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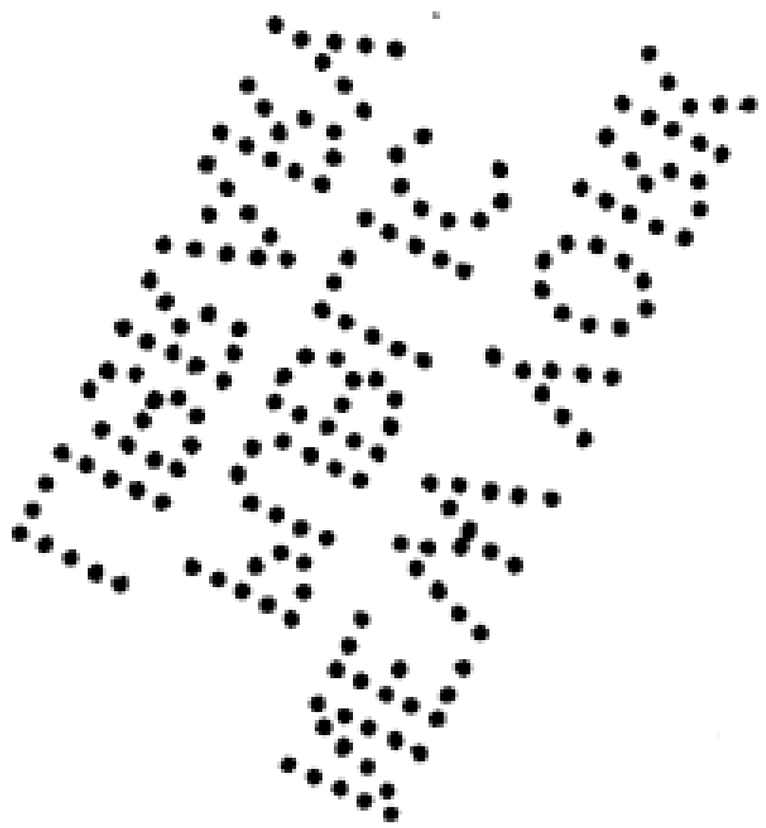

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The Marathon Mystery

A STORY OF MANHATTAN

BY

BURTON E. STEVENSON

AUTHOR OF "THE HOLLADAY CASE," "CADETS OF GASCONY," ETC.

With Five Scenes in Colour

BY ELIOT KEEN

NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1904

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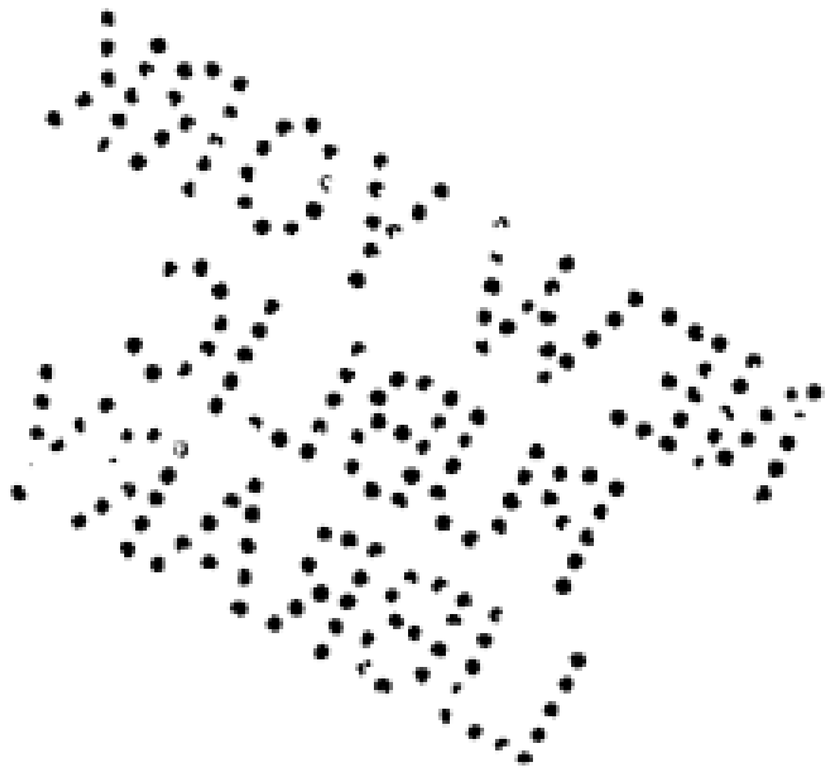

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SCENES IN COLOUR

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PART I

THE TRAGEDY IN SUITE FOURTEEN

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THE MARATHON MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

A Call in the Night

A SUDDEN gust of wind wrenched the door from Godfrey's grasp and slammed it with a bang that echoed through the building.

"Anything doing?" he asked, as he flapped the rain from his coat.

Simmonds, the grizzled veteran of the Central Office, now temporarily in charge of the devious business of the "Tenderloin," shook his head despondently.

"Not a thing. Only," he added, his eyes gleaming suddenly with appreciation, "you were right about that Delanne abduction case. It was all a faked-up story on the mother's part. She confessed this evening."

"I thought she would if you kept at her," said Godfrey, sitting down with a quick nod of satisfaction. "She hasn't nerve enough to carry through a thing like that—she's too pink-and-white. How does it happen you're alone?"

"Johnston's gone down to Philadelphia to bring back Riggs, the forger. Fleming's got the grip. Bad night, ain't it?"

"Horrible!" agreed Godfrey. "Listen to that, now."

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A gust of extra violence howled down the street, rattling the windows, shrieking around the corners, tearing down signs, and doing such other damage as lay in its power.

There was a certain similarity in the faces of the two men, especially in the expression of the eyes and mouth. Age, however, had given to Simmonds's features a trace of stolidity which was wanting in those of his companion. He had been connected with the Central Office for many years—was dean of the force, in fact—and though he had developed no special genius in his dealings with crime, he possessed a matter-of-fact industry and personal courage which had frequently achieved success. In the end, his chief had come to trust him greatly, probably because the brilliant theorists of the force made so many unfortunate mistakes.

Godfrey was a brilliant theorist and something more. He was not so patient as Simmonds, but then he was much younger. He had more imagination, and perhaps his greatest weakness was that he preferred picturesque solutions to commonplace ones. During his three years' connection with the force he had won four or five notable victories—so notable, indeed, that they attracted the attention of the *Record* management. The end of it was that Godfrey resigned his badge and entered the *Record* office as criminal expert, climbing gradually to the position of star reporter. Since then, the *Record* had not waited on the police; indeed, it had been rather the other way around.

It was with Simmonds that Godfrey had long since concluded an alliance offensive and defensive. The

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one supplemented the other—the eagle gave eyes to the mole; the mole gave the eagle the power of working patiently in the dark. Simmonds kept Godfrey in touch with police affairs; Godfrey enabled Simmonds to make a startling arrest now and then. Godfrey got the story, Simmonds got the glory, and both were satisfied. It may be added that, without in the least suspecting it, the mole was considerably under the influence of the eagle. Brains naturally lead industry; besides, the blind must have guidance.

They listened until the gust of wind died away down the street, then Godfrey arose and began to button up his coat.

"Nevertheless," he said, "I've got to be moving on. I can't stay loafing here. I wouldn't have stopped at all but for the chance of seeing you."

"Oh, don't go," protested Simmonds. "I was mighty glad to see you come in. I was feeling a little lonesome. Wait till this squall's over, anyway—and have a smoke."

Godfrey took the proffered cigar and relapsed into his chair.

"I'm only human," he said, as he struck a match, "and, besides, there's a fascination about you, Simmonds—there's always a chance of getting a good story out of you. You know more about the criminal history of New York than any other man living, I think."

Simmonds chuckled complacently.

"I *have* been in on most of the big cases," he agreed.

"Come, now," continued the other persuasively,

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"if I consent to stay, you've got to produce a story. Take those big cases—which do you think was the best of the lot?"

"The best?"

"The most intricate, I mean—the most puzzling—the hardest to solve."

"Well," and Simmonds rolled his cigar reflectively, "the hardest to solve, of course, were those that were never solved at all. There was the shooting of old Benjamin Nathan, in the summer of '70, at his house on West Twenty-third Street, and there was the stabbing of Harvey Burdell. I never had the least doubt that Burdell was killed by Mrs. Cunningham, the woman he'd secretly married. The stabbing was done by a left-handed person, and she was left-handed; but we weren't able to convict her."

"Yes," nodded Godfrey; "and the Nathan case?"

"There wasn't anybody in the house, so far as known, but the two sons," said Simmonds slowly, "and both of them managed to prove an alibi. But I've always thought—— Hello! What's this?"

The door flew back with a crash and a man rushed in—a heavy-set man, with red cheeks, who stopped, gasping, clutching at his throat.

Godfrey had a flask to his lips in an instant.

"Come, brace up!" he commanded sternly, slapping the stranger on the back. "Take a swallow of this—that's it."

"It seems to me I know him," remarked Simmonds, looking at the flushed countenance with contemplative eye.

"O' course you do!" gasped the stranger. "I'm

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Higgins—th' Marathon," and he jerked his head toward the door.

"Oh, yes," said Simmonds. "You're the janitor of the Marathon apartment house, just across the street."

"Well, what's happened at the Marathon?" demanded Godfrey. "No ghosts over there, I hope?"

"There'll be one," answered Higgins, his eyes beginning to pop again. "Oh, my God!"

"Come," repeated Godfrey sharply. "Out with it! What is it?"

"It's murder, that's what it is!" cried Higgins hoarsely. "I seed him, a-layin' on his back——"

He stopped and covered his eyes with his hands. Simmonds had quietly opened a drawer and slipped a revolver into his pocket. Then he took down the receiver from his desk 'phone.

"That you, sergeant?" he called. "This is Simmonds. Send three men over to the Marathon right away."

He put back the receiver with a jerk. Godfrey twirled the janitor sharply around in the direction of the door.

"Go ahead," he commanded, and pushed rather than led him out into the storm.

They made a dash for it through the rain, which was still pouring in torrents. Halfway across the street, they descried a cab standing at the farther curb, and veered to the right to avoid it.

"Here we are," said Higgins, running up a short flight of steps into a lighted vestibule. "It's in soot fourteen—second floor."

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They sprang up the stairs without thinking of the elevator—one flight, two . . . Higgins began to choke again.

A single door stood open, throwing a broad glare of light across the hallway.

"It's there," said Higgins, and stopped to gasp for breath.

The others ran on. For an instant, they stood upon the threshold, gazing into the room—at a huddled form on the floor, with a red stain growing and growing upon its breast—at a woman staring white-faced from the farther corner—a woman, tall, with black hair and black eyes.

Then Godfrey stepped toward her with a quick exclamation of surprise, incredulity, horror.

"Why, it's Miss Croydon!" he said.

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CHAPTER II

A Tangled Web

SIMMONDS had dropped on one knee beside the body. He was up again in an instant.

"No need for an ambulance," he said tersely. "He's dead."

The words seemed to rouse the girl from the ecstasy of horror which possessed her, and she buried her face in her hands, shuddering convulsively. Godfrey caught her as she swayed forward, and led her gently to a chair.

"Perhaps you don't remember me, Miss Croydon," he said. "Godfrey's my name—it was only the other night at Mrs. Delroy's I met you. It was Jack Drysdale who introduced me—you know I'm an old friend of his."

"Yes," she murmured indistinctly, "I remember quite——"

An exclamation from Simmonds interrupted her. He had picked up a small, pearl-handled revolver from the floor in the corner.

"Is this yours, miss?" he asked.

She nodded faintly.

He snapped it open and looked at the chambers. One had been discharged. He sniffed at the barrel, then held it out to Godfrey. The odour of burnt gunpowder was plainly discernible.

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Godfrey's face hardened as he turned to the janitor, who had regained his breath and stood staring on the threshold.

"My friend," he said, "shut the door——"

He stopped as he heard the tramp of heavy feet approaching along the corridor.

"Wait," said Simmonds. "There come my men. I'll be back in a minute."

Godfrey nodded curtly, and waited until Simmonds closed the door after him.

"Now, Miss Croydon," he said, "tell me quickly how it happened. I can't help you unless I know the whole story, and I want to help you."

The gentleness of his voice, the quiet assurance of his manner, the encouraging glance, combined to calm and strengthen her. She sat up, with an effort of self-control, and clasped her hands together in her lap.

"There isn't much to tell," she began, striving to speak steadily. "I came here to—to keep an appointment——" She stopped, her voice dying away, unable to go on.

"With this man?" asked Godfrey. "Who is he?"

"I don't know," and she cast a horrified glance at the huddled form. "I never saw him before."

"Then it wasn't he you came here to meet?"

"No—that is—it may have been——" And again she stopped.

"Miss Croydon," said Godfrey, gently yet clearly, "I can't help you unless you're quite frank with me, and I fear you are going to stand in need of help. Did you kill this man?"

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"No!" she cried. "Oh, no!"

Her face was in her hands again and she was trembling; it was impossible to doubt that she spoke the truth.

"Then who did?"

There was no answer; only a dry, convulsive sobbing.

As Godfrey paused to look at her, the door opened and Simmonds came in. He closed it and snapped the lock.

"There's a policeman outside and one at each landing," he announced. "We'll look things over here, and then search the building. First, let's look at the body."

It was lying partly on its back, partly on its right side, with its legs doubled under it. The face was a bearded one, rough, coarse, and a little bloated—not a prepossessing face under any circumstances, and actively repulsive now, with its gaping mouth and widely staring eyes. It was tanned and seamed by exposure to wind and rain and there was a deep scar across the left temple.

"Between fifty and sixty years of age," remarked Godfrey. "Pouf! smell the whiskey."

Then, looking into the staring eyes, he uttered a sudden exclamation.

"See there, Simmonds, how the right pupil's dilated. Do you know what that means?"

Simmonds shook his head.

"No, I can't say I do."

"It means," said Godfrey, "that somebody hit this fellow a hard blow on the left side of the head and produced a hæmorrhage of the brain."

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Simmonds gave a little low whistle.

"That could hardly have been her," and he nodded toward the girl, who had regained her self-control and was leaning anxiously forward, eyes and ears intent.

"No, of course not. Let's see if he was really shot."

They stripped back the shirt from the breast. A little blood was still welling from a wound just over the heart.

"That's what did the business," observed Simmonds, "and at close range, too; see there," and he pointed to the red marks about the wound. "He wasn't shot from the corner, that's sure. Let's see what he's got in his pockets."

The examination was soon made. There were only a pipe, a knife, a package of cheap tobacco, a handful of loose coins, and an old pocket-book containing a little roll of newspaper clippings and a receipt for a month's rent for suite fourteen made out to "H. Thompson."

"Thompson," repeated Simmonds, "and a lot of clippings. Can you read French, Godfrey?"

"A little," answered Godfrey modestly. "Let me see." He took the clippings and looked at the first one. "'Suresnes, September 16, 1891,'" he read haltingly. "'I have to report an event the most interesting which has just happened here, and which proves again the futility of vows the most rigorous to quiet the ardent desires of the human heart or to change the——'"

"Oh, well," interrupted Simmonds, "we can't waste

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time reading any more of that rot; it sounds like a French novel. The coroner can wrestle with it, if he thinks it's worth while."

He replaced the clippings in the purse, which he slipped back into the pocket from which he had taken it.

"Now," he added, rising to his feet, "we'd better get the girl's story."

"Do you know who she is?" asked Godfrey, in a low voice. As he glanced at her, he was startled to note her attitude of strained attention, which, as he turned, lapsed instantly to one of seeming apathy.

"I heard you call her Miss Croydon."

"Yes—she's the sister of Mrs. Richard Delroy."

Again Simmonds whistled.

"The deuce you say! Dickie Delroy! Well, that doesn't make any difference," and he turned toward her resolutely.

"Miss Croydon," he began abruptly, though perhaps in a gentler voice than he would have used toward the average suspect, "were you in the room when this man was killed?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know him?"

"Only slightly," she answered coolly, disregarding Godfrey's stare of amazement. "His name, I think, was Thompson."

"You had an engagement with him here?"

"Yes, sir; on a private matter which cannot concern the police."

Simmonds passed that over for the moment.

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"You had an engagement with him here?"

"Yes, sir; on a private matter which cannot concern the police."

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"Will you kindly tell us just what happened?" he asked.

"I drove here in a cab," she said, speaking rapidly, "which I told to wait for me. In the vestibule, I met the janitor, and asked to be conducted to suite fourteen. He brought me up here where Mr.—Mr. Thompson was waiting. I entered and closed the door. We were talking together, when the door of the inner room opened and a man came out. Before I realised what he was doing, he had raised a bar of iron he held in his hand and struck Mr. Thompson upon the head. Then, standing over him, he drew a revolver and fired one shot at him. I had shrunk away into the corner, but thinking him a madman, believing my own life in danger, I drew my pocket-pistol and fired at him. Without even glancing at me, he opened the outer door and disappeared. The janitor rushed in a moment later."

"Did your shot hit him?" asked Simmonds.

"I don't know; I think not; he showed no sign of being wounded."

Simmonds stood looking at her; Godfrey turned to an examination of the opposite wall.

"Miss Croydon's shot went wild," he said, curiously elated at this confirmation of her story. "Here's the bullet," and he pointed to it, embedded in the woodwork of the bedroom door.

Simmonds took a look at it, then he returned to inquiry.

"Did you know this intruder?" he asked.

"No, sir; I'd never before seen him," she answered steadily.

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"Will you describe him?"

She closed her eyes, seemingly in an effort at recollection.

"He was a short, heavy-set man," she said, at last, "with a dark face and dark moustache which turned up at the ends. That is all I can remember."

"And dressed how?"

"In dark clothes; he wore a slouch hat, I think, drawn down over the eyes. I didn't see the face clearly."

The answer came without hesitation, but it seemed to Godfrey that there was in the voice an accent of forced sincerity.

"What did he do with the bar of iron?" asked Simmonds.

"As soon as he struck the blow, I think he—he threw it down. I remember hearing it fall——"

"Yes—here it is," said Godfrey triumphantly, and fished it out from under a chair which stood near the wall. "But see, Simmonds—it's not a bar, it's a pipe."

Simmonds examined it. It was an ordinary piece of iron piping, about fifteen inches in length.

"Her story seems to be straight," he said, in an undertone to Godfrey. "What do you think about it?"

"I think she's perfectly innocent of any crime," answered Godfrey, with conviction. He had his doubts as to the absolute straightness of her story, but he concluded to keep them to himself.

"Well, there's nothing more to be learned out here," remarked Simmonds, after another glance around.

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"Suppose we take a look at the other room," and he led the way toward the inner door.

It was an ordinary bedroom of moderate size and with a single closet, in which a few soiled clothes were hanging. The bed had been lain upon, and evidently by a person fully dressed, for there were marks of muddy shoes upon the counterpane, fresh marks as of one who had come in during the evening's storm. An empty whiskey bottle lay on a little table near the bed.

"I guess Thompson was a boozer," observed Simmonds.

"Yes," agreed Godfrey, "his face showed that pretty plainly."

"Well, the man we're after ain't in here; we'll have to search the house."

"Can't we let Miss Croydon go home? She won't run away—I'll answer for that. Besides, there's nothing against her."

Simmonds pondered a minute.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said, at last. "Of course, she'll have to appear at the inquest. Do you know her address?"

"Yes—twenty-one East Sixty-ninth Street."

Simmonds jotted it down in his note-book.

"All right," he said. "You'd better take her down to her cab."

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CHAPTER III

Tricks of the Trade

GODFREY turned aside to hide the smile of satisfaction he could not wholly suppress; he had been adroitly driving Simmonds toward that suggestion.

For Godfrey wanted to be alone a few minutes with Miss Croydon. He was acutely conscious that here was a mystery much more puzzling than appeared on the surface; much more picturesque than the ordinary run of mysteries. Miss Croydon had said that her errand to suite fourteen had been on a private matter which did not concern the police, but Godfrey was not so sure of that. Of course, he could not compel her to explain it, and yet he felt that two or three well-directed questions might give him the clew which he was seeking now in vain.

"Very well," he agreed; "I'll see her down to her cab. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to quiz the janitor and then search the house. Maybe the other fellow hasn't had a chance to get away yet. I wonder what's going on out there?" he added, as they returned together to the other room.

They could hear a commotion of some sort in the hall, the hum of many voices, the shuffling of many feet . . .

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The commotion swelled to an uproar as Simmonds opened the door and closed it quickly behind him. Godfrey heard his voice raised in angry expostulation, and he chuckled grimly to himself as he turned to Miss Croydon.

He gazed at her with interest, searchingly, pondering how best to surprise her secret—at the bent head, with its crown of dark hair, shadowed by a little velvet hat; at the rounded arms, the graceful figure. The remarkable resolution and self-control with which she had answered the detective's inquiries seemed to have deserted her. She was sitting huddled up in the chair, with her head in her hands, in an attitude almost of collapse. A convulsive shudder shook her from moment to moment. They had been thoughtless, Godfrey told himself, to leave her alone with the dead man—that was enough to unnerve any woman.

He paused yet a moment, looking at her,—at the slender hands, the little ear,—and he pictured to himself what her training had been, how she had been fenced away from the rough places of the world, the unpleasant things of life. Certainly, she could never have committed such a crime as this, or even connived at it.

Yet she had lied—deliberately and distinctly she had lied. She had told him that she had never before seen the dead man; she had told Simmonds just the opposite. Which was the truth? Doubtless the first; her first impulse would be to speak the truth; afterward, at leisure for a moment, she had mastered her agitation, had thought out the lie, and had uttered it with a surprising calmness.

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Godfrey felt that he was groping toward the light. But there was another mystery more impenetrable still. What was it had nerved her to brave the tittle-tattle of the world, to endanger her good name, to run she knew not what risk of indignity and insult? A love affair? Bah! To suppose her capable of such an assignation was preposterous. One had only to look at her to see that. And yet, what other reason could have brought her to this place, alone, on such a night . . .

Suddenly she felt the scrutiny he bent upon her, and raised her eyes to his. Then she straightened up, quickly, still looking at him, and he saw a flash of defiance in her eyes. Plainly, she did not fear him; he fancied there were few things in the world she did fear.

"May I see you to your cab, Miss Croydon?" he asked.

"To my cab?" she repeated, half-rising. "I may go, then? I am free? You have not——"

"Betrayed you?" he finished, as she stopped suddenly. "No; I don't intend to. Whether you know the man yonder or not, I don't for an instant believe you killed him."

"Oh, I didn't!" she cried. "I did my best to save him. But it was done so quickly—I didn't understand until too late."

"Nevertheless," continued Godfrey evenly, "I think you're wrong in trying to protect the scoundrel who did."

The colour faded suddenly from her face.

"To protect him?" she faltered.

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"I'm sure you know him. You could place him in the hands of the police, if you wished."

She stared without answering into his steady eyes. There was something compelling in their glance, a power there was no resisting, urging her to speak. She had been deeply shaken by the evening's tragedy; her strength was almost gone. Godfrey saw her yielding, yielding—a moment more, and he would have the story. With a last sigh of resistance, she opened her lips, closed them, opened them again . . .

The door opened and a man came in—a keen-faced man of middle age, who nodded to Godfrey and threw a quick, penetrating glance at his companion. Behind him, the clamour burst out anew; various heads appeared in the doorway, various eager faces sought to peer into the room; but the newcomer calmly closed the door and assured himself that it was locked. He looked at Godfrey again, then expectantly at the girl.

"Miss Croydon," said Godfrey, "this is Coroner Goldberg, whose duty it is to investigate this affair, and who may wish to ask you some questions."

Goldberg removed his hat and bowed. Miss Croydon met his gaze with an admirable composure. Godfrey sighed—that moment of weakness was past—if Goldberg had only been a moment later!

"Only a few at present," began the coroner, in a voice soft and deferential, as only he knew how to make it. How often, with that voice, had he led a witness on and on to his own ruin! "You were the only witness of this tragedy, I believe, Miss Croydon?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Are you acquainted with the murderer?"

"No, sir."

"You never saw him before?"

"No, sir."

"But you could identify him, if the police succeed in capturing him?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"You have already given Mr. Simmonds a description of him?"

"Yes, sir; as well as I could."

"And told him the whole story?"

"Yes, sir—the whole story."

"Except one detail, I believe—you did not explain how you came to be in this room."

"No, sir; I did not tell him that," she answered, in a low tone.

"Will you tell me?"

"I do not think it concerns the police, sir."

"You would better let me judge of that; if it does not concern the police, I promise you it shall go no farther."

She was looking at him anxiously; she moistened her lips and glanced uncertainly at Godfrey.

"Do you object to Mr. Godfrey's presence?" asked the coroner.

"Oh, not at all," she said quickly. "I'm very glad that Mr. Godfrey is here."

"I persist," continued Goldberg, "because I think that perhaps the story may help us to identify this man."

"It won't," said Miss Croydon; "but I will tell you—briefly, this man claimed to have certain—papers

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which concerned—our family. We had never heard —of him before. We knew nothing about him. But I came here—to see."

"You did a very imprudent thing," commented the coroner.

"I see it now," agreed Miss Croydon humbly. "I came against the advice of my sister."

"Then your sister knew you were coming?"

"Oh, yes; and tried to dissuade me. But I am sometimes—well—a little obstinate, I fear," she went on, with just the ghost of a smile, and a humility which seemed to Godfrey a trifle excessive. "I shall not soon forget the lesson."

Goldberg nodded, still looking at her. Godfrey wondered if he, too, suspected that there was something hidden behind this seeming candour. He had seen more than one instance of Goldberg's acumen—an acumen heightened by a certain Oriental vividness of imagination. But, apparently, the coroner was satisfied with Miss Croydon's answers.

"That is all, at present," he said. "Your story shall go no farther. Mr. Godfrey, I am sure, promises that, too."

"Certainly," assented Godfrey.

"Of course," the coroner added, "I shall have to summon you as a witness at the inquest. It will probably be to-morrow afternoon."

She bowed without replying.

"One thing more," said Goldberg. "Did he have the papers? Did he give them to you?"

"No," she answered quickly. "He had no papers. He was lying."

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"Then that is all," repeated the coroner. "You'd better see her to her cab, Mr. Godfrey," he added, with a little smile. "She'll need an escort."

She rose from her chair and dropped over her face a heavy veil which she had raised about her hat. Godfrey opened the door for her and followed her through. She shrank back from the mob which charged down upon her as soon as she appeared on the threshold, but Godfrey sprang forward quickly to her rescue.

"Keep close to me," he said, and elbowed a way through the crowd with no great gentleness, despite a chorus of angry protests.

"It's Godfrey of the *Record*."

"Of course; he scents a corpse like a vulture."

"Well, he's no right to freeze us out!"

"Madame, we beg of you——"

But Godfrey merely smiled grimly and kept straight on, holding his companion firmly by the arm. In a moment, they were down the stairs and at the door of the cab.

"Miss Croydon," he said, leaning toward her as she took her seat, "do me the favour to deny yourself to all callers to-night."

"I shall," she agreed instantly.

"Thank you," and he stepped back, smiling, as the driver whipped up his horse.

He smiled more broadly still when he saw three other cabs following the first one.

"Now I call that enterprise!" he said to himself.

Then he chuckled again.

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CHAPTER IV

The Janitor's Story

GODFREY glanced at his watch. It was after nine o'clock. The rain had almost ceased, but the wind was still high. He turned back to the building and found the janitor sitting just inside the door. He had endured the ordeal of inquisition by police and reporters and was rather limp.

"May I use your telephone a moment?" asked Godfrey.

The janitor waved his hand toward the booth. Godfrey called up his office and asked that a photographer and an artist be sent up at once. The readers of the *Record* demanded illustrations with every story, and the paper always did its best to please them, at whatever cost of labour, ingenuity, or money. That done, Godfrey went back to the janitor and sat down beside him.

After all, he told himself, he had as yet only half the story; he must get every detail from this man, and he saw that it would be necessary to proceed delicately, for his companion's temper was evidently badly ruffled. He was a thick-set, choleric man, with a shortness of breath which perhaps argued some weakness of the heart. Godfrey studied him now for a moment before he ventured to open fire.

"Well," he began, at last, "you look as though those fellows had about worn you out, Mr.——"

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"Higgins is my name," said the janitor. "Simon Higgins."

"Oh, yes; I remember now. I suppose they asked you about a million questions?"

"A million!" echoed Higgins, with scorn. "Ten million 'd be more like it! But it wasn't so much that, as that they wouldn't believe me when I told 'em a thing. They seemed t' think I was lyin'!"

Godfrey nodded sympathetically.

"That *does* get on a man's nerves," he agreed. "I feel a little upset, myself—won't you try a smoke?"

Higgins took the cigar.

"It's agin th' rules," he said, "but I don't keer; I need it," and he bit off the end.

They sat together for a moment in silence, listening to the tramp of feet in the halls overhead, the opening and closing of doors, the subdued murmur of voices. At the stair-foot, beyond the elevator, they caught a glimpse, now and then, of a policeman pacing back and forth.

"They're searchin' th' house," observed Higgins, at last, with a grimace of disdain. "I turned th' keys over t' them. Much they'll find!"

"Nobody there, eh?" It was not really a question; it seemed more a sign of polite interest on Godfrey's part.

"I ought t' know. I told 'em they wasn't nobody there. Ain't I been here all evenin' 'cept fer that minute I run acrost th' street? Nobody in nor out, 'cept th' girl—not since seven o'clock. That was about th' time that there blamed Thompson come in, too drunk t' stand. He'd never 'a' got home in th' world

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by hisself, but they was a feller with him, a-holdin' him up."

Godfrey was listening with strained attention. There were many questions he wished to ask, but he dared not interrupt.

"Well, we got him upstairs atween us. An' then, when I went through his pockets, I couldn't find his key, an' I had t' come down an' git mine afore I could git his door open. We laid him on his bed an' left him there, a-snorin' like a hog. That feller who was with him was certainly a good sort. He set down here t' talk t' me a while—it was rainin' so hard he couldn't go—an' he said he'd run acrost Thompson down at Pete Magraw's place on Sixth Avenoo. Thompson was treatin' everybody an' actin' like a fool ginerally; then he got bad an' started t' clean out th' saloon, an' Pete was goin' t' call a cop, but this feller said he'd bring him home—an' so he did."

Higgins stopped to take breath, and Godfrey ventured to put a question.

"Did you know him?"

"No; I never seed him afore."

"What sort of a looking fellow was he?"

"A good-lookin' feller, well-dressed—no bum, I kin tell y' that. He was short an' heavy-set, with a little black moustache that turned up at th' ends."

Godfrey's heart gave a sudden leap—so Miss Croydon had told the truth, after all! She was not trying to protect anybody. And the case was going to prove a simple one—he had been reading a mystery into it that it did not possess; that was always the danger with your theorist, he told himself, a little bitterly—he was

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forever looking for hidden meanings, for abstruse clews, for picturesque solutions, instead of following the plainly evident, of accepting facts at their face value. Well, Simmonds certainly would not make that mistake; he would have little difficulty in finding his man.

"And then what happened?" he asked. "I suppose this fellow went away?"

"Oh, yes; he stayed here talkin' quite a while—he started t' go onct or twice, but th' rain was too bad. But about eight o'clock he said he couldn't stay no longer, rain 'r no rain, an' was jest buttonin' up his coat, when a cab drove up an' a woman got out. She had a thick veil on, so's I couldn't see her face, but from her style I judged she was a high-flyer. She come up t' me an' she says, 'I want t' go t' apartment fourteen—Mr. Thompson.' 'Madam,' says I, 'I wouldn't if I was you.' 'Why?' she asked, quick-like, 'ain't he there?' 'He's there,' says I, 'but he ain't in no condition t' see a lady.' 'Never mind,' says she, 'I'll go up.' 'All right,' says I. 'I'll be back in a minute,' I added t' my friend. 'No,' he says, 'I can't wait; I must be goin',' an' he started toward th' door. 'Well, good-night,' I says, an' stepped into th' car an' started it.

"I showed her th' door o' fourteen, an' she knocked. I was waitin' at th' elevator, fer I knowed Thompson was too dead drunk t' hear her an' I'd have t' take her down ag'in; when blessed if th' door didn't open an' in she walked. Well, sir, I was so dumbfoundered I couldn't believe my own eyes! But in she went, an' I come on down, tryin' t' figger it out. It was mebbe ten

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minutes later that I heard a pistol-shot an' I knowed in a minute what 'd happened. That drunken brute had got too familiar, an' she'd put a bullet in him. Though," he added, reflectively, "why, if she's straight, she'd go t' his room at all is more'n I kin see."

"Was there only one shot?" asked Godfrey.

"Only one," answered the janitor; "but it sounded like a small cannon. It didn't come from no sech little pop-gun as that which Mr. Simmonds picked up in th' corner. I rushed up th' stairs an' threw open th' door——"

"Wasn't it locked?"

"No; an' that's funny, too," he added, "fer I remember hearin' the lock snap after th' girl went in. Somebody must 'a' throwed it back ag'in. Mebbe th' girl did it, tryin' t' git out, an' Thompson got a-hold of her an' then she let him have it."

Godfrey nodded, with an appreciation seemingly very deep.

"That's it, no doubt," he said. "I see you're a close reasoner, Mr. Higgins."

"Why," said Higgins, with a smile of self-satisfaction, "I allers have been able t' put two an' two t'gether. They's one thing, though, I can't explain. As I was rushin' up th' steps, I heard th' openin' an' shuttin' of a door."

"Ah," said Godfrey thoughtfully. "And there was no one in the hall?"

"Not a soul; not a soul in sight."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure! O' course I am. There's a light in th'

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hall—an', anyway, they ain't no place anybody could hide."

"He might have gone into one of the other rooms, mightn't he?"

"They was all locked—I'm certain o' that."

Godfrey took a thoughtful puff or two.

"It was th' girl shot him—y' kin bank on that," added Higgins, with emphasis.

"But then," objected Godfrey, "you said the report you heard couldn't have come from her pistol."

Higgins gasped and choked, staring wide-eyed.

"Why, that's so!" he cried. "That's so! I never thought o' that! Mebbe there *is* a damn scoundrel hidin' 'round here some'rs," and he glanced excitedly up and down the hall.

"The police will find him if there is," said Godfrey reassuringly. "What happened after you reached the room?"

"Well," continued Higgins, quieting down a little, but still keeping one eye over his shoulder, "as I was sayin', I throwed open th' door, an' there was th' girl leanin' agin th' wall an' Thompson on th' floor with a big blood-spot on his shirt-front. I jest give one look at 'em an' then I went down th' steps three at a time an' over t' th' station. I tell you, it purty nigh done me up."

He was interrupted by a tramp of feet that came down the stairs. It was Simmonds and the coroner, closely attended by the crowd of reporters, who immediately surrounded Godfrey, in threatening admiration.

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"How did *you* happen to be here?" demanded Rankin of the *Planet*.

"Just luck," explained Godfrey, looking around the group with a pleasant smile.

"Does it mean another scoop?"

"Oh, no; not at all! I dare say you fellows know more about it now than I do."

"Oh, of course we do!" assented Rankin drily, amid derisive laughter.

"At least," Godfrey added, "Mr. Goldberg has all the facts and is probably willing to help you out."

"Yes," agreed the coroner; "but it's getting late, and I'm in a hurry—I'll give you ten minutes at my office," and he started toward the door.

"All right," said Rankin; "come on, boys," and they trooped out of the building together.

Simmonds waited until the last of them had disappeared.

"Well, we searched the house," he began.

"Nobody there?" asked Godfrey.

"Not a living soul. I didn't really expect to find anybody; but we went through every room—even to the suites which are occupied."

Higgins opened his mouth suddenly; then as suddenly closed it.

"Did you find the doors all locked?"

"Every one; the hall windows bolted on the inside and the trap in the roof hooked in place. There's only one way our man could get out—that was by the front door yonder," and Simmonds looked sharply at the janitor.

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Higgins grew red in the face.

"I ain't got nothin' more t' say!" he burst out explosively. "You'll be sayin' I did it, next!"

"Oh, no," retorted Simmonds coolly, "you didn't do it. But I'm not quite sure you've told us all you know."

Higgins sprang from his chair, fairly foaming at the mouth with rage, but Simmonds calmly disregarded him.

"I've left a man on guard in fourteen," he said. "Goldberg wants to bring his jury around in the morning to look at things. Here's your keys," and he handed the jingling ring back to the janitor.

"There's a man coming up from the office to take a flash-light of it," said Godfrey. "No objection to that, I guess?"

"No; that's all right. Come around in the morning to talk it over. I think I'll have some news for you," and he went on out into the street.

Higgins sat down again, still nursing his wrath.

"Did y' hear him?" he demanded. "Why, he as good as called me a liar!"

"Oh, you mustn't mind him," said Godfrey soothingly. "It's his business to be suspicious. He doesn't really suspect you."

"Well, they ain't no cause t' suspect me—I ain't done nothin'," returned the janitor; then he looked meditatively at his keys, which he still held in his hand. "Funny," he murmured; "funny. I don't know when they went out."

Godfrey said nothing, but contemplated him through half-closed eyes.

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At that instant the street door opened and a man and woman entered.

"There they come, now!" cried Higgins, springing to his feet. "Good-evenin', Mr. Tremaine."

"Good-evening," returned the stranger, in a voice singularly rich and pleasant.

"I was jest a-sayin' t' my friend here," added the janitor, "that I hadn't seen y' go out."

Godfrey, for an instant, found himself gazing into a pair of the keenest eyes he had ever encountered.

"You wished to see me?" asked Tremaine.

"Oh, no, no," interrupted Higgins; "but th' p'lice was goin' through th' buildin'——"

"The police?"

"Oh, I fergot—you don't know—that man Thompson's been murdered—he had th' soot right acrost th' hall from you."

"Murdered!" echoed Tremaine. "Murdered! Why, that's terrible! Who did it? How did it happen?"

Higgins retold the story with some unction, evidently enjoying his listener's horror. But Godfrey did not even glance at him. He was gazing—perhaps a shade too intently for politeness—at Mrs. Tremaine. And, indeed, she was a woman to hold any man's eyes . . .

Tremaine drew a deep breath when the story was finished.

"The house has been searched?" he asked. "The scoundrel couldn't be hidden——"

"Oh, no," Higgins assured him; "th' p'lice went all through it—even through your rooms."

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"I'm glad of that—then we can sleep in peace."

Godfrey rather wondered that Mrs. Tremaine took no part in the discussion. She stood listening apathetically, not even noticing his stare.

"When they told me they'd gone through your rooms," added Higgins, "I was kind o' surprised. I thought you was at home t' night."

"And that we stayed in our rooms during all that row?" queried Tremaine, smiling. "I suppose there was a row?"

His eyes sought Godfrey's again; then he turned back to Higgins, evidently disturbed.

"You mean we may have to prove an alibi?" he went on quickly. "Oh, we can do that. We left the house just after seven o'clock—that was the first that I knew fourteen was occupied—I could see a light through the transom. I didn't see you anywhere about."

"Oh, now I understand," cried Higgins; "that was while we was puttin' Thompson t' bed. You didn't know him, I guess, sir?"

"No—as I said, I thought fourteen was empty."

"He's only been here three days," explained the janitor, "an' he was out most o' th' time, tankin' up."

"Oh, he was that sort, was he?" and Tremaine tossed away the end of his cigarette. "He got his deserts, then, no doubt. Come, Cecily," he added, turning to his wife.

"Elevator, sir?" asked Higgins.

"No; we've been sitting all evening at the vaudeville," and they went on up the stair, leaving Godfrey staring after them.

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CHAPTER V

Simmonds Snares a Bird

"WELL," said Godfrey, sinking back in his chair, "who are they, anyway?"

"Mr. an' Mrs. Tremaine—that's all I know. But they're mighty nice people—he is, anyway—I don't see much o' her—'cept when she rings fer me t' tell me they ain't enough heat."

"How long have they been here?"

"About three weeks—an' he's a gentleman. That there Thompson, now—I was leery about lettin' him have th' rooms in th' first place—I didn't like his looks. But he offered t' pay in advance. I was goin' t' give him notice in th' mornin'. Th' agent won't stand fer no sech goin's-on."

"Was he in the habit of getting drunk?"

"Oh, he's been comfortable tanked ever since he's been here—I could smell it on him—but never so bad as t'-night. We can't have that here—our other people wouldn't stand it."

"Are all the apartments occupied?"

"No—y' see, they've been remodellin' th' house, tearin' it all apart, turnin' it inside out. It used t' be a hotel an' a damn poor one. It wasn't makin' any money, so th' guy that owns it thought he'd turn it int' an apartment house. Th' men that was a-workin' on it got three soots done, an' then around come a

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walkin' delegate with a red nose an' a big black moustache, an' ordered 'em out on a strike. Them three that's done are all full, though. Thompson had one; Tremaine an' his wife's got another, an' two young sports what 're lettin' on t' study art 's got th' third —away up at th' top with a skylight."

Godfrey smoked on placidly. He suspected that Higgins had something more to tell, and he saw that the only way to get it was to wait with what patience he could. He was in no hurry; besides, he wanted time to think. He had not yet recovered from that shock of realising how he had gone wandering after a will-o'-the-wisp of his own creation. He had fancied himself astute . . .

The door opened; he heard Higgins utter a sharp cry of amazement. He looked up to see Simmonds —and with him another man, short, heavy-set, with a dark moustache! He caught the gleam of steel at his wrists.

Higgins was on his feet, staring.

"So you recognize him, do you?" asked Simmonds, his face shining with triumph. "I thought I couldn't be wrong. I got him quicker 'n I expected, Godfrey; I didn't even have to hunt for him. Of course, you know him?"

"How do you do, Mr. Godfrey?" said the prisoner politely. "Oh, yes, Mr. Godfrey knows me—he knows me too well to think I'd be mixed up in anything like this!"

"How are you, Jimmy?" returned Godfrey. "No, I didn't suppose——"

"Of course not!" said Jimmy, with scorn. "I

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wouldn't put a man out—that ain't my line." And, indeed, it wasn't, for Jimmy the Dude had gained his reputation as an expert manipulator of combination locks.

The detective had listened with a satisfied smile.

"Higgins," he said, "this is the fellow who brought Thompson home, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir," responded the janitor inarticulately.

"This," observed Jimmy, with fine indignation, "is what a man gets for doing a good action. I found that cove over at Magraw's just spoilin' for trouble, and I took him in tow and brought him home. Now you say I put him out! I'd better have kept my hands off!"

"We all know you've got a kind heart, Jimmy," retorted Simmonds. "Did he have anything in his pockets besides that key?"

"What key?"

"The key to his room; of course you took that."

"Of course I did!" said Jimmy, with deep irony. "Why, of course I did! You'll find it on me."

"Oh, no, we won't," returned Simmonds, still smiling. "I've a much better opinion of you than that, Jimmy."

"Why, look here," cried Jimmy, seemingly deeply exasperated, "what 'd I want t' put him out for? Did he have any dough?"

"You probably know more about that than we do," answered Simmonds, with meaning.

"You mean I went through him? Well, I didn't! But if I did, what 'd I want t' come back and kill him for?"

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"Of course," murmured Simmonds, gazing meditatively at the ceiling, "it's quite impossible that he'd drop a word about the pile he had salted down in his room."

"Oh, hell!" said Jimmy. "A bum like that! But come; let's see how far you'll go—of course you've got it figgered out! How did I work it? Mr. Higgins, here, saw me leave the building——"

"No, he didn't, Jimmy," corrected Simmonds gently. "He only saw you start for the street door. But as soon as the elevator started, you took to the stairs."

Jimmy threw up his hands with a fine gesture of despair.

"Oh, you've got it all fixed," he cried. "You'll railroad me to the chair, if you can. I suppose you've got somebody that'll swear they saw me do it?"

"Yes," agreed Simmonds quietly, "we have."

Jimmy paused to look at him and turned a little pale when he saw he was in earnest. He began to realise that perhaps he was really in a tight place.

"Come, Mr. Simmonds," he said, at last, "you don't mean that!"

"You ought to know. I'll have you identified tomorrow."

"Identified?"

"Yes—by the woman who saw you kill Thompson."

"A woman is it?" asked Jimmy helplessly. "Mebbe she's already been so obligin' as to give you my name?"

"No; but she gave us a description of you—a

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mighty good one. I spotted you as soon as I heard Higgins's story."

"So Mr. Higgins had a tale to tell, too, did he?" asked the cracksman, with a somewhat venomous glance at the janitor. "Was he also on the scene? Or mebbe he was lookin' through the transom?"

"No cause to get funny, Jimmy. You won't feel that way after I get through with you."

"Oh, won't I? We all know you're a bright man, Mr. Simmonds!"

"Bright or not," said Simmonds complacently, "I've got you. Your record's against you, Jimmy."

"That's it—give a dog a bad name. See here, Mr. Godfrey, you don't believe I'd be such a damned fool as to put a man out with a woman watchin' me do it?"

"I don't know what to think," answered Godfrey slowly. "It doesn't seem quite like you, Jimmy."

"Like me! I should say not! And if I was crazy enough to do a thing like that, would I go back to Pete Magraw's and hang around there, waitin' for the police to come after me? If you think I'd do a thing like that, you'd better send me to Bellevue and be done with it!"

"I was expecting that argument, Jimmy," said Simmonds, still smiling. "You're a deep one!"

Jimmy threw up his hands again.

"Of course!" he cried. "You win; I lose! If I'd run away, it 'd be a confession of guilt; if I stay, it's because I'm a deep un! Oh, it's lots of justice I'll get! Well, go ahead. Go ahead and prove it! I'll prove an alibi."

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"Oh, I know you've got that all fixed, Jimmy," retorted Simmonds. "I expected that—I knew you'd think of that, right away. Who'll swear to it? Magraw?"

Jimmy's face was growing flushed; his temper was getting the better of him, which, perhaps, was just what Simmonds wanted.

"Magraw got a share of that last deal, didn't he?" he continued imperturbably. "Naturally, he's grateful. But you ought to have waited a little, Jimmy—you really ought. When was it you got back?"

"Yesterday," answered Jimmy sullenly. He evidently realised the danger of losing his temper and managed to control himself.

"And after an absence of two years! Come, Jimmy," pursued Simmonds persuasively, "what did you do it for? Was it a plant?"

Jimmy relieved his feelings by some vigorous swearing.

"I didn't do it, and you know it!" he shouted. "You know it! Only you've got t' do somethin'—you've got t' make a showin' so's th' people 'll think they're gittin' somethin' fer their money when th' papers puff you. I know th' game! Oh, come," and he stopped himself abruptly. "What's th' use? Are you goin' t' lock me up?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to," said Simmonds regretfully.

"Then, for God's sake, do it. When's this identification-long-lost-orphan scene goin' t' take place?"

"To-morrow afternoon at two o'clock. Don't you feel a little nervous about it, Jimmy?"

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"Not a damn bit!" retorted Jimmy. "But say —you might tell me her name—I'd like t' know who this posy is that says I did it. While she was about it, I don't see why she didn't give you my address."

"I don't think she has the honour of your acquaint-ance, Jimmy. You see, she doesn't move in just your circle. I warn you her word will count more with a jury than yours and Magraw's together."

"Well, who is she?" repeated Jimmy impatiently.

"She's Miss Croydon—sister-in-law of Dickie Del-roy."

The prisoner's mouth fell open, his colour changed . . .

"What!" he gasped. "What!"

Then his jaws snapped shut.

"Well," inquired Simmonds, "what 've you got to say?"

"Nothin'," answered Jimmy sullenly. "Not a damn word. Lock me up, if you're goin' to."

Simmonds laughed.

"All right; I thought I could take some of the ginger out of you."

"Lock me up, will you?" repeated Jimmy fiercely. "Come, now; lock me up."

Simmonds shrugged his shoulders and turned to-ward the door.

Godfrey, looking at the prisoner, noted his ruffled brow and troubled eyes. Plainly, Jimmy wanted an opportunity to arrange his thoughts—but what was there in the mere mention of Miss Croydon's name that should so disturb him? What connection could there be between them?

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CHAPTER VI

Light from a New Angle

IT was long past midnight when Godfrey dropped from the top of the *Record* building in the express elevator and walked over to the station of the Elevated for the trip uptown. The story was written —it would be the feature of the morning's paper, and it would be illustrated "exclusively"—but he was not wholly satisfied with it. He had accepted the explanation given by Miss Croydon, yet he felt instinctively that it did not explain—that there was much below the surface of which he had caught only the faintest glimpse and which he was utterly unable to decipher. He did not at all believe—and he took care that the readers of the *Record* should have no cause to believe—that Miss Croydon was in any way directly connected with the crime. Indeed, there was every evidence that she had, in that particular, spoken the truth.

And in the other particulars? Well, it was hard to separate the wheat from the chaff; hard to tell where truth left off and invention began. Some foundation of truth the story must have had, or it would not have been told so glibly nor appear so plausible. Indeed, in two details, it had been confirmed by other evidence—they had found the pipe with which the blow was struck and the bullet from her pistol embedded in the door.

Below it all, underlying it all, the foundation upon

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which the mystery rested was Miss Croydon's motive in making such an appointment, and, above all, in keeping it. That was a thing utterly opposed to her social training, to her maidenly instinct—it was wild, foolish, questionable. She would feel this more acutely than a man could, and yet it had not been sufficient to deter her, to hold her back. What resistless motive was it that had urged her on? What was the secret contained in the papers she had hoped to get from Thompson? Godfrey caught a dim glimpse of something dark, repulsive, terrible. What was the secret? Ah, he would have known, if Goldberg had only been a moment later!

As to Jimmy the Dude, Godfrey had maintained a careful reticence, while commending Simmonds's promptness in arresting him. Simmonds, no doubt, believed him guilty; but then Simmonds lacked imagination. It might be, Godfrey thought a little savagely, that he himself possessed too much of it, but the theory which that grizzled veteran had built up so adroitly did not in the least satisfy him. It was too prosaic, too matter-of-fact; reasonable, perhaps, but not convincing. It reduced the mystery to a mere sordid crime. Godfrey wanted colour in his mysteries —and right there, he reminded himself again, was his great weakness. Yet Jimmy's manner had not been that of a guilty man; to be sure, it had changed at the last moment, at the mention of Miss Croydon's name. Why? What was this wide-stretching net of intrigue, woven in the dark, involving alike Fifth Avenue and the "Tenderloin"—the Delroy mansion, the Marathon, Magraw's gilded saloon?

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Pondering this puzzle, with an intensity that had something poignant and personal in it, he would have been carried past his station but for the guard, who knew him, and who touched him on the arm. He went mechanically down the stair and turned up toward the avenue. Still mechanically, he mounted to his rooms and opened the door. A man who had been sitting in a chair before the fire sprang up as he entered.

"Why, Jack!" cried Godfrey, waking suddenly, and he held out his hand with that fine heartiness of greeting which is sometimes seen between men. Then, as he caught the other's eyes, his face changed. "Sit down," he said gently, "till I get out of these damp togs. Then we'll have a talk."

He disappeared into the inner room, while the younger man sank back into his chair and gazed gloomily into the fire. Even strained by emotion as it was at this moment, his face was worth looking at —clear-cut, square-jawed, alert—such as one has come, of late years, to associate with the typical college-bred American. But the face was more than merely handsome—it was open, ingenuous, winning—and looking at it, one could understand without further explanation how it happened that John Tolbert Drysdale had so many friends and so few enemies.

Godfrey was back in a moment, drew up another chair, and got out tobacco and pipes—for Drysdale a glossy briar, consecrated to his service; for himself, a meerschaum of a deep and tender brown, bespeaking years of loving usage. Not until the pipes were going nicely did Godfrey speak.

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"You've heard about it, then?" he asked.

"I know that something terrible has happened," said Drysdale, a little hoarsely. "I don't know what—it's beyond imagining, even—at least, beyond my poor brain. Miss Croydon told me to come to you——"

"Ah!" commented Godfrey. "Did she do that?"

"Yes—she said you could tell me all I wished to know."

"Where did you see her?"

"At Mrs. Delroy's. I came straight here from there."

"So you were at Mrs. Delroy's?" and Godfrey mused for a moment, with eyes intent on the fire. "But come, we'll never get the thing straightened out this way. Let's begin at the beginning. Tell me what happened at Mrs. Delroy's and then I'll fill out the story, if I can. Let me have every detail you can remember."

Drysdale waited a moment to be sure of his self-control.

"I called at Mrs. Delroy's about nine o'clock," he began, "and asked for Miss Croydon——"

"Wait a minute," Godfrey interrupted. "I want to ask you a question, which you mustn't be offended at. I'm asking because I'll have to know if I'm really to help you. Are you and Miss Croydon engaged to be married?"

Again a minute passed before the answer came.

"Yes," said Drysdale huskily, at last.

Godfrey silently held out his hand and gave his companion's fingers a warm pressure.

"Now go on," he said.

"I was shown into the library," continued the other,

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" while the maid took up my card. The room was in darkness, save for the light of the fire. The windows, you know, look out upon the street. Instead of sitting down, I wandered toward them and in a moment saw someone standing behind the curtains. My first thought—don't laugh at me—was that it was Miss Croydon looking for me, for she knew that I was coming, and I strode to the curtains and threw them back, uttering I know not what nonsense. You can imagine how abashed I was when Mrs. Delroy wheeled around upon me with a face so white and distorted that I scarcely knew her.

" 'Oh, I beg your pardon,' I cried, seeing how I had startled her.

" For a moment she didn't seem to know me.

" 'What is it?' she asked in a hoarse whisper. 'What has happened?'

" 'My dear Mrs. Delroy, you really must pardon me,' I repeated. 'I'm awfully sorry I frightened you. I took you for your sister.'

" She stared at me a minute longer in a queer way; then her face brightened and she smiled and held out her hand.

" 'Oh, how do you do, Mr. Drysdale?' she said, but her voice was even yet a little tremulous. 'Yes, you *did* startle me. Isn't it a fearful night?'

" 'Indeed it is,' I agreed. 'I had quite a time getting here.'

" 'You came to see Grace?' she asked, with a glance over her shoulder down into the street.

" 'Yes,' I said; 'she's expecting me. I've sent up my card. I told my man not to wait,' I added, think-

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ing it was for that she had looked out of the window. 'It's too bad a night to keep either man or beast outdoors. He's to come back at eleven—I dare say Grace will put up with me till then.'

"She hesitated an instant, looking at me in a way I did not understand. Just then the maid came to the door, but seeing me with Mrs. Delroy, went away again.

"'I fear she'll not be able to see you to-night, Mr. Drysdale,' she said, at last. 'She's not been feeling well since dinner. She's lying down now, and I think she's asleep.'

"'Oh, well, then,' I said, 'I won't disturb her. It's nothing serious, I hope?'

"'Not at all; merely a little indisposition. Shall I let you out?'

"There was something in the last words—a little too much eagerness, perhaps—which arrested my attention. They didn't sound quite like Mrs. Delroy, for you know, Godfrey, she's usually the sweetest, gentlest, most hospitable woman in the world—the very last person who would think of chasing a man out into a storm. I don't know why it was, but somehow the thought flashed through my head that she was deceiving me, that she wasn't telling the truth, that she wanted to get rid of me. I've got a streak of obstinacy in me that took fire in a moment.

"'Isn't there a chance that Miss Croydon may get better after a while and come down?' I asked.

"Mrs. Delroy shook her head decidedly.

"'I'm afraid not. It's a nervous headache, you see. It will last all night, probably.'

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"'Is she subject to nervous headaches?' I asked, playing for time. 'I'm sorry to hear that. She doesn't in the least look it.'

"'Oh, no,' she answered quickly, 'she's not at all subject to them; but occasionally, when she's overworked herself——'

"The sentence trailed off into nothingness. I saw that she wasn't thinking of what she was saying, and when she glanced down into the street again, I began to get an inkling of the real state of affairs. I was a little ashamed of the part I was playing, but I determined to brazen it out. If Miss Croydon had gone out alone on a night like this, I had a right to know it. Why should she make a mystery of it? What was there in her errand that needed to be concealed from me?

"Mrs. Delroy was looking at me anxiously. Finally she took the bull by the horns.

"'I really must be going upstairs,' she said. 'You'll excuse me?'

"'Certainly. Is Mr. Delroy here?'

"'No; he's out of town to-day,' and she made another movement toward the door.

"I didn't see how I was going to hang on any longer without being absolutely rude; I gave it up in despair. After all, I could wait outside the house. Then, suddenly, I realised that I was acting like a cad—I had no right to play the spy—but there was something back of it all—some mystery—which worried and puzzled me. But perhaps it was only my fancy—why should Mrs. Delroy deceive me? I was playing the fool—I had no right to suspect . . . .

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"And just then, Godfrey, as I glanced out of the window, I saw a cab dash up to the house and a woman get out of it. I knew her on the instant, and I shouldn't care to go through another such moment of doubt and suspicion and agony. For it was worse than I had thought. She had not used her sister's carriage—then, at least, she would have been in the care of a trusted coachman—she had hired a cab——"

"Yes," said Godfrey drily. "The Delroy carriage would have been too conspicuous; besides, she wanted to keep her errand a secret, even from the servants."

"Do you mean——"

"No matter; go ahead with your story, then I'll tell you mine."

Drysdale was shaking convulsively, but he managed to go on.

"As I said, I saw a cab drive up and a woman get out. She ran up the steps, the door opened, and Miss Croydon came into the room. Even in the dim light, I could see how white her face was.

"'Grace!' cried Mrs. Delroy, stepping forward at sight of her. 'Grace!'

"Miss Croydon turned to her and held out her arms.

"'Yes, I've seen him, Edith,' she said, in a voice that I shall never forget. 'I should have taken your advice. I should not have gone.'

"'You shall not go again, dear!'

"'No,' agreed the other, 'not again!'

"There was something in her tone that caught her sister's ear.

"'What is it, Grace?' she demanded fiercely. 'Tell me!'

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"'It's worse than either of us thought—he's dead, Edith!'"

Drysdale paused a moment. His voice was shaking so that he could not go on. He wiped his forehead mechanically, with trembling hand.

"Godfrey," he said, at last, "I tell you my own heart stood still at those words, uttered in such a tone—there was no mistaking her meaning—and it was a moment before I could see clearly enough to discern Mrs. Delroy's look of horror as she stared up at her sister.

"'Not that!' she cried. 'Not on your hands! Oh, why did you go?, Why did you go? What have you done?'

"She swayed, clutched blindly at the air, and would have fallen had not her sister caught her in her arms. That brought my senses back, and I sprang out from the shadow of the curtains.

"'Let me help you, Grace,' I said, as calmly as I could.

"She turned upon me a face dead but for the awful horror of the eyes looking out from it.

"'You!' she whispered. 'You! You here!'

"'Certainly,' I said. 'Weren't you expecting me, Grace?'

"She controlled herself by a mighty effort; I saw how much stronger she was than her sister.

"'Oh, yes,' she said, more quietly. 'I'd forgotten. You see, Edith is ill. Will you ring?'

"I rang the bell and in a moment Mrs. Delroy was carried away. Miss Croydon lingered a moment.

"'I must go, John,' she said, with something like her

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old manner. 'Come to-morrow—that is, if you care to come.'

"'Care to come!' I cried, but she held me away from her.

"'Yes,' she repeated steadily, 'care to come—perhaps you won't, and I shan't blame you. Go to Mr. Godfrey, John, and ask him—tell him that I sent you—then, afterwards, if you care to come, I shall be glad—glad——'

"I thought her self-control was going to fail her, but it was only for an instant.

"'However, John,' she added more calmly, 'if you do come, it must be with the understanding that I am to be asked no questions, be worried for no explanations. You must be content with what Mr. Godfrey can tell you, for I can tell you nothing more—at least, not now. You must trust me wholly. Good-night,' and she was gone.

"Then," concluded Drysdale grimly, "I took a cab straight here, and here I am. Now, in God's name, what does it mean? What has she done?"

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CHAPTER VII

A Glimpse at a Skeleton

GODFREY smoked for a moment in silence. The story he had just heard needed digestion. It shed a new light upon the problem—a light at the same time illuminating and confusing—a light, indeed, which served only to disclose new depths of mystery. So Miss Croydon's story had been true in another particular. Her sister had been cognisant of her errand; she had not approved of it; she had tried to hold her back; but the stronger nature had overridden the weaker one. The elder woman had tried to shield the younger one, had even lied for her—she had known, then, that the errand was one that could not be explained; she, with her experience of the world, had realised, perhaps more strongly than her sister, its compromising nature. What was the secret which those papers guarded?

Drysdale hitched impatiently in his chair.

"Out with it, Jim," he said. "Don't try to soften it—I can stand it, I guess. The only thing I can't stand is this suspense."

"I'm not going to soften it," Godfrey assured him, and he rapidly outlined the tragedy of the evening, while his companion listened with horrified attention. Godfrey watched him as he sat staring into the fire with haggard face.

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"Don't make it blacker than it is, Jack," he said, at last. "Personally, I don't believe they've got the right man, but I'm sure of one thing—Miss Croydon had no hand in it."

"Oh, I know she didn't!" Drysdale burst out. "It isn't that. Don't you see—it isn't that! But what took her to that house? Why should she go there alone, at night, to meet a drunken brute? Answer me that, Jim Godfrey. I don't care a hang for all the rest."

Godfrey's face hardened as he turned back to the fire. That was the very question to which he himself had been striving vainly all the evening to find an answer.

"Of course, Jack," he said slowly, "I can't tell you just what her whole purpose was. I don't know the secret of the papers she hoped to get—it's a family secret—and none of our business. But one thing's certain—whatever it is, there's no cause for you to worry about it."

"And why not?"

"Why, don't you see, Jack? If Mrs. Delroy knew her sister's errand, it could have been no questionable one—no vulgar intrigue—nothing that would touch her in any degrading way—probably nothing that would touch her personally at all. One doesn't confide things of that sort to one's sister, nor ask advice about them. To be sure, she didn't heed the advice; but at the very worst, all she's been guilty of is an indiscretion. That, I think, any man would be glad to forgive."

Drysdale drew a deep breath of relief,

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"Of course," he assented quickly.

"And that," continued Godfrey earnestly, "is all you need to know. I believe she tells the exact truth when she says she tried to save Thompson's life. Therefore, you may go back to her to-morrow without the need of asking a single question. Depend upon it, she'll explain it all in time. Show her now that you trust her—that's the least you can do—yes, and the most you can do to help her."

"I will," agreed Drysdale instantly. "You've taken a great load off my heart, old man."

"You hadn't faith enough. Why, one needs only to look at her to see that she's above suspicion. I don't think you quite appreciate her. Most men would be glad to get a woman like that on any terms."

Drysdale sat for a moment staring into the fire.

"I do appreciate her," he said slowly, "through and through. I'm appalled at the wonder of it, sometimes, that she should really care for a fellow like me. I'm not worthy——"

Godfrey was walking nervously about the room.

"No, you're not," he broke in abruptly. "Mighty few men would be. Luckily, women don't stop to look at that side of it. Besides, she'll help you, if you really try to live up to her——"

"I intend to," said Drysdale humbly.

Godfrey started to say something more, then shook himself impatiently.

"Her appearance will help her," he added in another tone, "when she's called before the coroner—she'll impress the jury in just the right way."

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Drysdale got up quickly.

"She'll have to appear before the coroner?"

"Of course—she's practically the only witness. Your place is with her—more especially since you say Delroy himself is out of town."

"Thank you," and Drysdale took up his hat. "You've helped me a lot," and with another warm hand-clasp, he was gone.

Godfrey turned back into the room and sat down again before the fire. Drysdale's story had, indeed, furnished him with new food for thought. So it was a family secret that Grace Croydon was guarding. She had spoken the truth—she had scorned to lie. A secret that affected the family honour. That was conceivable—it furnished the only possible solution of the mystery. He felt that he could reconstruct the drama with some degree of plausibility. He smiled grimly as he drew a pad of paper toward him and got out his pencil. Like all good tragedies, it should be in five acts.

Act I.

The Croydon family possesses a skeleton, and one Thompson holds the key to the closet in the shape of certain papers. He threatens to use them, to display the skeleton to the world. He writes to Miss Croydon, or perhaps to Mrs. Delroy, demanding a price for his papers. Mrs. Delroy is for letting him do his worst; Miss Croydon, less sensible (also perhaps more sensitive), is for trying to buy him off. She overrides her sister, makes an appointment with Thompson, disre-

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garding the risk she runs of compromising herself. (The skeleton, then, must be a particularly grisly one!)

Act II.

Miss Croydon goes to the appointment alone, but with the precaution of taking a pistol with her. (Query—Was she accustomed to using a pistol?) She is admitted by Thompson, who has barely awakened from a drunken sleep: A ten-minute parley follows, during which he states his demands. She, perhaps, finds them excessive, impossible to comply with, and tells him so. He grows angry, abusive, perhaps attempts some violence. She produces her pistol, and at that moment a man steals behind him from the inner room and strikes him down. Then, standing over him, he deliberately shoots him through the heart. Miss Croydon, perceiving his intention, instinctively raises her own pistol and fires at him. The shots are simultaneous, which explains the single loud report heard by the janitor. The murderer calmly opens the door and escapes.

Act III.

Mrs. Delroy is at her library window, anxiously awaiting her sister's return. She has been absent much longer than she expected to be, and Mrs. Delroy is growing alarmed. Enter Jack Drysdale, the sister's affianced. Mrs. Delroy tries desperately to get rid of him, even lies to do so, in the effort to pre-

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vent the discovery of her sister's absence. As he is about to go, Miss Croydon returns, sees her sister, and tells her that the interview has led to Thompson's death. Mrs. Delroy jumps to the conclusion that her sister has herself committed the crime and collapses. Miss Croydon then, for the first time, seeing Drysdale, warns him that she is compromised. Exit. Drysdale rushes off in search of an explanation. (That Mrs. Delroy should for an instant believe her sister guilty of such a crime argues that the skeleton is so horridly repulsive that only Thompson's death could bury it effectually—which, of course, is plausible, since he doubtless knew the contents of the papers.)

"There," said Godfrey, laying down his pencil, "after the recognised fashion, three acts are devoted to deepening the complications; two must now be devoted to clearing them away. That's the work for the future. Let us see what we have to do."

He took up the pencil again and turned to a new sheet.

1.—To establish the identity of the murdered man. This may be done by a more careful examination of his belongings. The callosities on his hands, his weather-beaten face, the cut of his clothes all indicate that he was a sailor. I should say that he had seen better days, but had been brought down in the world by drink. (Note—In the morning, send a man along the water-front with his photograph.)

2.—To disinter the skeleton. This, of course, will render necessary an examination of the history of the

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Croydons, and should not be difficult. (Note—Ask Delaney to look up the family.)

3.—To discover the murderer.

"This last," continued Godfrey, gazing contemplatively at his paper, "is, of course, the most important; indeed, it is the object of the other two. Now, let us see what we know about this mysterious individual," and he turned another page.

1.—He must have been in apartment fourteen before Miss Croydon's arrival, otherwise he could not have gained access to the bedroom unseen. (This shuts out Jimmy the Dude.)

2.—Therefore he was a friend or at least an acquaintance of Thompson's, since it is impossible that he could have been there without Thompson's knowledge.

3.—But if Thompson consented to his overhearing the interview, he must have expected some help from him.

4.—Yet he was not in the apartment at seven o'clock when Higgins put Thompson to bed.

5.—But Higgins says that no one entered after that except Miss Croydon. (Higgins may, of course, be mistaken.)

6.—Something which occurs during the interview arouses the unknown's anger. He picks up a piece of pipe (we must discover where he got it) and steals out upon Thompson and knocks him down. If it was merely to protect Miss Croydon, that would have sufficed, but instead he coolly draws a pistol and kills

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his victim. Then, knowing that the noise would attract the janitor, he steps into the hall, hides somewhere, and, as Higgins rushes into the room, walks down the stair and escapes.

7.—We have Miss Croydon's description of him.

Godfrey looked at his notes musingly.

"It's a tangled web," he said, at last. "A tangled web—there's lots of threads that need straightening out. But, except for that first point, it's not to be denied that Jimmy the Dude fits in with all the particulars. He was an acquaintance of Thompson, perhaps a friend; if he stole the key, he could have entered the rooms at any time; he's certainly capable of killing a man, upon provocation. But the mystery is—what could the provocation have been? To protect Miss Croydon? But then, why kill Thompson? That shooting of an unconscious man argues a ferocity scarcely human. Robbery? But Jimmy nor any other sane person would deliberately murder a man under the eyes of a witness. Well, to-morrow will tell the story—to-day, rather. If Miss Croydon identifies him, that settles it—but I've a feeling that it will be a long time before I can fill in the rest of the drama. However, I'll keep these notes."

He was whistling softly to himself as he tore the sheets from the pad. Somehow, the case no longer harried and perplexed him as it had from the moment he recognised Miss Croydon, cowering against the wall in suite fourteen; a curious load was lifted from him; she was not guilty, she had committed at most only an indiscretion; she was free from stain. The

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thought pleased him, elated him. He would lead the pack far away from her—the papers, the suspicious public. She should emerge unsmirched, even in the least degree.

He folded the sheets and docketed them:

THE MARATHON MYSTERY,

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS.

Then he placed them carefully in a file case. They were to confront him, before long, as an evidence of his own insufficiency—so far from having witnessed three acts of the tragedy, it was merely the prologue which had been enacted before him.

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CHAPTER VIII

The Fog Thickens

THE coroner's court was crowded, as it always is at any hearing presenting features of morbid or sensational interest, and Goldberg, with an inborn love of the theatric, arranged his witnesses so as to lead gradually to the climax, the dénouement. He put the janitor on the stand first, and then had Simmonds tell his story. Some medical testimony followed as to the exact nature of Thompson's injuries, and the bullet, which had been extracted, was put in evidence—it was plainly much too large to have come from Miss Croydon's pistol. Finally, Miss Croydon herself was called. A little gasp of delicious excitement ran through the crowd as she appeared at the door of the witness room. Here was a titbit to touch the palates of even the jaded police reporters.

Godfrey, looking at her as she came steadily forward to the stand, felt his heart warm with admiration. She seemed perfectly composed, and if not perfectly at ease, at least as nearly so as any woman of her position could be in such a place. Godfrey was pleased to see Drysdale in close attendance, and he nodded to him encouragingly.

Miss Croydon told her story clearly and with an accent of sincerity there was no doubting. It differed in one detail from the story she had told the night before. Thompson, she said, had perceived the intruder

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and there had been a short, fierce struggle before he fell under the blow of the pipe. He was not unconscious, but was struggling to his feet again, when his assailant shot him.

Jury, coroner, reporters listened with close attention. Godfrey watched her with a grim little smile at her superb assurance, her perfect poise. Then he glanced at the jury and smiled again as he noted their seriously respectful faces. When she had finished, Goldberg began a brief examination.

"That is not precisely the story you told last night, Miss Croydon," he suggested.

"No," she said; "no—I was too startled, then, too over-wrought to think quite clearly. This morning I endeavoured to recall exactly what occurred."

"And you believe that you have succeeded?"

"Yes, sir; I am sure of it."

"You would say, then, I suppose, that the deceased had been killed in self-defence."

"I am not familiar with the niceties of the law, sir," she answered steadily.

"But there was a struggle?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the deceased was endeavouring to inflict some injury upon his adversary?"

"He was doing his best to do so, I should say, sir."

The coroner paused for a moment and glanced at the jury, but none of them seemed disposed to ask any questions. Then Goldberg made a sign to Simmonds. He left the room, but reappeared in a moment, leading in Jimmy the Dude.

Not until they were quite near did Miss Croydon

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perceive them; then, as her eyes met the prisoner's, she half started from her chair, her face like marble. As for Jimmy, Godfrey was astonished to perceive the fascinated gaze he bent upon Miss Croydon. What was the connection between them? Where could they possibly have met? Was Jimmy guilty, after all? Certainly Simmonds had no longer any doubt of it, to judge by his beatific expression of countenance.

It was over in an instant—Miss Croydon gripped back her self-control and the prisoner managed to remove his eyes from her; but Goldberg had perceived their agitation, and the gaze he bent upon the witness grew perceptibly more stern.

"Miss Croydon," he began, "you have described the guilty man as short and heavy-set with a dark moustache turning up at the ends. Look at the prisoner before you—is he the man?"

"He is not," replied the witness in a firm voice and without an instant's hesitation.

Jimmy was again watching her with expressive eyes.

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly sure; there is little or no resemblance."

"You do not know the prisoner?"

"No, sir; I have never before seen him."

"He was talking with the janitor last night when you entered the Marathon."

"I had on a heavy veil at the time and could not see distinctly."

The answers came promptly, calmly. Goldberg hesitated and glanced at Simmonds's crestfallen face. Was he justified in pushing her further? He glanced

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at her again from under half-closed lashes, and her imperious beauty did its work.

"That is all," he said abruptly. "You may go, Miss Croydon."

Godfrey watched her as she lowered her veil, rose, stepped down, and took Drysdale's arm. She had carried it off well, exceedingly well. Her attitude had been so frank, so candid, so openly sincere that he himself was almost convinced by it. But for that instant's agitation when she first perceived the prisoner, he would have been quite convinced. She had told her story and answered Goldberg's questions with clear cheek and steady eye—with a directness which had plainly carried great weight with the jury. Wonderful was the adjective which Godfrey used in describing her to himself.

But what had that instant's agitation meant? Was Jimmy really guilty? Was she trying to shield him, out of gratitude, perhaps, for defending her? Had Jimmy risen to that height of chivalry? See with what a fascinated gaze he was watching her now!

She passed from sight, the door closed, and he leaned back in his chair to hear Jimmy tell a smooth story of his doings the night before. Magraw and half a dozen others confirmed the tale; it was a really good alibi, carefully arranged; there was nothing to disprove it, and at the end, the jury, without retiring, handed in the usual verdict of death at the hands of a person unknown.

When it was over, Simmonds crooked at Godfrey an inviting finger, and together they went down to the detective's private office.

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"Sit down," said Simmonds; "I want to talk to you. We're up against a tough proposition."

Godfrey sat down and looked at him.

"Yes, we are," he agreed.

"What do you think of it?"

"I'm more inclined to think Jimmy guilty than I was last night."

"You saw, then, that she was trying to protect him?" asked Simmonds eagerly.

"I saw there was some understanding between them. Don't let your theory of Jimmy's guilt carry you away. Besides, there's a good deal to say on the other side. There wasn't enough finish about it to look like Jimmy. He'd think a long time before he killed a man with a third person looking on."

"But if it was self-defence?"

Godfrey raised his eyebrows expressively.

"I think she was drawing the long bow myself," agreed Simmonds, quickly; "and there can be only one reason for it—she's trying to protect Jimmy, or whoever it was killed Thompson. It was Jimmy, I tell you—he was jealous of her——"

"Oh, nonsense!" interrupted Godfrey impatiently. "A love affair between those two! You've been reading French romances, Simmonds!"

"Maybe I have; but I've run across stranger things than that right here in New York. This is a bad snarl, any way you look at it. Here's a point, now—how could Thompson, who was dead drunk at seven o'clock, be wide awake at eight? How could he have heard Miss Croydon's knock?"

"Maybe it wasn't Thompson who opened the door."

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"But Miss Croydon entered without hesitation. The man who opened the door must 've been the one she expected to see. You'll remember, she asked for Thompson."

"Well, whoever it was," Godfrey pointed out, "it wasn't Jimmy. He couldn't have beaten the elevator upstairs."

"No," admitted Simmonds helplessly, "he couldn't. But let me point out one thing—whoever got into Thompson's rooms had his key. There was nobody there when Higgins put Thompson to bed; Higgins locked the door when he came out; Thompson's windows were all locked on the inside and the transom was bolted. Now if Jimmy didn't have the key, who did?"

"I don't know," said Godfrey. "But we'll never arrive anywhere if we keep tangling ourselves up this way. Who is Thompson? The first thing we've got to do is to establish his identity. Then, maybe, we can make a guess at the rest of the story."

"Of course; I saw that at once. But a queer thing is that we can't find out a thing about Thompson. Last night was the first time he'd ever been seen at Magraw's—nobody there 'd ever seen him before. He spent three or four dollars treating the crowd. Then he got noisy and Magraw was going to call the police, but Jimmy spoke up and said he'd look after him. His story was straight that far."

"Have you gone through Thompson's belongings?"

"Here they are," and Simmonds brought out a canvas bag and opened it. "Look at them."

Godfrey turned out the contents and examined them piece by piece. It was merely a lot of ordinary cloth-

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ing, most of it much the worse for wear and all of it strongly impregnated with the odour of tobacco.

"Anything in the pockets?" asked Godfrey.

"Not a thing except some loose smoking tobacco. There's one thing about the clothing, though—have you noticed? It's all summer clothing; see these linen trousers, now."

Godfrey nodded, with drawn brows.

"What's this?" he asked suddenly, holding up a swart object, shaped like a clam-shell and halving in the same way along the sharp edge.

"I don't know. A curio picked up at sea somewheres, perhaps. I have a theory that Thompson was a sailor."

"Why?"

"Well, the bag, in the first place—only a sailor would carry his clothes that way. Then, put your head down in it and, under the tobacco, you'll smell the salt."

Godfrey sniffed and nodded again. Then he got out his knife.

"Let's take a look at the inside of Mr. Thompson's curio," he said, and inserted the blade.

A twist and the sides unclosed. Simmonds sprang back with a sharp cry of surprise as he saw what lay within, and even Godfrey's heart gave a sudden leap.

For there, coiled thrice upon itself, lay a little viper, with venomous, triangular head.

Then, in an instant, Godfrey smiled.

"It's not alive," he said. "Don't you see, it's some marvellous kind of nut."

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Simmonds approached cautiously and took another look.

"A nut?" he repeated. "A nut? Well, that beats me!"

And well it might, for in every detail the form was perfect. Godfrey looked at it musingly.

"This may give us a clew," he said. "I shouldn't imagine a nut like this grows in many parts of the world. Though, of course, a sailor might pick it up anywhere—from another sailor, in a slop-shop, even here in New York, perhaps."

He closed the shell together again and placed it in the bag, stuffing the rest of the clothing in after it.

"Thompson had no very exalted idea of cleanliness," he remarked. "His clothing needs a visit to the laundry. And this is all?"

"Yes—he'd rented his furniture from a store down the street. He had to pay his rent in advance because he had so little baggage. That receipt's the only thing that's got his name on it—oh, yes; there's a letter tattooed on his left arm, but it's not a T—it's a J."

"Which goes to show that his name wasn't Thompson. I think you're right, Simmonds, in putting him down as a sailor. I thought so last night—in fact, I've already got two men making a tour of the docks trying to find somebody who knew him."

"Have you?" said Simmonds, smiling. "That's like you. There's another curious thing, though, about the clothing he had on."

"What is that?"

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"Some of it's marked with one initial, some with another. Not one piece is marked with his."

"That *is* queer," commented Godfrey; "but it isn't half so queer as another thing. Why should a sailor, a drunkard, without a decent suit of clothes, rent an apartment that costs him forty dollars a month, when he could get a room for a dollar a week down on the Bowery, his natural stamping ground?"

Simmonds nodded helplessly.

"That's so," he said.

"Unless," added Godfrey, "he thought he had to have some such place to work from. He could hardly have asked Miss Croydon to meet him in a Bowery lodging house."

"No," agreed Simmonds; "but he needn't have blown in forty dollars, either. He could 'a' got a nice room 'most anywhere uptown for five a week——"

A tap at the door interrupted him.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened and the coroner's clerk entered.

"Mr. Goldberg sent the exhibits back to you," he said, holding out a parcel to Simmonds.

Simmonds opened it and took out a pocket-book, a pipe, a knife, and some silver money.

"All right," he said, and signed a receipt.

Godfrey waited until the door closed, then he rose and came over to Simmonds's side.

"There's something here that might help us," he said, picking up the pocket-book. "Those clippings—why, they're not here!"

Simmonds smiled drily.

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"That's another thing I wanted to tell you. The clippings have been removed."

"Removed? By whom?"

"That's a question. They were removed some time between the moment we looked at them and the moment the coroner took charge."

Godfrey stared at him with startled eyes.

"You remember," Simmonds continued, "that after we looked at the pocket-book, I put it back in Thompson's pocket."

"Yes—I saw you do that."

"We then went into the bedroom, and had a look around, leaving the body alone——"

"With Miss Croydon," said Godfrey, completing the sentence.

"Precisely. Goldberg arrived a minute or two later. Then he and I searched the body again. When he opened the pocket-book there was nothing in it except the rent receipt."

Godfrey sat down again in his chair. The inference was obvious, irresistible. The clippings had been removed by Miss .Croydon—they were the papers she had risked so much to get possession of. Simmonds and he had had the secret under their hands and had missed it! It was not a pleasant reflection.

His thoughts flew back to Miss Croydon, and he found himself again admiring her. To have taken the clippings demanded a degree of bravery, of self-control, amounting almost to callousness. It seemed incredible that she should have dared approach the body, open the coat . . .

Then he remembered her half-fainting attitude when

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he had returned from the inner room. At the time, he had thought the collapse natural enough. Now, it took on a new meaning.

"There's another thing," continued Simmonds, after a moment. "Here's the piece of pipe we found on the floor. Do you know where it came from?"

"No—I was going to look that up."

"It came from the radiator. The connections were defective and a plumber was replacing them. This is a piece of pipe he had removed and left lying behind the radiator. He remembers it distinctly. Do you recall the position of the radiator?"

"Yes; it's against the wall opposite the bedroom door."

"Exactly. Then the person coming from that door must have crossed the room to get it. More than that, he must have hunted for it or known it was there, because it was in the shadow behind the radiator. It couldn't be seen unless one looked for it—I've tried it."

Godfrey paused to consider.

"Did you give these points to Goldberg?" he asked.

"No; I didn't think it would help matters any; besides, I didn't want to put Miss Croydon on her guard."

"Of course—though all this doesn't actually implicate her."

"No; but it shows she knows more than she's told us," said Simmonds doggedly. "I don't think she's been square with us."

Godfrey did not permit any trace of his inward perturbation to appear on his countenance; nevertheless

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he was seriously disturbed. He had hoped that no one but himself would suspect Miss Croydon's lack of frankness. He felt a certain irritation against her —she should have been more careful; she should have foreseen that the clippings would be traced to her. She was relying too much on his forbearance. He must do his best to control Simmonds.

"Well, perhaps she hasn't," he said slowly, after a moment; "but maybe she's not so much to blame for that, after all. Anyway, we've got to work at the case from the other end. We've got to identify Thompson first."

"Yes," agreed Simmonds; "that's our best hold. You'll let me know if you find out anything?"

"Of course," said Godfrey, rising, and with a curt nod he went out and down the steps to the street.

At the office he found two reports awaiting him. One was from the men he had sent along the docks—they had found no one who could identify the photograph of Thompson. The other was from Delaney, the head of the *Record's* intelligence department. At two o'clock that morning, just before retiring, Godfrey had 'phoned a message to the office:

"Delaney—I want all the information obtainable concerning the history of the Croydon family, to which Mrs. Richard Delroy and Grace Croydon belong."

This was the result:

"Gustave Croydon, notary and money-lender, No. 17 Rue d'Antin, Paris, removed with wife and young

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daughter about 1878, to Beckenham, just south of London, England. Why he removed from France not known. Rue d'Antin has been completely rebuilt within last thirty years and only person there now who remembers Croydon is an old notary named Fabre, who has an office at the corner of Rue St. Augustin. He has vague memory that Croydon left France to avoid criminal prosecution of some sort.

"Croydon bought small country place near Beckenham and lived there quietly in semi-retirement. Fortune apparently not large. In 1891, mortgaged estate for £2000; mortgage paid in 1897. Religion, Catholic. Excellent reputation at Beckenham.

"Eldest daughter, Edith, born in France, August 26, 1874. Educated at school there, but broke down from over-study and returned to Beckenham, where she became interested in social settlement work. There met Richard Delroy, New York, who was making investigation of London charities. Married him June 6, 1900, and went immediately to New York.

"Only other child, younger daughter Grace, born at Beckenham, May 12, 1880. Educated at home. No unusual incidents in life, so far as known.

"Croydon and wife died typhoid fever, 1901. Delroys came to England, and, after selling property and settling estate, took Grace home with them. Estate, left wholly to younger sister, paid inheritance tax on £7500."

Godfrey read this through slowly, dwelling upon it point by point.

"The skeleton," he said to himself, "is pretty plain

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—it lies concealed somewhere behind Croydon's departure from France. There must have been some unusual reason for that—a reason even more serious, perhaps, than this threatened prosecution—the clippings would tell the story.

"But is it worth while trying to dig it up? It wouldn't be a difficult thing to do if the newspapers handled it at the time; but I don't know," and he stared out through his window with drawn brows. "If it's buried again, I believe I'll let it rest—for the present, anyway," and he whirled back to his desk.

He wrote the story of the day's developments and turned it in.

"We've been lucky," said the city editor, with a gleeful smile, as he took the copy. "We've got photographs of all the principals."

"Have we?"

"Yes—they cost $500, but they're worth it. No other paper in town will have 'em."

"That's good," said Godfrey, but it was a half-hearted commendation, and he left the office in a frame of mind not wholly amiable. The methods of a popular newspaper are not always above reproach.

"Thank Heaven," he added to himself, his face clearing a little, "there's nothing in my story to implicate either Miss Croydon or Mrs. Delroy—there's no hint of the skeleton! I took care of that—which," he concluded, with a grim smile, "is mighty forbearing in a yellow journalist!"

What further tests there were to be of his forbearance not even he suspected!

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PART II

CECILY

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In the Promenade de Luxe of the New York Theatre.

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CHAPTER I

A Change of Lodgings

AS a matter of course, the affair at the Marathon created a great public sensation. The papers overflowed with details, theories, suggestions to the police, letters from interested readers. Many of the latter were quite certain that they could quickly solve the mystery, but unfortunately private business demanded their whole attention; meanwhile, the stupidity of the detective force was a disgrace to the city; let the guilty parties be arrested without further delay, whatever their position! It was remarkable how few accepted the simple theory which Simmonds had propounded; all of them chose to discern something deeper, more intricate, more mysterious, and Miss Croydon incurred much oblique reference. This, for the most part, took the form of scathing, even hysterical polemics against the degeneration of American Society, the greatest peril threatening the health and prosperity of the Republic. As it was with Rome, so would it be with America; luxury, sensuality, a moral code growing ever more lax, could have only one result!

No doubt these vigorous correspondents enjoyed themselves and imagined that Society quivered in consternation under the castigation. Certainly they formed a source of exquisite amusement to the readers of the papers.

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It has long been a habit of mine, when any particularly abstruse criminal mystery is before the public, to pin my faith to the *Record*. Its other features I do not admire, but I knew that Jim Godfrey was its expert in crime, and ever since my encounter with him in the Holladay case, I have entertained the liveliest admiration of his acumen and audacity. If a mystery was possible of solution, I believed that he would solve it, so it was to the *Record* I turned now, and read carefully every word he wrote about the tragedy.

It is difficult for me to explain, even to myself, the interest with which I followed the case. I suppose most of us have a fondness, more or less unrealised, for the unique and mysterious, and we all of us revolt sometimes against the commonplaceness of every-day existence. We had been having a protracted siege of unusually hard work at the office, and I was a little run down in consequence; I felt that I needed a tonic, a distraction, and I found it in "The Tragedy in Suite Fourteen," as Godfrey had christened it.

I was sitting in my room on the evening of the second day after the affair, smoking a post-prandial pipe and reading the *Record's* stenographic report of the coroner's inquest, when there came a knock at my door and my landlady entered. She held in her hand a paper which had a formidable legal appearance.

"Have you found another apartment yet, Mr. Lester?" she asked.

"No, I haven't, Mrs. Fitch," I said. "I'm afraid I've not been as diligent in looking for one as I should have been."

"Well, I've just got another notice," and she sighed

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wearily. "They're going to begin tearing down the house day after to-morrow. I can't find another house, so I'm going to put my furniture in storage. I've told the men to come for it to-morrow."

"All right," I said. "If I can't find an apartment to suit, I'll put my stuff in storage, too, and stay at a hotel for a while. I'll know by to-morrow noon, Mrs. Fitch."

"Very well. It does seem hard, though," she added, pausing on the threshold, "that we should be the ones to suffer, when there's so many other blocks they might have taken."

"The residents of any of the other blocks would probably have said the same thing," I pointed out. "After all, I suppose this block was better than the others, or it wouldn't have been chosen."

She sniffed sceptically, and went on her way to notify her other lodgers of the imminent eviction.

We were martyrs to the march of public improvement. The block had been condemned by the usual legal process, and an armory was to be erected on the site. So there was nothing left for us to do but move. I had hoped that Mrs. Fitch would find another house somewhere in the neighbourhood and that I could stay with her; now, it seemed, I must search for other quarters, and at exceedingly short notice. To find comfortable ones, conveniently situated, and at the same time within reach of my modest income would, I knew, be a problem not easy of solution.

I settled back in my chair and took up my paper again, when a sudden thought brought me bolt upright. Here was an apartment, two rooms and bath, just what

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I wanted, empty—and moreover, so situated that I should be admirably placed for close-at-hand study of the tragedy. I glanced at my watch—it was only half-past seven—and I hurried into my coat in a sudden fever of impatience lest someone else should get there before me.

Twenty minutes' walk brought me to the Marathon apartment house, and as I stepped into the vestibule, I saw sitting by the elevator a red-faced man whom I recognised instantly as Higgins, the janitor. He rose as I approached him.

"You have an apartment here to rent, haven't you?" I asked.

"Not jest now, sir," he answered. "There will be next week—if th' walkin' delegates leaves us alone. You see, th' house is bein' remodelled."

"Oh," I said, more disappointed than I cared to show, "I thought perhaps there was one I could move into at once. Next week won't do me any good."

He moistened his lips and scratched his head, eyeing me undecidedly.

"May I ask your name, sir?" he said, at last.

I handed him a card, which had also the address of my firm, Graham & Royce. He read it slowly.

"We've got one apartment, sir," he said, looking up when he had mastered it; "two rooms an' bath—but it needs a little cleanin' up. When do y' have t' have it?"

"I have to move in to-morrow," I answered, and I told him briefly why. "May I look at this apartment?"

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He hesitated yet a moment, then straightened up with sudden resolution.

"You kin see it if you want to, sir," he said; "but first, I must tell you that it's soot fourteen, where they was a—a murder two days ago."

"A murder?" I repeated. "Oh, yes; I *did* see something about it in the papers. Well, that doesn't make any difference; I'm not afraid of ghosts."

"Then that's all right, sir," he said, with a sigh of relief, and motioned toward the elevator. "I didn't believe we'd find it so easy t' rent that soot ag'in," he added, as we started upward, "though I see now that I was foolish; fer really, it don't make no difference——"

The car stopped and he led the way down the hall without troubling to finish the sentence.

"Here we are," he added, pausing before a door and producing a bunch of keys. "Which reminds me that I'll have t' git a key fer you—the other tenant lost his—leastways, it wasn't found on him. Or mebbe you'd rather I'd change th' lock?"

"Oh, no," I assured him. "Another key will do," and we entered together.

I examined the room with keen interest. Evidently everything had been left just as it was on the night of the crime; only the body had been removed, and it, I knew, was at the morgue, waiting identification. Higgins was busy pointing out to me the advantages of the apartment, but I confess I did not hear him. I reconstructed the picture which had met Godfrey's eye when he burst into the room; I tried in vain to discern some point of evidence which he had

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overlooked. The furniture was of the commonest kind and consisted of only the most necessary articles.

Higgins led the way into the bedroom and opened the door of the bathroom beyond.

"I shall bring my own furniture," I said. "But I haven't any carpets. Perhaps I can buy these. They seem pretty good."

"They are, sir," agreed Higgins. "They're good carpets and as good as th' day they was put down. It 'll make it lots easier for us if we don't have t' take 'em up."

"All right," I agreed. "Find out what they're worth. When can you have the rooms ready?"

He looked at me and scratched his head again; then, remembering suddenly the nature of janitors, I took out my purse and tipped him.

"Have them ready by to-morrow afternoon," I said. "Get a man to help you, if necessary. I'll expect to be at home here to-morrow night."

His face cleared instantly.

"I'll do it, sir," he agreed, as he pocketed the money. "I'll see that everything gits in all right. You kin sign th' rent agreement to-morrow—th' soot rents fer forty a month."

"Very well," I said, and followed him into the outer room, smiling to myself at the thought that I had forgotten to ask for this important detail. "Would you mind if I sat down and took a smoke, while I decide how I'll arrange my furniture?"

"That's all right, sir," he assured me instantly; and just then the elevator bell rang. "There," he

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