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THE
TWENTY-SIX CLUES

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THE TWENTY-SIX CLUES

BY

ISABEL OSTRANDER

AUTHOR OF

"THE CLUE IN THE AIR," "AT 1:30," ETC.

NEW YORK

W. J. WATT & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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BY

ISABEL OSTRANDER

"AT 1:30"

"THE HERITAGE OF CAIN"

"THE CREVICE"
(In collaboration with detective
William J. Burns)

"THE CLUE IN THE AIR"

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THE TWENTY-SIX CLUES

CHAPTER I

In the Crime Museum

"THE one thing you psychometric enthusiasts overlook in claiming perfection for your method of solving crime is the human equation. Your machines for recording the emotions of the suspect cannot lie, it is true, but neither can they tell the truth. Granted that they are perfect in themselves, they are operated by the most faulty machine created since the beginning of time—the human being. You, Mr. Terhune, are unquestionably the greatest living master of scientific criminal investigation, but do the purely mechanical implements of your trade invariably probe to the very soul of the crime?"

Five men of oddly assorted types were seated about a round table drawn up closely before the fireplace at one end of the spacious dining-room with coffee and liqueurs before them. The speaker, evidently the host, was small and elderly, with bushy gray hair and a pointed Vandyke beard which waggled excitedly when he talked yet lent an air of distinction to his dapper evening garb. His eyes beamed in eager, ingenuous interest through their heavy tortoise-rimmed glasses, but the lean, ascetic individual across the table whom he had addressed smiled austerely and lifted supercilious brows as he replied:

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"My dear Mr. Norwood, we do not rely only on what you designate the mechanical implements of our trade; we are fully aware of and prepared to cope with such subjective phenomena as hysteria, defective mentality, falsehood, suggestion and self-deception. That is where the human equation proves of value. The mechanical implement is supplemented by the trained, analytical mind."

Mr. Calvin Norwood nodded.

"But that brings us again to the faulty human machine," he remarked slyly. "Is the investigator himself proof against at least two forms of the subjective phenomena you mention: suggestion and self-deception? A preconceived theory——"

"We do not deal in theories." Wade Terhune interrupted with a trace of asperity. "We work on a basis of proof, not opinion; proof obtained by tapping all the resources of modern science. Toxicology, bacteriology, chemistry, mineralogy, physics, chirography, microscopy, all aid us in the solution of crime. The expert criminalist must be a profound and almost universal student before he can hope to succeed."

"And what is your method, Mr. McCarty?" The host turned to a stocky, broad-shouldered man at his left. "You achieved success in more than one intricate case while you were connected with the police force of the city to say nothing of your work last year in the Rowntree-Collins affair. The investigation of crime has been my hobby for more than twenty years and I follow the records of the department faithfully. What is your modus operandi?"

"My what, sir?" inquired ex-Roundsman Timothy McCarty carefully. "You might not think it, but I would have lit on the truth a good deal earlier in that Rowntree case if I'd known what the Coroner was getting at when he sprung that 'corpus delicti' thing on us at the inquest."

Calvin Norwood took the hint.

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"I mean, what is your procedure in starting an investigation?" he hastened to explain. "How do you go about it?"

McCarty stroked the immaculate chin beneath his stubby, sandy mustache reflectively.

"I don't know, sir," he responded in all sincerity. "I've no science like Mr. Terhune, only the wits I was born with. I just take the facts that's as plain as the nose on your face and fit them together. You see, Mr. Norwood, I had my training in the old days when it meant promotion if you got the guilty party, or a quick transfer to some backwoods precinct if you didn't. When anything stumped me I'd talk it over with my old friend here, Denny Riordan, and many a pointer I've got from him, though it's little he knew it himself, half the time!"

The long-limbed, lantern-jawed gentleman beside him stirred resentfully and his host smiled.

"I know of Mr. Riordan's co-operation with you," he said. "When I read the narrative which gave the inside facts of the Rowntree case I was anxious to meet you and talk it over with you; that is why I persuaded Mr. Terhune to bring you both here to dine with me to-night. Mr. Riordan, how do you analyze a case?"

"I don't!" protested Dennis Riordan hurriedly. "I'm a city fireman, not a detective, Mr. Norwood. However, being Mac's pal I'm let in for most that he's got on his mind. Before his uncle died and left him a landed proprietor so that he quit the force, there wasn't much came up in the department that we didn't discuss and scrap over and settle to suit ourselves. When he was on a case I'd just trail along with him to see what would happen."

"Interesting, Victor, eh!" Norwood turned to the fifth man, who had made no move to join in the conversation.

He was slim and dark, with a delicate, sensitive face

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which bore the scars of a skillfully healed wound. Obviously in his twenties, he held himself with an erect military air, the bit of ribbon in the lapel of his dinner jacket and cross with two palms below it which he was destined never to behold attesting to the gallantry that had cost him his sight.

He bowed slightly and smiled as his soft, blind, brown eyes turned instinctively in the direction from which he had been addressed.

"Most interesting, Monsieur Norwood," he responded. "A d'Artagnan of the gendarmerie, is it not so? I have much desire to learn more of the little machines of Monsieur Terhune, however. To me it is quite incomprehensible, this recording of the emotions automatically; it would appear a miracle."

Terhune unbent and his quick smile lost all trace of patronage.

"It will be a privilege, my dear Captain Marchal, to give you a practical demonstration," he announced. "I will arrange to have you present at the next scientific experiment upon which I may be engaged, that you may note the effectiveness of my method. I can promise you that you will be astounded at the reactions displayed. But our host has made a collection of souvenirs which interests me profoundly. Are we to be favored this evening by a sort of private view, Mr. Norwood?"

"I should scarcely call them 'souvenirs'!" retorted his host with a shade of injured dignity. "In my crime museum I have assembled relics which have formed important data on many strange cases, solved and unsolved, as well as objects that have played significant parts in moments when history was made. I have been a mere dabbler, a dilettante in criminal investigation but occasionally a real find has come my way which at the time when inquiry was rife would have been of inestimable value to the authorities but which they

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themselves failed to unearth. For instance, within the last few days a worn black wallet has come into my possession which contains the only tangible clue to a mystery which aroused and baffled the city ten years ago. I tell you this in confidence, gentlemen, for I mean to work upon its evidence myself before turning it over to the police; they have resented my suggestions in the past and refused my offers of co-operation on more than one occasion. I feel perfectly justified in withholding this from them for the present in view of the length of time that has elapsed since their investigation of the case was dropped."

"What mystery was that, sir?" asked McCarty, his embarrassment at the unaccustomed grandeur of his surroundings wholly forgotten in his interest. "I don't call to mind any case that wasn't finished about that time, and I was on the force then."

"The Hoyos case, Mr. McCarty."

"Think of that, now!" Dennis, too, broke through the bonds of self-consciousness which had held his abashed tongue in leash. "You remember it, Mac! That Dago who was lost off his yacht in the Hudson? 'Twas when you were laid up after Nick the Wop knifed you! You said yourself it was no suicide at the time, though the Chief let it go at that."

"I recall it," McCarty responded. "And so you've fresh evidence, sir? I'd like nothing better than a peep at your museum."

"Come then," Calvin Norwood rose. "I'll show you some interesting things."

"If you will excuse me." The young Frenchman spoke hesitatingly in a lowered tone. "I—there are some letters which I can finish typing, Monsieur Norwood, and you will perhaps not require my presence——"

"Oh, let the letters go, Victor." The older man inter-

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rupted with kindly solicitude. "You have not been like yourself this evening, and we can't have you moping off all alone too much, my boy. Besides, I may need you to check me up on some of my data. You can have no idea, gentlemen, what a valuable assistant Captain Marchal has already proved himself. My museum is as sacred to me as a gallery of Old Masters would be to an art connoisseur, and my young friend here has developed a positive flair for the work."

Victor Marchal flushed darkly at the praise.

"I find it most interesting, this study of crime in the abstract," he repeated. "It was to me a pleasure to catalogue the contents of this unique museum."

Nevertheless, he hung back with evident reluctance when the others prepared to follow their host and McCarty watching his sensitive face noted the shade of repugnance which passed across it and did not marvel. To a young man fresh from the carnage of war and all but prostrated beneath the shock of the irreparable blow which it had dealt to him, a more cheerful atmosphere could well be imagined than the morbid horrors of a crime museum, but after his first momentary hesitation he resigned himself in suave compliance to his patron's suggestion.

The Norwood residence was an imposing if somewhat old-fashioned structure of brownstone situated near the Park in the most aristocratic section of the city, its center hall flanked by drawing-room and music-room on one side, library and dining-room on the other while at the rear a square, flat-roofed single-storied wing had been added which occupied almost half of the ample back-yard space, with a narrow strip of garden on either side.

It was toward this wing that the elated host marshaled his guests, chattering volubly the while with the naïve delight of an enthusiast sure of a congenial audience.

"You will see, gentlemen, the actual operating table

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upon which the mad surgeon Valparese committed so many murders before his mania was discovered. Upon it, beneath the blanket which covered Madero's body immediately after his assassination, lies the skeleton of the once beautiful Duchess of Piatra, the instigator and herself the victim of the famous Bucharest poisonings a generation ago."

Dennis Riordan clutched the arm of his friend McCarty with a muttered exclamation, but the latter shook him off in scorn and pressed forward lest a word of Norwood's discourse be lost to his avid ears.

"I have relics to show you of less celebrated but quite as interesting crimes." The sprightly, little, elderly gentleman continued with ghoulish relish. "For instance, the pocketknife which after five years convicted that Yonkers factory superintendent, Arnold, of the murder of his employer; also the knotted rope which proved that Ogilvy, the eccentric Scotch millionaire, was hanged and did not commit suicide, and the bottle of supposed headache cure —but you shall see for yourselves!"

They had reached the end of the corridor and Norwood with a flourish threw open the door leading to the wing and pressing an electric-light switch stepped aside that the others might precede him. They beheld a square, spacious, high-ceilinged room with a huge fireplace in the center of the left wall, tall windows at the farther end and long shelves and rows of cases filled with an incongruous and bewildering miscellany of objects familiar and bizarre.

In the center of the room directly beneath the great dome of light stood a long table upon which was suggestively outlined a figure beneath the gayly colored, sinisterly stained Mexican blanket, and on all sides ordinary firearms were mingled with strange knives and weapons, bits of fabric, fragments of furniture, medieval parchments, modern documents and hermetically sealed glass jars containing relics

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of a more gruesome nature which combined to form the oddest conglomeration that had ever met their marveling gaze.

With an exclamation of keen, professional interest Wade Terhune advanced and McCarty followed gazing about him in awed wonderment. Dennis Riordan hung doggedly at his heels and the secretary, Marchal, brought up the rear with Norwood's guiding hand upon his arm.

"Ah! This, I take it, is your collection of footprint molds, of which you told me the other day." Terhune had paused at the first flat, glass-topped case. "Your theory regarding them was inconclusive but highly ingenious, I remember. I congratulate you, Mr. Norwood; you have indeed a most complete aggregation of specimens——"

"That is only the beginning." His gratified host drew him to a second case and McCarty turned aside to a shelf upon which a certain glass jar had caught his eye.

Discovering that it contained a neatly severed human ear he was hurriedly replacing it, when a smothered exclamation from Dennis Riordan summoned him.

The lanky fireman, awkward enough in his civilian clothes, had been drawn as by a magnet to the bright-hued blanket covering the skeleton upon the table and as his friend approached he muttered darkly:

"Mac, would you believe it? 'Twas this very rag they covered Madero with, after the murdering devils had riddled him with bullets! By the powers, I'm not a believer in ghosts but this is not the room I'd choose to spend a night in by myself! I don't wonder that blind young Frenchman would rather juggle his typewriter than take a chance of running up against one of these relics unbeknownst!"

"Whist, he'll hear you!" McCarty cautioned. "He's standing over by the fireplace. Come on and look at something more cheerful; there's a pickled ear over yonder——"

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"I want none of it!" Dennis announced with a shudder. "I've heard of grown men running like mad after butterflies and spending their last nickel for canceled stamps and such, but it's a strange and unholy taste that would lead to a collection of this sort! Still, I would like one peep at the bones of the Duchess Who's-this, under the blanket. From the bulk of it, Madero himself might be lying beneath it."

"I've no doubt Mr. Norwood will show it to you, after. Come on, now, and listen to him!" McCarty urged. "What's that he's taking out of the case?"

"—Singular indeed!" Wade Terhune's comment carried distinctly to their ears in grudging admiration. "Poisoned court-plaster! I confess I never should have thought of so simple a method of introducing deadly toxin directly into the blood."

"It found an innocent victim." Calvin Norwood closed the glass lid. "You may recall the inexplicable death of the little Thorndike heiress, after a slight fall which merely grazed her knee? The matter was hushed up for family reasons and this bit of plaster came into my possession in a confidential manner, but I have a very definite idea as to the murderer's identity and for whom he really intended its use. However, I want to show you the Hoyos wallet, of which I spoke before we came in here. It contains some letters which throw an entirely new light—— Ah, Mr. Riordan! You are interested in the Madero blanket?"

He had turned to cross the room and encountered Dennis, who still lingered as if fascinated at the head of the long table.

"In what's under it, sir," Dennis responded. "The bones of this Duchess you told us about. Did she have any hair left now, I wonder?"

He spoke with elaborate carelessness, but McCarty, who

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had turned also from his place at Norwood's elbow, eyed him sharply and then took a quick step toward him.

"Hair?" repeated the amateur criminologist with an indulgent smile. "In life the Duchess of Piatra had very beautiful red hair and a few strands of it cling still to the skull. Would you care to see it?"

"*Red* hair, you say, sir? And it couldn't change after?" There was a note of suppressed excitement in Dennis' voice now which drew even Wade Terhune's attention, and the young Frenchman, too, awoke from his reverie and approached. Dennis' rugged face had paled slightly and his gray eyes glinted. "Mr. Norwood, I would like nothing better than to see what is here!"

Still smiling, their host advanced to the side of the table.

"The Duchess of Piatra," he began in his most didactic manner, "was accredited the most beautiful woman in the Balkans twenty years ago. During the last of the petty wars before the great world-struggle her tomb was rifled and I managed, after much diplomatic bartering, to obtain the skeleton. The nature of the poison which killed her has never been discovered, but it had a curious effect upon the bones, as you may see——"

Norwood lifted a corner of the blanket and with one jerk swept it to the floor. The next instant he had leaped back, his face gray and eyes fairly protruding from their sockets while a sound like a sharp, convulsive gasp emanated from the tense group about him.

Stretched upon the table lay no skeleton but the rounded life-like form of a young woman in all the opulent curves of budding maturity. One arm was crumpled beneath her, the other lay carelessly across the breast of her dark silk gown and her masses of disheveled, jet-black hair rippled over the edge of the table. It would seem almost that she slept until her face was seen and then the distorted swollen

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features, the staring eyes and blackened, protruding tongue revealed the hideous truth no less surely than the blue scarf which had been knotted so ruthlessly about her slender throat as to seem almost embedded in the flesh.

"My God! What is this!" Norwood croaked at last.

Terhune stood as if petrified, but Dennis rocked upon his heels.

"Holy Mother!" he ejaculated. "Is it the Duchess herself come to life a corpse again, or is it——?"

"It's murder!" McCarty announced in an awestruck tone, as he touched the face of the dead woman. "The woman's been strangled within the hour! Who is she?"

"Murder?" Victor Marchal elbowed him aside and groping wildly for the table, bent above it. He had scarcely touched it, however, when he straightened and cowered back.

"That perfume!" His cry rang through the room. "That scent of the Rose d'Amour! It is she! Madame Jarvis!"

"Evelyn? God, can it be?" Calvin Norwood gasped in a raucous whisper as his shuddering gaze swept the still form before him. "It—it is! Who can have done this fearful thing!"

"Murder, is it?" Dennis' voice expressed a certain revived confidence now that he was assured the materialization before them, tragic as it was, had not been induced by some dread supernatural agency. He turned to McCarty in swift challenge: "Now, you Irish son-of-a-gun, solve that!"

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CHAPTER II

Two Strands of Black Hair

"BUT is it true that she is really dead?" The blind secretary's emotional voice rose in an almost hysterical appeal and his fingers hovered tremblingly over the body. "What is it that has killed her? A-ah! This scarf which is drawn about her throat! Unloose it, Messieurs, I beg of you! It may be that life still lingers; that there is yet time!"

"'Tis useless, sir," McCarty interrupted him. "She's already cold, and the body must not be disturbed until the police come."

At the mention of the authorities who were sometimes his allies, more frequently his adversaries but always his competitors, Wade Terhune bestirred himself to action and took swift command of affairs. Fixing his erstwhile host with the cold eye of an inquisitor he asked in a curt, peremptory tone.

"Who is Evelyn Jarvis?"

"She is my niece Joan's intimate friend," Norwood responded mechanically as he moistened his dry lips. The jaunty air of self-possession had fallen from him and he appeared all at once shrunken and aged. "Oliver Jarvis' wife and our near neighbor. God! How can we tell him!"

"You positively identify the body, then, Mr. Norwood?" Terhune went on steadily.

"It cannot be! I feel as if I must have gone mad!" The other passed a shaking hand across his brow. "I can

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scarcely believe the evidence of my own eyes and yet—her eyes, her hair, that emerald upon her finger—oh! It is Evelyn! Poor child! Poor child!"

"You say they are neighbors of yours?" Terhune began and turned swiftly at a movement behind him. "Where are you going, McCarty?"

"To telephone Police Headquarters." The ex-Roundsman responded with a firmness which matched the criminalist's dominant tones. "There's been murder done and the body's here, Mr. Terhune. It's up to them first of all."

Terhune bit his lip and a slight color flushed his lean face, but he capitulated with an ironic smile.

"Assuredly, my dear McCarty. Summon them by all means! I merely wished to make a preliminary investigation before their well-meant efforts obliterated any possible clues." As the other disappeared in the corridor, he turned once more to Calvin Norwood. "Where do the Olivers live?"

"On the next street south directly on a line with this house; their back-yard and ours are separated only by a fence in which we have had a door cut through, for the girls—Evelyn and my Joan—have been like sisters. Why should anyone have taken her life, and how—how did she get here?"

Terhune did not reply immediately. He had bent over the table in his turn and was examining the body with deft, sure touches. Dennis Riordan stepped aside deferentially, and Victor Marchal had retreated to the cold hearth once more and stood with his elbow upon the mantel and his face averted.

"We must send for Oliver, of course." Norwood's dazed, trembling voice rambled on. "I can't tell the boy, I can't! It will kill him! He worshiped her——"

"Dead at least four or five hours." Terhune audibly made note of the result of his conclusions as he glanced at his

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wrist watch. "A quarter of ten; the murder was committed, then, approximately between five and six. There was a violent struggle; her hands are bruised and one sleeve of her gown is torn as you can see, but that is merely superficial. The knot in which the scarf is tied is the significant point. When did you last see Mrs. Jarvis alive?"

"The day before yesterday, on Wednesday evening. They gave an informal farewell dinner; she and Oliver are sailing for France next week—were to have sailed, I mean——" He paused and with an obvious effort pulled himself together, adding: "Mr. Terhune, I appreciate your interest in this terrible affair from a purely professional standpoint but really I cannot discuss it further until Oliver has been summoned."

"He's coming." McCarty's voice announced from the doorway as he re-entered. "After I talked to Inspector Druet, I looked up the Jarvis' number in the 'phone book and called their house. Some man, the butler, I've no doubt, told me nobody was at home but Mr. Jarvis might be at his club, the Gotham. I got to him there."

"What did you tell him?" quavered Norwood.

The secretary, too, had come forward once more.

"Just that you must see him here immediately, sir. 'Twas no concern of mine, but the Inspector will be asking for him, anyway. And, Mr. Norwood, sir, I think if you'd just say a word to the servants—the butler heard me at the telephone talking to Headquarters and I'm afraid we'll have them about our ears——"

"I—I must speak to them, of course!" Norwood turned to the door. "This is horrible! What am I to say to Oliver!"

He hurried from the room and Victor Marchal started to follow, then paused and stooping, fumbled for the Mexican blanket.

"You will permit, Messieurs?" he asked quietly. "Until

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the police officials arrive, at least, it is but respect to the dead."

Reverentially he spread the blanket over the pitiful, still form upon the table, then turning with outstretched, groping hands he made his way from the room.

Terhune had taken himself to the farther end of the museum where the four long French windows, set so closely as to give the effect of a wall of glass, looked out upon the back-yard and McCarty and Dennis stood gazing round-eyed at each other.

"I knew it!" the latter ejaculated at last in a lowered tone. "From the first minute I set foot in this room I knew there was something wrong with it more than the heathenish collection would account for. No more could I keep my eyes off that table——"

"Whatever put it into your head to ask that question of Mr. Norwood about the hair, Denny?" McCarty demanded.

"Well, I saw a skeleton in a real museum once, and it was not what you might call corpulent," Dennis averred. "Likewise, it was as bald as the palm of your hand. Now, that blanket looked too bulky to be covering just a rack of bones and when I walked around the head of the table I saw a long, black lock of hair hanging down nearly to the floor. I didn't know what to think, Mac, except that there was something going on here beyond a healthy mortal mind to figure out. What do you make of it?"

McCarty walked to the end of the table and glanced down. From beneath the gaudy blanket there rippled a single strand of silky ebony hair.

"Well, McCarty, what is your opinion?" Terhune had approached and unconsciously echoed Dennis' inquiry. "Have you formed one yet?"

There was about him an air of conscious superiority which betokened a discovery and the other eyed him warily.

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"I have not, Mr. Terhune," he responded. "I've nothing yet to go upon. This is the first time in my experience that a murder has been committed and the body brought and laid out where it would be the most handy to come to the notice of Mr. Norwood, as if the murderer was mocking him and daring him to find out the truth. Of all places in the world you'd expect to come on a fresh-killed corpse, it would not be in a museum of old crime relics!"

"Mr. Norwood is merely an eccentric amateur." Terhune shrugged. "The remarkable phase of the affair is that it should have occurred to-night, of all occasions, when I was present; and you, too, McCarty, for your work on the force in the old days and in association with me last year on the Rowntree case is not forgotten. If someone, knowing that we were to gather here to-night, had actually planned this ghastly surprise for us it could not have been more successfully consummated."

"It could not," McCarty agreed. "However, 'twas not to give us something to do that the poor lady was murdered! What do you think of it yourself, sir?"

The subdued but insistent peal of the front door-bell checked Terhune's reply and all three listened anxiously.

"What is it?" they heard a deep and pleasantly modulated masculine voice inquire. "What has happened, Uncle Cal? I came as quickly as a taxi would bring me."

Their elderly host's quavering tones responded in an indistinguishable murmur and there came a sharp exclamation from the other.

"Evelyn! An accident? What do you mean? Where is she?"

Calvin Norwood's voice rose in a broken cry.

"Oliver, oh, my boy! I can't tell you! She's there—there in my museum! May God help us all!"

Hasty steps strode down the corridor and a tall, young

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man appeared in the doorway. He was in his early thirties, well-built and of a clean-cut Anglo-Saxon type but his smoothly shaven face was very white and his blue eyes swept widely about the room ignoring or unconscious in his alarmed state of the presence of the three strangers.

"Where is my wife?" he repeated hoarsely. "She is not here! What has happened to her?"

Wade Terhune stepped forward.

"Mr. Jarvis, we have terrible news for you. Your wife has been killed."

He spoke slowly and quietly and for a moment the younger man eyed him as though the purport of the words had not penetrated his consciousness. Then he staggered back.

"Killed!" It was a mere husky whisper. "Evelyn—killed!"

His eyes roved dazedly once more about the room and back to Terhune's face and leaping forward he seized him by the arm.

"You can't mean what you are saying!" he cried. "Speak, man! My wife——!"

"It is true, Mr. Jarvis. She is dead."

"But how? Where?" The other's voice broke in sheer agony of half-incredulous grief. "Take me to her!"

"You don't understand, Mr. Jarvis. Your wife's body was discovered here a few moments before you were summoned. You must try to command yourself, for I have something yet more shocking to tell you." Terhune's own voice was gravely sympathetic but his sharp eyes followed every expression of the stricken face before him. "Mrs. Jarvis' body was brought here and placed where it was found in this room. She had been killed, I told you; I should have said 'murdered'!"

"Murdered! You are mad! Who would murder Evelyn? Where is this body which you have found?"

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No one answered him but unconsciously all eyes turned to the swathed form upon the table and he followed their gaze. With a gasp he sprung forward and tore off the enshrouding blanket and a cry rang through the room so poignant with horror and heart-breaking despair that the others instinctively averted their faces.

"My boy!" Calvin Norwood had entered and swiftly approached him. "Try to be brave and control yourself for her sake! We must find the vile wretch who——"

His voice ended in a choking gurgle for the grief-crazed young husband had turned and seized him by the throat.

"You've done this!" he roared. "You've killed her!"

Terhune moved swiftly, but McCarty and Dennis were before him and with a dexterous lunge forced Jarvis to relinquish his frenzied grasp.

"There now!" McCarty admonished soothingly. "'Tis a terrible business, Mr. Jarvis, but Mr. Norwood is not responsible. He knows no more of it than we do. We all came in here with him and found the body just as you see it now. We've no notion how it came here nor who killed her!"

A shudder shook the tense form which they held and it relaxed suddenly.

"Uncle Cal, I didn't mean—I didn't know what I was doing!" The young man murmured brokenly and turning once more to the table he fell upon his knees with his arms thrown out across the body of his wife and burst into harsh racking sobs.

At that moment the door-bell rang a second time and Inspector Druet's curt, incisive tones reached their ears in quick questioning. The butler's frightened stammer replied to him and then firm steps sounded in the corridor and the police official entered the room followed by two

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sturdy figures who took up their positions on either side of the doorway.

The Inspector nodded to Terhune and McCarty and his keen, alert eyes took in the situation at a glance.

"Mr. Norwood?" He turned to the bowed, elderly figure. "I'm from Headquarters. I'd like to have you tell me what you know of this crime, but first who is that?"

He pointed to the grief-stricken man by the table and Norwood responded:

"Her husband. Mr. McCarty sent for him as soon as he had telephoned to you. Inspector, this is a frightful affair! The young woman was an intimate friend of my household and a near neighbor, but I have not seen her for two days. I don't know how she was murdered nor the body conveyed here. I only know that we came in a half-hour ago and found her as you see, only the blanket had been drawn up, completely covering her. We were in here for some minutes before we discovered the body——"

The Inspector stopped him with a gesture, for Oliver Jarvis had dragged himself to his feet and lurched toward them.

"The police?" he asked thickly. "Find me the man who killed my wife and you can have all I possess! Find him for me and let me deal with him! Evelyn! Evelyn!"

He swayed and collapsed utterly, slumping forward as McCarty caught him in his strong arms.

"He'll do no good here for awhile," the latter remarked. "He's fainted, I think. Shall we get him to another room, Inspector, till he comes to and quiets down a bit? He's near crazed, and no wonder!"

"Yes, Mac. Take him away, but come back yourself—no, Martin and Yost can take him."

The two figures by the door advanced at the Inspector's nod, and Norwood roused himself.

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"The library would be best; the front room on your left as you entered the house. Victor Marchal, my secretary, is there and will attend to him."

As the unconscious form was borne away by the two stalwart detectives, the Inspector examined the body swiftly and then returned once more to his interrogation.

"When did you enter this room last, Mr. Norwood?"

"This afternoon; I think it was about three o'clock." The older man had regained a trifle of his composure with the removal of the bereaved husband, but his eyes fitternigly avoided the figure upon the table. "Everything was in perfect order then."

"The operating table was bare?"

"No, it is always covered with the Madero blanket beneath which I had placed the skeleton of the Duchess of Piatra!" Norwood paused with a start of returning memory which anticipated the Inspector's next query.

"Where is that skeleton now?"

"I—I don't know! The murderer must have hidden it somewhere or removed it altogether when he put the body there in its place. I hadn't remembered it until this moment." Norwood glanced about him as if expecting the gruesome object to meet his eye, but it was not in evidence and the room contained no closed receptacle large enough to conceal it. "You've heard of my collection of crime relics, Inspector,——"

The other interrupted him with a trace of impatience.

"Of course. But this afternoon, did you raise the blanket and look beneath it?"

"No. It is sometimes undisturbed for weeks together. I only took it from the table to-night to show my guests—Mr. Terhune, Mr. McCarty, and Mr. Riordan—the skeleton. This afternoon I entered for just a moment to obtain some notes for my secretary to transcribe, and went out

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immediately thereafter, to visit my friend, Professor Parlowe, the eminent toxicologist. I found him in the midst of a highly interesting experiment in his laboratory and returned home barely in time to change for dinner."

"You were alone when you came in here for the notes this afternoon?"

"No. Victor—Captain Marchal—my secretary, was with me."

"He left the room with you?" persisted the official.

"Yes, but he returned later and replaced the notes." Norwood was evidently disturbed afresh at the trend of the questioning. "He has free access to the museum at all times, Inspector; most of his work for me is in the care and tabulating of my collection, you know. He carries one key and I the other."

"You keep your museum locked, then?"

"Of course. It is only on comparatively rare occasions that I throw it open to visitors." Norwood spoke with dignity. "My collection is not on display for the morbidly curious."

"The door was locked when you brought your guests here this evening?" The Inspector was not to be swerved from his point and Dennis stirred and glanced meaningly at McCarty.

"Why, no, I—I don't believe that it was." Norwood's eyes traveled from one to another of them in troubled bewilderment. "I was so deeply engrossed in talking of the various objects of interest which I intended to show my friends that I scarcely noted. Did you observe whether I used my key or not?"

He appealed to Terhune, but while the latter was considering his reply Dennis broke in irrepressibly.

"You did not, sir. You switched on the light and just turned the handle of the door."

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"Dear me! This is most unusual." Norwood was plainly taken aback. "I must ask Victor if he forgot to lock the door."

"I will ask him myself, later," the Inspector announced drily. "Who else was in the house this afternoon during your absence?"

"Only the cook and housemaid, and they were below stairs. My niece is out of town on a visit and her personal maid is with her," explained Norwood. "We have reduced our household staff considerably as a matter of war economy and we keep no other servants except the butler. I gave him an afternoon off to-day to go to see his brother, who is ill in the hospital."

"H'm! I should like to have a little talk, then, with your secretary." Inspector Druet turned to the door. "He may have seen——"

"He can see nothing." Norwood interrupted. "He is a young French officer, recently blinded in battle, whom I brought back with me from France three months ago. He knows no more of this terrible event than I, and I beg that you will be as considerate with him as possible. His nerves were completely shattered by the ordeal through which he has passed and he is only beginning to regain his grip on life. Evelyn—Mrs. Jarvis—had taken a very kindly interest in him and the shock of her death, her murder, has utterly depressed and unnerved him. He was on the verge of absolute prostration when I left him in the library."

"I will let him off as lightly as I can, Mr. Norwood," the Inspector promised with a note of deepened respect in his tones. "However, if the murder was not committed here someone in this house must know how the woman's body was conveyed to this room——"

"If you will pardon my intrusion, Inspector," Terhune's tones were ironically apologetic. "I may be able to save

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you some valuable time. Mrs. Jarvis was not killed on the premises, nor was her body carried through the house. Someone, presumably her murderer, brought it in through that window there, the second from the left as you face it. I do not as a rule express an opinion on mere theory but I am led to believe that the murder occurred in her own home."

"Is that so, Mr. Terhune?" The Inspector paused deferentially. "On what do you base thât opinion?"

"I have already ascertained from Mr. Norwood that the Jarvis residence is directly on a line with this, facing the next street south and the two back-yards are separated only by a wall through which a door has been cut." Terhune's tenuous fingers sought the pocket of his vest. "Just before your arrival I examined the four windows in the rear of the room carefully. All were closed as you see them now, but the second from the left was unbolted and I opened it experimentally. Caught in a loose sliver of wood on the inner side of the frame, a little over four feet from the floor, where the two perpendicular sides of the window open like double doors I found—this."

He stretched out his hand and Dennis and McCarty glanced once more significantly at each other. From between the thumb and forefinger dangled a long, curling strand of glossy, jet-black hair.

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CHAPTER III

MARGOT

FOR a moment they stared and then Calvin Norwood gasped:

"But it seems incredible! That window is ten feet or more from the ground and there is only an open space beneath this end of the extension, for the kitchen although built out also does not reach the length of the museum. There is no way in which a person could climb up here, to say nothing of one burdened with the weight of a dead body."

"If you will glance out of the window you will see how easily that difficulty was overcome," interrupted Terhune. "A short ladder has been placed against the house, its upper end resting upon the ledge of the window."

"The ladder!" Norwood exclaimed. "I never thought of that! It is used for preening the vines which run over the yard fence and is usually lying around somewhere at hand, but it did not occur to me that anyone would ever employ it as a means of gaining ingress here!"

A rapid but fairly comprehensive search of the museum disclosed no further clues nor traces of the assailant's presence and Inspector Druet went to the telephone to summon the Chief Medical Examiner and notify the Homicide Bureau.

McCarty, with Dennis in tow, trailed him wistfully into the hall.

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"I'll be taking myself off now, Inspector," he remarked. "You've the case in hand, to say nothing of an expert like Mr. Terhune right on the job to help you and Mr. Norwood himself."

"Between you and me, Mac," the Inspector interrupted confidentially, "old Norwood is a plain nut. He has been the pest of the department for the last twenty years, dabbling and interfering in every case that has come up, offering advice and getting under foot generally. You know how we've always been bothered with amateur Sherlock Holmeses, but he is the worst crank of the lot and the fact that he has never yet gotten the slightest result in an investigation doesn't discourage him a little bit. As for Mr. Terhune, he is a great man in his line, but he is not officially on this case, you know, he only stumbled on it, just as you did, and Riordan. Why don't you stay and see the preliminary examination through at least? It looks to me as if it were going to be one of the biggest things we've tackled in years and I'd like to have you on the job in an unofficial capacity."

"I wouldn't ask anything better!" McCarty beamed. "I telephoned to you over the head of the Lieutenant of the precinct because I thought likely the District Attorney would put you on the case anyway, sir, and you would want to be in on the ground floor. It's the devil and all how I came to fall into this, now that I'm off the force, but I'd hate to quit it cold; I've never seen the beat of it in all my experience."

The Inspector concluded his telephonic communications and then, locking the museum door with the owner's key which he had procured from him, led the way to the library, whither the host and Wade Terhune had preceded them. They found Victor Marchal in his accustomed attitude before the fireplace, his sightless eyes fixed as if intro-

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spectively upon the empty hearth. He was pale but composed and there was no trace of the prostration of which Norwood had spoken.

The latter was seated on the couch with his arm about the bowed shoulders of Oliver Jarvis, and Terhune stood before them.

"I can't understand it!" The young husband's tone was monotonous and dulled with despair. "It's like a hideous, insane nightmare! I feel that every moment Evelyn may come and wake me from it and then I see her poor face with that frightful knotted thing about her throat——"

He broke off, shuddering, and Norwood patted him in fatherly fashion.

"We must try not to think of that now," he admonished. "We have stern work ahead of us, Oliver——"

"Do you think I'm forgetting?" Jarvis sprang to his feet. "Do you think I mean to waste my time in weak repining now, Uncle Cal, when my poor darling has been done to death and the creature who could do so monstrous a thing still breathes God's air? All that I want, all that is left to me, is to find him and make him suffer! Mr. Terhune, they say that you are the greatest criminal investigator in the world to-day; that you have never lost a case——"

"I do not claim to be infallible, Mr. Jarvis," interrupted the detective, modestly.

"Nevertheless, your work is celebrated; you have an international reputation and surely you can find the murderer of my poor wife! Use every effort, Mr. Terhune. Spare no expense! I am accounted rich as men compute such things in these days and I would cheerfully, eagerly, give everything I possess to avenge her! That is all that

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matters to me now; I have nothing else to live for and I shall not rest until it is accomplished!"

"You mean that you wish to engage me to investigate the case for you, Mr. Jarvis?" Terhune's eyes glinted with enthusiasm.

"I do. I place myself unreservedly in your hands." The younger man turned to the official. "Please don't misunderstand, Inspector. I have no lack of confidence in your ability or that of the authorities, but I want to leave no possible stone unturned to find the assassin."

"We are always glad to work with Mr. Terhune." Inspector Druet bowed slightly. "In fact, we have ourselves called upon him on more than one occasion to give us the aid of his specialized knowledge. Have you an idea of any possible motive for the crime, Mr. Jarvis?"

"None! It seems like the act of a madman! Evelyn had no enemies, no secrets; her life was like an open book and everyone who came in contact with her loved her." He broke off with a groan. "No one could have had a sane motive for taking her life!"

"How long have you been married?"

"Five years. My wife was an orphan of French descent, resident in New Orleans with her guardian. I met her the winter before our marriage, when I went down for the Mardi Gras." Jarvis was evidently bracing himself to meet the ordeal of questioning and the Inspector' stone was considerately gentle.

"What was Mrs. Jarvis's maiden name?"

"Evelyn Beaudet. She was an only child and has no living relatives."

"This guardian of whom you speak; who is he?"

"Pierre Chartrand; he died about two years ago. He was a banker and life-long friend of her father; an eccentric

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old gentleman but he worshiped Evelyn and made her his sole heiress."

"You brought Mrs. Jarvis to New York immediately after your marriage?"

"Yes. Then we went to Europe but returned when the war broke out." He hesitated and added: "My wife had never been north until we were married and as we have not since visited New Orleans, her old friends have dropped completely away. Her life entered practically a new phase with our marriage and I know how and where every hour of it has been spent. Her friends and associates are mine and it is inconceivable that among them there could be one who desired her death, much less a friend who could have encompassed it in such wise! I tell you this hideous thing has come like a bolt from a clear sky!"

"When did you last see your wife alive, Mr. Jarvis?"

"At luncheon to-day—God! Could it have been only to-day? It seems years!—We were both busied with preparations for our departure, for we had planned to sail for France next week to engage in relief and reconstruction work and there were many final details to be arranged."

"You lunched at home? Who was present beside Mrs. Jarvis and yourself?"

"No one. Our household consists only of the servants."

"How many are there?"

"Four, besides the chauffeur; the butler, cook, housemaid, and my wife's personal maid. All the others have been discharged pending our departure."

"What do you know of them, Mr. Jarvis? Would you consider them trustworthy?" pursued the Inspector.

"Oh, absolutely. The butler, old Henry, was employed by my parents before I was born, and the cook, also, was in my mother's service; the housemaid is her niece and Margot, my wife's maid, is particularly devoted to her.

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She was a Belgian refugee whom we brought back from Europe with us at the outbreak of the war. They are all unquestionably loyal, Inspector; I could take my oath on that."

"You left the house after luncheon, Mr. Jarvis?"

"Yes, immediately. I had an appointment at my attorney's office and a later one at the French consulate. I was delayed there until after seven o'clock."

"You did not dine at home?"

"No, I went directly to the club. Evelyn—" he paused and a startled expression swept his drawn face. "Why, Evelyn was to have dined alone at the house of old Mrs. Lyle Fremont. I wonder——?"

"We will look into that presently." Inspector Druet waived the implied suggestion. "What were your wife's plans for the afternoon?"

"She intended to shop and pay a farewell call or two; nothing of any vital importance, however; Mrs. Fremont, with whom she was to have dined, is an invalid and practically a recluse, but she and my mother were girls together and my wife was one of the few people she would still receive; she adored her. Inspector, when—how long do you think my wife——?"

He could not continue, but Inspector Druet nodded comprehendingly.

"We must wait for the arrival of the Chief Medical Examiner before we can positively determine that, Mr. Jarvis," he responded. "However, I think we may safely conclude that death took place in the afternoon, some little time before the dinner hour. When you took leave of your wife to-day did her manner seem quite as usual? You observed no depression nor apprehension?"

"On the contrary," replied Jarvis in a surprised tone. "She was never frivolous nor lightminded and she had en-

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tered with very serious intent into our plans for aid in France, but to-day there was a gentle gayety about her, a sense of joyous anticipation in our projected journey and the work which lay before us——"

His voice ended in a dry, convulsive sob and once more he buried his face in his hands.

"I will ask you only one more question, Mr. Jarvis." Inspector Druet's voice lowered. "What was your wife's costume at lunch? The same as when you viewed the body just now in the museum?"

A violent shudder swept again over the bowed figure.

"I don't know—I saw only her face, as I shall see it before me until I die!" he exclaimed brokenly. "When I left her this afternoon she was dressed for her shopping expedition in a green tailored suit; I remember that distinctly, for she spoke of discarding it before we sailed next week."

Dennis, who, with McCarty, had remained in the background, thrust out a bony elbow and nudged his friend significantly. The body lying in the museum had been clad in a plain gown of dark plum-colored silk with a low rolling collar and cuffs of soft white and the scarf so cruelly knotted about the slender throat was of navy blue.

McCarty shrugged impatiently at the unnecessary reminder and his eyes eagerly followed the Inspector, who had turned to the young Frenchman.

"Captain Marchal, you accompanied Mr. Norwood to the museum this afternoon, did you not?"

"Yes, Monsieur." The secretary advanced with one guiding hand resting lightly upon the mantel. "There were some notes which Monsieur Norwood desired transcribed——"

"You left the museum with Mr. Norwood?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

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"Did you or he lock the door behind you?"

"Monsieur Norwood did, but I unlocked it later with the key which he has presented to me, when I went to replace the notes after transcribing them."

"Do you know what time that was, Captain Marchal?"

"Just after four. The clock upon the mantel here struck the hour as I was gathering together the notes to return them."

"The museum was empty then? Did you detect anything which would suggest the presence of an intruder?" Inspector Druet spoke carefully and the young man smiled a faint acknowledgment.

"Nothing, Monsieur. Since I do not see, my other senses are gradually becoming—how shall I say?—acute, and I am sure that I should have known of a living presence, but yet——"

He paused, and after a moment the Inspector suggested:

"'Yet'—what, Captain Marchal?"

"I—I did not know—nothing warned me, when we re-entered the museum an hour ago, of the presence of the dead." His voice had sunk to a mere whisper and he added hurriedly. "In spite of that I believe there was no one there this afternoon when I entered."

"Did you relock the door on leaving?"

"Yes, Monsieur; of that I can assure you. See! here is my key, which never leaves me." He produced a small, flat key of the Yale patent and held it out. "I returned here to the library and typed until Monsieur Norwood came home."

"What time was that?"

"I do not know to the moment, but it was after six."

"So that you were practically alone in the house from the time of his departure until the dinner-hour?"

"Except for the cook and the housemaid, Monsieur,

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and they were below. The butler was out, but just before Monsieur Norwood returned I heard him moving about in the dining-room, arranging the table for dinner. Until then no slightest sound in the house had reached my ears." The young man spoke with deep earnestness. "The bell of the front door, even that of the telephone, was silent all the afternoon."

"Captain Marchal, when was the last time you—er, encountered Mrs. Jarvis alive?"

"Late on Tuesday afternoon. Madame Jarvis had called to see Monsieur Norwood, but he was engaged."

"You entered into conversation with her?"

The young man hesitated.

"Madame very graciously invited me to dine at her home the following evening, with Monsieur Norwood."

"You declined?" The question was terse.

"I am still awkward and gauche, Monsieur, in groping my way about in strange surroundings." He replied with simple dignity. "I have not gained what you call self-confidence. Monsieur and Madame Jarvis have been most kind, but I should have felt de trop."

The arrival of the Chief Medical Examiner interrupted the proceedings and Inspector Druet accompanied him to the museum, where Martin and Yost mounted guard behind the locked door.

With the departure of the official the tense atmosphere relaxed somewhat and a stir of movement swept the little group.

Norwood had started forward to follow the Inspector, but the latter closed the door behind him with a hint which brooked no opposition.

Jarvis, too, sprang to his feet.

"I must go to her!" he cried brokenly. "I cannot endure

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the thought that strange, alien hands should desecrate her now! Uncle Cal, we must see about getting her home!"

"Not yet, Mr. Jarvis." Terhune interposed smoothly. "The formalities must be complied with, you know, and the matter is out of our hands."

"Oliver, our personal feelings must not interfere with the course of justice," supplemented Norwood. "After all, our one aim now is to get at the truth."

Captain Marchal had made his way to a window seat and dropped wearily upon it with his face in shadow.

Dennis glanced toward him and asked in a cautious undertone.

"Do you think he told the truth, Mac; about no one coming here this afternoon?"

"And why not?" McCarty demanded. "If Mrs. Jarvis' body was brought up the ladder and in through that museum window, and the murderer left the same way even with that rattling, clattering skeleton in his arms, Captain Marchal would not have heard a sound of it in here and there would have been no need for the murderer to come into this part of the house at all."

"Then why was the museum door unlocked?" retorted Dennis argumentatively. "If this young feller can be believed he didn't leave it so at four o'clock this afternoon, then somebody must have opened it between then and the time we went in there to-night. The lad wasn't any too anxious to go with us, either, if you remember."

"It's a good thing you're not the jury sitting on him," averred McCarty in disgust. "You'd be handing in the verdict before court opened! Wait till we find out what's gone on in that house beyond the back fence!"

Terhune meanwhile was plying his client with questions in his turn, but he had succeeded in eliciting no detail from

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