THE THINKING MACHINE ON THE CASE

JACQUES FUTRELLE

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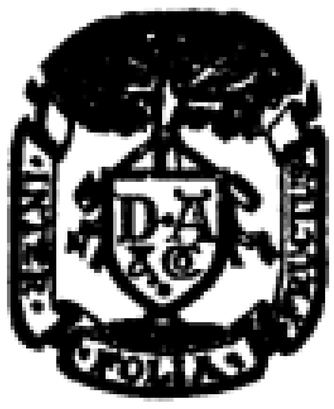
By

JACQUES FUTRELLE



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THE THINKING MACHINE ON THE CASE

CHAPTER I

"THE THINKING MACHINE"

IT was absolutely impossible. Twenty-five chess masters from the world at large, foregathered for the annual championships, unanimously declared it impossible, and unanimity on any given point is an unusual mental condition for chess masters. Not one would concede for an instant that it was within the range of human achievement. Some grew red in the face as they argued it, others smiled loftily and were silent; still others dismissed the matter in a word as wholly absurd.

A casual remark by the distinguished scientist and logician, Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, provoked the discussion. He had, in the past, aroused bitter disputes by some chance remark; in fact had been once a sort of controversial center of the sciences. It had been due to his modest announcement of a startling and unorthodox hypothesis that he had been invited to vacate the chair of Philosophy in a great university.

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Later that university had felt honored when he accepted its degree of LL. D.

For a score of years, educational and scientific institutions of the world had amused themselves by crowding degrees upon him. He had initials that stood for things he couldn't pronounce; degrees from France, England, Russia, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Spain. These were expressed recognition of the fact that his was the foremost brain in the sciences. The imprint of his crabbed personality lay heavily on half a dozen of its branches. Finally there came a time when argument was respectfully silent in the face of one of his conclusions.

The remark which had arrayed the chess masters of the world into so formidable and unanimous a dissent was made by Professor Van Dusen in the presence of three other gentlemen of note. One of these, Dr. Charles Elbert, happened to be a chess enthusiast.

"Chess is a shameless perversion of the functions of the brain," was Professor Van Dusen's declaration in his perpetually irritated voice. "It is a sheer waste of effort, greater because it is possibly the most difficult of all abstract problems. Of course logic will solve it. Logic will solve any problem—not *most* of them but *any* problem. A thorough understanding of its rules would enable anyone to defeat your greatest chess players. It would be inevitable, just as inevitable as that two and

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two make four, not *some* times but *all* the time. I don't know chess because I never do useless things, but I could take a few hours of competent instruction and defeat a man who has devoted his life to it. His mind is cramped; bound down to the logic of chess. Mine is not; mine employs logic in its widest scope."

Dr. Elbert shook his head vigorously.

"It is impossible," he asserted.

"Nothing is impossible," snapped the scientist. "The human mind can do anything. It is all we have to lift us above the brute creation. For Heaven's sake leave us that."

The aggressive tone, the uncompromising egotism brought a flush to Dr. Elbert's face. Professor Van Dusen affected many persons that way, particularly those fellow savants who, themselves men of distinction, had ideas of their own.

"Do you know the purposes of chess? Its countless combinations?" asked Dr. Elbert.

"No," was the crabbed reply. "I know nothing whatever of the game beyond the general purpose which, I understand to be, to move certain pieces in certain directions to stop an opponent from moving his King. Is that correct?"

"Yes," said Dr. Elbert slowly, "but I never heard it stated just that way before."

"Then, if that is correct, I maintain that the true

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logician can defeat the chess expert by the pure mechanical rules of logic. I'll take a few hours some time, acquaint myself with the moves of the pieces, and defeat you to convince you."

Professor Van Dusen glared savagely into the eyes of Dr. Elbert.

"Not me," said Dr. Elbert. "You say anyone—you for instance, might defeat the greatest chess player. Would you be willing to meet the greatest chess player after you 'acquaint' yourself with the game?"

"Certainly," said the scientist. "I have frequently found it necessary to make a fool of myself to convince people. I'll do it again."

This, then, was the acrimonious beginning of the discussion which aroused chess masters and brought open dissent from eminent men who had not dared for years to dispute any assertion by the distinguished Professor Van Dusen. It was arranged that at the conclusion of the championships Professor Van Dusen should meet the winner. This happened to be Tschaikowsky, the Russian, who had been champion for half a dozen years.

After this expected result of the tournament Hillsbury, a noted American master, spent a morning with Professor Van Dusen in the latter's modest apartments on Beacon Hill. He left there with a sadly puzzled face; that afternoon Professor Van Dusen met the Russian champion.

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The newspapers had said a great deal about the affair and hundreds were present to witness the game.

There was a little murmur of astonishment when Professor Van Dusen appeared. He was slight, almost child-like in body, and his thin shoulders seemed to droop beneath the weight of his enormous head. He wore a number eight hat. His brow rose straight and dome-like and a heavy shock of long, yellow hair gave him almost a grotesque appearance. The eyes were narrow slits of blue squinting eternally through thick spectacles; the face was small, clean shaven, drawn and white with the pallor of the student. His lips made a perfectly straight line. His hands were remarkable for their whiteness, their flexibility, and for the length of the slender fingers. One glance showed that physical development had never entered into the schedule of the scientist's fifty years of life.

The Russian smiled as he sat down at the chess table. He felt that he was humoring a crank. The other masters were grouped near by, curiously expectant. Professor Van Dusen began the game, opening with a Queen's gambit. At his fifth move, made without the slightest hesitation, the smile left the Russian's face. At the tenth, the masters grew tensely eager. The Russian champion was playing for honor now. Professor Van Dusen's fourteenth move was King's castle to Queen's four.

"Check," he announced.

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After a long study of the board the Russian protected his King with a Knight. Professor Van Dusen noted the play then leaned back in his chair with finger tips pressed together. His eyes left the board and dreamily studied the ceiling. For at least ten minutes there was no sound, no movement, then:

"Mate in fifteen moves," he said quietly.

There was a quick gasp of astonishment. It took the practiced eyes of the masters several minutes to verify the announcement. But the Russian champion saw and leaned back in his chair a little white and dazed. He was not astonished; he was helplessly floundering in a maze of incomprehensible things. Suddenly he arose and grasped the slender hand of his conqueror.

"You have never played chess before?" he asked.

"Never."

"*Mon Dieu!* You are not a man; you are a brain—a machine—a thinking machine."

"It's a child's game," said the scientist abruptly. There was no note of exultation in his voice; it was still the irritable, impersonal tone which was habitual.

This, then, was Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, Ph. D., LL. D., F. R. S., M. D., etc., etc. This is how he came to be known to the world at large as The Thinking Machine. The Russian's phrase had been applied to the scientist as a title by a newspaper reporter, Hutchinson Hatch. It had stuck.

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CHAPTER II

THE MOTOR BOAT

CAPTAIN Hank Barber, master mariner, gripped the bow-rail of the Liddy Ann and peered off through the semi-fog of the early morning at a dark streak slashing along through the gray-green waters. It was a motor boat of long, graceful lines; and a single figure, that of a man, sat upright at her helm staring uncompromisingly ahead. She nosed through a roller, staggered a little, righted herself and sped on as a sheet of spray swept over her. The helmsman sat motionless, heedless of the stinging splash of wind-driven water in his face.

"She sure is a-goin' some," remarked Captain Hank, reflectively. "By Ginger! If she keeps it up into Boston Harbor she won't stop this side o' the Public Gardens."

Captain Hank watched the boat curiously until she was swallowed up, lost in the mist, then turned to his own affairs. He was a couple of miles out of Boston Harbor, going in; it was six o'clock of a gray morning. A few minutes after the disappearance of the motor boat Captain Hank's attention was attracted by the hoarse shriek of a whistle two hundred yards away. He dimly

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traced through the mist the gigantic lines of a great vessel—it seemed to be a ship of war.

It was only a few minutes after Captain Hank lost sight of the motor boat that she was again sighted, this time as she flashed into Boston Harbor at full speed. She fled past, almost under the prow of a pilot boat, going out, and was hailed. At the mess table later the pilot's man on watch made a remark about her.

"Goin'! Well, wasn't she though! Never saw one thing pass so close to another in my life without scrubbin' the paint offen it. She was so close up I could spit in her, and when I spoke the feller didn't even look up—just kept a-goin'. I told *him* a few things that was good for his soul."

Inside Boston Harbor the motor boat performed a miracle. Pursuing a course which was singularly erratic and at a speed more than dangerous she reeled on through the surge of the sea regardless alike of fog, the proximity of other vessels and the heavy wash from larger craft. Here she narrowly missed a tug; there she skimmed by a slow-moving tramp and a warning shout was raised; a fisherman swore at her as only a fisherman can. And finally when she passed into a clear space, seemingly headed for a dock at top speed, she was the most unanimously damned craft that ever came into Boston Harbor.

"Guess that's a through boat," remarked an aged salt, facetiously as he gazed at her from a dock. "If

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that durned fool don't take some o' the speed offen her she'll go through all right—wharf an' all."

Still the man in the boat made no motion; the whizz of her motor, plainly heard in a sudden silence, was undiminished. Suddenly the tumult of warning was renewed. Only a chance would prevent a smash. Then Big John Dawson appeared on the string piece of the dock. Big John had a voice that was noted from Newfoundland to Norfolk for its depth and width, and possessed objurgatory powers which were at once the awe and admiration of the fishing fleet.

"You ijit!" he bellowed at the impassive helmsman. "Shut off that power an' throw yer hellum."

There was no response; the boat came on directly toward the dock where Big John and his fellows were gathered. The fishermen and loungers saw that a crash was coming and scattered from the string piece.

"The *durned* fool," said Big John, resignedly.

Then came the crash, the rending of timbers, and silence save for the grinding whir of the motor. Big John ran to the end of the wharf and peered down. The speed of the motor had driven the boat half way upon a float which careened perilously. The man had been thrown forward and lay huddled up face downward and motionless on the float. The dirty water lapped at him greedily.

Big John was the first man on the float. He crept

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cautiously to the huddled figure and turned it face upward. He gazed for an instant into wide staring eyes then turned to the curious ones peering down from the dock.

"No wonder he didn't stop," he said in an awed tone. "The durned fool is dead."

Willing hands gave aid and after a minute the lifeless figure lay on the dock. It was that of a man in uniform —the uniform of a foreign navy. He was apparently forty-five years old, large and powerful of frame with the sun-browned face of a seaman. The jet black of mustache and goatee was startling against the dead color of the face. The hair was tinged with gray; and on the back of the left hand was a single letter—"D"—tattooed in blue.

"He's French," said Big John authoritatively, "an' that's the uniform of a Cap'n in the French Navy." He looked puzzled a moment as he stared at the figure. "An' they ain't been a French man-o'-war in Boston Harbor for six months."

After awhile the police came and with them Detective Mallory, the big man of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation; and finally Dr. Clough, Medical Examiner. While the detective questioned the fishermen and those who had witnessed the crash Dr. Clough examined the body.

"An autopsy will be necessary," he announced as he arose.

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"How long has he been dead?" asked the detective.

"Eight or ten hours, I should say. The cause of death doesn't appear. There is no shot or knife wound so far as I can see."

Detective Mallory closely examined the dead man's clothing. There was no name or tailor mark; the linen was new; the name of the maker of the shoes had been ripped out with a knife. There was nothing in the pockets, not a piece of paper or even a vagrant coin.

Then Detective Mallory turned his attention to the boat. Both hull and motor were of French manufacture. Long, deep scratches on each side showed how the name had been removed. Inside the boat the detective saw something white and picked it up. It was a handkerchief—a woman's handkerchief, with the initials "E. M. B." in a corner.

"Ah, a woman's in it!" he soliloquized.

Then the body was removed and carefully secluded from the prying eyes of the press. Thus no picture of the dead man appeared. Hutchinson Hatch, reporter, and others asked many questions. Detective Mallory hinted vaguely at international questions—the dead man was a French officer, he said, and there might be something back of it.

"I can't tell you all of it," he said wisely, "but my theory is complete. It is murder. The victim was captain of a French man-of-war. His body was placed

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in a motor boat, possibly a part of the fittings of the war ship and the boat set adrift. I can say no more."

"Your theory is complete then," Hatch remarked casually, "except the name of the man, the manner of death, the motive, the name of his ship, the presence of the handkerchief and the precise reason why the body should be disposed of in this fashion instead of being cast into the sea?"

The detective snorted. Hatch went away to make some inquiries on his own account. Within half a dozen hours he had satisfied himself by telegraph that no French war craft had been within five hundred miles of Boston for six months. Thus the mystery grew deeper; a thousand questions to which there seemed no answer arose.

At this point, the day following the events related, the problem of the motor boat came to the attention of Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, The Thinking Machine. The scientist listened closely but petulantly to the story Hatch told.

"Has there been an autopsy yet?" he asked at last.

"It is set for eleven o'clock today," replied the reporter. "It is now after ten."

"I shall attend it," said the scientist.

Medical Examiner Clough welcomed the eminent Professor Van Dusen's proffer of assistance in his capacity of M. D., while Hatch and other reporters impa-

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tiently cooled their toes on the curb. In two hours the autopsy had been completed. The Thinking Machine amused himself by studying the insignia on the dead man's uniform, leaving it to Dr. Clough to make a starling statement to the press. The man had not been murdered; he had died of heart failure. There was no poison in the stomach, nor was there a knife or pistol wound.

Then the inquisitive press poured in a flood of questions. Who had scratched off the name of the boat? Dr. Clough didn't know. Why had it been scratched off? Still he didn't know. How did it happen that the name of the maker of the shoes had been ripped out? He shrugged his shoulders. What did the handkerchief have to do with it? Really he couldn't conjecture. Was there any inkling of the dead man's identity? Not so far as he knew. Any scar on the body which might lead to identification? No.

Hatch made a few mental comments on officials in general and skilfully steered The Thinking Machine away from the other reporters.

"Did that man die of heart failure?" he asked, flatly.

"He did not," was the curt reply. "It was poison."

"But the Medical Examiner specifically stated that there was no poison in the stomach," persisted the reporter.

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The scientist did not reply. Hatch struggled with and suppressed a desire to ask more questions. On reaching home the scientist's first act was to consult an encyclopedia. After several minutes he turned to the reporter with an inscrutable face.

"Of course the idea of a natural death in this case is absurd," he said, shortly. "Every fact is against it. Now, Mr. Hatch, please get for me all the local and New York newspapers of the day the body was found—not the day after. Send or bring them to me, then come again at five this afternoon."

"But—but—" Hatch blurted.

"I can say nothing until I know all the facts," interrupted The Thinking Machine.

Hatch personally delivered the specified newspapers into the hands of The Thinking Machine—this man who never read newspapers—and went away. It was an afternoon of agony; an agony of impatience. Promptly at five o'clock he was ushered into Professor Van Dusen's laboratory. He sat half smothered in newspapers, and popped up out of the heap aggressively.

"It was murder, Mr. Hatch," he exclaimed, suddenly. "Murder by an extraordinary method."

"Who—who is the man? How was he killed?" asked Hatch.

"His name is—" the scientist began, then paused. "I presume your office has the book 'Who's Who In

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America?' Please 'phone and ask them to give you the record of Langham Dudley."

"Is he the dead man?" Hatch demanded quickly.

"I don't know," was the reply.

Hatch went to the telephone. Ten minutes later he returned to find The Thinking Machine dressed to go out.

"Langham Dudley is a ship owner, fifty-one years old," the reporter read from notes he had taken. "He was once a sailor before the mast and later became a ship owner in a small way. He was successful in his small undertakings and for fifteen years has been a millionaire. He has a certain social position, partly through his wife whom he married a year and a half ago. She was Edith Marston Belding, a daughter of the famous Belding family. He has an estate on the North Shore."

"Very good," commented the scientist. "Now we will find out something about how this man was killed."

At North Station they took train for a small place on the North Shore, thirty-five miles from Boston. There The Thinking Machine made some inquiries and finally they entered a lumbersome carry-all. After a drive of half an hour through the dark they saw the lights of what seemed to be a pretentious country place. Somewhere off to the right Hatch heard the roar of the restless ocean.

"Wait for us," commanded The Thinking Machine as the carry-all stopped.

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CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

THE Thinking Machine ascended the steps, followed by Hatch, and rang. After a minute or so the door was opened and the light flooded out. Standing before them was a Japanese—a man of indeterminate age with the graven face of his race.

"Is Mr. Dudley in?" asked The Thinking Machine.

"He has not that pleasure," replied the Japanese, and Hatch smiled at the queerly turned phrase.

"Mrs. Dudley?" asked the scientist.

"Mrs. Dudley is attiring herself in clothing," replied the Japanese. "If you will be pleased to enter."

The Thinking Machine handed him a card and was shown into a reception room. The Japanese placed chairs for them with courteous precision and disappeared. After a short pause there was a rustle of silken skirts on the stairs, and a woman—Mrs. Dudley—entered. She was not pretty; she was stunning rather, tall, of superb figure and crowned with a glory of black hair.

"Mr. Van Dusen?" she asked as she glanced at the card.

The Thinking Machine bowed low, albeit awkwardly. Mrs. Dudley sank down on a couch and the

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two men resumed their seats. There was a little pause; Mrs. Dudley broke the silence at last.

"Well, Mr. Van Dusen, if you——" she began.

"You have not seen a newspaper for several days?" asked The Thinking Machine, abruptly.

"No," she replied, wonderingly, almost smiling. "Why?"

"Can you tell me just where your husband is?"

The Thinking Machine squinted at her in that aggressive way which was habitual. A quick flush crept into her face; and grew deeper at the sharp scrutiny. Inquiry lay in her eyes.

"I don't know," she replied at last. "In Boston, I presume."

"You haven't seen him since the night of the ball?"

"No. I think it was half past one o'clock that night."

"Is his motor boat here?"

"Really, I don't know. I presume it is. May I ask the purpose of this questioning?"

The Thinking Machine squinted hard at her for half a minute. Hatch was uncomfortable, half resentful even, at the agitation of the woman and the sharp, cold tone of his companion.

"On the night of the ball," the scientist went on, passing the question, "Mr. Dudley cut his left arm just above the wrist. It was only a slight wound. A piece

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of court plaster was put on it. Do you know if he put it on himself? If not, who did?"

"I put it on," replied Mrs. Dudley, unhesitatingly, wonderingly.

"And whose court plaster was it?"

"Mine—some I had in my dressing room. Why?"

The scientist arose and paced across the floor, glancing once out the hall door. Mrs. Dudley looked at Hatch inquiringly and was about to speak when The Thinking Machine stopped beside her and placed his slim fingers on her wrist. She did not resent the action; was only curious if one might judge from her eyes.

"Are you prepared for a shock?" the scientist asked.

"What is it?" she demanded in sudden terror. "This suspense——"

"Your husband is dead—murdered—poisoned!" said the scientist with sudden brutality. His fingers still lay on her pulse. "The court plaster which you put on his arm and which came from your room was covered with a virulent poison which was instantly transfused into his blood."

Mrs. Dudley did not start or scream. Instead she stared up at The Thinking Machine a moment, her face became pallid, a little shiver passed over her. Then she fell back on the couch in a dead faint.

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"Good!" remarked The Thinking Machine complacently. And then as Hatch started up suddenly: "Shut that door," he commanded.

The reporter did so. When he turned back his companion was leaning over the unconscious woman. After a moment he left her and went to a window where he stood looking out. As Hatch watched he saw the color coming back into Mrs. Dudley's face. At last she opened her eyes.

"Don't get hysterical," The Thinking Machine directed calmly. "I know you had nothing whatever to do with your husband's death. I want only a little assistance to find out who killed him."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Mrs. Dudley. "Dead! Dead!"

Suddenly tears leapt from her eyes and for several minutes the two men respected her grief. When at last she raised her face her eyes were red, but there was a rigid expression about the mouth.

"If I can be of any service—" she began.

"Is this the boat house I see from this window?" asked The Thinking Machine. "That long, low building with the light over the door?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Dudley.

"You say you don't know if the motor boat is there now?"

"No, I don't."

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"Will you ask your Japanese servant, and if he doesn't know let him go see, please?"

Mrs. Dudley arose and touched an electric button. After a moment the Japanese appeared at the door.

"Osaka, do you know if Mr. Dudley's motor boat is in the boat house?" she asked.

"No, honorable lady."

"Will you go yourself and see?"

Osaka bowed low and left the room, closing the door gently behind him. The Thinking Machine again crossed to the window and sat down staring out into the night. Mrs. Dudley asked questions, scores of them, and he answered them in order until she knew the details of the finding of her husband's body—that is, the details the public knew. She was interrupted by the reappearance of Osaka.

"I do not find the motor boat in the house, honorable lady."

"That is all," said the scientist.

Again Osaka bowed and retired.

"Now, Mrs. Dudley," resumed The Thinking Machine almost gently, "we know your husband wore a French naval costume at the masked ball. May I ask what you wore?"

"It was a Queen Elizabeth costume," replied Mrs. Dudley, "very heavy with a long train."

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"And if you could give me a photograph of Mr. Dudley?"

Mrs. Dudley left the room an instant and returned with a cabinet photograph. Hatch and the scientist looked at it together; it was unmistakably the man in the motor boat.

"You can do nothing yourself," said The Thinking Machine at last, and he moved as if to go. "Within a few hours we will have the guilty person. You may rest assured that your name will be in no way brought into the matter unpleasantly."

Hatch glanced at his companion; he thought he detected a sinister note in the soothing voice, but the face expressed nothing. Mrs. Dudley ushered them into the hall; Osaka stood at the front door. They passed out and the door closed behind them.

Hatch started down the steps but The Thinking Machine stopped at the door and tramped up and down. The reporter turned back in astonishment. In the dim reflected light he saw the scientist's finger raised, enjoining silence, then saw him lean forward suddenly with his ear pressed to the door. After a little he rapped gently. The door was opened by Osaka who obeyed a beckoning motion of the scientist's hand and came out. Silently he was led off the veranda into the yard; he appeared in no way surprised.

"Your master, Mr. Dudley, has been murdered,"

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declared The Thinking Machine quietly, to Osaka. "We know that Mrs. Dudley killed him," he went on as Hatch stared, "but I have told her she is not suspected. We are not officers and cannot arrest her. Can you go with us to Boston, without the knowledge of anyone here and tell what you know of the quarrel between husband and wife to the police?"

Osaka looked placidly into the eager face.

"I had the honor to believe that the circumstances would not be recognized," he said finally. "Since you know, I will go."

"We will drive down a little way and wait for you."

The Japanese disappeared into the house again. Hatch was too astounded to speak, but followed The Thinking Machine into the carry-all. It drove away a hundred yards and stopped. After a few minutes an impalpable shadow came toward them through the night. The scientist peered out as it came up.

"Osaka?" he asked softly.

"Yes."

An hour later the three men were on a train, Boston bound. Once comfortably settled the scientist turned to the Japanese.

"Now if you will please tell me just what happened the night of the ball?" he asked, "and the incidents leading up to the disagreement between Mr. and Mrs. Dudley?"

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"He drank elaborately," Osaka explained reluctantly, in his quaint English, "and when drinking he was brutal to the honorable lady. Twice with my own eyes I saw him strike her—once in Japan where I entered his service while they were on a wedding journey, and once here. On the night of the ball he was immeasurably intoxicated, and when he danced he fell down to the floor. The honorable lady was chagrined and angry—she had been angry before. There was some quarrel which I am not comprehensive of. They had been widely divergent for several months. It was, of course, not prominent in the presence of others."

"And the cut on his arm where the court plaster was applied?" asked the scientist. "Just how did he get that?"

"It was when he fell down," continued the Japanese. "He reached to embrace a carved chair and the carved wood cut his arm. I assisted him to his feet and the honorable lady sent me to her room to get court plaster. I acquired it from her dressing table and she placed it on the cut."

"That makes the evidence against her absolutely conclusive," remarked The Thinking Machine, as if finally. There was a little pause, and then: "Do you happen to know just how Mrs. Dudley placed the body in the boat?"

"I have not that honor," said Osaka. "Indeed

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I am not comprehensive of anything that happened after the court plaster was put on except that Mr. Dudley was affected some way and went out of the house. Mrs. Dudley, too, was not in the ball room for ten minutes or so afterwards."

Hutchinson Hatch stared frankly into the face of The Thinking Machine; there was nothing to be read there. Still deeply thoughtful Hatch heard the brakeman bawl "Boston" and mechanically followed the scientist and Osaka out of the station into a cab. They were driven immediately to Police Headquarters. Detective Mallory was just about to go home when they entered his office.

"It may enlighten you, Mr. Mallory," announced the scientist coldly, "to know that the man in the motor boat was not a French naval officer who died of natural causes—he was Langham Dudley, a millionaire ship owner. He was murdered. It just happens that I know the person who did it."

The detective arose in astonishment and stared at the slight figure before him inquiringly; he knew the man too well to dispute any assertion he might make.

"Who is the murderer?" he asked.

The Thinking Machine closed the door and the spring lock clicked.

"That man there," he remarked calmly, turning on Osaka.

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For one brief instant there was a pause and silence; then the detective advanced upon the Japanese with hand outstretched. The agile Osaka leapt suddenly, as a snake strikes; there was a quick, fierce struggle and Detective Mallory sprawled on the floor. There had been just a twist of the wrist—a trick of jiu jitsu—and Osaka had flung himself at the locked door. As he fumbled there Hatch, deliberately and without compunction, raised a chair and brought it down on his head. Osaka sank down without a sound.

It was an hour before they brought him around again. Meanwhile the detective had patted and petted half a dozen suddenly acquired bruises, and had then searched Osaka. He found nothing to interest him save a small bottle. He uncorked it and started to smell it when The Thinking Machine snatched it away.

"You fool, that'll kill you!" he exclaimed.

* * * * * * *

Osaka sat, lashed hand and foot to a chair, in Detective Mallory's office—so placed by the detective for safe keeping. His face was no longer expressionless; there were fear and treachery and cunning there. So he listened, perforce, to the statement of the case by The Thinking Machine who leaned back in his chair, squinting steadily upward and with his long, slender fingers pressed together.

"Two and two make four, not *some* times but *all*

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the time," he began at last as if disputing some previous assertion. "As the figure two, wholly disconnected from any other, gives small indication of a result, so is an isolated fact of little consequence. Yet that fact added to another, and the resulting fact added to a third, and so on, will give a final result. That result, if every fact is considered, *must* be correct. Thus any problem may be solved by logic; logic is inevitable.

"In this case the facts, considered singly, might have been compatible with either a natural death, suicide or murder—considered together they proved murder. The climax of this proof was the removal of the maker's name from the dead man's shoes, and a fact strongly contributary was the attempt to destroy the identity of the boat. A subtle mind lay back of it all."

"I so regarded it," said Detective Mallory. "I was confident of murder until the Medical Examiner—"

"We prove a murder," The Thinking Machine went on serenely. "The method? I was with Dr. Clough at the autopsy. There was no shot, or knife wound, no poison in the stomach. Knowing there was murder I sought further. Then I found the method in a slight, jagged wound on the left arm. It had been covered with court plaster. The heart showed constriction without apparent cause, and while Dr. Clough examined it I took off this court plaster. Its odor, an unusual

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one, told me that poison had been transfused into the blood through the wound. So two and two had made four.

"Then—what poison? A knowledge of botany aided me. I recognized faintly the trace of an odor of an herb which is not only indigenous to, but grows exclusively in Japan. Thus a Japanese poison. Analysis later in my laboratory proved it was a Japanese poison, virulent, and necessarily slow to act unless it is placed directly in an artery. The poison on the court plaster and that you took from Osaka is identical."

The scientist uncorked the bottle and permitted a single drop of a green liquid to fall on his handkerchief. He allowed a minute or more for evaporation then handed it to Detective Mallory who sniffed at it from a respectful distance. Then The Thinking Machine produced the bit of court plaster he had taken from the dead man's arm, and again the detective sniffed.

"The same," the scientist resumed as he touched a lighted match to the handkerchief and watched it crumble to ashes, "and so powerful that in its pure state mere inhalation is fatal. I permitted Dr. Clough to make public his opinion—heart failure—after the autopsy for obvious reasons. It would reassure the murderer for instance if he saw it printed, and besides Dudley did die from heart failure; the poison caused it.

"Next came identification. Mr. Hatch learned that

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no French war ship had been within hundreds of miles of Boston for months. The one seen by Captain Barber might have been one of our own. This man was supposed to be a French naval officer, and had been dead less than eight hours. Obviously he did not come from a ship of his own country. Then from where?

"I know nothing of uniforms, yet I examined the insignia on the arms and shoulders closely after which I consulted my encyclopedia. I learned that while the uniform was more French than anything else it was really the uniform of *no country*, because it was not correct. The insignia were mixed.

"Then what? There were several possibilities, among them a fancy dress ball was probable. Absolute accuracy would not be essential there. Where had there been a fancy dress ball? I trusted to the newspapers to tell me that. They did. A short dispatch from a place on the North Shore stated that on the night before the man was found dead there had been a fancy dress ball at the Langham Dudley estate.

"Now it is as necessary to remember *every* fact in solving a problem as it is to consider every figure in arithmetic. Dudley! Here was the "D" tattooed on the dead man's hand. 'Who's Who' showed that Langham Dudley married Edith Marston Belding. Here was the 'E. M. B.' on the handkerchief in the boat. Langham Dudley was a ship owner, had been a sailor,

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was a millionaire. Possibly this was his own boat built in France."

Detective Mallory was staring into the eyes of The Thinking Machine in frank admiration; Osaka to whom the narrative had thus far been impersonal, gazed, gazed as if fascinated. Hutchinson Hatch, reporter, was drinking in every word greedily.

"We went to the Dudley place," the scientist resumed after a moment. "This Japanese opened the door. Japanese poison! Two and two were still making four. But I was first interested in Mrs. Dudley. She showed no agitation and told me frankly that she placed the court plaster on her husband's arm, and that it came from her room. There was instantly a doubt as to her connection with the murder; her immediate frankness aroused it.

"Finally, with my hand on her pulse—which was normal—I told her as brutally as I could that her husband had been murdered. Her pulse jumped frightfully and as I told her the cause of death it wavered, weakened and she fainted. Now if she had known her husband were dead—even if she had killed him—a mere statement of his death would not have caused that pulse. Further I doubt if she could have disposed of her husband's body in the motor boat. He was a large man and the manner of her dress even, was against this. Therefore she was innocent.

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"And then? The Japanese, Osaka, here. I could see the door of the boat house from the room where we were. Mrs. Dudley asked Osaka if Mr. Dudley's boat were in the house. He said he didn't know. Then she sent him to see. He returned and said the boat was not there, *yet he had not gone to the boat house at all.* Ergo, he knew the boat was not there. He may have learned it from another servant, still it was a point against him."

Again the scientist paused and squinted at the Japanese. For a moment Osaka withstood the gaze, then his beady eyes shifted and he moved uncomfortably.

"I tricked Osaka into coming here by a ludicrously simple expedient," The Thinking Machine went on steadily. "On the train I asked if he knew just how Mrs. Dudley got the body of her husband into the boat. Remember at this point he was not supposed to know that the body had been in a boat at all. He said he didn't know and by that very answer admitted that he knew the body had been placed in the boat. He knew because he put it there himself. He didn't merely throw it in the water because he had sense enough to know if the tide didn't take it out it would rise, and possibly be found.

"After the slight injury Mr. Dudley evidently wandered out toward the boat house. The poison was working, and perhaps he fell. Then this man removed

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all identifying marks, even to the name in the shoes, put the body in the boat and turned on full power. He had a right to assume that the boat would be lost, or that the dead man would be thrown out. Wind and tide and a loose rudder brought it into Boston Harbor. I do not attempt to account for the presence of Mrs. Dudley's handkerchief in the boat. It might have gotten there in one of a hundred ways."

"How did you know husband and wife had quarrelled?" asked Hatch.

"Surmise to account for her not knowing where he was," replied The Thinking Machine. "If they had had a violent disagreement it was possible that he would have gone away without telling her, and she would not have been particularly worried, at least up to the time we saw her. As it was she presumed he was in Boston; perhaps Osaka here gave her that impression?"

The Thinking Machine turned and stared at the Japanese curiously.

"Is that correct?" he asked.

Osaka did not answer.

"And the motive?" asked Detective Mallory, at last.

"Will you tell us just why you killed Mr. Dudley?" asked The Thinking Machine of the Japanese.

"I will not," exclaimed Osaka, suddenly. It was the first time he had spoken.

"It probably had to do with a girl in Japan," ex-

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plained The Thinking Machine, easily. "The murder had been a long cherished project, such a one as revenge through love would have inspired."

It was a day or so later that Hutchinson Hatch called to inform The Thinking Machine that Osaka had confessed and had given the motive for the murder. It was not a nice story.

"One of the most astonishing things to me," Hatch added, "is the complete case of circumstantial evidence against Mrs. Dudley, beginning with the quarrel and leading to the application of the poison with her own hands. I believe she would have been convicted on the actual circumstantial evidence had you not shown conclusively that Osaka did it."

"Circumstantial fiddlesticks!" snapped The Thinking Machine. "I wouldn't convict a yellow dog of stealing jam on circumstantial evidence alone, even if he had jam all over his nose." He squinted truculently at Hatch for a moment. "In the first place well behaved dogs don't eat jam," he added more mildly.

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CHAPTER IV

DRESSING ROOM "A"

THAT strange, seemingly inexplicable chain of circumstances which had to do with the mysterious disappearance of the famous actress, Irene Wallack, from her dressing room in a Springfield theater during a performance, while the echo of tumultuous appreciation still rang in her ears, was one of the most fascinating problems which was not purely scientific that The Thinking Machine was ever asked to solve. The scientist's aid was enlisted in this singular mystery by Hutchinson Hatch, reporter.

"There is something far beyond the ordinary in this affair," Hatch explained to the scientist. "A woman has disappeared, evaporated into thin air in the hearing, almost in sight, of her friends. The police can make nothing of it. It is a problem for a greater mind than theirs."

Professor Van Dusen waved the newspaper man to a seat and himself sank back into a great cushioned chair in which his diminutive figure seemed even more child-like than it really was.

"Tell me the story," he commanded petulantly. "All of it."

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The enormous yellow head rested against the chair back, the blue eyes squinted steadily upward, the slender fingers were pressed tip to tip. The Thinking Machine was in a receptive mood.

"Miss Wallack is thirty years old and beautiful," the reporter began. "As an actress she has won recognition not only in this country but in England. You may have read something of her in the daily papers, and if——"

"I never read the papers unless I am compelled to," the other interrupted curtly. "Go on."

"She is unmarried, and so far as anyone knows, had no immediate intention of changing her condition," Hatch resumed, staring curiously at the thin face of the scientist. "I presume she had admirers—all beautiful women of the stage have—but she is one whose life has been perfectly clean, whose record is an open book. I tell you this because it might have a bearing on your conclusion as to a possible reason for her disappearance.

"Now the actual circumstances of that disappearance. Miss Wallack has been playing a Shakespearean repertoire. Last week she was in Springfield. On Saturday night, which concluded her engagement there, she appeared as Rosalind in 'As You Like It.' The house was crowded. She played the first two acts amid great enthusiasm, and this despite the fact that she was suffering intensely from headache to which she was subject

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at times. After the second act she returned to her dressing room and just before the curtain went up for the third the stage manager called her. She replied that she would be out immediately. There seems no possible shadow of a doubt but that it was her voice.

"Rosalind does not appear in the third act until the curtain has been up for six minutes. When Miss Wallack's cue came she did not answer it. The stage manager rushed to her door and again called her. There was no answer. Then, fearing that she might have fainted, he went in. She was not there. A hurried search was made without result, and the stage manager, finally, was compelled to announce to the audience that the sudden illness of the star would cause a slight delay; that he hoped within ten or fifteen minutes she would be able to resume her part.

"The curtain was lowered and the search resumed. Every nook and corner back of the footlights was gone over. The stage doorkeeper, William Meegan, had seen no one go out. He and a policeman had been standing at the stage door talking for at least twenty minutes. It is, therefore, conclusive that Miss Wallack did not leave the theater by the stage door. The only other way it was possible to leave the stage was over the footlights. Of course she didn't go that way. Yet no trace of her has been found. Where is she?"

"The windows?" asked The Thinking Machine.

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"The stage is below the street level," Hatch explained. "The window of her dressing room, Room A, is small and barred with iron. It opens into an air shaft that goes straight up for ten feet, and that is covered with an iron grating. The other windows on the stage are not only inaccessible but are also barred with iron. She could not have approached either of these windows without being seen by other members of the company or the stage hands."

"Under the stage?" suggested the scientist.

"Nothing," the reporter went on. "It is a large cemented basement which was vacant. It was searched because there was, of course, a chance that Miss Wallack might have become temporarily unbalanced and wandered down there. There was even a search made of the 'flies'—that is the galleries over the stage where the men who work the drop-curtains are stationed."

There was silence for a long time. The Thinking Machine twiddled his fingers and continued to stare upward. He had not looked at the reporter. He broke the silence after a time.

"How was Miss Wallack dressed at the time of her disappearance?"

"In doublet and hose—that is, tights," the newspaper man responded. "She wears that costume from the second act until practically the end of the play."

"Was all her street clothing in her room?"

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"Yes, everything, spread across an unopened trunk of costumes. It was all as if she had left the room to answer her cue—all in order even to an open box of candy on her table."

"No sign of a struggle?"

"No."

"Or trace of blood?"

"Nothing."

"Her maid? Did she have one?"

"Oh, yes. I neglected to tell you that the maid, Gertrude Manning, had gone home immediately after the first act. She grew suddenly ill and was excused."

The Thinking Machine turned his squint eyes on the reporter for the first time.

"Ill?" he repeated. "What was the matter?"

"That I can't say," replied the reporter.

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know. Everyone forgot all about her in the excitement about Miss Wallack."

"What kind of candy was it?"

"I'm afraid I don't know that either."

"Where was it bought?"

The reporter shrugged his shoulders; that was something else he didn't know. The Thinking Machine shot out the questions aggressively, staring meanwhile steadily at Hatch who squirmed uncomfortably.

"Where is the candy now?" demanded the scientist.

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Again Hatch shrugged his shoulders.

"How much did Miss Wallack weigh?"

The reporter was willing to guess at this. He had seen her half a dozen times.

"Between a hundred and thirty and a hundred and forty pounds," he ventured.

"Does there happen to be a hypnotist connected with the company?"

"I don't know," Hatch replied.

The Thinking Machine waved his slender hands impatiently; he was annoyed.

"It is perfectly absurd, Mr. Hatch," he expostulated, "to come to me with only a few facts and ask advice. If you had all the facts I might be able to do something, but this——"

The newspaper man was nettled. In his own profession he was accredited a man of discernment and acumen. He resented the tone, the manner, even the seemingly trivial questions which the other asked.

"I don't see," he began, "that the candy even if it had been poisoned as I imagine you think possible, or a hypnotist could have had anything to do with Miss Wallack's disappearance. Certainly neither poison nor hypnotism would have made her invisible."

"Of course you don't see," blazed The Thinking Machine. "If you did you wouldn't have come to me. When did this thing happen?"

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"Saturday night, as I said," the reporter informed him a little more humbly. "It closed the engagement in Springfield. Miss Wallack was to have appeared here tonight."

"When did she disappear—what time by the clock, I mean?"

"The stage manager's time slip shows that the curtain for the third act went up at 9:41—he spoke to her, say, one minute before, or at 9:40. The action of the play before she appears in the third act takes six minutes, therefore——"

"In precisely seven minutes a woman, weighing more than 130 pounds, certainly not dressed for the street, disappeared from her dressing room. It is now 5:18 Monday afternoon. I think we may solve this crime within a few hours."

"Crime?" Hatch repeated eagerly. "Do you imagine there is a crime then?"

Professor Van Dusen didn't heed the question. Instead, he arose and paced back and forth across the reception room half a dozen times, his hands behind his back and his eyes cast down. At last he stopped and faced the reporter who had also arisen.

"Miss Wallack's company, I presume, with the baggage, is now here," he said. "See every male member of the company, talk to them and particularly *study their eyes*. Don't overlook anyone, however humble.

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Also find out what became of the box of candy, and if possible how many pieces are out of it. Then report here to me. Miss Wallack's safety may depend upon your speed and accuracy."

Hatch was frankly startled.

"How——?" he began.

"Don't stop to talk—hurry," commanded The Thinking Machine. "I will have a cab waiting when you come back. We must get to Springfield."

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CHAPTER V

FITTING A HYPOTHESIS

THE newspaper man rushed away to obey orders. He didn't understand them at all—studying men's eyes was not in his line, but he obeyed nevertheless. An hour and a half later he returned to be thrust unceremoniously into a waiting cab by The Thinking Machine. The cab rattled away toward South Station where the two men caught a train, just about to move out, for Springfield. Once settled in their seats the scientist turned to Hatch who was nearly suffocating with suppressed information.

"Well?" he asked.

"I found out several things," the reporter burst out. "First, Miss Wallack's leading man, Langdon Mason who has been in love with her for three years, bought the candy at Schuyler's in Springfield early Saturday evening before he went to the theater. He told me so himself, rather reluctantly, but I—I made him say it."

"Ah!" exclaimed The Thinking Machine. It was a most unequivocal ejaculation. "How many pieces of candy are out of the box?"

"Only three," explained Hatch. "Miss Wallack's

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things were packed into the open trunk in her dressing room, the candy with them. I induced the manager——"

"Yes, yes, yes," interrupted The Thinking Machine impatiently. "What sort of eyes has Mason? What color?"

"Blue, frank in expression, nothing unusual about them," said the reporter.

"And the others?"

"I didn't quite know what you meant by studying their eyes, so I got a set of photographs. I thought perhaps they might help."

"Excellent! Excellent!" commented The Thinking Machine. He shuffled the pictures through his fingers, stopping now and then to study one, and to read the names printed below. "Is that the leading man?" he asked at last, and handed one to Hatch.

"Yes."

Professor Van Dusen did not speak again. The train pulled into Springfield at 9:20. Hatch followed him out of the station and, without a word, climbed into a cab.

"Schuyler's candy store," commanded The Thinking Machine. "Hurry."

The cab rushed off through the night. Ten minutes later it stopped before a brilliantly lighted confectionery shop. The Thinking Machine led the way inside and approached the girl behind the chocolate counter.

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"Will you please tell me if you remember this man's face?" he asked as he produced Mason's photograph.

"Oh, yes, I remember him," the girl replied. "He's an actor."

"Did he buy a small box of chocolates of you Saturday evening early?" was the next question.

"Yes. I recall it because he seemed to be in a hurry—in fact, said he was anxious to get to the theater to pack."

"And do you recall that this man ever bought candy here?" asked the scientist. He produced another photograph and handed it to the girl. She studied it a moment while Hatch craned his neck, vainly, to see.

"I don't recall that he ever did," the girl answered finally.

The Thinking Machine turned away abruptly and disappeared into a telephone booth. He remained there for five minutes, then rushed out to the cab again, with Hatch following closely.

"City Hospital," he commanded.

Again the cab dashed away. Hatch was dumb; there seemed to be nothing to say. The Thinking Machine was plainly pursuing some definite line of inquiry yet the reporter didn't know what. The case was getting kaleidoscopic. This impression was strengthened when he found himself standing beside The Thinking Machine in City Hospital conversing with the House Surgeon, Dr. Carlton.

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"Is there a Miss Gertrude Manning here?" was the scientist's first question.

"Yes," replied the surgeon. "She was brought here Saturday night suffering from——"

"Strychnine poisoning, yes I know," interrupted the other. "Picked up in the street, probably. I am a physician. If she is well enough I should like to ask her a couple of questions."

Dr. Carlton agreed and Professor Van Dusen, still followed faithfully by Hatch, was ushered into the ward where Miss Wallack's maid lay, pallid and weak. The Thinking Machine picked up her hand and his slender finger rested for a minute on her pulse. He nodded as if satisfied.

"Miss Manning, can you understand me?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied weakly.

"How many pieces of the candy did you eat?"

"Two," said the girl. She stared into the face above her with dull eyes.

"Did Miss Wallack eat any of it up to the time you left the theater?"

"No."

If The Thinking Machine had been in a hurry previously he was racing now. Hatch trailed on dutifully behind, down the stairs and into a cab, whence Professor Van Dusen shouted a word of thanks to Dr. Carlton.

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This time their destination was the stage door of the theater from which Miss Wallack had disappeared.

The reporter was muddled. He didn't know anything very clearly except that three pieces of candy were missing from the box. Of these the maid had eaten only two. She had been poisoned. Therefore it seemed reasonable to suppose that if Miss Wallack had eaten the third piece she also would be poisoned. But poison would not make her invisible. The reporter shook his head hopelessly.

William Meegan, the stage door-keeper, was easily found.

"Can you inform me, please," began The Thinking Machine, "if Mr. Mason left a box of candy with you last Saturday night for Miss Wallack?"

"Yes," Meegan replied good-naturedly. He was amused at the little man. "Miss Wallack hadn't arrived. Mason brought a box of candy for her nearly every night and usually left it here. I put the one Saturday night on the shelf here."

"Did Mr. Mason come to the theater before or after the others on Saturday night?"

"Before," replied Meegan. "He was unusually early, presumably to pack."

"And the other members of the company coming in stop here, I imagine, to get their mail?" and the scientist squinted up at the mail box above the shelf.

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"Sure, always."

The Thinking Machine drew a long breath. Up to this time there had been little perplexed wrinkles in his brow. Now they disappeared.

"Now, please," he went on, "was any package or box of any kind taken from the stage on Saturday night between nine and eleven o'clock?"

"No," said Meegan positively. "Nothing at all until the company's baggage was removed at midnight."

"Miss Wallack had two trunks in her dressing room?"

"Yes. Two whacking big ones, too."

"How do you know?'

"Because I helped put 'em in, and helped take 'em out," replied Meegan.

Suddenly The Thinking Machine turned and rushed out to the cab, with Hatch, his shadow, close behind.

"Drive, drive as fast as you know how to the nearest long distance telephone," the scientist instructed the cabby. "A woman's life is at stake."

Half an hour later Professor Van Dusen and Hutchinson Hatch were on a train rushing back to the city. The Thinking Machine had been in the telephone booth for fifteen minutes. When he came out Hatch had asked several questions to which the scientist vouchsafed no answer. They were perhaps thirty minutes out of Springfield before the scientist showed any disposition

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to talk. Then he began without preliminary much as if he were resuming a former conversation.

"Of course if Miss Wallack didn't leave the stage of the theater, she was there," he said. "We will admit that she did not become invisible. The problem, therefore, was to find her on the stage. The fact that no violence was used against her was conclusively proven by half a dozen instances. No one heard her scream, there was no struggle, no trace of blood. Ergo, we assume in the beginning that she must have consented to the first steps which led to her disappearance.

"Now let's shape a hypothesis which will fit all the circumstances. Miss Wallack had a severe headache. Hypnotic influence will cure headaches. Was there a hypnotist to whom Miss Wallack would have submitted herself? Assume there was. Then would that hypnotist take advantage of his control to place her in a cataleptic condition? Assume a motive and he would. Then, how would he dispose of her?

"From this point questions radiate in all directions. We will confine ourselves to the probable, granting for the moment that the hypothesis—the only one that fits all the circumstances—is correct. Obviously, a hypnotist would not have attempted to get her out of the dressing room. What remains? One of the two trunks in her room."

Hatch gasped.

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"You mean you think it possible that she was hypnotized and placed in that second trunk, the one that was strapped and locked?" he asked.

"It's the only thing that *could* have happened," said The Thinking Machine emphatically, "therefore that is just what *did* happen."

"Why it's horrible!" exclaimed Hatch. "A live woman in a trunk for forty-eight hours? Even if she were alive then, she must be dead now."

The reporter shuddered a little and gazed curiously at the inscrutable face of his companion. He saw no pity, no horror there; there was merely the reflection of the working of a brain.

"It does not necessarily follow that she is dead," explained The Thinking Machine. "If she ate that third piece of candy *before* she was hypnotized she may be dead. If it were placed in her mouth after she was in a cataleptic condition the chances are that she is not dead. The candy would not melt and her system could not absorb the poison."

"But she would be suffocated—her bones would be broken by the rough handling of the trunk—there are a hundred possibilities," the reporter suggested.

"A person in a cataleptic condition is singularly impervious to injury," replied the scientist. "There is of course, a chance of suffocation, but a great deal of air may enter a trunk."

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"And the candy?" Hatch asked.

"Yes, the candy. We know that two pieces of it nearly killed the maid. Yet Mr. Mason admitted having bought it. This admission indicated that this poisoned candy is not the candy he bought. Is Mr. Mason a hypnotist? He hasn't the eyes. His picture tells me that. We know that Mr. Mason did buy candy for Miss Wallack on several occasions. We know that sometimes he left it with the stage door-keeper. We know that members of the company stopped there for mail. We instantly see that it is possible for one to take away that box and substitute poisoned candy. All the boxes are alike.

"Madness and the cunning of madness lie back of all this. It was a deliberate attempt to murder Miss Wallack, long pondered and due, perhaps, to unrequited or hopeless infatuation. It began with the poisoned candy, and that failing, went to a point immediately following the moment when the stage manager last spoke to the actress. The hypnotist was probably in her room then. You must remember that it would have been possible for him to ease the headache, and at the same time leave Miss Wallack free to play. She might have known this from previous experience."

Hatch was silent for a long time as he mentally reviewed the case. He couldn't yet quite believe. It seemed inconceivable that human ingenuity could devise

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such a crime; and it was equally inconceivable that the brain of a man wholly disassociated with it could fathom it by pure logic.

"Is Miss Wallack still in the trunk?" he asked at last.

"No," replied The Thinking Machine. "She is out now, dead or alive—I am inclined to believe alive."

"And the man?"

"I will turn him over to the police in half an hour after we reach the city."

From South Station the scientist and Hatch were driven immediately to Police Headquarters. Detective Mallory received them.

"We got your 'phone from Springfield——" he began.

"Was she dead?" interrupted the scientist.

"No," Mallory replied. "She's unconscious but no bones are broken, although she is badly bruised. The doctor says she's hypnotized."

"Was the piece of candy taken from her mouth?"

"Sure, a chocolate cream. It hadn't melted."

"I'll come back here in a few minutes and awake her," said The Thinking Machine. "Come along with us now, and get the man."

Wonderingly the detective entered the cab and the three were driven to a big hotel a dozen blocks away. Before they entered the lobby The Thinking Machine

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handed a photograph to Mallory, who studied it under an electric light.

"That man is upstairs with several others," explained the scientist. "Pick him out and get behind him when we enter the room. He may attempt to shoot. Don't touch him until I say so."

In a large room on the fifth floor Manager Stanfeld of the Irene Wallack Company had assembled the men who played in her support. This was done at the request by 'phone of The Thinking Machine. There were no preliminaries when Professor Van Dusen entered. He squinted comprehensively about him, then went straight to Langdon Mason, and stared into his eyes for a moment.

"Were you on the stage in the third act of your play before Miss Wallack was to appear—I mean the play last Saturday night?" he asked.

"I was," Mason replied, "for at least three minutes."

"Mr. Stanfeld, is that correct?"

"Yes," replied the manager.

There was a long tense silence broken only by the heavy footsteps of Mallory as he walked toward a distant corner of the room. A faint flush crept into Mason's face as he realized that the questions had been almost an accusation. He started to speak, but the steady, impassive voice of The Thinking Machine stopped him.

"Mr. Mallory, take your prisoner!"

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Instantly there was a fierce, frantic struggle and those present turned to see the detective with his great arms locked about Stanley Wightman, the melancholy Jaques of "As You Like It." The actor's face was distorted, madness blazed in the eyes, and he snarled like a beast at bay. By a sudden movement Mallory threw Wightman and manacled the hands, then looked up to find The Thinking Machine peering over his shoulder into the eyes of the prostrate man.

"Yes, he's a hypnotist," the scientist remarked in self-satisfied conclusion. "It always tells in the pupils of the eyes."

An hour later Miss Wallack was aroused, told a story almost identical with that of The Thinking Machine, and three months later resumed her tour. And meanwhile Stanley Wightman, whose brooding over a hopeless love for her made a maniac of him, raves and shrieks the lines of Jaques in the seclusion of a padded cell. Alienists pronounce him incurable.

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CHAPTER VI

THE CRYSTAL GAZER

WITH hideous, goggling eyes the great god Budd sat cross-legged on a pedestal and stared stolidly into the semi-darkness. He saw, by the wavering light of a peacock lamp which swooped down from the ceiling with wings outstretched, what might have been a nook in a palace of East India. Draperies hung here, there, everywhere; richly embroidered divans sprawled about; fierce tiger rugs glared up from the floor; grotesque idols grinned mirthlessly in unexpected corners; strange arms were grouped on the walls. Outside the trolley cars clanged blatantly.

The single human figure was a distinct contradiction of all else. It was that of a man in evening dress, smoking. He was fifty, perhaps sixty, years old with the ruddy color of one who has lived a great deal out of doors. There was only a touch of gray in his abundant hair and mustache. His eyes were steady and clear, and indolent.

For a long time he sat, then the draperies to his right parted and a girl entered. She was a part of the picture of which the man was a contradiction. Her lustrous black hair flowed about her shoulders; lambent mysteries

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lay in her eyes. Her dress was the dress of the East. For a moment she stood looking at the man and then entered with light tread.

"Varick Sahib," she said, timidly, as if it were a greeting. "Do I intrude?" Her voice was softly guttural with the accent of her native tongue.

"Oh no, Jadeh. Come in," said the man.

She smiled frankly and sat down on a hassock near him.

"My brother?" she asked.

"He is in the cabinet."

Varick had merely glanced at her and then continued his thoughtful gaze into vacancy. From time to time she looked up at him shyly, with a touch of eagerness, but there was no answering interest in his manner. His thoughts were far away.

"May I ask what brings you this time, Sahib?" she inquired at last.

"A little deal in the market," responded Varick, carelessly. "It seems to have puzzled Adhem as much as it did me. He has been in the cabinet for half an hour."

He stared on musingly as he smoked, then dropped his eyes to the slender, graceful figure of Jadeh. With knees clasped in her hands she leaned back on the hassock deeply thoughtful. Her head was tilted upward and the flickering light fell full on her face. It crossed Varick's

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mind that she was pretty, and he was about to say so as he would have said it to any other woman, when the curtains behind them were thrown apart and they both glanced around.

Another man—an East Indian—entered. This man was Adhem Singh, the crystal gazer, in the ostentatious robes of a seer. He, too, was a part of the picture. There was an expression of apprehension, mingled with some other impalpable quality on his strong face.

"Well, Adhem?" inquired Varick.

"I have seen strange things, Sahib," replied the seer, solemnly. "The crystal tells me of danger."

"Danger?" repeated Varick with a slight lifting of his brows. "Oh well, in that case I shall keep out of it."

"Not danger to your business, Sahib," the crystal gazer went on with troubled face, "but danger in another way."

The girl, Jadeh, looked at him with quick, startled eyes and asked some question in her native tongue. He answered in the same language, and she rose suddenly with terror stricken face to fling herself at Varick's feet, weeping. Varick seemed to understand too, and looked at the seer in apprehension.

"Death?" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

Adhem was silent for a moment and bowed his head respectfully before the steady, inquiring gaze of the white man.

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"Pardon, Sahib," he said at last. "I did not remember that you understood my language."

"What is it?" insisted Varick, abruptly. "Tell me."

"I can not, Sahib."

"You must," declared the other. He had arisen commandingly. "You must."

The crystal gazer crossed to him and stood for an instant with his hand on the white man's shoulder, and his eyes studying the fear he found in the white man's face.

"The crystal, Sahib," he began. "It tells me that—that——"

"No, no, brother," pleaded the girl.

"Go on," Varick commanded.

"It grieves me to say that which will pain one whom I love as I do you, Sahib," said the seer, slowly. "Perhaps you had rather see for yourself?"

"Well, let me see then," said Varick. "Is it in the crystal?"

"Yes, by the grace of the gods."

"But I can't see anything there." Varick remembered. "I've tried scores of times."

"I believe this will be different, Sahib," said Adhem, quietly. "Can you stand a shock?"

Varick shook himself a little impatiently.

"Of course," he replied. "Yes, yes."

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"A very serious shock?"

Again there was an impatient twist of Varick's shoulders.

"Yes, I can stand anything," he exclaimed shortly. "What is it? Let me see."

He strode toward that point in the draperies where Adhem had entered while the girl on her knees, sought with entreating hands to stop him.

"No, no, no," she pleaded. "No."

"Don't do that," Varick expostulated in annoyance, but gently he stooped and lifted her to her feet. "I am not a child—or a fool."

He threw aside the curtains. As they fell softly behind him he heard a pitiful little cry of grief from Jadeh and set his teeth together hard.

He stood in the crystal cabinet. It was somewhat larger than an ordinary closet and had been made impenetrable to the light by hangings of black velvet. For awhile he stood still so that his eyes might become accustomed to the utter blackness, and gradually the sinister fascinating crystal ball appeared, faintly visible by its own mystic luminosity. It rested on a pedestal of black velvet.

Varick was accustomed to his surroundings—he had been in the cabinet many times. Now he dropped down on a stool in front of the table whereon the crystal lay and leaning forward on his arms stared into its limpid

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depths. Unblinkingly for one, two, three minutes he sat there with his thoughts in a chaos.

After awhile there came a change in the ball. It seemed to glow with a growing light other than its own. Suddenly it darkened completely, and out of this utter darkness grew shadowy, vague forms to which he could give no name. Finally a veil seemed lifted for the globe grew brighter and he leaned forward, eagerly, fearfully. Another veil melted away and a still brighter light illumined the ball.

Now Varick was able to make out objects. Here was a table littered with books and papers, there a chair, yonder a shadowy mantel. Gradually the light grew until his tensely fixed eyes pained him, but he stared steadily on. Another quick brightness came and the objects all became clear. He studied them incredulously for a few seconds, and then he recognized what he saw. It was a room—his study—miles away in his apartments.

A sudden numb chilliness seized him but he closed his teeth hard and gazed on. The outlines of the crystal were disappearing, now they were gone and he saw more. A door opened and a man entered the room into which he was looking. Varick gave a little gasp as he recognized the man. It was—himself. He watched the man—himself—as he moved about the study aimlessly for a time as if deeply troubled, then as he dropped

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evening dress, picked up his hat and rushed out into the world of realities. The crystal gazer stood for a moment while Jadeh clung to his arm, tremblingly.

"It is as the gods will," he said sadly, at last.

* * * * * * *

Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen—The Thinking Machine—received Howard Varick in the small reception room and invited him to a seat. Varick's face was ashen; there were dark lines under his eyes and in them there was the glitter of an ungovernable terror. Every move showed the nervousness which gripped him. The Thinking Machine squinted at him curiously, then dropped back into his big chair.

For several minutes Varick said nothing; he seemed to be struggling to control himself. Suddenly he burst out:

"I'm going to die some day next week. Is there any way to prevent it?"

The Thinking Machine turned his great yellow head and looked at him in a manner which nearly indicated surprise.

"Of course if you've made up your mind to do it," he said irritably, "I don't see what can be done." There was a trace of irony in his voice, a coldness which brought Varick around a little. "Just how is it going to happen?"

"I shall be murdered—stabbed in the back—by a man whom I don't know," Varick rushed on desperately.

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"Dear me, dear me, how unfortunate," commented the scientist. "Tell me something about it. But here." He arose and went into his laboratory. After a moment he returned and handed a glass of some effervescent liquid to Varick, who gulped it down. "Take a minute to pull yourself together," instructed the scientist.

He resumed his seat and sat silent with his long, slender fingers pressed tip to tip. Gradually Varick recovered. It was a fierce fight for the mastery of emotion.

"Now," directed The Thinking Machine at last, "tell me about it."

Varick told just what happened lucidly enough, and The Thinking Machine listened with polite interest. Once or twice he turned and looked at his visitor.

"Do you believe in any psychic force?" Varick asked once.

"I don't disbelieve in anything until I have proven that it cannot be," was the answer. "The God who hung a sun up there has done other things which we will never understand." There was a little pause, then: "How did you meet this man, Adhem Singh?"

"I have been interested for years in the psychic, the occult, the things we don't understand," Varick replied. "I have a comfortable fortune, no occupation, no dependents and made this a sort of hobby. I have studied it superficially all over the world. I met Adhem Singh in India ten years ago, afterwards in England where he

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went through Oxford with some financial assistance from me, and later here. Two years ago he convinced me that there was something in crystal gazing—call it telepathy, self hypnotism, sub-conscious mental action—what you will. Since then the science, I can call it nothing else, has guided me in every important act of my life."

"Through Adhem Singh?"

"Yes."

"And under a pledge of secrecy, I imagine—that is secrecy as to the nature of his revelations?"

"Yes."

"Any taint of insanity in your family?"

Varick wondered whether the question was in the nature of insolent reproof, or was a request for information. He construed it as the latter.

"No," he answered. "Never a touch of it."

"How often have you consulted Mr. Singh?"

"Many times. There have been occasions when he would tell me nothing because, he explained, the crystal told him nothing. There have been other times when he advised me correctly. He has never given me bad advice even in intricate stock operations, therefore I have been compelled to believe him in all things."

"You were never able to see anything yourself in the crystal until this vision of death, last Tuesday night you say?"

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"That was the first."

"How do you know the murder is to take place at any given time—that is next week, as you say?"

"That is the information Adhem Singh gave me," was the reply. "He can read the visions—they mean more to him than——"

"In other words he makes it a profession?" interrupted the scientist.

"Yes."

"Go on."

"The horror of the thing impressed me so—both of us—that he has at my request twice invoked the vision since that night. He, like you, wanted to know when it would happen. There is a calendar by weeks in my study; that is, only one week is shown on it at a time. The last time the vision appeared he noted this calendar. The week was that beginning next Sunday, the 21st of this month. The only conclusion we could reach was that it would happen during that week."

The Thinking Machine arose and paced back and forth across the room deeply thoughtful. At last he stopped before his visitor.

"It's perfectly amazing," he commented emphatically. "It approaches nearer to the unbelievable than anything I have ever heard of."

Varick's response was a look that was almost grateful.

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"You don't believe it impossible then?" he asked, eagerly.

"Nothing is impossible," declared the other aggressively. "Now, Mr. Varick, you are firmly convinced that what you saw was prophetic? That you will die in that manner, in that place?"

"I can't believe anything else—I can't," was the response.

"And you have no idea of the identity of the murderer-to-be, if I may use that phrase?"

"Not the slightest. The figure was wholly unfamiliar to me."

"And you know—*you know*—that the room you saw in the crystal was yours?"

"I know that absolutely. Rugs, furniture, mantel, books, everything was mine."

The Thinking Machine was again silent for a time.

"In that event," he said at last, "the affair is perfectly simple. Will you place yourself in my hands and obey my directions implicitly?"

"Yes." There was an eager, hopeful note in Varick's voice now.

"I am going to try to disarrange the affairs of Fate a little bit," explained the scientist gravely. "I don't know what will happen but it will be interesting to try to throw the inevitable, the pre-ordained I might say, out of gear, won't it?"

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With a quizzical, grim expression about his thin lips The Thinking Machine went to the telephone in an adjoining room and called some one. Varick heard neither the name nor what was said, merely the mumble of the irritable voice. He glanced up as the scientist returned.

"Have you any servants—a valet for instance?" asked the scientist.

"Yes, I have an aged servant, a valet, but he is now in France, I gave him a little vacation. I really don't need one now as I live in an apartment house—almost a hotel."

"I don't suppose you happen to have three or four thousand dollars in your pocket?"

"No, not so much as that," was the puzzled reply. "If it's your fee——"

"I never accept fees," interrupted the scientist. "I interest myself in affairs like these because I like them. They are good mental exercise. Please draw a check for, say four thousand dollars, to Hutchinson Hatch."

"Who is he?" asked Varick. There was no reply. The check was drawn and handed over without further comment.

It was fifteen or twenty minutes later that a cab pulled up in front of the house. Hutchinson Hatch, reporter, and another man whom he introduced as Philip

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Byrne were ushered in. As Hatch shook hands with Varick The Thinking Machine compared them mentally. They were relatively of the same size and he bobbed his head as if satisfied.

"Now, Mr. Hatch," he instructed, "take this check and get it cashed immediately, then return here. Not a word to anybody."

Hatch went out and Byrne discussed politics with Varick until he returned with the money. The Thinking Machine thrust the bills into Byrne's hand and he counted it, afterward stowing it away in a pocket.

"Now, Mr. Varick, the keys to your apartment, please," asked the scientist.

They were handed over and he placed them in his pocket. Then he turned to Varick.

"From this time on," he said, "your name is John Smith. You are going on a trip, beginning immediately, with Mr. Byrne here. You are not to send a letter, a postal, a telegram or a package to anyone; you are to buy nothing, you are to write no checks, you are not to speak to or recognize anyone, you are not to telephone or attempt in any manner to communicate with anyone, not even me. You are to obey Mr. Byrne in everything he says."

Varick's eyes had grown wider and wider as he listened.

"But my affairs—my business?" he protested.

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"It is a matter of your life or death," said The Thinking Machine shortly.

For a moment Varick wavered a little. He felt that he was being treated like a child.

"As you say," he said finally.

"Now, Mr. Byrne," continued the scientist, "you heard those instructions. It is your duty to enforce them. You must lose this man and yourself. Take him away somewhere to another place. There is enough money there for ordinary purposes. When you learn that there has been an arrest in connection with a certain threat against Mr. Varick, come back to Boston—to me—and bring him. That's all."

Mr. Byrne arose with a business like air.

"Come on, Mr. Smith," he commanded.

Varick followed him out of the room.

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CHAPTER VII

A MATTER OF LOGIC

HERE was a table littered with books and papers, there a chair, yonder a shadowy mantel * * * * A door opened and a man entered the room * * * * moved about the study aimlessly for a time as if deeply troubled, then dropped into a chair at the desk * * * * made some hopeless gesture with his hands and leaned forward on the desk with his head on his arms * * * * another figure in the room * * * * knife in his hand * * * * creeping stealthily toward the unconscious figure in the chair with the knife raised * * * * the unknown crept on, on, on * * * *

There was a blinding flash, a gush of flame and smoke, a sharp click and through the fog came the unexcited voice of Hutchinson Hatch, reporter.

"Stay right where you are, please."

"That ought to be a good picture," said The Thinking Machine.

The smoke cleared and he saw Adhem Singh standing watching with deep concern a revolver in the hand of Hatch, who had suddenly arisen from the desk in Va-

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rick's room. The Thinking Machine rubbed his hands briskly.

"Ah, I thought it was you," he said to the crystal gazer. "Put down the knife, please. That's right. It seems a little bold to have interfered with what was to be like this, but you wanted too much detail Mr. Singh. You might have murdered your friend if you hadn't gone into so much trivial theatrics."

"I suppose I am a prisoner?" asked the crystal gazer.

"You are," The Thinking Machine assured him cheerfully. "You are charged with the attempted murder of Mr. Varick. Your wife will be a prisoner in another half hour with all those who were with you in the conspiracy."

He turned to Hatch, who was smiling broadly. The reporter was thinking of that wonderful flash-light photograph in the camera that The Thinking Machine held,—the only photograph in the world, so far as he knew, of a man in the act of attempting an assassination.

"Now, Mr. Hatch," the scientist went on, "I will 'phone to Detective Mallory to come here and get this gentleman, and also to send men and arrest every person to be found in Mr. Singh's home. If this man tries to run—shoot."

The scientist went out and Hatch devoted his attention to his sullen prisoner. He asked half a dozen

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questions and receiving no answers he gave it up as hopeless. After awhile Detective Mallory appeared in his usual state of restrained astonishment and the crystal gazer was led away.

Then Hatch and The Thinking Machine went to the Adhem Singh house. The police had preceded them and gone away with four prisoners, among them the girl Jadeh. They obtained an entrance through the courtesy of a policeman left in charge and sought out the crystal cabinet. Together they bowed over the glittering globe as Hatch held a match.

"But I still don't see how it was done," said the reporter after they had looked at the crystal.

The Thinking Machine lifted the ball and replaced it on its pedestal half a dozen times apparently trying to locate a slight click. Then he fumbled all around the table, above and below. At his suggestion Hatch lifted the ball very slowly, while the scientist slid his slender fingers beneath it.

"Ah," he exclaimed at last. "I thought so. It's clever, Mr. Hatch, clever. Just stand here a few minutes in the dark and I'll see if I can operate it for you."

He disappeared and Hatch stood staring at the crystal until he was developing a severe case of the creeps himself. Just then a light flashed in the crystal, which had been only dimly visible, and he found himself looking into—the room in Howard Varick's apartments, miles

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away. As he looked, startled, he saw The Thinking Machine appear in the crystal and wave his arms. The creepiness passed instantly in the face of this obvious attempt to attract his attention.

It was later that afternoon that The Thinking Machine turned the light of his analytical genius on the problem for the benefit of Hatch and Detective Mallory.

"Charlatanism is a luxury which costs the peoples of the world incredible sums," he began. "It had it's beginning, of course, in the dark ages when man's mind grasped at some tangible evidence of an Infinite Power, and through its very eagerness was easily satisfied. Then quacks began to prey upon man, and do to this day under many guises and under many names. This condition will continue until enlightenment has become so general that man will realize the absurdity of such a thing as Nature, or the other world's forces, going out of its way to tell him whether a certain stock will go up or down. A sense of humor ought to convince him that disembodied spirits do not come back and rap on tables in answer to asinine questions. These things are merely prostitutions of the Divine Revelations."

Hatch smiled a little at the lecture platform tone, and Detective Mallory chewed his cigar uncomfortably. He was there to find out something about crime; this thing was over his head.

"This is merely preliminary," The Thinking Ma-

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chine went on after a moment. "Now as to this crystal gazing affair—a little reason, a little logic. When Mr. Varick came to me I saw he was an intelligent man who had devoted years to a study of the so-called occult. Being intelligent he was not easily hoodwinked, yet he had been hoodwinked for years, therefore I could see that the man who did it must be far beyond the blundering fool usually found in these affairs.

"Now Mr. Varick, personally, had never seen *anything in any* crystal—remember that—until this 'vision' of death. When I knew this I knew that 'vision' was stamped as quackery; the mere fact of him seeing it proved that, but the quackery was so circumstantial that he was convinced. Thus we have quackery. Why? For a fee? I can imagine successful guesses on the stock market bringing fees to Adhem Singh, but the 'vision' of a man's death is not the way to his pocket-book. If not for a fee—then what?

"A deeper motive was instantly apparent. Mr. Varick was wealthy, he had known Singh and had been friendly with him for years, had supplied him with funds to go through Oxford, and he had no family or dependents. Therefore it seemed probable that a will, or perhaps in another way, Singh would benefit by Mr. Varick's death. There was a motive for the 'vision,' which might have been at first an effort to scare him to death, because he had a bad heart. I saw all these things

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when Mr. Varick talked to me first, several days after he saw the 'vision' but did not suggest them to him. Had I done so he would not have believed so sordid a thing, for he believed in Singh, and would probably have gone his way to be murdered or to die of fright as Singh intended.

"Knowing these things there was only the labor of trapping a clever man. Now the Hindu mind works in strange channels. It loves the mystic, the theatric, and I imagined that having gone so far Singh would attempt to bring the 'vision' to a reality. He presumed, of course, that Mr. Varick would keep the matter to himself.

"The question of saving Varick's life was trifling. If he was to die at a given time in a given room the thing to do was to place him beyond possible reach of that room at that time. I 'phoned to you, Mr. Hatch, and asked you to bring me a private detective who would obey orders, and you brought Mr. Byrne. You heard my instructions to him. It was necessary to hide Mr. Varick's identity and my elaborate directions were to prevent anyone getting the slightest clue as to him having gone, or as to where he was. I don't know where he is now.

"Immediately Mr. Varick was off my hands, I had Martha, my housekeeper, write a note to Singh explaining that Mr. Varick was ill, and confined to his room, and for the present was unable to see anyone. In this

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note a date was specified when he would call on Singh. Martha wrote, of course, as a trained nurse who was in attendance merely in *day time*. All these points were made perfectly clear to Singh.

"That done it was only a matter of patience. Mr. Hatch and I went to Mr. Varick's apartments each night—I had Martha there in day time to answer questions—and waited, in hiding. Mr. Hatch is about Varick's size and a wig helped us along. What happened then you know. I may add that when Mr. Varick told me the story I commented on it as being almost unbelievable. He understood, as I meant he should, that I referred to the 'vision.' I really meant that the elaborate scheme which Singh had evolved was unbelievable. He might have killed him just as well with a drop of poison or something equally pleasant."

The Thinking Machine stopped as if that were all.

"But the crystal?" asked Hatch. "How did that work? How was it I saw you?"

"That was a little ingenious and rather expensive," said The Thinking Machine, "so expensive that Singh must have expected to get a large sum from success. I can best describe the manufacture of the 'vision' as a variation of the principle of the camera obscura. It was done with lenses of various sorts and a multitude of mirrors, and required the assistance of two other men—those who were taken from Singh's house with Jadeh.

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"First, the room in Mr. Varick's apartments was duplicated in the basement of Singh's house, even to rugs, books and wall decorations. There two men rehearsed the murder scene that Mr. Varick saw. They were disguised of course. You have looked through the wrong end of a telescope of course? Well, the original reduction of the murder scene to a size where all of it would appear in a small mirror was accomplished that way. From this small mirror there ran pipes with a series of mirrors and lenses, through the house, carrying the reflection of what was happening below, so vaguely though that features were barely distinguishable. This pipe ran up inside one of the legs of the table on which the crystal rested, and then, by reflection to the pedestal.

"You, Mr. Hatch, saw me lift that crystal several times and each time you might have noticed the click. I was trying to find then, how the reflection reached it. When you lifted it slowly and I put my fingers under it I knew. There was a small trap in the pedestal, covered with velvet. This closed automatically and presented a solid surface when the crystal was lifted, and opened when the crystal was replaced. Thus the reflection reached the crystal which reversed it the last time and made it appear right side up to the watcher. The apparent growth of the light in the crystal was caused below. Some one simply removed several sheets of gauze, one at a time, from in front of the first lens."

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"Well!" exclaimed Detective Mallory. "That's the most elaborate affair I ever heard of."

"Quite right," commented the scientist, "but we don't know how many victims Singh had. Of course any 'vision' was possible with a change of scene in the basement. I imagine it was a profitable investment because there are many fools in this world."

"What did the girl have to do with it?" asked Hatch.

"That I don't know," replied the scientist. "She was pretty. Perhaps she was used as a sort of bait to attract a certain class of men. She was really Singh's wife I imagine, not his sister. She was a prominent figure in the mummery with Varick of course. With her aid Singh was able to lend great effectiveness to the general scheme."

A couple of days later Howard Varick returned to the city in tow of Philip Byrne. The Thinking Machine asked Mr. Varick only one question of consequence.

"How much money did you intend to leave Singh?"

"About two hundred and fifty thousand dollars," was the reply. "It was to be used under his direction in furthering an investigation into the psychic. He and I had planned just how it was to be spent."

Personally Mr. Varick is no longer interested in the occult.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE INTERRUPTED WIRELESS

SEVEN bells sounded. The door of the wireless telegraph office on the main deck of the transatlantic liner Uranus was opened quietly, and a man thrust his head out. One quick glance to his right, along the narrow, carpeted passage, showed it to be deserted; another glance to his left showed a young woman approaching, with steps made uncertain by the rolling and pitching of the ship. In one hand she carried a slip of paper, folded once. The man paused only to see this much, then withdrew his head and closed the door abruptly.

The young woman paused opposite the wireless office, and thoughtfully conned over something on the slip of paper. Finally she leaned against the wall, erased a word with a pencil, wrote in another, then laid a hand on the knob of the door as if to enter. The door was locked. She hesitated for an instant, then rapped. There was a pause, and she rapped the second time.

"What is it?" came a man's voice from inside.

"I wish to send a message," responded the young woman.

"Who is that?" came another query.

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"It's Miss Bellingdame," was the impatient response. "I desire to get a wireless to a friend on the Breslin which has just been sighted to the north."

Again there was a pause. "It's impossible to send any message now," came the short, harsh answer at last. "It may not be possible to send it at all."

"Why?" demanded Miss Bellingdame. "It's a matter of the utmost importance. I must send it!"

"Can't be done—it's out of the question," came the positive, quick spoken answer. "There has been an—an accident."

Miss Bellingdame was silent for a moment, as she seemed to ponder a note of deep concern, excitement even, in the voice.

"Well, can't it be sent after the accident has been repaired?" she asked at last.

There was no answer.

"Is that Mr. Ingraham talking?" Miss Bellingdame demanded.

Still there was no answer. She remained there for a minute, perhaps, staring at the locked door, then turned and retraced her steps. A few minutes later she was reclining in a deck chair, gazing thoughtfully out over the treacherous, dimpling Atlantic with a troubled expression on her face.

At just about the moment she sat down the telephone buzz in the Captain's cabin sounded, and Captain Deihl

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impatiently laid aside a remarkably promising pinochle hand to answer it.

"Captain Deihl?" came a short, sharp query over the wire.

"Yes."

"This is Mr. Tennell, sir. I'm in the wireless office. Can you come at once, and have some one send Dr. Maher?"

"What's the matter?" demanded the Captain gruffly.

"I can't very well tell you over the 'phone, sir," came the response; "but you and Dr. Maher are needed immediately."

With a slightly puzzled expression on his bronzed face, Captain Deihl turned to Dr. Maher, the ship's surgeon, who had been his opponent in the pinochle game and now sat staring idly out of the window.

"Tennell wants both of us down in the wireless office at once," the Captain explained. "He won't say what's the matter."

"Wants me?" inquired Dr. Maher. "Somebody hurt?"

"I don't know. Come along."

Captain Deihl led the way along the hurricane deck, down to the main deck, and along the narrow passage to the wireless office. The door was still locked. He rapped sharply, impatiently.

"Who's there?" came from inside.

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"Captain Deihl. Open the door!"

The key turned in the lock, and First Officer Tennell's white face—white even beneath the deep tan—appeared.

"What's the matter, Mr. Tennell?" demanded the Captain brusquely.

"Please step inside, sir," and the first officer opened the door. "There's what's the matter!"

With a gesture the first officer indicated the corner of the cabin where the wireless operator's desk stood. Sitting before it, as if he had dropped back utterly exhausted, was the operator, Charles Ingraham. His head had fallen forward on his breast, and the arms hung straight down, flabbily. His back was toward them, and against the white of his shirt, just beneath the left arm, a heavy handled knife showed. A thin line of scarlet dyed the shirt just below the knife handle.

Captain Deihl stood stockstill for one instant, then turning suddenly closed and locked the door behind him. Dr. Maher took two steps forward, wrested the knife from the wound with a slight effort, flung it on the floor, then dropped on his knees beside the chair.

"What is all this, Mr. Tennell?" demanded Captain Deihl at last.

"I don't know, sir," was the reply. "I found him like that."

Dr. Maher rose after a moment, with a hopeless

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shake of his head, and minutely examined the wound. It was a clean cut incision; the knife had been driven in and allowed to remain. The blade had passed between the ribs and had reached the heart. Dr. Maher noted these things, then stooped and picked up the knife. It was a long, heavy, broad bladed, dangerous looking weapon. After satisfying himself, the surgeon passed it to Captain Deihl.

"It was murder," he said tersely. "He could not have stabbed himself in that position. You keep the knife; it may be the only clue."

"Murder!" the Captain repeated involuntarily. "How long has—has he been dead?"

"Perhaps ten minutes—certainly not more than twenty," was the surgeon's reply. "The body is still warm, and the blood flows."

"Murder!" repeated Captain Deihl. "Who could have killed him? What could have been the motive?"

He stood staring at the knife silently for a time, then lifted two keen, inquisitive eyes to those of his first officer. Dr. Maher too was staring straight into Tennell's face, and slowly, under the sharp scrutiny, the blood mounted again to the tanned cheeks.

"What are your orders, sir?" inquired the first officer steadily.

"How long were you in this room, Tennell, before you called me?" asked Captain Deihl.

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"Two or three minutes," was the reply. "I was in my cabin forward, preparing the dispatches which were to go ashore, according to your order, sir. The wireless was going then; for I could hear it. I noticed after a time that it stopped; so, having completed my dispatches, I brought them here directly. I found Mr. Ingraham just as you see him."

"H'm!" mused the Captain. He was still staring thoughtfully into the other's face. "Was the door locked?"

"No, sir. It was closed."

"And this knife, Mr. Tennell?" The Captain examined it again and then passed it to his first officer. "Do you know it? Have you ever seen it before?"

Without any apparent reason the first officer's face whitened again and he dropped down on the bench, with hands gripping each other fiercely. Dr. Maher was staring at him; Captain Deihl seemed surprised.

"You know whose knife it is then?" asked the Captain finally.

"Yes," and the first officer's head dropped forward. "It's mine!"

There was a long dead silence. The hands of the first officer were working nervously, with heavy fingers threading in and out. Dr. Maher turned away suddenly and idly fingered some papers on the operator's desk.

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Captain Deihl's heavy face grew set and stern. "Did you kill him, Tennell?" he asked.

"No!" Tennell burst out. "No!"

"But it is your knife?"

"It would be useless for me to deny it, sir," replied the first officer, and he rose. "It was given to me by Mr. Forbes, the second officer, only a few weeks ago, and he could identify it instantly. I lost the knife yesterday, and last night—I shall ask you to corroborate this, sir—I posted a notice in the fo'c'sle offering a reward to anyone who should find it and return it to me."

Dr. Maher turned suddenly upon them. "And isn't it true, Mr. Tennell," he demanded, "that you and Ingraham had some—some serious disagreement a few days ago?"

Again the first officer's face blanched. "That is true, yes," he replied steadily. "It was a matter of ship's discipline. This was Mr. Ingraham's second trip with us, and on other ships he had been allowed certain liberties which the discipline of this ship compelled me to curtail. There was a disagreement, yes."

Dr. Maher nodded as if satisfied, and turned again to the desk.

Captain Deihl stood staring straight into the eyes of his first officer for a time, and then cleared his throat. "I want to believe you, Tennell," he admitted at last.

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"I have known you and believed in you for fourteen years. Now tell me why you call me here, show me this, and then admit things which—which you must confess make it look black for you. Now, Harry Tennell, if you ever in your life told me the truth, tell it now—man to man!"

The first officer read the friendliness behind the stern, commanding voice, and there was a grateful softening of the glaring eyes. "Man to man, John Deihl, I'll tell you the truth; but it's hard to believe, and I doubt if you will understand it," he said slowly, deliberately. "I did have a row with this man," and he indicated the crumpled figure in the chair,—"a nasty row in the hearing of half a dozen of the crew. That was several days ago. Today I came here in the course of my duties, and found him like this. I recognized the knife instantly as mine—the one I had lost. I am not a coward, John Deihl,—no man knows that better than you do,—yet for a moment I was overcome by a feeling of terror. Here was the fact of the quarrel, my knife as the weapon of death, myself alone in the cabin with this man while the body was still warm. It all flashed across my mind in an instant—I was frightened at the utter helplessness of my position. No one had seen me enter this cabin, I knew, and the thought came that perhaps I might leave it without being seen, keep my mouth shut, and allow some one else to discover this." The first

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officer paused and sought vainly to read the expressions on the faces of the two men before him.

"I even went so far as to draw the knife out of the wound, with the purpose of flinging it overboard," the first officer continued slowly; "then my senses came back. I knew my duty again. I replaced the knife in the wound, precisely as I found it, and called you. You are a severe man, but you're a just man, John Deihl, and you know I am not the man to stab another in the back; you know, John Deihl, that fourteen years with me as shipmate and fellow officer has never shown you a weak spot in my courage; you know me, John Deihl, and I know you." The voice dropped suddenly. "That's all."

Captain Deihl had stood motionless, with stern, set face and keen, cold eyes searching those of the first officer. At last he reached out a hand and gripped the one that met it. "I believe you, Harry," he said quietly.

Dr. Maher turned quickly and regarded the two with a slight cynical uplifting of his lip. "I understand then," he said unpleasantly, "that this is to be a matter of friendship rather than of evidence?"

The first officer's face flamed, and he took one step toward the surgeon, with clenched fists.

"Go to your cabin, Mr. Tennell!" ordered Captain Deihl curtly. "Remain there till further orders come from me!"

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The first officer paused, involuntarily straightened himself, and lifted one hand to his cap. "Yes, sir," he said.

"And you are not to mention this matter to anyone," Captain Deihl directed.

"I understand, sir."

But news travels quickly aboard ship; so that within less than an hour the tragedy had become a matter of general discussion. Miss Bellingdame was reclining comfortably in a deck chair, when a casual acquaintance, Clarke Matthews, dropped into a seat beside her, and informed her of it. She struggled to her feet, stood staring at him dully for an instant with whitening face, swayed, and fell prone to the deck. It was fully half an hour before the stewardess and her assistants saw the eyelids flutter and open weakly; and at the end of another half hour the stewardess sought out the Captain. She found him at his desk in his cabin, with Second Officer Forbes.

"We must get those despatches off, Mr. Forbes," the Captain was saying. "Have the ship canvassed, first and second cabin, steerage and crew, to see if by any chance there is a man, woman, or child aboard who can operate the wireless. Attend to it at once!

Forbes touched his cap and went out. The Captain turned to the stewardess inquiringly.

"Please, sir, Miss Bellingdame is almost insane from

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the shock of the murder," the stewardess informed him. "It's hard to make her keep in her state room, let alone the berth. Dr. Maher doesn't seem to be able to do her any good. She insists on seeing the body."

"Why?" asked Captain Deihl in surprise. "Was she acquainted with Ingraham?"

"She was engaged to be married to him, sir," replied the stewardess. "Poor child! I don't know what to do for her."

Captain Deihl stared at her blankly for an instant, then rose suddenly and accompanied her to Miss Bellingdame's state room. She was sitting up in her berth, pallid as the sheets about her. One of the stewardess's assistants sat near trying to soothe her.

"Is it true, Captain?" she demanded.

Captain Deihl nodded grimly.

She extended her hands convulsively and clutched his arm, then her head sank forward against it and she sobbed bitterly. "Do you know who—who did it?" she asked at last.

"We don't know, madam," he replied gently. "We are doing all we can; but—"

"Somebody told me your first officer had been arrested," she interrupted suddenly. "He is tall and dark, with a heavy mustache, isn't he?"

"Yes," replied the Captain. "Why?"

For a little while she was silent as she struggled

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to regain control of her voice, and then: "May I say something to you in private, Captain?"

"Do you know—do you suspect—?" he began.

"I must!" she insisted.

At a gesture from Captain Deihl the stewardess and her assistant left them alone together. Fifteen minutes later he emerged and summoned Second Officer Forbes to his cabin.

"Mr. Forbes, proceed at once to Mr. Tennell's cabin and formally place him under arrest," he ordered shortly. "You had better put him in irons, and keep an armed guard beside him day and night until we land. Don't take any chances with him."

"Yes, sir."

Two hours later Second Officer Forbes appeared in the cabin again. "We have canvassed the ship, sir," he reported. "There is not a wireless operator aboard, or even a telegraph operator."

"What is our speed?"

"A little better than seventeen knots, sir."

"We should land then about five o'clock tomorrow afternoon," the Captain mused. "Very well, Mr. Forbes; we shall have to do without an operator."

Captain Deihl paced slowly, thoughtfully, back and forth across the bridge. Above the stars glittered coldly down upon the silent, sinister sea as it slid past the Uranus in green, oily swells. The encompassing night

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