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POISON UNKNOWN

CHARLES J. DUTTON

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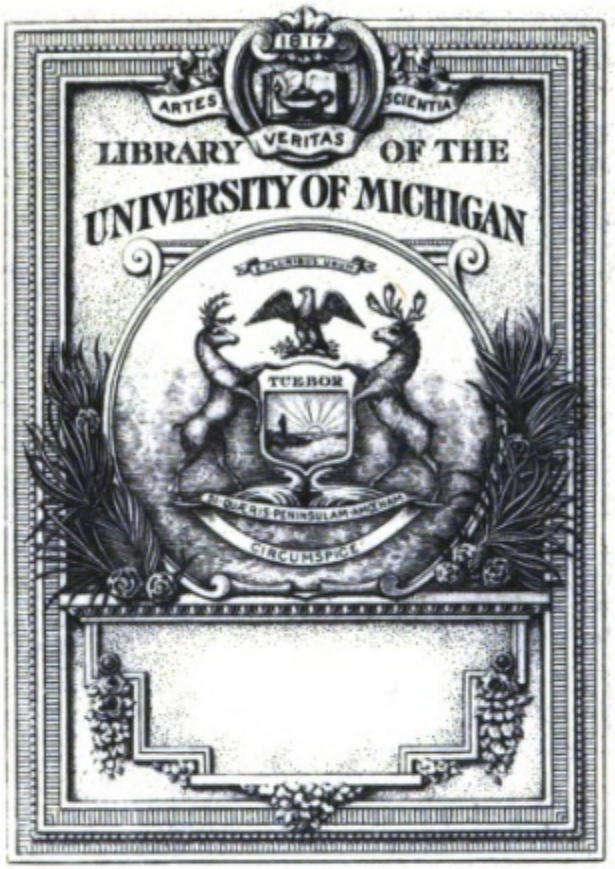

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POISON UNKNOWN

By CHARLES J. DUTTON

"The first man to enter a new station brings murder on his heels" is an old police saying and Timothy Rogan was no exception. His first assignment—to watch the house of a wealthy gentleman who had received two threatening letters—seemed quite innocuous. But that very night a prominent physician suddenly dropped dead at that same man's dinner table, poisoned by some drug unknown to science!

Harley Manners, the famous professor of abnormal psychology, whom Mr. Dutton's readers remember well, is called in. No clues, no motive, no method, not even theories. Then fate strikes again, with another murder, this time even more puzzling than the first. It is not until Manners has discarded every idea he had built up, and started afresh from the standpoint of our newest criminal psychology, that he is able to gain a hint of the method in these crimes and their perpetrator.

Those who enjoyed the originality of "Murder in a Library" will welcome this astonishing story. For here is a brand new poison which Mr. Dutton believes has never been used in a mystery story and is not mentioned in any work on toxicology. As for the story, it has all the excitement, speed and logic characteristic of this widely-known writer.

BY THE AUTHOR OF:

THE CROOKED CROSS
FLYING CLUES
THE SHADOW OF EVIL
MURDER IN A LIBRARY

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Mystery Stories

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OUT OF THE DARKNESS
THE SHADOW ON THE GLASS
THE HOUSE BY THE ROAD
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FLYING CLUES
THE CROOKED CROSS
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THE SHADOW OF EVIL
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Biography

THE SAMARITANS OF MOLOKAI:
THE LIVES OF FATHER DAMIEN AND BROTHER DUTTON AMONG THE LEPERS

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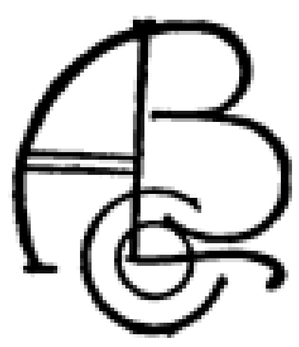
Poison Unknown

A Detective Story

By CHARLES J. Hudson DUTTON



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C. F. BUTLER
BERNEST
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NOTE

I am indebted to Prof. Earle Galloway of the Des Moines College of Pharmacy for information regarding the poison mentioned in this book—a rare and extremely obscure poison, which actually exists

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CHAPTER I

TIMOTHY ROGAN wanted to take off his coat. It was decidedly a new garment with brass buttons sparkling on blue broadcloth. On his chest was a badge, a massive, glittering thing of gold, bearing the word CHIEF. Only an hour ago the mayor himself had made a speech, and after referring to "our brave and efficient police chief" had pinned the badge over the place where he thought Rogan's heart should be. The occasion had been the official dedication of the new police headquarters, and the speech had been rather long and flowery. As he sank down into the chair behind his desk, the thought of the speech caused the round face to frown.

He wanted to take off his coat, throw it down on the desk, and then light a stogie. That was what he would have done in his old office. But this room, with its shining furniture, its air of newness, rather awed him. He had been in the habit of tilting back in his chair and putting his feet on the desk. But that was in the old office. Now the familiar desk, stained and worn by the years, had vanished; and he realized one must treat this shining mahogany with respect. And he did not like the chair he was sitting in, a chair which touched him in unexpected places. For the chair, like everything else in the room, was new.

With a gloomy sigh he ran his big hands through his snow-white hair. When the gesture was over, the

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hair was in wild disorder, but he felt more at ease. Instinct caused a hand to reach down towards a drawer, only to have it pause in mid-air. In the old office there would have been a box of stogies in that drawer. There was none here. But on the smooth surface of the desk stood a box of cigars that someone had sent in as a gift—a box at which he gave a scowling glance, just as though it did not contain the most expensive brand the city could produce. However, they were better than nothing and, without looking at the label, he opened the box and lighted a cigar.

Slumped far down in the chair he soberly watched the smoke drift through the room, as he realized that he was very tired. All morning he had been compelled to listen to speeches, and the lunch at which he had been given the gold badge had ended the ceremonies. For thirty-five years the city had been talking about a new police headquarters, and at last it had become a reality. For the first time he was sitting behind his desk in the new building; and he was not happy.

Thirty-five years . . . almost the same period that he had been on the force . . . years of hard work they had been, with small salary and, since he became chief, lots of complaints. He would retire in six months; but he realized he would never be happy. If only they had allowed him to end his career in the old office! There were memories in that room; comedy and tragedy had played their parts in the dingy office, whose door for twenty years had told the city he was their chief of police.

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As his eyes went slowly traveling around the room, he admitted to himself this was a far better place. There was space here, a high ceiling, large windows that he knew overlooked the lake. But it was all so new, the furniture so glittering, that somehow he felt out of place. The old office had been home; this place—well, he hardly knew what it was.

He should have been at peace with the world, for the noon lunch had been given in his honor and very flattering things had been said about him. His lips twitched into a half-smile, as he thought of the nonsense the mayor had voiced. What did the outside world know about police work? Nothing! Though they did know how to complain when things did not suit them.

For some reason he felt depressed, uneasy and alone. In the old station all sorts of sounds would have come drifting down the hallways to creep under his door. There were no sounds here. True, he could hear the wind howling from across the lake; but that was all. Save for the sound of the wind he might as well have been alone in the building. He knew he was not, knew that beyond his door were many other rooms filled with men who were at their tasks; yet, knowing this, he caught himself bending forward as though listening for some sound that would tell him the building was occupied.

He thought once more of the lunch. What was it the mayor had said? Something about the city's now having one of the best-equipped police headquarters in the country. He had boasted that every scientific device used in the detection of crime was now at the

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disposal of the citizens. Rogan had smiled a little when this was said—though he knew it to be true.

As he thought over the mayor's remarks he slowly shook his head. Science was all right, and one needed every bit of technique one could get, but again and again he had seen it fail. There was such a thing as intuition (though Rogan would have called it a hunch) and as he thought this he gave a start. He had suddenly remembered an old saying that he had heard quoted many times in police circles that when a police chief moves into a new headquarters his first case will be a murder.

He had been depressed before the saying flashed into his mind, but afterwards his gloom increased. So far as he knew, the desk man had yet to book the first prisoner, for not until Rogan walked into his new office had the headquarters been pronounced open. As yet no one had wished to see him. But somehow, deep down in his mind, he knew that before he went out there would be a visitor. Why he knew it he could not tell; but he was certain.

For a while he tried to throw off the feeling which had crept over him, by thinking of his long years on the force. The thoughts brought him no comfort. Thirty-five years was a long time, and during those years all the sordid ugliness of the city's life had come to his attention. It had been a small city when he started out as a patrolman; now it had a population of over a quarter of a million. And with the increase in population had come an increase in stupid, vicious crime.

He rose, at last, to walk slowly over to the win-

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dows. The old office had been partly below the street level, and nothing could be seen from its windows except the feet of people on the sidewalk. But these windows commanded a view of the lake, and for a while he stood looking down at the tumbling water.

A half-gale was sweeping in from Canada. It came lashing across the lake, whipping its surface into a mass of rushing white-caps. Below him he could see the public dock, noticed spray was dashing in blinding sheets over the lower end. Far out, almost at the horizon's rim, an ore boat was laboriously pounding its way into the wind.

The scene fitted into his mood. On a calm day the lake would have been a mass of glittering silver, with sunlight dancing on its surface. There would have been boats, and through the windows would come the laughter of children playing about the docks. But today the water was dark and troubled, and the wind shrieked around the building, howling as if it were on the track of a long-wanted criminal.

As he walked back to his desk to sink down in the chair he concluded he was old. In six months he expected to retire on his pension; and he decided it was time he did. For twenty years he had directed the police force of the city: twenty years of anxiety and trouble, worry and hard work. It had been difficult enough when he first entered his position; but in the last few years it had become worse. The character of crime had changed; there was more of it, and the criminals were more youthful. A younger man might find the office far less troublesome than he.

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There were many in the city who said that the red-faced man sitting behind the big desk was a rough-neck. Others admitted that he was tough and hard, endowed with a bad temper and totally devoid of sympathy. But the men under Rogan never said these things. Among themselves they might growl and grumble about the "old man"; but they loved him. Even those who disliked him, and there were many in the city who did, admitted that he was efficient. And no one had ever accused Rogan of being dishonest or unfair.

Lifting his head he gravely studied the large room. His successor would have a better place to start with than he had had. What was more, he would have a well-trained police force, a group of men whom he could trust. It had taken years to build up the force to its present state of efficiency. He was proud of his men; and his successor would be proud of them.

A sound came drifting across the floor. Someone was fumbling with the knob of the door. Turning he saw it slowly open, watched the head that gave a quick glance into the room and recognized the face as that of George Kent, the head of his Homicide Squad. Soberly he watched the tall young officer slip into the room and then carefully close the door. Wondering a little what was wanted he waited as the man crossed over to his side without speaking.

The inspector was a tall, raw-boned man, and if Rogan had any favorite on the force it was the head of his murder squad. He wondered if anything was troubling his officer; but a glance at the expressionless face assured him all was well. Obeying the chief's

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gesture the inspector brought a chair over from the wall and seated himself beside the desk. Then his eyes slowly traveled over the room.

"It looks better than the old joint," was the comment.

There came only a grunt from Rogan; for he was not going to express himself about his new office. He was homesick for the old room, but he would never say so. Yet as Kent watched the stern, sober face, observed the disheveled white hair, he knew what his chief was thinking. What was more he sympathized with the look that was upon the red face.

With an odd expression, Rogan reached for the box of cigars, and shoved it across the desk. Without a word Kent picked out a cigar, and slowly applied the match. Silence for a while, in which he studied the cold, set face across from him. The chief was not feeling very happy—though, thought Kent, after the flattering words from the mayor Rogan should have been in a far better humor than he appeared. At last came the moment when the stodgy figure stirred uneasily in the chair. The rough voice growled forth a question:

"Everything in the place in running order?"

Kent nodded, replying that everything had started off without any trouble. He smiled as he told the chief they had already booked their first prisoner. The sudden start from Rogan was due to his remembering the old saying. He wanted to know what the charge had been, smiled when informed it was only a drunken driver. Then sitting upright he became serious:

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"You know, Kent, I have been in this game a long time." There was a pause as he reflected a second. "Thirty-five years. Heard and seen a lot of things in my time. Did you ever hear the old saying they used to pass around—about what happened when a chief had his first prisoner brought into his new office?"

Watching the smoke of his cigar drift across the room, the younger man admitted he had no idea what the saying might be. The serious tone in Rogan's voice, when he replied, caused him to look across the desk. He saw that the red face was serious, the gray eyes somber.

"Well, they say that the first case a police head deals with, when he enters a new station, is always a murder. And you know, there may be something in it. I have known—"

The sentence was not completed. There came the laughing voice of his inspector. A little smile played around Kent's lips as he spoke:

"They may say that, Chief, but it won't apply to you. There is a man down below now who wants to see you. He ought to be in any moment. And it's no murder case coming your way. Just an anonymous letter."

"Who is it?" was the growled out question.

"Oh you know him. John Fletcher."

The only response was a half-grunt. Rogan knew him; but the name brought forth memories of the man's father. There had been a real man: honest, intelligent, charitable. The city had lost an asset when the elder Fletcher died. As for his son, for

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ten years he had been engaged in spending the money his father had left. The comparisons between father and son that flashed through the chief's mind were not pleasant. Just as he was on the verge of voicing some of them there came a knock at his door, a sharp, determined knock. With a half-scowl on his face he asked the unseen person to enter.

The man who passed through the door might have been forty; but he was dressed as if he were twenty-five. His white flannel suit was just a little too tight; and the slender cane, swinging upon his arm, caused Rogan to flash upon it a disapproving look. The man's face was thin, disagreeable, Kent thought, and a bit dissipated; but the air of satisfaction which it wore could not be improved upon. A very self-centered man, perfectly sure of himself and one, thought Rogan, whom you would not care to trust overmuch.

He came to a halt beside the desk, to grin down at the stolid figure of the chief. A hand went up to smooth the little black mustache into place, fooled with it a moment, then went into a pocket to come forth with an extremely flat cigarette case. As he snapped it open a smile crossed the thin lips—the smile of a man very certain of his own importance.

"Well, Chief," began the rather disagreeable, high-pitched voice, "one of your leading tax-payers has come to beg a favor. I feel you will grant it."

Without a word Rogan's gray eyes passed coldly over the white suit, and rested upon the cane. His action caused the sallow face to flush a little, and a hand went up to his head to remove his hat. Lean-

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ing a little on the table, he appealed to the chief.

"Somebody, Chief, has been writing me letters. Silly sort of letters. And—"

"Got them with you?" was the gruff retort.

"One. Threw the first two away. Just thought at first it was some silly joke. Some of the boys trying to have fun with me, you know. But the one this morning rather upset my wife." A knowing smile crossed the thin lips. "You know how women are."

"Let me see it," was the snapped-out command.

Reaching into the inside pocket of his coat, Fletcher brought forth a folded paper. It was dirty, and after he put it on the desk he took out a colored handkerchief and carefully brushed his fingers. For a second Rogan watched the gesture; then his hand shot across the desk for the folded letter.

It was an extremely soiled sheet of paper. Even after it was opened, and his eyes had taken in the three typewritten lines, Rogan sat wondering how the paper could have become so badly creased and so dirty. It looked as though someone had crumpled it into a ball. And the typewritten letters were very uneven, and badly smudged.

"This is the third time we warn you. Youse in for trouble. Get you yet, won't be hard. Ain't much use to try and avoid it. Could get you at your dinner tonight."

Three short typewritten lines—that was all. Unsigned, of course—every letter of this type he had ever seen (and there had been a good many of

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them) had been unsigned. It contained a threat, and a reference to a dinner. In general the letter was not unlike others he had seen; and as a rule they led to nothing. As he thrust it across the desk for Kent to read, Rogan raised his head to glance at the silent figure beside his desk.

"What have you been doing?" he barked out.

Fletcher's eyes opened wide in startled surprise. The thin face flushed; then the red faded away. So eager was his reply that he stammered out the first words:

"Why—why—nothing, Chief. Can't imagine who might send me such a letter. Have not the slightest idea why. Unless—." A hand went waving out in a hopeless gesture.

"Unless what?"

"Well, you see, Chief, if you have a bit of money people get jealous, you know. Have all sorts of foggy ideas, odd thoughts, and such things. Might be somebody like that; that's all I can think of. But my wife is a bit frightened."

The glance he received was cold and calculating. Rogan was thinking. The man might be right. He ran round with a rather wild crowd. The younger golf-club set to which he belonged were noted far more for their escapades than they were for their intelligence. Somebody might be trying to frighten him. And then, on the other hand, he had heard stories about Fletcher. He did not have the best reputation as to personal conduct. He asked about the other letters.

There had been two others, he was told. They

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came by mail, to the man's house; and he had thrown them away, thinking his friends might be trying to frighten him. But his wife had seen this one, and it had frightened her a little. To all of the chief's endeavors to make him admit he had some idea who might have written them, the same answer was made. Fletcher simply threw out his hands in a hopeless gesture, shrugged his shoulders, and said he had no idea.

"What do you want me to do?" Rogan asked at last.

"Why, I was thinking, Chief, that you might send a couple of men up to my place tonight. Have a little dinner on, tonight, at eight. It would make my wife feel easier: that I know. And after all, I am a heavy tax-payer, and ought to ask a favor of you once in a while."

Rogan's first impulse was to retort that large tax-payers thought they owned the city. The request for two men to guard Fletcher's estate during his dinner seemed unnecessary. He knew the man's place: a house on the high bluff just outside the city. The grounds were spacious, covered with trees, running back from a bluff which rose for seventy feet above the lake. It was the city's most exclusive residential section, though the chief had always thought it a rather lonesome place.

What he might have said, if it had not been for the thought that flashed into his mind, would be difficult to discover. He had no liking for the self-satisfied man who stood beside his desk. But he remembered the old saying which he had quoted to

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Kent: that the first visitor to the new office of a police chief brings with him a murder. And the thought caused his lips to set in a straight line.

The word "intuition" would have had little meaning to Rogan. But he had great respect for what he called his hunches. There was a good deal more to police work than simply running down clues, acting upon evidence. Like every other police chief, Rogan would have told you that there was a thing which he could not explain, a feeling, an obscure warning that made him realize that evidence was not everything. Intimations came at times, defying all reason; and when they did, one must listen.

Of course the saying he had repeated to his inspector was simply a bit of superstition. But then, Rogan knew of times when it had turned out to be true. After all, Fletcher was not only the first person to bring a problem into his new office; he had also produced a threatening letter. No doubt the letter meant nothing at all; yet, on the other hand, it would do no harm to consent to his request. Two men stationed on his grounds, during the dinner, would prevent anything from happening. Though when he said he would see that the men were sent Rogan knew, deep down in his heart, that they would not be needed.

With a nod of agreement, Fletcher voiced his thanks and started across the floor towards the door. The letter had been replaced on the desk, and, seeing it, Rogan picked it up and put it in his inside pocket. Why he did this he did not know; for after all it should have been sent into the file room. After the

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door closed he turned to Kent.

"Guess he's been up to something. But you'd better send two of your men up there." He paused a moment to say, half apologetically, "He does pay a lot of taxes, and it won't harm anything. Guess somebody was simply trying to scare him a bit."

The inspector nodded; for he agreed with his superior. Fletcher had a good deal of money, but his type did not appeal. The letter had not impressed him. Without a doubt somebody was trying to throw a scare into the man; that was all, and nothing would come out of it. But Rogan was right. If Fletcher wanted two plain-clothes men to patrol his grounds during his dinner, why, they must be sent. He belonged to a group which had a good deal of money and whose taxes were heavy.

Voicing his thoughts he rose from his chair to leave the room. A glance at his wrist watch showed that it was four. With his hand on the door knob he turned, as Rogan's voice came floating across the room:

"I suppose you will be around here tonight. I am going to have dinner with Harley Manners; so you will know where to get me."

Kent nodded as he left the room. When the door closed Rogan rose slowly from his chair and walked to the window. For a while he glanced down at the lake. The wind was still high, the clouds low and black. It might rain before night, though he doubted it. The waves were beating against the end of the long public pier, and he saw the spray flung high in the air. Gloomy and depressed, he decided he would

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go at once to his friend's, though dinner was not until after six.

The friendship between the rough and uncultivated police chief and the wealthy and highly intellectual professor of abnormal psychology had always been one of the things which the city had failed to understand. There were many things about Harley Manners that people could not understand. Why one of his social position and wealth should spend his days teaching, when he had money enough to do anything he wished, had long puzzled those who knew him. But his warm friendship for Rogan puzzled them more.

It was a friendship that went back to Manners' boyhood days, and had increased as he grew older. On many occasions it was the advice Rogan received in Manners' library which had solved the problem that baffled the police. Rogan knew nothing about science, even less about that insight into the human mind which was Manners' life work. Yet he realized that without the aid of his friend he would have been unsuccessful in the solution of the three crimes that had been his hardest problems.

It was a little after five when he walked out of the new headquarters, to stand for a second on the wide granite steps. Stretching away before him, the main street of the city lost itself between high, towering buildings. Through this narrow canyon the wind swept like a leaping hound. A newspaper, thrown by a careless passer-by into the street, whirled in a fantastic dance over the court-house lawn. This was to his left; and beyond it he could just make out

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the front steps of the Federal Building.

Something caused him to stand for several moments, while his grave eyes contemplated the city street. He was not an imaginative man; but something faintly stirred within him as he looked. Those tall buildings, out of whose doors the workers were now hurrying, represented the strength and wealth of the city's life. And the building behind him, over which he had control, contained protection for all of the thousands of people. He thought of this for a moment; then slowly walked down the steps toward the red police car which was waiting in the street.

With a word to his driver, he sank into the seat of the open machine. A cigar was stuck between his lips, his hat pulled low over his eyes. As they swept into the main street, filled with homeward traffic, he wished he had ordered the driver to take a closed car. The wind was strong; and all the dirt and dust of past weeks was being hurled through the air. It was going to be a windy drive, and, as he glanced at the heavy traffic, he decided it would be a slow one.

Through the crowded business section they drove, turning at last to run past a park. Next came a broad avenue with wide green lawns. These past, there came smaller streets, with rough uneven pavement, over which the machine swayed and rocked. The suburbs reached, the houses were left behind as they began to climb a long, steep hill, a hill which twisted and curved every few yards. This breasted, a high stone wall came into sight, and beyond it, half-hidden by the trees, he had his first glimpse of Manners' house.

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Dismissing the driver at the entrance to the driveway, he climbed out of the car. The wind seemed lustier here than down in the city. The elm trees upon the expanse of lawn were swaying and bending before its steady blasts. As he came down the drive toward the house a dog strolled off the wide piazza to meet him: a great brute of a dog, Manners' oversized Airedale, Satan.

Rogan was not much given to noticing scenery; but he always insisted that the view from Manners' lawn was the finest in the city. Manners had chosen the site of his long, rambling, stone house for several reasons. He wanted solitude, and he knew it to be the finest view in the city. On the top of the highest hill for miles around he had built his stone house; and even Rogan had to admit the site was beautiful.

Far below, the uneven sky-line of the city was etched against the horizon. Beyond it was the lake: a dark and somber mass of moving water. By turning, he could have looked down over green fields, caught a glimpse of irregular groups of trees, and again seen the wide expanse of water. But he paid no attention to the view, walking a little hurriedly towards the stone house before him.

The dog paced soberly along by his side. Rogan was one of the few persons of whom the Airedale approved; though his only mark of affection had been to give a shy thrust of his cold nose against the chief's hand, he walked along by his side, and climbed with him the steps that led to the piazza.

Pushing the button of the bell, Rogan heard its shrill warning sound within the house. Waiting for

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the door to open, he happened to touch his coat just over the inside pocket. Something soft responded to the touch; and he wondered for a second what it might be. Then he remembered. He had put the letter Fletcher had shown him in his pocket. It should have been left at the station, to be filed away in the document room. But as he heard footsteps within the hall he smiled. It might interest Manners; anyway he would ask him what he thought of it.

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CHAPTER II

SLOWLY pulling the sheet of paper from his typewriter, Harley Manners added it to the pile of manuscript upon the desk, then fumbled in a pocket for his pipe. Contentedly his long fingers patted the tobacco firmly into the worn bowl, then applied a match. As the first gray puff of smoke drifted out into the room, he leaned far back in his chair and smiled down at the typewritten sheets.

All the long afternoon he had been quietly writing at the desk, which stood between the curving bay windows of his library. For many weeks he had been working there; and though he knew that the book, when completed, would interest few, yet it had given him a summer of fascinating work. A thousand people, perhaps, might read the words upon the typewritten sheets of paper. That the book when published might overthrow every existing theory concerning witchcraft, and yet be of no interest to the world at large, did not bother him. The work itself, the new theory he had evolved, was the thing that counted.

Leaning far back in his chair, he threw a long reflective glance over the room. Twilight had crept through the large windows, casting shadows into the dim corners. The glass-covered book-cases that lined the walls were now mere dim outlines, their thousands of books a solid mass of uniform color. On the

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walls the etchings, mingled with eighteenth-century colored French prints, were now scarcely distinguishable. Only the twenty Rops, whose devilish suggestiveness leered down from the nearest wall, could be clearly discerned.

He did not need to see this room; for its every detail was firmly etched in his mind. It was a place dear to his heart, the room in which he read, and worked, and dreamed: containing the books and etchings that he loved. Behind those glass-enclosed cases stood thousands of volumes, collected with care and discrimination. Long rows of books on popular superstitions, customs and folk-lore stood beside history and psychology; and these in turn were flanked by one of the largest collections in the country upon crime. Almost every curious and out-of-the-way book could have been found in that long room.

For a while, with closed eyes, he leaned back in his chair, thinking. He was the most popular professor the university boasted; but his popularity was among the students, not with the president or faculty. That one of his wealth and social position should care to teach had been discussed more than once in faculty meetings—when he was not present. That in his own subject, abnormal psychology, he was one of the leading authorities in the country was—if grudgingly—admitted.

About Manners there was a great deal which both the college faculty and his friends failed to understand. Why, with the opportunity of living wherever he might desire, he should from choice reside in the lake city puzzled many. His wish for solitude, to-

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gether with a firm refusal to be part of the social life to which his position gave him entrée, perplexed others. What they failed to understand was that Manners had been gifted not only with a keen brain, but also with a great curiosity concerning life. He had but one fear: the fear that he might not know enough about everything.

It was this desire to know all the curious by-paths of human conduct that was responsible for his interest in crime. Behind the glass-covered book-cases stood a remarkable library. All the books dealing with the absurd and weird abnormalities of men and women, accounts of famous crimes and trials, could be found there. And this interest was far from an academic one. Three murder cases had been solved by Manners' technical skill.

The sound of the wind howling around the house made him open his eyes. All afternoon the half-gale had shrieked at the windows, and it had been his idea that it would die away when the dusk came. But as the windows rattled at the blast, he placed the pipe on the stand and rose to his feet. Pulling aside the damask draperies he looked out into the gathering dusk.

On the wide lawn the elm trees were swaying and rocking before the wind. A mile away, down across the fields, he saw the lake, a tumbling mass of angry water. Turning, the etched outline of the city flashed into his vision. By the sparkling gleam of lights—which must just have been turned on—the long line of the main street could be followed.

Chief among the reasons why he had built his

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house upon the top of the hill had been this view. He would never tire of it; and the place was far enough outside of the city limits to give him the solitude and quiet he craved. On bright days there was always the sight of the gleaming lake, and a long vista of green fields. At night, when the city lights became stars of flame in the darkness, there was a beauty that brought peace to his soul.

For a time he stood looking out of the window. Night was approaching; and though the wind was blowing stronger than ever, he anticipated that it would soon die away. A movement of his arm caused his eyes to fall upon the sleeve of his silk shirt. Time he was changing his clothes. It was his habit to do all his writing dressed in a very disreputable pair of flannels. White they had once been—but that had been a long time ago.

Turning from the window, he went out to the kitchen to interview his housekeeper. Rogan was coming to dinner, and the chief would be weary and also a bit depressed. The dedication of the new police-station would have reminded his friend that soon he must retire, and that another would take his place. This was the reason Manners had invited him to the house, that within its peace and quiet he might relax.

The housekeeper seen, he hastened to the second floor and into his bedroom. Water was turned on in the bath, and he began to whistle as he dropped his clothes to the floor. This bedroom overlooked the lawn, and within it the furniture was plain and simple. There were no etchings on the walls—though

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a picture did stand upon the dresser—the only picture in the room.

He stood, now, before it for a moment, and took it in his hand, as a little pathetic smile crossed his lips. It was a proud face he looked down upon: a head held high, thrown back a little, with a wistful smile lingering upon intelligent lips. The picture might have explained a good deal about Manners which his friends did not know; and when he replaced it on the dresser and went to his bath he was unusually silent.

It was while dressing that he heard the sound of the bell, and knew his guest had arrived. When he went down into the library, he found Rogan already seated in his easiest chair, with the dog lying a few feet in front of him. A glance took in the new uniform; and he smiled as he saw the glittering gold badge. The smile caused a self-conscious look to sweep over the round face of the chief.

As soon as the first words of greeting had been exchanged Manners excused himself to go to the kitchen. Left alone, Rogan's gray eyes swept slowly over the book-lined walls. There were more books in this room than in any other place he had ever seen, unless it be the public library. What they might all be about he did not know, and once he had asked Manners if he had read them all. The answer—yes—had rather stirred the unimaginative police official; and the sight of the book-lined walls always impressed him.

But he liked the room, felt its peace and quiet stealing over him. It had been a long hard day, filled

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stogies was discovered in the drawer of the desk, kept there for Rogan alone, and with a smile Manners placed it in the chief's hand.

Sinking down into the easiest chair in the room, Rogan lighted his long, thin roll, then cast a reflective look at his friend. Across from him, with a little smile upon his face, sat Manners. The gray suit which clothed the tall, lanky frame was of costly texture; and in the gay tie there sparkled a precious stone. For a while Rogan silently studied him: noting, as always, the high forehead, the keen eyes, the sensitive lips, the long artistic fingers. He liked this young man; and he knew his age to be the same as the number of his own years upon the police force.

Manners bore the friendly scrutiny with a little smile playing about his lips. Rogan seemed more rested than when he had come, and the somber look had left the gray eyes. It should have been a proud day in the chief's life, for kindly words had been said regarding his long years of service. A year ago the local papers were leading a political fight to have Rogan thrown out of office. Today they had sung his praises.

"Good deal of difference now, Rogan," he commented, "from a year ago."

Taking the stogie from his lips, the chief nodded his head. After a moment's reflection the rough voice spoke. There came an admission that a great many fine things had been said about him during the dedication ceremonies—followed by the sarcastic comment that they meant nothing. One day the police were praised, the next day nothing but evil was said about

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them. Rogan's attitude told his host that even the pinning of the gold badge upon the blue coat had not impressed him. Manners changed the conversation:

"Have you booked anyone in your new station?"

He was surprised by the effect of the harmless question. With a start, the stogie was jerked from the corner of Rogan's lips as the chief sat upright in his chair. The look he threw his friend was a startled one, as though the words had occasioned an unpleasant train of thought. After a pause he spoke:

"Harley, did you ever hear the old saying that floats round police circles—that when a chief steps into a new station, the first man to see him will bring a murder case in with him?"

Manners slowly shook his head, smiling a bit. Rogan might be hard-headed and realistic; yet there was a streak of superstition in his make-up. The sight of a black cat could always give the chief an uneasy hour. The day the police car ran into a telephone pole, for instance, Manners spent an hour endeavoring to assure Rogan there was no connection between the accident and the fact that, an hour before it happened, he had unwittingly walked under a ladder. This, however, was a new superstition; and he remarked as much to the chief.

Rather grudgingly he was assured that though it might be superstition it was yet a familiar saying in police circles. Leaning back in his chair, as the stogie was allowed to go out, Rogan commented upon the cases in which he had known the saying to prove true. There were not many, two in fact, but he produced

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them as if they were a hundred. When he had finished he was asked one question:

"What was the first case you booked in the new building?"

It was admitted that the first prisoner brought in had been simply a drunken driver. At the little smile, Rogan retorted that the tradition said "the first person to see the chief." He had not seen the first prisoner; that was a mere matter of detail for a desk man. But there had been a man in to see him, the first and only person he had yet interviewed in his new office. As there came no inquiry as to who it might have been, the information was volunteered:

"John Fletcher was in to see me."

The name made Manners smile. Fletcher was well known in the city, and as Manners thought of the man he realized the absurdity of what had been in Rogan's mind. Fletcher was simply the son of a man who had left a good deal of money for his offspring to throw away. There were many unpleasant traits in Fletcher's character; but crime in the usual meaning of the word could not be thought of. He was interested enough, however, to ask why he had wished to see Rogan.

"He got an anonymous letter," came the answer.

Rogan was reminded that anonymous letters were rather commonplace things, and as a rule meant little. Warming to the subject, Manners commented on the fact that almost eight-five percent of all such letters were written by women: neurotic, repressed women, wishing to injure someone, finding some psychological satisfaction in what they did. But gen-

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erally such letters were meaningless, rarely leading to murder. A few cases there were in which anonymous letters had figured in a murder. These, however, had been largely warnings sent out by certain societies, whose membership consisted of people of foreign birth.

"I have seen some funny letters in my time," began Rogan in a reminiscent mood. The look of interest on Manners' face led him to continue. "Knew a case where for five years, every Monday morning, the postman laid an anonymous letter on a man's desk. Got so after a while he would have felt hurt if it hadn't come. And who do you think was sending them to him all the time? His own wife. And then I got mixed up in a couple of cases where we discovered that the persons receiving the letters were writing them themselves. Women those were, and I don't just see it."

The puzzled expression on the red face induced the professor to enter into an explanation. He reminded him that the letters which the women had written to themselves would be violent and obscene. Nodding his agreement, the chief listened as he was given the psychological reason why certain highly repressed and neurotic persons are able to release their repressions by writing to themselves. Scientifically the explanation he received was correct; but, when Manners paused to light a cigarette, Rogan simply shook his head. It might all be true, and no doubt was, but after all it was beyond him. He started to voice this opinion, only to have Manners' words cut in ahead of him:

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"What sort of letter was sent to Fletcher?"

About to reply, Rogan suddenly remembered. The letter itself was in the inside pocket of his coat. Without speaking, he fumbled for the piece of paper. Bringing it forth he tossed it into Manners' lap, and waited for the comment which would come.

As he took the badly creased bit of paper in his hands, Manners' first thought was that it was about as dirty a letter as he had ever seen. If it had been deliberately rubbed on the ground, it could not have been more soiled. The manner in which it had been folded interested him also. Twice it had been folded; then, seemingly, it had been crumpled into a tight ball. Nothing else could explain the multitude of folds and creases in the paper. The message itself appeared to mean nothing, though Manners noted that the letters in which it was written were unevenly spaced, and that the typewriter used must sadly have needed cleaning.

At the station Rogan had given the letter but a glance, then tossed it across the desk to Kent. He was surprised, now, to see Manners rise and go to the desk with it. Opening a drawer the professor took out a large magnifying glass. For a few moments he peered at the letter, turning the paper over and over: examining even the creases, which were black with dirt. When the examination was over the letter was handed back, and Manners sank down in his chair without speaking.

"Well?" came Rogan's impatient voice.

"That piece of paper tells a lot," was the comment. "I would conclude that whoever wrote it tried

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to disguise the class of society in which he moved. Of course he overlooked one thing, in fact two, which rather give him away."

The letter had been replaced in the chief's pocket; but the last remark made him take it out again and give it a quick glance. For a moment he stared, then throwing back his head growled out a question:

"Overlooked what?"

"I mean this. Most anonymous letters are written by people who are afraid to sign their names, and who attempt to disguise their writing. In most cases the person receiving the letter knows, or has met, the one who wrote it. This does not apply, of course, to prominent people much in the public eye, whose mail is filled with letters from cranks. But the average anonymous letter is written by someone who, as a rule, knows the person to whom he is writing. Oftentimes the writers are known very well, and of course they try to disguise the handwriting, stationery, and phraseology. Such an attempt was made in this letter; but in the very attempt the writer gave himself away.

"You see," he said, reaching forward to take the letter from Rogan's hand, "the first thought would be that the writer of this letter was illiterate, careless and rather fond of dirt. But look at the paper. It's rag paper, an expensive brand, hard to find even in the better shops. Then look at certain words in the three lines. 'Ain't' and 'youse' are not used today even by the uneducated. See how dirty the thing is. What the writer did seems very simple."

"What he did?"

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"Yes. In writing the letter he wished Fletcher to think it came from someone outside his own social group. The sender used a dirty machine, spaced the letters badly, and tried to pick words he thought an uneducated person might us. He must have taken the sheet of paper and rubbed it on the ground, in the dirt. In no other way could it have become so soiled as it is. Not satisfied with that, he then rolled it up in a ball, in order that it might appear badly creased. Yet one thing was forgotten: he had used a grade of paper that is not only expensive, but is also a bit hard to find. I wager, Rogan, you might find the shop that sells this paper—rather easily; though that would give you no idea who wrote the letter."

"What do you think this person was trying to do?" was the question.

"Oh, just somebody trying to scare Fletcher, or have a little fun with him."

"That was what Fletcher thought," was the retort.

Manners nodded in agreement, remarking that no doubt it was someone in Fletcher's own social group who had written the letter to him. That it was of any importance he did not believe, though he admitted there might be persons who would not feel too sad if some misfortune did overtake the person to whom the letter was written. Then a thought struck him:

"Why did Fletcher bother to bring the letter into your office? There is little in it to make him feel excited: that is, unless he has some idea who might have written it."

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"His wife saw it," was the comment. "You see, this was the third letter he had received. He destroyed the first two, but his wife saw this one and got excited. They are having a dinner there tonight."

The remark about the dinner was not clear to Manners; so Rogan entered into an explanation. He told of Fletcher's request that two men guard his grounds, shrugging his shoulders as he admitted that if it had not been for the old saying about the first visitor to a new police station he would have refused the man's request. His added remark, that he had sent the men because Fletcher was a heavy tax-payer, made Manners smile.

The professor could picture an excited woman, reading into the three lines a threatened disaster. The admission of her husband, that there had been two other letters, would only deepen her feeling of terror. It was but natural that Fletcher should have come to Rogan and asked for the two men: there was nothing else he could do. Manners voiced this idea, with which Rogan rather doubtfully agreed. Then silence fell over the room.

It was a silence lasting a long time. At peace with the world, rested, his mind at ease, Rogan allowed his eyes to travel down the long line of books. There was one section of the shelves upon which his glance remained for some moments. There against the wall, their covers bright splotches of color, were the books upon crime. All the world's famous criminal trials, accounts of famous crimes—from those well-known down to more hidden, obscure happenings—were upon the shelves. More than once the chief had

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pulled forth a book, and looked within. Now he was wondering in how many cases an anonymous letter had been the starting point for the printed words.

He thought this over for a while, leaning far back in his chair, as he watched the pale blue smoke of his stogie. He was rested now; the peace and quiet of the room had overpowered him. Close to his chair lay the dog, fast asleep. No sound came from the yard; for the wind had died down when darkness came. Across from him, with a thoughtful look upon his face, Manners sat, apparently studying a series of newly acquired eighteenth-century French prints by Queverdo.

It was the telephone in the hall that broke the stillness. The long, insistent ring seemed unnecessarily loud, and very shrill. Jerked upright in his chair by the sound Rogan watched Manners rise and amble out of the room, listened to a murmured conversation, then heard his own name spoken. The call was for him. As he rose to walk across the floor he felt uneasy.

Back again in the library Manners went to the desk, soberly reaching down to open a box of cigarettes. He heard the first barking question, as Rogan gave his name—then came a silence. It was an uneasy silence, a long one, as though the unknown person at the other end of the wire had a good deal he wished to say. Then came Rogan's voice, the tone startled, eager, questioning. Silence again—then once more the chief was speaking. This time he was barking out commands, commands issued in a sharp tense tone, whose undercurrent was fear mingled with

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anger.

As the receiver was replaced on the hook there came a little click. After a moment the short, heavy figure appeared in the doorway. No longer was Rogan's face that of a man at peace with the world. Once more worried lines had leaped around the thick lips: lips now shut tensely. His gray eyes, like frozen light, looked over at his friend. As their glances met, Manners waited for the words which would come.

"Harley," came the rough voice, its tone even, cold, and without expression. "That call was from Kent at the station. Something has gone wrong at Fletcher's dinner. Something—"

So icy was the tone that Manners' mind leaped to but one thought—a thought expressed in his exclamation:

"Murder?"

For a second there was no reply. Instead of speaking Rogan looked over towards the windows. Through the curtains could be seen the blackness of the night. For a moment he studied the windows as though he had never seen them before. Then all at once he turned:

"I don't know, Harley. Kent 'phoned that one of the plain-clothes men just called up to say that one of Fletcher's dinner guests has died—died very suddenly, while at the table. Said there was something suspicious about it, though he doesn't know what it is."

In the silence that fell, Manners reached into his pocket for his cigarette case. There came Rogan's voice again. This time behind the even tone could be

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felt the tension in his mind.

"I just told Kent to rush up there and take our police doctor. Told him to tell the men to allow no one to leave the house till we get there. Told him we would be at the place as soon as he is. That means you will have to drive me out. He says the man died very suddenly while at the table. Nothing out of the way that he knows about. But—"

The big hands went sweeping out in a half-circle. What the gesture might mean Manners could not tell. But it was violent enough: the action of a man who had made up his mind. As Manners thought this, the chief spoke again:

"Remember what I told you, Harley—told you of that old saying that the first visitor in my office would bring a murder?"

As the last word rang over the room the chief turned, while his eyes swept the hall. Yes, there was his hat on the stand, just where he could reach it without having to take more than two steps. He would want it in a minute. But before he picked it up, he must speak again:

"Maybe it's just a superstition. I don't know. That's what you and Kent said it was. But get this, Harley. Fletcher was the first man in my new office. He wanted two men to guard his grounds tonight. I sent them out there, and while they were on duty one of his guests died—died suddenly at the table. Now it all may be just a coincidence. But do you know what I think we are going to find before we get through with it? Do you?"

Though he knew what the answer would be, Man-

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ners had to return the question. For a second before replying, Rogan's cold, gray eyes met his own. There came one word—a word barked out with all the conviction within the police official's soul:

"Murder."

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CHAPTER III

THERE were three cars in Manners' garage. As he hurried across the grass, with Rogan at his heels, he decided to take the new roadster. It was the fastest he owned, and the police chief, he knew, wished to reach Fletcher's place as soon as possible. The old superstition must be playing through his mind, and though to the psychologist this nervous uneasiness seemed absurd, yet he knew how disturbed Rogan must be.

It was dark on the lawn, and the tall trees were scarcely distinguishable. Clouds hid the stars, and far over the lake played intermittent flashes of lightning. The air was still, close, heavy, threatening an approaching storm. Beyond the fields, on the edge of the point running out into the water, could be seen the steady flare of the light-house.

It took but a moment to run the long, low, roadster out of the garage. Even before his foot went down on the starter Rogan was beside Manners, his hand clutching his hat. In the chief's mind there were no illusions as to what this ride would be. He had driven with Manners before, on occasions when speed had been suggested. And though he had said nothing, he noticed that it was the fastest car in the garage that was being used.

Almost in the second they came through the opening in the hedge, the machine was in high. Just past

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the house, the road turned to run down a long winding hill. By the time they had crested the hill, and begun their curving descent, the car was beginning to pick up speed. Long before they reached the bottom Rogan had glanced soberly at the speedometer, and he blinked as he saw the swinging needle playing around the figure seventy.

Not for long, however, was the speedometer watched. The chief had ridden with Manners before, knew there was no better driver in the city. So slumping far down behind the wind-shield, he gave himself up, now, to his gloomy thoughts. Ever since Fletcher had walked into his office he had been uneasy. Just what it was he feared, he could not tell. But Kent's telephone call, with the information that a tragedy had occurred at Fletcher's dinner, had caused all his disturbed feelings to solidify into a suspicion. A man had no right to bring an anonymous letter into his office and then five hours later have a guest die at his dinner table.

The car went skidding off the main highway to turn down a back road, one that ran in a straight line for five miles, then connected with the lake drive. Under the onrushing headlights the fields were a black, moving line. The machine swayed from side to side, and Rogan breathed a faint prayer that they would not meet anyone. They were going ninety, and it was fast enough. He stole a glance at his companion, noticed the long fingers gripping the wheel, then turned his eyes again upon the road, which seemed to leap up to meet them.

Manners, though he saw every stone and rut in

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the road, was thinking as he drove. Rogan, he knew, was worried. Why the chief should have the wild idea that Fletcher's guest had been murdered was beyond him. Kent had said nothing about a crime, only that a guest had died suddenly at the dinner table. The anonymous letter, he supposed, was to blame for Rogan's saying it would prove to be murder—the letter and that absurd superstition. It was an odd coincidence that one of Fletcher's dinner guests should die; yet such things did happen.

Manners ran over in his mind what he knew about Fletcher. The man's father had been a much respected citizen, which was more than could be said of the son. Fletcher belonged to a younger social set. The group had money; but they lacked culture, and possessed neither intelligence nor stability. Their Saturday night dances at the golf club, noted for noise and wild drinking, had driven the more conservative members from the club on week-ends: a selfish group, whose escapades, to the psychologist, showed lack of balance and responsibility. Not a criminal group; it took something Fletcher's crowd did not possess to be that—it took courage.

He thought of Fletcher. The man must be close to forty, though he dressed as if he were twenty-five. There had been stories about him, floating round the better clubs and business offices. For the moment Manners could not recall what they were. Nothing very bad, he concluded, mix-ups with women, and something about an inability to carry his liquor. He was unintelligent, of course, and selfish: a person who had been the inheritor of money, but who had

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not the ability to know what money could buy.

He stopped thinking, to take his foot hastily off the gas and apply the brakes. With a sickening lurch the heavy machine skidded around a dog, who had paid no attention to their lights. As the car bumped back into the center of the road a muffled expression escaped Rogan's lips. It might have been a prayer; but it sounded too emphatic for that.

On the lake road, ahead, could be seen the traffic, and Manners began to slow down. For a mile they would be forced to travel on the most popular highway of the city. It skirted the lake front, and though it was far from a pleasant evening there would be heavy traffic. High speed was over.

A mile down the highway they turned to go in the direction of the water. It was a private road they entered, wide, with tall trees lining each side. Through the trees could be seen glimpses of stone walls; behind the walls were hidden large houses. They were in the most exclusive residential section of the city, a place of large estates, with the houses secluded behind high stone walls or well-trimmed hedges. Only occasionally could they see lights in the windows, cheery spots of brightness against the dark.

At the entrance to a private driveway the road ended. Illuminated suddenly by their headlights, a pebbled drive could be seen curving away towards a large house. A high stone wall hid the yard, but they could see dimly outlined the tops of tall trees. On either side of the driveway was thick shrubbery, much higher than a man's head, and smoothly trimmed.

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The hedge ended before reaching the house, and the driveway swept around in a wide circle. As the car came to a crunching stop on the gravel, Manners noticed there were cars parked to his right—noticed something else: as his lights had swept round the drive, the shadowy figure of a man darted behind one of the machines. At least, that was his impression. Something had moved—of that he was sure; though what it was he had been unable to discern clearly.

For a moment, after the car stopped, they sat looking at the house. It was a long white building, with a veranda running across the entire front. The entrance was directly before them, and they could see the lighted hallway. To the right, in another room on the main floor, there were lights; but all other parts of the house were dark. Though they knew there were people within, yet from the car they could see no signs of life.

Only for a moment did they look, for with a sudden grunt Rogan flung open the door, pushed his hat back on his head, and climbed out. As he started for the veranda Manners turned off his lights, then followed.

It was Rogan was reached the door first, and whose finger went pounding down on the button. Within the house came the faint ringing of the bell. They could see a light, though the frosted glass in the door prevented their looking into the hall. In a second came the sound of a hand fumbling at the knob; and when the door swung open a blue-coated policeman scowled out at them.

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As Rogan brushed his way into the house, a sound on the lawn made Manners turn. He had not been mistaken; he had heard the sound of a motor. There appeared to be little effort at concealment; for with a sudden roar an engine leaped into life, and he saw a machine come off the grass to turn down the driveway—a machine that was picking up in speed every second. He watched the red tail-light until it vanished around a curve, then stepped into the house.

The policeman who had opened the door either had not heard the car, or was not interested. He was at the farther end of the long hallway speaking to his chief. Rogan's head was vigorously nodding, though he was not saying a word. Both men disappeared into another room. In a second Manners was hurrying after them.

The long hallway down which he hastened was very spacious. A beautiful stairway curved up to the second floor, and he noticed that there was a light on the landing. The furniture was all colonial, and he would have given much to own the chairs standing along the walls. One thing was striking: the silence. Not a sound could he hear, except the noise of Rogan's footsteps ahead of him.

There were two persons in the living-room, the tall raw-boned head of the Homicide Squad and a large man to whom he was talking. At the sight of his chief a relieved look crossed the face of the inspector. They were all standing now by Kent's side, and the look he cast his superior was a doubtful one.

"I did what you said," he began. "Got up here

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at once. Brought Bell with me. He is in the dining-room now. But what the—"

"Never mind all that," broke in Rogan, turning with an impatient gesture to the patrolman. "I want to hear what Rice's got to say."

"There's not much to tell, Chief. The inspector sent Mike and me up here, to sort of keep watch on the grounds, while those birds were at dinner. Nice lonely job it was. Dark as the devil out on that lawn, and nothing to see. I looked in through the windows every little while, but there was nothing out of the way there—just having a dinner. Then about nine, I hear somebody yell in the house, and hustle to the window and give a look. There was a man half-lying on the table. All the dames were yelling, everybody all excited. So I busted into the house. They said he had just flopped over and died. That's all there seems to be in it. But I got thinking—"

An embarrassed smile passed over the policeman's face as he uneasily shifted his feet. It was Rogan's impatient voice that broke the silence.

"Well?"

"Well, Chief, I don't know why we were sent up here. But it's just not natural for a man to be laughing one minute and be dead the next. I saw him through the window, laughing his head off every time I looked in. Then when I hear them yell, and bust in the house, why, there he is dead. And it didn't look right. Besides—" Again he hesitated.

"Besides what?"

"Well, he looked sort of funny to me. Don't know

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why. So I just called the inspector, and he said to keep everyone here and he would be up. So I did."

For a moment Rogan's gray eyes soberly studied his officer. Then he turned to Kent.

"What did you do with those people who were at dinner?"

"They are out in the kitchen," replied the official, with a vague gesture of his arm and a shrug of his shoulders. "And they raised plenty hell when I told them they could not leave until you came." The voice became serious— "God knows what's in your head, Chief, but those people not only have money; but they also have lots of influence. They raved round a lot when I herded them up like a bunch of crooks. And I can't think what under heaven you are doing it for."

"You don't have to think," was the growled retort. "That's one thing I did not ask you to do. Told you to see no one got out till I had looked this place over. Remember that letter I showed you?"

Rogan's temper was displaying itself. Kent had been through many experiences with his chief. Like everyone else on the force he loved the old man; and he realized now that there was something disturbing him. His request that they rush to Fletcher's house, and investigate what was without a doubt a sudden though natural death, had puzzled him. But the mention of the letter explained it. The old man was again playing one of his hunches. And he knew he would have to play along with him.

Manners had observed the worried look upon Kent's face and knew what the inspector was think-

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ing. Rogan might be getting himself into trouble, and into plenty of trouble. A man had died suddenly while at a dinner; and the chief was trying to find something mysterious in what was an uncommon but also a perfectly natural occurrence. No doubt the people who had been seated at Fletcher's table were, as Kent had said, both wealthy and well-known in the city. To be told they could not leave the house until police gave permission would not be much to their liking.

Turning, Manners' eyes glanced at the long table he could see within the dining-room. It was covered with china and glassware and decorated with flowers. The wineglasses were half-empty. Chairs were pushed back from the table, and he could see a napkin lying on the floor. Evidently the people who had been eating there had left the meal half-finished and gone away hurriedly. As he gazed through the doorway he saw a man come into sight, and he recognized him as the young police doctor, Bell.

Rogan had again turned to Kent; but Manners did not wait to hear what he was saying. Crossing the floor he hastened into the dining-room. As he came through the door, the police doctor hurriedly turned to see who was intruding. Manners knew the young physician rather well, and simply smiled a greeting. Then he turned to study the dining-room.

It was a beautiful room, but only for a second did his eyes pause on its details; instantly they traveled to the most significant object there—an object that, as he looked, became awesome and sinister. In a chair, with his head bowed upon the

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table, was a man: a man whose shoulders did not move, a man who would never again sit at a dinner table.

The dark head was lying against the table, with hidden face pressed into the white linen. Outstretched were the long arms, the fingers tightly clenched. A picture flashed into Manners' mind—of that man sitting there but a few moments before, among laughing guests. Sprawled out now over the table, the silent figure told that death had come suddenly, and without warning.

Turning his eyes from the dark head, Manners glanced once more down the table. Eight chairs stood around it, at some little distance from the dessert plates, as though hastily pushed back. Evidently the man had died before the dinner was over.

As Bell did not speak, Manners continued to glance about the room. He noted that the table stood rather close to long, wide windows overlooking the lawn. There were five of these windows; and two of them were swung back. On the walls were a few fine hunting scenes, their gay colors making a spot of brightness against the light wall-paper. Close to a door which led to the rear of the house was a serving table, and upon the buffet stood a number of bottles.

"Well, what does it all mean?" came Rogan's voice from the doorway.

The chief had just entered the room. His face wore a scowl, which vanished as his eyes took in the bowed head upon the table. For a second the thick lips set in a tight line, the gray eyes narrowed. Then,

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as he moved across the floor, there came his second question:

"What is it all about, Bell? What did he die of?"

The doctor was a young man. He had taken his office as a means of securing experience before entering into private practice. An unusually efficient doctor, Manners had often told Rogan, far superior to the usual medical man doing police work. He expected a quick, decisive answer. To his surprise it was several moments before Bell replied.

Instead of speaking, the doctor walked to the table and gently lifted the bowed head. As the shoulders were raised, there came first the sight of a wide expanse of white shirt front, then the little black tie. As though not wishing them to see the face until he was ready, Bell had bent forward as he raised the head upright. Supporting it in his hands, he stepped aside. One quick glance at the white features, twisted a little by pain, and Manners gave a sudden exclamation.

He knew the man. So did Rogan. It was Dr. Langdon, the child specialist, one of the best-known physicians in the city. Unmarried, quiet and scholarly in his tastes, he was the last person Manners would have expected to be at a dinner in Fletcher's house. But he had been. And that white, silent face, whose eyes still bore a startled look, would never smile again.

An astonished grunt escaped from Rogan's lips as he recognized the dead man. It was even worse than he expected. This man was not only well-known; he was one of the best-liked physicians in the city. There

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"You see I knew Langdon. For a busy, well-known specialist, he always was rather kind to me. And he would be the last man in the world I should think would have a stroke. He always seemed in perfect health." He paused, slowly shaking his head. "But of course you never can tell. I noticed he was very pale when I first examined him, his skin moist and cold. The body seems to have become rigid rather rapidly; but that means little."

"It means an autopsy," broke forth Rogan.

The doctor turned and looked at his chief. The stern glance he received was not unfamiliar to him. Stubborn determination was on the red face, a half-scowl around the tight lips. Bell shrugged his shoulders. The old man had made up his mind, though what he was insisting upon would be an absurdity. Langdon had died while seated at the dinner table of his host. The occurrence was sad, much to be regretted, but of course the death was a natural one. An autopsy would not only be absurd, it would make a lot of talk.

He voiced his opinions. Rogan was reminded that he was not dealing with people devoid of influence and power. An autopsy would make the city talk, wonder whether there was any hint of a crime. When the chief was forced, as Bell assured him he would be, to tell the papers that the death had been a natural one, then the fireworks would begin. Toward the end Bell became even eloquent, and with ironic sarcasm in his voice demanded if Rogan thought he knew more about medicine than his doctor did.

His face expressionless, the chief listened. When

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the doctor paused, more because he was out of breath than for any other reason, the police official only gave him a long searching look. Very sarcastic was the rejoinder that came, reminding the doctor that, after all, he would have to take his orders from his superior. He was going to have an autopsy, no matter what Bell thought about it. And his next words were a command—to arrange that the body be taken to the proper place.

Rogan knew what the men in the room were thinking. There was much truth in what Bell had said. Fletcher and his guests did have influence, and the autopsy would make a great stir. In a sense there was no reason for one. The doctor had said the death was a natural one. Yet Rogan had not failed to notice the hesitancy in his voice, and it had made him remember the old superstition. Besides, there was an uneasy feeling in his own mind: a warning that all was not well. What caused it he did not know. It was a feeling that had come over him on other occasions. And whenever he had followed the warning things had gone well for him.

At the farther end of the room a door was suddenly thrust open. For a second there was a glimpse of a butler's pantry. A face looked anxiously into the room—that of a policeman. His eyes fell upon his chief, and in a loud whisper he said he wished to speak to him. With a shrug of his shoulders Rogan crossed the floor to pass through the door.

As the latter swung back into place behind him, Manners turned to Bell. There was a disgusted look

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on the young doctor's face, and as the glance of the professor met his own he slowly shook his head. It was an expressive gesture; that of one who realized from sad experience in the past that Rogan would have his own way. It occasioned a question from Manners:

"You think it absurd to have an autopsy?"

There came a long look at the silent figure slumped over the table. Then the doctor spoke.

"Professor, we were told when we got here that there were eight people at this table. Suddenly Dr. Langdon gave a cry, and a moment later fell over—dead. There is no hint of anything mysterious in his death. I will admit the setting is unusual; and it's odd it happened to be him. But such things do take place. And everything I can see points to his having died from a stroke. Only—"

"Only you are not certain," was the retort.

"No," was the grudging admission, "I am not certain that it was a stroke. I don't like the way the corners of his lips are pulled down. But if you think I have any idea that it was not a natural death, you are all wet. Rogan's just got one of those hunches he loves to talk about, that's all."

The doctor was reminded that the chief had not forgotten Fletcher's receipt of an anonymous letter, warning him that he might be in for trouble. Bell nodded, evidently having been told of the letter by the inspector. Then he retorted:

"Sure, that's the thing bothering the chief. But the old boy forgets it was Fletcher who was going to get

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into trouble, not one of his guests. Yet because, by sheer coincidence, Dr. Langdon died at Fletcher's dinner, Rogan goes crazy for an autopsy." The tone was sarcastic.

Seeing that Bell was thinking of the work ahead of him, Manners walked away toward the end of the table to stand directly behind the bowed shoulders of Dr. Langdon. Gravely he glanced down the length of the table, as his eyes narrowed.

One odd thing about that table, he thought. Decorations and fittings: everything one might expect. But one thing seemed out of place. The head of the table stood very close to the center window. There had been six guests. It was the custom for host and hostess to sit at either end of a dinner table. Yet Langdon's body was in the chair Manners would have expected Fletcher to occupy.

As he moved closer to the silent figure, the professor felt something crunch under his feet. Stepping aside, he looked down at the rug. For a second he was unable to detect anything; not until he bent down could he distinguish the white, powdery substance on which he had stepped. Sugar, was his first thought; but when, reaching down, he ran his hand over the rug, he was not so certain. The substance was a bit too coarse and rough to be sugar.

Whatever it was, it covered several inches of the rug. The sole of his shoe had ground the substance into the fabric. In his pocket there was an envelope, and, obeying some instinct, he sank down on one knee and managed to gather a few of the white crystals

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between his fingers. It was rather difficult, for they were almost a powder, and there was not much of it. He felt a little embarrassed as he rose to his feet, but noticed that Bell had not observed his action.

Bell would have had no time to comment on it at any rate; for Rogan had come slamming through the door. Something had roused him. There was an angry flush on his face. His glance swept quickly from Manners to Bell, then passed to the door leading into the living-room. At the question he barked forth Kent hastened to his side.

"How many persons did you say were at this dinner of Fletcher's?"

"Eight."

"You told them they must all remain here until I said they could leave?"

He was informed that the inspector had commanded the two policemen not to allow anyone to leave the house until the chief arrived. The guests with their host and hostess had been sent to the kitchen; and with a hint of sarcasm in his voice Kent assured his superior they were still there. The response to this remark was a long, cold, angry look.

"They are?" came the icy comment. "They are? Well get this, Kent. You bring Fletcher into the dining-room. Go out and get him yourself. And when you get in that kitchen count the people out there. Count them well!"

"What do you mean by 'count them'?"

Rogan's hand plunged into the pocket of his coat, searching for one of the stogies he had taken from

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the box on Manners' desk. The end was snapped off with a vicious bite of the white teeth; but the stogie was not lighted. Instead:

"There were eight at the dinner. Dr. Langdon is dead. That leaves seven. Out in that kitchen there should be seven people—should be! It happens only six are there. One of them has vanished."

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CHAPTER IV

THOUGH it had nothing to do with what had just been said, an old Italian proverb flashed into Manners' mind: "The Devil knows how to make the cup, but can never make the cover fit tightly." An absurd thought, and why it occurred to him he did not know. Was there even the slightest chance that Rogan might in the end discover that his suspicions had some foundation? Then came another thought. He recalled the sound he had heard as he entered the house. Once again he saw the darkly outlined car sweeping off the grass and into the driveway. Rogan had said that one of the guests had vanished. Whoever had been driving that car had been in a hurry to get away. Turning, Manners told the chief what he had observed.

With an uneasy frown upon his face, Rogan listened. All afternoon he had been feeling restless. Just now he was far more than restless—he was nervous. Everything was going wrong. If it had been Fletcher who was found dead he would not have been greatly surprised. But the doctor— And he stopped to remark that it would at any rate not be a difficult task to discover which one of the guests had disobeyed his order not to leave the house. Then he snapped out a sharp command to Kent.

The inspector, with a short nod, hastened in the direction of the kitchen. With an uneasy shrug of his

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shoulders, Rogan observed the door swing to behind him, then walked into the living-room. Manners watched him cross the floor and pass through into the hall; then saw a light spring into being beyond. The room the chief had entered was a library.

Turning to the scene behind him once more, Manners looked again at the table. The still shoulders, the dark head lying there against the mahogany, made his lips tighten. If there was one man in the city whom he would not have expected to die at Fletcher's table, it was the famous child specialist. And only a moment ago the chief had snarled out that one of the dinner guests, despite police orders, had vanished.

The sound of a voice drifted through the closed door: a high voice, its tone shrill, querulous, angry and complaining. It was carrying on a one-sided conversation; for there were no answering words. Even after Kent pushed open the door, to half-shove the man in front of him into the room, Fletcher's voice was still going on. There seemed little doubt, judging by the way his tongue slurred and tripped over certain words, that he had drunk a bit too much.

He took but two steps into the room; then retreated to lean against the wall. The white shirt of his dinner suit was ruffled; his hair was in disorder. Well-waxed, however, was the tiny black mustache; and the small eyes threw an angry, uneasy look over the room. As they fell upon the silent figure at the table, Manners noticed that Fletcher gave a little shudder.

Only for a second did his glance remain on the

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table. Turning his eyes away, he looked coldly toward the doctor, then raised his eyebrows a trifle as he saw Manners. Though he knew him, there was no sign of recognition. Instead, turning his back upon the three men, Fletcher walked to the buffet. With an eager hand he reached for a tall glass; and the Scotch he poured from one of the bottles was enough for three drinks. Throwing the glass down, his hand reached again for the bottle, hesitated, then fell to his side. With a sudden motion he whirled about.

"What in hell does all this mean?" was the snarling question to Kent, followed by a nervous gesture with the hand still holding the glass. "It's bad enough to have a guest die at my dinner table, without you damned fool police coming in and ordering my guests around as if they were a bunch of crooks. Where do you get that sort of stuff? You are not dealing with people who will allow you to get away with any rough stuff."

Kent made no reply. After all, this was Rogan's party, not his. And the old man was going a bit further than the occasion warranted. Fletcher was angry, and deep down in his heart Kent did not blame him. The death at his dinner table of one of the distinguished physicians of the city must have been a shock. To have the police come rushing in, treating a natural death as though it were a suspicious one, refusing to allow one's dinner guests to leave the house—it was not the sort of thing to make a man like Fletcher feel happy. With relief, the inspector heard the commanding voice of the chief from across the hall.

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In obedience to the voice, with Fletcher in the lead and Manners bringing up the rear, they crossed the living-room, to enter a room on the opposite side of the hall; Bell alone remaining behind. It was a small room, with book-cases on three sides, and to Manners' surprise they were well filled. Someone in the house did some reading; though he felt certain it could not be the angry man who had walked into the room ahead of him, and was now standing directly in front of the chief.

For a second Rogan's cold glance swept over the raging figure before him. Weight about a hundred and forty-five, in poor physical condition, and decidedly angry—so Rogan summed him up. Not much color to his face, and it would do him no harm to lay off liquor for a while. As he thought this the chief suddenly wished he had a drink himself. He needed one; it would do him good. Fletcher was angry, his flushed face told that, and he'd best be careful what he said to him. After all, this man did have a good deal of power in the city.

"What in—" began the high voice.

"Only want to ask you a few questions," came the chief's interruption. The mildness of his tone made both Manners and Kent smile. "Only want to ask a few questions. Maybe we'd better sit down to talk."

It was evident for a second that a vicious retort was trembling upon Fletcher's lips. Then, with a half-shrug of his shoulders, he walked over to a sofa. For a moment, from his seat, he watched the three men find chairs, which they brought close to the desk in the center of the room. Then, as though sud-

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denly remembering his wrongs, he burst into speech once more.

"What in hell do you mean, Rogan, by telling my guests they can't leave the house till you say so? One would think we were a bunch of crooks."

"No," was the slow retort, "not that. But you know, Fletcher, you wanted two men sent up here to see that nothing happened at your dinner. Well, something did happen—Dr. Langdon died. Now tell us all about it."

There came a moment's silence. Fletcher's hand searched into the inside pocket of the dinner coat, to find a cigarette case, which he nervously snapped open. As the odor of the Turkish tobacco filled the room, he spoke.

"There's not much I can tell. Had a little dinner on. Langdon was one of the guests. All at once, toward the end of the dinner, he gave a little cry, and a minute later slumped down on the table. Of course the shock of finding he was dead made some confusion. Then your policeman came bursting in, and told us he was calling you. But all I know about it is that he just sort of fell over, and died."

Rogan nodded, as his restless hand started to reach into a pocket for a stogie. He realized that Manners and Kent disapproved of what he was thinking: that there was something mysterious about the doctor's death. He also realized that he disliked the well-dressed man sitting on the sofa. There seemed, however, nothing more he needed to ask Fletcher. He cast an imploring glance at Manners.

The professor came to the rescue. Had Fletcher

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noticed any appearance of illness in the doctor? And he had mentioned a sudden little cry; what had he meant by that?

When the reply came, Fletcher's voice was icy. It was evident that he resented the source of the question. Before speaking, he carefully placed one knee over the other, then looked down to see if the sharp crease in his trouser leg had been harmed.

"Saw nothing out of the way in his appearance," came the admission. "He did make a little cry—all at once—as if in pain. That's all I can tell you."

Manners fumbled for his cigarette case, felt its cool surface, then allowed it to remain in his pocket. "Just one more question, Fletcher," he apologized. "Stupid perhaps to ask it. But how did it happen that Langdon was sitting at the head of your table? Unusual, you know, for any but the host to sit there."

A puzzled look swept Fletcher's face. "Oh yes," he said. "I remember. I got up to turn on the radio. Suggested he might like to talk with Clara Underwood, who was sitting on my right. That's how he happened to be in my chair. I took his."

"Which one of your guests disregarded my order not to leave the house?" came Rogan's impatient question.

Fletcher gave a sudden start. There was no doubt about the surprise which played across his sallow face. A nervous hand reached up to feel of the little mustache. His eyes opened in startled astonishment —as though he did not comprehend the chief's meaning.

"Left!" was the shrill exclamation.

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"Yes. Who sneaked away? One of them drove out of this yard just as we came into the house," came Rogan's impatient voice. "Who was it? And why did that person go?"

Rising slowly to his feet, Fletcher stared at the police official as though he doubted the sincerity of the question. One quick look at the stern, set face, and there came a slow shake of his head:

"I can't tell you. I know Billy Hardy went into the butler's pantry, saying he wanted a drink. Come to think of it, I don't remember that he returned. But if he sneaked out of the house I can't tell you why he did it. Haven't the slightest idea. Funny thing to do."

Kent crossed to the chief's side. As they started a low, whispered conversation there came a muttered remark from Fletcher that he needed a drink, and he hurried from the room. Only for a moment did the two officials speak, then with a little understanding nod Kent turned to hasten out into the hall. A second after he had disappeared Fletcher returned.

He did not come far into the room. There was a tall glass in his hand, two-thirds filled with Scotch. He moved his hand so that the liquid swirled in the glass, and his little eyes soberly followed the revolving fluid. Then, with a quick motion, the glass was raised to his lips, and the drink gulped down. Suddenly he started to laugh.

It was far from a pleasant laugh. Behind the shrill inflection one could hear hatred. It was evident that the last drink had not been needed—the smile that crossed the thin lips was fatuous. Suddenly he turned to Manners, with a vague gesture of his right arm.

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"Tell you something, Professor," volunteered the sly voice—and he lurched a little as he spoke. "Tell you something. First time you ever visited my house—first time. You know, I feel awfully sorry over the doctor's death. But I never invited him, never invited him to dinner. He's my wife's friend. She asked him. I—"

A silly smirk crossed his face, as he tried to throw back his shoulders. "Never did like him very much. He was too sancti—*sanctimous*. Told me once I ran round too much, drank too much. 'Lazy' he called me. Think of that!" He made a wide circle with his arms. "Fine man, though. Doctor a big man. But too sanctim—*sanctimous*." There came a grin, as for the third time he struggled with the word, then burst out— "Oh, you know what I mean. Too strict and all that sort of thing. Funny he'd come to a dinner I give, and then die. Funny thing that. If—" The rambling voice died suddenly away.

His guests were coming into the room. In the lead were three women, whose low-cut evening gowns showed shoulders pale as their faces. In the rear followed the one man, a short tubby man, with a big head and flaming red hair—a man whose round fat face was working nervously as his eyes threw one searching look at the police.

Tommy Davidson was well-known chiefly because each year he managed to figure in a serious automobile accident. No one could ever know as much as Davidson thought he knew, or be as pompous as he was on certain occasions. As Manners saw him come through the door he smiled to himself. Once, when

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called as a psychological expert in court, he had testified that Davidson belonged to the type that never should be allowed to drive an automobile. As the little eyes flashed a quick look in his direction, he knew the statement was being recalled.

Two of the women Manners knew, though they did not give any sign of recognition. There was Davidson's wife, a tall well-formed brunette—whose shoulder-straps threatened at ever moment to slide from her shapely shoulders. Her face was handsome enough; though around the painted lips dissatisfied and petulant lines showed. Behind her was Mary Moorhead.

Every one in the city at least knew about the tall, angular woman called Mary Moorhead. Her enthusiasms were many and varied, from badly played rôles at the Little Theater to poorly done book-reviews at the Book Forum. With a quick temper, unbounded conceit, and a not over-truthful tongue, her father's fortune allowed her to bully her selfish way through the social life of the city. There was a half-sneer on her narrow lips, as she coldly surveyed the room.

The third woman Manners did not know. She was by far the best-looking of the three, with hair of a shade between auburn and blond. She might have been over twenty-five, though the voluptuous body, plainly showing in the tightly fitted evening dress, seemed younger. Not an over-intelligent face, thought Manners, and the sensuous lips trembled a little as she came into the room, as though she were afraid.

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As Rogan slowly eyed the group his heart sank. He was recalling the remarks of his inspector. These people, with their wealth and social position, could not be treated as could the criminals whom he saw daily. That they were all angry was clearly apparent; and that he would find it rather difficult to explain his reason for refusing to allow them to leave the house was becoming every moment more evident. He had allowed a foolish suspicion to run away with him. He was about to speak, when there came a little sound at the door.

Another woman had come into the room. Manners, as he turned and saw Fletcher's wife, had to stifle a surprised exclamation. He had kept very much to himself in the last two years, and when in the city had been hard at work in his library. Social affairs had been neglected, and though under ordinary circumstances he would have met Ann Fletcher long ago, his first sight of her was as she came slowly into her library.

A very beautiful woman, he thought, tall, with a perfectly proportioned figure which her simple black velvet evening gown showed to perfection. But it was her face that interested him: a sensitive face, with clear honest eyes, and finely shaped lips. There was intelligence there, and breeding, which showed in the proud way she carried her head.

Yet in the brief moment she stood motionless in the doorway he saw she was both unhappy and troubled. Though the dark head was held high there were shadows under the gray eyes and, he thought, traces of tears. As her glance slowly swept the room,

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lingering for a second upon Rogan's glittering badge, he saw her bite her lips. It was the only trace of real emotion any of the company had shown.

Rogan nervously shifted his feet: "I wanted you all in the room in order that I might ask a few questions."

Mary Moorhead gave a snort of disgust. "From the way you herded us in that kitchen one might have thought we were all criminals."

Rogan gave the sneering woman a cold glance. She opened her lips again; but a motion of his hand stopped the threatened retort.

"No," he protested, "nothing like that. But Dr. Langdon was one of our distinguished men. His sudden death will be a sensation. The papers will want to know all the particulars, and—" he hesitated. "You realize that in all cases of sudden death the matter comes under the investigation of the coroner. The police doctor happens to be coroner in our city. All I want to know is: did Dr. Langdon say anything before he died?"

There fell an uneasy silence. Manners knew they were all recapturing the scene at the table. There had been laughter, mirth, then suddenly the grim face of death. It was the low, husky voice of Mrs. Fletcher that broke the stillness—a voice which was trying to keep its even tone, but which despite her effort shook a little.

"No," was her low response. "He simply gave a little cry, and a moment later his head slumped down on the table. I—we rushed to his side—but he was dead."

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The low voice trembled into silence. Rogan's eyes swept the room. No one seemed to wish to add anything; though he saw several heads nod in agreement. Perhaps it was best to ask no more questions. After all, there was nothing to be discovered. But one thing more he did wish to know.

"Can any of you tell me why it was that one of your number left the house, despite my orders for all to stay?"

Somebody gave a nervous little laugh—one of the women—though which one the chief did not know. It was stifled almost as soon as it began. But it was Davidson who leaped into speech; and Rogan noticed that his wife, who was standing beside him, laid a warning hand on his fat arm.

"He just beat it," began the high voice. "Walked into the pantry saying he was going to have a drink. Must have climbed out of the window. We heard his car a few minutes later."

"Why?" Rogan demanded.

There came a little icy laugh from Mary Moorhead. "We are not mind-readers," she said ironically. "Do we have to be? I suppose he just got tired of being told he could not go."

Silence fell. Manners saw Fletcher's wife lean wearily against the wall. The white shoulders drooped as though she were very tired, weary and sick at heart. The fine face trembled a little, then suddenly her eyes met his—deep, clear eyes, honest and searching. For a moment their glances held; then she looked away. It was Rogan who broke the stillness:

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"You can go now. I am sorry I had to ask you to remain until I arrived. But it was necessary."

They turned to rush out of the library. In the confusion Fletcher's voice was heard, a little shrill and excited; and he was having difficulty with the words.

"Now it's all over we'd better have a drink. That includes the police, and—" he paused, to add sarcastically—"Professor Manners."

No one replied. The women were leaving the room. Davidson had gone close to Fletcher's side and whispered something in his ear, which made them both laugh. With a half-scowl on his face, Rogan watched Fletcher and his guests hurry out of the room, and knew by the sound of an opening door that they had not gone into the dining-room. Langdon was still there—and his silent figure was something they would not care to see.

As the last one vanished, the chief reached into his coat and found a stogie. With a vicious click of his teeth he bit off the end. The explosive manner in which he blew forth the first cloud of smoke showed his disgust. It did not need the words he poured forth to tell Kent and Manners that he was also angry.

"People like those," he started in, "give me a pain—a big one. Think they own the earth. But there's nothing more I can do—nothing I have a right to do. So I'm just going to let Bell hurry through the autopsy."

Kent protested. "But Chief, you do not need one. It was a natural death. You heard what they said."

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"Yes—they said nothing. But get this, Kent. It was a sudden death. And the law in such cases allows an autopsy by the coroner. That's why we had our own police doctor made coroner—so it would be possible to look into sudden deaths of this sort. I am going to have an autopsy—even if you don't like it. The doctor was a big man; and it won't hurt anyone to discover why he flopped over and died. He died too damn quick to suit me." A pause—in which the red face flushed, and a half-oath. "What's more, I am going to find out why that young pup sneaked out of the house."

Fifteen minutes later Manners came out of the front door to stand for a moment looking over the lawn. It was a place of shadows filled with pools of darkness, the shrubbery forming large squares of blackness. Save for the slight breeze in the trees there was no sound.

There was still lightning, though the storm was far over the lake, and apparently would come no nearer. A faint wind had sprung up; and the air was cooler than when he had entered the house. Rogan had refused his offer to drive him back to town, saying he would remain until the body of the doctor had been taken away. Feeling there was no reason for his remaining Manners had said good night.

Stepping off the veranda he paused, for a moment, to get his bearings. Fletcher must have a rather large estate, he thought. To his right stretched the yard, a mysterious place of shadows and darkness reaching to the top of the high bluff—which at this point on the shore ran for almost two miles along the lake

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front. To his left the driveway curved towards the road outside the stone wall.

In a sense it was a lonesome place, rather isolated, the other houses some distance off. Beyond the stone wall, at least a thousand yards away, shone the lights in the road. But there were no lights in Fletcher's grounds. And it was impossible to do more than distinguish the dark outlines of the trees.

Instead of going to his car the professor turned, to step on the soft, springy grass. Reaching the end of the house he walked a few yards over the lawn, to find himself under the shadow of tall elms. If he continued he knew he would reach the top of the bluff, and that seventy feet below him would be the lake. But he turned to his left.

Walking about forty feet, he paused to look at the house. The first floor was now lighted, its windows bright oblongs against the darkness. In the second story there was but one lighted window, well toward the front of the house. From where he was standing he could look directly into the dining-room, through a large bay window made in five sections, two of which were swung open. He could see the long table, the white linen and silver—see also the dark, still form at the end of the table. And he noticed the moving figure of a man in the room. As the man came forward into his vision he knew, from the blue uniform, that it was a policeman.

For a time Manners stood motionless. His first thought had been to cross the grass and stand directly under the window. But that would be a useless thing to do. He knew what was in that room. From

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where he stood there was nothing to break the view. True, under the window there was shrubbery; but it was not high; and the tree, only a few feet from the house, was not in his line of vision.

Within that house one of the most distinguished men of the city had suddenly passed out of life. Death is the fate of every man; Manners did not forget that. But back in his mind was another thought, mingled with a vague wonder. Langdon had been a scholar, a man wrapped up in his profession. The guests at Fletcher's dinner would not be the type of people the physician would choose for his friends. Nor could he picture Fletcher as ever becoming a confidant of the doctor.

This thought was with him as he drove home. It was late, with little traffic on the road, and he could have driven as rapidly as he wished. But the car moved slowly. He was thinking.

Odd, indeed, that Langdon should have been at that dinner. No one there worthy of a moment of the doctor's time. Then he remembered Fletcher's wife. Her clear-cut, sensitive face flashed into his memory. Intelligence there was there, and also unhappiness. He wondered how she found life with the man whom she had married, why she had married him. . . .

He gave up thinking after a while, knowing his thoughts were leading nowhere. Had it not been for the anonymous letter Fletcher had brought into the police-station Rogan would not have been disturbed. But the chief had been led to expect that something would happen—only he had expected that it would

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happen to Fletcher.

When he had put the car in his garage the dog came leaping over the grass, to thrust a cold nose in his hand. Together they walked into the house, and the Airedale followed him gravely out to the kitchen. Here Manners opened a cabinet, found a squatty bottle, brought out a stubby one of soda, and mixed a long drink. The mixture was carried back into the library, and—with a sigh—he sank down in his easiest chair.

He was tired, and a little disturbed. The quiet evening he had so carefully planned for the chief had turned into a night of horror. For horror was the only word to express his feeling over the death of the doctor. It had been a shock, and part of the shock had been his startled wonder at the place where the doctor died.

Sipping the Scotch, his eyes wandered over the room. Slowly they passed down the long line of bookcases, lingering for a moment at the section that contained his collection upon crime. There were hundreds of volumes in that section, the stories of every nation. But there was nothing in any of them that would meet the situation he had just encountered.

The glass drained, a cigarette lighted, he smiled. He could picture Rogan, ending what should have been a happy day, in a spirit of unrest. The chief had played one of his hunches; and it was very apparent it had gone wrong. But the stubborn old boy would never admit he had been mistaken—though Manners knew that, even now, he was wishing he had gone a bit slower.

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He stopped thinking, to lean back in his chair with eyes closed. It was very peaceful in the long room; its restful quiet came sweeping into his soul. For a long while he did not stir; then suddenly a hand reached down to linger for a moment on the head of the dog, who was asleep by his side. At last he rose to his feet.

It was time for bed. As he went up the wide, winding stairway, he was sure of one thing. He would hear from Rogan tomorrow. That was a certainty. Whenever the chief was troubled Manners always heard from him. With that thought in his mind, he began to prepare for bed.

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CHAPTER V

TIMOTHY ROGAN scowled down at a disordered desk. Twenty-four hours in his new office had resulted in one thing: the surface of the desk was cluttered with a mass of papers and reports, a careless litter that looked as though it might have been accumulating for months. The disorder rather pleased the chief; it was the only thing in the room that reminded him of his old office.

There were, however, two objects on the desk that made his lips tighten. In one corner was tossed the morning paper, while directly in front of him, crumpled into a tight ball, lay the noon edition of the *Evening Star*.

He did not have to pick them up and re-read their news columns to recall what was on the first page of both papers. Heavy black headlines had leaped forth to hold his attention when he first looked at them. In the morning paper the headlines announced the sudden death of Dr. Langdon. The early afternoon edition had begun to hint at something else.

In the morning paper the account of the sudden death of Dr. Langdon at Fletcher's dinner party had not disturbed the chief. Many columns had retold the story of the physician's prominence in the social and professional life of the city. They were news stories revealing clearly the warm place the doctor had filled in many hearts.

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This account had not disturbed Rogan. No reference had been made to the fact the police had gone to the house, nothing was mentioned about the autopsy. But the afternoon edition made up for what had been omitted in the morning. In headlines that ran across the page, it had shrieked to an eager public that Rogan had demanded an autopsy. And it hinted that a sensation was coming.

What the sensational developments might be the paper had not indicated; for it did not know. But the public had been reminded that autopsies were performed only when the police were suspicious as to the cause of death. Much was made of the fact that Rogan had ordered the autopsy himself. From then on the chief's name became very prominent in the news columns.

It had been a strenuous morning. First the station had been swamped by reporters. The news of the autopsy had sent them thronging into Rogan's office. Many of their questions he had been unable to answer—mostly because he did not know the answers himself. Why had he ordered an autopsy? Was there any suspicion that Langdon's death had not been due to natural causes? It was his answer to the last question that had provoked the ironical, perplexed editorial in the afternoon paper.

A more diplomatic police chief might have been able to answer this question satisfactorily. But even Rogan's best friends had never looked upon him as a diplomat. Honest, hard-working, efficient he might be; but his direct soul led him to tell the truth always as he saw it. He had informed the reporters that so

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