They are confidential employes, I suppose, no less than the other man who is present."

"Right. Well, I'm listening to you."

"Inspector Joyce," said Van Zanten, his voice hard and appallingly convincing. "I am afraid I am going to be murdered."

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CHAPTER TWO

Friday—Can This Be Poison?

When Nicholas Van Zanten declared with the very accents of truth that he was afraid he was going to be murdered, the atmosphere in Joyce's private office abruptly changed. The social pleasantries were thrust aside, and the room grew charged with a psychic current as definite as electricity. Tom and Kay stiffened into attitudes of professional attention. The noiseless Symes turned his blank face toward the center of interest.

But it was Michael Joyce himself who underwent the most complete transformation. His good-humored, jesting Irish mannerisms fell away from him, and he became at once the keen analyst of mysteries. His blue eyes glittered like blades.

"What's your main reason for thinking yourself in danger, Mr. Van Zanten?" he asked.

"Within the past year, two members of my family have died in suspicious circumstances," the man answered starkly.

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"Was there a police inquiry in either case?"

"Oh, no! Nothing like that."

"Then it's merely your own suspicions that have been aroused?"

"Perhaps. Others may be alarmed, but if so they have kept their fears hidden from me."

"Have you discussed the matter with any of your relatives or friends?"

"No."

"So much the better, if there's foul play to be investigated. Now tell me the story from the beginning."

"Willingly. I——"

"Just a minute," interrupted Joyce. "Say first why you think your death might follow the two that have already occurred." It was a favorite ruse of his to get a narrator started, and then to wrench the all-important conclusion from him before the threshing over of facts and fancies had possibly caused him to substitute some new-born theory.

"Because I am the next in line save one, Inspector," replied Van Zanten, flustered. "That is—that is, if a plot to destroy us all indeed exists."

"Hm! We'll come back to that when you've finished talking. Go ahead."

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"But I don't know where to begin."

"No vagueness, please. Tell me about your family."

"Ours is one of the oldest names in New York." Van Zanten brightened. "We trace our ancestry to the early Dutch settlers. The founder of the line built a house on Maiden Lane, Manhattan. Since the Van Zantens moved to Staten Island, our home has been handed down from father to son for five generations."

"Are you wealthy?"

"Moderately so."

"Would you say the crimes you suspect are being committed for vengeance, or for money, or what?"

"There can be no question of vengeance. No one has any cause to hate us. But the million dollars or so that the estate is worth has a curse on it. It has inspired deeds of violence for the past hundred years."

"Are you tormenting yourself about supposed murders that have stretched over a century?"

"No. Dear me, no! What happened in the long ago was often terrible, but not mysterious. Two gallant men lost their lives in 1846, in duels for the hand of a Van Zanten heiress. My great-grandfather was a suicide."

Joyce shook with exasperation as the other came to a stop. Van Zanten's devious approach to the real issue

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and the necessity of coaching him were hard for a detective to bear.

"Please state, sir, who the persons were that died recently, and why the circumstances were suspicious," he said severely.

"A year ago, almost to the day, my brother George was seized with violent stomach cramps which came and went for three days. At the end, his tongue seemed paralyzed. Just before the final attack, he tried to gasp out some last message to us, but could not pronounce a word."

"Poison, eh?"

"I fear so."

"And the second case?"

"I attended yesterday afternoon the funeral of George's daughter and only child, my niece Mary. Her symptoms had been different, and even more alarming. We found her in bed in convulsions on Tuesday morning. She obtained a little relief toward nightfall, not sufficiently to tell a collected story, alas! An hour after dawn, she was dead."

"That might have been poison, too, though not the same kind of poison. Did both patients receive medical treatment before they succumbed?"

"Yes."

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"What causes of death were certified?"

"George died of acute indigestion, the doctor said. Our little Mary of angina pectoris, culminating in the bursting of a blood vessel on the brain."

There was something infinitely pathetic about the tremulous tone in which Nicholas Van Zanten uttered the phrase, "our little Mary."

"Were autopsies held on the bodies?"

"No, Inspector."

"Great grief! Why not? It would have been the logical thing to demand, since you evidently didn't feel right about what happened."

"To tell you the truth, I suspected nothing wrong when George died. He had been a life-long sufferer from indigestion. He had had several attacks which resembled the fatal one."

"Then the man may actually have been taken off by indigestion?"

"I even consider that probable. I am not convinced that George was murdered."

"But you consider it strange that his young daughter should have followed him, I take it. Why didn't you have a post mortem in her case?"

"I suggested it," said Van Zanten. He hesitated. "But—but I was persuaded that that would be foolish.

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Some one in whom I have great confidence pooh-poohed the idea."

"The attending physician?" snapped Joyce.

"Oh, no! A—a valued employe and loyal friend, sir."

"Now we're getting somewhere. Who is this individual?"

"I refer to Mr. Alexander Fawcett, the manager of the Van Zanten estate."

"Is he a relative?"

"No."

"A salaried employe, then?"

"I provide him with an income, of course. He is an extremely competent man."

"Do you suspect him of having had a hand in the deaths of George and Mary Van Zanten?"

"Absolutely not. I was not being ironical when I called him loyal. He is closer to me than any other living person. I only fear that the warm humanity of his nature, his distaste for evil thoughts, misled him when he advised me not to have an autopsy performed on the body of my niece."

"I see." Joyce reflected for a moment. He perceived that he would be forced to probe for the continuity of Van Zanten's story, that every fact would have to

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be dug out of the man by a process of direct questioning.

"You have hinted," he went on, "that these deaths may have been brought about to affect the inheritance of your million dollar fortune. Also, that you may be a victim because you would be the next one in line for elimination. Is that right?"

"Yes, God help me! But I said the next save one."

"Who is that one?"

"My spinster sister, Constance," replied Van Zanten with a peculiar brusqueness.

"Your sister is the only immediate surviving member of the family, except your son?"

"Yes."

"And if you and Miss Constance die, the entire fortune will fall to your son?"

"Obviously. But do not imagine that I have thought of Jimmy as the plotter. That would be too grotesque."

"You perhaps believe that he is being made the beneficiary of crime, without his knowledge."

"That would be more likely, though I am loath to believe it."

"Is there any outsider whose own interests would be served by such a scheme?"

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"Jimmy is engaged to a girl of whom I do not approve," said Van Zanten slowly, and dragging out the words with difficulty. "Her name is Celestine Curtis."

"Ah! Why do you disapprove of her?"

"She is not his social equal. She comes of a poor working family."

"Poor, eh!" growled Joyce, seizing on the significant word. "But what about her character, her personal qualities?"

"Just a pleasure-seeking, cigarette-smoking flapper," declared Van Zanten wrathfully. It was characteristic of him to use a term already outdated to pillory this daughter of the modern era.

"Did I understand you to say that young Mr. Van Zanten was about the same age as my Tom—twenty-five?"

"No, Inspector. The lads resemble each other. But Jimmy is a few weeks less than twenty-one years old."

"Not quite of age, then! He can't marry without your consent. Might that be a factor in the mystery?"

"Possibly." Van Zanten frowned and stroked his white mustaches. "It has a greater significance, however, than this—er—this silly betrothal. My son's minority, I mean. I should tell you that, as a precaution in view of my advancing years, I had appointed my

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late brother George to be Jimmy's legal guardian, should I pass away first."

"But it was Mr. George Van Zanten who died," commented Joyce drily.

"Precisely. Discovering nothing sinister in that fact at the time, I simply appointed another guardian."

"Who?"

"My manager, Mr. Fawcett."

"Did he suggest it?"

"Why no, Inspector. We are in the habit of talking over everything that comes up affecting the estate, Mr. Fawcett and I. At our first conference after George's funeral, it naturally occurred to me to pass on the responsibility of the guardianship to him."

"Supposing that murder has been done, do you now fear for Mr. Fawcett's life?"

"Hardly. George Van Zanten, in addition to being guardian, had a share in the fortune which passes to surviving members of the family. So had Mary. But the small legacy I have made Mr. Fawcett would go to his own heirs, if he died. Nothing would be gained by destroying him."

"Logical enough, if you hold to the idea that this is a plot against the Van Zanten million. Do you consider your son in danger?"

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"He may be. Indeed I cannot guess how sorely we are to suffer. All is conjecture in my mind, Inspector."

"Has it taken the form of wondering whether the scheme might be to establish Miss Constance as the sole inheritor?"

"No, no—that would be insane. Constance is a religious woman, whose time is occupied with charities."

"Are you in sympathy with her charities?"

"I cannot say that I am, Inspector. In fact, they irritate me. She is passionately devoted to the work of a mission which seeks to convert the tranquil islanders of Bali from their Brahmin faith. She also maintains a home for stray dogs and gives tombstones for the dog cemetery connected therewith."

For the first time since Van Zanten had said he was menaced by death, Joyce's lips twitched in amusement; but his gravity returned swiftly.

"Outside of those you have named, what persons compose your household?" he asked.

"There is only Mrs. Fawcett."

"Anything remarkable about her?"

"She is a gentle, modest woman of about forty and performs her duties of housekeeper most unobtrusively. We are all fond of her."

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"How many servants have you?"

"Five, including a butler, a gardener, a cook and two maids."

"Do you consider them trustworthy?"

"Decidedly. All of them have been with us for years."

Joyce fell silent and stared at the wall beyond Van Zanten's head. His hand reached automatically for a paper knife which was really a finely-wrought damascene dagger, and his thick yet sensitive fingers wandered over the surface of the weapon, searching out the convolutions of the carved handle, testing the edge of the blade, weighing the few ounces of the deadly trifle, and passing it from finger-tip to finger-tip, from palm to palm. It was a trick he had when he was thinking. His collecting of lethal instruments and his love of toying with them was the form which an odd impulse toward dilettantism had taken in the case of this ex-Pinkerton sleuth and police official.

But Nicholas Van Zanten fidgeted at the prolonged pause. "I feel sure, after talking to you, that there should be a confidential inquiry into the deaths," he said. "Will you undertake it?"

Joyce looked around. "No," he answered bluntly. "This is no job for me."

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"Why, Inspector? Why?" the other wailed, in naïve disappointment.

"Your course is very clear and simple. Have the two bodies exhumed and the contents of the viscera analyzed. Any investigator would demand that as your first move. If poison is not found, there's no mystery. If it is, the affair becomes a public scandal and the police step into it right away. What need have you for a private detective?"

"But if I choose to employ one, is that not my privilege? I want a secret inquiry, in advance of any possible post mortems upon George and Mary Van Zanten. I understand you were in the business of accepting such commissions."

The drab countenance of Sheriff Symes reflected, by a general drooping of the muscles rather than any expression about the mouth and eyes, its approval of the client's sentiments and its grief at the indefensible reluctance of Joyce. Kay Carey and Tom looked more patently worried.

"I am on the point of taking a vacation," declared the chief coldly. "But it goes without saying that if you are so good as to employ my organization for detective work of any kind, my assistants will take care of you."

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"I want you, Inspector Joyce—you yourself," pleaded the old man unhappily.

"I'll not mince words with you, Mr. Van Zanten. The evidence isn't convincing enough to force me to clear the decks and go into action, at the expense of personal plans. Any death *may* turn out to have been a murder. But your facts don't spell murder."

"They don't?"

"No, except as a long chance. Two members of your family have died a year apart. Their symptoms were alarming, but not unique. A reputable physician has certified that they perished of natural causes. You're pretty sure that your brother had nothing but indigestion. You haven't made me believe that the girl was poisoned; do you believe it?"

A morbidly crafty expression, founded upon some deeply-rooted horror, took hold of the waxen flesh of Van Zanten's face and remained fixed there. He fumbled for his wallet and pulled from it an unmounted photograph of post card size, which he handed to Joyce.

"I was with Mary when she died," he said harshly. "I asked Mrs. Fawcett, who had been nursing her, to step out of the room for a minute. I fetched Mary's own camera from a cupboard and snapped this. No-

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body saw me do it. An—an instinct told me to get a picture of our little girl before the undertakers went to work on her."

Joyce's lips tightened about the stub of his cigar, as he scrutinized the photograph. It had been taken with a strong Graflex lens, and could not have been clearer. He saw the well-shaped head of a young woman against a white pillow. It was impossible to judge whether the features had been beautiful, so terribly were they distorted. The eyes were wide open, and rolled to one side in their sockets. The jaw had fallen, yet the lips were sucked against both the upper and lower teeth, forming a ghastly rictus with a leftward sag. Pinched nostrils and taut cheeks completed the register of anguish. Lumps in the bed clothes indicated that Mary's hands were crisped above her breast and her knees drawn up to her stomach. The body was on its back.

Joyce looked from the picture to Van Zanten, and stared wordlessly.

"The dead face says, 'Poison!' " the old man croaked.

The detective beckoned to Symes and Kay and Tom. They advanced and examined the photograph over his shoulder. Kay shuddered. But after a moment, all three withdrew in well-trained silence.

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"I have something else here," said Van Zanten, his voice under better control. "Mary could not talk after her seizure, but she made signs that she wanted paper and pencil. This is all she had the force to write."

The half-sheet of notepaper which Joyce accepted bore an indefinitely labored scrawl, ending in strokes that were barely legible:

"DANGER—YOU—I AM D——"

Joyce clipped together the picture and the note. "With these in your possession, it was a hell of an idea to let any one pooh-pooh you out of holding an autopsy," he said grimly. "But why, at least, didn't you show them to me right off?"

"I was ashamed of seeming melodramatic," replied Van Zanten. "Sooner or later, I would have shown them to you."

"You need a guardian yourself."

"Perhaps I do," the old man admitted humbly. "But Inspector, I implore you, take my case."

Joyce turned his shoulder on him and addressed his secretary.

"Kay, get a dossier started," he ordered. "Make as complete a report as possible on what you've heard this

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gentleman say. The full name is Nicholas Van Zanten, of Van Zanten Manor, Staten Island."

Efficient and swift, Kay turned to a filing cabinet and selected a stout manila folder. She lettered across the front of it the words:

POISON CASE NO. 10

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CHAPTER THREE

Friday—The Wrong Man Is Stricken

Now that he had accepted Van Zanten as a client, Joyce treated him with courteous firmness. He knew that he would have to be tolerant of the man's devious approach to the crux of any question, but he proposed to control and anticipate him as much as possible. The case claimed from him an absolute professional loyalty. Van Zanten had become simply one of the human factors through which he expected to reach a solution.

"I'm at your service," he said. "A secret inquiry should, and shall, be made. What strikes you as being the best way to have me meet your family, without their knowing who I am?"

"I'd been thinking about that, Inspector. Suppose you come out with me as a house guest. I'll introduce you as a former business acquaintance."

"Not bad. Call me Charles P. Ryan, a construction engineer who's just returned from South America. This is Friday. I can stay over the week-end. If it's

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necessary for me to remain longer, we can fix up a story."

"That will be splendid. Can we start at once?"

"No, Mr. Van Zanten. I have some details to attend to in the office, and a bag to pack. Besides, it wouldn't look normal for me to show up with you in the middle of the afternoon."

"What then?" The other's face twitched nervously, as if he feared that Joyce was going to slip out of his hands.

"You return home now, and announce my coming. Have your car meet me, if you will, at the St. George ferry at six o'clock."

"Your wishes are my wishes, Inspector."

"Very good. And, by the way, in an affair of this kind a woman assistant would be invaluable to me. Allow me to bring Miss Carey."

At the mere mention of a person of the opposite sex, Van Zanten forgot his tragedy and became gallant. He turned toward Kay, smiling and bowing from the waist. "Delighted. The pleasure will be all mine," he said. "But how am I to explain the presence of so charming a stranger?"

"She can pass as my daughter," answered Joyce crisply. His manner brushed sentiment out of the

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way. "Please take care not to make any slips of the tongue in using our names. I'm to be Ryan—Charles P. She becomes Miss Dorothy Ryan."

"I shall be very careful, Inspector," replied Van Zanten meekly.

He and Joyce stood up at the same moment, and the detective left the office with him, to see him to the elevator. A businesslike air prevailed for a moment after their going. Not one of the three assistants so much as commented upon the grim photograph of the dead Mary; they had seen others almost as terrible. Symes had resumed his compilation of the chronicles of a safe-cracker. A sheet of paper in Kay's typewriter was already half-filled with notes concerning the events at Van Zanten Manor.

But Tom passed his fingers through his thick blond hair. He flushed, and his eyes looked troubled.

"I've bought a pair of seats to take you to the *Follies* tonight," he said sulkily to Kay.

She shook her head, without glancing up. "You heard the boss. He's adopted me over the week-end. I'm your sister, Tom. Isn't that nice?"

"Don't kid me, please. I never was more serious in my life. I—I don't want you to go out on this job."

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The girl interrupted her typewriting then, and stared at him. "Why?"

"It's no work for a woman. It cheapens her, and it's often dangerous. Dad should know better than to drag you into it."

"Your dad is a great detective," Kay replied indignantly. "He loves his profession, and he's taught me to love it. What's good enough for him is good enough for me. Old-fashioned notions about woman's place in the world leave me cold."

The two talked without the least embarrassment in the presence of Sheriff Symes. They took it as a matter of course—and they were right—that among his friends he was all of the three monkeys of the Japanese toy rolled into one: he saw nothing, heard nothing and spoke nothing of what had not been intended for him. The man had a curious faculty for conveying this impression. It made him the ideal ferret type of sleuth. For strangers, to their sorrow, also imagined him to be uninquisitive and discreet.

"Maybe this is not a good time for me to tell you, Kay," said Tom Joyce, "that I could like you a whole lot better if you weren't so wrapped up in the private agency business."

"Isn't it sweet of you to like me at all!" she answered

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pertly. "Have you stopped to consider that I'd think more of *you* if you took a greater interest in detective work?"

Tom parted his lips to make a retort, but interrupted himself as his father strode into the office.

"Will you jump into a taxi and run up to the flat, Tom?" he asked with smooth authority. "I don't want to phone and trust this to servants. Pack my week-end bag. You know, the set-up, the one containing nothing that has initials on it. Stop by Kay's house and have her sister do the same stunt for her. You can be back here by five-thirty."

"Surest thing you know, Dad," the young fellow replied briskly, and hurried away.

"And I'm going to spend the time, Kay, refreshing my memory on poisons and toxic symptoms in the human body. If the telephone rings, you answer it and say I'm busy."

Joyce went to a bookshelf in the corner. He took down a bulky volume, over which he pored with intense concentration as he walked back and forth or rested one shoulder against the nearest support. It was one of his idiosyncrasies seldom to read seated. He made no notes. But occasionally he raised his head, a slight frown between the eyebrows, and gazed

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blankly at the wall while he mentally analyzed some knotty scientific point. His memory was prodigious.

At exactly five-fifteen, he restored the book to its shelf, sat at his desk and watched the door fretfully for Tom's reappearance. His son arrived within five minutes with the two bags, and Joyce's face lit up. He was far from being a fidgety man, except sometimes where Tom was concerned. He had taken to worrying that Tom might fail him in small matters.

"All right, Kay," he cried. "Let's get started."

The girl arose like a soldier coming to attention. She went to the women's cloak room, and was back with her hat and a light coat on, her nose powdered and her lips rouged, in less time than it takes the average girl to wash her hands. Joyce admired that quality in her. He grinned his approval, and nodded ever so slightly. She flushed with as much pride as if she had been awarded a medal of honor.

They descended to the street and caught a cab to South Ferry. It was at the height of the rush hour, when clerks of both sexes, laborers and honest burghers who have been in town shopping, swarm in their thousands aboard the municipal ferry boats. The movement toward the island borough of Richmond is one of the lesser streams of New York's commuting traffic,

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but between five and six-thirty each evening it makes a brave showing.

Joyce and Kay struggled with their bags into the main cabin of the *Dongan Hills,* the most recent addition to the harbor fleet. There was not a seat vacant. They found the decks almost equally crowded, and the men's section below was a horror of unwashed humanity in the mass and of billowing tobacco smoke. The broad, open aisle that ran from end to end of the boat was jammed with trucks and private cars, with their motors and lights off and their brakes on. One had the alarming feeling that if the unwieldly craft should give a sudden lurch, this tangle of vehicles would be catapulted into the water.

The engines of the ferryboat had begun to throb and she was nosing her waddling course out of the slip, when Joyce and Kay decided to remount the interior stairway. The latter was clear. Swinging doors shut it off from the passengers; it was a perfectly tranquil retreat.

Half way up, Joyce set down his bag and laughed. "This is against the rules of the Department of Plant and Structures," he said. "No one may ride on the stairway, as you'll notice by that sign. But cops and ferry bootblacks usually do. So why shouldn't we?"

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"It's the only place where we can talk," remarked Kay.

"Precisely."

They sat side by side on the steps, like a couple of children. Kay was burning to ask a dozen questions about the case on which they were bound, but she was far too well disciplined to start the ball rolling. It was for her chief to speak, if and when he was ready. She hoped he would tell her what poison he thought had been administered to Mary Van Zanten. But he opened up along a different line.

"Kay, girl," he said, "who do you believe our old fashion-plate client suspects?"

"Celestine Curtis, his son's fiancée," she replied promptly.

"You're wrong. He certainly got all steamed up when he mentioned her. But what did he accuse her of? Of pleasure-seeking and cigarette-smoking. He called her a flapper. A gentleman of that school would never think of 'murderess' and 'flapper' in the same breath. He'd have promoted her to be a vampire, at the very least."

"Yet she may be guilty. A motive can be pinned on to her."

"If it *was* a murder, anybody may be guilty."

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"Surely that unfinished message proved a murder."

"Not conclusively. 'Danger—you—I am d——' Blank! That's what it said. Mary may have intended simply to end with the word 'dying.'"

"She'd already written 'danger.' Could she have meant that she thought herself suffering from a contagious disease?"

"Pretty far-fetched. A dying person doesn't need a reason for going hysterical over the idea of danger. But I was asking you for your impression of Van Zanten's suspicions."

"Shut out Celestine Curtis, and I'm at a loss, Inspector. He evidently has complete faith in his manager, Fawcett, and he looks upon his sister as a harmless simpleton."

"Granted, Kay me darlin'. Where does your process of elimination bring you?"

Kay thought for a moment. "His son!" she gasped.

"Just so."

"But why—why?"

"Which 'why' do you mean? Why Van Zanten suspects his son? Or why I knew that that was what he had on his mind? We'll let the first drop, because it's too early to express an opinion."

"I guess I did mean the other thing."

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"That's better. I want you to think straight, before you express yourself. You'll never be a detective until you do."

Kay hung her head.

"When the old man first came in, he was mighty sentimental about sons in general. He almost cried over Tom," Joyce went on. "You heard him envying me. Yet he was scared for his own life, and not for his son's. He's trying to kid himself that some one expects to benefit through this Jim becoming the sole inheritor. But his real fear is blacker still."

"Do you think there's much chance of his being right?"

"I think he's easily hoodwinked, and that's all."

"The man who got himself made the heir's guardian and then advised against a post mortem on Mary's body doesn't seem to me to be above suspicion."

"Fawcett? Not a bad theory, Kay. But it's too obvious. Until I meet these people and size them up, I refuse to commit my mind on any suspect."

They continued to discuss the mental quirks of Nicholas Van Zanten, but Joyce studiously avoided the question of poisons. If he had obtained hints from his tome on legal medicine and toxicology, he preferred for the time being to keep them to himself.

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Poison Case Number 10

The twenty minute voyage to St. George was made by the pair in a seclusion as complete as if they had been riding in an empty subway car. No sounds reached them except the pulsing of the engines and an occasional echo of the churning paddle-wheels. They missed the splendid pageantry of New York harbor on a long September afternoon. When they left the boat, however, on the heels of a crowd that dashed madly in the direction of waiting trains, busses and trolley cars, bright sunshine was still flooding the scene. Daylight saving had several weeks yet to run, and the actual solar time was five o'clock.

They went to the cluttered square outside the Ferry Building, which like all other public places on Staten Island gave the impression of a provincial city remote from New York. The square was nothing but a stone platform resting on pillars, between the railroad cuts on either side. A flock of shabby taxis waited there. The eye readily picked out the only car of any pretensions, a limousine of an ancient model. Joyce and Kay walked over to it.

"Is this Mr. Van Zanten's car?" the detective asked.

The driver turned quickly in his seat. He was a man with a broad, stupid face and gnarled hands. His uniform fitted him badly.

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"Yes, sir," he answered. "You Mr. Ryan?"

Joyce nodded.

Instead of getting out, to open the door and help with the bags, the driver manipulated the catch from the inside. The visitors were left to settle themselves in their seats as best they might. The limousine glided forward.

Through the glass partition, Joyce studied the fellow's broad back for a moment. He lowered his voice and addressed Kay:

"Does this chauffeur say anything to you?"

"Mr. Van Zanten spoke of having five servants. He did not include a chauffeur. Driving the car is not this man's regular job."

"Good girl. But suppose he's from a garage."

"No. His coat wouldn't be lumped up between the shoulders, in that case, and he'd have better manners. It's not the butler, because they couldn't spare the butler so shortly before dinner. Besides, I noticed his hands. It's the gardener."

Kay's eyes twinkled as she spoke. This was an old game with Joyce, to test her on the A.B.C. of detective observation. It was a joy to her to show him how rapidly she improved. But she had not anticipated

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the warmth with which he suddenly covered both the hands in her lap with one of his great palms.

"Sure, I'd look far to find a daughter that could make me prouder," he said.

The possible double meaning in his words left Kay Carey speechless.

The car circled the Richmond Borough Hall and climbed a long, winding street leading to the top of the hill on which the homes of St. George clustered. A few tall apartment houses had recently been thrown up, here and there, amidst the weather-stained brick and frame dwellings of the older inhabitants. But the township was soon left behind. The limousine gathered speed and flew along a broad turnpike, pompously named Victory Boulevard, which ran down the center of the island. Pleasant suburban houses with lawns and shade trees now succeeded each other at short intervals. It was amazing to realize that this was an integral part of the City of New York.

Barely two miles beyond St. George, the car turned westward into a side road which curved in an easy grade over a low ridge of land and terminated at a gateway flanked by crumbling gray pillars. The iron gate was closed, and the chauffeur was forced to jump out twice, to open and to shut it. After that, the route

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lay along a private driveway, far from well kept, but bordered by trees of noble proportions. Cows and horses grazed in a walled field. A fine old house, of late Colonial architecture, was visible straight ahead.

"Van Zanten Manor," commented Joyce. "It's a regular estate. Several such have been held intact on Staten Island."

There was time only to observe that the lawn was as smooth as velvet, and that a fine rose garden adjoined the house on the left, when the limousine drew up in front of the porch.

Joyce and Kay got out briskly. But a watch had evidently been kept for them. The front door opened before they could start for it and a maid came hurrying to take their bags. Over her shoulder, they could see the neat figure of Nicholas Van Zanten, who was awaiting them just beyond the threshold.

The old man shook hands with them nervously. His waxen face bore the stamp of some new worry. He recalled the coaching he had received, however, and greeted them as if by rote.

"I am so happy that you could pay us this visit, Mr. Ryan," he said. "And here is your charming daughter, of course. How do you do, Miss Ryan."

"We're delighted to be with you," answered Joyce.

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He stared hard at Van Zanten, to encourage him to hint at what was really on his mind.

"But you'll have to put up with the company of old folks tonight—just my sister Constance and I. Unexpected difficulties have arisen."

"Yes?" questioned Joyce, impersonal and polite for the benefit of any servants who might be listening.

"My son did not know until I got home this afternoon that you would be coming. He had made an engagement which will keep him out until very late."

"But I can meet your son tomorrow. There is no hurry."

"Something else has happened. My manager and dear friend, Mr. Fawcett, is ill and confined to his room."

The detective felt a thrill of excitement run through him. But before he could ask a question concerning Fawcett's malady, a tall and cadaverous figure stalked out of the adjoining parlor, remarking in a voice that rasped:

"Our guests, I presume."

Her severe features, flat chest and untidy gray hair proclaimed the spinster, Constance Van Zanten.

Joyce shook hands with her. She demanded, without prelude:

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"Do you like dogs?"

Repressing his impatience, he replied that he liked most dogs and was informed that the lady owned a number of unique canine pets which could not fail to arouse his admiration.

As soon as he could politely do so, he turned back to Van Zanten.

"You said Mr. Fawcett is ill. Is it anything serious?" he inquired.

"The doctor reserves judgment until he sees whether there is a recurrence of the attack."

"Oh, you have had a doctor for him! What were Mr. Fawcett's symptoms?"

"He was seized with a fit of vomiting at about five o'clock."

Joyce needed no physician to tell him that the majority of lethal poisons cause vomiting.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Saturday—The Clue in the Tomb

THE darkening mystery of Van Zanten Manor was not discussed at the cheerless first meal which Joyce and Kay shared with their hosts. Constance's tongue wagged in a persistent lecture on her philanthropic hobbies, and she continued to monopolize the talk after the diners had adjourned to the parlor.

Dogs were her chief preoccupation that evening, but the welfare of the islanders of Bali came next. Some missionary society had convinced her that their peculiarly narrow view of the seven deadly virtues should be made to prevail in that far tropical paradise. She gave the better part of her income to bring the dubious result to pass, and she enjoyed harping on it.

Van Zanten broke away at about eleven o'clock and saw Joyce to his room. The old man was eager to sit up for further talk, but Joyce cut him short with a single request.

"Please go and see how Fawcett is doing," he said.

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"Give me an exact report on his condition, and after that we'll go to bed. You're tired, and so am I."

In due course, Van Zanten returned, his face beaming.

"Mr. Fawcett is much better," he stated. "His stomach was sensitive for several hours after he vomited. But the medicine Dr. Henkle left with him had a soothing effect. He is now free of pain, and his strength is fast coming back."

"That's fine. Is Henkle the same doctor who attended your late brother and niece?"

"Yes, Inspector. He is our family physician. But about Fawcett—the doctor's first opinion that it was just a touch of ptomaine poisoning seems justified, eh?"

Joyce smiled cryptically. "The patient is out of danger, at any rate. Let's get some sleep. Good night, Mr. Van Zanten."

"Good night, Inspector, and rest well. Breakfast will be served at eight."

In defiance of the accepted conventions of sleuthing, Joyce did not start to prowl through the house the moment his host was out of sight. He did not even lie awake and apply his master mind to an analysis of the strange circumstances surrounding the deaths of two

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members of the Van Zanten family, as well as the present illness of Fawcett. Most casually, he undressed, got into bed and slept with the soundness natural to a perfectly healthy man.

He opened his eyes at half-past seven, because he had mentally set that hour for arising. Like all experienced detectives, soldiers and travelers, he had trained himself to need no alarm clock. He bathed, shaved and dressed swiftly, and entered the breakfast room downstairs precisely at eight.

The only person ahead of him was a young man whose cleancut features and blond complexion were not unlike those of his son Tom. But this youth had cheeks that tended to be hollow, a tight-lipped mouth and precociously weary eyes. He was evidently more serious for his years than Tom Joyce. He advanced courteously to meet the visitor, and held out his hand.

"Mr. Ryan, I presume," he said. "My father has told me a lot about you. I am James Van Zanten."

Joyce made small talk, while he appraised the other keenly. "He tries hard to be a forceful character," he thought, "but there's an inferiority complex gnawing at him. The result of some one obsession, perhaps. He's not always sure of himself."

"By the way, have you heard how Mr. Fawcett is

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this morning?" the detective asked, at the first convenient pause in the conversation.

"He's quite all right," the lad answered, his eyes suddenly growing hard. "In fact, he's up and at his gardening already."

"His gardening?"

"Sure. The garden is his special hobby. That's why we have such grand flowers."

Jimmy waved his hand in the direction of the French windows, and for the first time Joyce glanced outdoors. He saw a perfect riot of the hardier blooms that do not vanish with summer. Chrysanthemums of many shades were especially noticeable. Close to the house, a dozen varieties of roses were still blossoming. A man with a pair of shears was hovering about a bed of fading hollyhocks in the near distance. Farther down, another man crouched on his haunches, plying a trowel.

"An honest to God garden," commented Joyce. "It's a sight for sore eyes."

At that moment, the elder Van Zanten and Kay Carey entered the breakfast room together.

"Good morning, Mr. Ryan. 'Morning, Jimmy," the old man cried in the cheeriest tones that Joyce had heard from his lips. "I found this young lady in need

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of a guide around the old house, and here we are. What a lovely day it is! And the scent of those roses is mighty sweet."

He introduced his son to Kay, naming her meticulously as Miss Dorothy Ryan, and they all sat down to breakfast. Constance Van Zanten, it was explained, was not in the habit of arising so early.

They chatted across the table about matters of no importance. Joyce refrained from saying anything that might have led the Van Zantens to mention recent tragic events. He preferred to study the peculiar gravity of Jimmy's demeanor throughout a talk of a nature gay rather than grave. Had the boy been harder hit by his cousin Mary's death than the family realized? Joyce wondered. Or was he suffering from remorse? Why, too, was he unable to suppress a certain note of frigidity whenever the name of Alexander Fawcett was mentioned?

Of lesser interest to the detective, but still important, were the personalities of the maid who served at table and of the housekeeper, Mrs. Fawcett, who dropped in for a few minutes. Joyce found the two women utterly colorless, as he had found the butler at dinner the night before. All were of the stolid servant type, including Sarah Fawcett. The latter lacked the social

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presence expected of the wife of a man who had risen to be manager of a great estate. She stammered, and she wore her hair in an incredibly old-fashioned "bun" at the back of her head.

"You must let me show you and Miss Ryan about the grounds," Joyce heard Van Zanten saying. "There is much to see. The early morning is the best time, before the sun gets too warm."

"We'll enjoy that immensely," the detective answered.

Kay, who had been devoting herself to Jimmy, addressed the lad with a touch of coquetry: "It rained a bit last night. You can help me over the puddles, if there are any."

But Jimmy looked at her moodily. "I'm awfully sorry, Miss Ryan. I have to leave right away, to attend a lecture in Stapleton."

The oddity of this assertion did not escape Inspector Joyce. "A lecture on a Saturday morning. That's real devotion to the cause of self improvement," he remarked in an off-hand manner.

"Jimmy is taking a preparatory course before he enters Johns Hopkins," said old Van Zanten.

"Johns Hopkins! Is he going to be a doctor?"

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"Why, yes. He has always had a passion for medicine."

"You bet I have," said Jimmy.

The statement interested Joyce profoundly, though he did not reveal that fact by so much as the flicker of an eyelash. He felt irritated anew at the secretiveness, or the lack of clear thinking, which marked his venerable client's methods. Why on earth had Van Zanten not told him that Jimmy was a medical student?

At nine o'clock, the group arose from the breakfast table. Jimmy went to the garage, and presently reappeared in a small roadster. He sketched a vague salute with his left hand, and drove toward the gate at breakneck speed. It was evident that his nerves were in shreds.

The others stepped hatless into the autumn fairyland of the garden. It had been years since Joyce had seen a private tract to compare with it, and the mild, sweet weather that morning made it the more delicious. Flowers of almost every description were cultivated there, to deck the changing seasons with color. Many of the annuals had ceased to blossom, and their leaves were withering. But their places had been taken by the sturdy chrysanthemums and asters, and an exotic note was struck by giant tiger lilies from Japan. Dec-

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orative shrubs abounded, plants grown for the sake of their vivid leaves, as well as borders of boxwood that had been clipped into a variety of formal shapes.

The garden stretched for a full acre behind the house. Starting with the rose-beds that adjoined the southern wing, it curved also toward the southwest and ended at a greenhouse some thirty feet long. The whole tract was meticulously tended, the earth spaded and freshly manured. It seemed as though it would tax the capacities of four men, much less of the two who were working there.

As he approached the men, who had drawn closer together, Joyce observed them covertly. The crouching one with the trowel proved to be, as he had expected, the chauffeur of the evening before. The other was a loosely-built, stoutish man in his later fifties. He wore his hair a trifle long in the back, which gave him the appearance of a politician of the William Jennings Bryan school. Seen face to face, his salient features were his smooth, plump cheeks which showed no traces of the years, and a pair of remarkably bright hazel eyes. Even when the rest of his countenance was in repose, his eyes appeared to be beaming.

"Mr. Ryan and Miss Ryan," said Van Zanten pom-

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pously, "I want you to know my manager, Mr. Alexander Fawcett."

Fawcett transferred a huge pair of shears to his left hand, and extended his right. He turned his face to the sunlight as he did this, and his complexion was revealed as being abnormally pasty, with a bluish tinge about the nostrils. Nevertheless, his eyes laughed.

"I'm happy to meet you," said Joyce. "But your courage in getting to work so early has me worried for your sake. I hear you were very ill yesterday."

"Not *very* ill—oh, no!" answered Fawcett, drawling his words. "My stomach was upset. The doc called it ptomaine, but I think a little roach powder or something like that must have fallen into my soup. It didn't feel like ordinary food poisoning."

"I hope the ill effects have all worn off," remarked Van Zanten solicitously.

"Sure, sure. Thanks for your interest. I feel fine. I'm a hard man to kill."

"This garden is the best medicine for you, no doubt. The family tells me you're responsible for it. It's a marvelous garden," Joyce threw in.

Fawcett's eyes positively danced. "Isn't it!" he cried, with childish vanity. "I give it every spare minute of

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