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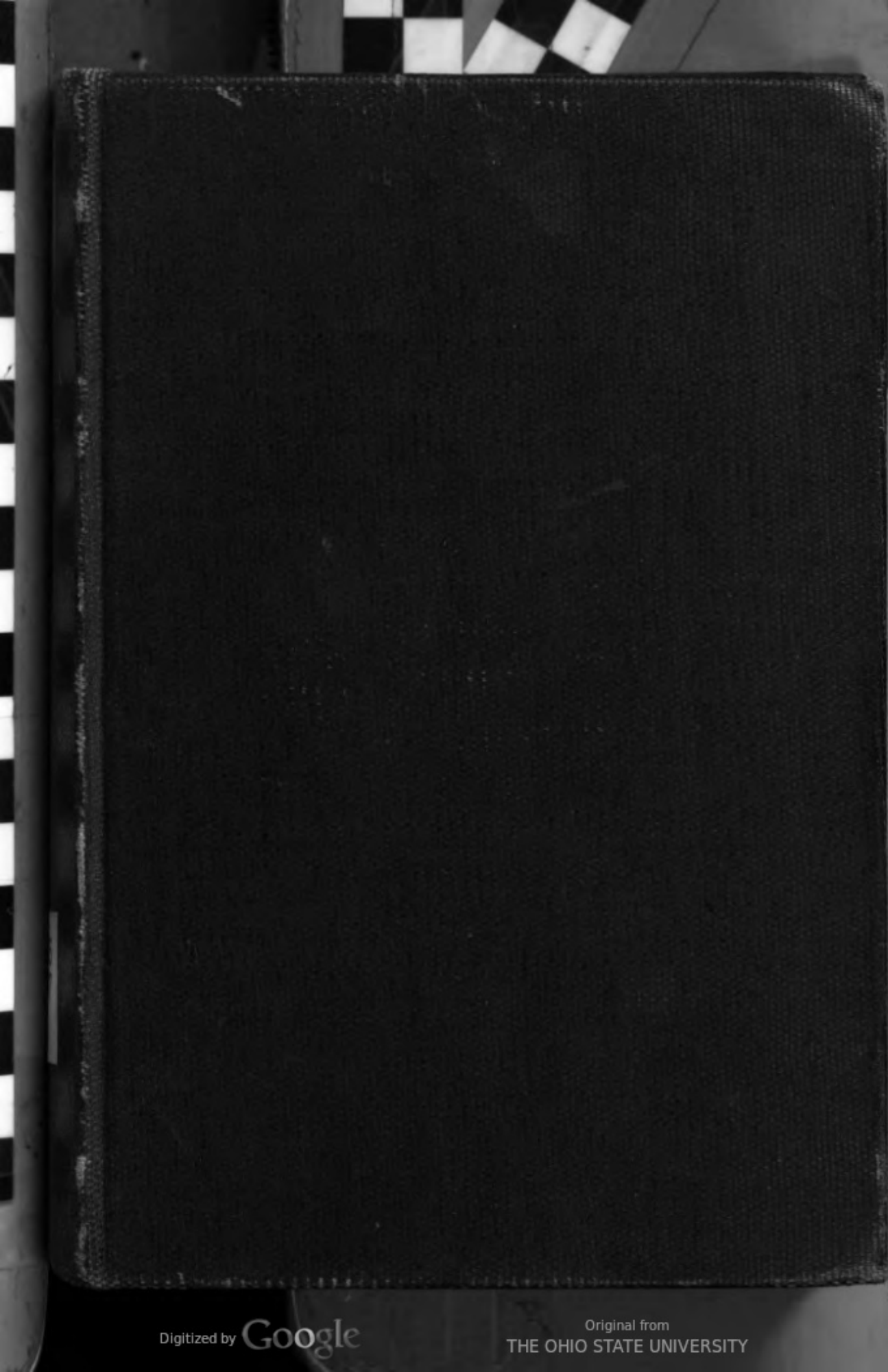
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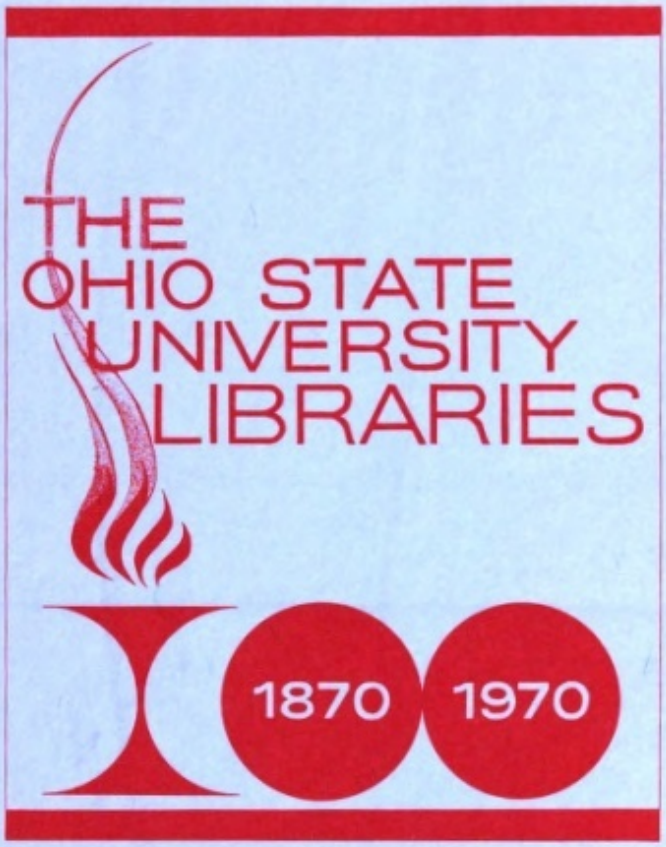

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THE BROOKLYN MURDERS

by

G. D. H. COLE

NEW YORK
THOMAS SELTZER
1924

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THE BROOKLYN MURDERS

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CHAPTER I

A FAMILY CELEBRATION

AT seventy Sir Vernon Brooklyn was still the outstanding figure in the theatrical world. It was, indeed, ten years since he had made his farewell appearance on the stage; and with a consistency rare among the members of his profession, he had persisted in making his first farewell also his last. He had also for some time past resigned to younger men the actual direction of his vast theatrical enterprises, which included five great West End theatres and a steady stream of touring companies in the provinces and overseas. Both as actor and as manager, he was wont to say, his work was over; but as Chairman of the Brooklyn Dramatic Corporation, which conducted all its work under his name, he was almost as much as ever in the eye of the public.

Like most men who have risen by their own efforts, aided by fortune and by a public which takes a pleasure in idolatry, to positions of wide authority, Sir Vernon had developed, perhaps to excess, the habit of getting his own way. Thus, although his niece and house-keeper, Joan Cowper, and his near relatives and friends had done their best to dissuade him from coming to London, he had ignored their protests, and insisted on celebrating his seventieth birthday in the London house, formerly the scene of his triumphs, which he now seldom visited. Sir Vernon now spent most of his time at the great country house in Sussex which he had bought ten

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years before from Lord Fittleworth. There he entertained largely, and there was no reason why he should not have taken the advice of his relatives and his doctor, and gathered his friends around him to celebrate what he was pleased to call his "second majority." But Sir Vernon had made up his mind, and it was therefore in the old house just off Piccadilly that his guests assembled for dinner on Midsummer Day, June 25th.

Like Sir Vernon's country place, the old house had a history. He had bought it, and the grounds with their magnificent garden frontage on Piccadilly, looking over the Green Park, from Lord Liskeard, when that nobleman had successfully gambled away the fortune which had made him, at one time, the richest man in England who had no connection with trade. Sir Vernon had turned his purchase to good use. Facing Piccadilly, but standing well back in its garden from the street, he had built the great Piccadilly Theatre, the perfect playhouse in which, despite its size and large seating capacity, every member of the audience could both see and hear. The theatre covered a lot of ground; but, when it was built, there still remained not only the old mansion fronting upon its side-street—a *cul de sac* used by its visitors alone—but also, between it and the theatre, a pleasant expanse of garden. For some years Sir Vernon had lived in the house; and there he had also worked, converting the greater part of the ground floor into a palatial set of offices for the Brooklyn Dramatic Corporation. On his retirement from active work, he had kept in his own hands only the first floor, which he fitted as a flat to house him on his visits to town. On the second floor he had installed his nephew, John Prinsep, who had

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succeeded him as managing director of the Corporation. The third floor was given over to the servants who attended to the whole house. It was in this house that Sir Vernon was celebrating his birthday, and his guests were to dine with him in the great Board Room of the Corporation on the ground floor—formerly the banqueting hall of generations of Liskeards, in which many a political plot had been hatched, and many a diner carried helpless from under the table in the bad days of the Prince Regent.

Between the house and the tall back of the theatre lay the garden, in which a past Lord Liskeard with classical tastes had erected a model Grecian temple and a quantity of indifferent antique statuary, the fruits of his sojourn at the Embassy of Constantinople.

In this garden, before dinner was served, a number of Sir Vernon's guests had already gathered. The old man had been persuaded, despite the brilliant midsummer weather, to remain in the house; but Joan Cowper and John Prinsep were there to do the honours on his behalf. As Harry Lucas came into the garden, John Prinsep was laughingly, as he said, "showing off the points" of a dilapidated Hercules who, club, lion-skin and all, was slowly mouldering under the trees at one end of the lawn. The stone club had come loose, and Prinsep had taken it from the statue, and was playfully threatening to do classical execution with it upon the persons of his guests. Seeing Lucas, he put the club back into the broken hand of the statue, and came across the lawn to bid him welcome.

"You're the last to arrive, Mr. Lucas," said he. "You see it's quite a family affair this evening."

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It was quite a family affair. Of the eight persons now on the lawn, six were members of the Brooklyn family by birth or marriage; Lucas was Sir Vernon's oldest friend and collaborator; and young Ellery, the remaining member of the party, was Lucas's ward, and was usually to be found, when he had his will, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Joan Cowper. As Sir Vernon had fully made up his mind that Joan was to marry Prinsep, and there was supposed to be some sort of engagement between them, Ellery's attentions were not welcome to Prinsep, and there was no love lost between the two men.

But there was no sign of this in Prinsep's manner this evening. He seemed to be in unusually good spirits, rather in contrast to his usual humour. For Prinsep was not generally regarded as good company. Since he had succeeded Sir Vernon in the business control of the Brooklyn Corporation, of which he was managing director, he had grown more and more preoccupied with affairs, and had developed a brusque manner which may have served him well in dealing with visitors who wanted something for nothing, but was distinctly out of place in the social interchange of his leisure hours. Prinsep had, indeed, his pleasures. He was reputed a heavy drinker, whose magnificent natural constitution prevented him from showing any of the signs of dissipation. Many of Prinsep's acquaintances—who were as many as his friends were few—had seen him drink more than enough to put an ordinary man under the table; but none had ever seen him the worse for drink, and he was never better at a bargain than when the other man had taken some glasses less

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than he, but still a glass too much. Men said that he took his pleasures sadly: certainly they had never been allowed to interfere with his power of work; and often, after a hard evening, he would go to his study and labour far into the night. But, for this occasion, his sullenness seemed to have left him, and his rather harsh laugh rang out repeatedly over the garden.

Lucas had never liked Prinsep; and he soon found himself one of a group that included Joan and Ellery and Mary Woodman, a cousin of the Brooklyns who lived with Joan and helped her to keep Sir Vernon's house. Presently Joan drew him aside.

"Uncle Harry," she said, "there's something I want to tell you."

Lucas was, in fact, no relation of the Brooklyns; but from their childhood Joan and George Brooklyn had known him as "Uncle Harry," and had made him their confidant in many of their early troubles. The habit had stuck; and now Joan had a very serious trouble to tell him.

"You must do what you can to help me," she said. "I've told Uncle Vernon again to-day that on no account will I ever marry John, and he absolutely refuses to listen to me. He says it's all settled, and his will's made on that understanding, and that we're engaged, and a whole lot more. I must make him realise that I won't; but you know what he is. I want you to speak to him for me."

Lucas thought a moment before replying. Then, "My dear," he said, "I'm very sorry about it, and you know I will do what I can; but is this quite the time? We should only

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be accused, with some truth, of spoiling Sir Vernon's birthday. Let it alone for a few days, and then I'll try talking to him. But it won't be easy, at any time."

"Yes, uncle; but there's a special reason why it must be done to-night. Uncle Vernon tells me that he is going to announce the terms of his will, and that he will speak of what he calls John's and my 'engagement.' I really can't allow that to happen. I don't really mind about the will, or John getting the money; but it must not be publicly given out that John is to have me as well. Uncle Vernon has no right to leave me as part of his 'net personalty' to John or anybody else."

Lucas sighed. He foresaw an awkward interview; for Sir Vernon was not an easy man to deal with, and latterly every year had made him more difficult. But he saw that he was in for it, and, with a reassuring word to Joan, passed into the house in search of his host.

As Joan turned back to rejoin the others, Robert Ellery stepped quickly to her side. Slim and slightly built, he offered a strong contrast to Prinsep's tall, sturdy figure. Joan's two lovers were very different types. Ellery was not strictly handsome; but he had an invincible air of being on good terms with the world which, with a ready smile and a clear complexion, were fully as effective as the most approved type of manly beauty. Still under thirty, he was just beginning to make himself a name. A play of his had recently been produced with success by the Brooklyn Corporation: one of his detective novels had made something of a hit, and his personal popularity was helping him to win rapid recognition for his undoubted talent as a writer. Moreover, his

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guardian, Lucas, was a big figure in the dramatic and literary world, knew everybody who was worth knowing, and had a high opinion of the ability of his ward.

It was obvious that Ellery was in love with Joan. Few men had less power of concealing what was in them, and everybody in the Brooklyn circle, except Sir Vernon himself, was well aware that Ellery thought the world of Joan, and more than suspected that she thought the world of him. Of course, the theory could not be mentioned in Prinsep's presence; but, when he was not there, the situation was freely discussed. George Brooklyn and his wife always maintained that, even if Joan did not marry Ellery, she would certainly not marry Prinsep. Carter Woodman, Sir Vernon's lawyer as well as his cousin, held firmly to the opposite opinion, and often hinted that Sir Vernon's will would settle the question in Prinsep's favour; but then, as George said, Woodman was a lawyer and his mind naturally ran on the marriage settlements rather than the marriage itself.

The Brooklyns were neither particularly united nor particularly quarrelsome, in their own family circles. They had their bickerings and their mutual dislikes to about the average extent; but more than the normal amount of family solidarity had manifested itself in their dealings with the outer world. Two "outsiders," Lucas and Ellery, were indeed recognised almost as members of the family; and, on the other hand, one black sheep, Sir Vernon's brother Walter, had been driven forth and refused further recognition. For the rest, they stuck together, and accepted for the most part unquestioningly Sir Vernon's often tyrannical, but usually benevolent, authority. If Joan had been a real Brooklyn,

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George would hardly have been so confident that she would not marry Prinsep.

But Joan was not really a Brooklyn at all. She was the step-daughter of Walter, who had for a time retrieved his fallen fortunes, fallen through his own fault, by marrying the rich widow of Cowper, the "coffee king." The widow had then obligingly died, and Walter Brooklyn had lost no time in spending her money, including the large sum left in trust for Joan by her mother. But it was not this, so much as Walter's manner of life, that had caused Joan, at twenty-one, to say that she would live with him no longer. Sir Vernon, to whom she was strongly attached, had then offered her a home, and for five years she had been in fact mistress of his house, and hostess at his lavish entertainment of his theatrical friends. From the first Sir Vernon had set his heart on her marrying his nephew, John Prinsep, who was ten years her senior. But Joan was a young woman with a will of her own; and for five years she had resisted the combined pressure of Sir Vernon and of John Prinsep himself, without any success in persuading either Sir Vernon to give up the idea, or Prinsep of the hopelessness of his suit. Prinsep persisted in believing that she would "come round," though of late her growing friendship with Ellery had made him more anxious to secure her consent to a definite engagement.

Ordinarily, Prinsep had a way of scowling when he saw Joan and Ellery together; but to-night he seemed without a care as he came up to Joan and invited her to lead the way indoors. Dinner was already served; and Sir Vernon with Lucas was waiting for them all to come in.

There, in the great Board Room of the Corporation, they

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offered, one by one, their congratulations to the old man. An enemy had once said of Sir Vernon Brooklyn that he was the finest stage gentleman in Europe—both on and off the stage. The saying was unjust, but there was enough of truth in it to sting. Sir Vernon was a little apt to act off the stage; and the habit had perhaps grown on him since his retirement. To-night, with his fine silver hair and keen, well-cut features, he was very much the gentleman, dispensing noble hospitality with just too marked a sense of its magnificence. But it was Sir Vernon's day, and his guests were there to do his will, to draw him out into reminiscence, to enhance his sense of having made the most of life's chances, and of being sure to leave behind him those who would carry on the great tradition. The talk turned to the building of the Piccadilly Theatre. The old man told them how, from the first days of his success, he had made up his mind to build himself the finest theatre in London. From the first he had his eye on the site of Liskeard House; and it had taken him twenty years to persuade the Liskeards, impoverished as they were, to sell it for such a purpose. At last he had secured the site, and then again his foresight had been rewarded. Not for nothing had he paid for George Brooklyn's training as an architect, based on the lad's own bent, and given him the opportunity to study playhouse architecture in every quarter of the globe. The Piccadilly Theatre was not only George Brooklyn's masterpiece: it was, structurally, acoustically, visually, for comfort, in short in every way, the finest theatre in the world. It was also the best paying theatre. And, the old man said, if in his day he had been the finest actor, so was George's wife still the finest actress, if only she would not waste on domesticity

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the gift that was meant for mankind. For Mrs. George Brooklyn, as Isabelle Raven, had been the star of the Piccadilly Theatre until she had married its designer and quitted the stage, sorely against Sir Vernon's will.

Sir Vernon was in his best form; and the talk, led by him, was rapid and, at times, brilliant. But there was at least one of those present to whom it made no appeal; for Joan Cowper was painfully anxious as to the result of Lucas's interview with Sir Vernon. Several times she caught his eye; but, although he smiled at her down the table, his look brought her no reassurance. At last, when the servants had withdrawn after the last course, Joan rose, purposing to lead the ladies to the drawing-room. But Sir Vernon waved her back to her seat, saying that, before they left the table, there was something which he wanted them all to hear. Clearly there was nothing for it but to wait; but Joan made up her mind that, if Sir Vernon spoke of her publicly as engaged to Prinsep, not even the spoiling of his birthday party should stop her from speaking her mind.

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CHAPTER II

SIR VERNON'S WILL

"ALL of us here," began Sir Vernon, with a well-satisfied look round the table, "are such good friends that we can be absolutely frank one with another. I am an old man; and I expect that almost all of you have at one time or another wondered—I put it bluntly—what you will get when I die. It is very natural that you should do so; and I have come to the conclusion that you had better know exactly how you stand. Carter here has, of course, as my legal adviser, known from the first what is in my will; and now I want all of you to know, in order that you may expect neither too much nor too little. I fear I am still a moderately healthy old man, or so my doctor tells me, and you may, therefore, still have some time to wait; but at my age it is well to be prepared, and I felt that you ought not to be left any longer in the dark."

At this point several of Sir Vernon's auditors attempted to speak, but he waved them into silence.

"No, let me have my say without telling me what I know already," he continued. "I know that you would tell me truly that nothing is further from your thoughts than to wish me out of the way. It is not because I am in any doubt on that head that I am speaking to you; but because this is a business matter, and it is well to know in advance what

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one's prospects are. Listen to me, then, and I will tell you, as far as I can, exactly how the thing stands.

"To several of you I have already made substantial gifts. You, John, and you, George, have each received £50,000 in shares of the Company. You, Joan, have £10,000 worth of shares standing in your name. These sums are apart from my will, and the bequests which I propose to make are in addition to these.

"As nearly as Carter here can tell me, I am now worth, on a conservative estimate, some eight or nine hundred thousand pounds. Carter works it out that, when all death duties have been paid, there will be at least £600,000 to be divided among you. In apportioning my property I have worked on the basis of this sum. I have divided it, first, into two portions—£100,000 for smaller legacies, and £500,000 to be shared by my residuary legatees.

"First, let me tell you my smaller bequests, which concern most of you. To you, Lucas, my oldest and closest friend, I have left nothing but a few personal mementoes. You have enough already; and it is at your express wish that I do as I have done. To my young friend and your ward, Ellery, I leave £5000. I understand that he will have enough when you die; but this sum may be welcome to him if, as I expect, I am the first to go. To you, Carter, I leave £20,000. You, too, have ample means; but our close connection and the work you have done so well for me and for the Company call for recognition. To Mrs. Carter—to you, Helen—I have left no money—you will share in what your husband receives—but I will show you later the jewels which will be yours when

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I die. To you, Mary, who, with Joan, have lived with me and cared for me, I leave £20,000, enough to make you independent. There are but two more of my smaller legacies I need mention. The rest are either to servants or to charitable institutions. But you all know that, for many years past, I have not been on good terms with my brother Walter. I have no mind, since I have other relatives who are far dearer to me, to leave him another fortune to squander like the last; but I am leaving in trust for him the sum of £10,000, of which he will receive the income during his life. On his death, the sum will pass to my dear niece, Joan, to whom I shall also leave absolutely the sum of £40,000. This, with the £10,000 which she had already, will make her independent, but not rich.

"You may be surprised, Joan, that I leave you no more; but, when I tell you of my principal bequests, you will understand the reason. The residue, then, of my property, amounting to at least £500,000, I leave equally between my two nephews, John Prinsep and George Brooklyn. You too, therefore, will both be rich men. As so large a sum is involved, I have thought it right to make provision for the decease of either of you. Should George die before me, which God forbid, you, Marian, as his wife, will receive half the sum which he would have received under my will. The other half will pass to John, as the surviving residuary legatee. Should John die, the half of his share will pass to Joan—a provision the reason for which you will all, I think, readily appreciate. I have not made provision for the death of both my nephews—for an event so unlikely hardly calls for pre-

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caution. But should God bring so heavy a misfortune upon us, the residue of my property would then pass, as the will now stands, to my nearest surviving relative."

While Sir Vernon was still speaking Joan had been trying to break in upon him. Prinsep was able to check her for a moment, but at this point she insisted on speaking. "Uncle," she said, "there is something I must say to you in view of what you have just told us. I am very sorry if my saying it spoils your birthday; but I must say it all the same. What you have left to me is more than enough, and certainly all that I expect, or have any right to expect. But I cannot bear that you should misunderstand me, or that I should seem, by saying nothing now, to accept the position. I want you to understand quite definitely that I have no intention of marrying John. I am not engaged to him; and I never shall be. It's not that I have anything against him—it's simply that I don't want—and don't mean—to marry him. I'm sorry if it hurts you to hear me say this; but you have publicly implied that we are to be married, and I couldn't keep silent after that."

Sir Vernon's face had flushed when Joan began to speak, and he had seemed on the point of breaking in upon her. But he had evidently thought better of it; for he let her have her say. But now he answered coldly, and with a suppressed but obvious irritation.

"My dear Joan, you know quite well that this marriage has been an understood thing among us all. I don't pretend to know what fancy has got into your head just lately. But, at all events, let us hear no more of it to-night. Already what you have said has quite spoilt the evening for me."

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Then, as Joan tried to speak, he added, "No, please, no more about it now. If you wish you can speak to me about it in the morning."

Joan still tried to say something; but at this point Lucas cut quickly into the conversation. Actor-managers, he said, had all the luck. You would not find a poor devil of a playwright with the best part of a million to leave to his descendants. And then, with obvious relief, the rest helped to steer the talk back to less dangerous topics. Sir Vernon seemed to forget his annoyance and launched into a stream of old theatrical reminiscence, Lucas capping each of his stories with another. The cheerfulness of the latter part of the evening was, perhaps, a trifle forced, and there were two, Joan herself and young Ellery, who took in it only the smallest possible part. But Prinsep, Lucas, and Carter Woodman made up for these others; and an outsider would have pronounced Sir Vernon's party a complete success.

There was no withdrawal of the ladies that evening, for, after her discomfiture, Joan made no move towards the drawing-room. In the end it was Prinsep who broke up the party with a word to Sir Vernon. "Come, uncle," he said, "ten o'clock and time for our roystering to end. I have work I must do about the theatre and it's time some of us were getting home."

Then Joan seemed to wake up to a sense of her duties, and Sir Vernon was promptly bustled off upstairs, the guests gradually taking their leave.

Most of them had not far to go. Lucas had his car waiting to run him back to his house at Hampstead. Ellery had rooms in Chelsea, and announced his intention, as the night was

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fine, of walking back by the parks. The George Brooklyns and the Woodmans, who lived in the outer suburbs at Banstead and Esher, were staying the night in town, at the famous Cunningham, on the opposite side of Piccadilly, the best hotel in London in the estimation of foreign potentates and envoys as well as of Londoners themselves. George Brooklyn, saying that he had an appointment, asked Woodman to see his wife home, and left Marian and the Woodmans outside the front door of the Piccadilly theatre, while they crossed the road towards their hotel.

The guests having departed, Liskeard House began to settle down for the night. On the ground floor, indeed, there began a scurry of servants clearing up after the dinner. On the first floor Joan, having seen Sir Vernon to his room, sat in the long-deserted drawing-room, talking over the evening's events with her friend, Mary Woodman, and reiterating, to a sympathetic listener, her determination never to marry John Prinsep. Meanwhile, upstairs on the second floor, John Prinsep sat at his desk in his remote study with a heavy frown on his face, very unlike the seemingly light-hearted and amiable expression he had worn all the evening. Sir Vernon's birthday party was over, but there were strange things preparing for the night.

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CHAPTER III

MURDER

JOHN PRINSEP was a man who valued punctuality and cultivated regular habits, both in himself and in others. At 10.15 punctually each night a servant came to him to collect any late letters for the post. Thereafter, unless some visitor had to be shown up, he was left undisturbed, and no one entered his flat on the second floor of Liskeard House until the next morning. The servants, who slept on the floor above, had access to it by a staircase of their own, and did not need to pass through Prinsep's quarters.

No less regular were the arrangements for the morning. At eight o'clock precisely, Prinsep's valet called him, bringing the morning papers and letters and a cup of tea. At the same time, other servants began the work of dusting and cleaning the flat, a long suite of rooms running the whole length of the house. Prinsep's bedroom, opening out of his study, and accessible also from the end of the long corridor, was a pleasant room looking out over the old garden towards the back of the theatre.

On the morning after the birthday dinner, Prinsep's valet approached the bedroom door with some trepidation, for he had overslept himself and was at least five minutes late—an offence which his master would not readily forgive. Repeated knocks bringing no reply, Morgan slipped into the room, only

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to find that the bed had not been slept in, and that there was no sign that Prinsep had been there at all since he had dressed for dinner on the previous evening. Closing the door, Morgan walked back along the corridor to consult his fellow-servants. He found Winter, who was superintending the dusting of the drawing-room.

"Did you see the master last night?" he asked. Winter answered with a nod, and added, "Yes, I took some letters from him for the post as usual."

"Did he say anything about going out? His bed has not been slept in, and he's not in his room this morning."

Winter replied that Prinsep had said nothing, and the two men walked down the corridor together to take a look round.

At this moment there came a terrible scream from the study, and a scared maid-servant came running out straight into Morgan's arms. "Oh, Mr. Morgan—the master," she sobbed, "I'm sure he's dead."

The two men-servants made all haste into the study. There, stretched on the floor beside his writing-table lay John Prinsep. A glance told them that he was dead, and showed the apparent cause in a knife, the handle of which protruded from his chest, just about the region of the heart. Morgan went down on his knees beside the body, and felt the pulse. "Get out quick," he said, "and stop those girls from kicking up a row. He's dead, right enough."

Morgan's voice was agitated, indeed; but it hardly showed the grief that might have been expected in an exemplary valet mourning for the death of his master. Winter made no reply, but left the room to quiet the servants. Then he came back and telephoned first for the police and then for

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the dead man's doctor, who promised to be with them inside of half an hour. As he sat at the telephone he warned Morgan. "Don't disturb a thing. If we're not careful one of us may get run in for this job."

Morgan meanwhile had satisfied himself beyond a doubt that Prinsep was dead. Leaving the body he turned to Winter. "Some one will have to tell Miss Joan, I suppose. I'll go and find her maid. Meanwhile you stay on guard here."

Winter's guard was not for long. In less than ten minutes Morgan returned. "I've seen Miss Joan," he said, "and she's gone to tell Sir Vernon. Here are the police coming upstairs."

The telephone message had, by a lucky accident, found Inspector Blaikie already at Vine Street, and it was he, with two constables and a sergeant, who had come round to the house at once. The constables remained downstairs, while he and the sergeant made a preliminary examination. Winter told him that nothing had been disturbed, except that they had touched the body in order to make sure that Prinsep was dead, and used the telephone to communicate with the doctor and the police.

"No doubt about his being dead," said Inspector Blaikie, after a brief examination of the body. "Dead some hours, so far as I can see. And no doubt about the cause of death, either"—and he pointed to the knife still in the body. "Has either of you ever seen that knife before?"

Both Winter and Morgan took a good look at the shaft, but disclaimed ever having seen the knife. "It wasn't his—I can tell you that," said Morgan. "I know everything he had

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in the study, and I'm dead sure it wasn't here yesterday."

"Hallo," said the inspector suddenly, "this is curious. There's a mark on the back of the head that shows he must have been struck a heavy blow. It might have killed him by itself—must have stunned him, I should say. Well, we'll leave that for the doctors." So saying, the inspector got up from his knees and began to make a minute examination of the room. "Here, you two," he said to Morgan and Winter, "clear out of here for the present, and stay in the next room till I send for you."

Inspector Blaikie was a careful man. Everything in the room was rapidly submitted to a detailed examination, the results of which the sergeant wrote down as his superior dictated them. They were neither surprisingly rich nor surprisingly meagre. Of fingermarks there were plenty, but these might well prove to be those of Prinsep himself, or of other persons whose presence in the room was quite natural. Identifiable footmarks there were none.

Robbery, unless of some special object, did not appear to have been the motive of the murderer. Considerable sums of money were in the drawers of Prinsep's desk; but neither these nor the other contents of the drawers seemed to have been in any way disturbed. A safe stood unopened in a corner of the room. The dead man's watch and other valuables had been left intact upon him. Either the murderer had left in great haste without accomplishing his purpose, or that purpose did not include robbery of any ordinary kind.

Inspector Blaikie directed his special attention to the papers lying on the dead man's desk, which he seemed to have been working upon when he was disturbed. These, it did not take

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the inspector long to discover, related to the financial affairs of Walter Brooklyn who, as he soon ascertained later by a few questions, was the brother of Sir Vernon, a man about town of shady reputation, and known to be head over ears in debt. The papers seemed to contain some sort of abstract statement of his liabilities, with a series of letters from him to Sir Vernon asking for financial assistance.

"H'm," said the inspector to himself, "these may easily have a bearing on the case."

But there were other interesting discoveries to come. The inspector was now informed that the doctor had arrived. He ordered that he should be shown up immediately, and suspended his examination of the room to greet the new-comer. Dr. Manton had been for some years the dead man's medical adviser; but no other member of the Brooklyn family had been under his care. Something in common with him had perhaps caused Prinsep to forsake the staid family physician in his favour; but this hardly appeared on the surface. Prinsep was heavily built and sullen in expression: Dr. Manton was slim built and rather jaunty, with a habit of wearing clothes far less funereal than the normal etiquette of the medical profession seems to dictate. He entered now, flung a rapid and seemingly quite cheerful "Good-morning, inspector —bad business this, I hear," to Blaikie, and went at once down on his knees beside the body. "Bad business—bad business," he continued to repeat to himself, in a perfectly cheerful tone of voice, as he made his preliminary examination. He made a noise between his teeth as he touched the hilt of the knife still embedded in Prinsep's chest: then, as he saw the contusion on the back of the head, he said "H'm, h'm." Then he

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relapsed into silence, which he broke a moment later by whistling a tune softly to himself.

"Well," said the inspector, "what's the report?"

The doctor made no answer for a moment. Then he said, "Have him carried into the bedroom. I want to make a fuller examination. I'll talk to you when I've done."

"Very well," said the inspector; and he went to the door and called to the sergeant to bring up the two constables to move the body. Heavily they marched into the room, lifted up the dead man, and bore him away, the doctor following. But, as they raised the body from the floor, an interesting object came to light. Underneath John Prinsep's body had lain a crumpled pocket-handkerchief. The inspector pounced upon it. In the corner was plainly marked the name of George Brooklyn.

"Who's George Brooklyn?" Inspector Blaikie called out to the doctor in the adjoining room. The doctor came to the door, and saw the handkerchief in the inspector's hand. "Hallo, what's that you've got?" he said. "George Brooklyn is Prinsep's cousin, old Sir Vernon's other nephew. An architect, I believe, by profession."

"Thanks. This appears to be his handkerchief," the inspector answered. "It was under the body."

"H'm. Well, that's none of my business," said the doctor, and turned back into the bedroom.

There, a minute or two later, Inspector Blaikie followed him, leaving the sergeant on guard in the room where the tragedy had occurred. But first he carefully packed up and transferred to his handbag the handkerchief, the papers from the desk, and certain other spoils of his search.

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"Well, what do you make of it now?" he asked Dr. Manton.

The doctor had by this time drawn the knife from the wound, and this he now handed silently to the inspector, who examined it curiously, felt its edge, and finally wrapped it up and put it away in his bag with the rest of his findings. Then he turned again to the doctor.

"A shocking business, inspector," said the latter, still with his curiously cheerful air, "and, I may add, rather an odd one. The man was not killed with the knife, and the knife wound has not actually touched any vital part. He was killed, I have no doubt, by the blow on the back of the head—a far easier form of murder for any one who is not an expert. It was a savage blow. The wound in the chest, I have little hesitation in saying, was inflicted subsequently, probably when the man was already dead. As I say, it would not have killed him, and there are also indications that it was inflicted after death—the comparative absence of bleeding and the general condition of the wound, for example."

"H'm, you say the man was killed with a knock on the head, and the assassin then stabbed him in order to make doubly sure."

"Pardon me, inspector, I say nothing of the sort. I say that the blow on the back of the head was the cause of death, and that the knife wound was, in all probability, subsequent. Anything about assassins and their motives and methods is your business and not mine."

"I accept the correction," said the inspector, smiling. "But the inference seems practically certain. Why else should the murderer have stabbed a dead man?"

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"I have no theory, inspector. I simply give you the medical evidence, and leave you to draw the inferences for yourself."

"But perhaps you can give me some valuable information. I believe you were Mr. Prinsep's doctor."

"Yes, and I think I may say a personal friend."

"What sort of man was he? Anything wrong, physically?"

"No; there ought to have been, from the way he used his body. But he had the constitution of an ox. He limped, owing to an accident some years ago. But otherwise—oh, as healthy as you like."

"And, apart from that, what was he like?"

"I got on well with him; but there were many who did not. A tough customer, hard in business and not ready in making friends."

"What terms was he on with his family—with Mr. George Brooklyn, for instance?"

"Come now, inspector, this is hardly fair. I barely know George Brooklyn. I don't think he and Prinsep liked each other; but there had been no quarrel so far as I know. I suppose you are thinking of the handkerchief."

"I have to think of these things."

While he was speaking the inspector opened his bag and took out the knife again.

"A curious knife this," he said. "Perhaps you can tell me whether it is a surgical instrument."

"Not so curious, when you know what it is. I do happen to know, though it has nothing to do with my profession. My son is a mechanical draughtsman, and he has several. Knives

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of this type are sold by most firms which supply architects' and draughtsmen's materials."

"H'm, what did you say was Mr. George Brooklyn's profession?"

"I believe he is an architect, and a very promising one."

"That, doctor, may make this knife a most valuable clue."

"I do not choose to consider it in that light. Clues are not my affair, I am glad to say."

"Well, they are my business, and I shall certainly have to make further inquiries about Mr. George Brooklyn."

"Oh, inquire away," said the doctor. "But I fancy you will find George Brooklyn quite above suspicion."

The inspector's eyes showed, just for an instant, a dangerous gleam. Then, "And is there anything else you can tell me?" he asked.

"Nothing else, I think," said the doctor. "I'm afraid you won't find it much of a clue." And with that and a few words more about the necessary inquest, the doctor took his leave.

The inspector went back into the study. "Ask those two men who are waiting to step in here, will you?" he said to the sergeant. Morgan and Winter were duly brought in. "Sergeant, while I talk to these two men, I want you to make a thorough examination of the rest of the house. Leave nothing to chance. House and garden, I mean. And make me a sketch plan of the wholé place while you're about it."

"Now," said the inspector, when the sergeant had withdrawn, "there are a number of questions I want to ask you. First, who, as far as you know, was the last person to see the deceased alive? Which of you was in charge of the front door last night?"

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"I was, sir," replied Winter.

"Well, then," said the inspector, "I will begin with you. Morgan can go back to the other room for the present, and I will send for him when I want him. Now, when did you yourself last see Mr. Prinsep?"

"At 10.30 last night, sir, when I went up to fetch his letters for the post."

"Did you notice anything unusual, or did he make any remark?"

"He just gave me the letters. He didn't say anything. He seemed in a bad temper, but that was nothing out of the ordinary."

"I see. There was nothing remarkable. Do you know if any one saw him after you?"

"Yes, sir. At about a quarter to eleven Mr. George Brooklyn called and asked for Mr. Prinsep. I told him I thought Mr. Prinsep was in, and he said he would find his own way up."

"And do you know when Mr. George Brooklyn came out?"

"Yes, I happened to catch sight of him crossing the hall to the front door about three-quarters of an hour later—somewhere about half-past eleven. We were in the dining-room clearing up, and several of us saw him go out."

"You say 'clearing up.' Had there been some entertainment in the house last night?"

"Yes, sir. It was Sir Vernon Brooklyn's family party. His seventieth birthday, sir. Besides those in the house there were Mr. and Mrs. George, Mr. Carter Woodman, sir—the solicitor, who is also Sir Vernon's cousin—and his wife, and Mr. Lucas—and, yes, Mr. Ellery."

"When did they leave?"

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"They all left a minute or two after ten o'clock. Mr. and Mrs. George and the Woodmans are staying at the Cunningham, sir, and they walked. Mr. Lucas—the playwriter, sir—he went off in his car to Hampstead, and Mr. Ellery, he walked off in a great hurry."

"So far as you know, no one besides Mr. George Brooklyn saw Mr. Prinsep after 10.15."

"No. Of course, Miss Joan or Miss Woodman or Sir Vernon may have seen him without my knowing."

"One more question. Do you recognise this walking-stick?" The inspector had found this lying on the floor of the room. It might be Prinsep's; but it was best to make sure.

"No, sir. I've never seen it to my knowledge. But it may have been Mr. Prinsep's, for all that. He had quite a number."

"You've no idea, then, whose it was?"

"No, sir. Mr. Prinsep used to collect walking-sticks. He was always bringing new ones home."

"Now, I want to ask you another question. You see this knife—the one that was sticking out of the body. Have you ever seen it before?"

Winter's manner showed some hesitation. At length he said, "No, I can't say I have. I mean, it wasn't here to my knowledge yesterday."

"You seem to hesitate in answering. It's a curious sort of knife. Surely you would remember if you had seen it. Or have you seen one like it?"

"Must I answer that question, sir? You see, I'm not at all sure it was the same."

"Of course you must answer. It is your business to give the

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police all the help you can in discovering the murderer."

"Well, sir, all I meant was that I'd often seen Mr. George Brooklyn using that sort of knife when he was doing his work —he's an architect—down at Fittleworth. He used to bring his work down when he came to stay with Sir Vernon, and I know he had a knife like that."

"I see. But you can't say whether this is his."

"No. It might be; but all I know is it's the same pattern."

"And that's all you can tell me, is it?" Winter said nothing, and the inspector added, "Very well, that will do. Now I want to ask Morgan a few questions."

Morgan had little light to throw upon the tragedy. He had been out all the previous evening, after helping his master to dress for dinner, when he had noticed nothing extraordinary. He had come back soon after 11.30, and had gone straight to bed. Where had he been? He had spent the evening with friends at Hammersmith, had come back by the Tube with two friends, who had only left him at the door of the house. There he had met Winter and had gone upstairs with him to bed.

Asked if he knew the walking-stick, he was quite sure that it was not his master's, and that it had not been in the room on the previous day. About the knife he knew nothing, except that he had never seen it, or one like it, before.

The inspector had just finished his examination of Morgan when he was startled by a shout from the garden. Throwing up the window, he called to a constable who was running towards the house. The man's answer was to ask him to come as quickly as possible. Calling another constable to keep guard in the study, Inspector Blaikie hastened to the garden,

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directed by Morgan to a private stairway which led directly to it from the back of the house. This, Morgan informed him, was Mr. Prinsep's usual way of getting into the garden, and thence, by the private covered way, into the Piccadilly Theatre itself.

But before inspector Blaikie left the study, he did one thing. He 'phoned through to Scotland Yard, and made arrangements for the immediate arrest of George Brooklyn, who was probably to be found at the Cunningham Hotel.

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CHAPTER IV

WHAT JOAN FOUND IN THE GARDEN

JOAN COWPER usually knew her own mind. And, in her view, knowing your own mind meant knowing when to stop as well as when to go on. She had made her position clear at the dinner, and Sir Vernon could no longer pretend, she said to herself, that her marriage with Prinsep was a foregone conclusion. Sir Vernon, indeed, had said nothing more about the matter when she took him to his room in the evening, and they had separated for the night apparently on the best of terms. But Joan had known that she must prepare for a stormy interview on the morrow; and, as she dressed in the morning, her thoughts were running on what she should say to Sir Vernon, in answer to the reproaches he was sure to address to her.

Just as she was ready for breakfast, her scared maid came to her door, and said that Morgan wished to speak to her for a moment. Joan looked at the girl's face, and saw at once that something serious was amiss.

"Why, what's the matter?" she said.

"I don't know, miss; but there's something wrong upstairs, and they're sending for the police."

Joan hurried to the room where Morgan was waiting for her. With the impeccable manner of the good manservant, and almost without a shade of feeling in his voice, Morgan

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told her what had happened—how he and Winter had found Prinsep lying on the floor of his study, dead.

"You are sure that he is dead," she managed to ask. "Have you sent for a doctor?"

Morgan assured her that everything was being attended to, and said that he had come to her because some one would have to break the news to Sir Vernon. Would she do it?

Into Joan's mind came the thought of the interview she had expected, and of the interview she was after all to have. No question now of her marrying John Prinsep—there was no longer any such person as John Prinsep to marry.

"I suppose I must do it," she said.

Joan's composure lasted just long enough for the door to close behind Morgan. Then she flung herself down on a couch, and let her feelings have their way. She sobbed half hysterically—not because, even at this tragic moment, she felt grief for John Prinsep, but simply because the sudden catastrophe was too much for her. Tragedy had swooped down in a moment on the house of Brooklyn, sweeping out of existence the crisis which had seemed so vital to her only a few minutes ago. On her was the sense of calamity, bewilderment, and helplessness in the face of death.

She had felt no call to ask Morgan questions. John Prinsep's death—his murder—was a fact—a shattering event which must have time to sink into her consciousness before she could begin to inquire about the manner of its coming. She did not even ask herself how it had happened, or who had done this thing. As she lay sobbing, the one thought in her mind was that Prinsep was dead.

But soon that other thought, that call to action which had

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been presented to her at the very moment when Morgan told her the news, came back into her mind. She had given way; but she must pull herself together. Sir Vernon, old and weak as he was, must be told the news; and she must tell him. She must tell him at once, lest tidings should break on him suddenly from some other quarter. Already the police were probably in the house. With a powerful effort, Joan forced herself to be calm. Drying her eyes, she stood upright, and looked at herself in the glass. She would need all her power to break the news to the old man whom she loved—the old man who had loved John Prinsep far more than he loved her.

John Prinsep had been Sir Vernon's favourite nephew—the man who was to succeed him—had indeed already succeeded him—in the management of the great enterprise he had built up. He liked George and Joan; but Prinsep had always had the first place in both his affection and his esteem. This death—this murder—Joan told herself, might be more than he could bear. It might kill him. And it fell to her, who only the night before had flouted his will by refusing to marry John Prinsep, to break to the old man the news of his favourite's death.

Still, it had to be done, and it was best done quickly. Sir Vernon always lay in bed to breakfast, and it was to his bedroom that Joan went with her evil tidings. She did not try to break it to him gradually—she told him straight out what she knew, holding his hand as she spoke. He looked very old and feeble there in the great bed. But he took it more quietly than she had expected, unable apparently to take in at once the full implication of what she said. "Dead—murdered," he repeated to himself again and again. He lay back in the bed

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and closed his eyes. Joan sat beside him for a while, and then stole away. His eyes opened and he watched her to the door; but he did not speak.

Joan's first act on leaving Sir Vernon was to telephone to the family doctor—old Sir Jonas Dalrymple—and ask him to come round as soon as he could. Then she felt that she must have air: her head was swimming and she was near to fainting. So she went down the private staircase and out into the old garden which, now as ever, seemed so remote from the busy world outside. For some minutes she walked up and down the avenue of trees, along which were ranged the antique statues Lord Liskeard had brought home from Asia Minor. Then, in search of a place where she could sit and rest, she went towards the model temple which the same old scholar-diplomat had built to mark his enthusiasm for the world of antiquity.

But, as Joan came nearer the temple she saw, in the entrance, some indistinct dark object lying upon the steps. At first she could not be sure what it was; but, as she came close, she became sure that it was the body of a man, lying with the feet towards her in an unnatural attitude which must be that of either unconsciousness or death. Her impulse was to turn tail and run to the house for help; but, with a strong effort of will, she forced herself to go still nearer. It was a man, and the man, she felt sure, was dead. The face was turned away, lying downwards on the stone of the topmost step; and on the exposed back of the head was the mark of a savage blow which had crushed the skull almost like an egg-shell. Already Joan was nearly certain who it was, and an intense feeling of sickness came over her as she forced her-

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self to touch the body and to turn it over enough to expose the face. Then she let the thing drop back, and started back herself with a sharp cry. It was her cousin, George Brooklyn, manifestly dead and no less manifestly murdered, who lay there on the steps of the Grecian temple.

Filled as she was with horror at the second tragedy of the morning, Joan did not lose her presence of mind. She staggered, indeed, and had to cling for a minute to the nearest of the old statues—the Hercules whose points John Prinsep had showed off to his guests only the night before. The tears which she had been keeping back burst from her now, and the weeping did her good. She regained her composure and realised that her first duty was to summon help. Slowly and unsteadily she walked towards the house. At the door leading to the garden she met one of the policemen who was helping the sergeant in his examination of the house. She tried to speak, but she could only utter one word, "Come," and lead the way back to the horror that lay there in the garden.

The policeman followed her. But as soon as they came in view of the temple and he saw what she had seen already, he ceased to advance. "One moment, miss," he said, "I must fetch the sergeant," and he started back to the house in search of his superior.

Joan stood stock still, only swaying a little, until the policeman came back with the sergeant. Then she watched the two men go up to the body, turn it over slightly to see the face, and then let it fall back.

"Begging pardon, miss," said the sergeant, turning to her, "but maybe you know who this gentleman is?"

With a violent effort Joan managed to answer, "George—

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my cousin—Mr. George Brooklyn," she said; and then, overcome by the strain, she fainted.

The sergeant was a chivalrous man, and he instantly left off his examination of the spot and came to Joan's help. Propping up her head he fanned her rather awkwardly. As he did so, he shouted to the policeman. "Don't stand there, you fool, looking like a stuck pig. Go and get some water for the lady."

The constable set off at a run, lumbering heavily over the grass. "And tell the inspector what's toward," shouted the sergeant after him. It was this shout that the inspector heard, and that made him throw up the study window and receive at once the constable's message.

By the time Inspector Blaikie reached the garden, the constable had returned with a glass of water, and Joan had recovered consciousness. She was sitting on the grass, her back propped against the pedestal of the statue, and the sergeant was trying to persuade her to go indoors. The inspector, after a hasty glance at the scene, added his entreaties; but Joan refused to go.

"No, I must see this through," she said, as to herself. "I'm all right now," she added, trying to smile at the police officer. "Let me alone, please." After a time they left her to herself and pursued their investigation of the crime.

Not only were the fact and manner of death plain enough: the actual weapon with which the blow had been dealt was also clearly indicated. Between the body and the statue lay a heavy stone club, evidently a part of the group of statuary against which Joan was resting. It was the club of Hercules, taken from the hand of the stone figure which stood only a

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few feet away from the body. On the club were unmistakable recent bloodstains, and clotted in the blood were hairs which seemed to correspond closely with those of the dead man.

The blow had been one of immense violence. The stone club itself was so heavy that only a very strong man could have wielded it with effect; and it had evidently been brought down with great force on the back of George Brooklyn's head by some one standing almost immediately behind him, but rather to the right hand. So much appeared even from a cursory inspection of the wound. It was also evident that the body did not lie where it had fallen. It had been dragged two or three yards along the ground into the temple entry, presumably in order that it might be well out of the way of casual notice. The dragging of it along the ground had left clear traces. A track had been swept clear of loose stones and rubble by the passage of the body, and two little ridges showed where the stones and dust had piled up on each side.

George Brooklyn was fully dressed in his evening clothes, just as he had appeared at dinner the night before. He had evidently come out into the garden without either hat or overcoat—or at least there was no sign of these on the scene of the crime. His body lay where it had been dragged—presumably by the murderer; and all the evidence seemed to show that death had been practically instantaneous. There was no sign of a struggle: the only visible mark of the event was the trail left where the dragging of the body had swept clear of dirt and pebbles the stone approach to the model temple.

All these observations, made by the sergeant within a minute or two of discovering the body, were confirmed by the inspec-

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tor when he went over the ground. Footmarks, indeed, were there in plenty; but Joan explained that they had all been walking about the garden before dinner on the previous evening, and that nearly all of them had actually stood for some time just outside the porch of the temple. From the footprints it was most unlikely that any valuable evidence would be derived.

Had the situation been less grim Inspector Blaikie would have been inclined to laugh when he found that the man whose body lay in the garden was the very man for whose arrest he had just issued the order. His fear had been that George Brooklyn would slip away before there was time to effect an arrest. That fear was now most completely removed. If George Brooklyn had killed Prinsep upstairs, certainly fate had lost no time in exacting retribution.

The inspector's immediate business, however, was to see what clues to this second and more mysterious murder might have been left. And it soon appeared to him that valuable evidence was forthcoming. First, on the stone club, his skilled examination plainly revealed a fine set of finger-prints, blurred in places, but still quite decipherable. Moreover, these prints occupied exactly the spaces most natural if the weapon had been used for a murderous assault. The inspector carefully wrapped up the club for forwarding at once to the Finger-Print Department at Scotland Yard.

But good fortune did not end there. Close to the statue of Hercules from which the club had been taken he found, trodden into the ground, a broken cigar-holder. It was a fine amber holder, broken cleanly across the middle. Where the cigar was to be inserted was a stout gold band, and on this

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band was an inscription, "V.B. from H.L." Blaikie looked in vain for a cigar end. Probably the holder had dropped from a pocket and been trodden upon. Perhaps from the pocket of the murderer himself.

The inspector turned to Joan with his find.

"Have you ever seen this before?" he asked.

Joan gave a start of surprise. For a moment she stared at the cigar-holder without saying a word. Then she spoke slowly, and as if with an effort.

"Yes," she said. "Uncle Harry—I mean Mr. Lucas—gave it to Sir Vernon; but Mr. Prinsep always used it. I saw him using it last night."

"Miss Cowper," said the inspector, "this may be very important. Are you quite sure that you saw Mr. Prinsep using this holder last night, and, if you are, at what time?"

"Yes, quite sure. He was smoking a cigar in it when he went up to his room."

Joan had stayed in the garden while the inspector was examining the ground, because she seemed to have lost the power of doing anything else. If she went in she must go and tell Sir Vernon of this second tragedy, or else talk to him in such a way as deliberately to keep him in ignorance of it. The strain in either case would be, she felt, more than she could bear. It was better even to stay near this horrible corpse, and to watch the police making their investigations.

Meanwhile, Dr. Manton, and with him a police surgeon, had come into the garden and were making an examination of the body. When they had done, two stout constables placed it on a stretcher and carried it into the house. Joan followed almost mechanically, leaving the inspector still in the garden.

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As she entered the house Winter told her that Mrs. George Brooklyn and Mrs. Woodman were upstairs with Miss Woodman, and that Carter Woodman had telephoned to say that he was coming round at once. He had just heard, at his office, the news of Prinsep's murder; but of course he would know nothing yet of George's fate. And then it occurred to Joan that Mrs. George, who was upstairs, had probably heard nothing as yet of her husband's death. Was she to break the news again—this time to a wife whose love for her husband had been so great as to become a family proverb? "As much in love as Marian." How often they had laughed as they said it; and now it came home suddenly to Joan what it meant. Still, she must go upstairs and see them—tell them, if need be.

She found that they knew already. They had seen from a window the excitement in the garden, and Mary Woodman had run down to find out what the trouble was. So Mary had had to tell Mrs. George, and there they were sitting in silence, waiting for news that could be no worse, and could be no better.

Joan shortly told them what she knew. Marian listened in silence, sitting still and staring at nothing with a fixed gaze. She did not weep: she was as if she had been turned to stone. Joan thought that she looked more beautiful now than she had ever looked on the stage, when she set a whole theatre crying for the sorrows of some queen of long ago. She longed to offer comfort, but she dared do nothing. Complete silence fell on the room.

Meanwhile, below, Carter Woodman had arrived. He heard from Winter at the door the news of the second tragedy

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of the morning. At first he seemed half incredulous; but he was soon convinced that there was no room for doubt. With a sentence expressing his horror, he hurried through into the garden in search of the inspector, whom he found still seeking for further traces of the crime.

Carter Woodman took the position by storm. His tall, athletic presence dominated the group of men gathered round the statue. He insisted that he must hear the whole story, demanded to know what clues the police had found, and so bullied the inspector and everybody else as to get himself at once very heartily disliked. Before he had half done the police were quite in a mood to convict him of the murder, if they could find a shred of evidence.

But they had to respect his energy; for it was he who pointed out to them something which they had overlooked. It was a scrap of paper lying on the floor of the temple, seemingly blown into a corner, just beyond where the body had lain. A leaf clearly from a memorandum book, and, from the cleanness and the state of the torn edge, apparently not long torn out. On it was written, in a hand which Woodman at once identified as Prinsep's, "Come to me in the garden. I will wait in the temple.—J.P." There was no address or direction. But it seemed to prove that Prinsep, who lay dead upstairs, had arranged with some one a meeting in the garden, where now George Brooklyn's body had been found.

It was Woodman, too, who made a valuable suggestion. "Look here, inspector," he said. "Most of this part of the garden, though it is hidden from the house by the trees, can be seen from the windows at the back of the theatre. Who-

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ever was here with poor old George last night may quite possibly have been seen by some one from there. There are nearly always people about till late."

The inspector at once pointed out that the place where they were standing, and the temple itself, were completely hidden from the theatre by a thick belt of trees and shrubs. But Woodman insisted that the chance was worth trying. George or his assailant might have been in another part of the garden some of the time.

The inspector and Woodman accordingly went across to the theatre, to which the news had already spread. And there they quickly found what they wanted. A caretaker, who lived in a set of ground-floor rooms at the back of the house had distinctly seen John Prinsep walking up and down the garden shortly after eleven o'clock, or it might have been a quarter past, on the previous night. He had been quite alone, and the man had last seen him walking towards the shrubbery and the temple. Asked if he was quite certain that the person he saw was Prinsep he said there could be no mistaking Mr. Prinsep. He had on his claret-coloured overcoat and slouch hat, and no one could help recognising his walk. He had a pronounced limp, and walked with a curious sideways action. "It was Mr. Prinsep all right," the caretaker concluded. "I should know him out of a thousand."

This would have satisfied some men; and it appeared to satisfy Woodman. But the inspector held that it was desirable to look for corroborative evidence. No one else in the building seemed to have seen any one in the garden; but most of the staff had not yet arrived. The inspector made ar-

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rangements for each to be interrogated on arrival, and he and Woodman then went back into the garden through the private door opening on the covered way communicating between the theatre and the house. They continued their search; but no further clues were to be found.

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CHAPTER V

PLAIN AS A PIKESTAFF

INSPECTOR BLAIKIE, when he had done all that he could on the scene of the double crime, went at once to report to his superiors and to hold a consultation at Scotland Yard. The officer to whom he was immediately responsible was the celebrated Superintendent Wilson—"the Professor," as his colleagues called him, in allusion to his scholarly habits and his pre-eminently intellectualist way of reasoning out the solution of his cases. "The Professor," in his earlier days as Inspector Wilson, had patiently found his way to the heart of a good many murder mysteries by thinking them out as logical problems. He had made his name by solving the great "Antedated Murder Mystery," when every one else had been hopelessly in fault; and a man's life and a great fortune had both depended on his skill in reasoning out the truth. He was a small man, with quick, nervous movements, and a curious way of closing his eyes and holding up his hands before him with the tips of his fingers pressed tightly together when he was discussing a case. He was reputed to have but a scant respect for most of his colleagues at Scotland Yard; but he made an exception in favour of Inspector Blaikie, whose pertinacity in following up clues worked in excellently with his own skill at putting two and two together. Blaikie, he would often say, could not reason;

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but he could find things out. He, Wilson, stuck there in his office, could not go hunting for clues; but he and Blaikie together were a first-class combination. He was sitting at his desk, busy with a mass of papers, when the inspector entered. He at once put his work aside and settled down to discuss the new case. Word of the second murder had already been sent to him over the telephone; and he had seen that the case was certain to make a stir. The connection of the victims with Sir Vernon Brooklyn and the Piccadilly Theatre was enough to ensure a first-class newspaper sensation. There was an unusual note of eagerness in his voice as he asked for the latest news.

"The trouble about this case, sir," said Inspector Blaikie, "is that it's as plain as a pikestaff; but what the clues plainly indicate cannot possibly be true. Perhaps I had better tell you the whole story from the beginning."

Superintendent Wilson nodded, put the tips of his fingers together, leant back in his chair, and finally closed his eyes. He had composed himself to listen.

"I went to Liskeard House shortly before half-past eight this morning, on receipt of a telephone message stating that a murder had been committed."

"Who sent the message?"

"One of the servants. They had found the body when they went in to clean the room in the morning. I went to the house, as I say. In a room on the second floor, a study, I found the body, which the servants identified as that of Mr. John Prinsep, by whom the second floor was occupied. Mr. Prinsep was managing director of the Brooklyn Corporation and nephew of Sir Vernon Brooklyn."

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The superintendent nodded.

"The body was lying on the floor with the face upwards. A knife, which I have since found to be of a peculiar type used by architects and draughtsmen, was protruding from the chest in the region of the heart. On the side of the head was a very clearly marked contusion, obviously caused by a heavy blow from some blunt instrument, which cannot have been any object of furniture in the room. The dead man's doctor, Dr. Manton, and the police surgeon agree that this blow, and not the knife wound, was the cause of death. The knife did not touch any vital part, and the doctors believe that the wound in the chest was inflicted after death."

"You say 'believe.' Are they certain?"

"No; almost certain, but not so as to swear to it. I at once made an examination of the room. The dead man had evidently been sitting at his desk, and had fallen from his chair on being struck from behind on the left-hand side. On the desk was a mass of papers relating to the financial affairs of a Mr. Walter Brooklyn, a brother, I find, of Sir Vernon Brooklyn, and therefore uncle to the deceased. I have the papers here."

The inspector handed over a bundle which the superintendent placed beside him on the table. "Go on," he said.

"Lying on the floor, at some distance from the body, was this walking-stick, which may, or may not, have some connection with the crime. There were at least thirty or forty walking-sticks standing in a corner; but this was lying on the floor behind the study chair to the left—that is, at the point from which the murderer seems to have approached his victim. The servants say that they do not remember seeing

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the immediate arrest of Mr. George Brooklyn, who was believed to be staying at the Cunningham Hotel."

"Yes," said the superintendent. "I sent two men round there. They were informed that Mr. Brooklyn had booked rooms, and that his wife had spent the night in the hotel. He had not been there since the previous day before dinner. I was about to take further steps when I received your second message."

"Quite so. Now I come, sir, to the really extraordinary part of the case. Immediately before telephoning to you I had received an urgent message to come down to the garden, where the sergeant was making investigations. In the garden I found a body, which was identified by a young lady who lives in the house—Sir Vernon Brooklyn's ward, I understand—as that of Mr. George Brooklyn himself. He was in evening dress, without hat or coat, and the body was lying on the steps of a curious sort of stone summer house—they call it the Grecian temple—where it had been dragged. The cause of death—the doctors confirm this—was a terrific blow on the back of the head, and the weapon was lying a few yards from the body. I have it here in the parcel." The inspector lifted the heavy club with an effort on to the table, and the superintendent gave an involuntary start of surprise as he saw the strange weapon that had been employed in this sinister tragedy.

"It is, as you see, sir, a heavy stone club. It is part of a group of statuary—a Hercules, they tell me—which stands in the garden about four yards from the summer-house or temple. It has obviously been detached for some time from

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the rest of the statue. On it are some bloodstains and hairs which correspond to those of the dead man. There are also finger-prints, which I suppose you will have examined. I took the precaution to secure finger-prints of both the dead men for possible use. They are here." The inspector handed over another parcel.

"I studied carefully the scene of the crime. The deed was evidently done almost at the foot of the statue, and the body was dragged from there to the temple, presumably to remove it from casual notice. At the foot of the statue I found this crushed cigar-holder, which Miss Joan Cowper—the young lady to whom I referred—identifies as habitually used by Mr. John Prinsep, and actually seen in his mouth at ten o'clock last night, when a party then held in the house broke up. I also found on the floor of the temple this crumpled piece of paper, presumably a leaf from a memorandum book," and the inspector handed over the brief scrawled note in John Prinsep's writing making an appointment in the garden.

What he said, however, was not quite accurate; for it was not he, but Carter Woodman, who had found the note.

"The writing of this note was identified by Miss Cowper as that of Mr. Prinsep. It is one of the puzzles of this affair."

"You mean that it would have fitted in better if John Prinsep's body had been found in the garden," suggested the superintendent.

"Exactly; as things are it is confusing. About this time Mr. Carter Woodman, Sir Vernon Brooklyn's lawyer, arrived. At his suggestion we went across to the theatre which

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overlooks the garden, although the place where the crime was committed and the body found is completely concealed by trees from both the house and the theatre. Our object was to find if any one from the theatre had seen anything of what happened. A caretaker stated that he had seen Mr. Prinsep walking in the garden some time between eleven o'clock last night and a quarter past. I made further inquiries, both in the house and at the theatre; but that, I think, exhausts the discoveries I have made so far." And the inspector stopped and wiped his face with a green handkerchief.

"You have stated the case very plainly," said Superintendent Wilson. "Now tell me what you make of it?" And he gave what can best be described as the ghost of a chuckle.

"Ah, that's just where the troubles come in, sir," replied the inspector. "I don't know what to make of it. As I said, it's as plain as a pikestaff, and yet it can't be. When I examined Mr. Prinsep's room I found abundant evidence pointing to the conclusion that he was murdered by Mr. George Brooklyn. But when I go into the garden, I find Mr. George Brooklyn lying dead there, under circumstances which strongly suggest that he was killed by Mr. Prinsep. Yet they can't possibly have killed each other. It's simply impossible."

"You say that there is strong ground for suspecting that Prinsep killed Brooklyn. What is the ground?"

"Well, first there's that cigar-holder. The second thing is the letter in his writing, though I admit that raises a difficulty. The third thing is that I'm practically certain the finger-prints on the club correspond to those I took from Prinsep's hands. Then Prinsep was certainly seen walking in the garden."

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"In short, Inspector Blaikie," said the superintendent, half smiling, "you appear to hold very strong *prima facie* evidence that each of these two men murdered the other."

The inspector groaned. "Don't laugh at me, sir," he said. "I'm doing my best to puzzle it out. Of course they didn't kill each other. At least, both of them didn't. They couldn't. You know what I mean."

"You mean, I take it, that they could only have killed each other and left their bodies where they were found, on the assumption that at least one corpse was alive enough to walk about and commit a murder and then quietly replace itself where it had been killed. It will, I fear, be difficult to persuade even a coroner's jury that such an account of the circumstances is correct."

"Of course it isn't correct, sir; but you'll admit that's what it looks like. It is quite possible for a man who has committed a murder to be murdered himself as he leaves the scene of his crime; but it's stark, staring nonsense for the man whom he has killed to get up, as if he were alive and well, and come after his murderer with a club. To say nothing of laying himself out again neatly afterwards. No, that won't wash. Yet the evidence both ways is thoroughly good evidence."

"We can agree, inspector, that these two men did not kill each other. But it remains possible, even probable, on the evidence you have so far secured, that one of them did kill the other, and was then himself killed by some third person unknown, possibly a witness of the first crime bent on exacting retribution. How does that strike you?" The superintendent thrust his hands deep into his pockets and leant

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back in his chair with a satisfied look, as if he had scored a point.

Inspector Blaikie's face, however, hardly became less doleful. "Yes, that's possible," he said; "but unfortunately there is absolutely nothing to show which set of circumstantial clues ought to be accepted and which discarded in that case. We do not know which of the two men was killed first. When Brooklyn went to see Prinsep, did he murder him then and there in the study, or did Prinsep decoy his visitor into the garden by means of the note we have found, and there kill him? Either theory fits some of the facts: neither fits them all. I don't know which to think, or which to work on as a basis. The evidence we have probably points in the right direction in one of the cases, and in the wrong direction in the other; but how are we to tell which is right and which is wrong? There is nothing to lay hold of."

"What about the medical evidence as to the time of death? Does that throw any light on the case?"

"None whatever, unfortunately. In both instances the doctors agree that death almost certainly took place at some time between 10.30 and 12 o'clock. But they say it is impossible to time the thing any more accurately than that."

"Come, that seems at least to narrow the field of inquiry. When were each of these men last seen alive?"

The inspector referred to his notes. "John Prinsep was seen at 10.30 by the servant, Winter, who went to fetch his letters for the post. He was seen in the garden at some time between 11 o'clock and 11.15 by the caretaker at the Piccadilly Theatre, Jabez Smith, and also, I have since ascertained, by a dresser named Laura Rose about the same time.

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No one seems to have seen him later than about 11.15. His body was found in his study this morning at ten minutes past eight by the maid, Sarah Plenty, and seen immediately afterwards by the household servants, William Winter and Peter Morgan."

"And George Brooklyn?"

"He was seen at about a quarter to eleven by Winter and other servants, when he called at Liskeard House and went up by himself to John Prinsep's room. He was seen again, by Winter and two other servants, leaving the house at about 11.30. He did not go home to his hotel, and neither his wife nor any one else I have been able to discover saw him again. His body was discovered at 9.30 this morning in the garden of Liskeard House by his cousin, Joan Cowper."

"That certainly does not seem to help us very much. In the case of Prinsep, he may have died any time after 11.15. Brooklyn was still alive at 11.30."

"Yes; but, if Brooklyn killed Prinsep, it seems he must have done so between 11.15, when Prinsep was still alive, and 11.30, when Brooklyn was seen leaving the house."

"That does not follow at all. We know he came back after 11.30, since he was found dead in the grounds. The first question is, How and when did he come back?"

"I have made every possible inquiry about that. The front door was bolted at about 11.45, and Winter is positive that he did not come in again that way. There are two other ways into the garden. One is through the coach-yard. That was locked and bolted about 11, and was found untouched this morning. The other is through the theatre. Nobody saw him, and the caretaker says he could not have gone through

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that way without being seen. But it appears that the door from the theatre into the garden was not locked until nearly midnight, and it is just possible he may have slipped through that way. He seems to have been seen in the theatre earlier in the evening—before his call at Liskeard House at 10.45."

"Was it a usual thing for Prinsep to walk about the garden at night?"

"Yes, they tell me that he often took a stroll there on fine nights before going to bed."

The superintendent rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I can only see one thing for it," he said. "We have no evidence to show which of these men died first, and therefore, which, if either of them, killed the other. You must follow up both sets of clues until you get further evidence to show which is the right one. But remember that, even if one murder can be accounted for in that way, there is still another murderer somewhere at large—unless another unexpected corpse turns up with clear evidence of having been murdered by one of the other two."

The inspector laughed. "Well," he said, "it all seems a bit of a puzzle. It seems to me the next thing is to find out whether either of them had any special reason for murdering the other. If you agree, I shall work up the antecedents of the case, and do a little research into the family history."

"Yes, that's probably the best we can do for the present. But spread the net wide. Find out all you can about the whole family and the servants—every one who is known to have been in the house last night—every one who could have any reason for desiring the death of either or both of the murdered men."

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"I suppose one of them must have murdered the other," said the inspector reflectively.

"I see no sufficient reason for thinking that," replied his superior. "It looks to me more like a very carefully planned affair, worked out by some third party. But we mustn't take anything for granted. Your immediate job is certainly to follow up the clues you have found. Even if they do not lead where we expect them to lead, they will probably lead somewhere. A deliberately laid false clue is often just as useful as an ordinary straightforward clue in the long run."

"Oh, I'll keep my eyes open," said the inspector, "and as there is a third party involved in any case, it's worth remembering that he could not easily have got into the house after midnight at the latest, and I'm blest if I see how he could have got out of it and left all the doors properly fastened unless he had an accomplice inside."

"That is certainly a point. Every one who slept in the house is certainly worth watching. What about the men-servants?"

"Only two—Morgan and Winter—sleep in the house. Morgan says he came back about 11.30, after spending the evening with friends in Hammersmith. He and Winter went up to their rooms together soon after. Morgan's room can only be reached through Winter's. Winter says he lay awake for some hours—he is a bad sleeper—and heard Morgan snoring in the next room all the time. He did not go to sleep until after he had heard two o'clock strike. He says he is a light sleeper, and Morgan could not have passed through his room without waking him."

"That seems to clear Morgan, if Winter is speaking the

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truth. What about Winter himself? A good deal seems to turn on his testimony."

"Winter is a very old servant. He has been in the family since he was a boy. He doesn't strike me as at all the kind of man to be mixed up in an affair of this sort. Morgan is rather a sly fellow—much more the sort of man one would be inclined to suspect."

"You are probably right; but we must not let Winter off too easily. Suppose it is true that one of these two men did kill the other. Isn't an old devoted family servant, if he saw the crime, just the man to take his revenge? There have been many crimes with far less strong a motive."

"I will certainly have Winter watched, and Morgan too. But I'm not at all hopeful. It's too well planned to be a sudden crime, and I'm sure Winter's not the man for a high-class job of this sort."

"Do the best you can, and keep me fully informed about the case. If I have a brain-wave, I'll let you know. At present I can't see light any more than you."

With that unsatisfactory conclusion the two detectives parted. Superintendent Wilson, left alone, walked quickly up and down the room, chuckling to himself, and every now and then marking off a point on his fingers, or pausing in his walk to examine one of the clues which the inspector had left in his keeping. He appeared to find it a fascinating case.

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CHAPTER VI

A PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

WHEN Inspector Blaikie got to his own room, he sat down with a sheet of paper in front of him, and on it made out, from his notes, a list of all the persons whom he knew to have been in the house the previous night. It was a long list, and he made it out more to set his subconscious mind free to work than with any idea that it would throw a direct light on the problem. Having made his list, he began to write down, after each name, exactly what was known about its owner's doings and movements on the night before. He left out nothing, however unimportant it might seem; for he had fully mastered the first principle of scientific detection—that detail generally gives the clue to a crime, and that therefore every detail matters.

He began with those who seemed least likely to have had any hand in the business. First there were the four maid-servants. They had gone to bed before eleven. They slept two in a room, and there seemed no reason to doubt that, as they said, they had all slept soundly. He did not dismiss them from his mind, but he had nothing against them so far.

Then there was the lady's maid, Agnes Dutch. She had slept alone on the first floor, in a little room next to that of Joan Cowper. She had felt tired, she said, and had gone to bed at 10.30, after making sure that Miss Joan would not

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want her again. She seemed a nice, quiet girl, and, although she seemed very upset in the morning when the inspector saw her, that was no more than was to be expected. There was nothing against her either. Besides, Mary Woodman had not gone to bed until after twelve, and she said that she was certain the girl was in her room until then. She had been sitting in the big landing-lounge reading, and both Joan's and the maid's doors opened on to the lounge.

What of Mary Woodman herself? She had been with Joan until about eleven, and had then sat for an hour reading. No one had seen her during that hour, or heard her go to bed afterwards. But Mary notoriously got on with everybody and had not an enemy in the world. Every one had told the inspector, without need of his asking the question, that she was the very last person to have anything to do with a murder. Besides, the whole thing was clearly a man's job. The inspector filed Mary Woodman in his mind for future reference; but he felt quite sure that she knew nothing about the crimes.

Then, to finish the women, there was Joan Cowper. She had discovered George Brooklyn's body in the garden, and her manner after the discovery seemed to be sign enough that it had come to her as a horrifying surprise. Certainly, she had known nothing about George Brooklyn's death; but she might, for all that, be in a position to throw some further light upon the crimes. He had asked her in the garden how she had spent the previous evening; and she had answered without hesitation. After seeing Sir Vernon to his room shortly after ten, she had sat with Mary Woodman in the lounge until eleven o'clock, and had then gone to bed. Her

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maid had come to her rather before half-past ten and she had told her she would be needed no more that night. Mary Woodman, who had sat on in the lounge, confirmed this, and stated that Joan had not left her room before midnight. Certainly there seemed to be nothing to connect Joan with the crimes. She was a fine young lady, the inspector reflected. She had borne up wonderfully.

Next there were the men, and it was among them that the criminal, if, as Blaikie suspected, he was one of the intimate circle of Liskeard House, would probably be found. Sir Vernon Brooklyn was clearly out of it. He was a feeble old man whose hand could not possibly have struck those savage blows. He was reported to be very fond of both his nephews; and he had undoubtedly gone to bed at a quarter past ten. So much for him. He might know things or suspect, but he could have had no hand in the murders. At present, the inspector had been told, he was prostrated by the news of Prinsep's death, and his doctor had forbidden any mention of the matter in his presence. He did not even know yet that George Brooklyn was dead.

The only other men who had slept in the house were the two servants—Winter and Morgan. Morgan seemed to be cleared of suspicion, at least if Winter had told the truth. But might not Winter himself have had a hand in the affair? The superintendent had dropped a plausible hint, and there might be something in it. Inspector Blaikie wrote it down as possible, but unlikely. Two other menservants, who had waited at dinner, did not sleep in the house, and had left soon after half-past eleven. They had been busy clearing up until the very moment of their departure, and it seemed

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plain that they had enjoyed neither time nor opportunity for any criminal proceeding. Besides, they were strangers, imported for the evening from the restaurant attached to the theatre. As robbery had evidently not been a motive in either murder, there was the less reason to think seriously about them. They could have had no motive.

Next, the inspector turned to a consideration of the guests who had been at the dinner. These were, first, George Brooklyn and his wife. About George he had already noted down all that he knew. What of Mrs. George? Inquiries which the sergeant had made established that she had gone straight back to her hotel—the Cunningham—soon after ten o'clock. George had left her in the care of the Woodmans, parting from them at the door of the theatre on plea of an appointment. Mrs. George—or, as she was better known both to the inspector and to all London, Isabelle Raven, the great tragedy actress—had then sat talking with Mrs. Woodman in the sitting-room which they shared at the hotel until "after eleven," when she had gone to bed, expecting that her husband might come in at any moment. She had gone to sleep and had only discovered his absence when she woke in the morning. She had been worried, and after a hasty breakfast she had hurried across to Liskeard House with Helen Woodman to make inquiries. There she had been met with the fatal news. She was now lying ill in her room at the Cunningham Hotel, with Mrs. Woodman in faithful attendance upon her.

This recital clearly brought up the question of the Woodmans, man and wife. When they returned to the hotel with Mrs. George, Carter Woodman had gone to one of the hotel waiting-rooms to write letters, leaving the two women to-

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gether. He said that he had remained at work till 11.45 or so, when he had gone down to the hall and asked the night porter to see some important letters off by the first post in the morning. This was corroborated by the night porter, who had so informed the sergeant. Carter Woodman had then gone straight to bed—a statement fully confirmed by his wife. This seemed fairly well to dispose of any connection of either the Woodmans or Mrs. George with the tragedy.

Harry Lucas? Sir Vernon's old friend had left in his car for Hampstead at ten minutes past ten after a few farewell words with Sir Vernon. He had reached home soon after 10.30, and had gone straight to bed. This had been already confirmed by police inquiries at Hampstead during the morning.

Robert Ellery? He had left the house soon after ten, saying that he intended to walk back to his room at Chelsea. The inspector had not yet followed his trail; but he now made up his mind to do so, though he had not much faith in the result. Still, here was at least a loose end that needed tying.

When he had made his list and tabulated his information, Inspector Blaikie did not feel that he had greatly advanced in his quest. Not one of the people on the list seemed in the least likely either to have committed the murders, or to have been even an accessory to them. He began to feel that he had not yet got at all on the track of the real criminal, or at least of the second one, if one of the two men had really killed the other. Was it some one quite outside the circle he had been studying, and, if so, how had that outsider got access to the house? He might have slipped in without being noticed, but

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it did not seem very likely, and it was far more difficult to see how he had slipped out. But, after all, George Brooklyn had got back somehow after 11.30, and, where he had come, so might another. Perhaps some one had slipped in and out by way of the theatre.

So the inspector made up his mind to go over the whole scene again, and, above all, to find out more about the persons with whom he had to deal—their histories and still more their present ways of life: their loves and, above all, their animosities, if they had any. There, he felt, the clue to the mystery was most likely to be found.

Accordingly, on the following morning—the second after the tragedy—Inspector Blaikie presented himself early at the office of Carter Woodman and sent up his card. Sir Vernon was still far too ill to be consulted, and the next thing seemed to be a visit to his lawyer, who, being both confidential adviser and a close relative, would be certain to know most of what there was to be known about the circumstances surrounding the dead men. Woodman had offered all possible assistance, and had himself suggested a call at his office.

The inspector presented his card to an elderly clerk who was presiding in the outer office, and was at once shown in to the principal. Again he was struck, as he had been on the morning before, with the lawyer's overflowing vitality. At rather over forty-six, Woodman still looked very much the athlete he had been in his younger days, when he had accumulated three Blues at Oxford, and represented England at Rugby football on more than one occasion. He had given up "childish things," he used to say; but the abundant vigour of the man remained, and stood out strongly against the rather dingy

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background which successful solicitors seem to regard as an indispensable mark of respectability. Carter Woodman, the inspector knew, had a big practice, and one of good standing. He did all the legal work of the Brooklyn Corporation, and he was perhaps the best known expert on theatrical law in the country.

Woodman greeted the inspector cordially, and shook his hand with a force that made it tingle for some minutes afterwards.

"Well, inspector," he said, "what progress? Have you got your eye on the scoundrels yet?"

The inspector shook his head. "We are still only at the beginning of the case, I am afraid. I have come here to take advantage of your offer to give me all the help you can."

"Of course I will. It is indispensable that the terrible business should be thoroughly cleared up. For one thing, I am very much afraid for Sir Vernon; and there certainly would be more chance of his getting over it if we knew exactly what the truth is. Uncertainty is a killing business. He has not been told yet about Mr. George Brooklyn's death."

"You will understand that, as it is impossible for me to see Sir Vernon, I shall have to ask you to tell me all you can about any of the family affairs that may have a bearing on the tragedy. As matters stand it is most important that I should know as much as possible about the circumstances of the two dead men. To establish the possible motives for both crimes may be of the greatest value. There is so little to go upon in the facts themselves that I have to look for evidence from outside the immediate events."

"Am I to understand that you have no further light on the

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crime beyond what you gained when the bodies were found?"

"Hardly that, Mr. Woodman. I have at least had time to think things over, and to conduct a few additional investigations. But I shall know better what to make of these when I have asked you a few questions."

"Ask away; but I shall probably be able to answer more to your satisfaction if you tell me how matters stand. I think I may say that I know thoroughly both Sir Vernon's and the late Mr. Prinsep's affairs."

"Well, you know, Mr. Woodman, the *prima facie* evidence in both cases seemed to point to a quite impossible conclusion. In each case, what evidence there was went to show that the two men had murdered each other. This could not be true of both; but we have so far no evidence to show whether it ought to be disbelieved in both cases, or only in one. That is where further particulars may prove so important."

"I will tell you all I can."

"Let us begin with Mr. Prinsep. Was he in any trouble that you know of?"

The lawyer hesitated. "Well," he said at length, "it is a private matter, and I am sure it can have no bearing on the case. But you had better have all the facts. There had been some trouble—about a woman, a girl who is acting in a small part at the Piccadilly Theatre."

"Her name?"

"Charis Lang. Prinsep had been, well, I believe somewhat intimate with her, and she had formed the opinion that he had promised to marry her. He came to see me about it. He denied that he had made any such promise, and said he was anxious to get the matter honourably settled. I wrote to the

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woman and asked her to meet me; but she refused—said it was not a lawyer's business, but entirely a private question between her and Mr. Prinsep. I showed him her letter, and he was very much worried. He informed me that Mrs. George Brooklyn—she used to be leading lady at the Piccadilly—had known the girl in her professional days, and I approached her and told her a part of the story. She took, I must say, the girl's side, and said she was sure a promise of marriage had been made. She wanted to take the matter up; but George Brooklyn objected to his wife being mixed up in it, and undertook to see Miss Lang himself. He was to have done so two nights ago—the night of the murders—and then to have gone back to tell Prinsep what had happened. I have no means of knowing whether he actually did so."

"This is very important. Can you give me Miss Lang's address?"

"I have it here. Somewhere in Hammersmith. Yes, 3 Algernon Terrace. But she is at the theatre every evening, and you could probably find her there."

"I must certainly arrange to see her. Can you tell me anything further about the young woman? For instance, is she —well—respectable?"

"I have told you all I know. Mrs. George might know more."

"Thank you. Now, is there anything else you know about Mr. Prinsep that might have a bearing on his death?"

"Nothing."

"Had he any financial troubles?"

"None, I am sure. He had a large salary from the Brook-

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lyn Trust, besides a considerable personal income, and he always lived well within his means."

"Had he any enemies?"

Again the lawyer paused before answering. Finally, "No," he replied, "no *enemies*."

The inspector took the cue.

"But there were some people you know of with whom he was not on the best of terms?" he asked.

"I think I may say 'yes' to that. He had a temper, and there had been violent disputes on several occasions with Mr. Walter Brooklyn—Sir Vernon's brother."

"One moment. Was he on good terms with Mr. George Brooklyn?"

Again a pause. "No, I can't say he was—but they were not enemies. George thought he had behaved badly to Charis Lang, and said so. Also, George was strongly against Prinsep's marrying Miss Joan Cowper, which Sir Vernon had set his heart on."

And then, in question and answer, the whole episode at the dinner, the announcement of Sir Vernon's will, and Joan's dramatic refusal to marry Prinsep, gradually came out. The inspector felt that now at last he was learning things.

"Did Miss Cowper know about Miss Lang?"

"Not that I am aware of. But I can't be sure. Mrs. George may have told her."

"And what would you say were the relations between Miss Cowper and Mr. Prinsep?"

"He was half in love with her—in a sort of a way. At any rate he certainly wanted to marry her. She was most certainly

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not in love with him. I don't think she had any strong feeling against him; but it is impossible to be sure. She would have done almost anything rather than marry him, I am certain."

"Had Miss Cowper, so far as you know, any other attachment?"

"That is a difficult question. She is very thick with Robert Ellery, the young playwright, you know; but whether she is in love with him is more than I can tell you. He is obviously in love with her. It was the common talk, and everybody knew about it except Sir Vernon."

"This Mr. Ellery—can you tell me anything about him? He was at the dinner, was he not?"

"Yes, he's a ward of old Mr. Lucas, one of Sir Vernon's oldest friends. A good deal about with Joan, and a frequent visitor at Sir Vernon's country place. A nice enough fellow, so far as I have seen."

"Was he on good terms with Mr. Prinsep?"

"Prinsep did not like his going about with Joan, I think. Otherwise, they seemed to get on all right."

"Now, Mr. Woodman, I want to ask you a somewhat difficult question. I should, of course, ask Sir Vernon himself, if he were well enough. You know, presumably, the terms of Sir Vernon's will. Do you feel at liberty to tell me about its contents? They might throw some light on the question of motive."

The lawyer thought a moment. "I don't see why I shouldn't tell you the whole thing—in confidence," he said. "Sir Vernon told them all that night what was in his will, and you certainly ought to know about it. The greater part

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of his property was to be divided at his death between his two nephews, who have now unhappily predeceased him."

"Yes, and in the event of the death of either or both of the nephews, what was to happen?"

"If Mr. George Brooklyn died, half of his share was to go to Mrs. George and half to Prinsep. If Prinsep died, half of his share was to go to Miss Joan Cowper. Sir Vernon explained that his arrangements were based on her marrying Prinsep."

"Then, under the will, Miss Cowper now gets half Mr. Prinsep's share. Does she get half Mr. George's share also?"

"No, a part of it goes to Mrs. George, and the remainder in both cases to the next of kin."

"I see. And who is the next of kin."

"Joan's step-father, Mr. Walter Brooklyn."

"Ah! I think you mentioned that Mr. Walter Brooklyn was on bad terms with Mr. Prinsep."

"Walter Brooklyn was on bad terms with most people who knew him. His step-daughter left him after her mother's death, and came to live with Sir Vernon. I am afraid Walter Brooklyn is not a very likeable person."

"On what terms was he with Sir Vernon?"

"He was always trying to get money from him. He had run through one big fortune, his wife's—including all the money left in trust for Miss Cowper. He leads a fairly expensive life in town, supported, I understand, partly by his bridge earnings and partly on what he can raise from his friends."

"Did Sir Vernon give him money?"

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"Yes, far more than I thought desirable. But Sir Vernon had a very strong sense of family solidarity. Latterly, however, Walter Brooklyn's demands had become so exorbitant that Sir Vernon had been refusing to see him, and had handed the matter over to Prinsep, whom Walter was finding a much more difficult man to deal with."

"Do you know whether Prinsep had been seeing Mr. Walter Brooklyn lately?"

"Yes; I know he saw him the day before the murder. Walter was always after money. He'll probably begin sponging on Miss Cowper in a day or two."

"You certainly do not give Mr. Walter Brooklyn a good character."

"No; but I think every one you ask will confirm my estimate."

"I will look into that. Now, are there any other particulars in the will I ought to know about? I should like to know approximately what Sir Vernon is worth."

"Not far short of a million."

"You don't say so. Then any one interested in his will had a great deal at stake. Are any others interested besides those you have mentioned?"

"There are a number of smaller legacies. Miss Cowper was left £40,000. My sister, Miss Mary Woodman, and I are left £20,000 each. The rest are quite small legacies."

"I think that is almost all I need ask you. But is there any other particular you think might help me in my inquiry?"

"As to that, I cannot say; but there are two points I have been intending to mention. The first is that I know Mr.

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Walter Brooklyn called at Liskeard House a few minutes after ten on the night of the murder. My wife and I saw him go up to the porch and ring the bell just after we had come out of the house."

"This is very important. Do you know anything more?"

"No, it was merely a chance that I noticed him and pointed him out to my wife. Mr. and Mrs. George may also have seen him. They were with us. He went into the hall. That is all I can tell you."

"Where did you go when you left the house?"

"Straight back to the hotel where I was staying. I did not go out again that night. I heard nothing about the tragedy till they rang me up about it at my office the next morning."

"Who rang you up?"

"One of the servants at Liskeard House. I do not know which it was."

"And what was the other point you wished to mention?"

"Only that I know Mr. Walter Brooklyn was in exceptional financial difficulties, and had been trying in vain to raise a loan. This has happened very opportunely for him."

"But, of course, Sir Vernon may alter his will."

"If he recovers enough to do so, he may. But I doubt if he will. He always told me that he could not bear the thought of leaving money out of the family. And much as he disapproves of Walter Brooklyn, he is still attached to him."

"H'm. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Woodman. What you have told me has been very helpful. Perhaps I will call again and tell you what success I meet with in following it up. I may, of course, have more to ask you later."

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The inspector rose and Woodman gave him his hand. He went out of the office with his hand tingling.

"Certainly a man who impresses himself upon one," said he, laughing softly to himself. "And what he had to say was most enlightening."

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CHAPTER VII

THE CASE AGAINST WALTER BROOKLYN

INSPECTOR BLAIKIE left Carter Woodman's office with the feeling that a new and unexpected light had been thrown on the tragedy, and that he had at least found a quite sufficient motive for both crimes. If Walter Brooklyn had committed the murders, he stood to gain directly a considerable slice of Sir Vernon's huge fortune. Moreover, a considerable slice of the remainder would go to his step-daughter, Joan Cowper, and he might hope to despoil her again, as he had despoiled her of her mother's money. Evidence against Mr. Walter Brooklyn might be lacking; but certainly there was no lack of motive. Moreover, the man seemed, from Woodman's description, quite a likely murderer. The inspector decided that his next job was undoubtedly to discover whether there was any direct evidence against Walter Brooklyn.

To begin with, he said to himself, what had he to go upon? Of direct evidence, not a shred; but where the direct evidence pointed obviously in the wrong direction, it was necessary to consider very seriously the question of motive. Walter Brooklyn, he reflected, would not stand to inherit Sir Vernon's money unless both nephews were cleared out of the way. He had, therefore, a motive for both murders together, but not for either of them except in conjunction with the other. This seemed to point to the conclusion that, if Walter Brook-

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lyn had committed either of the murders he had committed both. On the other hand, it still remained possible that one of the two men had killed the other, and that Walter Brooklyn, knowing this and realising his opportunity, had then disposed of the survivor. Or, after all, the indications might again be as deceptive as those which followed hard upon the discovery of the murders.

What Woodman had told the inspector provided, however, at least one clear line of investigation which could be followed up immediately. If Woodman and other people had seen Walter Brooklyn approaching Liskeard House and ringing the front-door bell soon after ten o'clock on the night of the murders, it ought not to be difficult to get further information about his movements. Had he been admitted to the house; and if so, when had he left, and why had no mention of his visit previously been made to the inspector? The best thing was to call at Liskeard House at once and make inquiries. Inspector Blaikie set off immediately.

The bell was answered by a maid-servant, and the inspector asked for a few words with Mr. Winter. He was shown into a small side-room, and within a minute Winter joined him. The inspector plunged at once into business.

"Since I have left you there have been certain developments which make it desirable that I should ask you one or two questions. I want to know whether, on Tuesday night, any one called at the house during the evening?"

"Well, sir, of course, there were the guests at dinner that night. You have their names."

"Did any one else call—later in the evening, for example?"

"Yes, there was Mr. George. As I told you, he came at

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about a quarter or ten minutes to eleven, and left at about 11.30."

"Did anybody else visit the house that night?"

"No—there was no one else."

"Now, I want you to be very careful. Are you positive that no one else called?"

"Yes—I mean, no. I had quite forgotten. At a few minutes after ten Mr. Walter Brooklyn—Sir Vernon's brother—came. He sent up his name to Sir Vernon, and asked him to see him at once. He said it was about something important."

"Did Sir Vernon see him?"

"No. He sent down word by one of the temporary men-servants he couldn't see him. He told him to see Mr. Prinsep or to write."

"Then, did Mr. Walter Brooklyn go up to see Mr. Prinsep?"

"No. He seemed mighty annoyed, he did. Said to me things were coming to a pretty pass when a man wouldn't see his own brother. Then he took himself out of the house in a rage, and I shut the door after him."

"Did you see anything more of him?"

"No, that's the last I saw. He didn't come back; for I was on duty here till the place was bolted up for the night."

"Did Mr. Walter Brooklyn often come to the house?"

"Well, he'd been a number of times lately to see Mr. Prinsep."

"Had he been to see Sir Vernon?"

"No. You see, Sir Vernon's been away in the country for some time."

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"But when he was in London, did Mr. Walter Brooklyn come to see him?"

"He used to. Then I believe there was a bit of a quarrel. Last time he was in London Sir Vernon told me he would not see Mr. Walter, and I was to tell him to see Mr. Prinsep if he came. I sent up on Tuesday because I didn't know if the instructions still held."

"Then there had been a quarrel?"

"Hardly what you would call a quarrel. What we understood was that Mr. Walter wanted money, and Sir Vernon wouldn't give it him."

"Did any one else see Mr. Walter Brooklyn on Tuesday?"

"Yes, the maid—Janet—must have seen him."

The inspector sent for Janet, who confirmed what Winter had said. It seemed plain enough that Walter Brooklyn had called at about ten minutes past ten, had been refused an interview with Sir Vernon, and had left a few minutes later. Thereafter, no one about the house had seen any more of him.

Before he left the inspector obtained from Winter Mr. Walter Brooklyn's address. He lived at his club, the Byron —named after the playwright, not the poet—only a few steps down Piccadilly. The inspector made that his next place of call.

The club porter, with the aid of the night porter, gave him the information he needed. Walter Brooklyn had dined in the club on Tuesday, had gone out at about ten o'clock and had returned just about midnight. The night porter had noticed nothing unusual about him when he came back. It was about his usual hour. He had gone straight upstairs, the man believed—probably to his room, but the porter could not say.

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So far there was nothing very much to go upon. Walter Brooklyn might have committed the murders—he had certainly been out until midnight. But this was nothing unusual, and there was no evidence that he had been in the house. What evidence there was seemed to show that he had not.

But Inspector Blaikie still lingered in talk with the two porters, asking further questions which produced quite unilluminating answers. Soon they found a common interest in the cricket news, and plunged into a discussion of the respective chances of Surrey and Middlesex for the County Championship. The night porter, who was a north-countryman and a partisan of Yorkshire, cut in every now and then with a sarcastic comment. He was especially scornful of the day porter's pride in the number of amateurs included in the Middlesex eleven. "Call them gentlemen," he said. "They get paid, same as the players, only they put it down as expenses."

But at this point the argument broke off; for the day porter suddenly changed the subject.

"Let me have a look at that stick, will you?" he said to the inspector.

Inspector Blaikie, who had been twirling the stick about rather obtrusively, at once handed it over. It was the stick found in Prinsep's room, and he was carrying it about with him solely with the hope that some one might recognise it, and enable him to discover to whom it had belonged. It was a peculiar stick, and likely to be noticed by those who saw it. The shaft was of rhinoceros horn, linked together with bands of gold; and it had a solid gold handle.

"What do you make of it?" the inspector asked.

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"I was going to ask you how you got hold of it," answered the porter.

"Why do you ask?"

"Only because it is surely Mr. Walter Brooklyn's stick. I have often seen him carrying it."

"Take a good look. Are you quite certain it is his?"

"Either it is, or it's one just the same. It's a most unusual pattern, too."

"Yes, rhinoceros horn, I should say. Could you swear to it?"

"Hardly that. There might be two of them. But I've not seen Mr. Brooklyn with his for a day or two."

"Try to remember—was he carrying this stick when he went out on Tuesday?"

The porter paused a minute. "Yes, I think he was," he said. "But, no, you mean in the evening. You'll have to ask the night porter here that. He was on duty from nine o'clock."

The inspector turned to the night porter. "Do you recognise this as Mr. Brooklyn's stick?"

"Yes, I'm pretty sure it's his."

"And do you remember whether he was carrying it on Tuesday night when he went out?"

The man hesitated some time before replying. Finally, "No," he said, "I can't say. Maybe he was—I rather think he was. But I'm not sure."

"And when he came in?"

"He had a stick, I remember. He rapped at the door with it. I expect it was this one. No, I don't think it was. It was a plain stick, I'm almost sure."

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"Remember that this may be of the utmost importance. You can't remember whether or not Mr. Brooklyn had a stick when he went out?"

"Not for sure. I think he had."

"But you can't say whether it was this stick?"

"No, not for certain."

"And when he came in?"

"He had a stick; but I'm almost sure it wasn't this one."

"Would any one else be likely to know?"

"I don't think so. There was no one else about."

At this point the day porter struck in. "I wonder why you're so curious about that stick," he said.

"That, I am afraid, is my business," said the inspector. "Now, can you tell me where Mr. Brooklyn usually goes of a night?"

"Sometimes to a theatre or variety show. But most often he goes to play bridge at his other club."

"Where is that?"

"It's a small place—the Sanctum, in Pall Mall. Only a few minutes from here."

After a few words more the inspector took his leave *en route* for Duke Street. The stick he held in his hand had become a clue of the first importance. Its presence in Prinsep's study seemed to show that its owner had been there on the fatal night. More and more Walter Brooklyn was becoming involved. But how had he got in? That was the mystery still.

At the Sanctum, Inspector Blaikie at first drew a blank—a blank which he had expected. Walter Brooklyn had not been to the club on Tuesday. Nothing had been seen of him since the previous Saturday night.

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"So you've heard nothing of him this week?" said the inspector, preparing to take his leave.

"Beg pardon, sir," replied the porter. "It had almost slipped my memory. Mr. Walter Brooklyn rang up one night this week on the telephone. I have a note of the call somewhere."

"What was it about?"

"He asked if a registered parcel had come for him, because if it had he wanted it sent round to him at once by hand."

"Sent to his other club?"

"No. He wanted it sent to Sir Vernon Brooklyn's, Liskeard House, Piccadilly. He gave us the name and address over the 'phone."

"Did you send the parcel?"

"No. Because we told him no parcel had come."

"Has it arrived since?"

"No."

"When was this call you mention?"

The porter referred to his book. "It was about 11.30, or a bit before. The call before was at 11.20."

"On what day?"

"On Tuesday of this week."

"The night of the murder," thought the inspector. "And did Mr. Brooklyn say where he was speaking from?"

"Yes, he was at Liskeard House, where he wanted the parcel sent."

So Walter Brooklyn, who had apparently failed to secure admittance to the house just before 10.15, had somehow got into it afterwards, and was there at 11.30. He, like George Brooklyn, had slipped into the house unseen. That fact,

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with the fact of the stick, seemed to the inspector to determine his guilt, or at least his complicity in the crimes, or one of them. The stick and the telephone message, taken together, proved that he had been in Prinsep's room.

The inspector next produced the stick. The porter recognised it at once as the one Walter Brooklyn always carried. He had never seen him with another. He was more sure than the porters at the Byron. He was prepared to swear to the stick. "But," he added, "you've gone and lost the ferrule."

The inspector had noticed that there was no ferrule; but it had not seemed important. It might have dropped off anywhere. He therefore followed up a different line.

"When did you see this stick last?"

"On Saturday, when Mr. Brooklyn was here, he was showing off a billiard stroke with it out there in the hall. It had a ferrule then, all right. I happened to notice it."

No further information was forthcoming, and the inspector passed on to his next business. He went straight back to Liskeard House, and up to Prinsep's study. Exhaustive search there failed to reveal any trace of the missing ferrule.

"I may as well try the garden," said the inspector to himself. "But it's almost too good to be true."

Nevertheless, there in the garden the inspector lighted on the ferrule, lying in a heap of gravel near the base of the statue. He cursed himself for missing it before, and then blessed his luck that had enabled him to retrieve the blunder. There could be no doubt that it was the right ferrule. The stick was an outsize and it fitted exactly. The nail-marks and the impression left by the rim on the stick coincided exactly. The ferrule was a little out of shape, as if it had been wrenched,

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and there was a scratch on it where it was bent. But, when the inspector had bent it back into shape, there could be no doubt about the fit. Walter Brooklyn had been in the garden as well as in Prinsep's study, and had been on the very spot where the murder of George Brooklyn had taken place.

Inspector Blaikie was more than satisfied with his day's work. Out of seemingly insignificant beginnings, he had built up, he felt, more than enough evidence to hang Walter Brooklyn. He went in the best of spirits to report to his superior officer.

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CHAPTER VIII

A REVIEW OF THE CASE

THE inspector found Superintendent Wilson in his room. As he told his case, the superintendent kept his eyes closed, but every now and then he gave an approving nod. His subordinate had done well, and it was only right that this should be recognised. The inspector's spirits rose higher still as he saw the impression he was making.

Having told the full story, he came to the point on which he wanted his superior's assent.

"And now, sir, I think, as we have abundant evidence, I must ask you to get a warrant made out at once for Walter Brooklyn's arrest."

It was then the inspector received his first check.

"Not quite so fast, my friend," said the superintendent. "Do you mean that, in your opinion, it is proved that Walter Brooklyn committed these murders?"

"Surely," said Inspector Blaikie, "after what I've just told you, there can't be the shadow of a doubt about it."

Superintendent Wilson gave a short laugh, and sat upright in his chair. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

"Ah, but I think there can. Come now. Let us take first only the murder of John Prinsep, leaving out of account for the moment the murder of George Brooklyn. Now, what evidence have you as to the murder of John Prinsep?"

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"First, that Walter Brooklyn's walking-stick has been found in his room, and secondly that Walter Brooklyn rang up from Liskeard House at about 11.30 that night. He must have rung up from Prinsep's room. There are only two telephones in the building, one in the porter's room downstairs, connecting with the offices on the ground floor, and the other, on a separate line, in Prinsep's room. He couldn't have used the downstairs 'phone, because it was out of order that night. Winter told me that."

"Assume that you are right. Still, there is at least as strong evidence that George Brooklyn was in the room that night, too. Remember his handkerchief you picked up, and the draughtsman's knife. And in any case he was seen leaving the house at 11.30, and we know from the discovery of his body in the grounds that he came back afterwards."

"Yes, I know that," said the inspector.

"And do you mean to tell me that, in face of that evidence, you can prove to a jury that it was Walter, and not George Brooklyn, who killed Prinsep?"

"Perhaps not, if the case were taken alone. But it has to be considered together with the other—the murder of George Brooklyn. The double incrimination seems to me decisive."

"Wait a bit. Next let us take George Brooklyn's case, leaving aside for the moment that of Prinsep. Now, there, what evidence have you?"

"The finding of the ferrule in the garden, and the strong motive Walter Brooklyn had to put *both* nephews of Sir Vernon out of the way."

"Motive by itself, however strong, is not enough; and the

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ferrule evidence is rather slender. It may have been dropped previously."

"Walter Brooklyn had not been to Liskeard House for more than a week before the murder, and the ferrule was on his stick only three days before."

"I allow you that point. But, even if his stick was in the garden, it does not follow that he was there. He may have lost it earlier. Prinsep may have had it for all we know. Moreover, what of the evidence which seems to show that Prinsep murdered George Brooklyn? He was seen in the garden just before eleven o'clock. The cigar-holder which he habitually used, and had been using that very evening, was found broken on the spot where the murder was done. Moreover, I have in my possession now a far more decisive piece of evidence. You told me that you were sure the finger-prints on the stone club found in the garden were those of Prinsep. You were perfectly correct. The Finger-Print Department has compared them with the impressions of John Prinsep's hands, and these coincide beyond a doubt with the marks left on the stone. You have not yet seen the reproductions, inspector. Here they are."

The superintendent took some papers and photographs from a drawer, and handed them across the table to the inspector, who pored over them for some time without speaking. Finally, he said, with something of a sigh,—

"There can be no doubt they are the same. And, as you say, this throws a quite new light on one of the murders. It seems to prove that George Brooklyn was killed by Prinsep."

"I do not regard it as proof positive: but it is certainly

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very strong evidence, especially as the marks on the club are just where a man would take hold in order to deal a smashing blow. The murderer used both hands, you notice. The prints are quite distinct for both the thumbs."

"Yes, that is clear enough, although none of the impressions is quite complete. Somehow a part of the marks had got rubbed off before the club was properly examined."

"These accidents will happen. It is only fortunate that the marks were not destroyed beyond hope of identification. Perhaps you yourself, inspector, or one of your subordinates, handled the club carelessly. Or perhaps some one else handled it before you came on the scene."

"No. I was most careful, and no one touched it after I appeared except myself. The sergeant did not allow it to be touched at all until I arrived. Miss Cowper, who first discovered the body, told me she had not even noticed the weapon, much less handled it. She was too upset to notice anything except the body."

"Well, I suppose it does not greatly matter, as the identification of the prints is still quite clear. There remains, of course, the bare possibility that, while Prinsep did handle the club, he did not actually kill George Brooklyn. But it is certain that the club was the weapon used. The fragments of hair clotted with blood which are still on it came quite definitely from the head of the deceased. The only doubt in my mind is whether Prinsep was a powerful enough man to strike such a blow. But I suppose we must take it that he was. It was a terrific blow, I understand from the medical evidence."

"Yes, but a man not unusually strong can, by using his

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opportunities, get in a very big blow. I do not think there is much in that."

"Quite so. Then I take it you agree that, in face of the evidence, it would be quite impossible to arrest Walter Brooklyn on the charge of having murdered George Brooklyn?"

The inspector sighed. "Yes," he said, "you are right. I thought the case was getting straightened out, but it now seems darker than ever." Then a thought came into the inspector's mind; and his expression brightened. "But," he went on, "if Prinsep murdered George Brooklyn, that makes it certain that George Brooklyn cannot have murdered him. It means that the evidence against Walter Brooklyn holds so far as the murder of Prinsep is concerned."

"I think you are forgetting a difficulty. Prinsep was last seen in the garden shortly after eleven. But George Brooklyn was seen leaving the house at 11.30. After that, he must somehow have come back, got into the garden, and been murdered. That would take some time."

The inspector nodded.

"But Walter Brooklyn, who rang up his club from Prinsep's rooms at 11.30, was back at his club before midnight. That leaves very little time. If the theory you advance is true, how do you fit in the times? George Brooklyn could hardly have got back into the garden and got himself killed, before a quarter to twelve. It would take Walter Brooklyn five minutes to get out of the house and back to his club. That leaves less than ten minutes for Prinsep to go up to his room and for Walter Brooklyn to murder him."

"That sequence of time is difficult; but it is not impossible. Crime is usually a pretty rapid business. Probably Walter

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and George came back into the garden together, and the two murders followed in rapid succession. Prinsep killed George, and he and Walter went upstairs together. Then Walter killed him while they were discussing his affairs. You remember the papers I found lying on the table?"

"Perhaps, but that seems to me exceptionally quick work—so quick that my instinct is to doubt whether it is the right explanation. After all, there is no direct evidence that Walter Brooklyn did murder Prinsep."

"Surely the walking-stick and the telephone message together are very strong evidence?"

"Not strong enough, I am certain, to obtain a conviction. The telephone message was sent some time before George Brooklyn was killed. And don't forget that, a moment ago, you thought your evidence that Walter Brooklyn had murdered George Brooklyn equally strong. Yet already you are practically convinced that he did not."

"I am still convinced that he was there when the murder took place in the garden."

"Ah, that is another matter. He may have been present at both murders, and yet committed neither."

"I see now what you are driving at. You mean that there may be a fourth man involved?"

"That may be so; but I was not quite sure on that point. What the evidence seems to me to establish beyond reasonable doubt is that some meeting of the three men—Prinsep and George and Walter Brooklyn—took place at Liskeard House that night. That meeting was followed by—probably resulted in—the death of two of the three. There may have been others present. That is for you to find out. But I am clear

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that the next step is to discover what this meeting was about, and who was there. If we knew that, it would probably throw a new light on the whole situation."

"In the circumstances, there is still, it seems to me, every reason for arresting Walter Brooklyn. He was certainly present, whether he committed murder or not."

"I think it will be best to leave him at large for the time being. We have, I think, ample evidence of his presence in the house, but not of his having had a guilty hand in the murders. I think, instead of arresting him, it will be far better for you to see him, and find out all you can about what happened that night."

"Very well. I will try to see him at once. Ought I to warn him that what he says may be used against him?"

"I must leave that to your judgment. And now, inspector, I fancy you are a bit discouraged by the result of our talk. You came here with your mind made up, and you have found that the case is not so straightforward as it was beginning to appear. But that is no reason at all for being discouraged. The evidence you have gathered is of the greatest value. It has enabled us to put our hand on some one who, we are practically sure, knows all about the murders, whether or not he actually committed one of them. Once again, let me congratulate you on a very fine day's work."

The inspector was only in part reassured by Superintendent Wilson's conclusion. He had been watching his superior intently, and had noticed the keen critical joy with which he had demolished the apparently overwhelming case against Walter Brooklyn. The inspector had been compelled to admit, even to himself, the force of his superior's arguments; but,

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when he left the room, he remained, somehow in spite of this, convinced that Walter Brooklyn was not merely an accessory, but the actual murderer of one, if not of both men, and with a strong suspicion that the apparently conclusive evidence that Prinsep had killed George Brooklyn had a flaw in it somewhere, if only he could find it.

But he could not attend to his instincts for the moment. His next business was to see Walter Brooklyn, and find out from him all he could. At the least, Walter must know a great deal. Most probably he knew the whole story. But how much would he tell?

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CHAPTER IX

WALTER BROOKLYN'S EXPLANATION

INSPECTOR BLAIKIE made a hasty meal, and then set off for Walter Brooklyn's club. He found Mr. Brooklyn there, and was soon alone with him in a private room. Before the inspector could even introduce himself and state his business, he found the offensive turned against himself. He had thought over the interview carefully beforehand, and had made up his mind that, whatever his private opinion might be, it was his duty to hear, without prejudice, whatever Walter Brooklyn had to say, and to put aside for the moment all suspicions, resting only on the undoubted fact that the man had been present in the house that night. He might be able to explain his presence, or he might not. The interview would show. Till the chance had been given, the inspector was determined to keep an open mind.

But the conversation did not begin at all as he had anticipated. As he got out the first few words about the purpose for which he had asked for an interview, Walter Brooklyn struck in abruptly.

"See here, inspector, I fail to see that it is any of your business to come nosing about in my affairs. I find you have been asking the porter downstairs a whole lot of questions. From your manner, the fellow has jumped to the conclusion that you suspect me of having had a hand in these murders. You've set all the servants simmering, and by now it's all

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round the club that I murdered my nephew or something like it. I tell you I'm damned if I'll stand it. Blast your impudence. Since you have come here, I think you owe me an explanation."

Walter Brooklyn's manner seemed to the inspector quite extraordinarily violent. But he noticed something else while Brooklyn was speaking—the man's amazing physical strength. He could not be less than sixty; but as he stood there, in a half-threatening attitude—with difficulty, it seemed, holding himself in—Inspector Blaikie could not help thinking that here was the very figure of a man to have struck the blows on both the dead men's skulls. Here, moreover, was a man, obviously passionate and lacking in self-control—just the sort of person to resort to violence if his will were crossed. The inspector's open mind was rapidly closing up before Brooklyn had finished his first speech. Nevertheless, he answered quietly enough,—

"I am sorry, Mr. Brooklyn, if any of my inquiries have caused you inconvenience. But you must understand that it is my duty to investigate these murders, and to ask any questions that may be necessary for that purpose. You apparently know——"

But here again Walter Brooklyn struck in.

"Necessary inquiries, of course," he said. "But what I want to know is what you mean by coming round here and practically telling my club servants that I have committed murder. Necessary inquiries, indeed!"

"If you know, Mr. Brooklyn, what was the matter of my conversation with the club servants, you can hardly fail to realise why the inquiries were necessary."

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"Most certainly I fail to see it. These murders have nothing to do with me."

"That may be; but even so it is necessary to establish that fact. You know, I suppose, that your walking-stick was found in Mr. Prinsep's room the morning after the murder. I want you to tell me how it got there."

"I dare say you say you found it there. I know that, if it was there, it was not I who put it there. I don't believe it was there at all. I lost it last Tuesday afternoon."

"And where did you lose it, may I ask?"

"If I knew that, my man, I should have been after it soon enough. I must have left it somewhere. Not that it's any business of yours what I did with it."

"Pardon me, Mr. Brooklyn. You will admit that the fact that it was found in Mr. Prinsep's room calls for some explanation. If you do not know where you left it, I shall have to do my best to find out. May I ask where you went last Tuesday afternoon?"

"I don't see why I should tell you."

"I think, Mr. Brooklyn, that, unless you wish to find yourself in the dock on a criminal charge, you had far better do so."

For a moment it seemed as if Walter Brooklyn would make a personal attack on the detective, or at least turn him then and there out of the room. But he seemed to think better of it. "Ask your questions," he said.

"First, then, where did you call when you were out on Tuesday afternoon?"

"I went first to see Mr. Carter Woodman—I presume you know who he is—at his office in Lincoln's Inn. Then I took

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a taxi to the Piccadilly Theatre, where I saw that young hound, Prinsep, and one or two others."

"Who were the others?"

"An actress-girl there—a Miss Lang. She was the only one."

"Did you see them separately or together?"

"Separately."

"And then where did you go?"

"Back to Mr. Woodman's office. I told him I had lost the stick, and thought I must have left it there. He had a look, but it wasn't there. He said I must have left it in the taxi, and I supposed I had."

"When did you notice the loss?"

"On leaving the theatre."

"So you might have left the stick there, or in the taxi, or at Mr. Woodman's?"

"Yes. If you found it in Prinsep's room, I suppose he must have found it in the theatre, and taken it up to his room."

"Why didn't he give it back to you when he saw you later in the evening?"

"Saw me later in the evening! He didn't see me later in the evening."

"But you were at Liskeard House on Tuesday evening."

"Look here, young man. I don't know what you're driving at. I tell you I did not see Prinsep except in the afternoon."

"But you were at Liskeard House in the evening."

"I tell you I was not. Yes, by Jove, though, I was—in a sense. I went to the door and asked for Sir Vernon, but he was not at home."

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"When was that?"

"About ten o'clock, I suppose."

"And you did not go into the house *then?*"

"No, only into the outer hall."

"That, Mr. Brooklyn, is not the occasion to which I was referring. You came back to Liskeard House still later on Tuesday evening."

Walter Brooklyn glared at the inspector. "Young man," he said, "I will thank you not to tell me where I was. I know that for myself."

"You admit, then, that you came back to the house."

"I admit nothing of the sort. I was not in the house at all. I've told you already that I did not go there."

The inspector discharged his bombshell. "Then how did it occur that you rang up the Sanctum Club from Liskeard House at 11.30 on Tuesday evening?"

This was too much for Walter Brooklyn. "Infernal impudence," he said. "I don't know where you picked up these cock-and-bull stories. I did not ring up the Sanctum from Liskeard House, because I was not there. And now I've had enough of your questions, and you can go." And he strode to the door and held it open. "Get out," he said.

The inspector picked up his hat. "I had some further questions to ask you," he said. "Perhaps another time I shall find you in a better mood. Good evening." And he left the room as hastily as he could without compromising his dignity, not quite certain whether Walter Brooklyn would complete the performance by throwing him downstairs. Brooklyn, however, merely relieved his feelings by slamming the door.

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In the hall the inspector found the porter. "Had a pleasant interview?" asked the latter, familiar with Walter Brooklyn's ways.

"Not exactly pleasant, but decidedly illuminating," said the inspector, as he went upon his way.

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CHAPTER X

INSPECTOR BLAIKIE, when he left the Byron Club, was quite convinced that Walter Brooklyn was the murderer. Not merely one of the murderers, but the murderer of both men. The evidence against Prinsep he was more than ever inclined to discount in face of the impression which Walter Brooklyn had made upon him. Not only the man's manner, but even more his physique, had convinced the inspector of his guilt. Here at least was a man who combined great physical strength with an obviously ungovernable temper—just the combination of qualities which seemed most clearly to fit the case. After all, he had never believed much in finger-prints. They showed, no doubt, that Prinsep had actually held in his hand the weapon with which the murder was committed; but did that prove that he had done the deed? He might conceivably have taken hold of the club for some quite different purpose. The prints were not conclusive evidence—on that point he permitted himself to differ from his superior, who had seemed to think that they were. They needed explaining, certainly; but there were other possible explanations. Moreover, if Prinsep had been careless enough to leave his finger-prints all over the club, was it not curious that not a trace of them had been left on the dead man's clothing,

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though he had obviously been dragged by the collar from the statue into the little antique temple so as to be out of the way. A starched collar was about the likeliest possible place for clear impressions of fingers. But there was not the trace of a finger-mark on it. The man who dragged the body to the temple steps had certainly worn gloves.

Then a very curious point struck the inspector. All the finger-prints had been partly obliterated, as if some one had handled the club subsequently. But, in the morning he had been careful that no one should do so, and he was fairly certain that no one had. Then another significant point occurred to him. No other finger-prints had been found on the club. Then, if some one else had handled it subsequently, that some one else had worn gloves. But, in the garden that morning, not one of those present had been wearing gloves. The obliterating marks had been made before the discovery, and therefore also presumably before the crime. The inspector almost felt that he could reconstruct the scene. John Prinsep had held the club; but later, Walter Brooklyn, wearing gloves, had handled it. As usual, the evidence of the finger-prints, true as far as it went, was misleading. Only the partial obliteration of the marks had given the key to the truth. The new explanation, moreover, fitted in exactly with his observation of the absence of finger-prints on George Brooklyn's crumpled collar.

It was true, of course, the inspector reflected, that all this was only hypothesis. He could not prove absolutely that the obliterations had been made by a pair of gloved hands holding the club with murderous purpose, and still less could he prove that the gloved hands were Walter Brooklyn's. His

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conjecture was not evidence in a court of law; but it served to confirm him in his own opinion. He could now, with good hope, go in search of further evidence.

What, then, ought his next step to be? His talk with Walter Brooklyn had opened up certain fresh lines of inquiry. He must see Woodman again, and find out what had been the business on which Brooklyn had twice visited him on the Tuesday. And he had better see this Miss Lang of the Piccadilly Theatre, in case she could throw any light on the case. And he must try to trace Walter Brooklyn's stick. He felt sure that Brooklyn had told him a lie about this, and that he had really left it in Prinsep's room in the evening. But it was his business to make every inquiry, and to test Brooklyn's story by every possible means.

By this time—for it was now nine o'clock—Woodman would certainly have left his office. The inspector felt that he had done a good day's work, and could with a good conscience leave further activity for the morrow. He went home, and straight to bed, in his tiny bachelor flat in Judd Street.

When Inspector Blaikie woke the following morning he at once began to turn the case over in his mind. It was now Thursday, and the inquests had been fixed for Friday. It would be necessary that day to decide on the procedure to be followed. Ought the police to produce the evidence which they had gathered, or would it be better to make the proceedings as purely formal as possible, and to reserve all disclosures for the trial which would surely follow? The Inspector's instinct was against any premature showing of his hand; but he would have to discuss the matter with Superintendent Wilson, with whom the final decision would rest. That could

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stand over until he had seen Woodman and the unknown Miss Lang. He would arrange to see the superintendent in the afternoon.

The inspector went out and breakfasted in one of those huge "Tyger" restaurants which cater for the servantless flat-dwellers of London. Then he went to Scotland Yard, arranged to see the superintendent after lunch, and 'phoned through to Woodman arranging an eleven o'clock appointment at his office. Next he got on the 'phone to the Piccadilly Theatre, and discovered that Miss Lang was expected there at about midday. He left a message stating that he would call to see her. She lived, as he knew, at Hammersmith, and was not on the telephone. He also rang through to the sergeant on duty at Liskeard House, who reported that there were no fresh developments.

At eleven o'clock punctually, the inspector entered Carter Woodman's outer office. The old clerk, seated there at his desk, looked up at him suspiciously from a heap of papers. Rather brusquely, the inspector announced that he had come to see Woodman by appointment. The man went to tell his master, and Carter Woodman promptly appeared at the door of the inner room to bid his visitor welcome. Coming towards the inspector, he gripped him firmly by the hand. "Well, my lad, how goes it?" he said. "Have you found the scoundrels? You must come in and tell me all about it."

The inspector felt himself almost carried bodily into the inner room, and seated breathless in a chair, while Carter Woodman took up a commanding position on the hearthrug. "Quite right to come to me," he said. "You must treat me

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as if I were Sir Vernon—as his man of business I regard myself as in charge of his affairs. Now let me know exactly what you have done so far, and I'll see if I can help you. But, first, have you any fresh clue as to the identity of the murderers?"

Inspector Blaikie reflected, as Woodman was speaking, that powerful physique seemed to run in the Brooklyn family. Woodman was only a distant relative; yet he had many of the physical characteristics which the inspector had noticed in Walter Brooklyn. But there the resemblance seemed to end. Woodman's bluff and hearty manner, which seemed to have big reserves of strength and self-control behind it, was in marked contrast to Walter Brooklyn's passionate and excitable temperament. Woodman belonged to a very definite type—the successful city man who combined keen business acumen and a sharp eye for a bargain with a hail-fellow-well-met manner and an ability to make himself instantly at home in almost any society.

The inspector, engrossed with his own thoughts, said nothing in immediate reply to Woodman's question; and the latter, after a pause, repeated it, remarking cheerfully, "What, day-dreaming, are we? Won't do in a detective, you know. Not at all what we expect of you, eh?" And, after putting his hand for a moment on the inspector's shoulder, he abandoned his place of vantage before the fireplace and sat down in his desk-chair facing his visitor.

"I saw Mr. Walter Brooklyn yesterday—not, I am afraid, a very pleasant interview. He seemed to resent very much my asking him any questions—in fact he all but threw me downstairs," the detective added with a laugh.

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"What took you to see him?" asked Woodman. "I suppose it was about our seeing him outside the house."

"It had come to my knowledge that Mr. Walter Brooklyn was actually in Mr. Prinsep's room at Liskeard House at 11.30 on Tuesday night."

"Good Lord, man, you don't say so. Are you sure? Why, who in the world told you that?"

"Nobody actually saw him there; but he telephoned at that time to his club, said that he was speaking from Liskeard House, and asked if a registered parcel had arrived for him, as he wanted it sent round there at once."

"Dear me, inspector, this throws a new—and a most distressing—light on the case. Did you discover from Mr. Brooklyn what he was doing at Liskeard House?"

"No, and it was exactly on that point that I came to see what you could tell me."

"My dear chap, I'm as surprised as you are to know that he was there at all."

"I understand from Mr. Brooklyn that he had seen you earlier in the day. It might help if I knew what was the business then."

"You probably know enough about Walter Brooklyn to guess that it was about money."

"I had guessed so; but I am glad to have it definite. Can you give me rather more particulars?"

"I think I may, though, strictly speaking, the matter ought to be confidential. Mr. Walter Brooklyn had been trying for some time to get Sir Vernon to pay his debts, as he had done on several previous occasions. This time Sir Vernon handed the matter over to John Prinsep, partly because he

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was away from town, and partly because he thought he could trust Prinsep to handle the matter more successfully than if he did it himself. Prinsep thereupon saw Walter Brooklyn, and also consulted me. On my advice, he refused to make any payment without a very clear understanding that this was to be the last application. Walter Brooklyn tried all means to get the money without conditions, and in particular refused to disclose in detail what his liabilities were. Prinsep would not give a penny unless his conditions were met. On Tuesday afternoon Walter Brooklyn came down by appointment to see me, and I tried to get him to accept the conditions. He refused, and declared his intention of seeing Prinsep again. I told him he must do what he liked about that. I believe he saw Prinsep. Anyhow, later in the afternoon he came back, and made another attempt to get me to urge that the conditions should be modified. I refused of course, and he left. I have not seen him since."

"So far as you know, he had made no appointment with Prinsep for the evening?"

"I know nothing about that. He may have done. He did not tell me."

"When he came back to you the second time, did he tell you that he had lost his walking-stick, and ask if you had found it in the office after he left?"

"Yes, I believe he did. It was not here. I said he had probably left it in the taxi."

"And that is all you know about the matter?"

"Yes, of course I know something about the extent of Walter Brooklyn's liabilities. They are considerable."

"We can go into that if it becomes necessary. But can

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you tell me—would it be likely that, if Walter Brooklyn arranged a meeting with Prinsep about money, George Brooklyn would also have been present? It seems they were both there that evening?"

"I should not have expected so; but it is certainly not impossible. Prinsep might have called in George, as he was co-heir to Sir Vernon's money, to help him make it quite plain that the money would only be paid if the conditions were met. Or, of course, it may have been an accident. George Brooklyn might have been with Prinsep when Walter called. Have you any reason to believe that it was so?"

"Well, we know that Walter Brooklyn, although he denies it, was in Prinsep's room at about 11.30. We know that George Brooklyn left the house at about that time, and he must have come back at some time later to the garden, if not to the house. It seems at least likely that they met either before or after 11.30."

"Yes, that seems probable. But I am afraid I know no more than I have told you."

"Perhaps you can help me a little more. I am getting interested in this Miss Lang, who seems to turn up at every point in the story. It now appears that Walter Brooklyn went to see her at the theatre on Tuesday afternoon. He saw her and Prinsep there separately."

"I know nothing about that. I told you he went off to see Prinsep; but I have no idea what he can have been doing with Miss Lang."

"Did Walter Brooklyn know Miss Lang?"

"Quite probably. He had a large theatrical acquaintance. But I did not know he was friendly with her."

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"But you said that Mr. George Brooklyn was to have seen Miss Lang on Tuesday evening."

The lawyer nodded.

"And now," the inspector continued, "we find Walter as well as George Brooklyn mixed up with her. May not she have had something to do with the evening meeting at Liskeard House?"

"Really, inspector, that is a matter for you. I have never seen the young woman, and I know no more about her than I have already told you. You had better see her yourself."

"That is what I propose to do; but I thought you might be able to throw some light on Walter Brooklyn's dealings with her."

"None at all, unfortunately. I wish I could; for there is nothing I want more than to get this horrible business cleared up."

The inspector saw that there was nothing more to be learned from Carter Woodman at that stage. He accordingly took his leave, and went in search of Charis Lang, who, he was beginning to feel, might well hold the clue to the whole mystery. His original idea had been to see her at her home; but he had decided that it would be better to talk to her at the theatre, where the event in which she was concerned had actually taken place. Accordingly, he took a taxi to the Piccadilly Theatre, and sent up his card to Miss Lang, who had just arrived, and been given his note and message.

When he was shown into Charis Lang's room, Inspector Blaikie had his first surprise. He had been expecting, without any good reason, to be confronted with a beauty of the

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picture post card type, some little bit of fluff from the musical comedy stage. But he saw at once that Charis Lang was not at all that kind of woman. She was a girl whom no one but an idiot—and Inspector Blaikie was far from being an idiot—would think of calling pretty. Beautiful, some people would call her, but less from any regularity of feature than from an effect of carriage and expression—a dignity without aloofness, a self-possession that was neither hard nor unwomanly. The inspector did not think her beautiful—she was not of the type he admired—but he said to himself that here was obviously a woman of character. And he at once changed his mind about the right way of tackling Miss Lang. She was, he recognised, a person with whom it would pay to be quite frank.

"I understand," she began, "that you wish to ask me some questions about"—she hesitated a moment—"this terrible affair." The inspector could see that she was deeply moved.

"Yes, Miss Lang," he replied, "I have come to ask you for certain information. We have, of course, every desire to trouble you as little as possible."

"Oh," she interrupted, "I only wish I had more to tell you. By all means, ask me what you will."

"I am afraid some of my questions may seem to you rather impertinent."

"No, inspector. I understand it is your business to get at the truth. I shall answer, whatever you may ask."

"Then, first of all, will you tell me about Mr. Walter Brooklyn. I understand that he came to see you last Tuesday here. Is that so?"

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"I confess I am surprised at the question. I thought it was about Mr. George Brooklyn and Mr. Prinsep that you wished to question me. But I can answer at once. Mr. Walter Brooklyn did come to see me."

"Do you know Mr. Walter Brooklyn well?"

"No, hardly at all. Indeed, until that day I had scarcely spoken to him. I had met him a few times in large gatherings at Liskeard House and elsewhere."

"Then he is not a friend of yours?"

"By no means." The answer was so decided as to startle the inspector.

"Have you any objection," he asked, "to telling me on what business Mr. Walter Brooklyn visited you on Tuesday?"

"It is not a thing I like to speak about; but I am fully prepared to tell you. Mr. Brooklyn came to make to me a dishonourable suggestion that I should help him to extract money from Mr. Prinsep."

"In what way?"

"Mr. Prinsep had refused to give Mr. Walter Brooklyn a certain sum of money which he wanted. He came to ask me to bring pressure to bear on Mr. Prinsep to give it to him. He suggested that I had a hold over Mr. Prinsep—I suppose I must tell you what made him think that too—and that if I was to ask he would get the money."

"And on what ground did he ask you to do this?"

"He threatened that if I did not he would tell Sir Vernon about me and Mr. Prinsep. He made the most horrible insinuations."

"You were friendly with Mr. Prinsep?"

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"Two years ago John Prinsep asked me to marry him, and I accepted him. Our engagement was kept secret at his request."

"Miss Lang, I am sorry if I give you pain; but I must ask you whether you were engaged to Mr. Prinsep at the time of his death."

The answer came clearly, but in a voice totally devoid of expression. "I do not know," said Charis Lang. "The engagement had at least not been formally broken off."

"And of course you rejected Walter Brooklyn's proposal?"

"I did."

"Did you tell Mr. Prinsep about it?"

"No. It was not a matter I could bring myself to mention to him."

"You understood that Walter Brooklyn intended to carry the story to Sir Vernon?"

"Yes, and of course Sir Vernon would have been very angry. He has always wanted John to marry his ward, Miss Cowper."

"What had Walter Brooklyn to gain by telling Sir Vernon?"

"I suppose he thought that Sir Vernon would soon make John give me up, and that between them they could fix up for John and Miss Cowper to marry. Or perhaps he relied on my telling John, and thought John would let him have the money to prevent him from going to Sir Vernon."

"Yes, that seems the most probable explanation. And did you see Mr. Prinsep after your meeting with Walter Brooklyn?"

"Yes, for a few moments. He had seen Mr. Brooklyn,

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too, and was very angry. Mr. Brooklyn had used the same threat to him as he used to me."

"And how had Mr. Prinsep taken it?"

"He had refused to give Mr. Brooklyn a penny, and said he would see Sir Vernon himself."

"In order to tell him of your engagement?"

Again came the answer, painfully given, "I do not know."

"I am sorry, Miss Lang, but I have not quite done. Did you see Mr. George Brooklyn on Tuesday?"

"Yes, he came here to see me after he had left Liskeard House in the evening."

"At what time was that?"

"It was after ten o'clock—probably about a quarter past. I am off the stage for a long time then."

"Was Mr. George Brooklyn a friend of yours?"

"Yes, in a way. At least, Mrs. George Brooklyn is a very dear friend. I used to understudy her when she was Isabelle Raven. She was *the* Isabelle Raven, you know."

"Yes. Then there was nothing unusual in Mr. George Brooklyn's coming to see you here?"

"I don't think he had ever been to my room before. I had often met him at his own house or at Liskeard House."

"Did he come for some special purpose?"

"Yes, he came to see me about my engagement to Mr. Prinsep."

"Do you mind telling me more exactly what you mean?"

"Until recently, Mr. Prinsep always behaved to me as if we were engaged. Lately, his manner to me had changed. When I spoke to him about it, he laughed it off, and I tried

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to go on treating him as I had done. But about a fortnight ago I had a letter from Mr. Carter Woodman—you know him, I expect—saying he would like to discuss with me certain matters placed in his hands by Mr. Prinsep. I wrote back saying that I could not conceive that there was anything in my relations with John that called for a lawyer's interference. Then I took the letter to John, and we had a real quarrel about it. I asked him if I was to consider our engagement at an end; but he put me off, and before I could get him to answer we were interrupted. I did not see him again until Tuesday, and then only for a minute. I meant to try to clear matters up, and to tell him I could not go on like that; but he was called away, and I had no chance. Then in the evening George Brooklyn came to see me."

"Will you tell me what happened then?"

"He asked me point-blank whether I had been engaged to John. I said that I certainly had been, but that I didn't know whether I still was. I told him that I still loved John; but I asked him to let John know—he had promised to see him when he left me—that I considered our engagement definitely at an end, unless he desired to renew it."

"Miss Lang, my questions must have been very painful, and it has been very good of you to answer them so freely. I think there is only one thing more I need ask. At what time did Mr. George Brooklyn leave you?"

"A few minutes after half-past ten. I went on the stage again almost immediately afterwards."

"And you did not see Mr. George Brooklyn again?"

"No."

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"You saw no more of either Mr. Prinsep or Mr. Walter Brooklyn, I suppose?"

"Yes, as it happens, I caught sight, out of my window, of Mr. Prinsep walking in the garden behind the theatre. That must have been about a quarter past eleven."

"And that is all you saw. He was alone?"

"Yes. I saw no one else."

"Then I have only to thank you again for the way in which you have told me what you know." And with that the inspector took his leave, feeling that, as a result of his talk, he had scored another good point against Walter Brooklyn. Quite apart from the murders, the man really deserved hanging for his behaviour to Charis Lang—at least that was how Inspector Blaikie felt about it. He must get enough evidence to convince his reluctant superior, and thereafter twelve good men and true, that Walter Brooklyn was the murderer. John Prinsep, perhaps, was not such a bad riddance: certainly he had been behaving like a cad. But then, Charis Lang was in love with him, and that was enough to cover a multitude of sins. For her sake at least the murderer must be brought to justice. Moreover, George Brooklyn seemed to have been a good sort. The inspector was inclined to dismiss the idea that he had had anything to do with the killing of Prinsep, even though his talk with Prinsep after leaving Charis Lang might have afforded full provocation, if, as seemed likely, Prinsep had refused to marry her. The inspector's last thought was that it was still a tangled enough skein that he had to unravel. But some at least of the knots had been successfully untied.

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CHAPTER XI

JOAN TAKES UP THE CASE

CHARIS LANG had kept her composure during that trying interview with the inspector, and had forced herself to tell him everything she had to tell that could even indirectly bear upon the murders. She had felt that this was her duty; and in her the sense of duty was unusually strong. But the telling had cost her a terrible effort, and when the inspector went away, and there was no longer need to hold herself up bravely, her fortitude gave way. She had told things which, until then, she had not admitted even to herself; and what hurt her most was that, in telling the truth and nothing but the truth, she had been compelled to let John Prinsep's character appear in the worst light. Not, she told herself, that it mattered to him any longer; but she loved him, and it was horrible to her that she should have to drag his memory in the mud. Moreover, was he not suspected of having killed George Brooklyn, and would not her account of him have made such an act seem more probable? She did not believe that he had done so, and, as she thought over her conversation with the inspector, she felt that she had been false to his memory; and yet she knew that there was nothing else she could have done.

But why had Walter Brooklyn been so dragged into the case by the detective? Until Inspector Blaikie had come to

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see her, she had been quite without a theory of the events of Tuesday. She had been stunned by the fact of Prinsep's death, and she had hardly troubled to think who could have killed him. Now it was clear that the police believed that Walter Brooklyn had something to do with it. An odious man, by all accounts, and one who had proved himself odious beyond measure in his dealings with her. Yet not a man she would readily have suspected of murder with violence. Underhand crimes—dirty, little crimes—she said to herself, would be more in keeping with what she knew of him. And then, despite his treatment of her, she accused herself of being uncharitable. After all, there was some dignity about murder; and her feeling, biased no doubt by her personal experience, was that Walter Brooklyn was not even fit to be a murderer.

Charis felt that she could not go on to the stage that afternoon as if nothing had happened. She had forced herself to play her part—and had played it as well as ever—since the tragedy; but for that afternoon at least she must be free, and her understudy must take her place. Having been forced to tell her story to the inspector, she felt all the more need to tell it again to some one more sympathetic—to some real friend capable of understanding what she had suffered and of sharing in her sorrow. Speedily her mind was made up. She must see Isabelle, Mrs. George Brooklyn. Isabelle, too, was in trouble at least as hard as her own. Isabelle had lost her George, as she had lost John Prinsep.

Then she remembered. Some people said that John had killed George Brooklyn, and some said that George Brooklyn had killed John Prinsep. She had heard that there was evi-

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dence, though she did not know what it was. Could either of these things be true, and, if there was even a chance that either might be true, how could she go and talk about it to Isabelle?

She did not find an answer to her questions; but all the same she made up her mind to go. She was capable of conceiving the thought that the two men might have quarrelled, and that the one might have killed the other; but she was not capable of believing the thought which she could conceive. She knew that they might quarrel—that they had done so often enough; but they would not kill. And even if they had—she barely formulated the thought—what did it matter now? She and Isabelle were both desolate and in need of comfort. She would go.

So Charis, having made—to her understudy's secret delight—her arrangements at the theatre, set off to find Isabelle—for that was the name by which she still called Marian Brooklyn. Isabelle, she knew, was still at the hotel—the Cunningham—and she had not far to go. In a few minutes the two women were in each other's arms. It was not a question of who had killed their lovers; they both needed comfort, and they sought together such comfort as could be found.

By-and-by, Charis found herself telling the story of the inspector's visit. She had never before spoken openly to Mrs. George about John Prinsep; but now she told the whole story, only to find that most of it was known to Marian already. Marian told her how Carter Woodman had come to see her, and asked her to use her influence to break the entanglement between Charis and John Prinsep, and how she had indignantly refused and had threatened to go and tell John straight out that he ought to marry her. Charis did not try to defend

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Prinsep: she realised that there could be no defence for what he had done; but she told Marian that she had loved him, and that she believed he had loved her—in a way—and would certainly have married her but for his fear of Sir Vernon's opposition. She told Marian that it was quite clear from the inspector's manner that he suspected Walter Brooklyn of one, if not of both, murders, and at last she told her of Walter Brooklyn's visit to herself, and of the infamous threat he had made.

To Charis's surprise, Marian Brooklyn altogether refused to consider the possibility of Walter's guilt. She had seen him outside Liskeard House as they left on the Tuesday evening, and she agreed that he might possibly have gone there to carry out his threat of telling Sir Vernon. But she was quite convinced that he had had nothing to do with the murders, and she was very doubtful whether he would really have carried out his threat against Charis. "Walter Brooklyn," she said, "is a thoroughly bad lot. In money matters you couldn't trust him an inch. But I do not believe he would really have done a thing like that—I mean, either murdered anybody, or really told Sir Vernon about you. He might threaten, but I don't believe he'd do such a thing, when it came to the point."

Then Marian Brooklyn realised what seemed to her the most horrible thing about the situation. "Poor Joan," she said, "it will be simply terrible for her if Walter Brooklyn is really suspected. She has trouble enough with what has happened, already, and with Sir Vernon on her hands in such a state that nearly everything has to be kept from him. If her stepfather is going to be dragged into court, I don't know what she will do."

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All Charis could suggest was that it would be best that she should know nothing about it until it could no longer be kept from her; but to this Marian Brooklyn did not agree. "I think, dear, she had better know at once. Joan is not easily frightened; and I am sure she would wish to be told."

And so it was finally settled. Marian Brooklyn said that she would go to Liskeard House at once and try to see Joan. At first she suggested that Charis should come with her; but finally they agreed that she had better go alone. Charis, a good deal more at ease after her talk with her friend, went back to the theatre with every intention of appearing at the evening performance.

Marian Brooklyn found Joan at home. Indeed, since Tuesday she had not left the house, save for an occasional breath of air in the garden. With the police continually making inquiries, newspaper reporters laying constant siege to the house, and Sir Vernon so ill that the fact of George Brooklyn's death had still to be kept from him, and George's absence explained by all manner of subterfuges, Joan and Mary Woodman had been going through a terrible time, made the worse, in Joan's case at least, by the sense of helplessness in face of a great calamity. Her duties in looking after Sir Vernon did not prevent her from thinking: rather they were such as to make thought turn to brooding. Her thoughts seemed to go round and round in an endless and aimless circle; and, as the days passed, the strain was telling on her far more than on Mary Woodman, who was not blessed—or cursed—with the faculty of imagination. Mary did her duty quietly and sympathetically, and with little sign of inward disturbance. Joan did her duty, too, but she was eating out her soul in the doing of it.

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Her face, as she came into the room to greet Marian, was haggard with lack of sleep. She had not quite lost that look of composure and self-possession that was normally hers; but it was easy to see that the strain on her had been severe.

Marian did not quite know how to begin what she had to say; but Joan saved her from her embarrassment by beginning at once to speak about Sir Vernon. He had been very bad indeed; he was still very bad, but she thought he was beginning to rally. It had been terribly difficult—having to keep from him the news and prevent him from taking any part in the investigation. He had asked more than once to see the police; but the doctor said that absolute rest was indispensable, and that any further shock or excitement would almost certainly still be fatal to him. Joan told Marian that she and Mary had their hands so full that they knew little or nothing of what was going on, and had no idea what progress the police were making towards the solution of the mystery.

This gave Marian the opening for which she had been waiting. "It was about that, darling," she said, "I came to see you. I did not want the police to come asking you more questions until you were prepared."

Joan expressed her surprise. "Prepared, Marian—prepared for what do you mean?"

"Well, dear, I thought I had better tell you. The police think they have a clue."

"A clue? Do you mean they know who did it?"

"No, dear. I don't mean that they know; but there is somebody whom they suspect. Of course, it is their business to suspect people; but I thought I ought to tell you."

"Of course, it is their business to find out who did it. I

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am only glad it isn't mine—and yet I can't help wondering. I keep thinking about it, even though I try hard to put it out of my mind."

"That is only natural, dear. It is the same with me. I find myself wondering——"

Joan interupted, "And the worst of it is that one's thoughts take one no further. Mine just go round and round, I haven't the ghost of an idea who it was."

"What I came to tell you, Joan, was this. Of course, it can't be true; but tne police suspect—your stepfather."

Joan had been standing, leaning with one arm on the mantelpiece; but at Marian's words she went very white, and her body swayed. She gripped the mantelpiece to steady herself, and felt her way to a chair. For a moment she said nothing. Then, so low as to be just audible, her answer came. "Marian, tell me at once what makes you think that."

"I don't think it, my dear. But, unfortunately, the police do. That man, Inspector Blaikie, has quite convinced himself of it. I had better tell you exactly what I know."

Then Marian told Joan all about the inspector's visit to Charis Lang. Joan listened in silence, barely moving. Her colour came back slowly, and, as she realised that the police had built up a real case against her stepfather, a look of determination came into her face.

"I wonder if he knows," she said. "I must go to him at once."

Marian said to herself that Joan was bearing it wonderfully well. There was no fear that she would collapse under the shock. Indeed, she could see that the news had really done her good. During the days since the crime she had been

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suffering above all because she felt helpless and useless. The danger to her stepfather gave her a sense of work to do. It roused her and brought into play the reserves of strength in her character. Marian had so far held back the reason for Walter Brooklyn's visit to Charis Lang; but she felt that it was only fair to Joan to tell her the whole truth, however bad it might be. If she was to help Walter Brooklyn, she must certainly know the worst that could be said against him.

There was no doubt at all in Joan's mind. Badly as Walter Brooklyn had used her, and though she had refused to live any longer under his roof, she was quite certain that he was incapable of murder, above all of the murders of the two victims of Tuesday's tragedy. Even when Marian told her the purpose with which Walter Brooklyn had been to visit Charis Lang, that in no way altered her view. "He would never have told Sir Vernon," she said. "It was only too like him to threaten; but he would never have done it. I know him, and I'm sure of that."

Joan was keenly anxious to find out what evidence the police could possibly have against her stepfather; but of this Marian could tell her hardly anything. She could only suggest that probably Carter Woodman would know about it. Mrs. Woodman was still with her at the hotel; but Carter had been away the previous night, and she had not seen him. Joan said that she would try to see Carter at once, and then, when she had found out all she could, she would go to see Walter Brooklyn.

So far from being prostrated by the news, Joan was moved by it to take action at once. She telephoned through to Carter Woodman at his office, and asked him particularly to come

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and see her at Liskeard House that afternoon. Woodman tried to put her off; but when she said that, if he could not come to her, she would go at once to him, he at last agreed to come. Within an hour he was with her, and Joan plunged at once into business by asking him to tell all he knew about the police and the progress they had made.

Woodman seemed reluctant to talk; but, on being pressed, he told her most of what had passed at his first talk with the inspector, leaving out, however, anything which would tend to connect Walter Brooklyn with the crime, and thereby creating the impression that the police were totally at a loss. But Joan was not to be put off so easily. "It's no use, Carter," she said, "your trying to spare my feelings. I know that the police suspect my stepfather, and I want to know on what evidence they are trying to build up a case against him. Surely you must know something about that."

Faced with the direct question, Carter Woodman told her most of what he knew. He said that the police had found out that Walter Brooklyn had been in the house that night, and that he had actually telephoned to his club from Prinsep's room at about half-past eleven. He told her that Walter Brooklyn's walking-stick had been found in Prinsep's room, and that Walter had almost thrown the inspector downstairs when he went to question him about his movements. What surprised him, he said, was that Walter Brooklyn had not been arrested already.

At this Joan broke out indignantly, "You don't mean that you believe he did it?"

"My dear Joan, I only wish you had not asked me such a question. But what am I to think? It is clear that he was

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in the house, and somebody must have done it, after all. I'm sorry for you; but I think you are under no illusions about your stepfather's character."

"I tell you that he could never have done a thing like that. I know he's a bad man, in many ways. But he's not that sort. Surely you must understand that."

But Carter Woodman did not seem to understand it. Apologetically, but firmly, he made it quite clear to Joan that he was disposed to believe in Walter Brooklyn's guilt, or at least that he saw nothing unlikely in the supposition that he might have committed murder. Joan, who had intended to ask Woodman to go to work for the purpose of clearing her stepfather, soon saw that there was nothing to be gained by making such a request. In his present mood, at least, Carter Woodman would be far more likely to search for further evidence of Walter Brooklyn's guilt. Joan had found out from him most of what she wanted; and, seeing that there was nothing further to be gained by enlisting his help, she got rid of him as soon as she decently could.

When Woodman had gone, Joan sat down to think the matter over quietly. She was absolutely certain that her stepfather was in no way guilty of the murders; but, after what Woodman had said, it seemed only too clear that he must have been on the spot when one of them at least was committed. That meant that he knew the truth; but, for some reason or other, he had evidently not told the police what he knew. That, Joan felt, was not altogether surprising. Probably the police had somehow got him into one of his rages; and she knew that, if that were so, it was just like him to have refused to say a word. It was more than ever necessary for

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her to see him and get at the real truth of what he knew. Only if she had that to go upon could she help him; and, as Carter Woodman would do nothing, she felt that she must devote all her energies to clearing him of the suspicion. He would have to have a good lawyer of his own, of course; but Joan must see him, and compel him to bestir himself about his defence. For one thing, he was certain to be in low water; and she must at once promise to pay all the expenses of the case.

She admitted to herself that, in the light of what Charis Lang and Woodman had told her, the police seemed to have a strong case against Walter Brooklyn. Her mind went back to Woodman's words, "After all, somebody must have done it"; and she realised that, for the police "somebody" might mean Walter Brooklyn quite as readily as any one else. She, knowing him as no one besides knew him, might be sure of his innocence; but that was no reason why others should share her conviction. No, if Walter Brooklyn was to escape from the coils in which he was enmeshed, it would be because decisive evidence was forthcoming that he had not committed the murders. And that decisive evidence would have to be deliberately searched for by some one other than the police, who, intent on proving the case against Walter Brooklyn, would not be likely to seek for clues which would invalidate their own case. And, if she did not undertake this task, who would? She felt that the duty was hers.

But if, as she was sure, Walter Brooklyn had not committed murder, then who had, and what had her stepfather been doing in Liskeard House that night? It was true that, by Carter's account, he had denied his presence there; but it did not surprise Joan at all that her stepfather should have lied to the

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police. If he was determined not to tell what he knew, his only possible course was to deny that he had been present. She would have to point out to him that, as his presence in the house had been definitely established, the only possible course remaining was to tell the police everything that he knew.

But what could it be that he was holding back? If he had been present when murder was done, he must be concealing the name of the murderer. That puzzled Joan; for she did not see whom Walter Brooklyn could possibly be intent on shielding. Quixotism was as unlike him as deliberate murder. Moreover, who could the murderer have been? She searched her mind in vain for any hint of a clue. There was literally no one whom she could suspect. The whole thing appeared to her merely inexplicable.

She realised, however, that the best way—perhaps the only way—of clearing her stepfather was to bring the real murderer to light. But there might be two different murderers. Joan was inclined to regard it as quite possible that Prinsep might have killed George Brooklyn; but it was utterly inconceivable that George should have killed anybody. Far more clearly than her stepfather, he was not that kind of man. So that the best line of inquiry seemed to be to search for the murderer of John Prinsep. But, she remembered, it was in this case that the police had their strongest evidence against Walter Brooklyn. There was little or nothing, so far as she knew, to connect him with the death of George; but he had been in Prinsep's room, and there his stick had been found. Surely he must know who had killed John Prinsep. She could do nothing until she had seen him; but seeing him might well clear up the whole tragedy once and for all.

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Joan was still lying back in her chair, with closed eyes, trying to think the thing out, when Winter announced that Mr. Ellery was in the lounge, and would like to see her if she felt equal to it. She had not seen Ellery since that fatal Tuesday evening, when he had left with the other guests, announcing his intention of walking back to Chelsea. Doubtless, he had felt that to come sooner would be an intrusion; but she knew enough of his feelings to be sure that it had cost him a struggle to keep away. She was glad—very glad—he had come; for just what she wanted was some one to whom she could talk freely, some one on whose help she could rely in trying to clear her stepfather. Robert Ellery, she knew, would be ready to believe as she believed, and to do everything in his power to help her in her trouble. These thoughts flashed through her mind as she went to the lounge where he was waiting.

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