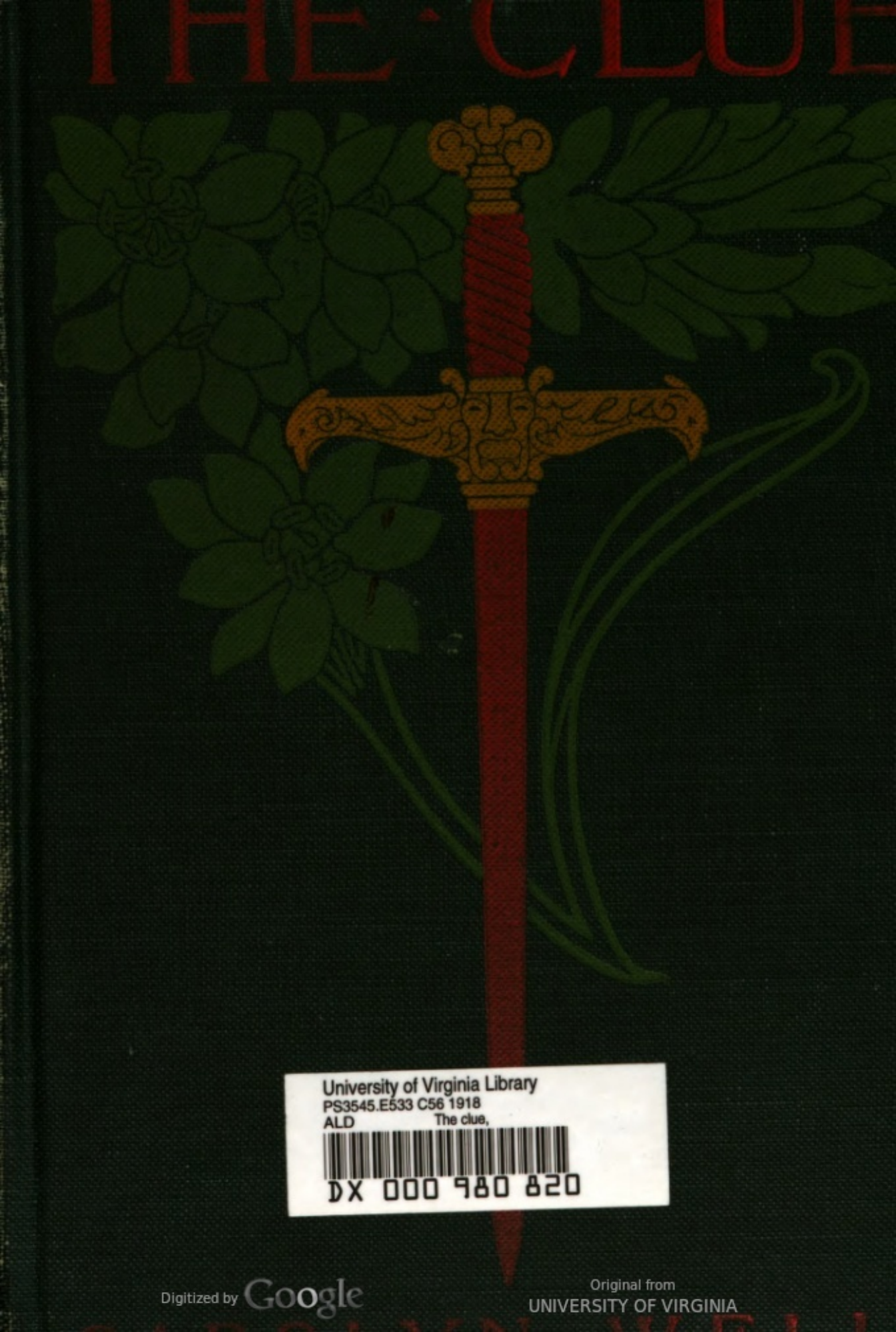
THE·CLUE



University of Virginia Library
PS3545.E533 C56 1918
ALD The clue,
DX 000 980 820

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

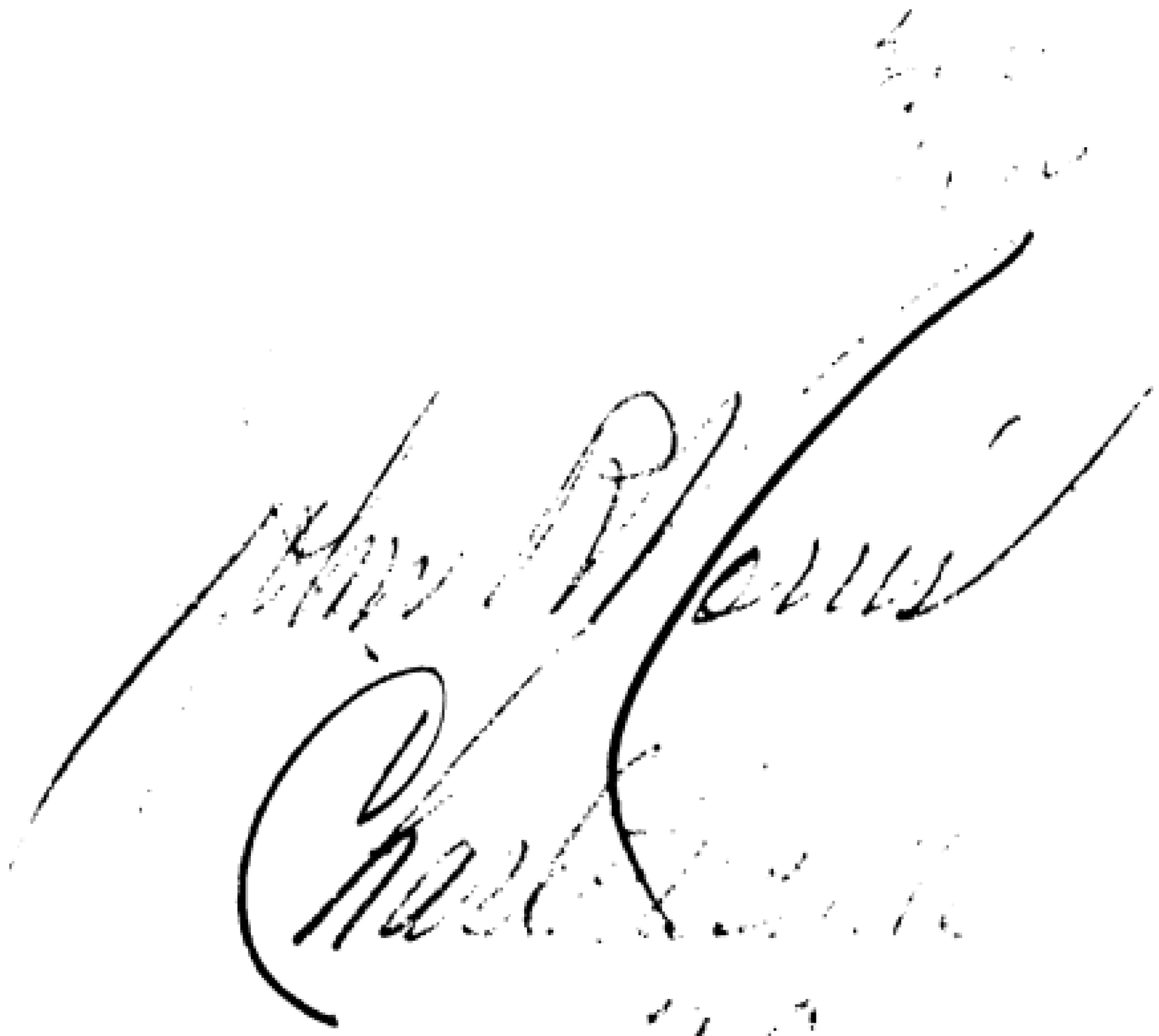
MARTHA JEFFERSON HOSPITAL

LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

PRESENTED BY

Martha Jefferson Hospital

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA



Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

THE CLUE

SECOND EDITION

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

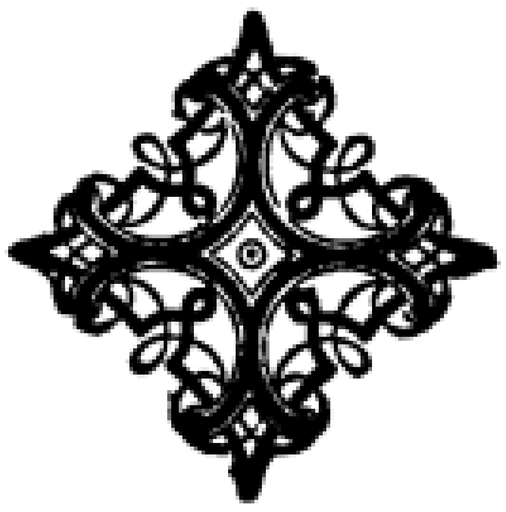
THE MAN POINTED TOWARD THE TABLE. PAGE 41.
THE CLUE

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

THE CLUE

By CAROLYN WELLS

AUTHOR OF
"A Chain of Evidence," "The Maxwell Mystery,"
"The Gold Bag," Etc.



With Frontispiece
By FRANCES ROGERS

A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers [c1918] New York

Published by Arrangements with J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

PS
3545
.E533C56
1918
COPY 1

COPYRIGHT, 1909
BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

Published September, 1909

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE VAN NORMANS	9
II.	MISS MORTON ARRIVES	23
III.	A CRY IN THE NIGHT	38
IV.	SUICIDE OR ——?	51
V.	A CASE FOR THE CORONER	65
VI.	FESSENDEN COMES	79
VII.	MR. BENSON'S QUESTIONS	94
VIII.	A SOFT LEAD PENCIL	107
IX.	THE WILL	122
X.	SOME TESTIMONY	135
XI.	"I DECLINE TO SAY"	149
XII.	DOROTHY BURT	162
XIII.	AN INTERVIEW WITH CICELY	175
XIV.	THE CARLETON HOUSEHOLD	190
XV.	FESSENDEN'S DETECTIVE WORK	204
XVI.	SEARCHING FOR CLUES	218
XVII.	MISS MORTON'S STATEMENTS	232
XVIII.	CARLETON IS FRANK	246
XIX.	THE TRUTH ABOUT MISS BURT	261
XX.	CICELY'S FLIGHT	274
XXI.	A SUCCESSFUL PURSUIT	288
XXII.	A TALK WITH MISS MORTON	301
XXIII.	FLEMING STONE	313
XXIV.	A CONFESSION	326

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Digitized by Google

Original from
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

THE CLUE

I

THE VAN NORMANS

THE old Van Norman mansion was the finest house in Mapleton. Well back from the road, it sat proudly among its finely kept lawns and gardens, as if with a dignified sense of its own importance, and its white, Colonial columns gleamed through the trees, like sentinels guarding the entrance to the stately hall.

All Mapleton was proud of the picturesque old place, and it was shown to visiting strangers with the same pride that the native villagers pointed out the Memorial Library and the new church.

More than a half-century old, the patrician white house seemed to glance coldly on the upstart cottages, whose inadequate pillars supported beetling second stories, and whose spacious, filigreed verandas left wofully small area for rooms inside the house.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

The Van Norman mansion was not like that. It was a long rectangle, and each of its four stories was a series of commodious, well-shaped apartments.

And its owner, the beautiful Madeleine Van Norman, was the most envied as well as the most admired young woman in the town.

Magnificent Madeleine, as she was sometimes called, was of the haughty, imperious type which inspires admiration and respect rather than love. An orphan and an heiress, she had lived all of her twenty-two years of life in the old house, and since the death of her uncle, two years before, had continued as mistress of the place, ably assisted by a pleasant, motherly chaperon, a clever social secretary, and a corps of capable servants.

The mansion itself and an income amply sufficient to mantain it were already legally her own, but by the terms of her uncle's will she was soon to come into possession of the bulk of the great fortune he had left.

Madeleine was the only living descendant of old Richard Van Norman, save for one distant cousin, a young man of a scapegrace and ne'er-do-weel sort, who of late years had lived abroad.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

This young man's early life had been spent in Mapleton, but, his fiery temper having brought about a serious quarrel with his uncle, he had wisely concluded to take himself out of the way.

And yet Tom Willard was not of a quarrelsome disposition. His bad temper was of the impulsive sort, roused suddenly, and as quickly suppressed. Nor was it often in evidence. Good-natured, easy-going Tom would put up with his uncle's criticism and fault-finding for weeks at a time, and then, perhaps goaded beyond endurance, he would fly into a rage and express himself in fluent if rather vigorous English.

For Richard Van Norman had been by no means an easy man to live with. And it was Tom's general amiability that had made him the usual scapegoat for his uncle's ill temper. Miss Madeleine would have none of it. Quite as dictatorial as the old man himself she allowed no interference with her own plans and no criticism of her own actions.

This had proved the right way to manage Mr. Van Norman, and he had always acceded to Madeleine's requests or submitted to her decrees without objection, though there had never been any demonstration of affection between the two.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

But demonstration was quite foreign to the nature of both uncle and niece, and in truth they were really fond of each other in their quiet, reserved way. Tom Willard was different. His affection was of the honest and outspoken sort, and he made friends easily, though he often lost them with equal rapidity.

On account, then, of his devotion to Madeleine, and his enmity toward young Tom Willard, Richard Van Norman had willed the old place to his niece, and had further directed that the whole of his large fortune should be unrestrictedly bestowed upon her on her wedding-day, or on her twenty-third birthday, should she reach that age unmarried. In event of her death before her marriage, and also before her twenty-third birthday, the whole estate would go to Tom Willard.

It was with the greatest reluctance that Richard Van Norman decreed this, but a provision had to be made in case of Madeleine's early death, and Willard was the only other natural heir. And now, at twenty-two, Madeleine was on the eve of marriage to Schuyler Carleton, a member of one of the oldest and best families of Mapleton.

The village gossips were pleased to commend

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

this union, as Mr. Carleton was a man of irreproachable habits, and handsome enough to appear well beside the magnificent Madeleine.

He was not a rich man, but, as her marriage would bring her inheritance, they could rank among the millionaires of the day. Yet there were those who feared for the future happiness of this apparently ideal couple.

Mrs. Markham, who was both housekeeper and chaperon to her young charge, mourned in secret over the attitude of the betrothed pair.

"He adores her, I'm sure," she said to herself, "but he is too courtly and polished in his manner. I'd rather he would impulsively caress her, or involuntarily call her by some endearing name than to be always so exquisitely deferential and polite. And Madeleine must love him, or why should she marry him? Yet she is so haughty and formal, she might be a very duchess instead of a young American girl. But that's Madeleine all over. I've never seen her exhibit any real emotion over anything. Ah, well, I'm an old-fashioned fool. Doubtless, they're cooing doves when alone together, but their high-bred notions won't allow any sentiment shown before other people. But I almost wish she were going to

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

marry Tom. He has sentiment and enthusiasm enough for two, and the relationship is so distant it's not worth thinking about. Dear old Tom! He's the only one who ever stirs Madeleine out of that dignified calm of hers."

And that was true enough. Madeleine had inherited the Van Norman traits of dignity and reserve to such an extent that it was difficult for any one to be a really close friend.

She had, too, a strange little air of preoccupation, and even when interested in a conversation would appear to look through or beyond her companion in a way that was discouraging to the average caller.

So Miss Van Norman was by no means a favorite with the Mapleton young people in a personal sense, but socially she was their leader, and to be on her invitation list was the highest aspiration of the village "climbers."

And now that she was about to marry Schuyler Carleton, the event of the wedding was the only thing talked of, thought of, or dreamed of by Mapleton society.

Madeleine, who always kept in touch with Tom Willard by correspondence, had written him of her

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

approaching marriage, and he had responded by coming at once to America to attend the ceremony.

Relieved from the embarrassment of his uncle's presence, Tom was his jovial self, and showed forth all the reprehensible attractiveness which so often belongs to the scapegrace nature. He sometimes quarreled with Madeleine over trifles, then, making up the next minute, he would caress and pet her with the privileged air of a relative.

He was glad to be back among the familiar scenes of Mapleton, and he went about the town renewing old acquaintances and making new ones, and charming all by his winning personality.

In less than a week he had more friends in the village than Schuyler Carleton had ever made.

Carleton, though handsome and distinguished-looking, was absolutely without personal magnetism or charm, which traits were found in abundance in Tom Willard.

The friends of Schuyler Carleton attributed his reserved, almost repellent demeanor to shyness, and this was partly true. His acquaintances said it was indifference, and this again, was partly true. Then his enemies, of whom he had some, vowed that his cold, curt manner of speech was merely snobbishness, and this was not true at all.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

His manner toward his fiancée was all that the most exacting could require in the matter of courtesy and punctilious politeness. He was markedly undemonstrative in public, and if this were true of his behavior when the two were alone, it was probably because Madeleine herself neither inspired nor desired terms or acts of endearment.

Tom's attitude toward Madeleine angered Carleton extremely, but when he spoke to her on the subject he was gaily informed that the matter of cousinly affection was outside the jurisdiction of a fiancée.

Tom, on his part, was desperately in love with Madeleine, and had been for years. Repeatedly he had begged her to marry him, and she knew in her heart that his plea was prompted by his love for herself and not by any consideration of her fortune.

And yet, should she marry another, all hope of his uncle's money would be forever lost to Tom Willard.

But prodigal and spendthrift that he was, if Tom felt any regret at his vanishing fortunes, he showed no sign of it. Save for sudden and often easily provoked bursts of temper, he was infectiously gay and merry, and was the life of the house party already gathered under Madeleine's roof.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

The fact that Tom was staying at the Van Norman house, which of course Carleton could not do, gave Willard an advantage over the prospective bridegroom, of which he was by no means unconscious. Partly to tease the imperturbable but jealous Carleton, and partly because of his own affection for his cousin, Tom devoted himself assiduously to Madeleine, especially when Carleton was present.

"You see, Maddy," Tom would say, "there are only a few days left of our boy and girl chumminess. I fancy that after you are married, Schuyler won't let me speak to you, save in most formal terms, so I must see all I can of you now."

Then he would tuck her arm through his own, and take her for a stroll in the grounds, and Carleton, coming to search for her, would find them cosily chatting in a secluded arbor, or drifting lazily in a canoe on the tiny, lily-padded lake.

These things greatly annoyed Schuyler Carleton, but remonstrance was never an easy task for him, nor did it ever affect Madeleine pleasantly.

"I wish, Madeleine," he had said one day, when he had waited two hours for her to return from a drive with Tom, "that you would have a little regard for appearances, if you have none for my

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

wishes. It is not seemly for my betrothed wife to be driving all over the country with another man."

Magnificent Madeleine looked straight at him, tilting her head back slightly to look beneath her half-closed lids.

"It is not seemly," she said, "for my betrothed husband to imply that I could be at fault in a matter of propriety or punctilio. That is not possible."

"You are right," he said, and his eyes gleamed with admiration of her glorious beauty and imperious manner. "Forgive me,—you are indeed right."

Though Schuyler Carleton may not have been lavish of affection, he begrudged no admiration to the splendid woman he had won.

And yet, had he but known it, the apparently scornful and haughty girl was craving a more tender and gentle love, and would gladly have foregone his admiration to have received more affection.

"But it will come," Madeleine thought to herself. "I am not of the 'clinging vine' type, I know; but after we are married, surely Schuyler will be less formally polite, and more,—well,—chummy."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Yet Madeleine herself was chummy with nobody save Tom.

They two were always chatting and laughing together, and though they differed sometimes, and even quarrelled, it was quickly made up, and forgotten in a new subject of merry discussion.

But, after all, they rarely quarrelled except regarding Madeleine's approaching marriage.

"Don't throw yourself away on that iceberg, Maddy," Tom would plead. "He's a truly fine man, I know, but he can't make you happy."

"How absurd you are, Tom! Give me credit, please, for knowing my own mind, at least. I love Schuyler Carleton, and I am proud that he is to be my husband. He is the finest man I have ever known in every way, and I am a fortunate girl to be chosen by such a man."

"Oho, Maddy! Don't do the humble; it doesn't suit you at all. You are the type who ought to have 'kings and crown princes at your feet.' And Carleton is princely enough in his effects, but he's by no means at your feet."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Madeleine angrily.

"Just what I say. Schuyler Carleton admires

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

you greatly, but he doesn't love you—at least, not as I do!"

"Don't be foolish, Tom. Naturally you know nothing about Mr. Carleton's affection for me—he does not proclaim it from the housetops. And I desire you not to speak of it again."

"Why should I speak of what doesn't exist? Forgive me, Maddy, but I love you so myself, it drives me frantic to see that man treating you so coolly."

"He doesn't treat me coolly. Or, if he does, it's because I don't wish for tender demonstrations before other people. I'm fond of you, Tom, as you know, but I won't allow even you to criticise the man I am about to marry."

"Oh, very well, marry him, then, and a precious unhappy life you'll lead with him,—and I know why."

Madeleine turned on him, her eyes blazing with anger.

"What do you mean? Explain that last remark of yours."

"Small need! You know why as well as I do;" and Tom pushed his hands into his pockets and strode away, whistling, well knowing that he had roused his cousin's even temper at last.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

In addition to some of her Mapleton friends, Madeleine had invited two girls from New York to be her bridesmaids. Kitty French and Molly Gardner had already come and were staying at the Van Norman house the few days that would intervene before the wedding.

Knowing Madeleine well, as they did, they had not expected confidence from her, nor did they look forward to cosy, romantic boudoir chats, such as many girls would enjoy.

But neither had they expected the peculiar constraint that seemed to hang over all the members of the household.

Mrs. Markham had been so long housekeeper, and even companion, for Madeleine that she was not looked upon as a servant, and to her Kitty French put a few discreet questions regarding the exceeding reserve of Mr. Carleton.

"I don't know, Miss French," said the good woman, looking sadly disturbed. "I love Madeleine as I would my own child. I know she adores Mr. Carleton,—and—yes, I know he greatly admires her,—and yet there *is* something wrong. I can't express it—it's merely a feeling,—an intuition, but there *is* something wrong."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"You know Mr. Willard is in love with Maddy," suggested Miss French.

"Oh, it isn't that. They've always had a cousinly affection for each other, and,—yes, Tom is in love with her,—but what I mean is aside from all that. The real reason that Madeleine flirts with Tom—for she *does* flirt with him—is to pique Mr. Carleton. There! I've said more than I meant to, but you're too good a friend to let it make any trouble, and, any way, in a few days they will be married, and then I'm sure it will be all right,—I'm *sure* of it."

Like many people, Mrs. Markham emphasized by repetition a statement of whose truth she was far from sure.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

II

MISS MORTON ARRIVES

THE day before the wedding the old house was a pleasant scene of bustle and confusion.

Professional decorators were in charge of the great drawing-room, building a canopy of green vines and flowers, beneath which the bridal pair should stand the next day at high noon.

This work was greatly hindered by a bevy of young people who thought they were helping.

At last, noting a look of dumb exasperation on the face of one of the florist's men, Molly Gardner exclaimed, "I don't believe our help is needed here; come on, Kitty, let's go in the library and wait for tea-time."

It was nearly five o'clock, and the girls found most of the house guests already assembled in the library, awaiting the arrival of the tea-tray.

Several other young people were there also, most of them being those who were to be of the wedding cortège next day.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Robert Fessenden, who was to be best man, had just come from New York, and had dropped in to see Miss Van Norman.

Although he was an old friend of Carleton's, Madeleine did not know him very well, and though she made him welcome, it was with that coldly formal air that did not greatly attract the young man, but he could not fail to be impressed by her great beauty.

"Lucky fellow, Carleton," he said to Tom Willard. "Why, that woman would create a sensation in any great city in the world."

"Yes, she is too handsome to live all her life in a small village," agreed Tom. "I think they intend to travel a great deal."

"An heiress, too, I believe."

"Yes, she has all the desirable traits a woman can possess."

"All?" Fessenden's tone was quizzical.

"What do you mean?" asked Tom sharply.

"Nothing; only, if I were to marry, I should prefer a little more softness of nature."

"Oh, that's only her manner. My cousin is most sweet and womanly, I assure you."

"I'm sure she is," returned Fessenden, who was

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

a bit ashamed of his outspokenness; "and she's getting a sterling good fellow for a husband."

"She is so," said Tom, heartily, which was kind of him, considering his own opinion of Carleton.

And then both men strolled over to where Madeleine sat at the tea-table. She was reading a telegram that had just been brought to her, and she laughingly explained to Tom that it meant a bother for him.

"Miss Morton has concluded to come to the wedding, after all," she said. "She wrote me that she wouldn't come, but she has changed her mind, it seems. Now, it does sound ridiculous, I know, but in this big house there isn't a room left for her but the one you have, Tom. You see, one bedroom is used for a 'present room,' one is reserved for Schuyler to-morrow, the bridesmaids have another, and except for our own rooms, and those already occupied by guests, there are no more. I hate to ask you, Tom, but could you go to the Inn?"

"Sure, Maddy dear; anything to oblige. But it does seem too bad to turn me out of your house the very last day that your hospitality is all your own to offer. To-morrow the grand Seigneur will

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

be master here, and my timid little Madeleine can no longer call her soul her own."

This reference to the tall and stately mistress of the house raised a general laugh, but Madeleine did not join in it.

"I'm so sorry, Tom," she said earnestly, as she looked again at the telegram she was holding, "but Miss Morton was an old friend of Uncle Richard's, and as she wants to come here I can't turn her away. And unless you give her your room, there is no other——"

"Nonsense, Madeleine! I'm only joking. Of course I'll go to the hotel. Only too glad to accommodate Miss Morton. Forget it, girl; I assure you I don't mind a bit. I'll pack up a few traps after dinner and skip down to the picturesque, if rather ostentatious, Mapleton Inn."

As Tom spoke he put his arm carelessly round Madeleine's shoulders, and though scarcely more than a cousinly caress, it was unfortunate that Schuyler Carleton should enter the room at that moment. A lightning glance flashed between the two men, and as Tom moved away from Madeleine with a slightly embarrassed shrug of his shoulders, Carleton's face grew so stern that an uncomfortable silence fell upon the guests.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

However, the arrival of the tea-tray saved the situation, and Madeleine at once busied herself in the pretty occupation of serving tea to her guests.

With an air of jealous proprietorship, Carleton moved toward her and, looking handsome, though sulky, stood by Willard with folded arms, as if on guard.

Urged on by a daredevil spirit of mischief, and perhaps remembering that Madeleine would soon be beyond his reach as Carleton's wife, Tom also moved toward her from the other side. Endeavoring to treat the situation lightly, Madeleine held up a newly-filled teacup.

"Who will have this?" she asked gaily.

"I will!" declared Carleton and Tom at the same time, and each held out a hand.

Madeleine looked at them both smilingly.

Carleton's face was white and set; he was evidently making a serious matter of the trifling episode.

Tom, on the contrary, was smiling broadly, and was quite evidently enjoying his rival's discomfiture.

"I shall give it to you, because you look so pleasant," declared Madeleine, handing the cup to Tom. "Now, Schuyler, smile prettily and you may have one, too."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

But Carleton would not fall in with her light mood.

Bending a little, he said in a tense voice, "I will leave you to your cousin now. To-morrow I shall assert my claim."

Though not rude in themselves, the words were accompanied by a harsh and disdainful glance that made several of the onlookers wonder what sort of a life the haughty Madeleine would lead with such a coldly tyrannical husband.

"The brute!" said Tom, under his breath, as Carleton left the room. "Never mind, Maddy, the old Turk has left you to me for this evening, and we'll take him at his word."

Suddenly Madeleine's mood changed to one of utter gaiety. She smiled impartially on all, she jested with the girls, she bewitched the young men with her merry banter, and she almost seemed to be flirting with Tom Willard. But he was her cousin, after all, and much is forgiven a bride-to-be on her wedding eve.

Robert Fessenden looked at Miss Van Norman with a puzzled air. He couldn't seem to understand her, and was glad when by chance the two were left comparatively alone for a few moments' conversation.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"A great responsibility devolves on the best man, Miss Van Norman," he said, in response to a chaffing remark of hers. "I suppose that to-morrow I shall be general director-in-chief, and if anything *should* go wrong, I shall be blamed."

"But nothing *will* go wrong," said Madeleine, gaily, "and then, think how you'll be praised!"

"Ah, but you won't be here to hear the praise heaped upon me, so what's the use?"

"No, I shall be gone forever," said Madeleine, putting on one of her faraway looks. "I never want to come back to Mapleton. I hate it!"

"Why, Miss Van Norman! You want to desert this beautiful old house? Schuyler can never find you a home so comfortable and attractive in every way."

"I don't care. I want to go far away from Mapleton to live. We're going to travel for a year, any way, but when we do settle down, it will be abroad, I hope."

"You surprise me. Schuyler didn't tell me this. We've been chums so long, that I usually know of his plans. But, of course, getting married changes all that.

"You're a very intimate friend of Mr. Carle-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

ton's, aren't you?" said Madeleine, with a strange note of wistfulness in her voice.

"Yes, I am. Why?"

"Oh, nothing; I only thought—I mean, do you think——"

Rob Fessenden was thrilled by the plaintive expression on the beautiful face, and suddenly felt a great desire to help this girl, who was seemingly so far above and beyond all need of help, and yet was surely about to ask his aid, or at least his sympathy.

"Don't hesitate," he said gently; "what is it, Miss Van Norman? I want to be as firm a friend of yours as I am of Schuyler's, so please say what you wish to."

"I can't—I can't," Madeleine whispered, and her voice was almost a moan.

"Please," again urged Fessenden.

"Do you know Dorothy Burt?" Madeleine then broke out, as if the words were fairly forced from her.

"No," said Fessenden, amazed; "I never heard the name before. Who is she?"

"Hush! She's nobody—less than nobody. Don't mention her to me ever again—nor to any one else. Ah, here comes Miss Morton."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

As Fessenden watched Madeleine, she changed swiftly from a perturbed, troubled girl to a courteous, polished hostess.

"My dear Miss Morton," she said, advancing to meet her newest guest, "how kind of you to come to me at this time."

"I didn't come exactly out of kindness," said Miss Morton, "but because I desired to come. I hope you are quite well. Will you give me some tea?"

Miss Morton was a tall, angular lady, with gray hair and sharp, black eyes. She seemed to bite off her words at the ends of her short sentences, and had a brisk, alert manner that was, in a way, aggressive.

"An eccentric," Rob Fessenden thought, as he looked at her, and wondered why she was there at all.

"An old sweetheart of Mr. Richard Van Norman, I believe," said Kitty French, when he questioned her. "They were once engaged and then quarrelled and broke it off, and neither of them lived happily ever after."

"As the Carletons *will*," said Fessenden, smiling.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"Yes," said Kitty slowly, "as the Carletons will—I hope. You know Mr. Carleton awfully well, don't you? Are you sure he will make our Maddy happy, Mr. Fessenden?"

"I think so;" and Fessenden tried to speak casually. "He is not an emotional man, or one greatly given to sentiment, but I judge she is not that sort either."

"Oh, yes, she is! Maddy is apparently cold and cynical, but she isn't really so a bit. But she perfectly adores him, and if they're not happy, it won't be her fault."

"Nor will it be his," said Fessenden, warmly defending his absent friend. "Carleton's an old trump. There's no finer man in the world, and any woman ought to be happy with him."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Kitty, with a little sigh of relief. "Do look at that funny Miss Morton! She seems to be scolding Madeleine. I'm sorry she came. She doesn't seem very attractive. But perhaps it's because she was crossed in love and it made her queer."

"Or she was queered in love and it made her cross," laughed Fessenden. "Well, I must go, now, and look up Carleton. Poor old boy, he was a little miffed when he went away."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

After tea all the callers departed, and those who were house guests went to their rooms to dress for dinner.

Tom Willard, with great show of burlesque regret and tearful farewells, went to the hotel, that Miss Morton might have the room he had been occupying.

He promised to return for dinner, and gaily blew kisses to Madeleine as with his traps he was driven down the avenue.

At dinner, Schuyler Carleton's place was vacant. It had been arranged next to Madeleine's, and when fifteen minutes after the dinner hour he had not arrived, she haughtily accepted Tom Willard's arm and led the way to the dining-room.

But having reached the table, she directed Tom to take his rightful seat, at some distance from her own, and Carleton's chair remained empty at Madeleine's side.

At first this was uncomfortably evident, but Madeleine was in gay spirits, and soon the whole party followed her lead, and the conversation was general and in a merry key.

The young hostess had never looked more regally beautiful. Her dark hair, piled high on her head,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

was adorned with a dainty ornament which, though only a twisted ribbon, was shaped like a crown, and gave her the effect of an imperious queen. Her low-cut gown of pale yellow satin was severe of line and accented her stately bearing, while her exquisitely modelled neck and shoulders were as white and pure as those of a marble statue. Save for a double row of pearls around her throat, she wore no ornaments, but on the morrow Carleton's gift of magnificent diamonds would grace her bridal costume. The combination of haughty imperial beauty and a dazzling witchery of mood was irresistible, and the men and girls alike realized that never before had Madeleine seemed so wonderful.

After the dessert was placed on the table, Willard could stand it no longer, and, leaving his own place, he calmly appropriated Carleton's vacant chair.

Madeleine did not reprove him, and Kitty French took occasion to whisper to her neighbor:

"'T were better by far to have matched our fair cousin to brave Lochinvar.'"

Mrs. Markham overheard the quotation, and a look of pain came into her eyes. But it was all too late now, and to-morrow Madeleine would be irrevocably Schuyler Carleton's wife.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

After dinner coffee was served in the cozy library. Madeleine preferred this room to the more elaborately furnished drawing-room, and to-night her word was law.

But suddenly her mood changed. For no apparent reason her gay spirits vanished, her smile faded away, and a pathetic droop curved the corners of her beautiful mouth.

At about ten o'clock she said abruptly, though gently, "I wish you'd all go to bed. Unless you girls get some beauty sleep, you won't look pretty at my wedding to-morrow."

"I'm quite ready to go," declared Kitty French with some tact, for she saw that Madeleine was nervous and strung up to a high tension.

"I, too," exclaimed Molly Gardner, and the two girls said good-night and went upstairs.

Two or three young men who had been dinner guests also made their adieux, and Tom Willard said, "Well, I may as well toddle to my comforts of home, as understood by a country innkeeper."

Madeleine said good-night to him kindly enough, but without jest or gaiety. Tom looked at her curiously for a moment, and then, gently kissing her hand, he went away.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Mrs. Markham, having seen Miss Morton comfortably installed in what had been Tom's room, returned to the library to offer her services to Madeleine.

But the girl only thanked her, saying, "There is nothing you can do to-night. I want to be alone for an hour or two. I will stay here in the library for a time, and I'd like to have you send Cicely to me."

A few moments later Cicely Dupuy came in, bringing some letters and papers. She was Miss Van Norman's private secretary, and admirably did she fill the post. Quick-witted, clever, deft of hand and brain, she answered notes, kept accounts, and in many ways made herself invaluable to her employer.

Moreover, Madeleine liked her. Cicely was of a charming personality. Small, fair, with big, childish blue eyes and a rose-leaf skin, she was a pretty picture to look at.

"Sit down," said Madeleine, "and make a little list of some final matters I want you to attend to to-morrow."

Cicely sat down, and, taking pencil and tablet from the library table, made the lists as Madeleine directed. This occupied but a short time, and then Miss Van Norman said wearily:

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"You may go now, Cicely. Go to bed at once, dear. You will have much to do to-morrow. And please tell Marie I shall not need her services to-night. She may go to her room. I shall sit here for an hour or more, and I will answer these notes. I wish to be alone."

"Very well, Miss Van Norman," said Cicely, and, taking the lists she had made, she went softly from the room.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

III

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

"HELP!"

The loud cry of a single word was not repeated, but repetition was unnecessary, for the sound rang through the old Van Norman house, and carried its message of fear and horror to all, awake or sleeping, within its walls.

It was about half-past eleven that same night, and Cicely Dupuy, still fully dressed, flew from her bedroom out into the hall.

Seeing a light downstairs, and hearing the servants' bells, one after another, as if rung by a frantic hand, she hesitated a moment only, and then ran downstairs.

In the lower hall Schuyler Carleton, with a dazed expression on his white, drawn face, was uncertainly pushing various electric buttons which, in turn, flashed lights on or off, or rang bells in distant parts of the house.

For a moment Cicely stared straight at the man.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Their eyes met, their gaze seemed to concentrate, and they stood motionless, as if spellbound.

This crisis was broken in upon by Marie, Madeleine's French maid, who came running downstairs in a hastily donned negligée.

"Mon Dieu!" she cried. *"Ou est Mademoiselle?"*

With a start, Carleton turned from Cicely, and still with that dazed look on his face, he motioned Marie toward the wide doorway of the library. The girl took a step toward the threshold, and then, with a shriek, paused, and ventured no further.

Cicely, as if impelled by an unseen force, slowly turned and followed Marie's movements, and as the girl screamed, Cicely grasped her tightly by the arm, and the two stood staring in at the library door.

What they saw was Madeleine Van Norman, seated in a chair at the library table. Her right arm was on the table, and her head, which had fallen to one side, was supported by her right shoulder. Her eyes were partly closed, and her lips were parted, and the position of the rigid figure left no need for further evidence that this was not a natural sleep.

But further evidence there was. Miss Van

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Norman still wore her yellow satin gown, but the beautiful embroidered bodice was stained a dull red, and a crimson stream was even then spreading its way down the shimmering breadths of the trailing skirt.

On the table, near the outstretched white hand, lay a Venetian dagger. This dagger was well known to the onlookers. It had lain on the library table for many years, and though ostensibly for the purpose of a paper-cutter, it was rarely used as such. Its edges were too sharp to cut paper satisfactorily, and, moreover, it was a wicked-looking affair, and many people had shuddered as they touched it. It had a history, too, and Richard Van Norman used to tell his guests of dark deeds in which the dagger had taken part while it was still in Italy.

Madeleine herself had had a horror of the weapon, though she had often admitted the fascination of its marvellous workmanship, and had said upon several occasions that the thing fairly hypnotized her, and some day she should kill herself or somebody else with it.

From an instinctive sense of duty, Marie started forward, as if to help her mistress, then with a convulsive shudder she screamed again and clasped her

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

hands before her eyes to shut out the awful sight.

Cicely, too, moved slowly toward the silent figure, then turned and again gazed steadfastly at Schuyler Carleton.

There must have been interrogation in her eyes, for the man pointed toward the table, and Cicely looked again, to notice there a bit of paper with writing on it.

She made no motion toward it, but the expression on her face changed to one of bewildered surprise. Before she had time to speak, however, the other people of the house all at once began to gather in the hall.

Mrs. Markham came first, and though when she saw Madeleine she turned very white and seemed about to faint, she bravely went at once toward the girl, and gently tried to raise the fallen head.

She felt a firm grasp on her shoulder, and turned to see Miss Morton, with a stern, set face, at her side.

"Don't touch her," said Miss Morton, in a whisper. "Telephone for a doctor quickly."

"But she's dead," declared Mrs. Markham, at the same time bursting into violent sobs.

"We do not know; we hope not," went on Miss

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Morton, and without another word she led Mrs. Markham to a sofa, and sat her down rather suddenly, and then went herself straight to the telephone.

As she reached it she paused only to inquire the name of the family physician.

Harris, the butler, with difficulty articulated the name of Doctor Hills and his telephone number, and without further inquiry Miss Morton called for him.

"Is this Doctor Hills?" she said when her call was answered. "Yes; this is the Van Norman house. Come here at once. . . . No matter; you must come at once—it is very important—a matter of life and death. . . . I am Miss Morton. I am in charge here. Yes, come immediately! Good-by."

Miss Morton hung up the receiver and turned to the frightened group of servants.

"You can do nothing," she said, and you may as well return to your rooms. Harris may stay, and one of the parlor maids."

Miss Morton had an imperious air, and instinctively the servants obeyed her.

But Cicely Dupuy was not so ready to accept the

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

dictum of a stranger. She stepped forward and, facing Miss Morton, said quietly, "Mrs. Markham is housekeeper, as well as Miss Van Norman's chaperon. The servants are accustomed to take their orders from her."

Miss Morton returned Cicely's direct gaze. "You see Mrs. Markham," she said, pointing to the sofa, where that lady had entirely collapsed, and, with her head in a pillow, was shaking with convulsive sobs. "She is for the moment quite incapable of giving orders. As the oldest person present, and as a life-long friend of Mr. Richard Van Norman, I shall take the liberty of directing affairs in the present crisis." Then, in a softer tone and with a glance toward Madeleine, Miss Morton continued, "I trust in view of the awfulness of the occasion you will give me your sympathy and co-operation, that we may work in harmony."

Cicely gave Miss Morton a curious glance that might have meant almost anything, but with a slight inclination of her head she said only, "Yes, madam."

Then Kitty French and Molly Gardner came downstairs and stood trembling on the threshold.

"What is it?" whispered Kitty. "What's the matter with Madeleine?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"Something dreadful has happened," said Miss Morton, meeting them at the door. "I have telephoned for Doctor Hills and he will be here soon. Until then we can do nothing."

"But we can try to help Maddy," exclaimed Kitty, starting toward the still figure by the table. "Oh, is she hurt? I thought she had fainted!"

As the two girls saw the dread sight, Miss Gardner fainted herself, and Miss Morton bade Marie, who stood shivering in the hall, take care of her.

Relieved at having something to do, Marie shook the girl and dashed water in her face until she regained consciousness, the others, meanwhile, paying little attention.

Schuyler Carleton stood leaning against the doorpost, his eyes fixed on Madeleine's tragic figure, while Kitty French, who had dropped into a chair, sat with her hands tightly clasped, also gazing at the sad picture.

Although it seemed hours to those who awaited him, it was but a few moments before the doctor came.

Doctor Hills was a clean-cut, alert-looking young man, and his quick eyes seemed to take in every detail of the scene at a glance.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

He went straight to the girl at the table and bent over her. Only the briefest examination was necessary before he said gently, "She is quite dead. She has been stabbed with this dagger. It entered a large blood vessel just over her heart, and she bled to death. Who killed her?"

Even as he spoke his eye fell on the written paper which lay on the table. With one of his habitually quick gestures he snatched it up and read it to himself, while a look of great surprise dawned on his face. Immediately he read it aloud:

I am wholly miserable, and unless the clouds lift I must end my life. I love S., but he does not love me.

After he finished reading, Doctor Hills stood staring at the paper, and looked utterly perplexed.

"I should have said it was not a suicide," he declared, "but this message seems to indicate that it is. Is this written in Miss Van Norman's hand?"

Miss Morton, who stood at the doctor's side, took the paper and scrutinized it.

"It is," she said. "Yes, certainly that is Miss Van Norman's writing. I had a letter from her only a few days ago, and I recognize it perfectly."

"Let me see it," said Mrs. Markham, in a determined, though rather timid way. "I am more

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

familiar with Madeleine's writing than a stranger can possibly be."

Miss Morton handed the paper to the housekeeper without a word, while the doctor, waiting, wondered why these two women seemed so out of sympathy with each other.

"Yes, it is surely Madeleine's writing," agreed Mrs. Markham, her glasses dropping off as her eyes filled with tears.

"Then I suppose she killed herself, poor girl," said the doctor. "She must have been desperate, indeed, for it was a strong blow that drove the steel in so deeply. Who first discovered her here?"

"I did," said Schuyler Carleton, stepping forward. His face was almost as white as the dead girl's, and he was scarcely able to make his voice heard. "I came in with a latch-key, and found her here, just as you see her now."

As Carleton spoke Cicely Dupuy stared at him with that curious expression that seemed to show something more than grief and horror. Her emotional bewilderment was not surprising in view of the awful situation, but her look was a strange one, and for some reason it greatly disconcerted the man.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

None of this escaped the notice of Doctor Hills. Looking straight at Carleton, but with a kindly expression replacing the stern look on his face, he went on:

"And when you came in, was Miss Van Norman just as we see her now?"

"Practically," said Carleton. "I couldn't believe her dead. And I tried to rouse her. Then I saw the dagger on the floor at her feet——"

"On the floor?" interrupted Doctor Hills.

"Yes," replied Carleton, whose agitation was increasing, and who had sunk into a chair because of sheer inability to stand. "It was on the floor at her feet—right at her feet. I picked it up, and there was blood on it—there is blood on it—and I laid it on the table. And then I saw the paper—the paper that says she killed herself. And then—and then I turned on the lights and rang the servants' bells, and Cicely—Miss Dupuy—came, and the others, and—that's all."

Schuyler Carleton had with difficulty concluded his narration, and he sat clenching his hands and biting his lips as if at the very limit of his powers of endurance.

Doctor Hills again glanced round the assembly in that quick way of his, and said:

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"Did any of you have reason to think Miss Van Norman had any thought of taking her own life?"

For a moment no one spoke, and then Kitty French, who, in a despairing, miserable way, was huddled in the depths of a great arm-chair, said:

"I have heard Madeleine say that some time she would kill herself with that horrid old dagger. I wish I had stolen it and buried it long ago!"

Doctor Hills turned to Mrs. Markham. "Did you have any reason to fear this?" he inquired.

"No," she replied; "and I do not think Madeleine meant she would voluntarily use that dagger. She only meant she had a superstitious dread of the thing."

"Do you understand her reference to her own unhappiness in this bit of writing?" went on the doctor.

"Yes, I think I do," said Mrs. Markham in a low voice.

"That is enough for the present," said the doctor, as if to interrupt further confidences. "Although it is difficult to believe a stab of that nature could be self-inflicted, it is possible, and this communication seems to leave no room for doubt.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Now, the law of New Jersey requires that in case of a death not by natural means the county physician shall be summoned, and further proceedings are entirely at his discretion. I shall therefore be obliged to send for Doctor Leonard before disturbing the body in any way. He will probably not arrive in less than an hour or so, and I would advise that you ladies retire. You can of course do nothing to help, and as I shall remain in charge, you may as well get what rest you can during the night."

"I thank you for your consideration, Doctor Hills," said Mrs. Markham, who seemed to have recovered her calmness, "but I prefer to stay here. I could not rest after this awful shock, and I cannot stay away from Madeleine."

Kitty French and Molly Gardner, who, clasped in each other's arms, were shivering with excitement and grief, begged to be allowed to stay, too, but Doctor Hills peremptorily ordered them to go to their rooms. Cicely Dupuy was allowed to stay, as in her position of social secretary she might know much of Madeleine's private affairs. For the same reason Marie was detained, while Doctor Hills asked her a few questions.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Schuyler Carleton sat rigidly in his chair, as immovable as a statue. This man puzzled Doctor Hills. And yet it was surely shock enough almost to unhinge a man's brain thus to find his intended bride the night before his wedding.

But Carleton seemed absorbed in emotions other than those of grief. Though his face was impassive, his eyes darted about the room looking at one after another of the shocked and terrified group, returning always to the still figure at the table, and as quickly turning his gaze away, as if the sight were unbearable, as indeed it was.

He seemed like a man stunned with the awfulness of the tragedy, and yet conscious of a care, a responsibility, which he could not shake off.

If, inadvertently, his eyes met those of Miss Dupuy, he shifted his gaze immediately. If by chance he encountered Mrs. Markham's sad glance, he turned away, unable to bear it. In a word, he was like a man at the limit of his endurance, and seemed veritably on the verge of collapse.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

IV

SUICIDE OR ——?

Miss Morton, also, seemed to have distracting thoughts. She sat down on the sofa beside Mrs. Markham, then she jumped up suddenly and started for the door, only to turn about and resume her seat on the sofa. Here she sat for a few moments apparently in deep thought. Then she rose, and slowly stalked from the room and went upstairs.

After a few moments, Marie, the French maid, also rose and silently left the room.

Having concluded it was a case for the county physician, Doctor Hills apparently considered that his personal responsibility was at an end, and he sat quietly awaiting the coming of his colleague.

After a time, Miss Morton returned, and again took her seat on the sofa. She looked excited and a little flurried, but strove to appear calm.

It was a dreadful hour. Only rarely any one spoke, and though glances sometimes shot from the eyes of one to the eyes of another, each felt his

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

gaze oftenest impelled toward that dread, beautiful figure by the table.

At last Schuyler Carleton, with an evident effort, said suddenly, "Oughtn't we to send for Tom Willard?"

Mrs. Markham gave a start. "Of course we must," she said. "Poor Tom! He must be told. Who will tell him?"

"I will," volunteered Miss Morton, and Doctor Hills looked up, amazed at her calm tone. This woman puzzled him, and he could not understand her continued attempts at authority in a household where she was a comparative stranger. And yet might it not be merely a kind consideration for those who were nearer and dearer to the principals of this awful tragedy?

But even as he thought this over, Miss Morton had gone to the telephone, her heavy silk gown rustling as she crossed the room, and her every movement assertive of her own importance.

Calling up the Mapleton Inn, she succeeded, after several attempts, in rousing some of its occupants, and finally was in communication with young Willard himself. She did not tell him of the tragedy, but only asked him to come over to the

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

house at once, as something serious had happened, and returned to her seat with a murmured observation that Tom would arrive as soon as possible.

Again the little group lapsed into silence. Cicely Dupuy was very nervous, and kept picking at her handkerchief, quite unconscious that she was ruining its delicate lace edge.

Doctor Hills glanced furtively from one to another. Many things puzzled him, but most of all he was at a loss to understand the suicide of this beautiful girl on the very eve of her wedding.

At last Tom Willard came.

Miss Morton met him at the door, and took him into the drawing-room before he could turn toward the library.

Schuyler Carleton's frantic touches on various electric buttons had turned on all the lights in the drawing-room. As no one had noticed this, the great apartment had remained illuminated as if for a festivity, and the soft, bright lights fell on the floral bower and the elaborate decorations that had been arranged for the wedding day.

"What is it?" asked Tom, his own face white with an impending sense of dread as he looked into Miss Morton's eyes.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

As gently as possible, but in her own straightforward and inevitably somewhat abrupt way, Miss Morton told him.

"I want to warn you," she said, "to prepare for a shock, and I think it kinder to tell you the truth at once. Your cousin Madeleine—Miss Van Norman—has taken her own life."

"What?" Tom almost shouted the word, and his face showed an absolutely uncomprehending amazement.

"She killed herself to-night," Miss Morton went on, whose efforts were now directed toward making the young man understand, rather than towards sparing his feelings.

But Tom could not seem to grasp it. "What do you mean?" he said, catching her by both arms. "Madeleine? Killed herself?"

"Yes," said Miss Morton, shaken out of her own calm by Tom's excited voice. "In the library, after we had all gone to bed, she stabbed herself with that horrible paper-cutter thing. Did you know she was unhappy?"

"Unhappy? No; why should she be? To-morrow was to have been her wedding day!"

"To-day," corrected Miss Morton. "It is

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

already the day on which our dear Madeleine was to have become a bride. And instead——" Glancing around the brilliant room and at the bridal bower, Miss Morton's composure gave way entirely, and she sobbed hysterically. At this Cicely Dupuy came across from the library. Putting her arm around Miss Morton, she led the sobbing woman away, and without a word to Tom Willard gave him a glance which seemed to say that he must look out for himself, for her duty was to attend Miss Morton.

As the two women left the drawing-room Tom followed them. He walked slowly, and stared about as if uncertain where to go. He paused a moment midway in the room, and, stooping, picked up some small object from the carpet, which he put in his waistcoat pocket.

A moment more and he had crossed the hall and stood at the library door, gazing at the scene which had already shocked and saddened the others.

With a groan, as of utter anguish, Tom involuntarily put up one hand before his eyes.

Then, pulling himself together with an effort, he seemed to dash away a tear, and walked into the room, saying almost harshly, "What does it mean?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Doctor Hills rose to meet him, and by way of a brief explanation he put into Tom's hand the paper he had found on the table. Tom read the written message, and looked more stupefied than ever. With a sudden gesture he turned towards Schuyler Carleton and said in a low voice, "but you *did* love her, didn't you?"

"I did," replied Carleton simply.

"Why should she have thought you didn't?" went on Tom, looking at the paper, and seeming to soliloquize rather than to address his question to any one else.

As this was the first time that the "S." in Madeleine's note had been openly assumed to stand for Schuyler Carleton, there was a stir of excitement all round the room.

"I don't know," said Carleton, but a dull, red flush spread over his white face and his voice trembled.

"You don't know!" said Tom, in cutting tones. "Man, you *must* know."

But no reply was made, and, dropping into a chair, Tom buried his face in both hands and remained thus for a long time.

Tom Willard was a large, stout man, and pos-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

sessed of the genial and merry demeanor which so often accompanies avoirdupois. Save for his occasional, though really rare, bursts of temper, Tom was always in joking and laughing mood.

To see him thus in an agonized, speechless despair deeply affected Mrs. Markham. Tom had always been a favorite with her, and not even Madeleine had regretted more than she the estrangement between Richard Van Norman and his nephew. And even as Mrs. Markham looked at the bowed head of the great strong man she suddenly bethought herself for the first time that Tom was now heir to the Van Norman fortune.

She wondered if he had himself yet realized it; and then she scolded herself for letting such thoughts intrude so unfittingly soon. And yet she well knew that it would not be in ordinary human nature long to ignore the fact of such a sudden change of fortunes. As she looked at Tom her glance strayed toward Mr. Carleton, and then the thought struck her that what Tom had gained this man had lost. For had Madeleine lived the Van Norman money would have been, in a way, at the disposal of her husband. The girl's death then would make Tom a rich man, while Schuyler Carle-

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

ton would remain poor. He had always been poor, or at least far from wealthy, and more than one gossip was of the opinion that he had wooed Miss Van Norman not entirely because of disinterested love for her.

While Mrs. Markham was busy with these fast-following thoughts a voice in the doorway made her look up.

A quiet, unimportant-looking man stood there, and was respectfully addressing Doctor Hills.

"I'm Hunt, sir," he said, "a plain-clothes man from headquarters."

The three men in the room gave a start of surprise, and each turned an inquiring look at the newcomer.

"Who sent you? And what for?" asked Doctor Hills.

"I've been here all night, sir. I'm on guard in the present room upstairs."

"I engaged him," said Mrs. Markham. "Madeleine's presents are very valuable, and although the jewels are still in the bank, the silver and other things upstairs are worth a large amount, and I thought best to have this man remain here during the night."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"A very wise precaution, Mrs. Markham," said Doctor Hills; "and why did you leave your post, my man?"

"The butler told me of what had happened, and I wondered if I might be of any service down here. I left the butler in charge of the room while I came down to inquire."

"Very thoughtful of you," said Doctor Hills, with a nod of appreciation; "and while I hardly think so, we may have use for you before the night is over. I am expecting Doctor Leonard, the county physician, and until he comes I can do nothing. I am sure the room above is sufficiently guarded for the time being, so suppose you sit down here a few minutes and wait."

Mr. Hunt chose to take a seat in the hall, just outside the library door, and thus added one more solemn presence to the quietly waiting group.

And now Doctor Hills had occasion to add another puzzling condition to those that had already confronted him.

Almost every one in the room was curiously affected by the appearance of this detective, or plain-clothes man, as he was called.

Schuyler Carleton gave a start, and his pale face became whiter yet.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Cicely Dupuy looked at him, and then turning her glance toward Mr. Hunt, whom she could see through the doorway, she favored the latter with a stare of such venomous hatred that Doctor Hills with difficulty repressed an exclamation.

Cicely's big blue eyes roved from Hunt to Carleton and back again, and her little hands clenched as with a firm resolve of some sort in her mind; she seemed to brace herself for action.

Her hovering glances annoyed Carleton; he grew nervous and at last stared straight at her, when her own eyes dropped, and she blushed rosy red.

But this side-play was observed by no one but Doctor Hills, for the others were evidently absorbed in serious thoughts of their own concerning the advent of Mr. Hunt.

Tom Willard stared at him in a sort of perplexity; but Tom's good-natured face had worn that perplexed look ever since he had heard the awful news. He seemed unable to understand, or even to grasp the facts so clearly visible before him.

But Miss Morton was more disturbed than any one else. She looked at Hunt, and an expression of fear came into her eyes. She fidgeted about,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

she felt in her pocket, she changed her seat twice, and she repeatedly asked Doctor Hills if he thought Doctor Leonard would arrive soon.

Doctor Leonard did not live in Mapleton, but motored over from his home in a nearby village. He was a stranger to all those awaiting him in the Van Norman house, with the exception of Doctor Hills. Unlike that pleasant-mannered young man, Doctor Leonard was middle aged, of a crusty disposition and curt speech.

When he came, Doctor Hills presented him to the ladies, and before he had time to introduce the two men, Doctor Leonard said crossly, "Put the women out. I cannot conduct this affair with petticoats and hysterics around me."

Though not meant to reach the ears of the ladies, the speech was fairly audible, and with a trace of indignation Miss Morton arose and left the room. Mrs. Markham followed her, and Cicely went also.

Doctor Leonard closed the library doors, and, turning to Doctor Hills, asked for a concise statement of what had happened.

In his straightforward manner Doctor Hills gave him a brief outline of the case, including all the necessary details.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"And yet," he concluded," even in the face of that written message, I cannot think it a suicide."

"Of course it's a suicide," declared Doctor Leonard in his blustering way; "there is no question whatever. That written confession which you all declare to be in her handwriting is ample proof that the girl killed herself. Of course you had to send for me—the stupid old laws of New Jersey make it imperative that I shall be dragged out many miles away from my home for every death that isn't in conventional death-bed fashion; but there is no suspicion of foul play here. The poor girl chose to kill herself, and she has done so with the means which she found near at hand. I will write the burial certificate and leave it with you. There is no occasion for the coroner."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Schuyler Carleton, in a fervent tone.

"Amen," said Tom. "It's dreadful enough to think of poor Maddy as she is, but had it been any one else who——"

Unheeding the ejaculations of the two men, Doctor Hills said earnestly, "But, Doctor, if it had not been for the written paper, would you have called it suicide?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"That has nothing to do with the case," declared Doctor Leonard testily. "The paper is there, and is authentic. No sane man could doubt that it is a suicide after that."

"But, Doctor Leonard, it would seem impossible for a woman to stab herself at that angle, and with such an astonishing degree of force; also to pull the dagger from the wound, cast it on the floor, and then to place her arm in that particular position on the table."

"Why do you say in that particular position?"

"Because the position of her right arm is as if thrown there carelessly, and not as if flung there in a death agony."

"You are imaginative, Doctor Hills. The facts may not seem possible, but since they are the facts you must admit that they are possible."

"Very well, Doctor Leonard, I accept your decision, and I relinquish all professional responsibility in the matter."

"You may do so. There is no occasion for mystery or question. It is a sad affair, indeed, but no crime is indicated beyond that of self-destruction. The written confession hints at the motive for the deed, but that is outside my jurisdiction.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Who is the man in the hall? I fancied him a detective."

"He is; that is, he is a man from headquarters who is here to watch over the bridal gifts. He came down-stairs thinking we might require his services in another way."

"Send him back to his post. There is no work for detectives, just because a young girl chose to end her unhappy life."

Doctor Hills opened the library door and directed Hunt to return to his place in the present room.

Doctor Leonard, still with his harsh and disagreeable manner, advised Willard and Carleton to go to their homes, saying he and Doctor Hills would remain in charge of the library for the rest of the night.

Doctor Hills found the women in the drawing-room, awaiting such message as Doctor Leonard might have for them. Doctor Hills told them all that Doctor Leonard had said, and advised them to retire, as the next day would be indeed a difficult and sorrowful one.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

V

A CASE FOR THE CORONER

It was characteristic of Miss Morton that she went straight to her own room and shut the door. Mrs. Markham, on the other hand, went to the room occupied by Kitty French. Molly Gardner was there, too, and the two girls, robed in kimonas, were sitting, white-faced and tearful-eyed, waiting for some further news from the room whence they had been banished.

Mrs. Markham told them what Doctor Leonard had said, but Kitty French broke out impetuously, "Madeleine never killed herself, never! I know she always said that about the dagger, but she never really meant it, and any way she never would have done it the night before her wedding. I tell you she didn't do it! It was some horrid burglar who came in to steal her presents, who killed her."

"I would almost rather it had been so, Kitty dear," said Mrs. Markham, gently stroking the brow of the excited girl; "but it could not have been, for we have very strong locks and bolts against

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

burglars, and Harris is very careful in his precautions for our safety."

"I don't care! Maddy *never* killed herself. She wouldn't do it, I know her too well. Oh, dear! now there won't be any wedding at all! Isn't it dreadful to think of that decorated room, and the bower we planned for the bride!"

At these thoughts Kitty's tears began to flow afresh, and Molly, who was already limp from weeping, joined her.

"There, there," said Mrs. Markham, gently patting Molly's shoulder. "Don't cry so, dearie. It can't do any good, and you'll just make yourself ill."

"But I don't understand," said Molly, as she mopped her eyes with her wet ball of a handkerchief; "*why* did she kill herself?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Markham, but her expression seemed to betoken a sad suspicion.

"She didn't kill herself," reiterated Kitty. "I stick to *that*, but if she did, I know why."

This feminine absence of logic was unremarked by her hearers, who both said, "Why?"

Because Schuyler didn't love her enough," said Kitty earnestly. "She just worshipped him, and

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

he used to care more for her, but lately he hasn't."

"How do you know?" asked Molly.

"Oh, Madeleine didn't tell me," returned Kitty. "I just gathered it. I've been here 'most a week—you know I came several days before you did, Molly—and I've noticed her a lot. Oh, I don't mean I spied on her, or anything horrid. Only, I couldn't help seeing that she wished Mr. Carleton would be more attentive."

"Why, I thought he was awfully attentive," said Molly.

"Oh, attentive, yes. I don't exactly mean that. But there *was* something lacking,—don't you think so, Mrs. Markham?"

"Yes, Kitty, I do think so. In fact, I know that Mr. Carleton didn't give Madeleine the heart-whole affection that she gave him. But I hoped it would all turn out right, and I surely never dreamed it was such a serious matter as to bring Madeleine to this. But she was a reserved, proud nature, and if she thought Mr. Carleton had ceased to love her, I know she would far rather die than marry him."

"But she could have refused to marry him," cried Molly. "She didn't have to kill herself to get rid of him."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"She didn't kill herself," stubbornly repeated Kitty, but Mrs. Markham said:

"You don't understand Maddy's nature, Molly; she must have had some sudden and positive proof of Mr. Carleton's lack of true affection for her to drive her to this step. But once convinced that he did not care for her, I know her absolute despair would impel her to the desperate deed."

"Why didn't he love her?" said Molly, who could see no reason why any man shouldn't love the magnificent Madeleine.

"I think," said Kitty slowly, "there was somebody else."

"How did you know that?" exclaimed Mrs. Markham sharply, as if she had detected Kitty in some wrongdoing.

"I don't know it, but I can't help thinking so. Madeleine has sometimes asked me if I didn't think most men preferred gentle, timid dispositions to a strong, capable nature like her own. Of course she didn't express it just like that, but she hinted at it so wistfully, that I told her no, she was the splendidest, most adorable woman in the whole world. I meant it, too, but at the same time I do think men 'most always love the soft, tractable kind of girls,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

that are not so imperious and awe-inspiring as Maddy was."

Surely Kitty ought to know, for she was the most delicious type of soft, tractable femininity.

Her round, dimpled face was positively peachy, and her curling tendrils of goldy hair clustered round a low white brow, above appealing violet eyes. A man might admire the haughty Madeleine, but he would caressingly love bewitching little Kitty, and would involuntarily feel a sense of protection toward her, because of the shy trustfulness in her glance.

This was not entirely ingenuous, for wise little Kitty quite understood her own charm, but it was natural, and in no way forced; and she was quite content that her lines had fallen in her own pleasant places, and she left the magnificent Madeleines of the world to pursue their own rôles. But she had admired and loved Maddy Van Norman, and just because of their differing natures, had understood why Schuyler Carleton's affection was tempered with a certain sense of inferiority.

"You know," she went on, as if thinking aloud, "everybody was a little afraid of magnificent Maddy. She was so superb, so regal. You couldn't imagine yourself *cuddling* her!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"I should say not!" exclaimed Molly. "I could only imagine salaaming to her, or deferentially kissing her hand."

"Yes, that's what I mean. Well, Mr. Carleton got tired of that stilted kind of an attitude,—or, at least, she thought he did. I don't know, I'm sure, but she was possessed with a notion that he cared for some other girl,—some one of the clinging rose-bud sort."

"Do you know this?" asked Mrs. Markham; "I mean, do you know that Maddy thought this?"

"Yes, I know it," asserted Kitty, with a wag of her wise little head. "I tried to persuade her that no clinging rosebud could rival a tall, proud lily, but she thoroughly believed there was some one else."

"But Mr. Carleton was to marry her," said Mrs. Markham. "I can't believe he would do that if he loved another."

"That's what bothered Maddy," said Kitty; "she knew how honorable Mr. Carleton had always been, and she said that as he was engaged to her, he would think it his duty to marry her, even though his heart belonged to some one else."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Molly. "If he was going

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

to marry her, and didn't love her, it was because of her fortune. Probably his rosebud girl hasn't a cent."

"Don't talk like that," said Kitty, shuddering. "Somehow it seems disloyal to both of them."

"But it is all true," said Mrs. Markham sadly. "Madeleine has never been of a confidential nature, but I know that she had the idea Kitty tells of, and I fear it was true. And I may be disloyal, or even unjust, but I can't help thinking Schuyler was attracted by Maddy's money. He is proud and ambitious, and he would be quite in his element as the head of a fine establishment, with plenty of money to spend on it."

"Well, he'll never have it now," said Molly, and as this brought back the realization of the awful event that had happened, both girls burst into crying again.

Mrs. Markham, herself with overwrought nerves, found she could do nothing to comfort the girls, so left them and went to commune with her grief in her own room.

Meantime the two doctors alone in the library were still in discussion.

"Well, what do you want?" inquired Doctor

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Leonard angrily. "Do you want to imply, and with no evidence whatever, that the girl died by some hand other than her own? Do you want to involve the family in the expense and unpleasant publicity of a coroner's inquest, when there is not only no reason for such a proceeding, but there is every reason against it?"

"I want nothing but to get at the truth," rejoined Doctor Hills, a little ruffled himself. "I hold that a young woman, unless endowed with unusual strength, or possibly under stress of intense passion, could not inflict upon herself a blow strong enough to drive that dagger to the hilt in her own breast, pull it forth again, and cast it on the floor, and after that place her arm in the position it now occupies."

Doctor Leonard looked thoughtful. "I agree with you," he said slowly; "that is, I agree that it does not seem as if a woman could do that. But, my dear Doctor Hills, Miss Van Norman did do that. We know she did, from her own written confession, and also by the theory of elimination. What else *could* have happened? Have you any suggestion to advance?"

Doctor Hills was somewhat taken aback at

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Doctor Leonard's suddenness. Up to this moment the county physician had stoutly maintained that the case was a suicide beyond any question, and then, turning, he had put the question to the younger doctor in such a way that Doctor Hills was not quite ready with an answer.

"No," he said hesitatingly; "I have no theory to advance, and, moreover, I do not consider this an occasion for theories. But we must ascertain the facts. I state it as a fact that a woman could not stab herself as Miss Van Norman is stabbed, withdraw the dagger, and then place her right arm on the table in the position you see it."

"And I assert that you are stating what is not a fact, but merely your own opinion."

Doctor Hills looked disconcerted at this. His companion was an older and far more experienced man than himself, and not only did Doctor Hills have no desire to antagonize him, but he wished to show him the deference that was justly his due.

"You are right," he said frankly; "it is merely my own opinion. But now will you give me yours, based, not on the written paper, but the position and general effect of the body of Miss Van Norman?"

Put thus on his mettle, Doctor Leonard looked

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

carefully at the dead girl, whose pose was so natural and graceful that she might have been merely sitting there, resting.

He gazed long and intently, and then said, slowly:

"I see your point, Doctor Hills. It was a vigorous blow, suddenly and forcefully given. It could scarcely have been done, had the subject been a frail, slight woman. But Miss Van Norman was of a strong, even athletic build, and her whole physical make-up indicates strength and force of muscle. Your observation as to her apparently natural position is all right so far as it goes; but I have observed more carefully still, and I notice her evident physical strength, which was doubtless greatly aided by her stress of mental passion, and I aver that a woman of her physique could have driven the blow, removed the weapon, and, perhaps even then unconscious, have thrown her arm on the table as we now see it."

"I thank you, Doctor Leonard," said young Hills, "for your patience with me. You are doubtless right, and I frankly admit you have made out a clear case. Miss Van Norman was, indeed, a strong woman. I have been the family physician for several years, and I know her robust constitution.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Knowing this, and appreciating your superior judgment as to the possibility of the deed, I am forced to admit your opinion is the true one. And yet——"

"Besides, Doctor Hills," went on Doctor Leonard, as the younger man hesitated, "we cannot, we *must* not, ignore the written paper. Why should we do so? Those who know, tell us Miss Van Norman wrote it. It is, therefore, her dying statement. Dare we disregard her last message, written in explanation of her otherwise inexplicable act? We may wonder at this suicide, we may shudder at it; but we may not doubt that it *is* a suicide. That paper is not merely evidence,—it is testimony, it is incontrovertible proof."

Doctor Leonard ceased speaking, and sat silent because he had nothing more to say.

Doctor Hills also sat silent, because, try as he might, he could not feel convinced that the older physician was right. It was absurd, he well knew, but every time he glanced at the relaxed pose of that white right arm on the table, he felt more than ever sure that it had lain there just so when the dagger entered the girl's breast.

As the two men sat there, almost as motionless as the other still figure, both saw the knob of the door turn.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

They had closed the double doors leading to the hall, on the arrival of Doctor Leonard, and now the knob of one of them was slowly and noiselessly turning round.

A glance of recognition passed between them, but neither spoke or moved.

A moment later, the knob having turned completely round, the door began to open very slowly.

Owing to the position of the two men, it was necessary for the door to be opened far enough to admit the intruder's head before they could be seen, and the doctors waited breathlessly to see who it might be who desired to come stealthily to the library that night.

Doctor Hills, whose thoughts worked quickly, had already assumed it was Mrs. Markham, coming to gaze once more on her beloved mistress; but Doctor Leonard formulated no supposition and merely waited to see.

At the edge of the door appeared first a yellow pompadour, followed by the wide-open blue eyes of Cicely Dupuy. Seeing the two men, she came no further into the room, but gave a sort of gasp, and pulled the door quickly shut again. In the still house, the two listeners could hear her footsteps crossing the hall, and ascending the stairs.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"Curious, that," murmured Doctor Hills. "If she wanted to look once more on Miss Van Norman's face, why so stealthy about it? And if she didn't want that, what *did* she want?"

"I don't know," rejoined Doctor Leonard; "but I see nothing suspicious about it. Doubtless, she did come for a last glance alone at Miss Van Norman, but, seeing us here, didn't care to enter."

"But she gave a strange little shuddering gasp, as if frightened."

"Natural excitement at the strange and awful conditions now present."

"Yes, no doubt." Doctor Hills spoke a bit impatiently. The phlegmatic attitude of his colleague jarred on his own overwrought nerves, and he rose and walked about the room, now and then stopping to scrutinize anew the victim of the cruel dagger.

At last he stood still, across the table from her, but looking at Doctor Leonard.

"I have no suggestion to make," he said slowly. "I have no theory to offer, but I am firmly convinced that Madeleine Van Norman did not strike the blow that took away her life. Perhaps this is more a feeling or an intuition than a logical conviction, but——" He hesitated and looked intently at

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

the dead girl, as if trying to force the secret from her.

With a sudden start he took a step forward, and as he spoke his voice rang with excitement.

"Doctor Leonard," he said, in a quick, concise voice, "will you look carefully at that dagger?"

"Yes," said the older man, impressed by the other's sudden intensity; and, stepping forward, he scrutinized the dagger as it lay on the table, without, however, touching it.

"There is blood on the handle," went on Doctor Hills.

"Yes, several stains, now dried."

"And do you see any blood on the right hand of Miss Van Norman?"

Startled at the implication, Doctor Leonard bent to examine the cold white hand. Not a trace of blood was on it. Instinctively he looked at the girl's left hand, only to find that also immaculately white.

Doctor Leonard stood upright and pulled himself together.

"I was wrong, Doctor Hills," he said, with a nod which in him betokened an unspoken apology. "It is a case for the coroner."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

VI

FESSENDEN COMES

It was about nine o'clock the next morning when Rob Fessenden rang the bell of the Van Norman house. Having heard nothing of the events of the night, he had called to offer any assistance he might give before the ceremony.

The trailing garland of white flowers with fluttering streamers of white ribbon that hung beside the portal struck a chill to his heart.

"What can have happened?" he thought blankly, and confused ideas of motor accidents were thronging his mind as the door was opened for him. The demeanor of the footman at once told him that he was in a house of mourning. Shown into the drawing-room, he was met by Cicely Dupuy.

"Mr. Fessenden!" she exclaimed as she greeted him. "Then you have not heard?"

"I've heard nothing. What is it?"

Poor Miss Dupuy had bravely taken up the burden of telling the sad story to callers who did not know of it, and this was not the first time that morning she had enlightened inquiring friends.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

In a few words she told Mr. Fessenden of the events of the night before. He was shocked and sincerely grieved. Although his acquaintance with Miss Van Norman was slight, he was Schuyler Carleton's oldest and best friend, and so he had come from New York the day before in order to take his part at the wedding.

While they were talking Kitty French came in. As Mr. Fessenden began to converse with her Cicely excused herself and left the room.

"Isn't it awful?" began Kitty, and her tear-filled eyes supplemented the trite sentence.

"It is indeed," said Rob Fessenden, taking her hand in spontaneous sympathy. "Why should she do it?"

"She didn't do it," declared Kitty earnestly. "Mr. Fessenden, they all say she killed herself, but I know she didn't. Won't you help me to prove that, and to find out who did kill her?"

"What do you mean, Miss French? Miss Dupuy just told me it was a suicide."

"They all say so, but I know better. Oh, I wish somebody would help me! Molly doesn't think as I do, and I can't do anything all alone."

Miss French's face was small and flower-like,

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

and when she clasped her little hands and bewailed her inability to prove her belief, young Fessenden thought he had never seen such a perfect picture of beautiful helplessness. Without reserve he instantly resolved to aid and advise her to the best of his own ability.

"And Mrs. Markham doesn't think as I do, either," went on Kitty. "Nobody thinks as I do."

"I will think as you do," declared Fessenden, and so potent was the charm of the tearful violet eyes, that he was quite ready to think whatever she dictated. "Only tell me what to think, and what to do about it."

"Why, I think Madeleine didn't kill herself at all. I think somebody else killed her."

"But who would do such a thing? You see, Miss French, I know nothing of the particulars. I saw Miss Van Norman for the first time yesterday."

"Had you never met her before?"

"Oh, yes; a few years ago. But I mean, I came to Mapleton only yesterday, and saw her in the afternoon. I was to be Schuyler's best man, you know, and as he didn't come here to dinner last night, I thought I'd better not come either, though

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

I had been asked. He was a little miffed with Miss Van Norman, you know."

"Yes, I know. Maddy did flirt with Tom, and it always annoyed Mr. Carleton. Did you dine with him?"

"Yes, at his home. I am staying there. By the way, I met Miss Burt there; do you know her?"

"No, not at all. Who is she?"

"She's a companion to Mrs. Carleton, Schuyler's mother. I never saw her until last night at dinner."

"No, I don't know her," repeated Kitty. "I don't believe she was invited to the wedding, for I looked over the list of invitations. Still, her name may have been there. The list was so very long."

"And now there'll be no wedding and no guests."

"No," said Kitty; "only guests at a far different ceremony." Again the deep violet eyes filled with tears, and Fessenden was conscious of a longing to comfort and help the poor little girl thrown thus suddenly into the first tragedy of her life.

"It would be dreadful enough if she had died from an illness," he said; "but this added awfulness——"

"Yes," interrupted Kitty; "but to me the worst

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

part is for them to say she killed herself,—and I *know* she didn't. Why, Maddy was too fine and big-natured to do such a cowardly thing."

"She seemed so to me, too, though of course I didn't know her so well as you did."

"No, I'm one of her nearest friends,—though Madeleine was never one to have really intimate friends. But as her friend, I want to try to do what I can to put her right in the face of the world. And you said you'd help me."

She looked at Fessenden with such hopefully appealing eyes, that he would willingly have helped her in any way he could, but he also realized that it was a very serious proposition this young girl was making.

"I will help you, Miss French," he said gravely. "I know little of the details of the case, but if there is the slightest chance that you may be right, rest assured that you shall be given every chance to prove it."

Kitty French gave a sigh of relief. "Oh, thank you," she said earnestly; "but I'm afraid we cannot do much, however well we intend. Of course I'm merely a guest here, and I have no authority of any sort. And, too, to prove that Maddy did not kill

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

herself would mean having a detective and everything like that."

"I may not be 'everything like that,'" said Fessenden, with a faint smile, "but I am a sort of detective in an amateur way. I've had quite a good deal of experience, and though I wouldn't take a case officially, I'm sure I could at least discover if your suspicions have any grounds."

"But I haven't any suspicions," said Kitty, agitatedly clasping her little hands against her breast; "I've only a feeling, a deep, positive conviction, that Madeleine did not kill herself, and I'm sure I don't know who did kill her."

Fessenden gave that grave smile of his and only said, "That doesn't sound like much to work upon, and yet I would often trust a woman's intuitive knowledge against the most conspicuous clues or evidences."

Kitty thanked him with a smile, but before she could speak, Miss Morton came into the room.

"It's perfectly dreadful," that lady began, in her impetuous way; "they're going to have the coroner after all! Doctor Leonard has sent for him and he may arrive at any minute. Isn't it awful? There'll be an inquest, and the house will be thronged with all sorts of people!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"Why are they going to have an inquest?" demanded Kitty, whirling around and grasping Miss Morton by her elbows.

"Because," she said, quite as excited as Kitty herself—"because the doctors think that perhaps Madeleine didn't kill herself; that she was—was——"

"Murdered!" exclaimed Kitty. "I knew it! I knew she was! Who killed her?"

"Mercy! I don't know," exclaimed Miss Morton, frightened at Kitty's vehemence. "That's what the coroner is coming to find out."

"But who do you think did it? You must have some idea!"

"I haven't! Don't look at me like that! What do you mean?"

"It must have been a burglar," went on Kitty, "because it couldn't have been any one else. But why didn't he steal things? Perhaps he did! We never thought to look?"

"How you do run on! Nobody could steal the presents, because there was a policeman in the house all the time."

"Then, why didn't he catch the burglar?" demanded Kitty, grasping Miss Morton's arm, as if

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

that lady had information that must be dragged from her by force.

Feeling interested in getting at the facts in the case, and thinking that he could learn little from these two excited women, Rob Fessenden turned into the hall just in time to meet Doctor Hills, who was coming from the library.

"May I introduce myself?" he said. "I'm Robert Fessenden, of New York, a lawyer, and I was to have been best man at the wedding. You, I know, are Doctor Hills, and I want to say to you that if the earnest endeavor of an amateur detective would be of any use to you in this matter, it is at your disposal. Mr. Carleton is my old and dear friend, and I need not tell you how he now calls forth my sympathy."

Instinctively, Doctor Hills liked this young man. His frank manner and pleasant, straightforward ways impressed the doctor favorably, and he shook hands warmly as he said, "This is most kind of you, Mr. Fessenden, and you may prove the very man we need. At first, we were all convinced that Miss Van Norman's death was a suicide; and though the evidence still strongly points to that, I am sure that there is a possibility, at least, that it is not true."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"May I learn the details of the case? May I go into the library?" said Fessenden, hesitating to approach the closed door until invited.

"Yes, indeed; I'll take you in at once. Doctor Leonard, who is in there, is the county physician, and, though a bit brusque in his manner, he is an honest old soul, and does unflinchingly what he judges to be his duty."

Neither then nor at any time, neither to Doctor Leonard himself nor to any one else, did Doctor Hills ever mention the difference of opinion which the two men had held for so long the night before, nor did he tell how he had proved his own theory so positively that Doctor Leonard had been obliged to confess himself wrong. It was not in Doctor Hills' nature to say "I told you so," and, fully appreciating this, Doctor Leonard said nothing either, but threw himself into the case heart and soul in his endeavors to seek truth and justice.

Fessenden and Doctor Hills entered the library, where everything was much as it had been the night before. At one time the doctors had been about to move the body to a couch, and to remove the disfigured gown, but after Doctor Leonard had been persuaded to agree with Doctor Hills' view of the

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

case, they had left everything untouched until the coroner should come.

The discovery of this was a satisfaction to Robert Fessenden. His detective instinct had begun to assert itself, and he was glad of an opportunity to examine the room before the arrival of the coroner. Though not seeming unduly curious, his eyes darted about in an eager search for possible clues of any sort. Without touching them, he examined the dagger, the written paper, the appointments of the library table, and the body itself, with its sweet, sad face, its drooping posture, and its tragically stained raiment.

In true detective fashion he scrutinized the carpet, glanced at the window fastenings, and noted the appointments of the library table.

The only thing Fessenden touched, however, was a lead pencil which lay on the pen-rack. It was an ordinary pencil, but he gazed intently at the gilt lettering stamped upon it, and then returned it to its place.

Again he glanced quickly but carefully at every article on the table, and then, taking a chair, sat quietly in a corner, unobtrusive but alert.

With something of a bustling air the coroner

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

came in. Coroner Benson was a fussy sort of man, with a somewhat exaggerated sense of his own importance.

He paused with what he probably considered a dramatic start when he saw the dead body of Miss Van Norman, and, shaking his head, said, "Alas! Alas!" in tragic tones.

Miss Morton and Kitty French had followed him in, and stood arm in arm, a little bewildered, but determined to know whatever might transpire. Cicely Dupuy and Miss Markham had also come in.

But after a glance round and a preliminary clearing of his throat, he at once requested that everybody except the two doctors should leave the room.

Fessenden and Kitty French were greatly disappointed at this, but the others went out with a feeling of relief, for the strain was beginning to tell upon the nerves of all concerned.

As usual, Miss Morton tried to exercise her powers of generalship, and directed that they should all assemble in the drawing-room until recalled to learn the coroner's opinion.

Mrs. Markham, unheeding Miss Morton's dictum, went away to attend to her household duties, and

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Cicely went to her own room, but the others waited in the drawing-room. They were joined shortly by Tom Willard and Schuyler Carleton, who arrived at about the same time.

Mr. Carleton, never a robust man, looked like a wreck of his former self. Years had been added to his apparent age; his impassive face wore a look of stony grief, and his dark eyes seemed filled with an unutterable horror.

Tom Willard, on the contrary, being of stout build and rubicund countenance, seemed an ill-fitting figure in the sad and tearful group.

But as Kitty French remarked to Fessenden in a whisper, "Poor Tom probably feels the worst of any of us, and it isn't his fault that he can't make that fat, jolly face of his look more funereal."

"And he's said to be the heir to the estate, too," Fessenden whispered back.

"Now, that's mean of you," declared Kitty. "Tom hasn't a greedy hair in his head, and I don't believe he has even thought of his fortune. And, besides, he was desperately in love with Madeleine. A whole heap more in love than Mr. Carleton was."

Fessenden stared at her. "Then why was Carleton marrying her?"

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

"For her money," said Kitty, with a disdainful air.

"I didn't know that," went on Fessenden, quite seriously. "I thought Carleton was hard hit. She was a magnificent woman."

"Oh, she was, indeed," agreed Kitty enthusiastically. "Mr. Carleton didn't half appreciate her, and Tom did. But then she was always very different with Tom. Somehow she always seemed constrained when with Mr. Carleton."

"Then why was she marrying him?"

"She was terribly in love with him. She liked Tom only in a cousinly way, but she adored Mr. Carleton. I know it."

"Well, it seems you were right about her not killing herself, so you're probably right about this matter, too."

"Now, that shows a nice spirit," said Kitty, smiling, even in the midst of her sorrow. "But, truly, I'm 'most always right; aren't you?"

"I shall be after this, for I'm always going to agree with you."

"That's a pretty large order, for I'm sometimes awfully disagreeable."

"I shouldn't believe that, but I've practically

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

promised to believe everything you tell me, so I suppose I shall have to."

"Oh, now I *have* defeated my own ends! Well, never mind; abide by your first impression,—that I'm always right,—and then go ahead."

"Go ahead it is," declared Fessenden, and then Molly Gardner joined them. Molly was more overcome by the tragic turn affairs had taken than Kitty, and had only just made her appearance downstairs that day.

"You dear child," cried Kitty, noting her pale cheeks and sad eyes, "sit right down here by us, and let Mr. Fessenden talk to you. He's the nicest man in the world to cheer any one up."

"And you look as if you need cheering, Miss Gardner," said Fessenden, arranging some pillows at her back, as she languidly dropped down on the sofa.

"I can't realize it at all," said poor Molly; "I don't want to be silly and keep fainting all over the place, but every time I remember how Maddy looked last night——" She glanced toward the closed library doors with a shudder.

"Don't think about it," said Rob Fessenden gently. "What you need most, Miss Gardner, is a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

bit of fresh air. Come with me for a little walk in the grounds."

This was self-sacrifice on the part of the young man, for he greatly desired to be present when the coroner should open the closed doors to them again. But he really thought Miss Gardner would be better for a short, brisk walk, and, getting her some wraps, they went out at the front door.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

VII

MR. BENSON'S QUESTIONS

It was some time after Fessenden and Molly had returned from their walk that the library doors were thrown open, and Coroner Benson invited them all to come in.

They filed in slowly, each heart heavy with an impending sense of dread. Doctor Hills ushered them to seats, which had been arranged in rows, and which gave an unpleasantly formal air to the cozy library.

The body of Madeleine Van Norman had been taken upstairs to her own room, and at the library table, where she had last sat, stood Coroner Benson.

The women were seated in front. Mrs. Markham seemed to have settled into a sort of sad apathy, but Miss Morton was briskly alert and, though evidently nervous, seemed eager to hear what the coroner had to tell.

Kitty French, too, was full of anxious interest, and, taking the seat assigned to her, clasped her

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

little hands in breathless suspense, while a high color rose to her lovely cheeks.

Molly Gardner was pale and wan-looking. She dreaded the whole scene, and had but one desire, to get away from Mapleton. She could have gone to her room, had she chosen, but the idea of being all alone was even worse than the present conditions. So she sat, with overwrought nerves, now and then clutching at Kitty's sleeve.

Cicely Dupuy was very calm—so calm, indeed, that one might guess it was the composure of an all-compelling determination, and by no means the quiet of indifference.

Marie was there, and showed the impassive face of the well-trained servant, though her volatile French nature was discernible in her quick-darting glances and quivering, sensitive lips.

The two doctors, Mr. Carleton, Tom Willard, and young Fessenden occupied the next row of seats, and behind them were the house servants.

Unlike the women, the men showed little or no emotion on their faces. All were grave and composed, and even Doctor Leonard seemed to have laid aside his brusque and aggressive ways.

As he stood facing this group, Coroner Benson

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

was fully alive to the importance of his own position, and he quite consciously determined to conduct the proceedings in a way to throw great credit upon himself in his official capacity.

After an impressive pause, which he seemed to deem necessary to gain the attention of an already breathlessly listening audience, he began:

"While there is much evidence that seems to prove that Miss Van Norman took her own life, there is very grave reason to doubt this. Both of the eminent physicians here present are inclined to believe that the dagger thrust which killed Miss Van Norman was not inflicted by her own hand, though it may have been so. This conclusion they arrive at from their scientific knowledge of the nature and direction of dagger strokes, which, as may not be generally known, is a science in itself. Indeed, were it not for the conclusive evidence of the written paper, these gentlemen would believe that the stroke was impossible of self-infliction.

"But, aside from this point, we are confronted by this startling fact. Although the dagger, which you may see still lying on the table, has several blood-stains on its handle, there is absolutely no trace of blood on the right hand of the body of Miss

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Van Norman. It is inconceivable that she could have removed such a trace, had there been any, and it is highly improbable, if not indeed impossible, that she could have handled the dagger and left it in its present condition, without showing a corresponding stain on her hand."

This speech of Coroner Benson's produced a decided sensation on all his hearers, but it was manifested in various ways. Kitty French exchanged with Fessenden a satisfied nod, for this seemed in line with her own theory.

Fessenden returned the nod, and even gave Kitty a faint smile, for who could look at that lovely face without a pleasant recognition of some sort? And then he folded his arms and began to think hard. Yet there was little food for coherent thought.

Granting the logical deduction from the absence of any stain on Miss Van Norman's hands, there was, as yet, not the slightest indication of any direction in which to look for the dastard who had done the deed.

Schuyler Carleton showed no emotion, but his white face seemed to take on one more degree of horror and misery. Tom Willard looked blankly

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

amazed, and Mrs. Markham began on a new one of her successive crying spells. Miss Morton sat bolt upright and placidly smoothed the gray silk folds of her gown, while her face wore a decided "I told you so" expression, though she hadn't told them anything of the sort.

But as Fessenden watched her—the rows of seats were slightly horseshoed, and he could see her side face well—he noticed that she was really trembling all over, and that her placidity of face was without doubt assumed for effect. He could not see her eyes, but he was positive that only a strong fear or terror of something could explain her admirably suppressed agitation.

The behavior of Cicely Dupuy was perhaps the most extraordinary. She flew into a fit of violent hysterics, and had to be taken from the room. Marie followed her, as it had always been part of the French maid's duty to attend Miss Dupuy upon occasion as well as Miss Van Norman.

"In view of this state of affairs," went on the coroner, when quiet had been restored after Cicely's departure, "it becomes necessary to make an investigation of the case. We have absolutely no evidence, and no real reason to suspect foul play, yet

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

since there is the merest possibility that the death was not a suicide, it becomes my duty to look further into the matter. I have been told that Miss Van Norman had expressed a sort of general fear that she might some day be impelled to turn this dagger upon herself. But that is a peculiar mental obsession that affects many people at sight of a sharp-pointed or cutting instrument, and is by no means a proof that she did do this thing. But quite aside from the temptation of the glittering steel, we have Miss Van Norman's written confession that she at least contemplated taking her own life, and ascribing a reason therefor. In further consideration, then, of this written paper, of which you all know the contents, can any of you tell me of any fact or quote any words spoken by Miss Van Norman that would corroborate or amplify the statement of this despairing message?"

As Mr. Benson spoke, he held in his hand the written paper that had been found on the library table. It was indeed unnecessary to read it aloud, for every one present knew its contents by heart.

But nobody responded to the coroner's question. Mr. Carleton looked mutely helpless, Tom Willard looked honestly perplexed, and yet many of those

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

present believed that both these men knew the sad secret of Madeleine's life, and understood definitely the written message.

Again Mr. Benson earnestly requested that any one knowing the least fact, however trivial, regarding the matter, would mention it.

Then Mrs. Markham spoke.

"I can tell you nothing but my own surmise," she said; "I know nothing for certain, but I have reason to believe that Madeleine Van Norman had a deep sorrow,—such a one as would impel her to write that statement, and to act in accordance with it."

"That is what I wished to know," said Coroner Benson; "it is not necessary for you to detail the nature of her sorrow, or even to hint at it further, but the assurance that the message is in accordance with Miss Van Norman's mental attitude goes far toward convincing me that her death is the outcome of that written declaration."

"I know, too," volunteered Kitty French, "that Madeleine meant every word she wrote there. She *was* miserable, and for the very reason that she herself stated!"

Mr. Benson pinched his glasses more firmly on

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

his nose, and turned his gaze slowly toward Miss French.

Kitty had spoken impulsively, and perhaps too directly, but, though embarrassed at the sensation she had caused, she showed no desire to retract her statements.

"I am told," said the coroner, his voice ringing out clearly in the strange silence that had fallen on the room, "that the initial on this paper designates Mr. Schuyler Carleton. I must therefore ask Mr. Carleton if he can explain the reference to himself."

"I cannot," said Schuyler Carleton, and only the intense silence allowed his low whisper to be heard. "Miss Van Norman was my affianced wife. We were to have been married to-day. Those two facts, I think, prove the existence of our mutual love. The paper is to me inexplicable."

Tom Willard looked at the speaker with an expression of frank unbelief, and, indeed, most of the auditors' faces betrayed incredulity.

Even with no previous reason to imagine that Carleton did not love Madeleine, the tragic message proved it beyond all possible doubt,—and yet it was but natural for the man to deny it.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Doctor Hills spoke next.

"I think, Coroner Benson," he said, as he rose to his feet, "we are missing the point. If Miss Van Norman took her life in fulfilment of her own decision, the reasons that brought about that decision are not a matter for our consideration. It is for us to decide whether she did or did not bring about her own death, and as a mode of procedure may I suggest this? Doctor Leonard and myself hold, that, in view of the absence of any stain on Miss Van Norman's hands, she could not have handled the stained dagger that killed her. A refutation of this opinion would be to explain how she could have done the deed and left no trace on her fingers. Unless this can be shown, I think we can *not* call it a suicide."

Although nothing would have induced him to admit it, Coroner Benson was greatly accommodated by this suggestion, and immediately adopting it as his own promulgation, he repeated it almost exactly word for word, as his official dictum.

"And so," he concluded, "as I have now explained, unless a theory can be offered on this point, we must agree that Miss Van Norman's unfortunate death was not by her own hand."

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Robert Fessenden arose.

"I have no theory," he said; "I have no argument to offer. But I am sure we all wish to discover the truth by means of any light that any of us may throw on the mystery. And I want to say that in my opinion the absence of blood on the hands, though it *indicates*, does not positively *prove*, that the weapon was held by another than the victim. Might it not be that, taking the dagger from the table, clean as of course it was, Miss Van Norman turned it upon herself, and then, withdrawing it, let it drop to the floor, where it subsequently became blood-stained, as did the rug and her own gown?"

The two doctors listened intently. It was characteristic of both that though Doctor Hills had shown no elation when he had convinced Doctor Leonard of his mistake the night before, yet now Doctor Leonard could not repress a gleam of triumph in his eyes as he turned to Doctor Hills.

"It is possible," said Mr. Benson, with a cautiously dubious air, though really the theory struck him as extremely probable, and he wished he had advanced it himself.

Doctor Hills looked thoughtful, and then, as nobody else spoke, he observed:

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA