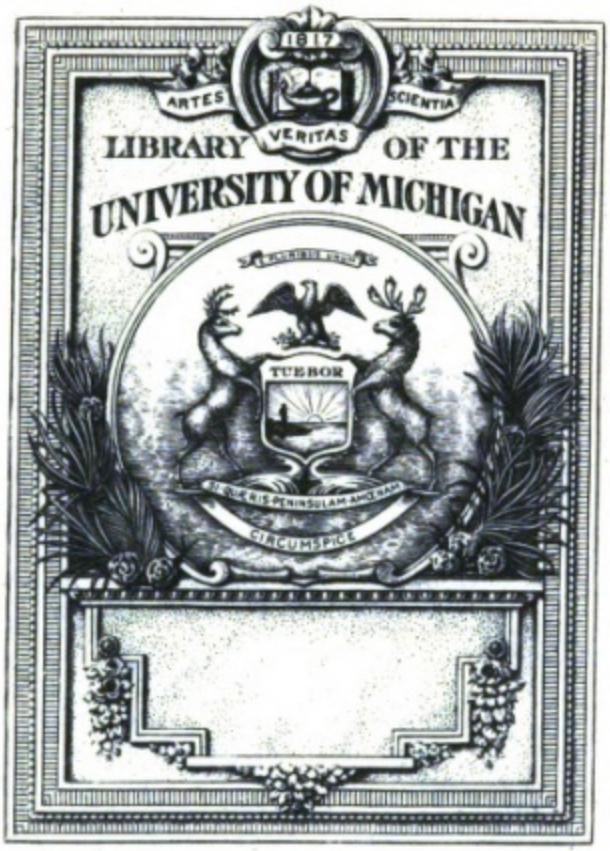
A 522206

"THERE WAS A CROOKED MAN"

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



Bequest of
Orma Fitch Butler
Asst.Professor of Latin

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

825
Y312

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"THERE WAS A CROOKED MAN"

By GEORGE WORTHING YATES

The corpse lay huddled in the rain on a terrace outside the executive offices of the Chelsac Theatre. The evening clothes were faultless, but the body had been horribly mutilated—years before. *Who was the crooked man?* Christien, the managing director of the theatre, had never seen the man before.

Percy Tussard, of the police, set to work on the case. And close on his heels came ancient and autocratic Lord Broghville. He threw the weight of his years, his influence, his impressive dignity and his immense intelligence into the search for the murderer.

***"There Was a Crooked Man"* adds to the ranks of amateur detectives a new one you cannot fail to take to your heart—the lonely and tremendous, the ancient and august Lord Broghville. You will meet him again in other mysteries by Mr. Yates—mysteries which, like this one, combine rich characterization with surprise and ingenuity of situation and unusual charm of style.**

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"THERE WAS A CROOKED MAN"

By GEORGE WORTHING YATES

WILLIAM MORROW AND COMPANY
NEW YORK
1936

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"THERE WAS A CROOKED MAN"

COPYRIGHT—1936

BY GEORGE WORTHING YATES

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
BY THE STRATFORD PRESS, INC., NEW YORK

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

O. F. Ruth,
Bennet
10-29-40.

The characters and events in this story are entirely imaginary. It takes place in the future.

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

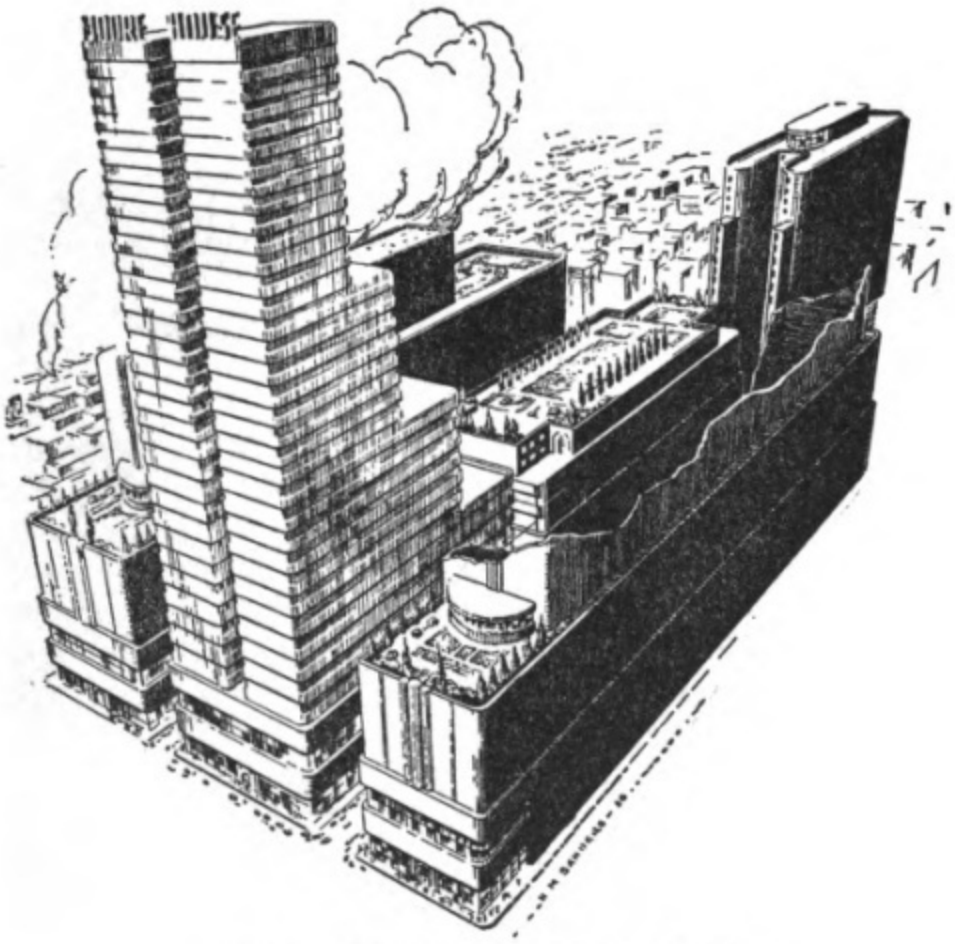
Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"THERE WAS A CROOKED MAN"

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



THE CHELSEA PROJECT

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAPTER ONE

THE RAIN, AS MUCH AS ANYTHING, thought the distinguished guest. His hostess was Mrs Frederick Christien. She was restless, uneasy.

This happened a little before midnight on the evening of Tuesday, May 22. An intermittent spring rain, which had been general along the Atlantic coast during most of the day, now turned abruptly into a sharp downpour. The drops spat and rattled on the windows. Mrs Christien moved from her chair, thrashed the fire a bit, scowled nervously at the clock, went to the windows and pecked at their curtains with a finger, then sighed and resigned herself to sitting in her chair again. The clock ticked heavily and the fire popped without warning, and the woman's husband never came home.

"Distracting," murmured the distinguished guest.

"Sorry," said Mrs Christien, because she was neglecting the guest, whose distinction was superlative. By way of apology, she smiled and told him, "Strange he hasn't telephoned. He always rings by eleven, if there's any . . . Practically always."

"Frightful weather," decided the guest. "Devilish."

"Weather wouldn't keep him from telephoning."

"Of course not. How right you are."

"He hasn't been well. I really don't think he ought to let business keep him in town at night. He works *so* hard."

"Ah."

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"If you'd tell him not to, I'm sure it would help. He really listens to you. I'm worried about him. You might do something with him. I'd be terribly grateful."

"Ah," said his lordship, nodding his venerable head in vague acquiescence and sucking the flame of a match into his pipe and looking politely sleepy, all in one complicated demonstration.

He sat sprawled on the sofa before the fire, and filled most of the space about the hearth like a fallen oak tree. He was the very ancient and benevolent Geoffrey Bennett, Lord Broghville, as institutional to look at as a life insurance company, but incognito, and choosing to call himself simply Mr G. Bennett during this visit to America. Frederick Christien was a friend. More than that, Christien was the kind of friend that Bennett was pleased to visit for a pleasantly swollen week-end, from Friday to Wednesday. Christien had this comfortable house in Southampton on Long Island, and Bennett sprawled in it nursing his pipe to noisy health. Mrs Christien fidgeted about the room again, until Bennett was driven to complain, "Oh, my dear Paula! Clock is three minutes fast. Fire does awfully well. Stop thrusting things at it. *Do* sit down, ah, good girl, that's it! Drink something or smoke something, relieve the anxiety. I think I shall tell you a story."

"To take my mind off my troubles?"

"Precisely."

"I'll listen, if I can," she said. She was quite obviously listening to something else, the sound of the rain, and for the expected swish of tires on the wet drive outside.

"No matter. Put away that wretched poker. As for the story, deplorable silly thing, concerning the Great War. And your husband. How I met him, you might say. This, my dear Paula, occurs in Macedonia, horrid place. Dare say I'm not at my best, telling stories, but I really can't think of anything else to do under the circumstances.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Short of a game of draughts. Which would be intolerable. That is, you wouldn't concentrate properly."

Being talked to by Geoffrey Bennett in his gentler aspects, was like giving up your tattered mind to the care of some quietly omnipotent and benign celestial grandfather. The voice did it. Low, precise, measured and gruff; easy on vowels but crisp with the consonants; authoritative, perfectly assured, parliamentary, military, but restrained for the occasion; it suited the size of him, and quite filled as much of the room as his body didn't.

2.

It wasn't much of a story.

"Hum. Macedonia, wretched place, don't go there. Ah. Night much like this one. Rain; rain and the most frightful mud, and wind, and all the damn country quite as black as your best hat. Even the sky may have been mud, if nothing worse. Quite appalling. Silly, too, you know. There we stood, some two or three hundred of us, soldiers more or less, simply weak as garden slugs for want of food, yet provided by the enemy with a great store of it, more than we'd dreamed of for months. We had grim little fires, which tried to put themselves out as soon as we turned our backs. And we dared not think of eating. Captured Bulgarian food depot. Poisoned, of course. We'd tested a bit of tinned meat on one poor devil, who went at once into quivering convulsions in a most depressing way. There, as I say, we stood. Have you any questions?"

"No. Why?"

"To make sure you listen, my dear. Shall I go on?"

Paula Christien laughed a little, and nodded. She was young, younger than her husband, and very attractive. Ancient Mr Bennett was gratified by the company of

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

attractive ladies, and the smell of good sherry, but sherry was bad for his gout. Otherwise he probably wouldn't have gone to all this bother.

"So, my dear, not having had food for three days, we languished. Starvation, as they say, stared us in the face. No railways. No roads. No people. Nothing, indeed, but miles of discouraging mud. Nothing ahead, and no base of supplies to retire upon. Dare say we would have experimented with those poisoned stores soon, if a—however, mustn't spoil my story, eh? As I think I mentioned, we were pottering about with our nasty little fires, when my sentries brought in a fellow. Damn civilian fellow. Like a conjuror's rabbit, popping out of that empty rain and mud. Tell me, do you know who it was?"

"No."

"Come, my dear! You'd anticipate more, if you were paying close attention. It was your husband, Freddy Christien."

"Oh."

"I'm boring you. It *is* a dismal story, isn't it? No matter. Christien was brought before me. He said, 'How d'you do,' and shook hands, and referred to the weather, and asked if I could let him have a horse. That wouldn't do, you see, because we'd killed the horse and eaten him several days earlier. Then he said, 'My lorry seems to be stuck fast in the mud about a mile down the hill. I saw your fires.' I said, 'Lorry? Astonishing. Incredible.' Something like that. And he said, 'One of these Fords, you know.' Then, to keep the conversation going, I asked him what he had *in* the lorry. 'Tinned spaghetti with tomato sauce,' he said. 'Ten gross of it.' Tinned spaghetti. Not that I have a taste for it myself, but oysters and brown bread couldn't have cheered us more. Preposterous, of course. The way he came out of the darkness. Yet I admired him at once, thought him a singular

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

and superior fellow, for having come at all, even if it was by chance. Yattering about Fords, bringing us food, strolling along like one of the lesser gods wrapped up in a dreadful old mackintosh, and asking—what is it, my dear?"

"I—I thought I heard a motor. It's nothing. Go on."

"Watch out. Lest you fancy horrid faces at the windows. To go on. Of course we discovered later during that night, how the Bulgarian food depot had *not* been poisoned, and that our convulsive fellow had really been suffering heroically from dysentery for days. Nevertheless my affection for the miraculous Freddy will never die or dwindle, and rain more than anything will always— Ah! There it is!"

It was the telephone.

3.

Paula Christien leaped from her chair. Bennett stirred his enormous legs. By the time he had got to his feet, she was talking in the dark passage. He could hear through the open door.

"Yes, this is Mrs Christien talking. . . . Who? . . . Oh, yes." A peculiarly heavy silence followed, while someone talked at the other end of the line.

Answering again, Paula's voice sounded frightened and desperate. She said, "Yes, I want to know. I must know. Please, I want to know where he is."

Lengthy, inaudible reply.

"He isn't—that is, he's not dying?"

Inaudible reply, even more prolonged.

"Yes. Please, I can't listen any more. I can't stand here. I'm coming. Listen to me. You must get his own doctor, Harvey Fawke, Fifty-ninth and Park. You *will* get him?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Inaudible assurances.

"I must hang up, please. I'm coming at once. Tell him I'm coming at once. Good-bye."

Bennett stood beside her. A maidservant, listening, her eyes frightened, hovered on the stairs. Paula's lips were white. She said, "No, I'm all right. They won't tell me the truth. I have to go to New York."

Bennett steadied her nevertheless. Another maid appeared, hovering uncertainly. Bennett put an end to the stricken flutter above, boomed at one maid for her to waken the chauffeur, at the other to come down for Paula. To Paula he said, "Of course. Steady. Now get your coat. Coming with you, my dear."

She nodded her head, and climbed the stairs obediently. Halfway, she turned and asked, "I wonder if they were afraid to tell me? I wonder if he's——?"

"Rot. Don't talk. Get your coat."

She obeyed.

Now the telephone was ringing again. Paula stopped as if to answer it, but Bennett forestalled her and answered it himself. An imperative brassy voice cried in his ear, "Hello? Hello? *Morning Mail* calling. Want to talk to Mrs Frederick Christien. Make it quick."

Bennett lowered the telephone to smile reassuringly at Paula, to shake his head and hurry her on up to her room. She disappeared at the top of the stairs. Then Bennett said, "You can't talk to Mrs Christien."

"Well, who's this?"

"Shan't tell you."

"We got a report here about Frederick Christien. Supposed to have tried to commit suicide. Hello? Can't I get Mrs Christien on the line? Case of murder and attempted suicide, and we want——"

"Who was murdered?"

"Unidentified man. Hello? And we want to find out who——"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"No doubt," said Bennett, hanging up. He put aside the telephone like an infected thing. He went to the bottom of the stairs. He demanded Hope, his own servant. Hope's head immediately came into sight above.

"Hope, damn you? Ah, you're there! Get my coat. Ah, you have it. Then get your own. We're going to the city at once. Cigarettes, and a flask of brandy."

Paula Christien with the two maids hurried down the stairs. The lights of the car, approaching hastily from the garage, flared along the windows. Hope came down. The telephone rang again.

Bennett ordered Hope, "Take Mrs Christien out to the car." Buttoning his coat about him, he turned to the two astonished maids. "Damn the telephone! Don't answer it! Understand? Keep away from it! Go away! Go to sleep! Go to bed!"

Then he climbed into the car after Mrs Christien. Hope sat with the chauffeur. The car sped down the wet drive. Behind them, dwindling, Bennett could hear the insistent crazy ringing of the telephone.

4·

Between rural Southampton and The Chelsea Project in New York City, lies almost the entire length of Long Island. The chauffeur, wearing cap, overcoat and boots over his rumpled hair and pyjamas, did his best. Roads were slithery and obscure in the darkness, and the screen of whitish rain was like a cloud about the car. The two dark figures in the tonneau leaned and lurched and bumped without complaint.

Only once did Mrs Christien refer to her calamity. "I've been so worried. I knew he wasn't well. It's his heart, it must be his heart. They'll call up his doctor, won't they?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Bennett cried, "Of course. Dash it, of course they will."

Otherwise she talked for a time with ghastly cheerfulness and courage, to keep from showing her grievous anxiety. Then at last she subsided into lethargy, and gave up pretence. She cried a little, soundlessly, and clung tightly to one of Bennett's great hands like a child bewildered in universal catastrophe.

Bennett, not very clever at comforting unhappy women, felt glad of the silence. He thought of the call from the newspaper. He had no patience with vague alarm and similar disorderly conditions of the mind. He considered what he knew, therefore, and concluded promptly that the sudden trouble looked like a very nasty mess, with which, for Freddy Christien's sake, he might be expected to cope. Though he hoped not. Somebody (Mr Hugh Martinsop in his *Biography of a Vice-Regent*) had once written of Broghville's particular virtue that he "confronted the scholar's problems with the forthrightness of a soldier, and the problems of government or war with the penetration of a subtle scholar." This august reputation let him in for a great many unpleasant things.

It is better, in fact, to explain his position completely, and at once. Lord Broghville, or Mr Geoffrey Bennett if you prefer, ruled during these years as a kind of king (by special arrangement with the League of Nations) over the contentious Pamin Island group, which rise out of the Indian Ocean far east of the coast of Tanganyika, and some way north of Madagascar. He was probably the only indisputably absolute monarch in the world. And this visit to America was his first relief from the responsibility of government in eleven years.

Bennett was very old; in his seventies, at least. He stood extremely tall and impressive to look upon, though slightly stooped now with age. He seemed at

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

once both slender and powerful, active and mighty. He comported himself in a manner curiously mixed—brusque, commanding, courtly and fastidious together. He had remarkably sharp eyes beneath white thickets of hair. He affected a few mannerisms, one most notably: he would confront you with a blank and ironic smile, and perhaps trifling gossip about minor Edwardian celebrities, as if he were dreaming to himself about a glamorous past. Well he might, if he liked. But you would be badly fooled if you were taken in by it.

Internationally distinguished and prominent as he was, though, he had avoided (up till Tuesday night) all extravagant publicity during his visit. This was less because he liked to be haughty and aloof, more because he found useless ceremony a bleeding bother. The State Department had to have him in mind, of course. New York's Civic Committee was stewing up something suitable for him. His Embassy had taken precautions, and made the usual arrangements. A Secret Service man had been attached to his retinue. But until this Tuesday night, he had remained a dignitary almost in the abstract, noted in the newspapers but not publicly cheered or showered with ticker tape, and permitted a decent amount of privacy.

These explanations are made in the hope that Broghville will be acquitted of being the irresponsible and fatuous booby certain newspapers took vicious pleasure in painting him.

Now the strange little bells that ring in the depths of the Theological Seminary were sounding one o'clock, and Mrs Christien (pathetically, it seemed to the uncomfortable Bennett) was putting on a brave face and fresh powder as the limousine swerved south on Ninth Avenue. Paula squared her shoulders. Bennett thought it a ruddy shame, a ruddy shame, something must be done

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

about it; because the sight of young women having to be brave made his spine prickle.

5.

They started down Ninth Avenue to Eighteenth Street. The Chelsea Project at this hour stood ghostly above them, dark and unsubstantial in appearance. The steep Moore House looked wildly improbable. In the street, a single furtive taxi slopped along in the rain, and a single cheerless pedestrian crawled beneath his wet umbrella. Above the El tracks and towards the North, a gigantic ruddy glare, a steamy furnace glow, filled the sky over distant Times Square. Chelsea Opera House loomed to their left, with its dark and shapeless bulk stained like satin in the storm.

Paula told the chauffeur, "Stop at the stage door on Ninth Avenue. I think the door on Eighteenth Street must be locked by now."

Nothing was as it should be. The car stopped. They got a first sniff of the air of calamity and official power that had intruded on the place; the smell of damp uniforms and cheerful policemen, wet rubbers and soggy cigars. Bennett recognized it. A policeman, who had lumbered out of the shelter of the dark doorway and waved with his night-stick for them not to leave the car, ducked his wet head into the tonneau through the door the chauffeur had opened. The policeman waggled his night-stick towards Eighteenth Street.

"No, ma'm, you can't get in this way now. I got to send everybody around the corner. Yes ma'm, if you talk to the sergeant around there he'll tell you anything you want to know. I ain't supposed to say anything. Now look out with your hand, ma'm, and I'll shut the door. . . ."

Mrs Christien bit her lips. The car swung in the

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

direction the policeman had pointed, then east along the curbing of Eighteenth to a small door of stainless steel, the entrance to the business offices of the Opera House. Several nondescript men huddled here. They turned white faces towards the car. Handmaidens of disaster, they signified the worst. Reporters. Hunching their shoulders against the rain, they descended on the car. Like a gleaming sea lion among penguins, a large policeman waddled after them and good-naturedly pushed them aside. He took his turn at thrusting an inquiring head into the tonneau.

"Yes, ma'm?"

"I'm Mrs Christien. I——"

"Christien? Yes, ma'm." A stir. "You're to go right up, Mrs Christien. Step back, boys. Mind the wet, lady. . . ."

Perhaps the sergeant had taken a drink to fortify himself against the weather, and as a result exuded respectful amiability and the scent of cloves like some kind of leaky balloon. He seemed to think Bennett was Mrs Christien's father. "Going up with her, mister? Kind of look after her, eh? Bad night for us old fellows to be out, eh? Come along now, and I'll take you up."

Through the reporters and past a battery of blank staring eyes in a small lobby, they were led to an elevator. This took them to an upper floor. They walked down a silent corridor to the door of the theatre's infirmary. Here a solemn, friendly little doctor in dinner dress met them. He warned them to be quiet.

"Mrs Christien, I'm very glad. He's awake now, for a few moments. Come in quickly. Nothing to excite him, and no talk. He may drop off again at once. Just ease his mind as much as possible, and come away at once if I tell you to."

Doctor and wife went softly through an inner door, and shut it after them. While it was open, Bennett had

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

a glimpse of a man in a white bed, the white face motionless on a pillow. Christien in health looked something like Calvin Coolidge in a puckish, gleeful mood. Now he looked like a hollow wax effigy.

Bennett waited. He saw that he was in the central room of the infirmary, elaborately equipped for surgery. An obvious policeman in plain clothes stood against an opposite wall, watching the sick man's door and smoking a cigarette. Bennett scowled, and thought.

The door opened again, and the doctor came out. He answered Bennett's stare with a flickering grim smile. Bennett attached the man by his arm, and drew him to an end of the room, as far from the door and the policeman as possible. He talked very softly.

"Very ill, I take it. How ill?"

The doctor shook his head and whispered, "Critically."

"Will he live?"

"Live? We hope so, don't we? It's hard to say."

"Conscious?"

"For a moment. Lucid enough, too. He's talking to his wife."

"You're Fawke, his usual man, I presume?"

"Yes. I've known him for ten years or more."

"Quite so. What happened to him?"

The doctor shrugged. "A great many things. Mostly what you'd call a weak heart, and strychnine. He used strychnine to stimulate it. Not on my advice, believe me!"

"No, of course not. Could it have been suicide?"

Fawke made a wry face, shrugged, and resorted to a cigarette. Blowing out smoke, he confessed, "Damned if I know. Who are you, by the way? Related?"

Bennett said, "No. Not at all. A friend."

"He'll need one," murmured the doctor, after looking shrewdly at Bennett from his boots to his white

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

hair. "Look here, sir; if Christien lives, he won't be able to help himself for a very long time, and it will be up to his friends to do something. You know Christien pretty well? Do you think he'd kill himself?"

"Incredible rot, sir!"

"Yes. I'd better tell you, I think. I knew Christien, and I knew there was danger of a collapse. He had a habit of using up his physical reserves. He lived on his will-power, he burned himself out; lots of men do it. I warned him years ago. And I think I expected something like this. His wife was afraid of it, too."

"Quite."

"Occasionally he felt trouble coming. His heart, mostly. He used strychnine to tide him over. Then he came to me about it, and paid no attention to what I told him because he hadn't time to bother. Well, tonight he suffered some extreme shock or strain, something I haven't had time to find out about. He felt his heart kicking up. He carried strychnine with him, and he took it. Too much. He collapsed at once. You understand, this is my opinion, putting suicide entirely out of consideration? Very well. Now he's lying in there, in the worst possible shape; strychnine poisoning, a strained heart, and something like general exhaustion, with an open invitation to any old complication that comes along. Frankly, I suggest his affairs be put in shape as quickly as possible."

"Why did you say he needs a friend? His affairs?"

"No. Something else. Look here: when a man encounters sudden trouble, and promptly takes a dangerous dose of strychnine, he's bound to be suspected of suicide. You know what rotten minds people have. And if they think it's suicide, they think naturally that the man was up to something peculiar and found himself at the end of his rope. *We* know he wasn't. But a hundred friends who admired him yesterday will be so-so about him to-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

morrow. I'm telling you this for a reason. A police inspector named Tussard believes Christien tried to kill himself. He's been down here talking to me. I didn't get anywhere with him."

"What name?"

"Tussard."

"Ah? Tussard. Where is he?"

"Down the hall a few doors, I suppose. Where the trouble happened."

"Indeed. If Christien lives how long will he be incapable?"

"I can't say. Weeks at least, I should guess, before he'll be any use to himself. Possibly a month. When he drops off now, he'll be unconscious for a very long time. These few lucid moments are the result of the strychnine."

Bennett was thoughtful. He stood looking down at the doctor. The policeman had become absorbed in whittling his finger-nails with a crude pocket knife. At last Bennett said, "Christien *must* live, you know. Quite competent, are you?"

The doctor bristled (unaccustomed, perhaps, to being challenged like a new schoolboy by a gruff master) and smiled uncomfortably, and at the same time, managed to shrug his shoulders deprecatingly. "Come, come, no offence! Dare say you are," Bennett told him. "How am I to know you're competent if I don't ask you? No occasion for huff. No. Ah, the door. Paula coming out. Leave us, like a good chap, will you?"

Paula, with strained face and stricken eyes, looked up at Bennett. The doctor disappeared into Christien's room. The policeman grew uneasy, like a tethered horse. Bennett awkwardly put out an arm to support the woman, and made brusque, reassuring growls in his throat.

She said, "He fell—asleep. The nurse made me come away."

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Quite natural, my dear."

"Will you do something, Geoffrey? You've got to. Somebody's got to."

"My dear child, you must not let this——"

"You didn't see him, Geoffrey. You didn't hear him. It's—terrible!"

"Quite."

"Some man was killed."

"Devilish."

"They think he did it. Why should they think that?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Come, shall we walk a bit?"

Ignoring the policeman, they walked slowly back and forth across the infirmary. Paula took a cigarette from Bennett. He said, "Damn nice of you not to cry. Tell me what he said."

"He's dreadfully sick, Geoffrey. He couldn't say much. He said he went out on the terrace. The terrace outside his office, I suppose. He stumbled over a dead man in the dark. He didn't know what it was at first, in the dark, and then he felt—felt his heart going, and took some of his strychnine tablets. That was all."

"All?"

"He doesn't remember anything more. He closed his eyes again. He doesn't know about—about him." She bent her head towards the policeman. "The nurse told me they think Fred killed that man, and then tried to commit suicide. Oh, Geoffrey, it's so horribly wrong! He couldn't——"

"No, to be sure."

"We've got to do something, Geoffrey."

"We shall. His solicitors, first. Who are they?"

"His lawyer? Asbach; it's a firm, Green, Asbach and Croly. I could see him, I suppose, but . . ." She hesitated doubtfully.

"Ah, but! You don't think well of him?"

"I do. But I don't know, he'd be so slow—and we

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

ought to do something now, tonight, and— Oh, what can I *do*, Geoffrey!"

"Stay at Freddy's side. The beaming eye, my dear. The cheery smile. Your hat's awry, you know. Much better. Go keep watch with the nurse, there's a good girl."

"You *will* do something for him, Geoffrey?"

"Quite."

"I'm glad you came with me, and——"

"Rubbish. I want a word with the doctor. Go away. And don't worry."

Paula was propelled smoothly into Christien's room, and the doctor beckoned out. Bennett spoke briskly.

"This Tussard. How can I find him?"

"I'm afraid I don't know how this place is laid out."

"No matter. You will stay with Christien?"

"Yes."

"Keep them—" he nodded towards the policeman "—away from him. And from her, if possible. You understand?"

"Yes. I'm going to move him to my hospital."

"Good."

The doctor went back to his patient. The policeman, even more like a cab-horse, turned suspicious and disillusioned eyes on Bennett, then on the tips of his own boots. Bennett saw dangers, and far implications, like a countryside in a flash of lightning. Questions to be asked, delicate steps to be taken. A dead man stumbled on in the dark. The newspaper telephoning to Southampton.

He put on his hat, and mentally girded his loins, and stalked off determinedly into the bright, new passages of that exquisite white elephant of the theatrical world —the great Chelsea Opera House and Academy of Music, otherwise known as the Chelsac Theatre.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAPTER TWO

THE ART CENTRE OF THE NATION it is called, and the art centre of the nation is what it is intended to be, though the general idea may appear strained, self-conscious, and a little silly at first glance. (The fact that the grandiose Chelsea Opera House and Academy of Music had to be converted, for financial reasons, into the Chelsac Cinema Theatre helps not at all to make it more dignified.) Simply, however, it is a group of new buildings co-ordinated into an ingeniously planned community; and the whole, covering an irregular space of ground between Eighth and Tenth Avenues, and Twentieth and Seventeenth Streets in New York City, is known as the Chelsea Project. It includes the Clarke Building, which contains artists' studios, dwelling flats, and business offices, mostly used for art galleries, the editorial offices of magazines, and various altruistic societies, at the present time. South of the Clarke Building is the Chelsac Theatre, facing Ninth Avenue, and the Moore House tower, facing Eighth. South of this, another block is divided between the Chelsea Athletic Club and the newly founded De Lancey College. De Lancey College contains the moderately celebrated Bennett School of Political Administration, an institution determined to develop political leaders to rule these United States, or know the reason why. On the west side of Ninth Avenue, and opposite the Chelsac Theatre, rises the hardly completed mass of the Livingston School of Architecture and Fine Art, and its neighbour, the Livingston Art Library.

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The offices of the Chelsac Theatre Corporation are on the fourth floor of the building, and at the south side, looking across Eighteenth Street at the windows of the Chelsea Athletic Club. The infirmary is also on the fourth floor, and at the east end of an enamelled passage. The fourth floor of the Chelsac Theatre is notable, so far as the Crooked Man affair involves it, for having only two means of access to the street: by the elevators, and by a steel fire escape descending through a kind of well or chimney from the infirmary to Eighteenth Street below.

At this late hour, the first flush of municipal pomp and hubbub had subsided entirely on the fourth floor. The Deputy Police Commissioner who had come because he hoped to get a kick out of it, had got his feet wet and gone home again to bed. The routine of investigation (under way now, grimly and quietly) was in the charge of a man from Centre Street—Tussard. In appearance Percy Tussard was plain as a lamppost; stouter, shorter and more agile, but quite as hard and matter-of-fact. He had mouse-coloured hair combed flat. He had grey jowled cheeks which looked greenish and unnatural by sunlight, if they happened ever to be exposed to it. He wore a plain grey suit, even on Sundays.

Tussard believed it to be to his advantage to know practically everything; and when Mrs Christien arrived at the infirmary, he knew that, too. He sent a policeman for her, and this was because Tussard left nothing to chance. Tussard, it may be deduced, was thoroughgoing. Also, he had important questions in his mind. And it was the policeman, on his errand, who encountered Mr Geoffrey Bennett, unknown and unauthorized, prowling the corridor. In an access of thoroughgoing zeal, the policeman attached Bennett and brought him instead of Mrs Christien.

At the moment, Tussard stood alone in the secretary's

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

office which separated Christien's private office (to the left of the entrance from the passage) and that (to the right) of Christien's assistant, a certain Lowes Levison. He stood with arms folded, scowling, and looking down at a motionless shape covered with a crisp, glaring white sheet in the centre of a fine bright blue carpet. He looked up at the policeman and Bennett without great interest. He let his scowl flatten gradually away. He asked, "Who's this?"

"He come in with Christien's wife. He says he was looking for you."

"All right. Now go back and see about Mrs Christien. After she gets through in here, you can let them come up and take this away." He indicated the body at his feet.

The policeman went away, shutting the door.

Bennett looked at Tussard. Tussard looked at Bennett, and finally said, "Well, mister? What's your name?"

"You're Tussard, I presume? I'm Bennett. A friend of Mr Christien's. Where did it happen? Out there?" With his umbrella, he pointed to a large French window behind the secretary's desk, and directly opposite the door from the passage. Many feet had tracked the wet into the room from the darkness outside.

"Yes. Englishman, aren't you? You came here with Mrs Christien, didn't you? Have a chair." Tussard's manner combined off-handed politeness, coldness, and some indifference, as if he were thinking about more important matters. "What do you know about this business?"

"Nothing," said Bennett. He remained standing. He touched the sheet with the end of his umbrella. "Who is this fellow?"

Tussard usually kept a beautifully blank face, but the question touched a very tender spot. He looked suddenly weary. "Don't I wish I knew," he murmured. He re-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

captured the beautiful blankness, and went on. "All right, Bennett, I'll ask you to take a look at him. Then you can leave your name and address with the man at the door, in case I have to get in touch with you tomorrow. Then I want Mrs Christien to take a look, and that'll be about all for tonight."

"Does she *have* to see this?"

"Can't be helped. I got to clean him up tonight. Lot easier on her seeing it here, anyhow, than down at the morgue."

"Quite. . . . *Oh, I'm damned!*"

Tussard had squatted on his haunches and flipped back the sheet.

The victim was at first sight, hideous; then, on closer inspection, merely pathetic. The body wore a rumpled dinner jacket, finely tailored, but showing that it had been put roughly in place again after the medical examiner's work. On the floor near the dead man's shoulder lay a tangled heap of gauze bandage and a stiff gauze mask. Tussard, catching Bennett's glance of inquiry, explained, "That was on his face when we found him. So as to hide him, kind of, and still let him breathe." Bennett nodded. The reason for the mask was obvious.

"How was he killed?"

Tussard expressively put a hand to his throat, made a motion of choking himself.

"Ah. Yes, I see."

"He couldn't put up a fight. And he couldn't let out a yell, because he was a mute. Nothing to yell with."

Bennett stooped close. Faint marks on the throat were still visible. In fact, it was only on the flesh of the throat —or on the forehead—that a bruise would have shown, since the rest of the man's face was a gap, a revolting emptiness. There remained no jaw, cheeks, chin, mouth or nose. The monstrous disfigurement had healed long ago into red scar. This, undoubtedly, had been covered

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

by the mask. Above the wound, however, and in pitiable contrast with it, were two clear and sensitive eyes; and a broad forehead, handsome, covered with skin that still, even in death, looked soft, fine and healthy. Bennett shifted his position. He looked at the dead hand. (There was only one.) That, too, like the forehead, seemed exceptionally fine, soft, well cared-for.

The rest of it was a miserable half-of-a-man, a vestige, a shocking parody. Not the fact of death appalled, but the thought that this deformed creature had once contrived to be alive.

Bennett said, "War injuries?"

"Looks like it," said Tussard. "The doc figures the wounds at fifteen or twenty years ago, seeing the way muscles have developed. Tough, getting around every day in that condition."

Bennett nodded. The victim seemed to have had no left arm and no left shoulder. The trunk itself looked shortened, dwarfish, bulky, grotesque. The left leg was very much shorter than the right.

"What do you say?" Tussard asked, looking up at Bennet. "Recognize him?"

"No," said Bennett. "No, not at all."

"Ever know a man who wore a bandage like that?"

"No."

"Ever hear of Christien knowing a cripple like——"

"No."

Tussard shrugged, and lowered his eyes, which had found nothing in Bennett's face. He pulled back the sheet, made it tidy, stood up and wiped the palms of his hands on his trousers. He folded his arms again, and looked blank. Bennett knew he was shrewd, and expectant. Bennett therefore leaned casually backwards against his umbrella.

"Horrid," he said. "I'm sure I don't know what to say. Devilish mysterious. He was killed out there on the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

terrace, I believe? And Mr Christien discovered him? Right?"

"That's right."

"Had he been dead long, when Christien found him?"

Tussard said, "He was killed when Christien found him. Christien says, just before he found him. I mean, Christien *said* he was dead. Then Christien went a little dead on us himself."

"Really. Will you charge Christien with it?"

"Murder? No."

"Ah, no?"

"Not yet."

"Indeed! Most explicit!"

In other words, and in Bennett's opinion, Christien would be safe until the police found out just a little more of what it was all about. Not reassuring, by any means; but very much worth knowing. Bennett smiled gravely, like an elderly cat with a faint dream of cream.

2.

Bennett took over with perfect assurance, without qualm or hesitation, and Tussard fell for it before he had time to notice an incongruity.

"What time did it happen, pray?"

"Quarter past eleven."

"Was Christien alone?"

"No. Three or four others up here."

"Indeed? Quite late. Why?"

"Some kind of meeting."

"Why did Christien leave it? Why did he go on the terrace?"

"The meeting was just beginning, getting ready to begin. They don't know why he went out. Getting a breath of air, maybe, they say—only it was raining just

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

then. Anyhow, he went out. He came back in, all excited, talking about a body on the roof. The next minute, he swallowed his pills, and faded out of the picture."

"Graphic. Christien seems suspicious, then, because he discovered the body, and in consequence took an unfortunate amount of heart stimulant?"

"Heart my eye. He took poison."

"And these other gentlemen at the meeting? Are they quite above suspicion?"

"Christien took poison. The others got a doctor and called the police. I ask you."

"Indeed. Not implausible. And the victim. An utter stranger to everybody, I presume?"

"Absolutely."

"Curious."

"Worse than that."

"I only suggest the obvious. Civil desire to assist, you know. This poor chap—" glancing at the sheet "—though striking, will be devilish hard to identify. Because he *is* striking."

"How do you mean?"

"Horribly difficult for him to walk. Impossible for him to talk. Inference, he kept in seclusion. His dress indicates sensibility and refinement, yet his appearance is shocking. Again, seclusion, as strict as possible. Would he have acquaintances? Surely not. Friends? Hardly. A wife, children? No, definitely no, unless he acquired them before he was injured. He was injured, I think, when a youngish man, and very possibly not married. However, you doubtless think of these things yourself. Do you wonder, as I do, why he came here? Extreme difficulties, wretched weather, his face hid in that makeshift mask. A letter in the post would not have served, it seems. Do you wonder? I see you do. Some frightful, urgent matter, oh, urgent until desperate, imperative,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

inevitable! No objection to my smoking my pipe? And now. How did he get here?"

"Here?"

"On the terrace, where Christien found him. Come, my dear man! Dare say I confuse you, though. A match?"

"Lots of matches. He came through the main theatre entrance. He came just about half past ten, he didn't buy a ticket, he was all muffled up, he used a pass——"

"Ah! Pass?"

"He had a regular company pass. The outfit that runs the theatre gives away these passes to important people, with their names written on them. Thing like an engraved invitation, only smaller. Good for a whole year. You show the pass, they give you a ticket, and let you in."

"Go on."

"He didn't get a ticket. He flashed the pass on the door man, and just walked in. He should have gone to the ticket window and got a reserved seat. He didn't. He had a kind of important air, he was in a hurry, he was crippled, maybe he wanted to see the picture and the last show was started—anyhow, the door man let him go in. The door man looked at the pass but he didn't get the name on it. And that's how he got in. Next thing, he was dead up here."

"Is there some convenient passage between the theatre and this terrace?"

"Sure. Convenient, like the inside of a cuckoo clock. You need a map. Two maps and a guide."

"Really?"

"Well, there's an elevator that comes up to these offices from the lobby. But he didn't take the elevator. So he probably came back-stage and around and up and through till he got here."

"Interesting."

"In other words, he knew the place."

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"To be sure. And the pass? He kept it, no doubt, in a pocket. It had his name, or some name, inscribed on it. Where is this pass?"

"Gone."

"Of course."

Tussard passed his hand over his eyes. "Gone," he said, "because somebody went through his pockets before we got here. Stuff thrown all over the place out there. What's left is on that desk in back of you. You might take a look at it, just for luck. I'll be back in a minute."

3.

Tussard went into Levison's office and shut the door. From there, he got out through the window to the terrace. Bennett listened, and heard him.

The portable property of the dead man had been spread out neatly on the secretary's desk. It consisted of:

A gold ring, very old, heavy and handsome.

A watch in a hunting case, likewise old and handsome. (Though uncommon enough, both watch and ring appeared to be at least three generations in use. They would be difficult to trace, Bennett appreciated, unless they had lately been in pawn. And not a few indications made the victim out to be anything but a haunter of pawnbrokers.)

Three ordinary keys, of the Yale type, not on a ring.

A fine leather note-case, damp, but little used.

Two-hundred-seventy-two dollars—thirteen twenties, one five, seven ones. Twenty-two cents—two dimes, two coppers. (The paper money, like the note-case, was damp. Bennett accounted for it thus: the murderer, rifling the dead man's pockets for marks of identity and working in utmost haste, had flung aside in the rain these things that seemed unimportant.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

A neat leather memorandum book holding a metal pencil; its pages scored so that they might easily be torn out; and over half of them missing. (The dead man, unable to talk, had obviously been forced to carry on conversations in writing. Therefore, this book, and the missing pages. That it was dry, suggested that the murderer had not even bothered to take it out of his victim's pocket, and perhaps, had known quite well its innocent use. Indeed, very intimately acquainted, the killer and the killed; so it seemed to Bennett.)

A typed message on a damp slip of paper. It read:

"The Executive Committee will hold its meeting Tuesday, May 22, 11 P.M., in my office.

F. CHRISTIEN,
Controller."

A curious printed advertisement, which read:

"DEAR SIR OR MADAM,

"You can pay less for better honey. Rockland County Apple Blossom Honey, direct from farm to you, postpaid 10 cents per lb. in bulk, or 25 cents per comb.

"Also fresh eggs by mail at less than city prices, as advertised in *American Lady*, the Cultured Periodical.

"Let me supply you. You will be delighted. Reply card enclosed, or telephone orders or visit 'THE BASQUE SHOP,' Moore House Square, Chelsea Buildings, New York.

EMMA WHITTACKER,
Editor of *American Lady*

Serving the Fastidious
American Household."

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

(And marked in the margin of this, against the name of Emma Whittacker, was an exaggerated exclamation mark, a sign, Bennett thought, of astonished recognition.)

Bundled together at the far end of the desk were a black overcoat, a black felt hat and a black silk scarf. Beneath these lay a stout malacca walking stick with a curved handle. The stick bore no mark; the hat had been made for Brooks Brothers; the coat, on a small white label inside the inner breast pocket, carried the name, Plenderby & Co., Tailors.

Bennett stuck the bit of his pipe between his favourite and most trustworthy teeth. Fortunately, he had kept Tussard's matches.

He realized that the notice of the Executive Committee meeting, and the advertisement, were of greatest importance. He realized that the murderer could have been careless enough to leave them in the dead man's pockets, only because he found himself in dreadful haste. He also realized that Tussard had been standing in the darkness outside the window looking in at him for the past minute or so. This amused him a little. He took pleasure in crooking a deliberate finger at the man.

Tussard came in again by the way he had gone out. He was brisk and impatient. Perhaps it had worked in his mind that Bennett, with nothing more than great size and a manner of authority, had caught him in a dejected and deeply thoughtful moment, and had managed to give him a fairly thorough pumping. Nothing, he consoled himself, that the papers wouldn't print tomorrow. Just the same . . .

"Well, make anything out of it?"

"A poor hotch-potch. It was culled, I think you said, by the murderer."

"Maybe it was. Right now I got some other business——"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"The matter of the pass, I hope."

"Maybe it is, Mr. Bennett. I'm not saying. So if you'll——"

"Of course. Police never do say, do they? A pity, I think."

Tussard had gone to the other door, the one into Christien's private office. He was getting rid of Bennett. At the same time he, and Bennett too, were noticing a puzzling distraction at the door to the passage. It had been growing, working itself up. The door opened a crack, let in sounds of whispering, shut again. It opened again, revealed an eye, and then shut. It opened again to let in a policeman's red face. The policeman evidently had doubts about the merits of his interruption. Gruff and plaintive, the policeman said, "Guy out here. Says it's important."

"Who?" asked Tussard.

"Holcomb."

"Yes."

Then Holcomb came in, breaking through the formalities. He came in glowing with controlled excitement. Bennett stood his ground, blandly inquisitive. Tussard seemed a little annoyed in passing, but the annoyance vanished when Holcomb spoke. Holcomb spoke, in fact, as he brushed through the policeman and the door.

"All bets are off. We can't find the night watchman."

"What night watchman?"

"There's only one. Disappeared. Last seen about eleven o'clock or a little after. He was coming up for a look at the terrace. Now he's not in the building."

"What do you mean, not in the building?"

"He didn't go out in the regular way. He ought to be here on duty. I just had a look for him. Can't find him. Just not here, that's all."

"What about it?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"I just found out," said Holcomb, "that the watchman was sent up here to have a look around at eleven o'clock, because something funny was going on. He came up. He never came down again. He isn't where he ought to be. He didn't make his rounds. Something screwy about it, isn't there. Because it looks to me he may have been out there on the terrace just about the time this guy was——"

Tussard said, "Come in a minute," and took hold of Holcomb's arm, and whisked him into the privacy of Levison's office, and closed the door on Bennett.

Bennett lifted an eyebrow at the thud of the closing door, found a comfortable chair, and philosophically composed himself to wait.

4.

Holcomb, had it not been for the murder, would have been out of his uniform by this time, and safely home in Stapleton, Staten Island, where very probably he would have been playing pinochle with two men from next door. Louis Holcomb was one of the assistants to John Boxworth, the House Director. He looked outstandingly efficient. He happened (this Tuesday night) to be at hand when he was needed. He thought this a stroke of the worst luck, a sharp injustice, and thinking so made him frown and hurry, and so in the end look all the more clever, reliable, and outstandingly efficient.

He was a young man, sleek, smart and intelligent, and ordinary. He wore a uniform, because his position was approximately that of a colonel in command of the ushers, as well as adjutant to Boxworth. The uniform —grey striped trousers, black morning coat, stiff turn-down collar and black tie—fitted him as smoothly as his marvellously smooth black hair. He seemed faintly tired,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

wise, and prematurely aged by disillusion. This was in fact only the consequence of chronic lack of sleep. And this in turn was due only to pinochle. On the whole, he was very willing to oblige, and very likeable; and he had a manner of understanding subtle allusions whether he really did so or not; and with these virtues he was making a not unpromising way towards success in the sly world.

When Tussard came flying out of Levison's office, Holcomb came flying in his wake. Tussard flung open the door to the passage, and cried at the policeman there, "Where's McGrath?"

"In where them people are."

"Where's Mighetto?"

"Out on the roof."

Tussard moved like an outfielder in an emergency. He went to the door of Christien's office (where the people were) and flung it open. He went inside. Holcomb still followed in his wake, as if he weren't sure what else he might be expected to do. Bennett followed with more dignity in Holcomb's wake. Tussard exchanged a remark with another policeman without slowing his charge, and then slid out the window. Holcomb and Bennett followed, losing ground. They, too, passed through Christien's office, which had a good collection of people in it, and a remarkably thick cloud of tobacco smoke, and so out another French window like that in the outer office. They found themselves on the roof, in comparative darkness and a faint drizzle. Tussard had outdistanced them badly. There was no use following him. Holcomb slowed and stopped, in doubt. Bennett, in two more strides, reached his side. In a most natural fashion, their glances met when they had finished looking into the darkness after Tussard for a moment.

"I guess I've started something," said Holcomb.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"My word!" said Bennett. "What is this bother about the watchman?"

"I don't know. This is the damnedest night I ever went through in my life. Are you a friend of that guy's? Tussard's?"

"Not at all. A friend of Christien's."

"Oh," said Holcomb, altering his attitude. "He didn't do it."

"Of course not."

"It's damn funny about this watchman," said Holcomb, assured of his ground. "If you look down that way—" he pointed towards Eighth Avenue and a set of lighted windows gleaming on the terrace "—you can see where the infirmary is."

"Quite. I came from there," said Bennett.

"As far as I can figure," Holcomb continued, "the night watchman must have come out of the hospital window, too, just about ten or fifteen minutes past eleven, just about when Tussard figures the murder happened. And now the watchman has blown up in smoke or something. He's gone, that's all. He can't be found."

"How extraordinary," murmured Bennett, encouragingly.

"It's absolutely crazy. There's only two nights a week, Tuesdays and Fridays, when there isn't a nurse in the hospital. Tonight's Tuesday, or was Tuesday before midnight. Anyhow, tonight the hospital was empty, and somebody entered it without any business being there. The nurse, you see, has to be on duty down in the lower lounge in place of the other nurse. Somebody opened the door, and went through the hospital, and came out on the terrace. We know that——"

"By the way," Bennett interrupted, "how could you know the hospital door and that window were opened, if the hospital was unoccupied?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"By the lights on the control board."

"What lights, pray, on what control board?"

"The doors in the building, most of them, are wired so that the stage manager when he's on stage, can tell what rooms are being used. He can keep track of actors in dressing rooms and that kind of thing. The hospital is wired that way, and opening the door there makes the light go on down below, on the control board where the stage manager sits. This time of the night, or I should say, *that* time of the night, when the feature picture is on, the man on duty at the control board hasn't much to do. Naturally, when somebody went in the hospital about ten to eleven, the light for the hospital lit up, and the man back-stage wondered about it. He called up the Eighteenth Street stage door to ask the door man to send somebody up to take a look at the hospital. The door man was talking to Lutz—he's the night watchman and he happened to be in early because he hadn't anything to keep him home. So Lutz said he'd go up to the hospital and have a look, in case somebody was breaking in to steal. Lutz went up. And he never came down again. He left the stage door about a minute or two before eleven. Say he got as far as the hospital at ten after eleven, and say he found the terrace door open and came here, which he'd naturally do. He'd walk out here just about quarter past eleven. And that was when they think the murder happened. What I'm asking myself is, what happened to Lutz?"

"A proper question, I dare say. Perhaps he went down the lift, and into the street, and away."

"He couldn't. The painters are using the elevators. I asked them, and they didn't see him or anybody else go down or up."

"Perhaps he went down some other way?"

"I don't think so. He didn't go down the stairs on this side, because they're painting, as I told you, and the

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

painters would have seen him. He didn't use the elevator on this side of the building, because it isn't running, because the painters are using it. He didn't go down the elevators on the other side, because the elevator boy didn't take him down. He didn't go out the Eighteenth Street stage door, because a man was at the door all the time, and nobody gets in or out without being checked. He didn't go down the fire escape, because that would ring a bell, and the bell didn't ring. And I know Lutz. He's just a good, honest, simple, decent watchman. What could he do, disguise himself? He wouldn't know how to put on a disguise in a million years. And he couldn't get out the theatre entrance without being spotted in his uniform, and besides, why should he want to get out? Anyhow, he must be around here somewhere. Only he isn't."

"I'm sure you must find it very perplexing," said Bennett. "However, you may take comfort. A missing watchman may turn suspicion from Christien."

"But you can't tell me the watchman did it."

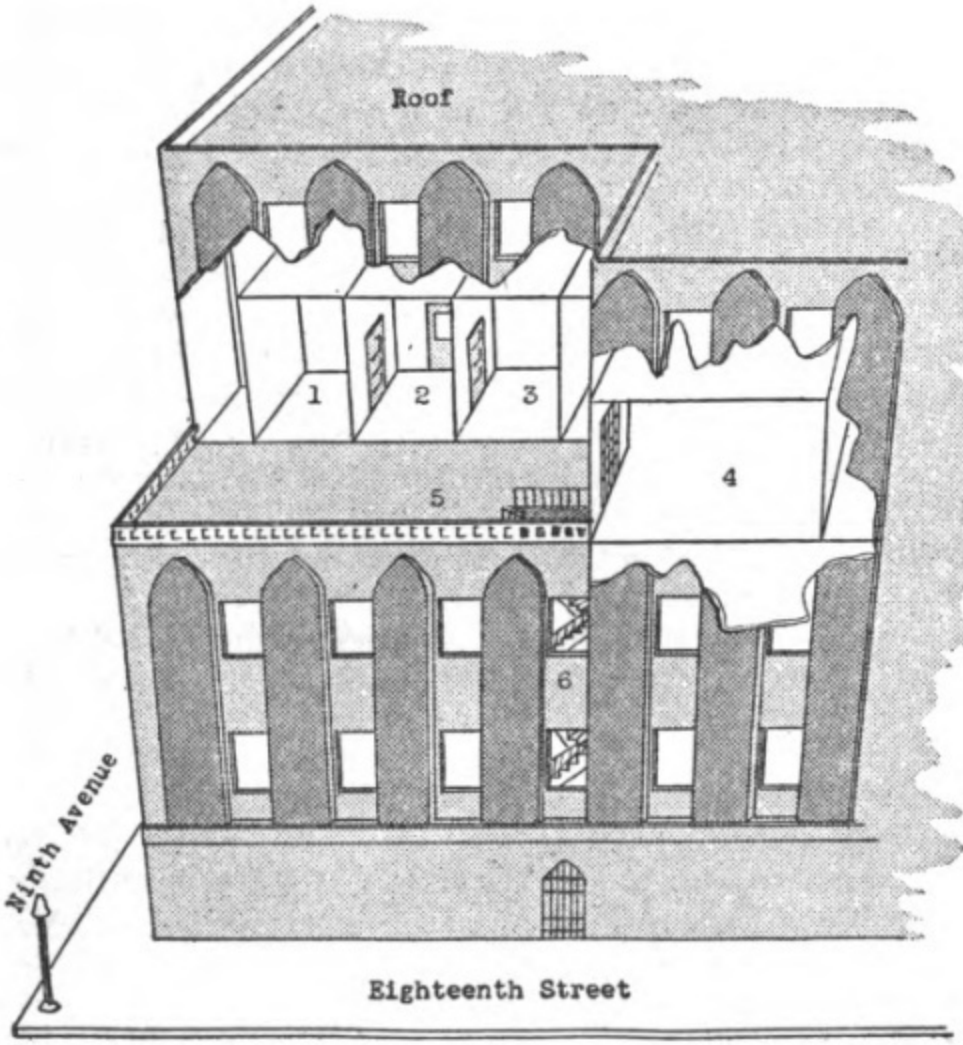
"I shan't, I assure you."

"And Tussard may get the idea Christien paid the watchman to run away. He didn't. I know he didn't, and I know Lutz didn't run away. I *know* these people, and it's absolutely crazy to think of them being mixed up in a murder. Just the same . . ."

"Ah. True. Policemen are appallingly cynical. Nevertheless, Holcomb, this watchman promises rare hunting for an hour or two, and I'm sure we ought not envy Tussard his pleasant distraction. Do him good. And please don't go away. Stay with me. You see, I find I want to talk with you. You might turn up the collar of your coat against the weather, and smoke a cigarette by all means, do, and tell me the answers to a few questions."

Holcomb obeyed.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



THE SOUTH TERRACE OF THE CHELSAC THEATRE

1. The private office of Lowes Levison.
2. The outer office.
3. The private office of Frederick Christien.
4. The infirmary.
5. Where the body was found on the terrace.
6. The fire escape.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAPTER THREE

THESE TERRACES, FOUR STOREYS above the street, one running along each corner of the bulk of the Chelsac Theatre, are like narrow shoulders on a crouching beast, or less fancifully, like decks on a high square ship. The walls drop from them clean and perpendicular to the pavement below, to Eighteenth and Nineteenth Streets. And it was on the south terrace, above Eighteenth, that Geoffrey Bennett stood moodily nursing his pipe, glancing up into the falling mist, and placing himself in the geography of New York.

"Ah. What's that, Holcomb?"

"Greenwich Village."

"Monstrous."

Since the heavy rain had stopped, it was possible to see vaguely up and down the terrace. The low clouds reflected a murky light.

"And this poor devil, the dead man. Where was he found?"

"Right about here, where we're standing."

"Oh."

"The police think he was killed here, and left just where he dropped. I guess they can tell by the clothes and all that."

Bennett nodded agreement. He rapped out the dottle of his pipe against the heel of his hand. He looked about the terrace, a clear space of stone tiles broken only by the mouth of the fire escape, and bounded simply and

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

cleanly by the high parapet above the street, and the high walls of the fourth storey. He turned then so that he faced the lighted windows of the three offices, one animated by the collection of witnesses, one quiet with a bored policeman standing watch over an unresponsive corpse, and a third empty.

"For Christien's sake, I should like very much to discover the truth. Making it my affair to do so. You understand, I hope, that you can help, if you will?"

"That goes without saying."

"Right. Pledge of discretion for both of us, eh? Right. I think we may safely get on with it, Holcomb. The gathering in that office—Christien's private office, I believe—why are they there?"

Bennett led Holcomb closer to the window, until they were able to look through into the room.

"Tussard's keeping them," said Holcomb, "because he isn't through with them, I suppose. They were around when it happened. He's been questioning them."

"Who are they?"

"Look over there. Stout man sitting in the arm chair. That's John Boxworth. House Director. He's my boss. He was up here for the Executive Committee meeting."

John Boxworth promptly smiled for Bennett, and lifted his face, though Bennett was far enough away in the darkness to be invisible. Nevertheless, the effect was that of a man cheerfully obliging the photographer. He held the pose. As a matter of fact, he happened to be listening to the conversation that was raging about him.

John Boxworth looked like Saint Nicholas with improved thyroid functioning. He was short, round, bulbous, yet dapper. He had a small cheerful mouth, fat pink cheeks, bright blue eyes. He had hair that was not quite white, more iron grey, but that served the purpose very well. He looked the personification of generous, amiable good-nature, kindly pleasantness, and he

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

may have been just so because of the necessity of living up to his appearance.

His clothes were fastidiously cut. His manner, as he sat there, seemed both vivacious and attentive. He looked to be over fifty, yet under sixty, and as energetic, sharp and alert as any younger man. A large, tall woman sat on the arm of his chair, and smoked in violent belches like a locomotive, and talked to him.

"Who is she?"

"That's Emma Whittacker."

"The woman who sent out those advertisements? Editor of the *American Lady,* or what's it called——?"

"That's right. Damned if I know what brought her here tonight. Just the same, she was here when it happened."

A tall, cheerful, elderly Amazon of a woman, this Emma Whittacker. She wore a mussy apple-green evening gown, a wilted gauze scarf round her strong neck, and over the whole an inappropriate tweed coat marked like a horse-blanket. She was earnestly talking Boxworth's ear off, with gestures. Bennett, who had daughters very much like her, and granddaughters, and great-granddaughters, too, in all likelihood, recognized her nature at once. She was a country woman.

Beyond Boxworth and Emma Whittacker, three younger people lounged against the wall and talked gravely, almost sadly.

"The girl with the two men. Dashed pretty. Who is she?"

"That's Emma Whittacker's niece. Ann Crofts, her name is. She's in business with her aunt. I don't know why she's here, either."

Ann Crofts was all that Bennett said—pretty, and capable besides. Her eyes, the movement of her head in the course of conversation, were as authoritative as the men's. They seemed to listen to her with respect.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The fact that she wore no evening dress, but a smart tailored suit of dark stuff instead, and a burberry over it, made her seem very businesslike. But more than she was capable, Bennett admitted, she was pretty.

On her left stood a tall and extremely slender young Jew, darkly handsome, quietly pessimistic, and probably intellectual. Sharp as a razor, Bennett commented to himself. A man whose wits would be accustomed to the most involute subtlety.

"And he?"

"That's Lowes Levison, Assistant to Mr Christien."

"He attends meetings of this Executive Committee, I presume?"

"All the men in there do, except Suttro. Boxworth and Levison are on the Committee, and Christien's head of it, and there's Mander, the Stage Director, who couldn't get here because he broke his arm in an accident yesterday afternoon. Suttro must have come up to the meeting on business, because I know he got here before eleven."

"And is that chap Suttro?"

"That's Anthony Suttro. The writer. I guess you must have heard of him."

Suttro, then, was the third of the three leaning against the far wall, conferring with Levison and Ann Crofts. Suttro had a perceptible air of importance and distinction about him, though his attitude was modest enough and unassuming. A kind of smooth assurance, easily identified but not very easily described, creeps over men who reach eminent success. Suttro had this; and a vocal halo of glory round his name when Holcomb pronounced it. The name, indeed, was vaguely familiar to Bennett, and he put to one side in his mind the intention of finding out why at a more convenient time. Something, he was sure, to do with political essays.

Suttro, more than any other feature, had a strikingly

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

handsome head, heroic, classical, and much more appropriate for a marble Apollo than for a man. Yet his face, animated and expressive, contrived to keep his head from appearing stupidly good-looking, and the complete impression was exactly what Suttro must have desired; that of a beautiful, mobile and powerful brain, tucked into a suitable package.

As Bennett watched, he saw Ann Crofts turn from Levison and Suttro towards her aunt, and beckon her. Something she said also urged the stout Boxworth out of his chair, and brought all five of them together in an attentive huddle. However interesting their subject might be, Bennett had no means of overhearing it. Holcomb threw away his cigarette, and fidgeted unhappily in the strong drizzle that had succeeded the rain.

"I say, did you happen to be here when Christien made his discovery?"

Holcomb said, "I was just coming in. I was late, held up downstairs, and Mr Boxworth was waiting for me to bring him the day's box-office figures. I got here right at the minute Mr Christien came back in the window."

"And these people in the room were here?"

"Boxworth, Suttro and Levison were in the offices. Ann Crofts was sitting outside in the hall, waiting for Suttro, or something like that. Emma Whittacker was somewhere in the building, we don't know just where."

"These five were convenient to the crime, then?"

"Yes."

"Could anybody else get to this part of the building?"

"I went over every bit of that with Tussard, and I'm damned if I see how anybody could. You notice we traced the cripple, the guy who was killed. We traced the watchman, too. If anybody else came up here, I'm willing to swear we'd have known about it."

"Then one of these five people must have killed the chap, if Christien didn't?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"In a way, I suppose that's right."

"May I add you to them, to make six?"

"I've got an alibi, but I don't know how good it is. I suppose I could have squeezed in time to choke the guy on my way from my office down in the theatre, to Christien's office here. That's the way these things are always done, isn't it?"

"Six, then."

"Add the watchman. He makes seven."

"Very well, seven."

"And there's Hobey Raymonds. He was somewhere around up here, high as a kite."

"Who is Raymonds?"

"A young gent who used to work here. He's crazy about Ann Crofts. He's drunk half the time. They dragged him off to a cell tonight because he was too drunk to talk straight."

"With Raymonds, there's eight. Drunk or dry, I shall include him. Eight, then, from whom to choose a guilty person. Is that reasonable? I think so. Of the eight who may have been in a position to commit murder, we shall have to drop Suttro, Boxworth and Levison, I presume——"

"They're too big to do anything like this," said Holcomb.

"Perhaps. I shall drop them, however, because they were together waiting for the meeting to begin."

"Together?"

"You imply they were."

"They weren't, damned if they were. That's what makes it bad for Mr Christien."

"Why?"

"They got together about eleven, they didn't have some papers, I was supposed to bring them up, they had to wait for me. Well, they didn't stay together. Suttro sat in Christien's office, alone. Boxworth was in the sec-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

retary's office looking through some papers at the desk in there. Levison was in his office with Christien."

"And?"

"Levison said he was so tired he had to snatch fifteen minutes' sleep if he could. He's always sleeping that way, and working all night. He fell asleep. And he doesn't know what Christien did. After talking it over with Mr Boxworth, I think it's pretty probable Mr Christien opened his window for some air, He has a bad heart, and he gets short of breath. When he opened the window, maybe he saw something out there in the rain, and he slipped out the window to take a good look at it. And found the dead man. But if it ever comes to saying Christien didn't do it, then there's no reason why Suttro and my boss Boxworth can't be suspected. And for that matter, if Christien dies, nobody'll be able to prove Levison didn't do it, because Christien's the only man who can prove Levison did sit in a chair and fall asleep, as he says. I don't think Christien, Suttro, Boxworth or Levison had anything to do with it, any more than I'd think President Roosevelt or the King of England or the Premier of France would get tangled up in a thing like that. People like that just don't, that's all, and you couldn't ever convince me they did. But if Christien and the watchman come out innocent, those others at the meeting will be next on Tussard's list, because everything that goes for Christien, except the suicide boloney, goes for them, too."

"Ann Crofts?"

"She was sitting in the hall. She didn't see anybody come past her. She couldn't go through Christien's or Levison's office or past Boxworth in the secretary's office without being seen. And she'd have had to go down the hall to the infirmary to get out on the terrace any other way. And I just don't think she did."

"This Emma Whittacker?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"They haven't got anything against her except that Tussard doesn't know where she was when it happened. You could say she came across from the north side of the building and made her niece promise not to tell when she went past to go out on the terrace—but that's not so hot."

"And Raymonds?"

"He wouldn't choke a man. He'd beat him up. Of course, I suppose Ann Crofts likes him enough to keep her mouth shut if she saw him going in or out, if that makes any difference."

"And you?"

"Ann Crofts didn't see me. And she's not in love with me, anyhow."

"The watchman, then?"

"I've known Lutz ever since he worked here. I don't think so."

Bennett seemed to groan quietly. He fished out his pipe again.

2.

"Mr Christien came out upon this terrace at fifteen minutes past eleven, and discovered a murdered man's body. That much is definite, I assume. Now, what happened when Christien came back into his office? You were here then, I believe."

"I was up here by then," said Holcomb. "There was a lot of excitement. There would be. I don't remember what Christien said, something about a dead man on the roof. He was all in, all out of breath and white as a sheet. He went to pieces on us, and Suttro called for the nurse downstairs to come up. I think it was Mr Boxworth who called up the police."

"It was raining then?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Hard."

"Christien's coat must have been wet."

"It was."

"And yours, and the others'?"

"We all got wet, because we all went out right away to see the dead man."

"You didn't observe anybody, Miss Crofts or Boxworth or Levison or Suttro, who seemed wet *before* going out?"

"There was too much excitement to notice. Maybe Miss Crofts had some rain on her coat, but she'd just come in a few minutes before, and a rain-coat doesn't soak up water like other coats."

"Quite."

"Raymonds was pretty wet. In fact, he was soaked. I think he'd been walking around town for half an hour before he came in here."

"How uncomfortable," said Bennett. "Was there some reason for holding this meeting of the Committee tonight?"

"I suppose there was."

"What, pray?"

"I don't know. I suppose Christien knew, he sent out word about it. Maybe Levison knows. Maybe Miss Bannerman—she's the secretary—knows. I wouldn't be surprised if it had something to do with Suttro, because he came to it, and he doesn't belong to it. But when I had a word with Mr Boxworth a little while ago, *he* said he thought it was something very important, but not connected with Suttro at all. Some kind of trouble that had just come up in the last day or two. It isn't much help, is it? In my job, I'm not supposed to know everything."

"What is Suttro in the theatre?"

"Nothing. He's an outsider."

"Oh?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"He's head of Suttro and Faunce, the public relations people, and they're the representatives of the Chelsea Project. In fact, Suttro's one of the trustees of the Project. He started the whole idea. It'll be his job now to keep the papers from being too rough with us."

"Indeed. Will he do that for Christien, too?"

"That's an idea. Somebody ought to see him about that."

"Exactly," said Bennett, and fell silent, thinking.

3.

Outside the windows of the infirmary, a sudden blinking of little lights appeared. Dark bodies moved, the lights swept out in faint beams over the surface of the terrace. Through the dazzling mist came an effect of great industry.

"They haven't found the watchman," said Holcomb.

"No."

"It's getting damn cold out here. I'm just about wet through."

"How uncomfortable. Dare say you're quite trustworthy?"

Holcomb was amazed; then he laughed a little and said, "I won't sell out cheap, anyhow."

"Good. Holcomb. I must remember the name. I shall depend on you, I think. No need for me to tell you how devilish precarious this affair seems, both for Christien and your Company. Two possible courses. To let the police go about their business, and consequently to trust Christien's eventual vindication to the awful processes of law—if it must come to that. Or to undertake a private investigation at once, in a spirit of prejudice against the theory of Christien's guilt. That is, to discover the real murderer. I prefer the second course. Do

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

you agree? I shall engage a private detective tomorrow."

"That's a good idea," said Holcomb. "You can count on me."

"In what way?"

"I know Mr Boxworth will start a little investigation of his own, and that'll be my job. Anything I find out, I'll tell you about, if Boxworth hasn't any objections."

"You must investigate those theatre passes."

"I have to get a list of owners," said Holcomb, "first thing in the morning. Tussard wants it."

"This list, will it be extensive?"

"Just prominent people, the Governor, the Mayor, movie stars, theatrical people, big executives, artists, people like that."

"Ah. Compare the names of the owners of those passes with the names to which those Whittacker advertisements were sent. Compare to the result, the names of the men who received notices of this meeting of the Committee tonight. That should suggest the identity of the murdered man."

"Not if he borrowed the pass, and happened to pick up the ad somewhere, and sneaked the notice of the meeting out of somebody's office."

"Nevertheless."

"I can tell you now, I don't know where Boxworth's notice went to, and neither does he. Levison can't remember what he did with his, if he didn't throw it away. And Suttro threw his away. I heard him say so. Tussard asked them to find them."

"I expect to meet difficulties, Holcomb."

"You will," said Holcomb. Two policemen in uniform were working close to them along the terrace, flashing torches and weaving back and forth in a vain and dogged search for the absent watchman. "Well, I've got to do a lot before I go home—before I go to a hotel, I should say. I won't get home any more tonight, I guess."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Tomorrow morning? For a bit of a talk?"

"Any time you say."

"Shortly before lunch. Here, in your office. Can you suggest a capable enquiry agent?"

"That's out of my line. I never went in for getting a divorce or anything. You might be able to find somebody in the telephone book."

"Of course."

"Where can I reach you, just in case?"

"The Ritz. Do you know my name? Geoffrey Bennett. Assurance of perfect discretion, of course."

"Yes, sure," said Holcomb. He seemed to be having a bit of trouble getting something out of his mind. He smoothed his wet hair with great vehemence, as if he had some hope of squeezing the thought into words by sheer physical pressure on his skull. He brought himself to the sticking-place at last, and blurted, "You know, I wouldn't say too much to anybody. That is, I wouldn't trust anybody too much. That is, you can't tell how some people will take it if . . ."

"What, pray, does *that* mean?"

"I don't know. It's not my business to talk, anyhow. Look here, I have to go now." Abruptly, Holcomb waved a hand and trotted briskly back across the tiles to the offices. He had to see Tussard. He had to see Mr Boxworth. He had to telephone his wife. He had to lock something up in the office files. And he had to get some sleep, God knew how. And there had to be a watchman on duty. . . .

The discouraged policemen brought their search close at the end of the terrace, then struggled past Bennett and went away. Bennett stood alone in the darkness and mist. Death had become a matter of casual fact, accepted and unsurprising. Tomorrow there was this and that to be done. Most oppressing, at this late hour of the night, were the cold, hollow, empty structures rising about

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

him, fantastic white monuments in the sky, dead as tombs, great human schemes with the living humans gone out of them, Chelsea Project asleep, sharply calm and dead. An uneasy sensation along the spine.

Bennett, aware that his pipe had gone out and that he was tired and that his feet were damp, turned unhappily back, in the way Holcomb had gone. He saw Vergil's horrid bird, the monster Scandal, wheeling on strange wings across the heavens. He brushed the fancy impatiently out of his mind. He said to himself, "Wretched, blundering fools, and the devil take us all for our incompetence."

He found Tussard to be in much the same unsatisfactory state.

4.

It was so late, and people had become so vague, ill-tempered and distracted for lack of sleep, that Tussard could do little with them but let them go. He had not found the watchman. He was sure the watchman had not got away. The watchman was therefore in the upper part of the building, but invisible. Tussard wanted a little time to think out this intricate matter, and all its implications.

"You can all beat it now," he said to the gathering in Christien's office. "I'm not keeping you any longer. Leave the addresses where I can get you when you go past the man at the door. Don't take it into your heads to go out of town without telling me first, because that would put me in a position where I'd have to be hard on you. I won't get tough, if you won't. Now go on, go home and get some sleep."

There was some pushing and talking in a confused way. They were awkwardly bearing out the dead man

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

on a stretcher, which gave some trouble at the door. The police, most of them, were abandoning the scene, now exhaustively photographed, examined, measured and tested for finger-prints. There was weary obstinacy in the congestion about the secretary's office. In the midst of it, Christien's doctor came pushing his way through to Bennett.

"I thought I'd better find you. Christien's been taken to my hospital in a private ambulance, and Mrs Christien will stay in town tonight."

"Quite."

"She looked at the body. Nasty shock. But she couldn't recognize it, of course. Odd, isn't it, that nobody's seen that fellow before?"

"Where is she?"

"This way."

Bennett had no trouble getting to the passage. The few policemen who remained were waiting for Tussard now, and gathering up the bits and pieces, the things on the secretary's desk, the coats and hats. . . . Paula Christien looked suddenly grateful at the sight of Bennett, stumbled against him and held fast with her hands to his coat. She said, "Geoffrey, they've taken him. They wouldn't let me go in the ambulance—because a policeman——"

"Not under arrest," the doctor explained. "You can tell her not to worry about it. Just a formality, the cop going along."

"Damned precious formality!"

"I arranged for her to have a room next to his at the hospital," said the doctor.

"Exactly. Come, Paula. Which way, doctor?"

They were last, excepting Tussard's men and Holcomb, to leave. They stood waiting for the elevator to come for them, when Tussard charged down the passage. At his heels came another policeman, in uniform.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Tussard stopped, stared at them with a kind of white anger.

"Look 'em over, McGrath."

McGrath went carefully through the doctor's clothes, pockets, linings, collar, socks, trouser ends and more intimate places; methodically, without unnecessary roughness, but leaving a ludicrous disorder behind him. The doctor tightened his lips and put up with it. He scowled a little when McGrath tickled him. He let Bennett protest.

"Aren't you being silly, Tussard?"

"Let's see your bag, Mrs Christien," said Tussard. He went through it, putting keys, purse, compact, card-case into his pockets after looking at them carefully.

The elevator came, opened, showed a tired youth in plum-coloured uniform. Tussard made a brisk motion with his hand, and the elevator went away again.

"If you explained to me," said Bennett, "I might help you. You aren't looking for the watchman, by chance?"

Tussard was stung. "I'm not looking for the watchman, Mr Bennett. What are you doing here, anyway? Looking for a street car?"

"You aren't quite civil."

"You want to know what I'm looking for? Somebody got a little careless and took away the slip of paper we found in the dead man's pocket. That Executive Committee notice."

McGrath finished with the doctor, shook his head, and turned to Bennett. Bennett gave him his hat, umbrella, gloves and overcoat.

"It must embarrass you," said Bennett. "Had it been photographed?"

"No."

"Too bad."

"I know it's too bad. Don't tell me."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Those others who were in Christien's office? And Holcomb? Dare say you'll search them, too?'

"They got away on me. Holcomb's being searched right now."

"Unfortunate. Holcomb won't have it. I saw him go past the desk myself, and I'm quite sure he couldn't reach it. Of course, we haven't it. I fancy it's destroyed by now."

"We'll see."

When Bennett, too, had been searched, and McGrath had assured Tussard that Mrs Christien could scarcely have hid it during the moments she and Bennett and the doctor were together after coming away from the office, Tussard's anger wilted into anticlimax and self-reproach.

"After this, I'll know enough to treat decent people like cheap crooks," he said. "Where's Dillon, wasn't he watching that room?"

"Ah, may we go?"

"Get the—go on, go anywhere you want to."

He turned his back on them, and charged back the way he had come, with an eye out for the culpable Dillon.

This was close to four o'clock on Wednesday morning. Mrs Christien went to the hospital, and Bennett went to his hotel to bed. The Christien chauffeur, luckless man, had to go back to Southampton that night for Mrs Christien's things, and Bennett's. Hope managed to avoid this somehow.

By four o'clock the mechanical process of scandal was almost complete. Within a few hours, the morning papers would be propped against a million or so different sugar bowls on as many breakfast tables. There would be the customary hoarse shouts of murder and foul suspicion rising on a thousand street corners. Nothing could be done to prevent this. Therefore Bennett,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

eminently sound in his attitude towards Fate and similar inconveniences, quietly wound his watch and brushed his hair and washed his teeth and drank the night-cap Hope had put ready for him, and fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAPTER FOUR

A VERY LONG TIME AGO AND during the reckless days of his youth, Bennett's personal servant had gone by the proud name of Cedric Hoppflack. The Hoppflacks as a family, even in these queasy times, are a proud lot of sturdy and self-respecting East Anglian yeomen; no mean people. Cedric, however, in the process of becoming a gentleman's man, suffered Hoppflack to be reduced first to Hopp, then when dignity required, to the mere undistinguished Hope, and as Hope he was still catching up on his sleep in his cubicle on the top floor of Bennett's hotel when the telephone rang in Bennett's rooms. Bennett himself, therefore, woke cursing loudly (this was at quarter to nine on Wednesday morning) and climbed out of bed blinking to answer the thing himself.

When he said Hello into the receiver, it sounded more like a sentence after court martial than a polite greeting.

"Good morning. This is Louis Holcomb talking," said an undaunted voice, as efficient and as weary as during the night before.

"Really? Well?"

"I just saw Tussard. You know a paper was picked up last night? He's out for blood. And there's no trace of the watchman."

"Surely, Holcomb, you aren't fool or rascal enough to wake me to tell me these cold comforts?"

"Sorry I woke you. I'd better call you later——"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"Carry on. Wait. Ruddy gale raging here. Ah, back in bed now. Sorry. Are you there? Carry on."

"Well, sir, I want to apologize in a way."

"Do you? Apologize, then."

"I didn't understand you were who you are when we were talking last night, and I don't want you to think I——"

"Ah! I feared it. Forget it. You Americans, Holcomb, are the most damnable snobs. Frightfully inconvenient. I think, Holcomb, it would be wise for us to be precise upon the point at the very beginning; our shortcomings, that is, my noble birth or what d'you call it, and your bloated emphasis upon the matter, must never rise to come between us again. Now, what the devil did Tussard say to you?"

"He dropped a hint that somebody has been pulling strings. Working the influential friends. Getting Tussard worried. He's afraid, I have an idea, that he may step on important toes if he isn't careful. Afraid he'll make a bad mistake and find himself pounding the pavements out in the wilds of Flatlands. I guess you understand what I mean."

"Whose toes, pray?"

"I don't know. Maybe he doesn't either. He tried to pump me about you."

"Ah! Why?"

"Because he found out you're Lord Broghville."

"Ah! This *is* thick, Holcomb. May I ask, in an idle way, who first came to you with this priceless discovery?"

"Everybody knows about it here. I think Mr Levison figured it out first. He *might* have told Tussard this morning, I don't know."

"Levison. Of course. Damn. What else did Tussard say?"

"Something you might be interested in, sir. You re-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

member I spoke of Hobey Raymonds, the boy who was drunk last night?"

"Yes."

"They haven't very much against him. Anyhow, Tussard wants to question him this morning. He's going to bring him over at eleven o'clock. We're checking up on what he says, so we can bring charges for illegal entry or something like that, if it's necessary. I thought you might like to be in on it. I fixed it for you to be here, if you want to."

"I do. At eleven. Right you are."

"And I asked Mr Boxworth about a private detective. He told me you could ring Murray Hill 2-0224. It's the Meaghen Agency—M-e-a-g-h-e-n. All he knows is that they keep in with the police pretty well, which might help. That's all I could find for you, sir."

"Good. Thank you. One word more. Has this Raymonds and his coming up for questioning implied a change in the official attitude?"

"No."

"I'll look in on you at eleven, then . . ."

Bennett put aside the telephone. Very soon, Hope brought the morning cup of tea to Bennett's bedside, and pulled open the curtains to let in an exuberant burst of robust spring sunshine. The old man drank the tea, blinked like a bear at the sun, and relaxed in complete tranquillity beneath the covers for his habitual period of reflection. Hope was running water for the bath. An orderly and reassuring sound.

As for this matter of the dead man's identity; something could be made of that without stirring a muscle. Far from being the corpse of almost anybody at all, as Tussard seemed to think, merely because it had no name and telephone number attached to it, it was in Bennett's opinion a most distinguished and unusual corpse, quite out of the ordinary run of such things.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The money: a wealthy man. The ring, the watch, the note-case: a man of sober taste, with respect for the acquisitions of his parents, and with no liking for cheap and shoddy things. The three keys on a thong: a man who seldom went abroad in the world, a man who lived simply. This was inferred, since Bennett regarded the accumulation of dozens, even hundreds of keys as one of the necessary attendant evils of an active and varied career. The more one does in the world, the more keys he must carry. The make-shift mask for the ruined face: a sensitive concealment of a personal horror that would have ceased to be a bother, in the case of an insensible or superficial person, many years ago. (Bennett never considered seriously the opinion, earnestly proposed in several newspapers, that the bandage had been intended as a kind of disguise.)

Even more revealing and insistent than any of these details remained the vision of that singular forehead, so clear, grave, intellectual, impressive, beautiful. Bennett raked in his memory for some elusive association, and recalled at last the poet Tennyson as he had seen him once on the Isle of Wight. Although the generalization ranged clear outside the farthest rules of logic, Bennett nevertheless believed that the faces of great men took on a perceptible nobility and refinement as they grew old. The forehead of the dead man, considered this way, would not let itself be reasoned quite into irrelevance.

Surely the murderer must have known very well whom he had killed. Knowing it, he had found it very necessary to suppress it; and he had made away with the pass and, later, the notice of the committee meeting, in spite of the greatest danger of discovery. It followed, too, that the murder had been a hasty deed, not carefully planned and prepared. Otherwise the clumsy and uncertain method, choking, would have been improved upon. With more time, and free from the pressure of circum-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

stances that had risen last night, the murderer might have succeeded in concealing his crime and his victim entirely, if the victim was as thorough a recluse as it seemed now. Who would set up a cry for a missing man without friends or family?

A man probably of distinction, wealth, culture, and certainly of secluded habits, had been throttled in some terrible emergency there on the terrace. But why had he gone there? And why had he been killed? Bennett speculated. The notice taken from under Tussard's nose, connected the dead man even more closely to one of the group of five—Ann Crofts and her aunt, Suttro, Levison and Boxworth. Less and less, the sphere of interest was proving unlimited. Progress, even in bed, was possible.

On this note of cheer and confidence, Bennett stretched and got up for his bath.

2.

Bennett had Hope call the Meaghen Agency. The operative (Francis X. Mapes, his card read) arrived in a remarkably short time, like a doctor come to deliver a baby. Bennett was still soaking his gaunt pink ancient body in a tub of warm water.

He sloshed an enormous sponge about, and deplored American plumbing as too dainty for his heroic tastes. In England bath tubs were tubs, not basins, and taps ran decent streams of water, not effeminate trickles. Hope was making soft sounds with the Wednesday razor and a strop.

"Mapes?" said Bennett, thoughtfully dipping the detective's business card up and down in an island of suds. "Mapes! My word, a name! Where is he?"

"In the sitting room, sir."

"Yes, of course. Dare say he won't mind waiting. By

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN