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THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER

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NOVELS BY BARONESS ORCZY

Author of "The Scarlet Pimpernel," etc.

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL
THE LAUGHING CAVALIER
LEATHERFACE
I WILL REPAY
THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER
BEAU BROCADE
THE BRONZE EAGLE
ELDORADO
THE NEST OF THE SPARROWHAWK
THE TANGLED SKEIN
BY THE GODS BELOVED
THE EMPEROR'S CANDLESTICKS
UNTO CÆSAR
A SON OF THE PEOPLE
LORD TONY'S WIFE
FLOWER O' THE LILY
HIS MAJESTY'S WELL BELOVED
THE FIRST SIR PERCY
THE HONOURABLE JIM
NICOLETTE, A Tale of Old Provence
THE CELESTIAL CITY

HODDER & STOUGHTON, LTD.

Publishers, London, E.C. 4

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THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER

By Baroness Orczy

Hodder and Stoughton
Publishers London

[1908]

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678825 A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
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R 1933 L

TO

MY DEAR UNCLE AND AUNT

COUNT AND COUNTESS WASS OF CZEGE

IN REMEMBRANCE

OF MANY HAPPY DAYS SPENT

IN TRANSYLVANIA

October, 1908

Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

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CHAPTER I

THE FENCHURCH STREET MYSTERY

THE man in the corner pushed aside his glass, and leant across the table.

"Mysteries!" he commented. "There is no such thing as a mystery in connection with any crime, provided intelligence is brought to bear upon its investigation."

Very much astonished Polly Burton looked over the top of her newspaper, and fixed a pair of very severe, coldly inquiring brown eyes upon him.

She had disapproved of the man from the instant when he shuffled across the shop and sat down opposite to her, at the same marble-topped table which already held her large coffee (3d.), her roll and butter (2d.), and plate of tongue (6d.).

Now this particular corner, this very same table, that special view of the magnificent marble

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hall—known as the Norfolk Street branch of the Aërated Bread Company's depôts—were Polly's own corner, table, and view. Here she had partaken of eleven pennyworth of luncheon and one pennyworth of daily information ever since that glorious never-to-be-forgotten day when she was enrolled on the staff of the *Evening Observer* (we'll call it that, if you please), and became a member of that illustrious and world-famed organization known as the British Press.

She was a personality, was Miss Burton of the *Evening Observer*. Her cards were printed thus:

MISS MARY J. BURTON.

Evening Observer.

She had interviewed Miss Ellen Terry and the Bishop of Madagascar, Mr. Seymour Hicks and the Chief Commissioner of Police. She had been present at the last Marlborough House garden party—in the cloak-room, that is to say, where she caught sight of Lady Thingummy's hat, Miss What-you-may-call's sunshade, and of various

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other things modistical or fashionable, all of which were duly described under the heading "Royalty and Dress" in the early afternoon edition of the *Evening Observer*.

(The article itself is signed M. J. B., and is to be found in the files of that leading halfpenny-worth.)

For these reasons—and for various others, too—Polly felt irate with the man in the corner, and told him so with her eyes, as plainly as any pair of brown eyes can speak.

She had been reading an article in the *Daily Telegraph*. The article was palpitatingly interesting. Had Polly been commenting audibly upon it? Certain it is that the man over there had spoken in direct answer to her thoughts.

She looked at him and frowned; the next moment she smiled. Miss Burton (of the *Evening Observer*) had a keen sense of humour, which two years' association with the British Press had not succeeded in destroying, and the appearance of the man was sufficient to tickle the most ultra-morose fancy. Polly thought to herself that she had never seen any one so pale, so thin, with such funny light-coloured hair, brushed very smoothly across the top of a very obviously bald crown. He looked so timid and nervous as he fidgeted incessantly with a piece of string; his long, lean, and trembling fingers tying and untying it into knots of wonderful and complicated proportions.

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Having carefully studied every detail of the quaint personality Polly felt more amiable.

"And yet," she remarked kindly but authoritatively, "this article, in an otherwise well-informed journal, will tell you that, even within the last year, no fewer than six crimes have completely baffled the police, and the perpetrators of them are still at large."

"Pardon me," he said gently, "I never for a moment ventured to suggest that there were no mysteries to the *police*; I merely remarked that there were none where intelligence was brought to bear upon the investigation of crime."

"Not even in the Fenchurch Street *mystery*, I suppose," she asked sarcastically.

"Least of all in the so-called Fenchurch Street *mystery*," he replied quietly.

Now the Fenchurch Street mystery, as that extraordinary crime had popularly been called, had puzzled—as Polly well knew—the brains of every thinking man and woman for the last twelve months. It had puzzled her not inconsiderably; she had been interested, fascinated; she had studied the case, formed her own theories, thought about it all often and often, had even written one or two letters to the Press on the subject—suggesting, arguing, hinting at possibilities and probabilities, adducing proofs which other amateur detectives were equally ready to refute. The attitude of that timid man in the

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corner, therefore, was peculiarly exasperating, and she retorted with sarcasm destined to completely annihilate her self-complacent interlocutor.

"What a pity it is, in that case, that you do not offer your priceless services to our misguided though well-meaning police."

"Isn't it?" he replied with perfect good-humour. "Well, you know, for one thing I doubt if they would accept them; and in the second place my inclinations and my duty would—were I to become an active member of the detective force—nearly always be in direct conflict. As often as not my sympathies go to the criminal who is clever and astute enough to lead our entire police force by the nose.

"I don't know how much of the case you remember," he went on quietly. "It certainly, at first, began even to puzzle me. On the 12th of last December a woman, poorly dressed, but with an unmistakable air of having seen better days, gave information at Scotland Yard of the disappearance of her husband, William Kershaw, of no occupation, and apparently of no fixed abode. She was accompanied by a friend—a fat, oily-looking German—and between them they told a tale which set the police immediately on the move.

"It appears that on the 10th of December, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, Karl

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Müller, the German, called on his friend, William Kershaw, for the purpose of collecting a small debt—some ten pounds or so—which the latter owed him. On arriving at the squalid lodging in Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, he found William Kershaw in a wild state of excitement, and his wife in tears. Müller attempted to state the object of his visit, but Kershaw, with wild gestures, waved him aside, and—in his own words—flabbergasted him by asking him point-blank for another loan of two pounds, which sum, he declared, would be the means of a speedy fortune for himself and the friend who would help him in his need.

"After a quarter of an hour spent in obscure hints, Kershaw, finding the cautious German obdurate, decided to let him into the secret plan, which, he averred, would place thousands into their hands."

Instinctively Polly had put down her paper; the mild stranger, with his nervous air and timid, watery eyes, had a peculiar way of telling his tale, which somehow fascinated her.

"I don't know," he resumed, "if you remember the story which the German told to the police, and which was corroborated in every detail by the wife or widow. Briefly it was this: Some thirty years previously, Kershaw, then twenty years of age, and a medical student at one of the London hospitals, had a chum

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named Barker, with whom he roomed, together with another.

"The latter, so it appears, brought home one evening a very considerable sum of money, which he had won on the turf, and the following morning he was found murdered in his bed. Kershaw, fortunately for himself, was able to prove a conclusive *alibi*; he had spent the night on duty at the hospital; as for Barker, he had disappeared, that is to say, as far as the police were concerned, but not as far as the watchful eyes of his friend Kershaw were able to spy—at least, so the latter said. Barker very cleverly contrived to get away out of the country, and, after sundry vicissitudes, finally settled down at Vladivostok, in Eastern Siberia, where, under the assumed name of Smethurst, he built up an enormous fortune by trading in furs.

"Now, mind you, every one knows Smethurst, the Siberian millionaire. Kershaw's story that he had once been called Barker, and had committed a murder thirty years ago, was never proved, was it? I am merely telling you what Kershaw said to his friend the German and to his wife on that memorable afternoon of December the 10th.

"According to him Smethurst had made one gigantic mistake in his clever career—he had on four occasions written to his late friend, William Kershaw. Two of these letters had

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no bearing on the case, since they were written more than twenty-five years ago, and Kershaw, moreover, had lost them—so he said—long ago. According to him, however, the first of these letters was written when Smethurst, alias Barker, had spent all the money he had obtained from the crime, and found himself destitute in New York.

"Kershaw, then in fairly prosperous circumstances, sent him a £10 note for the sake of old times. The second, when the tables had turned, and Kershaw had begun to go downhill, Smethurst, as he then already called himself, sent his whilom friend £50. After that, as Müller gathered, Kershaw had made sundry demands on Smethurst's ever-increasing purse, and had accompanied these demands by various threats, which, considering the distant country in which the millionaire lived, were worse than futile.

"But now the climax had come, and Kershaw, after a final moment of hesitation, handed over to his German friend the two last letters purporting to have been written by Smethurst, and which, if you remember, played such an important part in the mysterious story of this extraordinary crime. I have a copy of both these letters here," added the man in the corner, as he took out a piece of paper from a very worn-out pocket-book, and, unfolding it very deliberately, he began to read :—

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"'SIR,—Your preposterous demands for money are wholly unwarrantable. I have already helped you quite as much as you deserve. However, for the sake of old times, and because you once helped me when I was in a terrible difficulty, I am willing to once more let you impose upon my good nature. A friend of mine here, a Russian merchant, to whom I have sold my business, starts in a few days for an extended tour to many European and Asiatic ports in his yacht, and has invited me to accompany him as far as England. Being tired of foreign parts, and desirous of seeing the old country once again after thirty years' absence, I have decided to accept his invitation. I don't know when we may actually be in Europe, but I promise you that as soon as we touch a suitable port I will write to you again, making an appointment for you to see me in London. But remember that if your demands are too preposterous I will not for a moment listen to them, and that I am the last man in the world to submit to persistent and unwarrantable blackmail.

"'I am, sir,

"'Yours truly,

"'FRANCIS SMETHURST.

"The second letter was dated from Southampton," continued the old man in the corner

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calmly, "and, curiously enough, was the only letter which Kershaw professed to have received from Smethurst of which he had kept the envelope, and which was dated. It was quite brief," he added, referring once more to his piece of paper.

"'DEAR SIR,—Referring to my letter of a few weeks ago, I wish to inform you that the *Tsarskoe Selo* will touch at Tilbury on Tuesday next, the 10th. I shall land there, and immediately go up to London by the first train I can get. If you like, you may meet me at Fenchurch Street Station, in the first-class waiting-room, in the late afternoon. Since I surmise that after thirty years' absence my face may not be familiar to you, I may as well tell you that you will recognize me by a heavy Astrakhan fur coat, which I shall wear, together with a cap of the same. You may then introduce yourself to me, and I will personally listen to what you may have to say.

"'Yours faithfully,

"'FRANCIS SMETHURST.'

"It was this last letter which had caused William Kershaw's excitement and his wife's tears. In the German's own words, he was walking up and down the room like a wild beast, gesticulating wildly, and muttering sun-dry exclamations. Mrs. Kershaw, however, was

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full of apprehension. She mistrusted the man from foreign parts—who, according to her husband's story, had already one crime upon his conscience—who might, she feared, risk another, in order to be rid of a dangerous enemy. Woman-like, she thought the scheme a dishonourable one, for the law, she knew, is severe on the blackmailer.

"The assignation might be a cunning trap, in any case it was a curious one; why, she argued, did not Smethurst elect to see Kershaw at his hotel the following day? A thousand whys and wherefores made her anxious, but the fat German had been won over by Kershaw's visions of untold gold, held tantalisingly before his eyes. He had lent the necessary £2, with which his friend intended to tidy himself up a bit before he went to meet his friend the millionaire. Half an hour afterwards Kershaw had left his lodgings, and that was the last the unfortunate woman saw of her husband, or Müller, the German, of his friend.

"Anxiously his wife waited that night, but he did not return; the next day she seems to have spent in making purposeless and futile inquiries about the neighbourhood of Fenchurch Street; and on the 12th she went to Scotland Yard, gave what particulars she knew, and placed in the hands of the police the two letters written by Smethurst."

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CHAPTER II

A MILLIONAIRE IN THE DOCK

THE man in the corner had finished his glass of milk. His watery blue eyes looked across at Miss Polly Burton's eager little face, from which all traces of severity had now been chased away by an obvious and intense excitement.

"It was only on the 31st," he resumed after a while, "that a body, decomposed past all recognition, was found by two lightermen in the bottom of a disused barge. She had been moored at one time at the foot of one of those dark flights of steps which lead down between tall warehouses to the river in the East End of London. I have a photograph of the place here," he added, selecting one out of his pocket, and placing it before Polly.

"The actual barge, you see, had already been removed when I took this snapshot, but you will realize what a perfect place this alley is for the purpose of one man cutting another's throat in comfort, and without fear of detection. The body, as I said, was decomposed beyond all recognition; it had probably been

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there eleven days, but sundry articles, such as a silver ring and a tie pin, were recognizable, and were identified by Mrs. Kershaw as belonging to her husband.

"She, of course, was loud in denouncing Smethurst, and the police had no doubt a very strong case against him, for two days after the discovery of the body in the barge, the Siberian millionaire, as he was already popularly called by enterprising interviewers, was arrested in his luxurious suite of rooms at the Hotel Cecil.

"To confess the truth, at this point I was not a little puzzled. Mrs. Kershaw's story and Smethurst's letters had both found their way into the papers, and following my usual method —mind you, I am only an amateur, I try to reason out a case for the love of the thing —I sought about for a motive for the crime, which the police declared Smethurst had committed. To effectually get rid of a dangerous blackmailer was the generally accepted theory. Well! did it ever strike you how paltry that motive really was?"

Miss Polly had to confess, however, that it had never struck her in that light.

"Surely a man who had succeeded in building up an immense fortune by his own individual efforts, was not the sort of fool to believe that he had anything to fear from a man like Kershaw. He must have *known* that Kershaw

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held no damning proofs against him—not enough to hang him, anyway. Have you ever seen Smethurst?" he added, as he once more fumbled in his pocket-book.

Polly replied that she had seen Smethurst's picture in the illustrated papers at the time. Then he added, placing a small photograph before her:

"What strikes you most about the face?"

"Well, I think its strange, astonished expression, due to the total absence of eyebrows, and the funny foreign cut of the hair."

"So close that it almost looks as if it had been shaved. Exactly. That is what struck me most when I elbowed my way into the court that morning and first caught sight of the millionaire in the dock. He was a tall, soldierly-looking man, upright in stature, his face very bronzed and tanned. He wore neither moustache nor beard, his hair was cropped quite close to his head, like a Frenchman's; but, of course, what was so very remarkable about him was that total absence of eyebrows and even eyelashes, which gave the face such a peculiar appearance—as you say, a perpetually astonished look.

"He seemed, however, wonderfully calm; he had been accommodated with a chair in the dock—being a millionaire—and chatted

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pleasantly with his lawyer, Sir Arthur Inglewood, in the intervals between the calling of the several witnesses for the prosecution; whilst during the examination of these witnesses he sat quite placidly, with his head shaded by his hand.

"Müller and Mrs. Kershaw repeated the story which they had already told to the police. I think you said that you were not able, owing to pressure of work, to go to the court that day, and hear the case, so perhaps you have no recollection of Mrs. Kershaw. No? Ah, well! Here is a snapshot I managed to get of her once. That is her. Exactly as she stood in the box—overdressed—in elaborate crape, with a bonnet which once had contained pink roses, and to which a remnant of pink petals still clung obtrusively amidst the deep black.

"She would not look at the prisoner, and turned her head resolutely towards the magistrate. I fancy she had been fond of that vagabond husband of hers: an enormous wedding-ring encircled her finger, and that, too, was swathed in black. She firmly believed that Kershaw's murderer sat there in the dock, and she literally flaunted her grief before him.

"I was indescribably sorry for her. As for Müller, he was just fat, oily, pompous, conscious of his own importance as a witness; his fat fingers, covered with brass rings, gripped

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the two incriminating letters, which he ha
identified. They were his passports, as it wer
to a delightful land of importance and notoriety
Sir Arthur Inglewood, I think, disappointe
him by stating that he had no questions to as
of him. Müller had been brimful of answer
ready with the most perfect indictment, th
most elaborate accusations against the bloate
millionaire who had decoyed his dear frien
Kershaw, and murdered him in Heaven know
what an out-of-the-way corner of the Eas
End.

"After this, however, the excitement grev
apace. Müller had been dismissed, and hac
retired from the court altogether, leading awa
Mrs. Kershaw, who had completely broker
down.

"Constable D 21 was giving evidence as to
the arrest in the meanwhile. The prisoner, he
said, had seemed completely taken by surprise,
not understanding the cause or history of the
accusation against him; however, when put
in full possession of the facts, and realizing, no
doubt, the absolute futility of any resistance,
he had quietly enough followed the constable
into the cab. No one at the fashionable and
crowded Hotel Cecil had even suspected that
anything unusual had occurred.

"Then a gigantic sigh of expectancy came
from every one of the spectators. The 'fun

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was about to begin. James Buckland, a porter at Fenchurch Street railway station, had just sworn to tell all the truth, etc. After all, it did not amount to much. He said that at six o'clock in the afternoon of December the 10th, in the midst of one of the densest fogs he ever remembers, the 5.5 from Tilbury steamed into the station, being just about an hour late. He was on the arrival platform, and was hailed by a passenger in a first-class carriage. He could see very little of him beyond an enormous black fur coat and a travelling cap of fur also.

"The passenger had a quantity of luggage, all marked F. S., and he directed James Buckland to place it all upon a four-wheel cab, with the exception of a small hand-bag, which he carried himself. Having seen that all his luggage was safely bestowed, the stranger in the fur coat paid the porter, and, telling the cabman to wait until he returned, he walked away in the direction of the waiting-rooms, still carrying his small hand-bag.

"'I stayed for a bit,' added James Buckland, 'talking to the driver about the fog and that; then I went about my business, seein' that the local from Southend 'ad been signalled.'

"The prosecution insisted most strongly upon the hour when the stranger in the fur coat,

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having seen to his luggage, walked away towards the waiting-rooms. The porter was emphatic. 'It was not a minute later than 6.15,' he averred.

"Sir Arthur Inglewood still had no questions to ask, and the driver of the cab was called.

"He corroborated the evidence of James Buckland as to the hour when the gentleman in the fur coat had engaged him, and having filled his cab in and out with luggage, had told him to wait. And cabby did wait. He waited in the dense fog—until he was tired, until he seriously thought of depositing all the luggage in the lost property office, and of looking out for another fare—waited until at last, at a quarter before nine, whom should he see walking hurriedly towards his cab but the gentleman in the fur coat and cap, who got in quickly and told the driver to take him at once to the Hotel Cecil. This, cabby declared, had occurred at a quarter before nine. Still Sir Arthur Inglewood made no comment, and Mr. Francis Smethurst, in the crowded, stuffy court, had calmly dropped to sleep.

"The next witness, Constable Thomas Taylor, had noticed a shabbily dressed individual, with shaggy hair and beard, loafing about the station and waiting-rooms in the afternoon of December the 10th. He seemed to be watching the arrival platform of the Tilbury and Southend trains.

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"Two separate and independent witnesses cleverly unearthed by the police, had seen this same shabbily dressed individual stroll into the first-class waiting-room at about 6.15 on Wednesday, December the 10th, and go straight up to a gentleman in a heavy fur coat and cap, who had also just come into the room. The two talked together for a while; no one heard what they said, but presently they walked off together. No one seemed to know in which direction.

"Francis Smethurst was rousing himself from his apathy; he whispered to his lawyer, who nodded with a bland smile of encouragement. The employés of the Hotel Cecil gave evidence as to the arrival of Mr. Smethurst at about 9.30 p.m. on Wednesday, December the 10th, in a cab, with a quantity of luggage; and this closed the case for the prosecution.

"Everybody in that court already *saw* Smethurst mounting the gallows. It was uninterested curiosity which caused the elegant audience to wait and hear what Sir Arthur Inglewood had to say. He, of course, is the most fashionable man in the law at the present moment. His lolling attitudes, his drawling speech, are quite the rage, and imitated by the gilded youth of society.

"Even at this moment, when the Siberian millionaire's neck literally and metaphorically

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hung in the balance, an expectant titter wen round the fair spectators as Sir Arthur stretchec out his long loose limbs and lounged acros the table. He waited to make his effect—Si Arthur is a born actor—and there is no doub that he made it, when in his slowest, most drawly tones he said quietly:

"'With regard to this alleged murder of one William Kershaw, on Wednesday, December the 10th, between 6.15 and 8.45 p.m., your Honour, I now propose to call two witnesses, who saw this same William Kershaw alive on Tuesday afternoon, December the 16th, that is to say, six days after the supposed murder.'

"It was as if a bombshell had exploded in the court. Even his Honour was aghast, and I am sure the lady next to me only recovered from the shock of the surprise in order to wonder whether she need put off her dinner party after all.

"As for me," added the man in the corner, with that strange mixture of nervousness and self-complacency which had set Miss Polly Burton wondering, "well, you see, *I* had made up my mind long ago where the hitch lay in this particular case, and I was not so surprised as some of the others.

"Perhaps you remember the wonderful development of the case, which so completely mystified the police—and in fact everybody except myself. Torriani and a waiter at his

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hotel in the Commercial Road both deposed that at about 3.30 p.m. on December the 10th a shabbily dressed individual lolled into the coffee-room and ordered some tea. He was pleasant enough and talkative, told the waiter that his name was William Kershaw, that very soon all London would be talking about him, as he was about, through an unexpected stroke of good fortune, to become a very rich man, and so on, and so on, nonsense without end.

"When he had finished his tea he lolled out again, but no sooner had he disappeared down a turning of the road than the waiter discovered an old umbrella, left behind accidentally by the shabby, talkative individual. As is the custom in his highly respectable restaurant, Signor Torriani put the umbrella carefully away in his office, on the chance of his customer calling to claim it when he had discovered his loss. And sure enough nearly a week later, on Tuesday, the 16th, at about 1 p.m., the same shabbily dressed individual called and asked for his umbrella. He had some lunch, and chatted once again to the waiter. Signor Torriani and the waiter gave a description of William Kershaw, which coincided exactly with that given by Mrs. Kershaw of her husband.

"Oddly enough he seemed to be a very absent-minded sort of person, for on this second occasion, no sooner had he left than the waiter found

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a pocket-book in the coffee-room, underneath the table. It contained sundry letters and bills, all addressed to William Kershaw. This pocket-book was produced, and Karl Müller, who had returned to the court, easily identified it as having belonged to his dear and lamented friend 'Villiam.'

"This was the first blow to the case against the accused. It was a pretty stiff one, you will admit. Already it had begun to collapse like a house of cards. Still, there was the assignation, and the undisputed meeting between Smethurst and Kershaw, and those two and a half hours of a foggy evening to satisfactorily account for."

The man in the corner made a long pause, keeping the girl on tenterhooks. He had fidgeted with his bit of string till there was not an inch of it free from the most complicated and elaborate knots.

"I assure you," he resumed at last, "that at that very moment the whole mystery was, to me, as clear as daylight. I only marvelled how his Honour could waste his time and mine by putting what he thought were searching questions to the accused relating to his past. Francis Smethurst, who had quite shaken off his somnolence, spoke with a curious nasal twang, and with an almost imperceptible soupçon of foreign accent. He calmly denied Kershaw's

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version of his past; declared that he had never been called Barker, and had certainly never been mixed up in any murder case thirty years ago.

"'But you knew this man Kershaw,' persisted his Honour, 'since you wrote to him?'

"'Pardon me, your Honour,' said the accused quietly, 'I have never, to my knowledge, seen this man Kershaw, and I can swear that I never wrote to him.'

"'Never wrote to him?' retorted his Honour warningly. 'That is a strange assertion to make when I have two of your letters to him in my hands at the present moment.'

"'I never wrote those letters, your Honour,' persisted the accused quietly, 'they are not in my handwriting.'

"'Which we can easily prove,' came in Sir Arthur Inglewood's drawly tones, as he handed up a packet to his Honour; 'here are a number of letters written by my client since he has landed in this country, and some of which were written under my very eyes.'

"As Sir Arthur Inglewood had said, this could be easily proved, and the prisoner, at his Honour's request, scribbled a few lines, together with his signature, several times upon a sheet of note-paper. It was easy to read upon the magistrate's astounded countenance, that there was not the slightest similarity in the two handwritings.

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"A fresh mystery had cropped up. Who, then, had made the assignation with William Kershaw at Fenchurch Street railway station? The prisoner gave a fairly satisfactory account of the employment of his time since his landing in England.

"'I came over on the *Tsarskoe Selo*,' he said, 'a yacht belonging to a friend of mine. When we arrived at the mouth of the Thames there was such a dense fog that it was twenty-four hours before it was thought safe for me to land. My friend, who is a Russian, would not land at all; he was regularly frightened at this land of fogs. He was going on to Madeira immediately.

"'I actually landed on Tuesday, the 10th, and took a train at once for town. I did see to my luggage and a cab, as the porter and driver told your Honour; then I tried to find my way to a refreshment-room, where I could get a glass of wine. I drifted into the waiting-room, and there I was accosted by a shabbily dressed individual, who began telling me a piteous tale. Who he was I do not know. He *said* he was an old soldier who had served his country faithfully, and then been left to starve. He begged of me to accompany him to his lodgings, where I could see his wife and starving children, and verify the truth and piteousness of his tale.

"'Well, your Honour,' added the prisoner

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with noble frankness, 'it was my first day in the old country. I had come back after thirty years with my pockets full of gold, and this was the first sad tale I had heard; but I am a business man, and did not want to be exactly "done" in the eye. I followed my man through the fog, out into the streets. He walked silently by my side for a time. I had not a notion where I was.

"'Suddenly I turned to him with some question, and realized in a moment that my gentleman had given me the slip. Finding, probably, that I would not part with my money till I *had* seen the starving wife and children, he left me to my fate, and went in search of more willing bait.

"'The place where I found myself was dismal and deserted. I could see no trace of cab or omnibus. I retraced my steps and tried to find my way back to the station, only to find myself in worse and more deserted neighbourhoods. I became hopelessly lost and fogged. I don't wonder that two and a half hours elapsed while I thus wandered on in the dark and deserted streets; my sole astonishment is that I ever found the station at all that night, or rather close to it a policeman, who showed me the way.'

"'But how do you account for Kershaw knowing all your movements?' still persisted

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his Honour, 'and his knowing the exact date of your arrival in England? How do you account for these two letters, in fact?'

"'I cannot account for it or them, your Honour,' replied the prisoner quietly. 'I have proved to you, have I not, that I never wrote those letters, and that the man—er—Kershaw is his name?—was not murdered by me?'

"'Can you tell me of anyone here or abroad who might have heard of your movements, and of the date of your arrival?'

"'My late employés at Vladivostok, of course, knew of my departure, but none of them could have written these letters, since none of them know a word of English.'

"'Then you can throw no light upon these mysterious letters? You cannot help the police in any way towards the clearing up of this strange affair?'

"'The affair is as mysterious to me as to your Honour, and to the police of this country.'

"Francis Smethurst was discharged, of course; there was no semblance of evidence against him sufficient to commit him for trial. The two overwhelming points of his defence which had completely routed the prosecution were, firstly, the proof that he had never written the letters making the assignation, and secondly, the fact that the man supposed to have been

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murdered on the 10th was seen to be alive and well on the 16th. But then, who in the world was the mysterious individual who had apprised Kershaw of the movements of Smethurst, the millionaire ? ”

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CHAPTER III

HIS DEDUCTION

THE man in the corner cocked his funny thin head on one side and looked at Polly; then he took up his beloved bit of string and deliberately untied every knot he had made in it. When it was quite smooth he laid it out upon the table.

"I will take you, if you like, point by point along the line of reasoning which I followed myself, and which will inevitably lead you, as it led me, to the only possible solution of the mystery.

"First take this point," he said with nervous restlessness, once more taking up his bit of string, and forming with each point raised a series of knots which would have shamed a navigating instructor, "obviously it was *impossible* for Kershaw not to have been acquainted with Smethurst, since he was fully apprised of the latter's arrival in England by two letters. Now it was clear to me from the first that *no one* could have written those two letters except Smethurst. You will argue that those letters were proved

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not to have been written by the man in the dock. Exactly. Remember, Kershaw was a careless man—he had lost both envelopes. To him they were insignificant. Now it was never *disproved* that those letters were written by Smethurst."

"But——" suggested Polly.

"Wait a minute," he interrupted, while knot number two appeared upon the scene, "it was proved that six days after the murder, William Kershaw was alive, and visited the Torriani Hotel, where already he was known, and where he conveniently left a pocket-book behind, so that there should be no mistake as to his identity; but it was never questioned where Mr. Francis Smethurst, the millionaire, happened to spend that very same afternoon."

"Surely, you don't mean——?" gasped the girl.

"One moment, please," he added triumphantly. "How did it come about that the landlord of the Torriani Hotel was brought into court at all? How did Sir Arthur Inglewood, or rather his client, know that William Kershaw had on those two memorable occasions visited the hotel, and that its landlord could bring such convincing evidence forward that would for ever exonerate the millionaire from the imputation of murder?"

"Surely," I argued, "the usual means, the police——"

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"The police had kept the whole affair very dark until the arrest at the Hotel Cecil. They did not put into the papers the usual: 'If anyone happens to know of the whereabouts, etc. etc.' Had the landlord of that hotel heard of the disappearance of Kershaw through the usual channels, he would have put himself in communication with the police. Sir Arthur Inglewood produced him. How did Sir Arthur Inglewood come on his track?"

"Surely, you don't mean——?"

"Point number four," he resumed imperturbably, "Mrs. Kershaw was never requested to produce a specimen of her husband's handwriting. Why? Because the police, clever as you say they are, never started on the right tack. They believed William Kershaw to have been murdered; they looked for William Kershaw.

"On December the 31st, what was presumed to be the body of William Kershaw was found by two lightermen: I have shown you a photograph of the place where it was found. Dark and deserted it is in all conscience, is it not? Just the place where a bully and a coward would decoy an unsuspecting stranger, murder him first, then rob him of his valuables, his papers, his very identity, and leave him there to rot. The body was found in a disused barge which had been moored some time against the wall,

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at the foot of these steps. It was in the last stages of decomposition, and, of course, could not be identified; but the police would have it that it was the body of William Kershaw.

"It never entered their heads that it was the body of *Francis Smethurst, and that William Kershaw was his murderer.*

"Ah! it was cleverly, artistically conceived! Kershaw is a genius. Think of it all! His disguise! Kershaw had a shaggy beard, hair, and moustache. He shaved up to his very eyebrows! No wonder that even his wife did not recognize him across the court; and remember she never saw much of his face while he stood in the dock. Kershaw was shabby, slouchy, he stooped. Smethurst, the millionaire, might have served in the Prussian army.

"Then that lovely trait about going to revisit the Torriani Hotel. Just a few days' grace, in order to purchase moustache and beard and wig, exactly similar to what he had himself shaved off. Making up to look like himself! Splendid! Then leaving the pocket-book behind! He! he! he! Kershaw was not murdered! Of course not. He called at the Torriani Hotel six days after the murder, whilst Mr. Smethurst, the millionaire, hobnobbed in the park with duchesses! Hang such a man! Fie!"

He fumbled for his hat. With nervous, trembling fingers he held it deferentially in his

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hand whilst he rose from the table. Polly watched him as he strode up to the desk, and paid twopence for his glass of milk and his bun. Soon he disappeared through the shop, whilst she still found herself hopelessly bewildered, with a number of snap-shot photographs before her, still staring at a long piece of string, smothered from end to end in a series of knots, as bewildering, as irritating, as puzzling as the man who had lately sat in the corner.

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CHAPTER IV

THE ROBBERY IN PHILLIMORE TERRACE

WHETHER Miss Polly Burton really did expect to see the man in the corner that Saturday afternoon, 'twere difficult to say; certain it is that when she found her way to the table close by the window and realized that he was not there, she felt conscious of an overwhelming sense of disappointment. And yet during the whole of the week she had, with more pride than wisdom, avoided this particular A.B.C. shop.

"I thought you would not keep away very long," said a quiet voice close to her ear.

She nearly lost her balance—where in the world had he come from? She certainly had not heard the slightest sound, and yet there he sat, in the corner, like a veritable Jack-in-the-box, his mild blue eyes staring apologetically at her, his nervous fingers toying with the inevitable bit of string.

The waitress brought him his glass of milk and a cheese-cake. He ate it in silence, while

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his piece of string lay idly beside him on the table. When he had finished he fumbled in his capacious pockets, and drew out the inevitable pocket-book.

Placing a small photograph before the girl, he said quietly:

"That is the back of the houses in Phillimore Terrace, which overlook Adam and Eve Mews."

She looked at the photograph, then at him, with a kindly look of indulgent expectancy.

"You will notice that the row of back gardens have each an exit into the mews. These mews are built in the shape of a capital F. The photograph is taken looking straight down the short horizontal line, which ends, as you see, in a *cul-de-sac*. The bottom of the vertical line turns into Phillimore Terrace, and the end of the upper long horizontal line into High Street, Kensington. Now, on that particular night, or rather early morning, of January 15th, Constable D 21, having turned into the mews from Phillimore Terrace, stood for a moment at the angle formed by the long vertical artery of the mews and the short horizontal one which, as I observed before, looks on to the back gardens of the Terrace houses, and ends in a *cul-de-sac*.

"How long D 21 stood at that particular corner he could not exactly say, but he thinks it must have been three or four minutes before he noticed a suspicious-looking individual sham-

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bling along under the shadow of the garden walls. He was working his way cautiously in the direction of the *cul-de-sac*, and D 21, also keeping well within the shadow, went noiselessly after him.

"He had almost overtaken him—was, in fact, not more than thirty yards from him—when from out of one of the two end houses—No. 22, Phillimore Terrace, in fact—a man, in nothing but his night-shirt, rushed out excitedly, and, before D 21 had time to intervene, literally threw himself upon the suspected individual, rolling over and over with him on the hard cobble-stones, and frantically shrieking, 'Thief! Thief! Police!'

"It was some time before the constable succeeded in rescuing the tramp from the excited grip of his assailant, and several minutes before he could make himself heard.

"'There! there! that'll do!' he managed to say at last, as he gave the man in the shirt a vigorous shove, which silenced him for the moment. 'Leave the man alone now, you mustn't make that noise this time o' night, wakin' up all the folks.' The unfortunate tramp, who in the meanwhile had managed to get on to his feet again, made no attempt to get away; probably he thought he would stand but a poor chance. But the man in the shirt had partly recovered his power of speech, and

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was now blurting out jerky, naif intelligible sentences :

"'I have been robbed—robbed—I—that is —my master—Mr. Knopf. The desk is open—the diamonds gone—all in my charge—and—now they are stolen ! That's the thief—I'll swear—I heard him—not three minutes ago—I rushed downstairs—the door into the garden was smashed—I ran across the garden—he was sneaking about here still—Thief ! Thief ! Police ! Diamonds ! Constable, don't let him go—I'll make you responsible if you let him go——'

"'Now then—that'll do !' admonished D 21 as soon as he could get a word in, 'stop that row, will you ?'

"The man in the shirt was gradually recovering from his excitement.

"'Can I give this man in charge ?' he asked.

"'What for ?'

"'Burglary and housebreaking. I heard him, I tell you. He must have Mr. Knopf's diamonds about him at this moment.'

"'Where is Mr. Knopf ?'

"'Out of town,' groaned the man in the shirt. 'He went to Brighton last night, and left me in charge, and now this thief has been and——'

"The tramp shrugged his shoulders and suddenly, without a word, he quietly began taking off his coat and waistcoat. These he handed across to the constable. Eagerly the

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man in the shirt fell on them, and turned the ragged pockets inside out. From one of the windows a hilarious voice made some facetious remark, as the tramp with equal solemnity began divesting himself of his nether garments.

"'Now then, stop that nonsense,' pronounced D 21 severely, 'what were you doing here this time o' night, anyway?'

"'The streets o' London is free to the public, ain't they?' queried the tramp.

"'This don't lead nowhere, my man.'

"'Then I've lost my way, that's all,' growled the man surlily, 'and p'raps you'll let me get along now.'

"By this time a couple of constables had appeared upon the scene. D 21 had no intention of losing sight of his friend the tramp, and the man in the shirt had again made a dash for the latter's collar at the bare idea that he should be allowed to 'get along.'

"I think D 21 was alive to the humour of the situation. He suggested that Robertson (the man in the night-shirt) should go in and get some clothes on, whilst he himself would wait for the inspector and the detective, whom D 15 would send round from the station immediately.

"Poor Robertson's teeth were chattering with cold. He had a violent fit of sneezing as D 21 hurried him into the house. The latter, with another constable, remained to watch the bur-

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glared premises both back and front, and D 15 took the wretched tramp to the station with a view to sending an inspector and a detective round immediately.

"When the two latter gentlemen arrived at No. 22, Phillimore Terrace, they found poor old Robertson in bed, shivering, and still quite blue. He had got himself a hot drink, but his eyes were streaming and his voice was terribly husky. D 21 had stationed himself in the dining-room, where Robertson had pointed the desk out to him, with its broken lock and scattered contents.

"Robertson, between his sneezes, gave what account he could of the events which happened immediately before the robbery.

"His master, Mr. Ferdinand Knopf, he said, was a diamond merchant, and a bachelor. He himself had been in Mr. Knopf's employ over fifteen years, and was his only indoor servant. A charwoman came every day to do the housework.

"Last night Mr. Knopf dined at the house of Mr. Shipman, at No. 26, lower down. Mr. Shipman is the great jeweller who has his place of business in South Audley Street. By the last post there came a letter with the Brighton postmark, and marked 'urgent,' for Mr. Knopf, and he (Robertson) was just wondering if he should run over to No. 26 with it, when his master returned. He gave one glance at the

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contents of the letter, asked for his A.B.C. Railway Guide, and ordered him (Robertson) to pack his bag at once and fetch him a cab.

"'I guessed what it was,' continued Robertson after another violent fit of sneezing. 'Mr. Knopf has a brother, Mr. Emile Knopf, to whom he is very much attached, and who is a great invalid. He generally goes about from one seaside place to another. He is now at Brighton, and has recently been very ill.

"'If you will take the trouble to go downstairs I think you will still find the letter lying on the hall table.

"'I read it after Mr. Knopf left; it was not from his brother, but from a gentleman who signed himself J. Collins, M.D. I don't remember the exact words, but, of course, you'll be able to read the letter—Mr. J. Collins said he had been called in very suddenly to see Mr. Emile Knopf, who, he added, had not many hours to live, and had begged of the doctor to communicate at once with his brother in London.

"'Before leaving, Mr. Knopf warned me that there were some valuables in his desk—diamonds mostly, and told me to be particularly careful about locking up the house. He often has left me like this in charge of his premises, and usually there have been diamonds in his desk, for Mr. Knopf has no regular City office, as he is a commercial traveller.'

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"This, briefly, was the gist of the matter which Robertson related to the inspector with many repetitions and persistent volubility.

"The detective and inspector, before returning to the station with their report, thought they would call at No. 26, on Mr. Shipman, the great jeweller.

"You remember, of course," added the man in the corner, dreamily contemplating his bit of string, "the exciting developments of this extraordinary case. Mr. Arthur Shipman is the head of the firm of Shipman and Co., the wealthy jewellers. He is a widower, and lives very quietly by himself in his own old-fashioned way in the small Kensington house, leaving it to his two married sons to keep up the style and swagger befitting the representatives of so wealthy a firm.

"'I have only known Mr. Knopf a very little while,' he explained to the detectives. 'He sold me two or three stones once or twice, I think; but we are both single men, and we have often dined together. Last night he dined with me. He had that afternoon received a very fine consignment of Brazilian diamonds, as he told me, and knowing how beset I am with callers at my business place, he had brought the stones with him, hoping, perhaps, to do a bit of trade over the nuts and wine.

"'I bought £25,000 worth of him,' added the

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jeweller, as if he were speaking of so many farthings, 'and gave him a cheque across the dinner table for that amount. I think we were both pleased with our bargain, and we had a final bottle of '48 port over it together. Mr. Knopf left me at about 9.30, for he knows I go very early to bed, and I took my new stock upstairs with me, and locked it up in the safe. I certainly heard nothing of the noise in the mews last night. I sleep on the second floor, in the front of the house, and this is the first I have heard of poor Mr. Knopf's loss——'

"At this point of his narrative Mr. Shipman very suddenly paused, and his face became very pale. With a hasty word of excuse he unceremoniously left the room, and the detective heard him running quickly upstairs.

"Less than two minutes later Mr. Shipman returned. There was no need for him to speak; both the detective and the inspector guessed the truth in a moment by the look upon his face.

"'The diamonds——!' he gasped. 'I have been robbed.'"

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CHAPTER V

A NIGHT'S ADVENTURE

"NOW I must tell you," continued the man in the corner, "that after I had read the account of the double robbery, which appeared in the early afternoon papers, I set to work and had a good think—yes!" he added with a smile, noting Polly's look at the bit of string, on which he was still at work, "yes! aided by this small adjunct to continued thought—I made notes as to how I should proceed to discover the clever thief, who had carried off a small fortune in a single night. Of course, my methods are not those of a London detective; he has his own way of going to work. The one who was conducting this case questioned the unfortunate jeweller very closely about his servants and his household generally.

"'I have three servants,' explained Mr. Shipman, 'two of whom have been with me for many years; one, the housemaid, is a fairly new comer—she has been here about six months. She came recommended by a friend, and bore an excellent character. She and the parlour-maid room together. The cook, who knew me

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when I was a schoolboy, sleeps alone; all three servants sleep on the floor above. I locked the jewels up in the safe which stands in the dressing-room. My keys and watch I placed, as usual, beside my bed. As a rule, I am a fairly light sleeper.

"'I cannot understand how it could have happened—but—you had better come up and have a look at the safe. The key must have been abstracted from my bedside, the safe opened, and the keys replaced—all while I was fast asleep. Though I had no occasion to look into the safe until just now, I should have discovered my loss before going to business, for I intended to take the diamonds away with me——'

"The detective and the inspector went up to have a look at the safe. The lock had in no way been tampered with—it had been opened with its own key. The detective spoke of chloro-form, but Mr. Shipman declared that when he woke in the morning at about half-past seven there was no smell of chloroform in the room. However, the proceedings of the daring thief certainly pointed to the use of an anæsthetic. An examination of the premises brought to light the fact that the burglar had, as in Mr. Knopf's house, used the glass-panelled door from the garden as a means of entrance, but in this in-stance he had carefully cut out the pane of glass

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the act by Robertson. The facts were simple enough, but the mystery remained as to the individual who had managed to glean the information of the presence of the diamonds in both the houses, and the means which he had adopted to get that information. It was obvious that the thief or thieves knew more about Mr. Knopf's affairs than Mr. Shipman's, since they had known how to use Mr. Emile Knopf's name in order to get his brother out of the way.

"It was now nearly ten o'clock, and the detectives, having taken leave of Mr. Shipman, went back to No. 22, in order to ascertain whether Mr. Knopf had come back; the door was opened by the old charwoman, who said that her master had returned, and was having some breakfast in the dining-room.

"Mr. Ferdinand Knopf was a middle-aged man, with sallow complexion, black hair and beard, of obviously Hebrew extraction. He spoke with a marked foreign accent, but very courteously, to the two officials, who, he begged, would excuse him if he went on with his breakfast.

"'I was fully prepared to hear the bad news,' he explained, 'which my man Robertson told me when I arrived. The letter I got last night was a bogus one; there is no such person as J. Collins, M.D. My brother had never felt better in his life. You will, I am sure, very soon trace the cunning writer of that epistle—

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ah! but I was in a rage, I can tell you, when I got to the Metropole at Brighton, and found that Emile, my brother, had never heard of any Doctor Collins.

"'The last train to town had gone, although I raced back to the station as hard as I could. Poor old Robertson, he has a terrible cold. Ah yes! my loss! it is for me a very serious one; if I had not made that lucky bargain with Mr. Shipman last night I should, perhaps, at this moment be a ruined man.

"'The stones I had yesterday were, firstly, some magnificent Brazilians; these I sold to Mr. Shipman mostly. Then I had some very good Cape diamonds—all gone; and some quite special Parisians, of wonderful work and finish, entrusted to me for sale by a great French house. I tell you, sir, my loss will be nearly £10,000 altogether. I sell on commission, and, of course, have to make good the loss.'

"He was evidently trying to bear up manfully, and as a business man should, under his sad fate. He refused in any way to attach the slightest blame to his old and faithful servant Robertson, who had caught, perhaps, his death of cold in his zeal for his absent master. As for any hint of suspicion falling even remotely upon the man, the very idea appeared to Mr. Knopf absolutely preposterous.

"With regard to the old charwoman, Mr.

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Knopf certainly knew nothing about her, beyond the fact that she had been recommended to him by one of the tradespeople in the neighbourhood, and seemed perfectly honest, respectable, and sober.

"About the tramp Mr. Knopf knew still less, nor could he imagine how he, or in fact anybody else, could possibly know that he happened to have diamonds in his house that night.

"This certainly seemed the great hitch in the case.

"Mr. Ferdinand Knopf, at the instance of the police, later on went to the station and had a look at the suspected tramp. He declared that he had never set eyes on him before.

"Mr. Shipman, on his way home from business in the afternoon, had done likewise, and made a similar statement.

"Brought before the magistrate, the tramp gave but a poor account of himself. He gave a name and address, which latter, of course, proved to be false. After that he absolutely refused to speak. He seemed not to care whether he was kept in custody or not. Very soon even the police realized that, for the present, at any rate, nothing could be got out of the suspected tramp.

"Mr. Francis Howard, the detective, who had charge of the case, though he would not

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admit it even to himself, was at his wits' ends. You must remember that the burglary, through its very simplicity, was an exceedingly mysterious affair. The constable, D 21, who had stood in Adam and Eve Mews, presumably while Mr. Knopf's house was being robbed, had seen no one turn out from the *cul-de-sac* into the main passage of the mews.

"The stables, which immediately faced the back entrance of the Phillimore Terrace houses, were all private ones belonging to residents in the neighbourhood. The coachmen, their families, and all the grooms who slept in the stablings were rigidly watched and questioned. One and all had seen nothing, heard nothing, until Robertson's shrieks had roused them from their sleep.

"As for the letter from Brighton, it was absolutely commonplace, and written upon notepaper which the detective, with Machiavellian cunning, traced to a stationer's shop in West Street. But the trade at that particular shop was a very brisk one; scores of people had bought note-paper there, similar to that on which the supposed doctor had written his tricky letter. The handwriting was cramped, perhaps a disguised one; in any case, except under very exceptional circumstances, it could afford no clue to the identity of the thief. Needless to say, the tramp, when told to write his

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name, wrote a totally different and absolutely uneducated hand.

"Matters stood, however, in the same persistently mysterious state when a small discovery was made, which suggested to Mr. Francis Howard an idea, which, if properly carried out, would, he hoped, inevitably bring the cunning burglar safely within the grasp of the police.

"That was the discovery of a few of Mr. Knopf's diamonds," continued the man in the corner after a slight pause, "evidently trampled into the ground by the thief whilst making his hurried exit through the garden of No. 22, Phillimore Terrace.

"At the end of this garden there is a small studio which had been built by a former owner of the house, and behind it a small piece of waste ground about seven feet square which had once been a rockery, and is still filled with large loose stones, in the shadow of which earwigs and woodlice innumerable have made a happy hunting ground.

"It was Robertson who, two days after the robbery, having need of a large stone, for some household purpose or other, dislodged one from that piece of waste ground, and found a few shining pebbles beneath it. Mr. Knopf took them round to the police-station himself immediately, and identified the stones as some of his Parisian ones.

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"Later on the detective went to view th
place where the find had been made, and ther
conceived the plan upon which he built hi
cherished hopes.

"Acting upon the advice of Mr. Franci
Howard, the police decided to let the anony
mous tramp out of his safe retreat within th
station, and to allow him to wander whither
soever he chose. A good idea, perhaps—th
presumption being that, sooner or later, if th
man was in any way mixed up with the cunning
thieves, he would either rejoin his comrades or
even lead the police to where the remnant of
his hoard lay hidden; needless to say, his foot-
steps were to be literally dogged.

"The wretched tramp, on his discharge, wan-
dered out of the yard, wrapping his thin coat
round his shoulders, for it was a bitterly cold
afternoon. He began operations by turning into
the Town Hall Tavern for a good feed and a
copious drink. Mr. Francis Howard noted that
he seemed to eye every passer-by with suspicion,
but he seemed to enjoy his dinner, and sat some
time over his bottle of wine.

"It was close upon four o'clock when he
left the tavern, and then began for the inde-
fatigable Mr. Howard one of the most weari-
some and uninteresting chases, through the
mazes of the London streets, he ever remembers
to have made. Up Notting Hill, down the

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slums of Notting Dale, along the High Street, beyond Hammersmith, and through Shepherd's Bush did that anonymous tramp lead the unfortunate detective, never hurrying himself, stopping every now and then at a public-house to get a drink, whither Mr. Howard did not always care to follow him.

"In spite of his fatigue, Mr. Francis Howard's hopes rose with every half-hour of this weary tramp. The man was obviously striving to kill time; he seemed to feel no weariness, but walked on and on, perhaps suspecting that he was being followed.

"At last, with a beating heart, though half perished with cold, and with terribly sore feet, the detective began to realize that the tramp was gradually working his way back towards Kensington. It was then close upon eleven o'clock at night; once or twice the man had walked up and down the High Street, from St. Paul's School to Derry and Toms' shops and back again, he had looked down one or two of the side streets and—at last—he turned into Phillimore Terrace. He seemed in no hurry, he even stopped once in the middle of the road, trying to light a pipe, which, as there was a high east wind, took him some considerable time. Then he leisurely sauntered down the street, and turned into Adam and Eve Mews, with Mr. Francis Howard now close at his heels.

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"Acting upon the detective's instructions, there were several men in plain clothes ready to his call in the immediate neighbourhood. Two stood within the shadow of the steps of the Congregational Church at the corner of the mews, others were stationed well within a soft call.

"Hardly, therefore, had the hare turned into the *cul-de-sac* at the back of Phillimore Terrace than, at a slight sound from Mr. Francis Howard, every egress was barred to him, and he was caught like a rat in a trap.

"As soon as the tramp had advanced some thirty yards or so (the whole length of this part of the mews is about one hundred yards) and was lost in the shadow, Mr. Francis Howard directed four or five of his men to proceed cautiously up the mews, whilst the same number were to form a line all along the front of Phillimore Terrace between the mews and the High Street.

"Remember, the back-garden walls threw long and dense shadows, but the silhouette of the man would be clearly outlined if he made any attempt at climbing over them. Mr. Howard felt quite sure that the thief was bent on recovering the stolen goods, which, no doubt, he had hidden in the rear of one of the houses. He would be caught *in flagrante delicto*, and, with a heavy sentence hovering over him, he would probably be induced to name his accomplice.

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Mr. Francis Howard was thoroughly enjoying himself.

"The minutes sped on; absolute silence, in spite of the presence of so many men, reigned in the dark and deserted mews.

"Of course, this night's adventure was never allowed to get into the papers," added the man in the corner with his mild smile. "Had the plan been successful, we should have heard all about it, with a long eulogistic article as to the astuteness of our police; but as it was—well, the tramp sauntered up the mews—and—there he remained for aught Mr. Francis Howard or the other constables could ever explain. The earth or the shadows swallowed him up. No one saw him climb one of the garden walls, no one heard him break open a door; he had retreated within the shadow of the garden walls, and was seen or heard of no more."

"One of the servants in the Phillimore Terrace houses must have belonged to the gang," said Polly with quick decision.

"Ah, yes! but which?" said the man in the corner, making a beautiful knot in his bit of string. "I can assure you that the police left not a stone unturned once more to catch sight of that tramp whom they had had in custody for two days, but not a trace of him could they find, nor of the diamonds, from that day to this."

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CHAPTER VI

ALL HE KNEW

"THE tramp was missing," continued the man in the corner, "and Mr. Francis Howard tried to find the missing tramp. Going round to the front, and seeing the lights at No. 26 still in, he called upon Mr. Shipman. The jeweller had had a few friends to dinner, and was giving them whiskies-and-sodas before saying good night. The servants had just finished washing up, and were waiting to go to bed; neither they nor Mr. Shipman nor his guests had seen or heard anything of the suspicious individual.

"Mr. Francis Howard went on to see Mr. Ferdinand Knopf. This gentleman was having his warm bath, preparatory to going to bed. So Robertson told the detective. However, Mr. Knopf insisted on talking to Mr. Howard through his bath-room door. Mr. Knopf thanked him for all the trouble he was taking, and felt sure that he and Mr. Shipman would soon recover possession of their diamonds, thanks to the persevering detective.

"Ha! he! he!" laughed the man in the

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corner. "Poor Mr. Howard. He persevered—but got no farther; no, nor anyone else, for that matter. Even I might not be able to convict the thieves if I told all I knew to the police.

"Now, follow my reasoning, point by point," he added eagerly.

"Who knew of the presence of the diamonds in the house of Mr. Shipman and Mr. Knopf? Firstly," he said, putting up an ugly clawlike finger, "Mr. Shipman, then Mr. Knopf, then, presumably, the man Robertson."

"And the tramp?" said Polly.

"Leave the tramp alone for the present since he has vanished, and take point number two. Mr. Shipman was drugged. That was pretty obvious; no man under ordinary circumstances would, without waking, have his keys abstracted and then replaced at his own bedside. Mr. Howard suggested that the thief was armed with some anæsthetic; but how did the thief get into Mr. Shipman's room without waking him from his natural sleep? Is it not simpler to suppose that the thief had taken the precaution to drug the jeweller *before* the latter went to bed?"

"But——"

"Wait a moment, and take point number three. Though there was every proof that Mr. Shipman had been in possession of £25,000 worth of goods since Mr. Knopf had a cheque

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from him for that amount, there was no proof that in Mr. Knopf's house there was even an odd stone worth a sovereign.

"And then again," went on the scarecrow, getting more and more excited, "did it ever strike you, or anybody else, that at *no* time, while the tramp was in custody, while all that searching examination was being gone on with, no one ever saw Mr. Knopf and his man Robertson together at the same time?

"Ah!" he continued, whilst suddenly the young girl seemed to see the whole thing as in a vision, "they did not forget a single detail—follow them with me, point by point. Two cunning scoundrels—geniuses they should be called—well provided with some ill-gotten funds—but determined on a grand *coup*. They play at respectability, for six months, say. One is the master, the other the servant; they take a house in the same street as their intended victim, make friends with him, accomplish one or two creditable but very small business transactions, always drawing on the reserve funds, which might even have amounted to a few hundreds — and a bit of credit.

"Then the Brazilian diamonds, and the Parisians—which, remember, were so perfect that they required chemical testing to be detected. The Parisian stones are sold—not in business, of course—in the evening, after dinner

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and a good deal of wine. Mr. Knopf's Brazilians were beautiful; perfect! Mr. Knopf was a well-known diamond merchant.

"Mr. Shipman bought—but with the morning would have come sober sense, the cheque stopped before it could have been presented, the swindler caught. No! those exquisite Parisians were never intended to rest in Mr. Shipman's safe until the morning. That last bottle of '48 port, with the aid of a powerful soporific, ensured that Mr. Shipman would sleep undisturbed during the night.

"Ah! remember all the details, they were so admirable! the letter posted in Brighton by the cunning rogue to himself, the smashed desk, the broken pane of glass in his own house. The man Robertson on the watch, while Knopf himself in ragged clothing found his way into No. 26. If Constable D 21 had not appeared upon the scene that exciting comedy in the early morning would not have been enacted. As it was, in the supposed fight, Mr. Shipman's diamonds passed from the hands of the tramp into those of his accomplice.

"Then, later on, Robertson, ill in bed, while his master was supposed to have returned—by the way, it never struck anybody that no one saw Mr. Knopf come home, though he surely would have driven up in a cab. Then the double part played by one man for the next two days.

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It certainly never struck either the police or the inspector. Remember they only saw Robertson when in bed with a streaming cold. But Knopf had to be got out of gaol as soon as possible; the dual *rôle* could not have been kept up for long. Hence the story of the diamonds found in the garden of No. 22. The cunning rogues guessed that the usual plan would be acted upon, and the suspected thief allowed to visit the scene where his hoard lay hidden.

"It had all been foreseen, and Robertson must have been constantly on the watch. The tramp stopped, mind you, in Phillimore Terrace for some moments, lighting a pipe. The accomplice, then, was fully on the alert; he slipped the bolts of the back garden gate. Five minutes later Knopf was in the house, in a hot bath, getting rid of the disguise of our friend the tramp. Remember that again here the detective did not actually see him.

"The next morning Mr. Knopf, black hair and beard and all, was himself again. The whole trick lay in one simple art, which those two cunning rascals knew to absolute perfection, the art of impersonating one another.

"They are brothers, presumably—twin brothers, I should say."

"But Mr. Knopf——" suggested Polly.

"Well, look in the Trades' Directory; you will see F. Knopf & Co., diamond merchants, of

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some City address. Ask about the firm among the trade; you will hear that it is firmly established on a sound financial basis. He! he! he! and it deserves to be," added the man in the corner, as, calling for the waitress, he received his ticket, and taking up his shabby hat, took himself and his bit of string rapidly out of the room.

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CHAPTER VII

THE YORK MYSTERY

THE man in the corner looked quite cheerful that morning; he had had two glasses of milk and had even gone to the extravagance of an extra cheese-cake. Polly knew that he was itching to talk police and murders, for he cast furtive glances at her from time to time, produced a bit of string, tied and untied it into scores of complicated knots, and finally, bringing out his pocket-book, he placed two or three photographs before her.

"Do you know who that is?" he asked, pointing to one of these.

The girl looked at the face on the picture. It was that of a woman, not exactly pretty, but very gentle and childlike, with a strange pathetic look in the large eyes which was wonderfully appealing.

"That was Lady Arthur Skelmerton," he said, and in a flash there flitted before Polly's mind the weird and tragic history which had broken this loving woman's heart. Lady Arthur Skelmerton! That name recalled one of the most bewildering,

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most mysterious passages in the annals of undiscovered crimes.

"Yes. It was sad, wasn't it?" he commented, in answer to Polly's thoughts. "Another case which but for idiotic blunders on the part of the police must have stood clear as daylight before the public and satisfied general anxiety. Would you object to my recapitulating its preliminary details?"

She said nothing, so he continued without waiting further for a reply.

"It all occurred during the York racing week, a time which brings to the quiet cathedral city its quota of shady characters, who congregate wherever money and wits happen to fly away from their owners. Lord Arthur Skelmerton, a very well-known figure in London society and in racing circles, had rented one of the fine houses which overlook the racecourse. He had entered Peppercorn, by St. Armand—Notre Dame, for the Great Ebor Handicap. Peppercorn was the winner of the Newmarket, and his chances for the Ebor were considered a practical certainty.

"If you have ever been to York you will have noticed the fine houses which have their drive and front entrances in the road called 'The Mount,' and the gardens of which extend as far as the racecourse, commanding a lovely view over the entire track. It was one of these houses,

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called 'The Elms,' which Lord Arthur Skelmerton had rented for the summer.

"Lady Arthur came down some little time before the racing week with her servants—she had no children; but she had many relatives and friends in York, since she was the daughter of old Sir John Etty, the cocoa manufacturer, a rigid Quaker, who, it was generally said, kept the tightest possible hold on his own purse-strings and looked with marked disfavour upon his aristocratic son-in-law's fondness for gaming tables and betting books.

"As a matter of fact, Maud Etty had married the handsome young lieutenant in the ——th Hussars, quite against her father's wishes. But she was an only child, and after a good deal of demur and grumbling, Sir John, who idolized his daughter, gave way to her whim, and a reluctant consent to the marriage was wrung from him.

"But, as a Yorkshireman, he was far too shrewd a man of the world not to know that love played but a very small part in persuading a Duke's son to marry the daughter of a cocoa manufacturer, and as long as he lived he determined that since his daughter was being wed because of her wealth, that wealth should at least secure her own happiness. He refused to give Lady Arthur any capital, which, in spite of the most carefully worded settlements, would

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inevitably, sooner or later, have found its way into the pockets of Lord Arthur's racing friends. But he made his daughter a very handsome allowance, amounting to over £3000 a year, which enabled her to keep up an establishment befitting her new rank.

"A great many of these facts, intimate enough as they are, leaked out, you see, during that period of intense excitement which followed the murder of Charles Lavender, and when the public eye was fixed searchingly upon Lord Arthur Skelmerton, probing all the inner details of his idle, useless life.

"It soon became a matter of common gossip that poor little Lady Arthur continued to worship her handsome husband in spite of his obvious neglect, and not having as yet presented him with an heir, she settled herself down into a life of humble apology for her plebeian existence, atoning for it by condoning all his faults and forgiving all his vices, even to the extent of cloaking them before the prying eyes of Sir John, who was persuaded to look upon his son-in-law as a paragon of all the domestic virtues and a perfect model of a husband.

"Among Lord Arthur Skelmerton's many expensive tastes there was certainly that for horse-flesh and cards. After some successful betting at the beginning of his married life, he had started a racing-stable which it was generally

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believed—as he was very lucky—was a regular source of income to him.

"Pepperoorn, however, after his brilliant performances at Newmarket did not continue to fulfil his master's expectations. His collapse at York was attributed to the hardness of the course and to various other causes, but its immediate effect was to put Lord Arthur Skelmerton in what is popularly called a tight place, for he had backed his horse for all he was worth, and must have stood to lose considerably over £5000 on that one day.

"The collapse of the favourite and the grand victory of King Cole, a rank outsider, on the other hand, had proved a golden harvest for the bookmakers, and all the York hotels were busy with dinners and suppers given by the confraternity of the Turf to celebrate the happy occasion. The next day was Friday, one of few important racing events, after which the brilliant and the shady throng which had flocked into the venerable city for the week would fly to more congenial climes, and leave it, with its fine old Minster and its ancient walls, as sleepy, as quiet as before.

"Lord Arthur Skelmerton also intended to leave York on the Saturday, and on the Friday night he gave a farewell bachelor dinner party at 'The Elms,' at which Lady Arthur did not appear. After dinner the gentlemen settled

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down to bridge, with pretty stiff points, you may be sure. It had just struck eleven at the Minster Tower, when constables McNaught and Murphy, who were patrolling the racecourse, were startled by loud cries of 'murder' and 'police.'

"Quickly ascertaining whence these cries proceeded, they hurried on at a gallop, and came up -quite close to the boundary of Lord Arthur Skelmerton's grounds—upon a group of three men, two of whom seemed to be wrestling vigorously with one another, whilst the third was lying face downwards on the ground. As soon as the constables drew near, one of the wrestlers shouted more vigorously, and with a certain tone of authority:

"'Here, you fellows, hurry up, sharp; the brute is giving me the slip!'

"But the brute did not seem inclined to do anything of the sort; he certainly extricated himself with a violent jerk from his assailant's grasp, but made no attempt to run away. The constables had quickly dismounted, whilst he who had shouted for help originally added more quietly:

"'My name is Skelmerton. This is the boundary of my property. I was smoking a cigar at the pavilion over there with a friend when I heard loud voices, followed by a cry and a groan. I hurried down the steps, and saw this poor fellow lying on the ground, with a knife

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sticking between his shoulder-blades, and his murderer,' he added, pointing to the man who stood quietly by with Constable McNaught's firm grip upon his shoulder, 'still stooping over the body of his victim. I was too late, I fear, to save the latter, but just in time to grapple with the assassin——"

"'It's a lie!' here interrupted the man hoarsely. 'I didn't do it, constable; I swear I didn't do it. I saw him fall—I was coming along a couple of hundred yards away, and I tried to see if the poor fellow was dead. I swear I didn't do it.'

"'You'll have to explain that to the inspector presently, my man,' was Constable McNaught's quiet comment, and, still vigorously protesting his innocence, the accused allowed himself to be led away, and the body was conveyed to the station, pending fuller identification.

"The next morning the papers were full of the tragedy; a column and a half of the *York Herald* was devoted to an account of Lord Arthur Skelmerton's plucky capture of the assassin. The latter had continued to declare his innocence, but had remarked, it appears, with grim humour, that he quite saw he was in a tight place, out of which, however, he would find it easy to extricate himself. He had stated to the police that the deceased's name was Charles Lavender, a well-known bookmaker, which fact was soon verified,

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for many of the murdered man's 'pals' were still in the city.

"So far the most pushing of newspaper reporters had been unable to glean further information from the police; no one doubted, however, but that the man in charge, who gave his name as George Higgins, had killed the bookmaker for purposes of robbery. The inquest had been fixed for the Tuesday after the murder.

"Lord Arthur had been obliged to stay in York a few days, as his evidence would be needed. That fact gave the case, perhaps, a certain amount of interest as far as York and London 'society' were concerned. Charles Lavender, moreover, was well known on the turf; but no bombshell exploding beneath the walls of the ancient cathedral city could more have astonished its inhabitants than the news which, at about five in the afternoon on the day of the inquest, spread like wildfire throughout the town. That news was that the inquest had concluded at three o'clock with a verdict of 'Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown,' and that two hours later the police had arrested Lord Arthur Skelmerton at his private residence, 'The Elms,' and charged him on a warrant with the murder of Charles Lavender, the bookmaker."

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CHAPTER VIII

THE CAPITAL CHARGE

"THE police, it appears, instinctively feeling that some mystery lurked round the death of the bookmaker and his supposed murderer's quiet protestations of innocence, had taken a very considerable amount of trouble in collecting all the evidence they could for the inquest which might throw some light upon Charles Lavender's life, previous to his tragic end. Thus it was that a very large array of witnesses was brought before the coroner, chief among whom was, of course, Lord Arthur Skelmerton.

"The first witnesses called were the two constables, who deposed that, just as the church clocks in the neighbourhood were striking eleven, they had heard the cries for help, had ridden to the spot whence the sounds proceeded, and had found the prisoner in the tight grasp of Lord Arthur Skelmerton, who at once accused the man of murder, and gave him in charge. Both constables gave the same version of the incident, and both were positive as to the time when it occurred.

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"Medical evidence went to prove that the deceased had been stabbed from behind between the shoulder-blades whilst he was walking, that the wound was inflicted by a large hunting knife, which was produced, and which had been left sticking in the wound.

"Lord Arthur Skelmerton was then called and substantially repeated what he had already told the constables. He stated, namely, that on the night in question he had some gentlemen friends to dinner, and afterwards bridge was played. He himself was not playing much, and at a few minutes before eleven he strolled out with a cigar as far as the pavilion at the end of his garden; he then heard the voices, the cry and the groan previously described by him, and managed to hold the murderer down until the arrival of the constables.

"At this point the police proposed to call a witness, James Terry by name and a bookmaker by profession, who had been chiefly instrumental in identifying the deceased, a 'pal' of his. It was his evidence which first introduced that element of sensation into the case which culminated in the wildly exciting arrest of a Duke's son upon a capital charge.

"It appears that on the evening after the Ebor, Terry and Lavender were in the bar of the Black Swan Hotel having drinks.

"'I had done pretty well over Peppercorn's

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fiasco,' he explained, 'but poor old Lavender was very much down in the dumps; he had held only a few very small bets against the favourite, and the rest of the day had been a poor one with him. I asked him if he had any bets with the owner of Peppercorn, and he told me that he only held one for less than £500.

"'I laughed and said that if he held one for £5000 it would make no difference, as from what I had heard from the other fellows, Lord Arthur Skelmerton must be about stumped. Lavender seemed terribly put out at this, and swore he would get that £500 out of Lord Arthur, if no one else got another penny from him.

"'It's the only money I've made to-day,' he says to me. 'I mean to get it.'

"'You won't,' I says.

"'I will,' he says.

"'You will have to look pretty sharp about it then,' I says, 'for every one will be wanting to get something, and first come first served.'

"'Oh! He'll serve me right enough, never you mind!' says Lavender to me with a laugh. 'If he don't pay up willingly, I've got that in my pocket which will make him sit up and open my lady's eyes and Sir John Etty's too about their precious noble lord.'

"'Then he seemed to think he had gone too far, and wouldn't say anything more to me about that affair. I saw him on the course

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the next day. I asked him if he had got his £500. He said: "No, but I shall get it to-day."'

"Lord Arthur Skelmerton, after having given his own evidence, had left the court; it was therefore impossible to know how he would take this account, which threw so serious a light upon an association with the dead man, of which he himself had said nothing.

"Nothing could shake James Terry's account of the facts he had placed before the jury, and when the police informed the coroner that they proposed to place George Higgins himself in the witness-box, as his evidence would prove, as it were, a complement and corollary of that of Terry, the jury very eagerly assented.

"If James Terry, the bookmaker, loud, florid, vulgar, was an unprepossessing individual, certainly George Higgins, who was still under the accusation of murder, was ten thousand times more so.

"None too clean, slouchy, obsequious yet insolent, he was the very personification of the cad who haunts the racecourse and who lives not so much by his own wits as by the lack of them in others. He described himself as a turf commission agent, whatever that may be.

"He stated that at about six o'clock on the Friday afternoon, when the racecourse was still full of people, all hurrying after the day's excitements, he himself happened to be standing close to the hedge which marks the boundary of Lord

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Arthur Skelmerton's grounds. There is a pavilion there at the end of the garden, he explained, on slightly elevated ground, and he could hear and see a group of ladies and gentlemen having tea. Some steps lead down a little to the left of the garden on to the course, and presently he noticed at the bottom of these steps Lord Arthur Skelmerton and Charles Lavender standing talking together. He knew both gentlemen by sight, but he could not see them very well as they were both partly hidden by the hedge. He was quite sure that the gentlemen had not seen him, and he could not help overhearing some of their conversation.

"'That's my last word, Lavender,' Lord Arthur was saying very quietly. 'I haven't got the money and I can't pay you now. You'll have to wait.'

"'Wait? I can't wait,' said old Lavender in reply. 'I've got my engagements to meet, same as you. I'm not going to risk being posted up as a defaulter while you hold £500 of my money. You'd better give it me now or——'

"But Lord Arthur interrupted him very quietly, and said:

"'Yes, my good man .... or?'

"'Or I'll let Sir John have a good look at that little bill I had of yours a couple of years ago. If you'll remember, my lord, it has got at the bottom of it Sir John's signature in *your*

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handwriting. Perhaps Sir John, or perhaps my lady, would pay me something for that little bill. If not, the police can have a squint at it. I've held my tongue long enough, and——'

"'Look here, Lavender,' said Lord Arthur, 'do you know what this little game of yours is called in law?'

"'Yes, and I don't care,' says Lavender. 'If I don't have that £500 I am a ruined man. If you ruin me I'll do for you, and we shall be quits. That's my last word.'

"He was talking very loudly, and I thought some of Lord Arthur's friends up in the pavilion must have heard. He thought so, too, I think for he said quickly:

"'If you don't hold your confounded tongue, I'll give you in charge for blackmail this instant.'

"'You wouldn't dare,' says Lavender, and he began to laugh. But just then a lady from the top of the steps said: 'Your tea is getting cold,' and Lord Arthur turned to go; but just before he went Lavender says to him: 'I'll come back to-night. You'll have the money then.'

"George Higgins, it appears, after he had heard this interesting conversation, pondered as to whether he could not turn what he knew into some sort of profit. Being a gentleman who lives entirely by his wits, this type of know-ledge forms his chief source of income. As a pre-

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liminary to future moves, he decided not to
sight of Lavender for the rest of the day.

"'Lavender went and had dinner at The I
Swan,' explained Mr. George Higgins, 'and I,
I had had a bite myself, waited outside till I
him come out. At about ten o'clock I was
warded for my trouble. He told the hall po
to get him a fly and he jumped into it. I c
not hear what direction he gave the driver,
the fly certainly drove off towards the racecou

"'Now, I was interested in this little aff
continued the witness, 'and I couldn't affor
fly. I started to run. Of course, I couldn't k
up with it, but I thought I knew which
my gentleman had gone. I made straight
the racecourse, and for the hedge at the bott
of Lord Arthur Skelmerton's grounds.

"'It was rather a dark night and there
a slight drizzle. I couldn't see more than ab
a hundred yards before me. All at once
seemed to me as if I heard Lavender's vo
talking loudly in the distance. I hurried f
ward, and suddenly saw a group of two figu
—mere blurs in the darkness—for one instant,
a distance of about fifty yards from where I w

"'The next moment one figure had fall
forward and the other had disappeared. I r
to the spot, only to find the body of the murder
man lying on the ground. I stooped to s
if I could be of any use to him, and immediate

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I was collared from behind by Lord Arthur himself.'

"You may imagine," said the man in the corner, "how keen was the excitement of that moment in court. Coroner and jury alike literally hung breathless on every word that shabby, vulgar individual uttered. You see, by itself his evidence would have been worth very little, but coming on the top of that given by James Terry, its significance—more, its truth—had become glaringly apparent. Closely cross-examined, he adhered strictly to his statement; and having finished his evidence, George Higgins remained in charge of the constables, and the next witness of importance was called up.

"This was Mr. Chipps, the senior footman in the employment of Lord Arthur Skelmerton. He deposed that at about 10.30 on the Friday evening a 'party' drove up to 'The Elms' in a fly, and asked to see Lord Arthur. On being told that his lordship had company he seemed terribly put out.

"'I hasked the party to give me 'is card,' continued Mr. Chipps, 'as I didn't know, perhaps, that 'is lordship might wish to see 'im, but I kept 'im standing at the 'all door, as I didn't altogether like his looks. I took the card in. His lordship and the gentlemen was playin' cards in the smoking-room, and as soon as I

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could do so without disturbing 'is lordship, I give him the party's card.'

"'What name was there on the card?' here interrupted the coroner.

"'I couldn't say now, sir,' replied Mr. Chipps; 'I don't really remember. It was a name I had never seen before. But I see so many visiting cards one way and the other in 'is lordship's 'all that I can't remember all the names.'

"'Then, after a few minutes' waiting, you gave his lordship the card? What happened then?'

"''Is lordship didn't seem at all pleased,' said Mr. Chipps with much guarded dignity; 'but finally he said: "Show him into the library, Chipps, I'll see him," and he got up from the card table, saying to the gentlemen: "Go on without me; I'll be back in a minute or two."

"'I was about to open the door for 'is lordship when my lady came into the room, and then his lordship suddenly changed his mind like, and said to me: "Tell that man I'm busy and can't see him," and 'e sat down again at the card table. I went back to the 'all, and told the party 'is lordship wouldn't see 'im. 'E said: "Oh! it doesn't matter," and went away quite quiet like.'

"'Do you recollect at all at what time that was?' asked one of the jury.

"'Yes, sir, while I was waiting to speak to 'is

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lordship I looked at the clock, sir ; it was twenty past ten, sir.'

"There was one more significant fact in connection with the case, which tended still more to excite the curiosity of the public at the time, and still further to bewilder the police later on, and that fact was mentioned by Chipps in his evidence. The knife, namely, with which Charles Lavender had been stabbed, and which, remember, had been left in the wound, was now produced in court. After a little hesitation Chipps identified it as the property of his master, Lord Arthur Skelmerton.

"Can you wonder, then, that the jury absolutely refused to bring in a verdict against George Higgins? There was really, beyond Lord Arthur Skelmerton's testimony, not one particle of evidence against him, whilst, as the day wore on and witness after witness was called up, suspicion ripened in the minds of all those present that the murderer could be no other than Lord Arthur Skelmerton himself.

"The knife was, of course, the strongest piece of circumstantial evidence, and no doubt the police hoped to collect a great deal more now that they held a clue in their hands. Directly after the verdict, therefore, which was guardedly directed against some person unknown, the police obtained a warrant and later on arrested Lord Artbur in his own house."

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"The sensation, of course, was tremer
Hours before he was brought up befor
magistrate the approach to the court
thronged. His friends, mostly ladies, we
eager, you see, to watch the dashing society
in so terrible a position. There was univ
sympathy for Lady Arthur, who was in a
precarious state of health. Her worship o
worthless husband was well known; small wo
that his final and awful misdeed had practi
broken her heart. The latest bulletin issued
after his arrest stated that her ladyship was
expected to live. She was then in a comatose
dition, and all hope had perforce to be abando

"At last the prisoner was brought in.
looked very pale, perhaps, but otherwise k
up the bearing of a high-bred gentleman.
was accompanied by his solicitor, Sir Marmadu
Ingersoll, who was evidently talking to him
quiet, reassuring tones.

"Mr. Buchanan prosecuted for the Treasu
and certainly his indictment was terrific. A
cording to him but one decision could be arriv
at, namely, that the accused in the dock ha
in a moment of passion, and perhaps of fea
killed the blackmailer who threatened him wi
disclosures which might for ever have ruine
him socially, and, having committed the dee
and fearing its consequences, probably realizin
that the patrolling constables might catch sigh

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of his retreating figure, he had availed himself of George Higgins's presence on the spot to loudly accuse him of the murder.

"Having concluded his able speech, Mr. Buchanan called his witnesses, and the evidence, which on second hearing seemed more damning than ever, was all gone through again.

"Sir Marmaduke had no question to ask of the witnesses for the prosecution; he stared at them placidly through his gold-rimmed spectacles. Then he was ready to call his own for the defence. Colonel McIntosh, R.A., was the first. He was present at the bachelors' party given by Lord Arthur the night of the murder. His evidence tended at first to corroborate that of Chipps the footman with regard to Lord Arthur's orders to show the visitor into the library, and his counter-order as soon as his wife came into the room.

"'Did you not think it strange, Colonel?' asked Mr. Buchanan, 'that Lord Arthur should so suddenly have changed his mind about seeing his visitor?'

"'Well, not exactly strange,' said the Colonel, a fine, manly, soldierly figure who looked curiously out of his element in the witness-box. 'I don't think that it is a very rare occurrence for racing men to have certain acquaintances whom they would not wish their wives to know anything about.'

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"'Then it did not strike you that Lord Arthur Skelmerton had some reason for not wishing his wife to know of that particular visitor's presence in his house?'

"'I don't think that I gave the matter the slightest serious consideration,' was the Colonel's guarded reply.

"Mr. Buchanan did not press the point, and allowed the witness to conclude his statements.

"'I had finished my turn at bridge,' he said, 'and went out into the garden to smoke a cigar. Lord Arthur Skelmerton joined me a few minutes later, and we were sitting in the pavilion when I heard a loud and, as I thought, threatening voice from the other side of the hedge.

"'I did not catch the words, but Lord Arthur said to me: "There seems to be a row down there. I'll go and have a look and see what it is." I tried to dissuade him, and certainly made no attempt to follow him, but not more than half a minute could have elapsed before I heard a cry and a groan, then Lord Arthur's footsteps hurrying down the wooden stairs which lead on to the racecourse.'

"You may imagine," said the man in the corner, "what severe cross-examination the gallant Colonel had to undergo in order that his assertions might in some way be shaken by the prosecution, but with military precision

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and frigid calm he repeated his important statements amidst a general silence, through which you could have heard the proverbial pin.

"He had heard the threatening voice *while* sitting with Lord Arthur Skelmerton; then came the cry and groan, and, *after that*, Lord Arthur's steps down the stairs. He himself thought of following to see what had happened, but it was a very dark night and he did not know the grounds very well. While trying to find his way to the garden steps he heard Lord Arthur's cry for help, the tramp of the patrolling constables' horses, and subsequently the whole scene between Lord Arthur, the man Higgins, and the constables. When he finally found his way to the stairs, Lord Arthur was returning in order to send a groom for police assistance.

"The witness stuck to his points as he had to his guns at Beckfontein a year ago; nothing could shake him, and Sir Marmaduke looked triumphantly across at his opposing colleague.

"With the gallant Colonel's statements the edifice of the prosecution certainly began to collapse. You see, there was not a particle of evidence to show that the accused had met and spoken to the deceased after the latter's visit at the front door of 'The Elms.' He told Chipps that he wouldn't see the visitor, and Chipps went into the hall directly and showed Lavender out the way he came. No assignation could have been

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