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SUSPENSE

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SUSPENSE

BY

ISABEL OSTRANDER

AUTHOR OF

THE CLUE IN THE AIR, ETC.

GROSSET & DUNLAP
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SUSPENSE

CHAPTER I.

The Girl With the Scar.

"YOUNG woman, well-bred, educated, stranger in city, and without relatives, desires situation as companion or social secretary with lady of established reputation and position. Good oral reader, pianist, quick and accurate household accountant, intelligent amanuensis, willing and obliging. Amount of salary optional. Address Miss Betty Shaw, 160 Wakefield Avenue."

The girl read the advertisement for the twentieth time, then dropped the newspaper upon the shabbily ornate center table with a shrug of impatience, a frown gathering between her level brows.

The boarding house parlor was shrouded in gloom, and outside the window whirling snowflakes showed white against the deepening dusk. A little heap of torn envelopes and a card or two upon the

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mantel bore evidence that the naive appeal had evoked response, yet it was with a hopeless gesture that the girl turned from them and began pacing the floor, her brooding eyes fixed as though they would pierce the shadows which crept about her.

All at once she paused tense and alert with lifted chin and quickened breath. The throbbing purr of a motor had pulsed upon the stillness of the snow-enwrapped street, and halted with a dull grinding of brakes before the door.

She darted to the window and peered eagerly out between the dingy curtains. A massive limousine stood at the curb, its bulk looming blackly against the lesser darkness, with broad diagonal lines of white striping the lower body, and a rakish torpedo-shaped hood. It was just such a car as a person of somewhat bizarre taste and the wealth with which to gratify it might have chosen, yet had it been a veritable juggernaut its effect upon the girl could have been no more sinister. She recoiled from the window, her hands clenched, her breast heaving tumultuously, and shadowed as it was, her face seemed distorted into a mere mask of malevolent fury akin to triumph.

Then the small hands relaxed, and with a visible effort at control, she turned toward the door, as laggard feet shuffled along the passageway and a murmur of voices arose.

"'Nother lady to see you, Miss." A frowsy head

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appeared in the doorway and the girl advanced to meet the summons.

"Ask her to come in, please, Susan." Her voice was guilelessly soft and low. "No, wait, I must light the gas—"

But the servant had already disappeared and in her place stood a tall, commanding figure, swathed in furs and heavily veiled. For a moment the girl hesitated, then with a steady hand she struck a match and a flare of light streamed from the gas jet. In the full flow of its radiance, she turned and faced her visitor.

The woman in the doorway took a step forward and paused involuntarily, with a slight murmur of shocked surprise. The girl before her was slender and of quite a usual type, with soft brown hair and moderately large blue eyes, but a spreading blood-red scar with five curved streaks reaching out from it like an angry clutching hand covered her left cheek from brow to neck.

If the girl observed the other's momentary loss of poise she gave no sign. Her level brows were arched ingenuously, her expression childlike in its bland candor, but the smile which parted her lips did not reach her shadowed, inscrutable eyes.

"Won't you take this chair? You wished to see me regarding my advertisement for a position?"

The woman advanced and sank into the seat indicated, loosening her furs deliberately before she

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replied. The heavy veil still obliterated her features, but through its meshes her eyes glowed fixedly.

"Yes." She inclined her head slightly. "You are Miss Shaw?"

The girl nodded in turn.

"I have had no previous experience, but it has become necessary for me to earn my own living and I have not had any specialized training. I am quite alone in the world—"

The woman leaned suddenly forward.

"May I ask why you stated that in your advertisement, Miss Shaw? You are very young and doubtless inexperienced, but you must have realized that to announce yourself as alone and friendless would invite unsuitable and even dangerous response."

The girl glanced at the cards on the mantel and then back to her visitor in wide-eyed amazement.

"Why, no!" she exclaimed. "I wanted to make it clear that I could give no references except social ones from my own home town, and that my object was not so much a matter of salary as a home of refinement where I could feel safe and sheltered. It is dreadful to be adrift, with no one to take a personal interest, but back in Greenville there was nothing for me to do."

"Greenville?"

"In Iowa. My mother and I moved out there

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to live with an uncle of her's when my father died. I was a little girl then. Last year Uncle Will died, and six months ago, my mother." She glanced down at the simple black gown. "There is no one left belonging to me, and very little money, so I came back to the city where I was born to try to find a position. I have been here only a few days, but it is more difficult than I had thought. You are looking for a companion or secretary? I did not put it in the advertisement, but I am quite capable of taking charge of a household and managing servants. If—if you have children I can amuse them, too, they always take to me."

The woman's eyes searched the flushed, eager face but seemed to linger, repelled yet fascinated, on the sinister scar.

"You—er, you have had an accident?" she asked.

"Accident?" The girl repeated. Then with a smile of understanding quite free from bitterness she touched her cheek. "You mean—this? It is a birthmark and everyone around me is so accustomed to it that I scarcely ever think of it. It must be awfully unpleasant to strangers, though. I suppose it—it would be a drawback——"

Her tone was wistful, almost pleading, and she paused with a catch in her breath. There was a long minute of silence before her visitor spoke.

"Not unpleasant. It will merely be necessary, as

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you so sensibly say, for one to become accustomed to it. I am not sure that it is a disadvantage—" she caught herself up abruptly. "You spoke of social references from Greenville. You have friends there to whom I can write, if we come to an understanding? You realize that I, too, must be careful about whom I take into my household in so intimate a relationship as that of companion."

"Of course," the girl assented quickly. Then she hesitated. "You live here in the city?"

"On the North Drive. I am Mrs. Atterbury." The woman spoke as if the mere mention of her name sufficed to establish her status, and with a deliberate gesture she threw back her veil. The face revealed to the girl's frankly curious gaze was colorless, the thin, arched nose and firm, straight lines of her lips as immobile as if carved from marble. Only the eyes, sloe-black and glittering, gave a semblance of life to the flawless, masklike expression. The smooth, dark hair was coiled tightly about her head and brought low over the ears, but did not cover them sufficiently to conceal their peculiar formation. Small and delicately pink, they were lobeless and narrowed toward the top so sharply that the girl wondered if beneath the hair they might not be pointed, like a cat's.

As if intuitively aware of the other's scrutiny, the woman drew her furs more closely about her neck and spoke hurriedly.

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"I forgot for a moment that you were a stranger here. My husband was one of the most prominent financiers in the city, but since his death I have lived very quietly, receiving only a few old friends quite informally. I am childless, and, like you, alone in the world." She paused, with a slight suggestion of a smile and the girl's intent gaze shifted and dropped. "My home is one which you would perhaps consider luxurious, but it needs a youthful presence. I want the companionship of a bright, cheerful young girl, gently reared, who can amuse and interest me, and assist in the occasional entertainment of my guests. Practically the only duty you would have would be to attend to my correspondence, which is large as I have financial interests and property all over the country. I would require your time unreservedly, however. That is why I prefer a stranger, with no affiliations to distract her. For such services I am willing to pay well, but there are certain conditions I should impose."

The girl had listened without a change of expression, but now she glanced up quickly.

"Mourning depresses me. Would you be willing to lay it aside and dress in colors, such colors as I choose for you?"

"Oh, yes. I thought of that, in any event."

"Do you speak any foreign language?"

The girl shook her head.

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"There were no foreigners in Greenville but the Italian road builders."

"You are prepared to place yourself absolutely at my disposal? There will, of course, be hours when I will not need you, but I shall want you within call. Moreover, if I make you a member of my household I shall feel responsible for you. You must not attempt to go about the city alone without consulting me first. That is understood?"

The girl's eyes narrowed and for an instant her lips compressed, but she replied quietly:

"Of course. I appreciate the interest you take in me, Mrs. Atterbury, and I am grateful for it. I shall do my best to please you."

A few details followed.

"Then we will consider the matter settled." The women glanced at the jeweled watch on her wrist. "How long will it take you to pack?"

"You mean you wish me to go with you at once?" The girl's face had whitened until the scar stood out in cruel clarity upon her cheek. "I had thought of taking a few days to prepare—"

"Anything you need can be purchased tomorrow." There was a hardened note of dominance in the cold voice which brooked no denial. "I am a person of quick decisions, as you will discover, Betty—that is your name, isn't it? I came to take you home with me if I found you suitable, but I cannot keep my car waiting long in this storm."

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Betty rose submissively.

"I have no trunk, only two bags. It will take me only a few minutes to pack, if you will excuse me."

Mrs. Atterbury sat immovable until the sound of the girl's footsteps had died away upon the creaking stairs far overhead. Then she rose and gliding swiftly to the mantel, glanced over the cards and notes of her predecessors. Tossing them aside contemptuously, her eyes fell upon an open desk between the windows. A sheet of note paper half covered with writing lay upon it and picking it up she scanned it deliberately, nodding in evident satisfaction.

"'Reverend Doctor Slade,'" she repeated aloud. "Greenville, Iowa."

A quarter of an hour later, two figures emerged from the dingy vestibule and descended to the waiting car, the girl cringing in her thin black cloak against the icy blast which swirled about them, the older woman erect as if the very elements themselves could not compel her to bow her head.

With her foot upon the step the girl hesitated and her eyes swept the bleak snowy darkness in swift terror, like a trapped animal. The look was gone as quickly as it had come, however, and into her face crept a trace of the sinister, resolute triumph which had crossed it while she waited behind the curtains of her window for the entrance of

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this woman in whose hands she had placed herself.

In silence she seated herself beside her new employer, the footman closed the door with a snap and they glided swiftly away through the snow-muffled streets. Few words were spoken during the brief journey, and they were mere commonplaces, but beneath the casual banality ran an undercurrent of sharp tension almost tangible enough to be felt. It was as if, unconsciously, they were adversaries, pausing by tacit consent to take breath for a second encounter. The girl lay back relaxed with half-closed eyes, the woman sat with her veiled face averted, and each seemed buried in her own thoughts, yet each was aware of the sly, furtive glances of mutual speculative appraisal which passed between them.

The droning wind arose to a shrieking gale when they turned into the North Drive, the merging strands of electric light breaking into widely detached clusters as compact rows of brick and stone gave place to exclusive residences, each sequestered within its private park. The whistles of the river boats rose eerily above the blast of the storm and the girl shuddered and drew the straggling fur collar more closely about her throat.

"You must have warmer clothing." The woman spoke without turning her head. "You will need one or two dinner frocks also. That can be ar-

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ranged tomorrow, and I will supply them, as you are disposing of your mourning at my request. We are home at last."

The car swerved from the broad avenue and turning in between two high gate-posts, followed a short winding drive to a brilliantly lighted *porte-cochère*. Light streamed, too, from the opened doorway, upon the threshold of which stood a thick-set man in the conventional black of a butler.

"Welch," Mrs. Atterbury spoke with curt authority, "Miss Shaw will take Miss Harly's place. Show her to her room, please." Turning, she added to her companion: "We dine at seven. You need not change."

The butler bowed obsequiously, but his beady eyes surveyed the girl deliberately from head to foot in a coolly impudent stare before he picked up her bags and started for the staircase.

The hall was square and of spacious dimensions, with a gallery encircling the second floor landing, from which rare tapestries were hung. The leaping flames of the hearth played upon their soft, mellow hues and glancing off in darting rays from the brass andirons, turned the dull brown of the leather wall paneling into burnished gold.

Betty Shaw mechanically noted the general effect as she followed her surly guide. There was little surprise and no curiosity in her gaze, which had flown straight to the door opposite the hearth. As

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she reached the foot of the stairs this door was flung violently open, and a man sprang forward, confronting her employer.

"Good God, where have you been?" he demanded, his voice grating harshly with anxiety. "'Ranza has been trying to locate you all the afternoon. She saw him, but he has broken! He's going to —"

No countering exclamation from the woman had interrupted him, yet he paused with a strangling gasp, as if a hand had been laid suddenly upon his throat.

Betty glanced over her shoulder. Mrs. Atterbury stood silently drawn up to her full height regarding the intruder with eyes which blazed from a face that might well have given pause. The impassivity which had masked it was gone, the brows were drawn and knotted and the lips curled back in a distortion of silent rage so that her strong, white teeth gleamed menacingly in the firelight. The girl caught one swift glimpse of the man who cringed in the doorway, then turned and fairly fled up the stair.

The hall was dimly lighted but a rosy glow came from an opened door around a turning, and approaching, Betty found herself in a veritable bower of a room, spacious but cosy, with flowered chintz draperies and soft, rose-shaded lamps.

"If you want the maid, Miss, there's the bell."

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Welch had deposited her bags beside the dressing-table, and was again surveying her with his curiously intent, lowering gaze. "Should you be liking a cup of tea, now,—"

"Thank you. I shall require nothing before dinner." Her quiet tone was in itself a dismissal, yet the man still lingered as if on the point of further speech. Before her steady eyes, however, his own shifted and fell, and turning, he shambled from the room.

Betty waited until his stealthy, cat-like footsteps had passed well down the hall, then closed her door softly and began a minute examination of her apartment. It faced the side of the house, with two long French windows opening on a narrow balcony. A door in each wall led presumably to connecting rooms, but upon examination the first proved to be fastened, evidently by a bolt on the farther side, for the keyhole was plugged with a hard substance resembling sealing wax. The opposite door disclosed a well-appointed bathroom, with no opening other than a ventilator, high up in the wall.

Completing her simple preparations for dinner, the girl sank in a low chair before the glowing coals in the English grate and chin in hand, lost herself in a reverie. The eager, childishly trustful expression had vanished when she found herself alone and in its place had crept a hardened, crafty look which robbed her face of its youthful charm.

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The scar leaped again into prominence, and seemed to throb as if its clutching fingers were tightening in a relentless grip, and in her somber eyes abiding passion brooded.

The silver tones of a gong echoing up from below aroused her and she sprang to her feet, her clenched hands pressed to her burning temples. For an instant she stood swaying in the intensity of some all but overmastering emotion. Then her hands fell to her sides, revealing again the mask of disingenuousness.

But behind it there lurked, not wholly concealed, an air of joyous triumph, and she glanced exultantly about her as if out of all the world, the shelter of this roof had been her goal, and in winning her way into the household she had brought some deep-laid plan to consummation.

While she hesitated at the stair's foot, Mrs. Atterbury's voice summoned her to the drawing-room, where she found beside her employer a sallow little woman, dull-eyed and slender to the point of angularity, who was presented as Madame Cimmino. As Betty responded timidly to the conventional greeting another figure came forward from a shadowed corner and paused, smiling and urbane.

"Betty, this is an old friend, Mr. Wolvert." An odd smile twisted Mrs. Atterbury's attenuated lips. "Don't make love to Miss Shaw, Jack. She seeks

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sanctuary with me from the world, the flesh and the devil."

"Dear lady!" He raised a deprecating hand before extending it to the shrinking girl. "You malign me! Let me assure you of your immunity from evil here, Miss Shaw. Our hostess tolerates no serpents in her garden, as you will find."

The man's tone was smooth and unctuous, but there was an undercurrent deeper than mere mockery in the careless words, and Mrs. Atterbury's eyes glittered dangerously, although she shrugged in cold distaste.

"Shall we go in? Cook times her soufflés to the instant and she is the only mortal before whom I quail. Come, Speranza."

Madame Cimmino laid her hand lightly on Jack Wolvert's arm as she passed him, but his gaze was riveted upon the girl, and followed her slim figure curiously until the curtains fell behind her.

"She is attractive, this new little one, eh?" Madame Cimmino had halted in the doorway and there was a hard ring in her voice. "It is an added charm, perhaps, that brand upon her face!"

"Don't be absurd, 'Ranza." The man frowned impatiently. "There's something queer about that girl, something oddly reminiscent. I could almost swear I had seen her before, or at least heard her voice."

During the simple but perfectly served meal,

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Betty unobtrusively studied the two guests seated at either hand. Madame Cimmino was evidently of Latin birth, although her quick, impulsive speech was interlarded with ejaculations in many tongues. Huge opal hoops dragged at the lobes of her ears and her brown, clawlike hands were loaded with rings which glistened barbarically in her ceaseless gesturing. She ignored the newcomer as far as courtesy permitted, snubbed Wolvert with a proprietary air, which failed to carry weight before his bland equanimity, but showed an anxious almost fawning deference to her hostess.

Wolvert made a half-playful attempt to draw out the little companion, but finding no encouragement in her shy, monosyllabic replies, he devoted himself to his dinner, and Betty found opportunity to observe him at her leisure. He was a man of approximately forty, lean and wiry with olive skin and curiously light eyes in grotesque contrast with his crisply curling, black hair and small, military mustache. The man's whole personality seemed oddly at variance. His hands were slender and shapely, with the tapering, sensitive fingers of an artist, yet the high Slavic cheekbones, spreading nostrils and heavy jaw belied a finer sensibility, and his face in repose was saturnine.

Regarding him, Betty could scarcely bring herself to believe that he was the same man who had burst upon the scene at the moment of her arrival

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with his impassioned outcry. The inexplicable words still rang in her ears. "'Ranza," was evidently Madame Speranza Cimmino, but why had she tried so frantically to ascertain Mrs. Atterbury's whereabouts during the long afternoon? Who was the man she had seen, and what was the meaning of the phrase that he had broken?

Dinner concluded, they returned to the drawing-room, and after a brief desultory conversation Betty was dismissed, to her infinite relief. Wolvert sprang forward gallantly to open the door for her departure and stood staring after her until she disappeared around the turning at the stair's head, the same puzzled, questioning look in his eyes with with he had regarded her at their meeting.

Her light extinguished, Betty lay motionless and seemingly relaxed, but her sleepless eyes were fixed as though they would pierce the darkness, and her ears strained for the slightest sound. The storm swirled unabated outside the windows, and the tall clock on the stairs droned out the hours at all but interminable intervals.

Midnight came, and with it the hum of a high-powered motor on the drive. A subdued murmur of voices floated up to her from the hall, the front door closed with a thud and the motor snorted its way through the piling snowdrifts to the gate. A few minutes later there was a faint silken rustle of skirts past her door, then the cat-like tread of

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Welch as he went his final rounds and darkness and utter silence reigned supreme.

One o'clock struck, then two, and as the echo of the second stroke died away, Betty threw back the covers, and slipping from bed stole to her dressing bag. She fumbled for a moment and then a tiny, thread-like ray of light leaped from her hand. With the electric torch carefully shielded, she enveloped herself in a dark kimona, thrust her feet into soft felt slippers, and unbolting her door, crept silently out into the hall. The gleaming strand of light wavered, then steadied and moved slowly along to the turning into the gallery. Its pale afterglow lingered like a nimbus for a minute and then vanished, and darkness descended once more about the sleeping house.

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CHAPTER II.

The Silent Intruder.

THE storm ceased with the coming of day, and when Betty awoke a glistening expanse of diamond-encrusted snow met her gaze between the parted curtains of her window. Softened by sleep, her face was flushed and girlishly winsome as she lay with the cruel scar pressed deep into her pillow, her bewildered eyes roving the unfamiliar room. Then, with returning consciousness, the shadow descended once more and her expression perceptibly hardened.

Rising, she walked to the window and flung the curtains wide. The view of park and clustering, frost-spangled cedars was intersected sharply with vertical bars of iron and she gave a little involuntary gasp of dismayed surprise at the discovery that the narrow balcony beyond her windows was stoutly enclosed, like a huge cage.

The same trapped look of terror which had leaped to the girl's eyes on the previous day when she faltered at the door of the limousine returned anew, but she steeled herself against the sudden tide of

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emotion which all but overwhelmed her and moved resolutely to her mirror. The birthmark flamed back angrily at her, but she touched it almost caressingly as if the knowledge of it gave her strength, and an enigmatic smile wreathed her lips.

She breakfasted alone in the sunny morning room, attended by Welch, whose scrutiny of her at her arrival seemed to have satisfied him, for his bearing was that of a mere well-trained automaton. Betty observed him surreptitiously as he moved about the room, his heavy-jowled face and massive bulk incongruous with the light, springing, silent tread and his shifting eyes obsequiously lowered.

"If you please, miss," he coughed apologetically, as she rose, "Mrs. Atterbury will see you in the library."

Betty submissively followed him to a door at the left of the entrance hall. A voice bade her enter and she found her employer seated at an official-looking desk, already deeply engrossed in her correspondence. Her dress was severely plain, her hair coiffed low over the lobeless ears and to the girl's shy morning greeting she turned a face waxen in its pallor but inscrutable as on their first meeting.

"You are not late, my dear," she responded to Betty's contrite query. "I rose unusually early and have been sorting my mail in order to show you just what your task will be."

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She motioned to a chair by the desk, and Betty eyed with inward misgiving the formidable heap of unopened envelopes which still remained.

"Any letters which may be marked with a small cross in the corner, like this, for instance," Mrs. Atterbury held one out for inspection, "you may put aside. The rest you are to open and read, dividing them into two separate piles, business and purely social, for me to glance over later. Begging letters, even from personal friends for charity subscriptions, belong in the financial stack. Do you think you can manage now with these?"

"Yes, Mrs. Atterbury. Do you wish me to reply to them?"

"At my dictation. I will come back in an hour and we can go over them together." Mrs. Atterbury rose. "My seamstress will be here this afternoon to measure you for some new frocks."

When the door had closed behind her, Betty applied herself to her task. The social letters were few and formal in tone without intimate detail. Four of the remainder bore crosses and these she laid obediently aside. The others were palpably business communications and from their tenor it would have appeared that Mrs. Atterbury's financial interests were amazingly varied, and of a magnitude which even the luxury of her environment had not conveyed.

Mines, oil wells, railroads, stock companies and

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enterprises of every sort were represented in the heterogeneous collection, from the latest invention to live stock on the hoof. One letter, evidently concerning the latter, made Betty pause with a puzzled frown. It began without any form of address and was unsigned, its few lines being hurriedly scrawled, but unmistakably legible, although they conveyed no sense to the girl.

"Five thousand sheep no go," she read. "Bulls instead. Pink wash fed. Clearing den. Tail comet yellow."

In bewilderment she took up the envelope; the superscription was in the same irregular hand, and it was postmarked Laramie, Wyoming.

The desk telephone rang as she laid it aside, and hesitatingly she picked up the receiver.

"Marcia!" It was unmistakably the voice of Wolvert, but the bantering derisive note was gone, and stark fear rasped in every syllable. "Some one has squealed! He's got the dope and it's all—"

"I beg your pardon." Betty's tones were cool and steady, but her heart stood still, for her quick ear had caught the rustle of a skirt just behind her. "This is Mrs. Atterbury's secretary. To whom did you wish to speak?"

There was a smothered exclamation at the other end of the wire, and Mrs. Atterbury snatched the receiver from the girl's hand.

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"What is it?" she demanded in a voice which she strove in vain to control.

"I-I don't know," Betty murmured. "The person spoke so quickly I could not distinguish a word."

"Mrs. Atterbury speaking. . . . Oh, the market has broken? Well, sell the shares I hold in that company at whatever price you can obtain, do you understand? At whatever price! There will be no panic, tell your partner not to lose his head. It must be made clear that I will trade no more in that stock. . . . It will be enough, it must be. Remember, I look to you to settle the matter absolutely. Let me have an accounting by tonight."

She hung up the receiver and turned with a shrug but Betty saw that her lips were white.

"My broker," she remarked, with studied carelessness. "Conscientious man, but not resourceful. By the way, my dear, I neglected to tell you that you need never answer this telephone. It is my own private wire. Call me if it rings when I am at home, but pay no attention to it if I am not here."

"I am sorry—" began Betty, but the other silenced her.

"It is of no consequence. We will take up the letters now. You did not find them difficult?"

"No-o," Betty responded hesitatingly. "There is one, however, which I could not understand at

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all. It seems to be a business matter, but the wording doesn't make any sense; it's something about sheep."

"Sheep?" Mrs. Atterbury's level tones sharpened. "Where is the envelope? Was there no cross upon it?"

"No. At least I didn't see any, and I am quite sure I looked carefully. This is the one."

"Idiot!" The ejaculation was clearly not intended for the girl, as Mrs. Atterbury looked vainly for the distinguishing mark, and filliped the envelope angrily aside. "Give me the letter, please."

She glanced over it rapidly, without comment or change of expression and put it on the little heap of private letters.

"We will get rid of the social ones first—" she was beginning, when Betty suddenly interrupted her.

"There is a motor car coming up the drive."

"Ah, it is Mme. Cimmino." Mrs. Atterbury arose, her glance following the trim little electric brougham as it lurched over the hillocks of snow. "She will probably stay to lunch, and that means the letters will have to be held over until tomorrow. Amuse yourself as well as you can, my dear. You'll find plenty of books here and there is a phonograph in the corner."

But Betty did not turn to the well-filled bookcases which lined the walls. Instead she sat with

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the strange letter spread out before her, reading and re-reading it as if to memorize every word. That it was a code of some sort she did not doubt, and without the key it would seem a hopeless task to attempt to decipher it, yet the young girl pored over it as eagerly as though its possible solution contained a message of vital import to herself as well as her employer.

Welch brought her lunch upon a tray and the afternoon was well advanced before the summons came for her to go to the sewing room. She spent the intervening hours in a searching examination of the library itself, but it yielded nothing of seeming interest or import to her. There was no sign of Mme. Cimmino, but her car had not left the drive and a subdued murmur as of several voices came from behind the tightly-closed door of the drawing room as the girl passed. Welch ushered her to a large sunny room at the top of the house where she found Mrs. Atterbury deep in consultation with a faded little woman of indeterminate age who fluttered nervously on being presented.

"Miss Pope knows what you require, I think," observed Mrs. Atterbury. "Everything must be as simple as possible, you know."

Miss Pope nodded, her mouth full of pins which she was sticking with mathematical precision into the little flat cushion that hung from her belt. When the last was in place, she took up her tape measure.

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"Now, miss, if you please."

Betty stood patiently, marvelling at the odd tremulousness of the withered hands which fumbled about her. Could it be merely nerves, or was the worn, pallid, little creature under the spell of some emotion too strong to be wholly controlled?

Mrs. Atterbury had strolled to the window with a fashion book and the seamstress dropped to her knees before Betty to measure the skirt length. Glancing down, the girl met the tired eyes of the older woman and found them fixed on hers with a mute insistent appeal in their depths.

Involuntarily she started, and Miss Pope, with a warning gesture, turned over the pincushion at her belt. Upon the under side worked out in rough irregular letters formed by the pin heads, Betty read the words, "Go away."

Her eyes sought those of the seamstress once more in puzzled questioning, but the woman, after a vehement nod, evaded her glance, and her quivering fingers plucked at the pins until the strange message was obliterated.

"Have you finished?" Mrs. Atterbury's calm tones cut the pregnant silence.

"Yes, ma'am. I will come tomorrow for the lining fitting." The seamstress barely breathed the words, as she scrambled to her feet, but there seemed a shade of significance as she added: "I-I hope the young lady will be satisfied."

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"*I* shall be," Mrs. Atterbury responded with good-humored but unmistakable emphasis. A faint flush mounted in Miss Pope's wan cheeks and she did not glance again toward Betty, even as she bowed herself out.

"My dear, I shall not need you again this afternoon. Would you care to go out for a little while?"

Betty's eyes eagerly turned to the window were sufficient answer.

"You will find several paths leading around the grounds if you don't mind the snow, but do not go beyond the gate." Mrs. Atterbury smiled, but she watched the girl's face keenly. "You look pale, and the fresh air will do you good. We must not keep you cooped up in the house too much, but I do not want you to go about the city aimlessly until you learn your way."

"I will not leave the grounds," promised Betty.

"One thing more," Mrs. Atterbury paused at the door. "Don't go near the garage, for Demon may be unleashed. He is the watch dog and underfed to keep him savage. Be sure you come in at dusk."

When Betty, as warmly clad as her meagre wardrobe would allow, slipped out at the side door, the pale wintry sun was already sinking in the West and the still air nipped her sharply, bringing a tingling glow to her cheeks. She set out jauntily down the first path which led among the cedars, her footsteps ringing on the hard packed snow and

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the frosty vapor of her breath floating like a veil before her.

The events of the past twenty-four hours, culminating in the inexplicable attitude of the seamstress, had wrought upon her nerves and the sense of freedom and solitude was grateful, illusive though she knew it to be. No doubt of Miss Pope's good will or sanity came to her, but she wondered what part the faded little creature was called upon to play in the strange scene of which she herself had become a supernumerary.

What crisis had arisen in the mysterious affairs of her new employer and why were her friends, Mme. Cimmino and the man Wolvert, so deeply concerned for her? The voice of the latter over the telephone that morning had revealed a frenzy of emotion which his debonair assurance on the previous evening had utterly belied. Then his impetuous outburst at the moment of her arrival returned to her mind. Who was the mysterious "he?" The frantic telephone message of a few hours before had concerned the same man. Who could he be, and through him what menace threatened the quiet woman with the inscrutable face to whom her services were bound?

So engrossed was Betty in her maze of thought, that she had followed the path unheedingly and only paused when she found her way blocked by a square granite post. She had reached the entrance

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gates beyond which she might not stray. For a moment she lingered, her eyes turned wistfully down the broad, bleak avenue, a mad, incomprehensible impulse to escape surging up within her, as if tangible bonds held her to her voluntarily assumed duty, and danger lurked for her in the house behind the cedars. The next minute she had turned resolutely and started to retrace her steps.

The early dusk was already descending and Betty quickened her pace lest she prolong the hour of freedom beyond the time allotted her. Midway, the path entered a thick clump of trees, and all at once she became aware of the rapid thud of feet on the snow behind her. Someone was running toward the house.

The thought that she was being pursued flashed into her mind, but she banished it, and turning hastily aside, concealed herself behind a screen of tangled evergreens. Scarcely had she done so, when a man appeared around a turn in the path, and passed her with almost incredible speed.

The single fleeting glimpse she obtained of his gray, set face, however, had sufficed for recognition. It was Wolvert, and some unnameable terror sped with him through the eerie gloom.

Betty shivered and looked blindly about her for another way out of the grove. She dared not enter the house on the heels of this visitor, nor from the same direction in which he had come, lest she seem

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to have been spying upon him, and she desired above all else to reach her own room unobserved.

At length she discerned a break in the trees at her right and approaching found a second path branching off in a curve which promised to lead around the house. Mrs. Atterbury's warning had passed from her memory and only when the low square bulk of the garage loomed up before her and a rumbling growl assailed her ears, did she remember the presence of the dog.

She hesitated, a new and very tangible fright gripping her, but it was too late to turn back. Even as she paused, the growl changed to a deep, full-throated cry, and a huge shape bounded toward her out of the shadows. To attempt escape would only betray her fear to the brute intelligence and precipitate an attack upon her. Betty knew and understood canine nature and she realized that her safety depended on coolness now.

Motionless, she waited until the dog was almost upon her, and then held out her hand, palm uppermost. The great beast halted in his tracks, his slavering jaws agape and every hair bristling on his neck.

"Demon! Good Demon!" she called softly. "Steady, old boy. Come here."

Slowly the fire died out of his gleaming eyes and he approached warily, step by step, while her own eyes held him unwaveringly. He sniffed at her

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hand, gazed up at her in mute question and reading confidence and mastery in her face, dropped obediently in the snow at her feet.

The wave of relief which swept over her was checked by a fresh disquieting thought. Was the dog merely guarding her until his keeper appeared to relieve him of his charge? The slightest movement on her part might bring him up with a spring at her throat, but to wait until help came would mean the discovery of her disobedience.

Chance solved the problem for her before many minutes had passed. A shrill whistle sounded from the direction of the garage, and the dog, lifting his head, gave tongue in response. The whistle was repeated, followed by a hoarse, blasphemous command. Demon rose reluctantly, brushed against her knee in friendly farewell, and loped away in the fast-gathering darkness.

"Oh, Demon!" The girl breathed a sobbing little cry after him. "Remember me well, the sound of my voice and the scent of me. Sometime I may need you!"

Then ashamed of the momentary, hysterical weakness, Betty turned and fairly flew to the house. Slipping in at the side door by which she had left, she reached her room, breathless, but unobserved, and sank into a chair.

The house was oddly silent. No sound of voices had met her ears, but a narrow streak of light had

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shone from under the library door as she passed, and her overwrought imagination pictured for her a tense, constrained group within. In spite of Mrs. Atterbury's specious explanation, Betty knew beyond question whose voice had come to her over the telephone, and no mere financial crisis could have brought to Wolvert's face the look which she had seen upon it when he unwittingly crossed her path among the trees.

A half hour went slowly by and then the whirring of the electric brougham broke the stillness and droned diminishingly into the distance. Mme. Cimmino had evidently taken her belated departure. Had Wolvert accompanied her? Betty shrank from encountering him at dinner and the effort to meet his forced banter serenely, conscious of what lay beneath it, seemed beyond her power.

When she obeyed the gong's summons, however, she found the table laid only for two, and Mrs. Atterbury already in her place.

"You enjoyed your walk, my dear?" The latter raised imperturbable eyes to greet the girl. "You did not find it too cold?"

"Oh, no, the air was wonderfully bracing," Betty replied at random, scarcely aware of what she was saying. "I very nearly lost my way, though. There are so many paths and the trees quite hide the house."

"Yes. I purchased the property mainly because

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of the privacy and seclusion it promised. I am not a hermit," Mrs. Atterbury added, with the shadow of a smile, "but the rush and turmoil of an active social existence bore me. You will, perhaps, find it rather monotonous here, Betty, but there will be more tasks for you to do when you have settled down and learned your way about the city. I shall have many errands for you."

"I am glad," Betty responded with nervous eagerness. "The thought of the city doesn't frighten me any more, now that I feel anchored, Mrs. Atterbury, and I want to do anything I can. You know I have been idle all day and it does not seem as if I were earning my salary."

Mrs. Atterbury scrutinized the girl's face, and her own relaxed for an instant and sagged into deeply graven lines of utter weariness and exhaustion. The necessity for rigid self-command had faltered before Betty's seemingly innocent candor; the mask had slipped momentarily and from beneath it peered a shadow of the anxiety and dread which had beset her unexpected guest of the afternoon.

With the next breath, however, she had herself again in hand.

"You will not complain of that tomorrow." Her voice was amusedly tolerant. "We shall have a double amount of correspondence to attend to, remember, and I will positively be at home to no one until it is finished. I think I shall retire almost im-

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mediately after dinner, my dear, for I have a slight headache."

The warmth of the house after the sharp, nipping atmosphere outdoors brought an early drowsiness to Betty, who went directly to her room after the meal. In spite of the puzzling events of the day, and the air of mystery which seemed to envelop the household, a lassitude stole over her and her heavy eyelids drooped and fell.

The dropping of coals in the tiny grate awakened her and she started up to find that it was close on to midnight. Stumbling softly to the door she opened it and listened, but the silence was unbroken.

Disrobing, she laid her dressing gown and slippers ready to hand, extinguished the lamp and crept into bed. Her first deep sleep was over and Betty lay wide-eyed, staring into the darkness. A vague sensation of suspense set her brain a-tingle and she felt as if she were waiting with every nerve taut for something which she could not name.

Gradually, however, the feeling was dispelled and she was sinking into an uneasy slumber when all at once she started up in bed with a shivering gasp, her heart leaping wildly and the very hair upon her brow seeming to stir and rise as though an unseen hand were lifting it. A sudden, muffled crash had pierced her consciousness and the very air seemed to quiver with the jar of impact, although no further sound broke the stillness. Betty listened with bated

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breath for a moment, then rose, impelled by an impulse stronger than her power to combat.

Throwing her gown about her, she snatched the electric torch from the drawer of her dressing table and made her way to the door. Impenetrable darkness greeted her as before, but it seemed to her overwrought fancy that a shuddering tension filled the air and the ticking of the tall clock beat like a tocsin upon her brain.

As one in a trance she moved mechanically to the stairs and down, the thread of light which played from her hand guiding her cautious footsteps. The doors of the library and drawing-room were closed, but that of the dining-room was opened wide and a frigid draft blew through it, whipping the gown about her bare ankles.

Betty flashed her light upon the aperture and the outline of the heavily carved dining table leaped into view, while all about it on the floor lay fragments of something which scintillated in the shaft of radiance like scattered diamonds.

Slowly she approached the door, the darting rays from her torch piercing the sinister darkness, the very breath hushed in her throat. On the threshold she paused and stood transfixed.

The dining table had been slewed to one side, chairs were overturned, draperies pulled from their rings and the great glass punch bowl lay shattered on the floor.

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But it was not upon these signs of violence that her eyes were fastened in a glaze of horror. A man lay stretched before the hearth with upturned face and arms flung wide, a man whose eyes stared with tragic vacuity and from whose breast a sluggish crimson stream had flowed to form a spreading pool upon the rug.

For a long minute the girl stood staring with eyes as fixed as those of the dead. She opened her lips, but no sound issued from them to raise an alarm or summon aid. Instead she lifted her hands jerkily to her throat as if struggling to draw breath, and turning, fled silently for her very life up the stairs.

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CHAPTER III.

The Velvet Glove.

BETTY was seated before her mirror, gazing somewhat doubtfully from the small round box of rouge in her hand to her wan reflection. Dare she hoped successfully to conceal the ravages of a sleepless, tortured night? Her cheeks and very lips were blanched and her eyes sunken and heavily circled. Only the birthmark, like a scarlet stain, glowed sullenly and served but to accentuate her pallor. It were better by far that her employer's keen eyes should note a condition which she could attribute to illness than that her effort to conceal it would be so palpable as to invite suspicion of a graver nature.

How she had managed to reach her room after the shock of her tragic discovery, she could not have told. No memory remained with her of that swift silent flight from the room of death. She only knew that she found herself back in bed once more, trembling in every limb and with an icy, pulseless void in her breast where her heart had been. Reason itself seemed to have fled, and her thoughts

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become a whirling phantasmagoria of horror in which but one thing stood out as if stamped indelibly upon her mind; the face of the slain man.

It floated before her in the darkness as distinctly as the pitiless glare of her torch had revealed it, strangely calm and detached amid the debris of the devastated room below, and the girl cowered as if once more in its dread presence.

For hours which seemed like years she lay in an agony of expectancy, waiting for a cry of alarm when the inevitable discovery should be made. But no sound broke the tomb-like stillness save once, when a vague muffled thud came to her ears. Even that she could not be sure of, for her senses were tottering on the verge of hysteria, and the night passed in the hideous unreality of a dream.

With the dawn came utter exhaustion, but she desperately combated its lethargy, in fear lest sleep bring a nightmare which would wring from her unconscious lips a shriek of betrayal.

The hazy patch of light at her window broadened into day and at last faint but unmistakable sounds came to her from below. The servants were stirring, and surely now, at any moment, the alarm would be raised.

Wonder succeeded expectancy as the minutes passed and the normal tranquility of the house remained unbroken. At length, unable to endure the torture of inaction, she had arisen. Whatever the

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immediate future held in store, she, at least, must appear ignorant of all that had occurred during the silent watches of the night.

The breakfast gong sounded as she replaced her rouge unused in the drawer, and with leaden feet she descended the stairs. The door of the dining-room was open and from within it issued the cheerful clatter of silver and purr of the coffee urn.

As if hypnotized, Betty made her way down the hall but paused involuntarily on the threshold. The room was in perfect order, the furniture arranged as usual; even the great cut-glass bowl, which she had seen only a few hours before shattered into a score of fragments, stood whole and unmarred in its accustomed place upon the sideboard.

The girl's eyes turned incredulously to the hearth where the ghastly figure had lain. It was spic and span, and the pale gray of the silken rug showed no slightest trace of the sinister pool which had reddened it a few short hours before. The bright sunlight, streaming in between the curtains at the window, added the last touch of solid reality to the scene, and Betty felt that her sanity was rocking in the balance. Had she indeed been the victim of some fearful hallucination? Was the tragedy upon which she had stumbled but the figment of a dream?

All at once she became conscious of eyes upon her and turned sharply. Mrs. Atterbury stood just behind her, smiling her calm, inscrutable smile.

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"Good morning, my dear. Did you sleep well?"

"Not very." Betty forced her stiffened lips to frame the words. "I awoke toward morning with a terrific headache, but it is better now."

She stood boldly, with a shaft of sunlight full upon her face, conscious of the keen scrutiny to which she was being subjected, but determined to avoid possible suspicion by as realistic a semblance of candor as she could command.

The pause seemed interminable, but Mrs. Atterbury broke it at last.

"You are very pale. I must give you a headache powder before your coffee. Welch!"

A figure moved in the shadowed corner of the china closet, and Betty all but cried out in dismay. Had the sly, soft-footed butler been standing there, silently noting her hesitation on the threshold, and her significant glances about the room?

"Madam?"

"Tell Caroline to give you one of the powders from the blue box in my medicine chest; remember, the blue box."

"Yes, Madam."

Mrs. Atterbury seated herself in her accustomed place, and Betty took the chair opposite. She dared not refuse the proffered medicine but a hideous fear gripped her. Suppose her subterfuge had been suspected and she was now to be done away with, like that other whose body she had seen! Or had

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he really never existed, save in her distraught imagination?

She managed to drink her coffee, but the food repelled her. As her nerves steadied and self-command returned to her, she furtively studied the faces of her employer and the butler. There was no mistaking the significance of their suddenly acute espionage. She could not account to herself for the magic rehabilitation of the room, but as the chaos of her mind subsided one fact resolved itself irrefutably; the event of the night had been no dream or vision born of hysteria.

Upon that rug so miraculously cleansed had lain the body of the murdered man. How it had been spirited away, or how, indeed, the intruder had gained entrance, and the violent struggle which the condition of the room had indicated could take place without its noise alarming the house, were mysteries Betty made no attempt to solve.

Every sense was alert to her own danger, and she realized that her very life depended now upon her powers of dissimulation. The watchers had become the watched, and she noted that Welch's pasty face was gray in the strong light of morning and his shifty, ratlike eyes darted furtively over his shoulder when he crossed before the hearth.

Mrs. Atterbury, too, left her food practically untouched, and the hand with which she raised her cup shook visibly, but her indomitable brain was

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evidently schooled to the utmost concentration, for immediately after the farce of breakfast was concluded she conducted Betty to the library and dictated steadily for more than two hours.

The social letters were devoid of interest to the girl, and under the stress of the moment seemed curiously banal. Those concerning financial matters were for the most part unintelligible, but she strove to fix her mind on them and banish the hideous vision which still obsessed her. No illusion was made to the private letters marked with a cross, nor did Mrs. Atterbury dictate any reply to the cryptic communication concerning five thousand sheep which had arrived on the previous day.

However, when the voluminous correspondence had been seemingly disposed of and Betty's eyes were turning longingly toward the crisp sunshine beyond the window, Mrs. Atterbury rose and going to a tall, narrow bookcase built in a corner of the wall, swung it nonchalantly outward with a light practised touch.

A compact steel safe was revealed, imbedded in the solid brick of the wall, and Betty watched eagerly, striving to note each twirl and stop of the combination as the other woman swiftly manipulated it. With a final click the door swung open, disclosing row after row of numbered pigeonholes like a post-office rack, each containing its quota of long, legal-looking envelopes.

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The girl's gaze was riveted, tense and fascinated upon the movements of her employer, and unbidden there crossed her face once more that sly, subtle look of Machiavelian cunning and triumph, maturing yet debasing its artless charm.

Had Mrs. Atterbury turned at that moment she might have read a warning in the silent strained figure, but she was engrossed in her occupation. When at length she selected a packet and closing the safe carefully came back to her desk, the girl was rearranging its contents, her face averted.

"Here are rough drafts of some letters which I want you to copy for me. Be careful that you transcribe them exactly; I think you will find them readily legible. When you have finished, mark the envelopes with a cross and place them with the others, for Welch to mail."

The new task occupied Betty until lunch time, and when Welch appeared with her tray, as on the previous day, she ate with relish, grateful to escape the ordeal of another hour in that room of mystery under the Argus eyes of Mrs. Atterbury and her servitor.

The former returned as she concluded her simple meal.

"You have finished the letters? Good! I can see that you are going to be a valuable aid. Your predecessor, Inez Harly, was a conscientious girl, but stupid—!" Mrs. Atterbury rolled her eyes

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with an expressive shrug. "My dear, have you ever done any library work at home in—let me see, where did you come from?—Greenville, Iowa?"

"'Library work'?" Betty repeated with a smile. "Our community was not important enough to have attracted the attention of Mr. Carnegie, but we had quite an extensive library of our own, and I always took care of it for my—my mother."

If Mrs. Atterbury noted the odd hesitation in the last words she gave no sign.

"Then you understand the rearrangement, classification and listing of books? I wonder if you will attend to mine? There are, I believe, over four hundred in this room alone and many others are scattered practically all over the house. The sets are all in a jumble and I never seem able to put my hand on any particular volume when I want it."

"I think I can do it." Betty's eyes had turned again wistfully to the window and her heart sank. "It will take me several days, I am afraid, but if you have nothing more pressing for me to do—"

"I haven't at the moment." Mrs. Atterbury moved toward the door. "I shall be glad if you will begin this afternoon. Take all the time you require and when the books are arranged, please catalogue them for me. There are a few rare volumes among them which may interest you, if you are a student. I will send for you when Miss Pope comes."

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The books were in an almost hopeless state of confusion and Betty had no mind for her task. She was still shaken with the horror of the previous night's discovery, and the imperturbability of the other woman had suggested to her a new and startling train of thought. What if Mrs. Atterbury herself were ignorant of the tragedy which had taken place beneath her roof? Could it have been the work of Welch? The girl had read the evidence of his guilty knowledge unmistakably stamped upon his elemental, brutish face that morning, but Mrs. Atterbury's inscrutable countenance defied analysis.

The continued strain was telling upon the girl and she longed unspeakably for the cold, bracing air of out of doors, but it was evident that her employer intended to grant her no leisure that day. Could the rearrangement of the books have been merely an expedient to keep her occupied and close at hand? Mrs. Atterbury had shown her nothing but kindness, yet she was conscious of the woman's dominant character, and that beneath all her suavity lurked the pitiless tyranny of an inflexible will. She was beginning to feel the iron hand within the velvet glove, and she shuddered at the mere fancy that it might some time close about her.

It was significant that no thought of escape came to her. She had met the new danger as something which must be faced and lived down, and the natural alternative of notifying the authorities of

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the foul play to which she had been an unwitting accessory after the fact never entered her mind. Instead, with a singleness of purpose which seemed inexplicable she resolutely forced her thoughts into other channels than those which led to the appalling mystery, and strove to focus her attention on the books.

Through the long afternoon Betty plodded on at her tedious task, for it was dusk when Welch came to announce the seamstress' arrival. The silence in the house had remained unbroken, but as she left the library the girl became aware of distant and confused shouting in the street beyond the great gates. It sounded upon her ears like the clamor of an approaching mob, and her heart beat fast as she hurried upstairs.

"What can it be?" she voiced her query aloud as Mrs. Atterbury met her at the door of the sewing room. "Those cries upon the street! Did you hear them? Could there have been a—an accident?"

"It is just the news-sellers crying an 'extra'," the other responded, adding with an amused smile. "No wonder it startled you! I suppose they are unknown in your home town. They are an unmitigated nuisance, but the public feeds on cheap sensation—"

"There's been a murder!" the little dressmaker croaked suddenly from the corner where she had been waiting. "A gentleman was found stabbed—"

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Mrs. Atterbury's lips tightened and she lifted an authoritative hand.

"If you please, Miss Pope!" Her voice was as cold as the ringing of steel on steel. "Horrors do not appeal to me, and I am averse to discussing them."

"I'm very sorry, I'm sure." Miss Pope fluttered in distress, her pallid face flushing darkly. "I didn't think when I spoke, but I saw it in big staring headlines in a man's paper on the car, and the words just popped out of my mouth. I wouldn't say anything to upset anybody for the world——"

"You haven't." Mrs. Atterbury stemmed the quick, nervous flow of speech, and her own voice had sunk to its normal unemotional level. "I do not believe in encouraging a tendency to morbidity, especially in the young. We all know, unfortunately, that crime exists, but we who do not come in contact with it should spare ourselves the revolting details. Now let us see how the gown will fit."

Tremblingly, the cowed little creature busied herself about the girl's slender figure. Betty stood like an automaton, turning obediently at a touch of the seamstress' hand, but oblivious to all that went on about her. Miss Pope's inadvertent words had seared themselves on her brain in letters of fire and for an instant everything grew black before her eyes. Then out of the whirling darkness had come a fleeting glimpse of Mrs. Atterbury's face and all

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doubt of her knowledge of the midnight tragedy was gone forever. Stunned by the confirmation of her own secret fears, Betty gave no heed to the seamstress, until Welch appeared to call his mistress to the telephone.

When they were alone, Miss Pope glanced up with a strange intensity in her lack-lustre eyes.

"You—stay?" The words were barely formed by the woman's shaking lips.

"I think so," Betty murmured in response. "If Mrs. Atterbury likes me."

"Oh, she'll like you, fast enough." Miss Pope looked fearfully behind her as if the shadow of her employer lingered in the doorway. "Before you know it you'll be caught, too, and you'll never be able to get free. Why didn't you go yesterday when I warned you?"

"What did you mean? Mrs. Atterbury is kind and I must earn my living. Why should I leave this place?"

"Because you are young, with all your life before you! I can't explain. I'm taking an awful chance now, but oh! believe me, miss, and go! You'd be better off homeless, in the streets, than here!"

"You must tell me more!" Betty urged. "What is wrong here? What harm can come to me? I cannot give up a good position without even knowing why!"

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The seamstress' hands fluttered in a little hopeless gesture, and she laid one finger warningly on her lips. When she spoke, it was in an altered tone.

"Yes, Miss, as you say, a little more fullness here. Mrs. Atterbury will advise me about the draping."

Her ear had been quicker than the girl's, for even as she paused the rustle of a skirt came to them down the hall and the mistress of the house appeared in the doorway. She darted a keen glance from one to the other, but Betty met her eyes calmly, and the seamstress' face was averted.

The fitting concluded and Miss Pope dismissed, Mrs. Atterbury turned to the girl.

"A few friends are dining with me tonight and I do not want you to appear in that sombre black. I have had Caroline put one of my waists in your room which I think you can manage to wear. Come down to the drawing-room early, please."

Betty obeyed, but found that some of the guests had already arrived. Mme. Cimmino was curled up felinely in a corner of the great davenport, a cigarette between her fingers and a spot of red glowing in each sallow cheek. She was talking rapidly with shrugs and darting, nervous gestures, to a tall, white-haired, distinguished stranger who was introduced as Doctor Bayard.

Wolvert stood alone, with one arm resting on the mantel. He was gazing into the fire and his

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face in the flickering glare seemed aged and shrunken, the high cheek bones glazed like those of a skull and the pale eyes shadowed.

Mrs. Atterbury was conversing with two other men by the door and as Betty was presented she took furtive note of them. The first, Leonard Ide, was a mere youth with a receding chin and vacant, glassy eyes. His dinner coat was extreme to the point of foppishness, but its dashing lines could not conceal the narrow stooped shoulders and hollow chest beneath. The hand he extended was cold and clammy to the girl's touch, and his high, thin voice grated unpleasantly on her ear.

The other was in appearance almost humorously antithetical. Short and stocky, with a rotund paunch, and bushy, iron-gray hair, he stood with his plump legs set wide apart and his eyes twinkled benignly behind huge rimmed glasses as he bowed his salutations. His voice was deep and gutteral with a decided accent and his ruddy face glowed in the firelight. Betty did not catch his name, but the others called him "Professor."

The pale youth attempted to engage her in conversation with an air of bored patronage which would have amused her under other circumstances, but as she looked from face to face, one question rang insistently through her brain. Did they know? The old gentleman with the air of an aristocrat, the jovial Professor, the spineless youth—

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could they bear the burden of guilty knowledge in common with the rest?

There was an undercurrent of perfect understanding, a veiled intimacy about the scattered group, ill-assorted as it was, which suggested a closer bond than that of old acquaintanceship. Betty could not have defined the sensation which assailed her but she felt that her every move and intonation were being weighed in the balance, as one brought before a tribunal.

Wolvert had turned from the fire-place and was approaching her, when the door was once more flung open, and Welch announced:

"Mr. and Mrs. Dana."

There was nothing distinctive at first glance about the couple who entered. The man was smooth shaven and of middle-age, slightly florid, slightly bald with lines of fatigue or dissipation about his eyes. The woman, a trifle younger, carried herself with a certain indolent grace, but her complexion was a shade too brilliant, her hair meretriciously yellow, and her voluptuous figure in its shimmering gown resembled a gorgeous over-blown flower.

The others addressed them familiarly as "Mortie" and "Louise," but with their entrance Betty noted a perceptible change in the spirit of the assembled party. The talk became disjointed, but more general in tone, and the note of intimacy was lacking.

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At dinner, Betty was seated between the fatuous young man and Mr. Dana, with Wolvert again facing her across the table, as on the evening of her arrival. The debonair, bantering manner was gone, and he sat in moody silence, the food untouched before him, but his wine glass emptied as quickly as Welch could replenish it. A dull red gathered beneath his cheek bones, and his eyes glowed fitfully as the dinner progressed.

Betty could feel his gaze fastened upon a point just back of her, and involuntarily she glanced over her shoulder. The table had been enlarged to accommodate the augmented circle, and she realized with a start that she was seated directly in front of the hearth, almost upon the very spot where the body of the dead man had lain.

Madame Cimmino leaned over swiftly with her hand on Wolvert's arm, and whispered a few words in his ear, then deliberately she reached across for his wine glass and placed it beside her own plate.

He straightened as if suddenly awakened and flashed a lightening glance around the table, and at that moment the nasal tones of Mrs. Dana were raised in lazy derision.

"Ghosts! They went out of fashion with moated granges and secret panels. Good Lord, who believes in 'em nowadays?"

The professor shook his shaggy gray head.

"There is much that not yet scientifically ex-

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plained has been," he remarked argumentatively. "It is the talk of a child to say, 'This cannot be,' because we know it not. I, myself, haff seen——"

"My dear Professor!" Doctor Bayard lifted a slim, blue-veined hand in deprecation. "I suffer from insomnia. Do not present me, I beg of you, with a group of shades to evoke about my bed! If the ghosts of men live after them, it can be only in the thoughts of those who are left behind."

"Household pets, eh!" Wolvert's voice rang out in a strident laugh and he seized the wine glass from Madame Cimmino's detaining hand. "Let's drink to them! To the ghosts of yester-year! May their shadows never grow less!"

Watching, Betty saw his eyes stray past her once more, and the glass halted half-way to his lips. For an instant a sick horror stole over her and then she heard Mrs. Atterbury's calm, level tones.

"That is a toast for Hallowe'en, Jack, but not apropos now. Why drag in bogies when you can pledge other things more to your taste?"

"Beauty, my boy, and youth. That's the ticket, eh?" Mortie Dana looked up from the hot-house pear he was peeling with placid precision. "Me for the youth thing every time—until Louise tries to teach me the new dance steps. Then I pass."

Under cover of the titter which ran around the table, Mrs. Atterbury collected the eyes of her women guests, and they retired to the drawing-

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room for coffee. Betty hesitated in the doorway, declining Welch's proffered tray and her employer smiled tolerantly.

"You are tired? My dear, run along to bed, if you like. You have been indoors all day and busy, and I forgot that your head ached. If you cannot sleep, ring for Caroline, and she will give you a bromide."

Betty thankfully availed herself of the opportunity and made her escape, but sleep was furthest from her thoughts. The hideous mystery still hammered at the gates of her brain, and could not be dismissed, but she was grateful at least for solitude that she might relax from the strain of dissimulation.

She wrapped a loose robe about her, unbound her hair and extinguishing the light threw herself on the *chaise longue* before the hearth. A pale moon rode high in the sky, glinting on the frost-laden cedars beyond her window, and the smouldering coals in the grate cast a cheerful ruddy glow about her. In the tranquil reality, it seemed incredible that tragedy and crime could have lurked beneath that roof so short a time before. In a swift revulsion of feeling the girl wondered if the suspicion and watchfulness which she had read on every face save those of the Danas, could have been, after all, but the product of her imagination.

A sudden sharp scream, muffled but unmistak-

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able, brought her to her feet with her heart beating wildly. How long she had lain there, in the lethargy of a complete reaction, she had no means of knowing. The cry was not repeated, but the silence seemed pregnable with unnameable horror, and unable to control herself, Betty stole to her door and opened it. Then she paused, rigid with surprise. A few paces away, the maid, Caroline, sat on guard.

"Did you want something, Miss?" The woman rose respectfully, but her eyes did not meet the girl's. "Mrs. Atterbury said you might need me."

Betty started indignantly to speak, but checked the words which had risen to her lips. After a pause, she said quietly:

"No, but I fancied someone called."

"Oh, that was just somebody laughing, Miss. They're playing cards, Welch tells me."

Betty bade the woman a brief goodnight and closing her door, locked it with an emphatic click. The cry still echoed in her ears. Muffled as it had been, she recognized the voice of Mrs. Dana, and knew that no mirth had sounded in its shrill crescendo, but stark terror. Was a fresh tragedy being enacted below?

One point, at least, was clear beyond further doubt; the espionage and surveillance had been no vain imagining. The woman outside her door was there as jailor, not servitor. She herself, was a virtual prisoner!

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CHAPTER IV.

Blindfold.

THE offices of the Joseph P. McCormick Detective Agency, Incorporated, occupied the entire nineteenth floor of the Leicester Building and more nearly resembled those of a potentate of finance than a private investigator. The Chief's sanctum was protected by a series of smaller communicating offices presided over by subordinates of ascending rank and importance, through whose hands the visitor, client or culprit, must pass before gaining audience with the great man himself; a process which tended either to crush or irritate the stranger, according to his temperament.

The lady who sent in her card to the Chief on a certain crisp morning in late winter, however, seemed to find food for amusement in the ceremonious progression. She was of the type which proclaims rather than admits age, but in spite of her snow-white hair, her tall figure was as erect as that of a girl and her snapping gray eyes behind the gold *pince-nez* were neither dimmed nor mellowed by time.

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A dry smile tightened the fine lines about her lips as she was ushered into the last of these offices, which served as an ante-chamber to the supreme consulting room. A slim, mild-looking youth with the face of a student was seated behind a typewriter table and raised his eyebrows superciliously as he greeted her with the question which through reiteration had appealed to her sense of humor.

"You wish to see Mr. McCormick himself?"

"That fact should be self-evident even to a detective, since I have gained admittance as far as this." Her tone was pleasant, but peremptory, as if she were addressing an inquisitive schoolboy, and the young man gasped, but proceded doggedly with the formula.

"You have no appointment?"

"None. I have already stated that to a red-headed boy, two totally uninterested young ladies and several men, as you are doubtless aware."

A harassed look was creeping into the eyes of her inquisitor.

"If you will kindly state the nature of your business, Madame—"

"I came here to consult a private detective, not to discuss my affairs with his subordinates or shout them from the housetops." A sharper note had penetrated her tones as if a smooth weapon were suddenly turned edge upwards. "If your Mr.

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McCormick is too busy to talk to me in person, I prefer not to waste further time."

The young man rose resignedly.

"I think the Chief is at liberty now. Step this way, Madame."

He threw back a door at the farther end of the office, revealing a huge corner room walled on two sides by windows, from which a dazzling glare shone full upon their faces. A heavy-set, brawny figure, with keen eyes beneath beetling brows and a straight-clipped black mustache, rose impressively to receive her as the door closed behind her guide.

The old lady brusquely forestalled his opening remark.

"Young man," the Chief was at least forty-five, "I've been presented at five European courts with less fuss and bother than I have experienced in trying to reach you. Let us come to the point. I want someone found; if you think you can accomplish it for me, name your price."

The Chief smiled slightly as he glanced at her card on the desk before him.

"It is possible that I can be of service, Madame Dumois." His voice was blandly ingratiating. "Take this seat and give me the particulars. Is the missing person a relative?"

Madame Dumois seated herself as he had indicated and her lips set in a straight line.

"I did not come here to be cross-examined, my

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good man, and I haven't said the person was missing. I mean there has been no mysterious disappearance, if that is what you are getting at. I will tell you as much as I have a mind to and no more, and if you do not find it sufficient to work on, we can stop right here. I have lost track of a certain young woman, and I want to locate her. Never mind why, or what our relations have been. I'd pay a good price to lay eyes on her again."

Her voice hardened perceptibly and a faint, angry flush mounted in her faded cheeks and boded ill for the unfortunate object of her search. Detective McCormick leaned forward persuasively in his chair.

"But my dear Madame, I must have a few personal details or I shall not know what type of operative to assign to the case. I take it that it is strictly confidential?"

"I congratulate you!" Her lips twitched again in grim humor. "I seemed unable to convey that impression to your various secretaries. Your operative will have to be a person of intelligence and tact, and if he is to come in personal contact with this young woman, he must be a gentleman. She is what you would call a lady, I'll say that much for her."

"You do not care to give me her name?"

"It is immaterial."

The detective lifted his shaggy brows.

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"May I ask if this young woman is a fugitive? Is there a likelihood that you will bring charges, criminal or civil, when she is located?"

"It is possible, under certain conditions." Madame Dumois' tones trembled for the first time, then steadied and she added in a sharper key. "That is beside the point. I want her found; your case ends there. The rest is my affair. Call in your operative and I will put him in possession of such facts as I consider essential."

"It is absolutely essential that I should know more, myself, before I can assign anyone to the case." The detective squared himself firmly in his chair. "Have you any idea where this young woman may be found? Any possible clue? Where and when was she last seen?"

Madame Dumois rose majestically.

"I will not take up more of your valuable time, Mr. McCormick. I see that we will be unable to come to an understanding. Good morning."

She turned to the door, but he extended a swift detaining hand.

"My dear Madame Dumois! I am prepared to do anything that is possible to be of service to you, but you must realize that you have given me no data whatever to work upon."

"I was under the impression that you would not undertake this matter personally in any event." She had halted, but there was no yielding in her tone.

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"If you have a moderately clever, discreet operative with the bearing and appearance of a gentleman, I will talk with him. I do not wish to discuss the details of the case any more than is absolutely necessary. I will give him a description of the young woman, nothing more. The rest will be in his hands."

The detective reflected.

"I think I have just the man for you," he announced at last. "Unfortunately, he is out on a case at the present moment, but I will recall him and send him up to see you this afternoon, if you will leave your address."

"I will meet him here," Madame Dumois replied hastily. "If he has tact enough to accept what information I am prepared to give him, and brains enough to turn it to account, it will be all I shall ask. At what hour can you have him here?"

"Shall we say three o'clock? I am confident that you will find Mr. Ross eminently suitable for your purposes. He is young, good-looking and discreet, with great personal magnetism—"

"I am not requesting him to make love to the girl." A flash of her old humor returned. "And, now, Mr. McCormick, what are your terms?"

The business arrangement was briefly concluded and the detective bowed his visitor out with grudging admiration in his eyes. He waited until her firm, methodical footsteps had died away down the

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corridor, and then pressed a button upon the under edge of his desk top. The studious-looking young man made his appearance almost instantaneously from the adjoining office.

"Yes, sir?"

"Disappearance. Young woman, good standing. Probable social scandal. Detail Clark to tail Madame Dumois and get what info he can. Try the hotels, the old-fashioned conservative ones first. Wire Ross, 192-A. Spring Garden Street, Philadelphia, to return immediately earliest train and report here at two-thirty. Send Luders out to take his place."

The young man whipped out a pad, wrote rapidly and then paused with an inquiring glance. His chief nodded, chuckling.

"That's all. Peppery old lady, but she knows her business. Ross is the chap to handle her."

At precisely half-past two a young man bounded up the steps of the Leicester Building and, elbowing his way good-naturedly into the already packed elevator, shot up to the nineteenth floor. He was boyish-looking and slim, but his broad, straight shoulders and lithe hips betokened the athlete and his laughing eyes had a habit of narrowing suddenly in keen intensity.

He nodded a careless greeting to the red-headed boy and the burly strong-arm man who guarded the outer office, and made his way unceremoniously into the presence of his chief.

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The latter explained the reason for his recall and told him succinctly of the morning's interview.

"Tactful and brainy and a gentleman; that's what the old lady says she wants, and I guess you fill the bill, Bert," McCormick added. "You're the gentleman, all right, because you were born one, and that's something you never lose and can't fake. For kid glove cases no one stands in the same class with you, but you'll need more than that in handling Madame Dumois; asbestos gloves would be safer. She wants to find the girl, but she's dead scared of our getting a line on her. Sharp as a steel trap, she is—a regular Tartar!"

"Um—French?" Herbert Ross seemed in no wise perturbed by the formidable description.

"No. Yankee accent, but there's a Paris look to her clothes. Dressy old party, in spite of her widow's cap. Shouldn't wonder if she's just back from the other side. That's why I had her looked up at the hotels, but I couldn't smoke her out. Don't antagonize her by asking questions or you're a goner. Just let her do the talking and pick up what scraps of data you can. I'm not worrying about your ability to make a success of it, Bert, if you can only get enough out of the old lady to work on, but blood from a stone would be a cinch in comparison."

"Any hint as to why she wants the subject located?"

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Ross lighted a cigarette and leaned forward in his chair.

"Not in words, but from her manner I judge it is not from any desire to remember the young woman in her will," the Chief responded dryly. "Looks more like a scandal than anything else, as she's so anxious to keep the girl's identity a secret. I tried my level best to worm some information from her, but she flared up and threatened to call it all off. The best I've got is that the subject is young, refined and to all appearances a lady, although Madame Dumois seemed to grudge that fact. You go to it, Bert, and see what you can do." The young operator pondered for a moment.

"Well, sir," he began at last, "I can't hope to succeed where you have failed, if I work along the same lines. In your official capacity you have had the bad luck to antagonize her, so I think I shall try another scheme. May I have the reference library for an hour? I'll receive her there instead of here."

"Take the whole shop if you want it, but get the right dope from her about the girl!" The detective brought his hand down on the desk in a resounding slap. "It will be a long step up the ladder for you if you can start to make a reputation for yourself of successful discreet work among conservative people of the sort the old lady belongs to. That's why I put you on this; I haven't the time to go after

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it myself and it requires class as well as brains. The woods are full of refined young ladies who have turned one trick or another; a chance word may give you a line on how to locate this one. Try any scheme you like, but get results. That's all we're after."

The reference library was more like a club room than the sanctum of a private detective. A long, mahogany table surrounded by heavily carved chairs occupied the center of the room, and the walls were lined with bookcases, interspersed with tall glass cabinets filled with curios. A few prints and signed photographs hung above them and over the mantel was mounted a neat arrangement of firearms and various weapons.

There was nothing remarkable about the room or its appointments at first glance, save its obvious incongruity with the rest of the suite, but a closer inspection would have revealed the fact that all the volumes—with the exception of those in a small case between two windows—dealt with one subject; crime. The curios in the cabinets, the weapons above the mantel, each had its individual history, tragic or sordid, to bear mute testimony to the futility of defiance of the law.

Madame Dumois' return was punctual to the moment and she was ushered without delay to the apartment, where Ross awaited her. She stared critically at the slim, straight, immaculate figure as

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he turned toward her from the low bookcase, a quaint vellum-covered volume open in his hands.

"Madame Dumois?" he bowed low with continental courtesy over her hand. "I have come from Philadelphia to be of what service to you I may; I am Herbert Ross."

"Mr. McCormick suggested you—" she began, but he interrupted her swiftly.

"Do you know, while awaiting you I have come upon a real treasure here? The collected verse of Nizami!"

Mme. Dumois stepped backward, blinking.

"Poetry!" she ejaculated faintly, in blank amazement.

"Ah! I see you are interested." His face lightened in boyish eagerness. "Nothing so appeals to the woman of rare discernment and feeling as the lilting charm of the early Persians. The casual reader knows only the Bacchanalian philosophy of Omar, but you, I am sure are familiar with Rumi and this greatest of lyricists, Nizami, to say nothing of Hafiz—"

"Upon my soul!" Mme. Dumois had backed until the table barred her retreat. "You are a most extraordinary young man!"

"Should one permit the ugliness of life to blind one to the beauties of expression? But I see you have not done so. You possess that rarest of all gifts, sympathetic appreciation, Madame Dumois!"

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He beamed upon her. "Do you remember this lament of Majnun over the grave of Laili? Where even in the exquisite love letters of your own Abelard to Heloise, can you find such haunting beauty? Listen, I beg of you:

"Oh, bower of joy, with blossoms fresh and fair,
But doomed, alas! no ripened fruit to bear.
Where shall I find thee now in darkness shrouded!
Those eyes of liquid fire forever clouded—"

He sighed dramatically and closed the book. "Your French poets—but I forgot; I had fancied from your name that you were a native of France—"

"I am American—" Madame Dumois stammered, still dazed from his unexpected onslaught.

"That I realized at once when I saw you. I knew even the part of the country from which you came, Madame." He bowed again. "Only the women of New England retain their girlhood grace and beauty of form with their native charm of manner through years of cosmopolitan life, as this little volume has retained its beauty of thought and inspiration in spite of the fact that it was discovered in the pocket of an arch murderer when he was searched in the death house."

A faint flush had risen to the faded cheeks of the old lady at his daring flattery, but she paled again with an involuntary shudder.

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"Mercy! Put the horrid thing away!"

He laid the book upon the table.

"Forgive the digression, Madame Dumois. I am at your service."

For once she seemed at a loss.

"You are really a detective?" Her eyes searched his face keenly, as he pulled out a chair for her.

"That is my profession," responded Ross, with a touch of quiet dignity.

"This McCormick person has told you what I require?"

"You wish to find a certain young lady, whom you will describe to me."

"Precisely." Madame Dumois' tone was gracious. "I think, Mr. Ross, that we shall get on. This young woman appears refined, well-bred and rather more comprehensively educated than the average girl of today, but in appearance she is quite a usual type, neither blonde nor brunette, not actually pretty nor strikingly plain."

Ross nodded encouragingly as if he found valuable points in the negative description, and the old lady warmed to her task.

"She has brown hair and blue eyes, and her taste in dress is conservative, but her manner when last I saw her was altogether too self-reliant; pert, it would have been considered when I was a girl. There is very little more that I can tell you about her, but I believe her to be in the city somewhere."

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"Your description is remarkably clear." The young detective preserved an inscrutable face as he added blandly: "No doubt you have a photograph of her?"

"If I had, young man, I should not exhibit it," the old lady retorted.

"Only to me," he smiled persuasively, then dodged the issue. "You say, Madame Dumois, that the young woman is well educated. Is she also accomplished? Music, art, languages?"

"A mere smattering of music, but she is a perfect parrot in picking up strange tongues; a born linguist." She caught herself up abruptly. "However, I did not come here to answer questions, Mr. Ross, as I explained very definitely this morning. I want this young woman found. You have her description; now go ahead and find her."

"I will do my best." His smile had not wavered, and he bent forward ingratiatingly. "But will you permit one solitary question? It will not be an impertinent one, and it would simplify matters greatly. It has been said, you know, that the most passive, idle-minded of us has one pet enthusiasm, one hobby or talent, call it what you will, which interests us above all other things. Has this young woman any special predilection?"

"I hadn't thought of that!" Madame Dumois exclaimed. "Of course, she has, and a most ridiculous one for a gentlewoman: Egyptology."

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The detective gave no sign that at last a clue lay within his grasp, but remarked with studied carelessness:

"Oh, that sort of thing is a fad nowadays, to acquire the patter of some science or art and pose as a savant or connoisseur. In all probability the young woman has no real knowledge of the subject."

"If she hasn't it is her own fault." The old lady returned in unguarded haste. "She was a pupil of the greatest authority of the age, Professor Mallory, of Cairo."

"Indeed. I have not heard of him." Ross brushed the information aside with a slight gesture, as if it were of no moment. "I think, however, that I shall be able to proceed with the data you have given me."

Madame Dumois rose, and her sharp eyes flashed in a sort of grim exultation.

"In that case, I can only wait for your success. If you can lay your hands on that young woman, Mr. Ross, you will not find me unappreciative. You will report to me——?"

"But not here!" he expostulated. "The atmosphere, you know, for a person of your delicate sensibility in frequent visits to a detective agency would be too repellent to be borne. I will be delighted to come to you, Madame Dumois. I do not anticipate any insurmountable difficulty in the case,

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but if I find myself in a quandary I am sure your opinion and advice would be of inestimable value."

The broad touch of flattery proved the final straw to break the back of her prejudice, and the old lady capitulated.

"Well, you may call, if you like. I am staying with an old friend, Mrs. Hemmingway, on the North Drive, but I do not care to have my address bandied about this office, Mr. Ross."

"I quite understand." As he held the door open for her to depart he added coolly: "I will come tomorrow for the photograph."

"Which you will not get!" She chuckled in frank enjoyment of his pertinacity. Then the stern lines tightened about her mouth. "Find this young woman with the information I have given you, Mr. Ross, or drop the case. You have wormed more out of me than I meant you to, but I think I can trust you not to take advantage of it in any way other than to promote my object. The girl must be found."

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CHAPTER V.

Box A-46.

ON the morning after Mrs. Atterbury's dinner party, Betty awoke from a deep sleep of mental and physical exhaustion to find that a fresh snow-storm was raging. The fine, hard-driven flakes swirled past her windows like a heavy meshed veil, obscuring even the cedars just outside and piling in soft drifts between the iron bars of the balcony.

The terrified scream which had aroused her from her reverie at midnight still rang in her ears. She was sure that it had been the voice of Mrs. Dana, and she dared not allow her thoughts to dwell on what it might portend.

Her own position in the household, now clearly defined by her discovery that she was indeed under surveillance, left her no alternative but to disarm the suspicion directed against her at all costs. An instant off guard would be fatal and she summoned all her self-command to her aid.

Nevertheless, it was with a sinking heart that she dragged herself downstairs in response to the

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breakfast gong, dreading lest she come upon evidences of a second tragedy. The sedate, seemingly tranquil house had become for her an abode of horror, and with each reluctant step fear gripped her more tenaciously by the throat.

To her unspeakable relief, however, she heard Mrs. Dana's high, nasal tones issuing from the dining-room and entered to find the lady herself already seated opposite her hostess. She was attired in a teagown belonging to the latter, beneath which her ample figure sagged, and her face in the cold light was ghastly and drawn.

"Sit down, my dear." Mrs. Atterbury nodded her good-morning from behind the coffee urn. "You slept well?"

"Yes, thank you. My headache has quite disappeared," Betty murmured, adding deliberately: "It was kind of you to have Caroline at hand, but I did not need her services."

For a moment they looked squarely into each other's eyes; Mrs. Atterbury's were the first to fall.

"I kept Mrs. Dana with me as you see, because of the storm. Mr. Dana stayed over night, too, of course, but he left for his office half an hour ago. We played bridge until very late."

"I'm a wreck this morning," Mrs. Dana remarked fretfully, but there was a curious quiver in her voice. "Mortie says I am the original daylight saver; I only make use of the night hours."

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"The moon was ever so bright when I went to bed," ventured Betty. "The storm must have come very quickly."

"Quickly enough to give me quite a house party," Mrs. Atterbury replied. "Madame Cimmino remained also, and Professor Stolz, but they have not risen yet. I hope you will have an opportunity to talk with the Professor, Betty, you would find him most interesting. He is an eminent scientist and justly celebrated in his own country."

Betty would have liked to ask what branch of science had claimed him, but she discreetly remained silent, with a mental reservation to find out for herself, if possible.

Madame Cimmino appeared shortly, looking more sallow and shrunken than ever, and while her hostess greeted her, Betty slipped away to the library to sort the morning's mail.

The room had not yet been put in order for the day, and the girl's attention was caught by a heap of torn papers, half charred, on the cold hearth. The writing upon the scraps seemed oddly familiar, and she stopped hastily and examined them. They were the letters she herself had painstakingly copied from the originals which Mrs. Atterbury had taken from the safe and given to her on the previous day. Like the rearrangement of the bookcases, the letters had been merely a subterfuge to keep her employed and under watchful eyes.

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Nevertheless, she doggedly assailed her uncongenial task and was midway through the morning's mail, when a heavy foot sounded in the hall, and Professor Stolz stuck his shaggy head in the door.

"Pardon. I a book would wish to have and Mrs. Atterbury says it here is," he translated idiomatically from his native tongue. "I disturb you, no?"

"Not at all." Betty rose. "Perhaps I can help you, Professor. What sort of book are you looking for?"

"It is Egyptian—a history of the twelfth dynasty."

"Egyptian!"

The professor had been peering along the bookshelves, but at her exclamation he turned.

"Yes. Professor of Egyptology I have been for fifteen years already, in the University of Leipzig. The book you have perhaps seen, Fräulein. Very old and rare it is, with the cover much stained—"

"Is this it?" Betty held out a quaint, time-worn volume, which he seized with avidity.

"In here an inscription is, from the tomb of Ameni-emhat, at Beni-Hasan, for which long looking have I been." He turned the pages eagerly, then paused with a snort of satisfaction, and read in a mumbling undertone: "*Renpit XLIII Xer hen en Horu anx mest suten net xeper-ka-Ra anx t'etta—*'"

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"Year forty-three, under the Majesty of Horus, living one of births, king of the North, Kheper-ka-Ra, living forever—" Betty translated softly, in utter self-forgetfulness.

"Himmel! What is this?" The professor stared at her over his huge-rimmed glasses. "You know Egyptian!"

Betty flushed.

"I—I knew a young man in my home town who had studied it abroad, and he taught me a little," she stammered hastily.

"A little? Donnerwetter! For my assistant I should like you, so fluently you translate!" His eyes shone with the fire of an enthusiast. "After my own heart you are, Fräulein, and to teach you more, proud I should be!"

"Thank you, Professor, but I—I have no time at present." Betty turned back to her desk with a determined air and after futile efforts to engage her further in conversation he departed, shaking his head in stupefaction.

For several days thereafter no untoward incident disturbed the surface monotony of the household routine, and only the unobtrusive but persistent surveillance to which she was subjected remained to keep the tragic mystery uppermost in Betty's thoughts.

Of her knowledge of the espionage she gave no sign, but went about her daily tasks with winning

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docility and an outward serenity of bearing which brought the hoped-for reward. After the third night, Caroline was no longer installed on guard outside her door, and before the week was out the girl felt that she had at last lulled all suspicion. Mrs. Atterbury had not suggested that she walk again in the grounds of the estate, however, and although the confinement was telling upon her, Betty feared to risk a direct refusal by seeking permission.

However, from the hour that Caroline's vigil ceased, Betty had pursued her secret exploration of the home. As on the first night after her arrival, and the second, when she made her gruesome discovery, she had continued her mysterious quest throughout the sleeping house and every spare moment during the day, when she could escape detection, found her delving in odd nooks and corners. She managed in time to visit each of the sleeping apartments and even penetrated to the attic, but her efforts continued to be fruitless. The object of her clandestine activities seemed still to elude her.

She attended to the correspondence each morning and completed the rearrangement of the books in the library. Miss Pope appeared on two subsequent occasions, but made no further effort to communicate by stealth with the girl even upon the day she delivered the finished gowns. Whatever her

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motive had been, her courage was not equal to a second attempt.

The Danas made no reappearance, nor did the pale, foppish youth, Jordan Ide, but Mme. Cimmino and the ubiquitous Wolvert were constant visitors and on more than one occasion Betty heard Dr. Bayard's measured tones issuing from the drawing-room. By tacit arrangement, she now retired to her own room immediately after dinner on such evenings as there were guests present and the silent hours of readjustment and utter mental relaxation gave her renewed strength to play her daily part.

By the end of the week a thaw set in which swept the cedars bare of frost and turned the unbroken expanse of white into a veritable sea of mud. Mrs. Atterbury herself had not left the house since she acquired her new companion, but early one morning she entered the library where Betty sat wearily anticipating her secretarial duties, with a proposal which made the girl's eyes dance.

"My dear, I wonder if you will undertake an errand for me? The walking is atrocious, I know, but you have been cooped up indoors quite long enough and the fresh air will do you good."

"Oh, I shall be glad to go!" Betty cried warmly, adding in haste, "Of course, I don't know my way about, but if you will direct me I am sure I shall not make any mistake."

"I don't think there is a likelihood of your get-

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ting lost," Mrs. Atterbury smiled. "But if you do, you can always reach a telephone, you know, and I will send the car to conduct you home. I want you to go to Madame Cimmino's and bring back a package which she will give you for me. She lives in the Lorilton Apartments on Falmouth Avenue; walk three blocks across town from the corner here, and take a southbound red 'bus. Tell the conductor your destination and he will see that you reach it safely."

"That seems quite clear, Mrs. Atterbury." Betty rose with alacrity. "Do you wish me to go at once?"

"If you will, please. The mail can wait until later, but this is rather important."

The air was as mild as on a spring day and Betty's heart leaped as she passed out of the gateway to the broad, untrammeled avenue. She glanced back sharply at the house, but no one was visible, and its windows stared blankly at her.

Rounding the corner, she set out across town at a brisk pace, her blood tingling in her veins and the soft wind bringing a flush to her pale cheeks. Her gaze was introspective rather than curious and she boarded the southbound omnibus almost mechanically, although she scrutinized her fellow passengers with grave intentness.

A ride of some twenty minutes brought her to the doors of the Lorilton, which proved to be a

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huge, ornately constructed apartment house in a somewhat less exclusive locality than the North Drive.

A gaudily upholstered elevator deposited Betty on the tenth floor and in response to her ring, the apartment door was opened by a smug-faced Japanese butler who ushered her silently into the drawing-room.

She took a swift mental inventory of her surroundings as she waited. The room presented an odd mixture of real artistic treasures, and the basest of imitations; rare tapestries hung upon the walls between wretched copies of masterpieces, a hideous terra cotta statuette overshadowing a Ming vase, and an exquisite Buhl cabinet was filled with the most trumpery of knickknacks.

Madame Cimmino made her appearance in a gorgeous but somewhat soiled kimona. Her sallow cheeks were highly rouged and the jeweled hoops which tugged at her ears seemed oddly garish in the light of day.

"The packet? Ah, yes, I have it," she murmured in response to Betty's request. "You came alone? You are learning, then, to find your way in this strange city; that is well."

She clapped her hands, and when the butler appeared, jabbered rapidly to him in his native tongue, while Betty sat with her face averted. The functionary disappeared, to return almost immediately

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bearing a small package which Madame Cimmino placed in the girl's hands.

"Be careful that you do not lose it, my dear," she warned her at the door, adding with a flash of her white teeth, "Some day when you have leisure, little mouse, you shall come and have tea with me, if Mrs. Atterbury permits. I like American young girls."

Betty thanked her and departed. She thrust the precious package in her muff without a second glance, and a peculiar, hard light glowered in her eyes until she reached once more the house in the cedars.

Mrs. Atterbury accepted the package without comment, and thereafter Betty roamed the grounds at will. Her position save for the morning's correspondence had become a sinecure, but she felt a presentiment of impending change, and awaited developments with keen expectancy.

They ensued more quickly than she had anticipated. She was summoned to Mrs. Atterbury's room late one afternoon, to find her employer critically examining a gown which had just arrived; an exquisite affair of filmy tulle and creamy lace.

Betty could not suppress a little cry of admiration, and Mrs. Atterbury smilingly held it out to her.

"I wish you to try this on, my dear. If it fits you, it is yours."

Wondering, Betty placed herself in Caroline's

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hands and when the change had been effected Mrs. Atterbury herself gasped. In the simple blouse and skirt Betty had been winsomely attractive in spite of the disfiguring birthmark, but the delicate beauty of the gown transformed her as if some fairy godmother had touched her with a magic wand.

"Really, you are quite wonderful!" There was amazement mingled with the unfeigned admiration in Mrs. Atterbury's tones. "I had no idea that you would develop such possibilities, Betty. I did well to select this model for you."

"It is really mine?" The girl turned her flushed face from the mirror. "I—I don't know how to thank you, Mrs. Atterbury, but when shall I have an occasion to wear it?"

"Tonight." The reply came with startling brevity and promptitude. "You are going to hear 'Aida'. Have you ever been to the opera?"

"Aida!" gasped Betty. There was a pause, and then she added with a change of tone, "No, I—I have never heard any opera except on a phonograph. It will be like a dream come true."

And as if in a dream she completed her toilet for the evening. She had schooled herself to accept without visible surprise anything which might eventuate, but to appear at the opera in company with Mrs. Atterbury and her probable guests, was a move she had not in her wildest fancy anticipated.

A fresh surprise awaited her when she descended

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to the dining room. Only Mrs. Atterbury was present, and she was still attired in the somber gray gown she had worn throughout the day.

"Perhaps I should have waited to dress later, also," Betty murmured, glancing down at her own shimmering elegance. "I did not know we would have sufficient time after dinner."

"I am not going with you," Mrs. Atterbury replied to the implied question with calm directness. "I am sending you quite alone, Betty. The car will take you, and wait to bring you home when you have accomplished your errand."

"'My—errand?'" faltered Betty, off guard in her amazement.

"You will occupy Box A-48, in the grand tier," the older woman continued as if she had not heard the interjection. 'In A-46, on your left, there will be seated a party of ladies and gentlemen. You will take no apparent notice of them—I can depend upon your breeding to prohibit your staring—but be sure to take a chair close to the rail which separates the two boxes and allow your arm to rest upon it. At some time during the singing of the opera, one of the gentlemen in the next box will place an envelope in your hand. Do not betray any surprise, whatever you do, but remain quietly for a few minutes longer, then slip away as unobtrusively as possible and descend immediately to the carriage entrance, where the car will be awaiting you. This is a confidential

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matter, but you are discreet and I am sure that I can trust you, my dear. It is really quite simple; do you think you will be able to carry it through successfully?"

"I—I think so," responded Betty, faintly. She was dazed, but a new light had broken over her consciousness and much that had puzzled her was made clear. She shrank from the task before her, yet no thought of a refusal entered her mind. She had voluntarily placed herself in this woman's hands, and whatever commands were given her, she was prepared to obey.

"You do not seem very confident." Mrs. Atterbury's level tone had become suddenly stern. "If you follow my directions carefully you can make no mistake. I do not find it convenient to go myself, but if you object—"

"Oh, it isn't that!" cried Betty in haste to cover her momentary hesitation. "I'm sure I shall not have any difficulty in merely accepting the envelope and bringing it to you, but I never went to the opera before or sat in a box, and I shall feel as if everyone were looking at me. I am afraid that I am a trifle self-conscious, after all, about the birthmark on my face."

The lines about Mrs. Atterbury's mouth relaxed, and she smiled tolerantly.

"So that is all! You need not think of it, my dear, for I assure you it is rather attractive than

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otherwise. It serves to render you distinctive, at all events, and that is what everyone is striving for, nowadays. The car will be brought around to the door for you at ten, when you will be in time for the last act. You will have only one thing to remember; be sure that you seat yourself on the extreme *left* of the box, and that your hand is within reach."

"If you will describe the gentleman to me—" Betty began, but the other interrupted quickly.

"That is quite unnecessary, as you are to make no advances, nor indeed appear cognizant of his existence. Permit him to place the envelope in your hand, but do not even glance in his direction. That is quite clear?"

"Oh, yes!" laughed Betty ingenuously. "I should be an adept at that sort of thing; I have had practice enough at school, passing surreptitious notes."

Mrs. Atterbury permitted herself to laugh softly.

"Then I shall take your success for granted. Come to me before you start, my dear. I have some flowers for you to wear, and I am going to lend you a string of my pearls."

When Betty, wrapped in an ermine cloak the value of which she dared not attempt to compute, drew up before the opera house she was tingling with excitement, but her brain was clear, and her nerves steady. She had realized in a swift flash of comprehension that she was assuming the first of her real tasks. Whatever was written in the myste-

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rious letter which was to be entrusted to her, and whoever the stranger might be from whose hand she would receive it, she was convinced it was for this and no other purpose that she had been engaged. The secretarial work, the companionship, were mere subterfuges to conceal her true mission, although she could not fathom its meaning.

The third act was drawing to a close as she entered her box and Aida's exquisite pleading cry: *"Ah no! ti calma—ascoltami,"* thrilled her very soul. A daring idea came to her. She had been directed to return as soon as she received the letter, but why could she not delay its delivery until the very end of the opera? She longed to hear the final aria, and it would be a simple matter to keep out of arm's reach.

The box on her left was occupied, for although she did not glance toward it, a rustling and soft murmur reached her ears as if her entrance had occasioned comment, unobtrusive though it had been.

For a moment she hesitated, then obeying the swift impulse she dropped her cloak and seated herself in a chair well to the right, her face averted. Scarcely had she composed herself when the curtain fell.

Betty sat motionless in the sudden blaze of light, her eyes idly sweeping the glittering horseshoe which extended at her right, her heart beating

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wildly. She was conscious only of one pair of eyes upon her and she fought down an almost irresistible impulse to turn and meet them. Someone was staring at her from the box at her left, staring as if mutely compelling her gaze and she flushed darkly beneath the scar upon her cheek.

Whoever they were, it was evident that this man and his companions were well known, for from the fall of the curtain until its rise again, a constant stream of visitors eddied about their box and scraps of gay chatter and soft tinkling laughter came to her ears. One chance phrase, in a vivacious feminine voice made her breath catch in her throat:

"Oh, don't mind Toddie! He is fuming inwardly, although he won't tell why. Anyway, it's a positive comfort to know that there's something on his mind beside his hat. How were the ducks in North Carolina?"

Betty stirred uneasily in her chair. If "Toddie" were the man who had come to deliver the letter into her hands she could well understand the reason for his ill humor. What must he think of her presence yet deliberate evasion of him? Her determination did not falter, however. Come what might, she meant to drain to its dregs this cup of unalloyed happiness which so unexpectedly had been held to her lips.

Just as the lights were lowered, and the first soft strains of Amneris' lamentation swelled from the

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orchestra, she ventured a swift glance at the box on her left.

A portly, gray-haired dowager was directly beside Betty with two younger women on her left, and all three were glittering with jewels like miniature constellations. Behind them an obese elderly gentleman dropped his lowest chin upon his broad expanse of shirt bosom in well-calculated repose, a younger one bent forward to whisper into the ear of the girl in front of him, and a third, a round-faced man with a downy blond mustache turned squarely and met Betty's eyes, with exasperation glowering in his own.

She permitted her gaze to rest on him impersonally for a moment then slowly shifted it to the stage as the curtain rose.

The scene held her, and the beauty of the music so enthralled her senses that she forgot herself and the strange errand which had brought her there until a chair rasped against the box rail in unmistakable signal. With a start she threw off the spell which had entranced her, and just as the divine notes of Aida's *"Vedi? di morte l'angelo—"* rose winging through the vast house, she moved silently to the chair at her left and rested her arm upon the barrier.

There was a sound very like a sigh from the next box, and an envelope was thrust almost roughly beneath her fingers.

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For a space of interminable minutes she sat as motionless as if carved from stone, save that the hand holding the letter was clenched to her breast, crushing the cluster of white roses which she wore, and feeling like a pulseless lump of ice. The perfume of the flowers, cloyingly sweet, all but suffocated her, and the band of pearls seemed to tighten about her throat.

The strains of *"O Terra Adio"* were dying away in haunting sadness as she rose, and snatching up the ermine cloak, slipped from the box and down the promenade like a wraith.

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CHAPTER VI.

A Message From Pharaoh.

ON the morning following her visit to the opera, Betty sat at her desk in the library, with a copy of the *Literary Digest,* which had just arrived in the mail spread out before her. The waiting heap of correspondence was forgotten, and she read and reread as if hypnotized the chance advertisement which had caught her eye:

"Wanted:—Translator of Egyptian inscriptions and papyri of later dynastic periods. Scholar conversant with Mallory method preferred. Exceptionally high rates, tripling those ever previously paid in America will be given for accurate authentic work. No immediate time limit. Call office nine, National Egyptological Museum."

A gray haze of exuding frost arose from the bare dun lawns stretching before the window and the cedars drooped their branches as if weary of the long wait for spring, but she was blind to the somber prospect before her. Instead rose gorgeous pictures of the East and her vision was peopled with the glory of long-buried kings.

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Her own precarious position, the inexplicable shadow which lay like a pall over the house, even the dead man upon whom she had stumbled on that never-to-be-forgotten night had faded alike from her thoughts, and her eyes glowed with an eagerness almost fanatical.

If only she dared to reply in person to the advertisement! Aside from the emolument, which might prove an asset by no means to be despised in her straitened circumstances, the work would relieve her mind from the terrific strain under which she had placed herself.

Why should she not avail herself of this opportunity to pursue a study which possessed for her an irresistible fascination? In spite of her preoccupation, time hung heavily upon her hands and she had come to dread the many hours during which she was left to her own devices with only the wretched treadmill of her thoughts to bear her company.

It might be that with the successful accomplishment of her strange mission at the opera house she would enter upon a new phase of her present situation, with exciting adventures in store for her, on like mysterious errands, but she looked forward to that contingency with no lightening of her spirit. It would be merely a part of the task which she had assumed, and was constrained to carry through.

But to feel again the rustle of ancient papyrus beneath her fingers; to decipher the messages pic-

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tured in quaint hieroglyphs by patient hands long since turned to dust, that the unborn legions of the future might sit at the feet of ageless philosophy; to delve once more into a past which was of a bygone age even when three wise men journeyed out of the East—the desire became an obsession which she tried vainly to exorcise.

She did indeed thrust the idea from her while the letters demanded her attention, but it returned again with unabated force with the first moment of leisure. Why should she not at least investigate the advertisement?

At luncheon, Mrs. Atterbury herself precipitated her decision.

"My dear, I wish you would go to Jennings' Art Shop for me this afternoon and select a Colonial frame for that tall mirror which hangs in my room. They sent me a gilt monstrosity when I ordered by 'phone, and I don't want the bother of going myself. If you walk straight across town until you come to the park, and follow its wall around the southern end to the east side you cannot miss it. The Egyptian Museum is on the opposite corner. By the way, Professor Stolz tells me that you, too, are interested in Egyptology. How did you ever acquire a liking for that sort of thing in the middle west?"

"Through a neighbor, who had made a study of it in Egypt," Betty replied readily enough. "It is

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really fascinating, like a grown-up picture puzzle. But about the mirror, does the shopman know the size you require?"

With the details of her commission carefully pigeon-holed in her mind, the girl started upon her errand. She walked briskly, for she realized that her time must be accounted for, and she had determined to use a portion of it for her own ends. Reaching the park, she struck boldly through it instead of following the longer way around, and no one who had known its every path could have chosen a more direct course than she, a self-confessed stranger.

The purchase was quickly consummated and she had turned to leave the shop, when a figure barred her way. She glanced up to find herself confronted by a tiny, fairy-like creature wrapped in sables with a great bunch of livid purple orchids at her belt. Her hair shimmered like spun gold beneath the fur toque and her face, innocent of cosmetics, was exquisitely fair.

For an instant the stranger visibly hesitated and then as if resolutely checking her impulse, turned and walked to a distant counter.

Betty, too, halted in uncontrollable surprise, then made her way to the street as if in a daze. She had never, to her knowledge, encountered the other before, yet the stranger's face had blanched at sight of her and in the round, babyish blue eyes which for

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a fleeting moment had met hers, she read unmistakable repulsion and an underlying desperate fear. For whom had the woman mistaken her? She was veiled, but the birthmark must have been plainly discernible. Could it be that her disfigurement was so great as to cause such repugnance and almost hysterical fear in a chance observer?

The sight of the museum, however, drove all thought of the odd encounter from her mind, and as she ascended the low, broad steps to the revolving entrance door she resolved to accept the proffered opportunity, whatever the result should Mrs. Atterbury discover her dereliction.

The gray-haired attendant directed her to an upper floor where in a broad echoing marble corridor she found a double row of office doors. Number nine was ajar, and when she knocked a pleasant, masculine voice bade her enter.

The office was small, with files and glass cases lining the walls above which hung framed sections of parchment, time-frayed and shrunken. The westering sun shone through the single window full upon the desk, behind which sat a boyish-looking young man, with merry twinkling eyes and more than a suspicion of red in his chestnut hair.

Betty had been prepared to confront a sedate philologist of settled age and perhaps stern demeanor, and she came forward rather shyly.

"I am looking for the person who advertised in

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the current issue of the *Literary Digest* for an Egyptian translator," she remarked.

The young man rose from the chair, his eyes still fixed on hers, and she observed that they had narrowed swiftly with a keen intensity which lent maturity to his expression.

"Please be seated." His tone was quietly courteous. "I placed the advertisement in the magazine you mention. Do you understand the Mallory method?"

"If you mean the system employed by Professor Mallory, of Cairo, and the form of transliteration used by him so that the ancient phraseology might be retained, I can claim to be thoroughly conversant with it." Betty sank into the chair indicated, her breath ending in a little gasp. For all her self-possession, the young man's impersonal but fixed regard had a disturbing effect, and in the attempt to combat it her manner grew strained. "I have made practical use of it in translations for the Museum at Gizeh—"

She paused, biting her lip, but the young man appeared unobservant of her sudden check.

"You have studied under Professor Mallory?" The question was casually uttered, yet it brought a swift blush to her brow.

"I was a pupil of an associate of his." She spoke slowly as if choosing her words with care. "You mention the later dynastic periods in your advertise-

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ment; you refer doubtless to the era of the Persian influence?"

"Precisely. One papyrus in particular which we wish translated as literally as possible for purposes of record is believed to be a message from one of the kings of the twenty-seventh dynasty, who was called 'the Great Pharaoh'." The young man diverted his gaze at last, as he fumbled in a desk drawer. "I have a copy here. He isn't the same chap as the one mentioned in the Bible, whose daughter found Moses in the bulrushes, you know."

Betty could scarcely believe her ears. The flippant display of ignorance on the part of one who must be an important official of the museum seemed incredible, and a dim suspicion came to her that she was being made the victim of a hoax.

"I am aware of that fact," she responded frigidly. "The twenty-seventh dynasty was inaugurated only some five hundred years before Christ. Two of its rulers were known as 'the Great Pharaoh'; Xerxes and Artaxerxes. By which was this papyrus believed to have been inscribed?"

"I will let you judge that." He smiled in winning friendliness, quite unabashed by her icy tone. "To tell you the truth, I am not very well posted on it."

If this were indeed a hoax, Betty determined to obtain some personal satisfaction from it.

"Can you tell me, however, if an interlinear transliteration is required, as well as a translation?"

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The young man lifted his hands in a gesture of helplessness almost comic.

"I mean," she explained, dimpling behind her veil, "do you wish the corresponding letter in our alphabet placed beneath each pictured letter or hieroglyph, with the translation of the whole phrase on a third line? That is the form used by Professor Mallory."

"Then I presume that is what will be required. I am not going to try to impose on you by any false display of a knowledge I do not possess," he said with engaging candor. "As a matter of fact, I am lamentably ignorant of Egyptology in general, but I happen to be a sort of honorary member of the board of directors governing the museum, and the task of finding a translator was delegated to me, with instructions to obtain, if possible, a pupil of Professor Mallory for the work. The official translator for the museum is in Egypt at the present time. Here is the photographic copy of the papyrus in question."

He opened a portfolio and took from it several large sheets which he passed to her across the desk. Her momentary resentment was forgotten and a little exclamation of fervid interest escaped her lips as she spread the pages out before her and threw back her veil the more clearly to scrutinize them.

The young man leaned slightly forward studying her face, then quietly he touched a button in the

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wall and the room was suddenly flooded with light.

"That is better, isn't it?" he asked.

Betty glanced up, blinking in the sudden glare, then nodded abstractedly and bent again over the hieroglyphic scrawl. Several minutes passed while she sat absorbed, no sound breaking the stillness but the occasional rustle of the papers beneath her hand. At length she rearranged them with a sigh of satisfaction.

"This purports to be a message from Khshiarsha, or Xerxes, the first ruler of the twenty-seventh dynasty to be called 'the Great Pharaoh' and if the date of the original papyrus has been authenticated, it is a wonderful find, and a valuable addition to Egyptiana. This copy will serve perfectly for translation, but I should like very much to see the original sometime, if it is in the possession of the museum——"

The eager words died on her lips, and her glowing face paled, then flushed hotly. She had looked up to find that the young man's eyes were fixed with an expression which she could not fathom upon the birthmark on her cheek, and it burned her like a newly-seared brand. With a swift gesture she lowered her veil.

"I will see that you have access to it." The young man rose. "I could place it in your hands now, but the curator is out. However, if, as you say, this copy is suitable for translation, do you

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