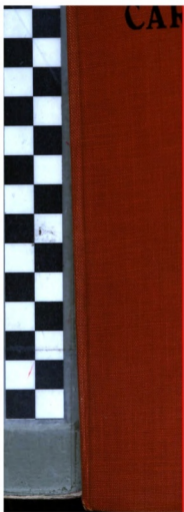


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**HOW MANY
CARDS?**

HOW MANY CARDS?

BY ✓

ISABEL OSTRANDER

AUTHOR OF "THE ISLAND OF INTRIGUE," "SUSPENSE,"
"ASHES TO ASHES," ETC.

NEW YORK
ALEXANDRIAN SOCIETY, INC.
1930

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*Printed in the
United States of America*

Published, 1920

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HOW MANY CARDS?

CHAPTER I

EX-ROUNDSMAN McCARTY MIXES IN

EX-ROUNDSMAN TIMOTHY McCARTY was taking one of the nocturnal strolls so habitual with him, as to have become almost instinctive since the far-off days when, as Officer 804 and one of the finest, he had pounded his beat.

It was a soft April night, starless, for the sky was still overcast from a recent shower, and the odor of wet earth and fresh, springing green things from the park across the avenue blended pleasantly with the smoke of the cigar which tilted upward from beneath his short, stubby, sandy mustache.

McCarty's meditations were pleasant, too, for earlier in the evening he had come off victor in a strenuous debate with his old crony, Dennis Riordan, of the fire department, over old versus new police methods, and the memory of it made his broad shoulders heave in a soundless chuckle.

All at once he paused in his measured, rhythmic tread, his teeth clamped down upon the cigar and his keen, twinkling blue eyes narrowed. A block ahead of him, keeping well in shadow, there slouched a figure whose type had been well known to him in the old days and among whose fraternity his own name had been mentioned blasphemously but with bated breath.

The figure was that of an undersized, narrow-framed man who moved with the slow, crouching poise of a cat. He wore no coat, but what appeared in the uttermost limits

of the rays of a street lamp to be a sweater, and his cap was pulled so far forward over his eyes that the back of his small, bullet-shaped head was plainly visible.

McCarty clutched his stout umbrella more firmly and without obviously quickening his pace he nevertheless narrowed the distance between the slim, slinking figure and himself with every yard. Forgotten was the fact that he had long ago retired from the force to live on the comfortable inheritance from his saloon-keeping uncle; he was once again following his beat and there before his eyes was a crook out to pull off a job!

The houses on the broad avenue which faced the park were veritable miniature palaces, each one occupied by a family whose rank in the social and financial world was of almost national reputation, and before the richest of these in the center of the block ahead the figure paused.

Instantly McCarty flattened himself as much as his girth would allow against the wall of the house he was passing, mentally anathematizing the newer style of American basements which admitted of no protecting high entrances or areaways; but after a moment it was evident that his simple strategy had sufficed, for when he cautiously craned his neck around the slightly projecting cornice the figure had disappeared.

Save for the rumbling and lights of a bus approaching from the opposite direction the avenue was deserted and it was inconceivable that in that instant the crook could have made off around the corner.

Moving with almost miraculous speed and silence, McCarty sped to the house before which the figure had paused and one glance showed the meaning of his sudden disappearance. The house was of white stone, wider and more imposing even than its neighbors, but like them with a low, broad entrance door sunk three steps below the level of the street, a smaller tradesmen's entrance some distance away and between them a row of wide, ornate windows.

The second one from the main entrance was open slightly, just enough for a bit of the heavy lace of the curtain to have been caught in the crack and for the tiniest ray of subdued light to creep through.

"The carelessness of him!" McCarty grumbled to himself in disgust at this lack of thoroughness even in one of his sworn enemies. "That light's not moving; did he have the nerve, I wonder, to turn on—!"

His speculations came to an abrupt end and he dived down the shallow steps and crouched waiting to spring, for the heavy window had opened swiftly with no apparent effort at silence, the curtain was whisked aside and the sinuous figure wormed its way through and dropped the scant eight feet which separated the sill from the level of the pavement.

Instantly, before he could turn, a huge, stockily built form hurled itself upon him and in his complete surprise he was borne by sheer weight to the ground where he was held and expertly frisked.

The whole affair had been a matter of seconds and no sound had come from either man save the quick, sobbing breath of the captive and the heavier snort of McCarty, but as the latter stuffed into his own pockets with one hand the pistol, blackjack and skeleton keys which had been the result of his search the other whined:

"Let me go, Mister! Honest t'Gawd, I ain't done a t'ing but just sneak in an'—an' right out! I ain't got nothin' on me, youse knows that! Honest t'Gawd—"

McCarty's answer was to drag the squirming, writhing youth to his feet with a firm grip on the collar of his sweater and with his other hand to pick up the umbrella from where he had dropped it beside him and rap smartly on the pavement for assistance.

"Oh, don't do that! Let me go before de bull comes, mister, for de love o' Gawd! I swear it on me mudder dat I didn't have nothin' to do wit—wit—what's in dere!"

Mixed with the whine of fear there was a rising note of horror in the youth's tones which made McCarty drag him swiftly over to the nearest street lamp. The face which the culprit raised shrinkingly to his was weak and tremulous, with the shifting, rat-like eyes and pasty yellow skin of the typical gangster, but there was something more than the mere fear of being caught at housebreaking in his eyes; mortal terror looked out from them and McCarty's grip on his collar tightened.

"What's in there?" he demanded, giving the all but collapsed figure a violent shake. "I don't know where the devil is Clancy, but what did you leave behind you in that house?"

"I didn't have nottin' to do wit' it, I'm tellin' youse! I just give it one look an' beat it! De foist job I ever tried to put over, an' now—!"

But a tattoo of heavy footsteps came pounding along the sidewalk and in another moment a blue-coated figure dashed up to them.

"What's goin' on here? Somebody rapped. For the love of heaven, 'tis you, Mac! And what have you there?"

"What you should have had if you'd been on your beat, Clancy!" McCarty retorted grimly. "A fine young second-story worker that I've been trailing these four blocks and more, and nabbed just as he was scrambling out of the window of that white house there after he had finished his job."

"I didn't finish no job!" the youth cried desperately. "Honest, I wasn't in dere two seconds! If you was trailin' me, mister, you know dat! I just give it a look an' started to make my getaway. Don't send me to de chair!"

"Chair, is it?" McCarty gave the policeman a significant glance. "I've been trying to get out of him what he did do in there while I was waiting for you to show up."

"We'll take him along and find out," Clancy declared briefly.

"No! Don't take me back in dat house!" the wretched youth wailed. "I don't wanna look at it again! I can't—!"

Unheeding his protestations, they dragged him back the few steps to the house, where McCarty pointed to the opened window from which the subdued light filtering through the lace curtain fell in a delicately patterned square on the pavement.

"Who lives here?" he asked, as the policeman pressed the button at the entrance door.

"Creveling, the millionaire," Clancy responded.

"Not Eugene Creveling, the fellow who used to pull off all those wild stunts on Broadway a matter of ten or fifteen years ago?" McCarty demanded. "They used to call him Million-a-month Creveling!"

"I don't know anything about that," Clancy asserted. "Must have been before my time. All I know is he's got a grand looking wife and barring the big entertainments they give the house is the quietest on the block.—Here, you! Quit that or I'll give you a rap that'll put you to sleep!" This to the struggling youth who now, utterly unnerved, was sobbing wildly. "I wonder if they're all dead in here! Mac, go and try the other bell."

McCarty obeyed but with no result. Save for the low light glowing from the open window the huge house might have been indeed a tomb.

"There's nothing to it, Mac. We can't get anything out of this bird, either, now. You get a hold of him and I'll go in the way he did, through the window."

McCarty gripped the shabby sweater collar once more and Clancy jumped up, caught the sill and swung himself over it, sweeping the curtain aside. It fell again into place and for a minute there was silence.

A second bus rumbled past, a limousine or two and a prowling taxi, but none saw the two figures huddled tense in the shadows.

"Say, what are you, mister; a dick?" the youth whined,

passing his sleeve across his slobbered face. "If you trailed me like youse said, you know you didn't hear nottin'! You know I wasn't dere long enough to croak him!"

"Croak who?" demanded McCarty.

"De guy in dere in de soup-an'-fish, wit' his chest all shot to pieces! You know I didn't do it! Dere ain't a pill gone from my gat! If youse an' de bull frames me—!"

There came a rattling of bolts and chains on the inner side of the huge entrance door and it divided and swung slowly inward revealing Clancy standing grave-faced in the aperture and behind him the wide marble staircase and rug-hung gallery of an imposing rotunda.

"Come in," he invited laconically. "I switched on these hall lights myself, but there was some already going in this room back here; come and see what I found."

He led the way across the marble hall, rich in the mellow, subdued colorings of the rugs and draperies under the soft lights, but funereal with the huge, carved chairs ranged in mathematical precision against the walls. McCarty followed with the lagging, handcuffed youth in tow.

The door of a room beside the staircase was open and as they reached it all three paused for a moment on the threshold. It was spacious in itself although small in comparison with the vastness of the hall and was furnished as a study, with two davenports facing each other projecting from either side of the fireplace and a long Jacobean refectory table between. Bookcases lined the walls, a massive writing table stood between two windows at the rear and deeply upholstered chairs were scattered here and there, each with a smoking stand beside it, but McCarty's eyes took in the details with a mere glance.

His attention was riveted on the long figure clad in the perfection of dinner clothes which lay stretched upon the floor. The feet in their glistening pumps were upturned and a gleam of white showed where waistcoat and shirt-

front met, but all the upper part of the body was stained crimson.

Clancy's own face was white, and inured as he was to sights as hideous as this, McCarty felt a wave of nausea sweep over him, while their captive put his manacled hands over his eyes and moaned.

"Is it Creveling himself, do you think?" McCarty asked in a lowered tone.

For reply Clancy knelt beside the body and slipping his hand in the stained waistcoat pocket pulled out a platinum cigarette case as thin as a knife blade, the top of which, barely protruding, had caught his eye.

He held it up for McCarty to see and the latter plainly read the initials upon it: "E. C. C."

"I remember now," he observed soberly. "I saw the name in the papers often enough, years past, to bring it back to me; Eugene Christopher Creveling."

Clancy replaced the cigarette case carefully and pointed to something which lay beside the body. It was a huge army pistol and it lay almost within touch of the finger tips of that limp, nerveless right hand.

"I'll have a word with you, Clancy." McCarty turned and shoved his captive into the nearest chair. "Sit there and if you stir I'll blow the head off you."

But there was plainly no thought of either resistance or flight left in the boy; he half turned and, resting his arms upon the wide-spreading ones of the chair, he buried his face in them.

McCarty drew his confrère to the other end of the room and with an ever watchful eye upon the thief he whispered:

"He never had a hand in it, Clancy. I saw he was up to mischief and I trailed him for four or five blocks, as I told you. I wasn't more than a block away when he skinned in that window and I didn't lose any time reaching the outside of it. There was no shot fired in the meantime and I'd hardly got here when he came squirming out again. I

grabbed him and dragged him over to the light of that street lamp and I saw then that he was scared clean through; he looked as though he had seen a ghost! He's telling the truth, all right; that rat wouldn't have the nerve to stick up a kid coming home from the grocery on an errand for its mother!"

"Did you frisk him?" asked Clancy.

"I did, and found a gat on him that's like a toy cap pistol compared to that gun lying there. Here it is."

He produced the keys, pistol and blackjack which he had taken from the thief and after one look at them Clancy announced:

"We'll send for the wagon and have him held as a material witness; that junk he was carrying will send him up for a stretch, anyway."

After some search they located a desk telephone on the writing table, concealed beneath a bell-shaped bronze ornament and the policeman called up his precinct station house and had the satisfaction of knowing that the message was relayed to the borough headquarters.

"It's too big entirely for them to handle," declared McCarty contemptuously when the other had hung up the receiver. "I'll put a call through myself to general headquarters and tip them off. Maybe my old friend Inspector Druet might be there and could happen along up here before the gumshoes from the bushes have a chance to ball up the game. It's highly irregular, but I'm only a private citizen now, by the grace of my uncle—may God rest his soul—and I'm free to do as I please."

To Inspector Druet, seated at his desk in the homicide bureau, there presently came over the wire a well-known voice, husky with ill-suppressed excitement.

"Mac, you old scoundrel!" he exclaimed in affectionate banter. "Where have you been keeping yourself, and what are you doing this time of night?"

"I'm mixing in high society, sir." McCarty's tones were

cautious. "I'm in a grand private house up on the Avenue facing the park just above the third side entrance—of the park, I mean, sir—and there'll be quite a little party here soon, I'm thinking. Maybe you'd like to get in a little ahead—"

"What is it? Where are you?" The inspector's own tones had crisped. "Mac, have you tumbled headforemost into another—?"

"'Tis the house of Mr. Eugene Creveling, sir; him they used to call Million-a-month. Jim Clancy is here with me and a young crook we copped by the way, but none of the family seems to be at home except himself, and we found him with a bullet in his heart from an army gun."

"I'll be with you," the inspector said briefly and the two receivers clicked in unison.

"It would never have been known until heaven knows when if you hadn't nabbed this bird here." Clancy spoke with reluctant but irrepressible honesty. "By the keys of Saint Peter, Mac, you've pulled off more stunts since you left the force than when you were on it! First that girl who was flung out the window of the Glamorgan and then the other one that was strangled in the crime museum—"

"'Twas Terhune, the great scientific detective, that got at the truth in the first case and the inspector himself who did the work in the other," McCarty remarked with dignity. "I just poked around like the old has-been I am.—But there comes the 'bus from the borough headquarters, and you'll be doing me a favor, Clancy, if you'll just forget I'm here until you're asked to tell what you know of it all. I'd like to snoop around a bit on my own account till the inspector gets here."

"How do we know it isn't suicide, anyway?" demanded Clancy, as the clatter of the police gong grew louder on the air and his companion made for the door.

"Because there are no powder marks that I saw," McCarty replied succinctly. "If he'd held that cannon against

his breast and fired it the powder would have been sprinkled all over the front of him."

As the automobile from the borough headquarters drew up before the door McCarty dodged into the room next to the study. It proved to be a breakfast room, and the ex-roundsman whistled softly to himself as he cautiously closed the door after finding and turning on the wall switch, which made the single low light over the table burst into a golden glow.

The table was laid for two and the remains of a supper were spread upon it, while an empty quart champagne bottle stood upon the floor and a second one reposed in the cooler, in the bottom of which a small quantity of ice still remained unmelted.

McCarty's brows knit at the sight of it, and he pulled out his watch.

"Quarter to three!" he muttered, then turned his attention to the table itself.

The food upon one plate was scarcely touched, but bread-crumbs were scattered all about it and the wine glass was empty. On the other hand, the second plate had been cleaned save for fragments, half a roll lay beside it and the glass was half full of dead champagne. Near at hand was an ash tray containing the stub of a cigarette and another unsmoked but broken in two lay in the center of the table.

McCarty was turning away when almost imbedded in the heavy pile of the rug just beneath the end of the cloth close to the champagne bucket something shining caught his eye. It was a broken bit of amber from the mouth-piece of a cigarette holder. He picked it up and shamelessly put it in his pocket.

The subdued purring of a second motor came to his ears and he left the breakfast room and, hurrying across the rotunda, flung open the house door. Inspector Druet was descending the steps.

"Come in, sir," McCarty urged superfluously. "The men are here from borough headquarters and they are holding a grand session in the room where Mr. Creveling was killed—if it was Mr. Creveling himself."

He led his former superior into the breakfast room and pointed to the table.

"Wherever the servants and the rest of the family have got to, there was two people had supper here to-night, as you can see, sir. One of them was contented and pleased, too interested to bother much with his wine, but ate a good meal, though something interrupted him before he finished smoking his cigarette and if he left the room then he didn't take it with him. The other was nervous or angry or scared; couldn't eat, crumbled his bread, drank his wine to keep up his courage but broke his cigarette in two and maybe his holder.—One of them is lying dead in the next room and the other has gone. What's the answer, sir? It's up to you."

CHAPTER II

THE VOICE ON THE WIRE

THE inspector approached the table and gazed thoughtfully down upon its array of porcelain and silver and glass.

"You're getting to be quite in Wade Terhune's class with your deductions, Mac, but you're right, I think," he observed. "If Creveling sat here, where the food is almost untouched and the bread crumbled, it looks as though he might have known what was coming to him, or feared it, anyway. We'll find out what enemies he had—"

McCarty shook his head.

"I don't think so, sir," he said quietly. "I think it was his visitor who sat in that chair. Mr. Creveling was host and all the servants were gone unless they're lying murdered upstairs, so he must have waited on the table himself, and you see the wine cooler is right close up to the other chair. I found this near it on the floor."

He produced the broken bit of amber and the inspector scrutinized it carefully.

"Part of a cigarette holder, eh? A mighty slender one, too, by the curve of this fragment. It looks as though a lady—"

He paused as McCarty picked up the broken cigarette from the table and silently handed it to him. It was but little thicker than a straw and bore in tiny square gold letters the initials E. C. C.

"They're the same as on the platinum case in the waistcoat pocket of the dead man in the other room there," McCarty remarked at length. "I've my opinion of a fellow

that would call a thing like that a smoke, but no matter. Did you take a good look at the supper table, sir?"

"No dope there, beyond what you pointed out." Inspector Druet had turned away. "Let's have a look upstairs before the rest go to it."

But he was too late, for even as he spoke the door of the next room opened and heavy footsteps could be heard crossing the rotunda and mounting the broad stairs. Like conspirators, the inspector and McCarty waited until they died away in the regions above.

"I wonder, now, what they did with the young crook I caught climbing out of the window?" McCarty queried aloud to himself.

"What's that?" Inspector Druet demanded.

Briefly McCarty recounted the events of the night and when he had concluded his companion started for the door leading into the hall once more.

"We'll have a look at the body and then join the rest upstairs. This is a headquarters job all right, Mac, and I'm going to take charge."

"I thought you would, sir." McCarty heaved a sigh of satisfaction not unmixed with envy. "At least you'll not have Terhune with his scientific stunts and mechanical mind-readers butting in on this case."

"How about you yourself?" The inspector halted and bent a quizzical gaze upon his companion. "Going to quit before the end of the first round?"

"Quit?" McCarty flushed. "Well you know, sir, that I'm not in it except maybe to testify against the lad for breaking and entering. I've nothing to do with the murder nor the solving of it."

"But you're itching for a chance, aren't you, you old scout?" The other smiled. "I'll swear you in as a special officer to-morrow, just as I did on the last case you got yourself mixed up in since you left the force. Come on, now."

McCarty's eyes shone and he squared his massive shoulders with proud elation as they entered the room where the master of the house lay. He was officially at work again, and the inhabitants of the instalment-plan suburban colony in which he had invested his savings and from which he drew his modest revenue might run the place to suit themselves until the case was finished. He was back in the old game!

When they opened the door of the study they found that its only occupants were the dead man and the wretched youth who still cringed in his chair, to one arm of which he had now been securely handcuffed. At sight of the inspector's face he uttered a sharp ejaculation and cowered further down.

"Well, well!" Inspector Druet searched his countenance keenly. "It seems to me we've met before, my friend."

"No, sir! Youse got me wrong—!"

"Have I? We've got you mugged down at headquarters; I never forget a face. Have you done time? What's your name? Speak up!"

"Joe Bodansky," the youth muttered sullenly. "I did one stretch in de reform'tory 'cause de gang I traveled wit' swiped some lead pipe, but I didn't have nottin' to do wit' it! Dis is de foist toime—"

"Never mind; thought I had you right. I'll get your story downtown later." Inspector Druet turned to McCarty and indicated the body. "Is this the way it was when you saw it first, Mac?"

"Yes. I was the third one to see it as far as we know; Joe, here, was first, then Clancy and then me. It don't look as if those flatfeet upstairs had disturbed it any except that the gun was lying nearer to the hand, almost touching the fingers—this way."

McCarty stooped and moved the position of the pistol a trifle.

"He sure got his with a vengeance, didn't he?" the inspector remarked.

A quick gleam of light came into McCarty's own eyes.

"Maybe he did, sir," he vouchsafed.

"There seems to have been a bit of a struggle here; look, Mac." The inspector spoke suddenly.

The strip of tapestry which lay along the center of the refectory table had been pulled awry at the end near which the man had fallen and it was evident that only the heavy lamp which stood upon it had prevented it from being swept to the floor, but there were no other signs of disorder in the room.

"Yes, sir," McCarty agreed somewhat doubtfully. "He wouldn't have had time to catch at it in falling, after that shot hit him, but maybe whoever it was did it might have twisted that table cover in rage or excitement before they fired and killed him."

"And you think Creveling was the sort of man to stand calmly and wait without raising a hand to defend himself while his guest worked his own nerve up to the point of murder?" The inspector shrugged. "Come along, let's go up and see what the others have found out."

The patrol wagon clattered up to the entrance at that moment and Joe Bodansky, obviously relieved to be removed from the immediate vicinity of the dead man, even in so grim and forbidding a vehicle, was consigned to the care of its officials.

After it had departed the inspector and his freshly appointed assistant mounted the great staircase to be met at the top by Clancy and two detectives from the borough headquarters. The latter were none too pleased to find an inspector from the central office already on the job but they concealed their chagrin with what diplomacy they could muster.

"Nothing doing up here, Inspector," the senior of the

twain announced. "We've looked in every hole and corner to the very roof and there isn't a soul about, living or dead. Nothing's been disturbed, either, and except for two or three of the servants' rooms it doesn't seem as if any of them had been occupied for some time, not even the master's own apartments."

"Mac, here, and I will just have a look around, anyway, and join you and Sam and Clancy below, Pete," Inspector Druet responded. "The Commissioner has put me in charge but I may need you both."

"Did you send the young crook off in the wagon, sir?" asked Clancy.

"Yes. He'll be taken care of and I'll want your report on him later, but I understand you and McCarty are agreed that he had nothing to do with the main crime, the murder.—Come, Mac."

As the rest descended to investigate the lower regions of the house, McCarty and the inspector crossed the wide corridor and entered the first room of a spacious suite on the left. It was evidently that of the mistress of the establishment, for the delicate lines of the furniture of the First Empire, the fragile ornaments and soft hues of the priceless rugs, all betokened a feminine influence, although the toilet articles and similar objects of intimate daily use were missing and a slight smudge of dust lay here and there as if the effort to keep the rooms in order had of late been merely perfunctory.

"Looks as if the Missis had been away, all right," McCarty observed. "I don't read the society columns as regularly as I might, not having moved in such circles as this before, but I guess we'll know where she is when the boys of the press get hold of this for an 'extra.'"

The rooms across the hall were no less richly appointed, but as unmistakably masculine in appearance as the first suite had been feminine. The furnishings were massive, the color scheme of walls and rugs and draperies dark but

boldly vivid, and despite its unstinted luxury the apartment bore an air of studied simplicity. Its rigid orderliness proclaimed that it, too, had not been occupied recently, but it was well aired and dusted as if in preparation for the immediate return of the owner.

In the lounging-room which opened off the bedchamber Inspector Druet approached an antique mahogany desk which stood in one corner and opened one drawer after another, while McCarty watched speculatively over his shoulder. They seemed to be filled with account books and miscellaneous correspondence mostly of a financial nature, and the latter was turning away when his superior paused with his hand upon the knob of the small drawer between the pigeon holes.

"Locked," he remarked succinctly. "And there isn't any keyhole."

"Then it works with a spring," McCarty suggested. "Million-a-month Creveling may not have dropped all his old philandering ways when he married, but he'd scarcely be likely to leave anything of a confidential nature in the place where his wife would first of all be looking for it, granted that she was of the looking kind."

"We have no time to bother with it now, at all events," the inspector remarked after several futile attempts to open the drawer. "I'll have an expert up here the first thing in the morning, but we had better be getting on through the house now; it's almost four o'clock."

Together they continued their inspection of the upper floors, but found nothing even remotely bearing on the investigation until they came to the topmost one, where the servants' quarters were evidently located. Here two connecting bedchambers and a third across the hall bore mute testimony not only of occupation but of hurried departure.

In the first room dresses and aprons of a plain, serviceable quality were scattered about and in the adjoining one the half-opened closet door and drawers of the bureau re-

vealed the habiliments of a butler dragged forth in obvious confusion.

The room on the other side of the landing was fitted out with a higher grade of furniture than the other two, worn but comparatively luxurious, as though the articles might have been relegated here from below stairs. An examination of the tailor's tabs on the suits which filled the clothes closet revealed that they had evidently been discarded from Creveling's own wardrobe.

"His valet, probably," McCarty hazarded. "The butler and one of the women servants must have occupied those rooms across the hall."

"That's obvious," retorted the inspector. "They may have been here last night and made a getaway when the murder was done, but if we can find the housekeeper's books we can get a line on who they were. The other rooms on this floor don't look as though they had been entered for weeks—"

"What's that—?" McCarty suddenly raised a thick, stubby finger in warning and cocked his ear.

"What?" the other demanded in curt tones.

"I thought I heard a sound downstairs, sir. Not all the way, but on the first sleeping floor."

"One of those flatfeet from borough headquarters, I suppose," the inspector grunted. "I didn't hear anything; you must be getting nerves, Mac! That big room at the back may have been the housekeeper's. Let's have a look at it anyway."

Obediently McCarty followed his superior down the hall, but as he did so he cast a swift glance at the stairs. Did he or did he not see a flitting shadow pause immovably just above the edge of the top step and then disappear?

Without comment he entered the room at the rear. The furniture was of walnut in severe lines, the rugs dark and spotless and the few pictures which broke the somber monotony of the gray wallpaper were of sedate, classic subjects.

A businesslike-looking desk stood near the window, but it was quite bare, and no intimate touches of human occupancy were visible save a tea-wagon covered with dusty porcelains drawn up beside the cold hearth.

"The housekeeper's room all right, I guess," remarked the inspector, as one after another he tried the drawers of the desk. "These are all locked and I don't see any keys about. It is pretty obvious that nobody has been in here, either, for some time. The whole thing looks funny to me, Mac. Of course, the three servants whose rooms have been occupied at least lately may have been left as caretakers while the family were away, but why did Creveling come back here just to give that little supper and get himself murdered after it—what in the world are you doing now?"

For McCarty was lifting the desk carefully, first from one side and then from the other and shaking it tentatively when he had raised an end from the floor.

"Well," he replied at length, "there would be little object, wouldn't there, sir, in locking an empty desk? Of course, we could force the drawers but I'm thinking it's small help you'd get from what's in here in solving the mystery downstairs. The locks are rusty, too, as you'll notice. Did you try the dressing-table?"

"Yes. The drawers are unlocked and empty. There's nothing more here, Mac; let us go down now and see what the rest have discovered."

But it was evident that no discovery of any significance had been made.

Sam and Pete, the two detectives from the borough headquarters, together with the policeman, Clancy, were standing in a little group near the body of the dead man in the study and the faces of all three bore an expression of stupefaction.

"Anything new turned up?" asked Inspector Druet crisply.

"No, sir. The kitchens are all in order, though it's evident that they have been used lately, but not for the supper

that we found spread out in the next room." Pete, the elder of the two detectives, replied: "That came from Mazzarini's, the caterer; his boxes are down in the pantry now."

"There's food and ice left in the refrigerators," the other detective, Sam, volunteered. "But it's not the kind of stuff the likes of him would eat."

He pointed with a grimy thumb at the dead man and was evidently about to continue his remarks when the inspector demanded:

"Have any of you boys been upstairs since we left you on the second floor?"

"No, sir." It was Clancy who answered. "There was nothing to take us up there, and plenty to look over down here though it is little enough that we found out!"

"You see, Mac?" The inspector turned with a grin to McCarty. "I told you that you were hearing things when you thought there was a sound from below while we were on the servants' floor!—Look here, Clancy, you've been on this beat nearly six months; you ought to know about how many there were in the household."

"I think I do, sir, and I can't get it through my head where they've all gone to," responded the officer. "To my knowledge there were ten of them, not counting the housekeeper; the cook was the butler's wife, and besides there was a footman, valet and houseman, then the kitchenmaid, housemaid, parlormaid and laundress, and the lady's maid, of course. The valet I almost never saw, but it comes to me now that the cook and the butler are the only ones I've noticed around for some time."

"What do you mean by 'some time'?" barked the inspector.

"Weeks, anyway, sir; maybe a month." Clancy shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "Not since a few days after the last big entertainment the Crevelings gave."

"When was that? What sort of an entertainment?"

"How should I know, sir?" the officer replied to the last

question. "'Twas a dinner or dance or something; awnings and a red carpet spread out to the curb and an orchestra playing till all hours, and a string of motor cars reaching around into both side streets. Except when they give some big society shindy like that the house is the quietest on the block, as I was remarking to McCarty only to-night.—But where is he?"

Clancy had turned for superfluous corroboration to the spot where the ex-roundsman had stood behind his chief, to find that he had vanished.

"I thought that I heard the front door close just now, sir," Pete observed.

"You're getting jumpy, like Mac," the inspector laughed. "You couldn't drive him out of the house now that he's on the old trail again; wait till you boys retire and then open the papers some fine morning and find a fresh murder mystery staring you in the face and the force being raked over the coals for not pinching the man who did it before the first edition reached the press! There isn't one of the three of you who wouldn't want to be back in harness with a chance to clap his hand on the shoulder of the murderer! —Mac's only poking around on his own account, but Clancy, this looks bad for you; a prominent citizen shot to death in his own house on your beat with an army .44 that could be heard a mile off, and it took a cheap crook to discover the crime!"

Clancy turned a rich crimson.

"Everything was quiet and the house dark when I went my rounds up to near midnight, sir," he said with dignity. "We'd received no notification of the family being away or any special watch being necessary. Besides, there's a private watchman employed on this block, the same as on the others up and down the Avenue. It did come to me as strange that I didn't run into him, but I thought no more about it. There's many a night I don't see him."

"You say that the house was dark up to nearly twelve

o'clock," repeated Inspector Druet. "When did you notice first that it was lighted?"

"At about a quarter before; I rang in at the box on the next corner ten minutes afterwards, more or less." Clancy's tone was cautious. "The faint little stream of light coming from the window here on the first floor meant nothing to me, for I'd often seen it till near dawn, and lots of the ground floor windows are left open the night long in all the residences on my beat this mild spring weather. I passed regular, and not once did I hear the sound of a shot or anything else, for that matter, but the motor cars going up and down the Avenue."

"What was the first you knew of this affair, then?"

"When I heard a pounding on the sidewalk, as though some one was rapping for help. That must have been a little after two o'clock, and I was a couple of blocks away. I saw two figures standing under the lamp post out there and I came on the run. It was McCarty and the young second-story crook that he'd nabbed crawling out of the window here half a minute after he'd got in."

Clancy continued his narrative with impartial justice to the ex-member of the force and much dramatic detail as to his own finding of the body, and at its conclusion McCarty reappeared. He entered silently and took up a respectful position in the background, his face guilelessly stolid as the inspector went to the telephone and called for the chief medical examiner, turning in a brief report to headquarters.

"Did you find out anything, Mac?" asked Clancy anxiously in an undertone.

McCarty shook his head.

"What could you find out in an empty house?" he countered evasively.

"Well, there's a smell on you as though you had been to some high-toned barber's, and Pete thought he heard the front door close awhile back."

Clancy sniffed the air audibly, much as a dog on the scent, and McCarty's twinkling blue eyes narrowed for an instant as he backed slightly away from the other man.

"Barber's, is it?" he repeated in great disdain. "I've been poking around the rooms upstairs and some of them smell yet of perfumery; Pete must have heard me closing a door up there behind me, if he heard anything at all. It's a wonder you and the boys wouldn't get on the job and do something before the papers get hold of this, and you have a howling mob of reporters storming the house!"

"It's up to the inspector," retorted Clancy sullenly. Then his tone changed. "There's a bell ringing somewhere!"

Inspector Druet had turned sharply and the two detectives glanced at each other. There was silence for a moment and then the subdued but insistent peal was repeated.

"You answer it, Mac," the inspector ordered. "Try the front entrance door first. The medical examiner or one of his assistants wouldn't have had time to get here, and it's five o'clock in the morning."

McCarty crossed the wide rotunda and even as he flung open the front door the bell rang once more through the silent house.

A middle-aged gentleman, small but erect and dapper despite the evident haste with which he had clothed himself, stood fuming on the threshold.

"Who are you?" he demanded peremptorily. "What is the meaning of this? Where is Mr. Creveling, and why have I been summoned from my bed at this unseemly hour? I insist upon an explanation—!"

"Just a moment, sir." The inspector had followed McCarty and the latter stood aside. "I am afraid that before you get your explanation I must ask you who *you* are, and who summoned you. I am from Police Headquarters."

The little man shrank back aghast and his Vandyke beard, tinged with gray, waggled in outraged amazement as McCarty shut the massive double doors behind him.

"'Police'!" he gasped. "What on earth has Eugene—? I demand to see Mr. Creveling at once!"

"I am afraid that is impossible," Inspector Druet replied smoothly. "Will you answer my questions, please? What brings you here at what you yourself have admitted is an unusual hour?"

"'Unusual'!" the newcomer exploded. Then with an obvious effort he calmed himself and responded in dignified resentment:

"I am George Alexander, Mr. Creveling's banking partner and the uncle and former guardian of Mrs. Creveling. That should be sufficient answer to you, sir. Will you inform me why I have been routed from my bed—?"

"Who sent for you, Mr. Alexander? Who told you to come here?" The inspector's tone was deferential but it held a note of unmistakable sternness.

"That is a point upon which I should like to be informed!" retorted the other. "I played my usual rubber of bridge at the club, went to my rooms and retired at eleven. A few minutes ago I was aroused by my telephone and told that I was urgently needed here at once. I expostulated but could gain no further information, so I dressed and came."

"Did you recognize the voice over the wire?"

Mr. Alexander paused thoughtfully and then replied with conviction:

"No. It was that of a man, of course, but it was totally strange to me, and when I demanded my informant's identity he hung up the receiver. I am quite sure I have never heard it before."

CHAPTER III

INQUIRIES

THE inspector turned involuntarily and glanced at his subordinate, but McCarty's face was blandly inscrutable.

"Mr. Alexander," began Inspector Druet, "your informant was unauthorized by the police department, and we have no more knowledge than you as to his identity, but your presence here is more than welcome in this emergency. Certain suspicious circumstances, the details of which you will learn later, caused an investigation of the house between the hours of two and three this morning by the regular officer on this beat. The premises were found to be deserted although a light was burning and the remains of supper for two are spread out in the breakfast room. In the study, or den, there lies the body of a man in evening clothes shot through the heart and it has been identified as that of Mr. Creveling."

"Eugene—shot!" the banker gasped. "Impossible! Good God, I cannot believe it! Why, only yesterday we had a long conference at the office—! But who could have done this thing?"

"The pistol—an army .44—lies within touch of his fingers," replied the inspector.

"You mean to insinuate that he killed himself?" Mr. Alexander bristled, but he seemed to shrink even more within his light spring overcoat. "Ridiculous! What reason could he have for such an act? His affairs were never in better shape; the conference at the office yesterday was in regard to a large loan we contemplated making which would

have brought us in highly advantageous returns and he had no other problems or troubles, no entanglements of any kind!"

"Come and see him for yourself." The inspector turned and led the way to the study with Mr. Alexander following and McCarty bringing up the rear. As they entered Clancy and the two detectives stepped aside exposing the motionless form outstretched upon the floor, and with a shocked exclamation the banker recoiled.

"It is he!—But Eugene never killed himself! Of that I am as sure as though I had been present when the deed was done!"

"Why are you so certain, Mr. Alexander?" the inspector asked.

"There could have been no reason," the other repeated. "No one ever loved life better than he or knew how to enjoy it to the full. He had an unassailable position both in the social and financial world, a beautiful wife, a host of friends—oh, it is unthinkable!"

"Yet the pistol is almost within his grasp," Inspector Druet reminded the banker. "Was he right or left-handed?"

"Right, but any one could have placed the weapon there after the crime was committed to make it look like a case of suicide." Alexander responded defensively. "Besides, who telephoned to me, and why?"

"That we must ascertain later." The inspector shrugged. "Do you recognize the pistol, Mr. Alexander? Have you ever seen it in Mr. Creveling's possession?"

"I have not, sir." The banker shook his head decisively. "It may have been his, of course. A man whose home was filled with valuable objects of art and whose wife's jewels constituted a huge fortune in themselves would be naturally supposed to guard against burglary, but he could have had no personal reason for such an article of self-protection."

The sound of another motor car outside and the ringing of the front door bell put a stop for the time being to any

further questioning by the inspector, and as one of the assistants of the chief medical examiner was ushered in the dead man's partner turned to McCarty.

"Are you one of those in charge here? If so, for God's sake, take me out of this for a while! I can't stand it! The shock—!"

It was the moment for which McCarty had been waiting.

"Come this way, sir. They'll call if you're needed." He drew the banker out to the hall and into the breakfast room, where he switched on the light once more and pulled forward a chair suggestively with its back to the disordered supper table. "Sit here, Mr. Alexander, and rest yourself. I'm not connected with the police force, if that's what you mean; I just happened by, and I'm a friend of the inspector. It must have been a terrible shock to you, as you say, to find the house deserted and Mr. Creveling killed like this!"

"The abrupt summons over the telephone was startling enough, but to lose my partner in this hideous, tragic way!" The banker sank into the chair and pressed his delicate, blue-veined hands over his eyes for a moment.

"I think, sir, you said that Mrs. Creveling was your niece?" McCarty asked slyly.

Mr. Alexander's hands dropped and he gazed at the other in a dazed fashion.

"Yes. She was my late brother's only child and my ward until her marriage to Eugene eight years ago. It will be a most—most distressing homecoming for her.—By Jove, we must wire her at once! I had forgotten—!"

"Mrs. Creveling is away?" McCarty's ingenuous blue eyes opened still wider. "That is why, then, that the house was all deserted."

He added the last as if to himself, but the dazed look faded partially from Mr. Alexander's eyes and a shade as of caution crept into them.

"Mrs. Creveling has been paying a round of visits on

Long Island for the last few weeks and Mr. Creveling has been living much at the club since his presence was required almost constantly in town on this banking matter we were arranging to negotiate." His explanation came with nervous haste. "I believe two or three of the servants were left here temporarily as caretakers, though; I cannot imagine where they may have gone. However, Mrs. Creveling must be sent for at once! May I ask that you arrange with the inspector to have one of those men in there dispatch a wire immediately to her in care of Mrs. Douglas Waverly, Broadmead, Long Island?"

"And what shall he say in the telegram, sir?" asked McCarty as he prepared to comply. "You don't want to tell her in cold blood that her husband has been shot, do you?"

"Heavens, no!" The little man recoiled. "Just explain that a serious accident has occurred and her immediate return is imperatively necessary. I—I cannot think! I confess that I find it almost impossible to pull myself together! This horrible thing—!"

"I understand, sir." McCarty's tone was full of respectful sympathy, but he paused with his hand on the door knob. "I wonder, now, you knowing Mr. Creveling so well, if you'd remember whether or not he smoked his cigarettes with an amber mouthpiece?"

"'An amber mouthpiece?'" the other repeated in unguarded surprise at the petty, irrelevant question. "No, he never used a holder of any sort.—But the telegram—!"

"I'll see that it goes at once, Mr. Alexander." McCarty closed the door behind him, and when he entered the room where the medical examiner's assistant was concluding his grim business the ex-roundsman's face did not betray by the flicker of an eyelash that he had stumbled on a clew, albeit a slender one. The inspector drew him aside at once.

"Creveling has been dead at least four hours," he announced. "The Doc seems to think he shot himself, al-

though he wants an autopsy for form's sake, and it's just as well. We'll let it go at that for a day or two anyway till we've something to spring on the Old Man. Where's Alexander?"

"In the next room. He wants a telegram sent at once to Mrs. Creveling. It seems that she's visiting a Mrs. Douglas Waverly at Broadmead, Long Island."

McCarty rapidly detailed the substance of his brief talk with Alexander and of the message to be sent and one of the detectives was despatched to the nearest telegraph office. The medical examiner's assistant also took his departure after arranging for the removal of the body for a formal autopsy and the inspector and McCarty returned to the breakfast room.

"Mr. Alexander," Inspector Druet recommenced his interrogation without any preamble. "My friend, here, says that you told him Mrs. Creveling had been visiting on Long Island for several weeks and her husband living at the club. Was he in the habit of returning here to his home to give midnight suppers when it was virtually closed and the staff of servants away?"

George Alexander, whom they had found standing by the table frowningly contemplating the débris of the supper, turned and faced them at the question and its implication.

"I know little of my late partner's habits," he replied stiffly. "In our banking business we deal with many foreign powers among the representatives of which each have our own especial clients, and not until all the preliminary negotiations have been concluded do we have a general conference. Mr. Creveling and I are known to have arranged several international loans of a confidential nature—you know how such affairs creep out through the underground channels of diplomacy—and it is quite probable that he may have brought a prospective client here to-night rather than to a restaurant or club in order to insure privacy. Is

it not at least probable also that after the departure of his guest he may have been attacked by burglars? You gentlemen of the police know that many an army pistol is now in the hands of a member of what I believe you term the 'underworld.'"

The inspector shrugged.

"The medical examiner who has just been here affirms that Mr. Creveling shot himself," he observed. "Mr. Alexander, you said that Mr. Creveling had no troubles of any sort. This may seem like an impertinent question but we must know the truth, and it is bound to come out in the end. Was he in no domestic difficulty? He and his wife seem to have been virtually living apart and the house left in the hands of caretakers—"

"Nothing of the sort!" the banker interrupted indignantly. "I am of an older generation, an older school than was Eugene, and their friends were not mine, but his wife was my niece and I should have been the first to know of any discord. To my mind they were a model, modern couple, independent in thought and action, but mutually considerate, and I can assure you that a very real affection existed between them. My partner was a man's man, caring little for society although his wife reveled in it. This was perfectly understood by their friends and the house here was frequently left in the hands of caretakers, especially in the spring and autumn when my niece—Mrs. Creveling—made a round of country house visits and Eugene preferred his club to an empty house, naturally."

"You say their friends were not yours, that they moved in a different set," the inspector interposed. "You must, however, have heard your partner and your niece mention from time to time those with whom they were most intimate."

Mr. Alexander's lips closed in a tight line.

"Mrs. Creveling was twenty at the time of their mar-

riage and ceased to be my ward a year later ; Mr. Creveling and I seldom discussed anything but business."

"How long have you and Mr. Creveling been in partnership?"

Mr. Alexander stroked his beard for a moment in evident hesitation before he replied :

"Since about the time of his marriage to my niece, although his family and ours have known each other for generations."

"Had Mr. Creveling been engaged actively in any financial pursuits prior to that?" Inspector Druet continued.

"I cannot say that he had, beyond speculating now and then on the market," the banker answered with yet more obvious reluctance. "But I really do not comprehend the significance of these questions at such a time as this. Mr. Creveling was a very rich man, but naturally the prospect of marriage made him ambitious to become something more than a—er—mere art dilettante—"

"And Broadway spender?" broke in McCarty irrepressibly.

Mr. Alexander's eyes shifted.

"I presume you refer to the unfortunate sobriquet of Mr. Creveling's college days, and which erroneously clung to him for years after he had reached maturity," he said. "Irresponsible youth and the possession of too much money have formed a dangerous combination before now but my partner has been unknown in the bright light district, save at an occasional theater party with his wife and their friends, for several years."

"Mr. Alexander," the inspector bent forward suddenly, "when I asked you just now if you knew who Mr. and Mrs. Creveling's intimates were you evaded the question ; in the face of this tragedy they are bound to be discovered and fully investigated. You said also that you seldom discussed anything but business with your partner and that your

guardianship of his wife ended a year after their marriage. Does that mean, too, that your social relationship with them was interrupted? That, in fact, there was any estrangement between you and them?"

"Most assuredly not!" The banker squared his somewhat narrow shoulders. "My niece made her home with me prior to her marriage and the greatest possible affection has always existed between us. As their only relative I have been a frequent visitor here, but I have already told you that their friends are in a different circle—"

As he spoke the slow, measured tread of heavy feet in the hall outside told of the temporary departure of Eugene Creveling from his home, before his final return for the brief scene in which he would be the principal but silent actor, and involuntarily his late partner paused, shuddering again.

The remaining detective from borough headquarters appeared in the doorway, with Clancy behind him, and both stood awaiting further orders.

"There's nothing more for either of you to do here now," the inspector announced. "Sam, have your report sent in to me downtown; Clancy, make your own to the Old Man and I'll look it over later. If that young crook tries to get hold of a shyster lawyer, ask the Commissioner to stall him and keep him quiet until I get back to Centre Street myself."

As the two men turned to go, McCarty went to the door.

"You'll not be needing me now for a bit, Inspector?" The statement was a question asked with the ingratiating which only the ex-roundsman could command. "I'll have another look over the ground—"

"Go as far as you like, Mac," Inspector Druet responded heartily, then turned once more to Mr. Alexander. "Who were the Crevelings' intimate friends, as far as you know? This Mrs. Douglas Waverly, for instance, whom Mrs. Creveling is visiting; do you know anything about her?"

The banker smiled slightly in a somewhat relieved fashion.

"She was born a Preston, of Washington." He spoke as though that was sufficient answer in itself. "Her husband is the son of old Monro Waverly, the tight-fisted Scot who developed a passion for speculation late in life, in the 'eighties, and amassed millions. Besides Broadmead the Douglas Waverlys have a town house a block or two below here. I have met them occasionally."

"Who were the others in the Creveling set?"

"An Irish aristocrat, if there be such a thing left, named O'Rourke and his wife who I believe has a title in her own right but refuses to use it, at least in this country; then there is a Mr. and Mrs. Ford, and I believe a Mrs. Culp or Kip, or some such name—really, you must ask my niece—!"

"We'll leave her out of it for the time being," the inspector interrupted crisply. "You said that Creveling was a man's man; who were his associates aside from those in his wife's social circle?"

"He belonged to most of the best clubs in town, but I am not in a position to tell you with whom he associated." The note of defense was again evident in the banker's tones. "If he had any hobby beyond an innate love of beautiful things and a desire to acquire them I never learned it and I have found that it is only through a knowledge of a man's hobbies or predilections that one can gauge the type of individual to whom he would naturally be drawn as a congenial companion."

Mr. Alexander halted suddenly as though he had said too much, and the inspector glanced at him sharply.

"It did not occur to you to interest yourself in your partner's companions and mode of life outside of his family and business?" he asked.

"Why should it have?" the other countered defiantly. "My niece's married life with him appeared to be ideal according to modern standards, our partnership was success-

ful and without friction of any sort and I was content. My own social interests, as I have told you, lay with an older, more staid school; a quiet round of golf or rubber of bridge, an occasional opera night or evening with my books or friends of my own generation; that for years has been my life after banking hours, Inspector."

Inspector Druet frowned thoughtfully.

"Conservative, eh? Why, then, Mr. Alexander, were you willing to enter into partnership with a man who you admit had no knowledge of business even if he was the husband of your niece?"

Once more a dull flush swept over the features of the dapper little man before him.

"I consider that question an impertinence, sir, but I have no reason to evade a reply to it except a natural aversion to discussing my private affairs with those for whom they can have no possible concern. I have already told you that prior to our entrance into partnership Mr. Creveling had speculated occasionally in Wall Street. Since he was to marry my ward I watched his operations and conceived a sincere admiration for his acumen. I realized that although he did not know the banking business I could trust his judgment; he brought the necessary capital into our concern and I the experience. It was an ideal combination which to-night's tragedy has so unfortunately broken."

"I see." The inspector nodded. "Was there any connection, Mr. Alexander, between that partnership and your niece's marriage? To put it bluntly, was the partnership a stipulation of the alliance? Mrs. Creveling was your ward; had she any fortune of her own?"

"You go too far, sir!" Mr. Alexander's eyes flashed. "The marriage was a love match; because of that alone I consented to it. Mrs. Creveling's fortune was not great but there is no older family than ours in America, and had she desired she could have made a far more brilliant alliance, in spite of Mr. Creveling's money. I—I decline absolutely

to answer any more of your questions until I learn my rights in this affair. I do not understand the trend of this interrogation, nor do I consider it pertinent to the crime you are investigating.—For it is a crime, no matter what your assistant medical examiners or any other so-called officials of the police department may assume. Eugene Creveling was murdered!”

“I beg pardon, sir!” A voice whose studied deferentiality was evident even in the shocked accents which now punctuated it was heard behind them and both men turned. In the doorway stood a thin, smooth-faced individual of perhaps thirty-five and upon his austere, almost clerical features deep concern struggled with curiosity and alarm. “I have just returned—arrived, I should say—in accordance with Mr. Creveling’s instructions, but he is not in his room. I hope nothing is wrong, sir? I knocked but you did not reply and I could not avoid hearing—”

“Oh, it’s you, Frank!” Mr. Alexander spoke with obvious relief at the other’s appearance, although his tone was fittingly lugubrious. “I regret to inform you that something very terrible has happened to your master. This is an inspector from police headquarters—”

“Who are you?” Inspector Druet stepped forward.

“Mr. Creveling’s man, sir. Frank Hill is my name.” The valet’s tone was still respectful, but there was a shade less of deference in it, although he spoke nervously.

“When did you last see your employer alive?”

“At eleven o’clock this—last night, sir, in his rooms at the club.”

“Where have you been since then?”

The man wet his thin lips and replied in a low, hesitating voice:

“On a private matter. My time was my own, sir. I—I had rather not say.”

CHAPTER IV

THE TORN CARD

MEANWHILE, McCarty had taken advantage of his superior's off-handed permission and slipped back into the study immediately after the body had been removed and Clancy and the detective had taken their departure.

Save for the dark stains upon the rug where the shattered form had rested and the strip of tapestry pulled away from its accustomed place upon the refectory table, there were no visible signs left to the casual eye of the tragedy which had so recently taken place within those four walls, but McCarty closed the door carefully behind him and stood for a moment with his back against it surveying the room.

The chairs with their adjacent smoking stands, the book-cases, davenports, and every article of furniture which the room contained, passed in swift but unerring detail before his vision and he whistled softly.

A delicate spring dawn was filtering in through the diaphanous curtains of the windows at the rear and turning the golden glow of the electric lights a sickly lemon yellow; why had the shades not been lowered or the thick draperies which hung on either side of the casements been drawn?

McCarty switched off the lights and striding over to the nearest window thrust aside the curtains and opened it. The explanation for the disregard of possible onlookers was instantly apparent, for a sheer blank brick wall rose before him about six feet distant. He glanced swiftly each way and then withdrew his head, leaving the window open that the gentle breeze might drift through the room. The

blank space, or alley, had no opening at either end and had evidently been left when the Creveling residence was built in order to give light to its rear windows.

Yet the house was practically in the middle of the block and beyond that brick wall could lie only the back yards of the buildings which faced on the side streets. Had Creveling caused that high blank barrier to be erected on the edge of his property for the purpose of insuring absolute privacy to the rooms which looked out upon it? The front of the house was no more carefully secluded from outside observation than were the others in the neighborhood; why should the rear have been thus shut away from prying eyes?

His mind still busied with the problem, McCarty moved slowly about the study measuring with a practiced gaze the distance between the various articles of furniture until he came to the long, narrow table between the two davenports which flanked the hearth. Here he paused and taking the edge of the twisted strip of tapestry between his forefinger and thumb began almost mechanically to straighten it.

As he lifted it a gleam of something white against the age-darkened wood of the table top caught his eye and, thrusting the tapestry hastily aside, he disclosed a small, highly glazed oblong upon which were spots of red. It was a playing card, the nine of diamonds, but superimposed upon its regular scarlet lozengers were tiny blotches of dull crimson, unmistakable in their significance.

McCarty picked it up gingerly, and saw that it was torn half across its face; the crimson spots were fast turning a murky brown and a smudge which resembled the imprint of a finger was plainly discernible near one side. The card itself was of the most expensive grade of linen, gilt-edged, and despite its sinister stains had obviously come from a new deck. The back was of a peculiar design printed in rich colors and gold after the manner of the ancient illuminated text and McCarty studied it with minute care, fixing

the pattern in his mind. Then he crossed to the writing table between the windows and opening a drawer selected an envelope and placed the card within it.

This he slipped into his pocket and then began a close and exhaustive search of the room, albeit he shook his head dubiously as he did so. How that single blood-stained playing card happened to have been slipped under the edge of that strip of tapestry he could not fathom nor what its significance might be, but he felt certain that the rest of the deck would not be brought to light within those four walls. His supposition proved to be a correct one, for he found no playing cards or games of any description save a set of rare old ivory chessmen which he unearthed from a lower drawer of one of the bookcases. He took a final survey of the room and opened the door to return to the inspector, when just as he did so he beheld a dark, clerical appearing form noiselessly pass across the hall from the other side of the staircase.

It halted before the door of the breakfast room for an appreciable minute as though listening intently, then opened it and McCarty heard a deferential voice utter the conventional: "I beg pardon, sir!"

There was a murmur of indistinguishable words and the man passed within, closing the door behind him. In his turn, McCarty advanced to it and listened, and so it came that he heard the inspector's questions and learned the identity of the intruder. At the valet's refusal to state his whereabouts during the night McCarty quietly entered.

"Possibly not." The inspector's curt tones held a hint of menace. "Your preference, however, will not be consulted and I warn you that you had better be candid with us now."

"Perhaps," Mr. Alexander's thin, nervous tones broke in, "it would be best to wait until Mrs. Creveling arrives—?"

To McCarty's keen gaze it seemed that a glance of warning shot from the eyes of Creveling's late partner to the

valet, but the latter's demeanor did not change even as Inspector Druet turned wrathfully upon the author of the suggestion.

"I am conducting this inquiry, sir!" he thundered. Then to the man before him he added: "Your employer has been found dead, shot through the heart. Do you still persist in your refusal—?"

"Mr. Creveling dead!" The valet started back a step or two. "I—I overheard Mr. Alexander say something about 'murder' as I stopped at the door just now, but I didn't think—! This is horrible! Who—who shot him?"

He passed one hand across his lips as though to hide some uncontrollable evidence of emotion, but his eyes were fixed watchfully, unchangingly upon his interrogator.

"That is what we are endeavoring to ascertain," retorted the inspector. "Did you know of your employer's intention to come here to his house last night?"

"Yes, sir." The valet had hesitated for a shade of a second. "I was here earlier in the evening; it was I who received the caterer's men and arranged the table for supper."

McCarty smiled to himself. The man Hill was on the defensive and his very caution was proving his own undoing.

"Who was Mr. Creveling's guest?"

The curt question seemed to vibrate on the air like the echo of a single sharp note struck upon a gong and the face of George Alexander tensed visibly as he waited for its reply, but the valet merely shrugged.

"I do not know, sir."

"You did not remain, then, to wait upon the table?"

"No, sir. As I have said, I went to Mr. Creveling at his club."

"You did not return here?"

"Not until ten minutes ago." The valet's voice rang out firmly.

"When you saw Mr. Creveling at his club did he mention who was to be his guest here? Did he at any time say anything which would lead you to infer the identity of this person?"

"He did not, sir." Hill's tone was still firm, but for a moment his eyes shifted and then returned as inscrutable as ever to those of the inspector.

"Where have you been staying since Mr. Creveling has made his home at his club?"

"Here, sir." It was evident that the valet intended to render no assistance to the inquiry beyond the terse and literal replies demanded of him, but Inspector Druet persisted.

"You were acting as caretaker also?"

"No, sir. Two of the other servants—Rollins and his wife, the butler and cook—remained here for that; the rest of the staff except Mrs. Creveling's maid were dismissed when Mrs. Creveling went to the country and Mr. Creveling to his club."

The inspector exchanged a significant glance with McCarty, who still hovered quietly in the background.

"Mrs. Creveling usually left home for such protracted periods, and always dismissed practically her entire staff?"

Again there was that shade of hesitation and then the valet responded:

"No, sir. The staff was usually retained at half pay when it was intended to reopen the house again within a short time, but I understand that this season Mr. and Mrs. Creveling had made other plans."

"What other plans?"

Once more the valet shrugged.

"I cannot say, sir, except that some mention was made of traveling. I have received no instructions for the future; I feel sure, though, that I was not to be dismissed or Mr. Creveling would have said something to me about it."

"How long have you been in Mr. Creveling's employment?"

"For eleven years, sir."

Inspector Druet suddenly changed the tenor of his questioning.

"The butler and cook are not in the house. When did you see them here last?"

"Yesterday afternoon." Frank Hill shifted his weight from one foot to the other, the first sign of nervousness which he had displayed throughout the interview save his momentary shock at the intelligence of his master's death and the manner of it.

"They are not in the house now. Do you know where they have gone?"

"No, sir." There was no surprise in the valet's tone, but a sort of defiant reserve beneath the slightly ironic deference which obviously nettled the inspector.

"You knew, however, that they were to be absent last night? I want the story, Hill. No hedging!"

"Rollins, the butler, told me that Mr. Creveling had given him and his wife a holiday, but they were to be back early this morning, to prepare for Mrs. Creveling's homecoming."

"'Homecoming'?" repeated Inspector Druet sharply. "You said just now—"

"I beg pardon, sir." The quiet voice forestalled him. "I meant to say that the house was not to be reopened again with the staff this season. In a manner of speaking, it is never closed when the caretakers are here, and some one is always left in charge. I understood that Mrs. Creveling was to return this morning with her maid for a few days of preparation before starting upon her journey with Mr. Creveling. The butler and cook, Yvonne—the maid—and myself could, of course, have given sufficient service if no entertaining were contemplated."

The inspector meditated for a moment.

"Why did Mr. Creveling give the butler and cook a holiday yesterday, of all times, when he intended to receive some one here for supper last night?" he asked finally. "Supposing the meal were to be supplied from a caterer's, why did he not require the services of the butler to wait upon the table?"

As though he realized the slip he had made the valet's eyes sought those of Creveling's late partner, but Mr. Alexander avoided them studiously.

"I can't say, sir," Hill responded at length. "Mr. Creveling told me nothing beyond my own instructions."

"Was it usual for your employer during his wife's absence to clear all the servants out of the house in order to entertain here?"

At the question and its implication Hill's color changed, but his eyes once more met those of the inspector levelly.

"I do not know that Mr. Creveling ever did that, sir; I mean, purposely. He frequently had one or more gentlemen here to supper when Mrs. Creveling was away. Sometimes the butler waited upon them, sometimes I did. I think he gave Rollins and his wife a holiday before I asked permission to have the night to myself on this occasion."

Inspector Druet evaded the issue of the valet's own movements during the hours which had passed since eleven by asking:

"Did Mr. Creveling ever entertain ladies also on these occasions?"

"During Mrs. Creveling's absence?" There was a note of shocked incredulity in the servant's tones as if he could scarcely believe that he had understood the question. "Indeed, no, sir! They were strictly stag suppers."

"Who were the gentlemen Mr. Creveling entertained here, then?" the inspector continued. "What were their names?"

"Rollins can tell you that better than I can, sir," Hill

temporized. "He usually waited upon them, it was only occasionally that I took his place and then the gentlemen were sometimes strangers to me, business acquaintances of Mr. Creveling's."

"You don't know the name of a single gentleman who ever had supper here with Mr. Creveling alone?" The inspector's tone had sharpened again.

"Of course, sir, a few of them. They were all personal friends of long standing, those I did know; Mr. O'Rourke has been here once or twice, and Mr. Waverly and Mr. Cutter. I can't recall them all at the moment, sir."

McCarty, unable to contain himself longer, coughed with elaborate ostentation and after a quick side glance at him the inspector nodded.

"Mac, show this man where the body was found.—No, Mr. Alexander!" He added the last as the banker started forward nervously. "There are a few more questions I wish to ask you. Wait here, please."

Mr. Alexander sank back with an air of hopeless vexation.

"Then I trust that you will be brief!" he snapped. "I know nothing, as I told you in the beginning, which could help you in any way and this ghastly affair has been an inexpressible shock to me. When my niece arrives I must meet her with the news of her tragic bereavement and assume control of the situation as the head of the family and I cannot do so without an opportunity to pull myself together, to—to bear up under my own natural grief—!"

The door closed upon the thin, testy tones and the thought crossed McCarty's mind that the banker's emotion was somewhat tardy in finding expression, but his grimly determined face gave no indication of the idea as he piloted his charge to the study.

"'Twas there the body was found," McCarty explained as he pointed to the dark stain upon the rug, and then added with seeming irrelevance: "What did they do, Hill, at these

stag parties you were telling the inspector about? Play cards?"

Before McCarty's good-natured but keen scrutiny the valet seemed to have lost a trifle of the assurance which he had maintained in the presence of the inspector and now he blinked, staring as if fascinated at the sinister spot upon the floor.

"No. They just ate and drank and smoked."

"What did they talk about?"

The man Hill raised sullen, resentful eyes at the question.

"It was not my place to listen to the conversation," he responded tartly. "I served them when Rollins wasn't here to do it and minded my own business. That's all I know."

"You'll find you're minding your own business best now, my man, if you'll speak up and come clean!" McCarty admonished sternly. "You told the inspector in there that Mr. Creveling said never a word to you about last night beyond giving you your instructions; what were they?"

The valet moistened his thin lips.

"He told me that he was having a guest here for supper; that I was to be here at six when the caterer's men arrived and arrange everything and then bring him a bag of clean linen at the club at eleven."

"And when did he tell you this?" McCarty's eyes had narrowed.

"Yesterday morning."

"Where?"

"Here. He came for some papers before going down to his office, and gave me some other instructions about his clothes; he didn't like the valet service at the club."

"And what club was this where he was staying?" McCarty asked.

"The Marathon."

"Why didn't he stay in his own home if there were three of you here to look after him?"

The valet's shoulders and eyebrows lifted expressively.

"I never asked him and he didn't tell me, but I suppose he liked the club better than an empty house; any gentleman would." For the first time Hill looked squarely at his inquisitor. "Who are you? A detective?"

"I'm a special officer on this case and my name's McCarty," the ex-roundsman replied. "You'll be only saving yourself trouble—"

"'McCarty!'" Hill interrupted and there was something very like consternation in his tones. "You're the McCarty who was in all the papers in connection with the Hoyos case and the Glamorgan affair?"

"I am that!" There was no braggadocio in Timothy McCarty's plain, matter-of-fact statement. "Now, Hill, how long had you been in the house before you knocked at the door of the room where the inspector and Mr. Alexander were?"

"Only a minute or two, sir." The tone was almost eager now and the habitual servility had returned to it. "I let myself in at the tradesmen's entrance with my own key as usual and went upstairs to get a couple of hours' sleep before Rollins and his wife returned and it would be time to bustle about and get the house in order for Mrs. Creveling's coming. I started up the back way, of course, and at the second floor I thought I'd stop and see if Mr. Creveling was in his room; he usually slept home instead of going back to the club when he'd had any one here for a late supper, and when I found nobody there I supposed maybe his guest hadn't gone yet and I'd better come down and see if they wanted any more wine or anything. Mr. Creveling's private cellar is stocked up for two or three years yet to come. I went down the front staircase and heard voices in the room where I'd laid out the supper table, so I knocked."

"You thought Mr. Creveling was still in there?" McCarty queried blandly. "I mean, when you stopped and listened before you knocked?"

The valet shot him a startled glance.

"I didn't know what to think!" he blurted out after a moment's hesitation. "I heard Mr. Alexander's voice and recognized it, of course, but for all I knew he might have been the guest Mr. Creveling was entertaining. Then he said something about 'murder' and a strange voice answered. You know the rest, sir; I'm giving it to you straight!"

"You've been with Million-a-month Creveling for eleven years," McCarty remarked slowly, using the nickname with deliberate intent. "That's three years before his marriage. You may have come through with all you know about tonight's affair, Hill, but you've only done it because we dug it out of you. There's a lot more you know about the man you've been working for and I'm going to have it."

"There's been nothing since his marriage that all the world don't know, and precious little before that, thanks to the reporters that were forever barking at his heels because he was a free-handed spender and liked a good time!" the valet retorted. "I'm not saying Mr. Creveling was any angel in his younger days but there's nothing you can hang on him now."

"I disremember just now what all the scandal used to be about him but a look at the old newspaper files will give me a line on that." McCarty spoke as though to himself, but he watched the other narrowly. "'Twas the usual thing, I suppose: wine and women and horses and cards. The first of them at least he didn't give up when he married, by your own testimony, but how about the last? Has Creveling been gambling heavy lately, that you know of? Did he have any quiet little games here?"

Hill shook his head decisively.

"He hasn't touched a card in years, at least not that I've heard of. He never even sat in at Mrs. Creveling's bridge parties. After he married and settled down he started in antique collecting; not paintings so much but rugs and tapestries and porcelains and rare old books. Regular pas-

sion it got to be with him and he studied up on periods and such, but then he was always a natural judge of good things, Mr. Creveling was."

McCarty pondered for a moment. The other man's expression was as inscrutable as ever but there had seemed to be a thinly veiled double meaning in his last remark. Why had he been so obviously on the defensive since the beginning of the interrogation? He was shrewd and intelligent above the average of his class; surely he must realize the equivocal position in which he stood with the inspector after his open defiance and refusal to state where he had himself been during those crucial hours! McCarty tried another lead.

"This house has a kind of a new look to it, in spite of all the old things Creveling collected," he observed. "When was it built?"

"At the time of his marriage, sir; he built it for his bride. There's not a residence of its size on the Avenue to compare with it." The valet spoke with almost personal pride.

"And 'twas him put up that high blank wall at the back?" asked McCarty. "Why?"

"I never heard him say, sir. I suppose he preferred it to the back courts of the side street houses." The reserve deepened once more in Hill's tones. "It may have been Mrs. Creveling who suggested it; I cannot say."

"Did anybody ever die here before?" McCarty's own tones had lowered.

"Die?" The valet started nervously.

"In this house, I mean. Has there been a death here since it was built?"

"No, not until this!"

"That's funny. I never heard of a new house with never a death in it that sported a ghost before." McCarty seemed again to be reflecting aloud and for a moment there was silence while the other eyed him askance. At length he

resumed: "You used your own latch key in coming in a while ago; who else has keys to the house?"

"I don't know." The valet spoke in evident relief. "Rollins, of course, and his wife. The rest of the staff were supposed to turn theirs in to the housekeeper when they left, but they may have had duplicates made. The housekeeper went back to Scotland a month ago when the establishment was closed and Mrs. Creveling started visiting, but I don't know what became of the keys."

"I suppose you do know, though, what you're letting yourself in for by refusing to tell where you have been since eleven o'clock?" inquired McCarty. "You are the last so far as we know to have seen Creveling alive, you had a key to come and go as you please and you won't try to make out an alibi for yourself. It's liable to go hard with you."

"Maybe," Hill commented without bravado, but there was a peculiar glint in his swiftly lowered eyes. "If you're on this case, Mr. McCarty, it's for you and the inspector to prove that I was here after eleven, not for me to prove that I wasn't. I know American law, sir."

In spite of his respectful tone there was a covert challenge in it which McCarty grimly accepted.

"You've had reason to, maybe," he retorted significantly. "You've nothing more to add to what you've told the inspector and me?—Then we'll just go back—"

A heavy, dull thud sounding from the main hall broke into his sentence and with a common impulse both men turned to the door. McCarty reached it first and opening it stepped mechanically outside just as the inspector and Mr. Alexander issued from the breakfast room.

Across the rotunda, flooded with a mingling of pale sunshine and the more brazen electric lights, the four men beheld a figure which momentarily held them spellbound. A few steps from the main entrance doors which had just closed behind her a woman stood looking from one to another of them. Ash-blond hair above deep violet eyes

peeped from beneath her motor hood and her tall, statuesque form, swathed in a long satin coat which revealed rather than concealed its splendid lines, was drawn up to its full height as she regarded them for a long minute in a silence which none of them seemed inclined to break.

At last her lips moved and with perfect self-possession she inquired slowly:

"What is it, please? What has happened to my husband?"

CHAPTER V

"WHO KILLED HIM?"

THE woman's tones were low and well-modulated but they seemed to soar to the topmost reaches of the galieried rotunda in the momentousness of their question and as they died away in a quivering silence even the matter-of-fact McCarty felt a cold shiver as of apprehension.

It seemed an age before George Alexander with a little nervous clearing of his throat advanced to meet her.

"My dear Myra!" There was mingled astonishment and dismay in his voice and beneath it McCarty detected that same undernote as of caution with which the banker had previously addressed the valet. "How could my telegram have reached you so quickly? I—we didn't expect—!"

"I know nothing of any telegram, Uncle George." Myra Creveling's voice still seemed strangely remote. "The cook telephoned out to me—at least I believe it was Sarah—that some accident had happened to Eugene. But who are these men?—Frank, where is Mr. Creveling?"

After a brief glance at the inspector and McCarty her eyes had fastened themselves upon the valet and as he opened his lips to reply the former stepped forward.

"You are Mrs. Creveling?"

"I am." Her glance returned to Inspector Druet. "May I ask who you are and what you are doing in my house?"

"Myra, my dear!" Alexander interposed hastily. "You must prepare yourself for a great shock, a great grief! This man is an inspector from the police department; Eugene was found here dead!"

For a moment her wide violet eyes stared deep into her uncle's and there came a sudden tensing of the lines of her beautiful face but no outcry, no faintness, no other signs of normal emotion. Then from her stiffened lips there issued one single question:

"Who killed him?"

McCarty glanced inadvertently at his superior. If the supposed maid had telephoned to her mistress merely that Creveling had met with some accident, why had his wife on learning that he was dead instantly assumed that he had been murdered?

Inspector Druet, however, did not take up that thread at once. Instead he gestured deprecatingly but with unmistakable authority to a throne chair which stood between two torch lamps near where she had halted and asked:

"At what hour did your cook telephone to you, Mrs. Creveling?"

Obediently, almost mechanically, the lady seated herself and loosening her cloak drew off her veil.

"At about five o'clock this morning, a trifle before the hour, I think." She put one hand to her forehead for a moment, but there was no dazed look of shock in the direct, clear gaze she bent upon her questioner.

"And that was all the message, that there had been an accident? You asked for no particulars?"

"I had no opportunity. That was all the message that was delivered to me. I did not receive it myself, the butler at Broadmead where I was staying replied to the telephone, then awakened my maid who in turn brought the news to me. I understood that the cook—the only maidservant left here—had said that I must come home at once, that something had happened to my husband."

At about five! That had been the hour when Alexander first made his appearance at the house, a few minutes after McCarty had concluded his solitary second search of the rooms upstairs. The agitated elderly gentleman had not

thought of sending the wire to his niece until a good half hour afterward; it must have been a quarter of six, at least, when the detective from borough headquarters reached the nearest telegraph office to despatch the message. Why had none of them thought to telephone direct to Broadmead instead?

As McCarty asked himself this question he glanced inadvertently at Alexander just in time to intercept a look which flashed between the banker and the valet; a deliberate motion of command with his eyes toward the room back of him which he had just left, the room with the disordered supper table still laid for two. McCarty's own eyes turned to Hill to find him slipping cat-like toward the door in a movement which the man himself instantly checked.

Mrs. Creveling's testimony was of utmost value at the moment, but McCarty made up his mind to keep his own attention upon this strangely assorted pair as well.

"You immediately aroused your host?" prompted the inspector.

"My hostess," Mrs. Creveling corrected him, still in that monotonous, remote tone without obvious display of repression. "Mr. Waverly was not at Broadmead last night.— Inspector, who killed my husband?"

Now indeed her voice had changed, but with no poignant outburst of pent-up grief. It rang out hard and cold and sharp as steel and behind it there was a stern, implacable determination to know the truth.

"What makes you think that any one killed him?" the inspector countered swiftly. "Your maid telephoned that an accident had occurred and your uncle here has merely informed you that Mr. Creveling was found dead."

She shrugged and a faint smile as of scorn curled her mobile lips for an instant before they settled again in that unyielding line.

"What fatal accident could have befallen him in his own home?" Her long, slim, white hands dismissed the pos-

sibility with a gesture of finality. "My husband was in perfect health and there can be no question of suicide. I demand to be told at once how he died."

"He was found in the study or library which opens just beside the staircase there, shot through the heart. The weapon, an army .44, was within reach of his hand and there was no living person in the house except those who discovered the body," Inspector Druet replied gravely. "Mrs. Creveling, when did you last see your husband alive?"

"Last Sunday. He came down to Broadmead over the week-end." She broke off and asked quickly: "Who found my husband? Was it Rollins or Sarah? Where are they?"

Frank Hill, the valet, interposed.

"Mr. Creveling himself gave them a holiday yesterday, Mrs. Creveling," he said.

She darted a swift glance at him and nodded slowly, but save for a slight tightening of her lips her expression did not change for a moment. Then a quick thought came to her.

"Then who—?"

Her uncle divined the question before it was uttered.

"We don't know. I was summoned, too, by telephone some little time before you were, but it was a man who called me, a stranger. I don't remember ever having heard his voice until early this morning." He spoke hastily, almost furtively. "Eugene entertained some one at supper here late last night, Myra, some client of ours probably—"

"Did you know that he intended doing so, Mrs. Creveling?" interrupted the inspector brusquely. "Do you know who the person was?"

She shook her head.

"No," she responded composedly. "I only know that if my husband was shot he was murdered. I do not wish to act in opposition to the authorities, but it is permitted I believe that in a case like this I may engage private investigators to cooperate with them?"

The inspector bowed but George Alexander started forward.

"Myra! Such a step would be most—most unnecessary! I am sure that the authorities are perfectly capable of handling this terrible situation and that they know best. I myself thought at first that it could not have been a case of suicide, but the pistol lay within touch of his fingers. I—I saw it myself! If you drag in blundering private detectives you will subject us to needless and distressing notoriety. This shock has dazed you, you are not quite yourself, my dear. If you will take time to think the matter over—"

"I have thought." Mrs. Creveling favored her uncle with a long inscrutable look and before it he seemed all at once to shrivel and the lines of age which grooming and care had kept smooth stood out in his pallid face. "I knew Eugene better than any one in the world and I know that the suggestion of suicide is absolutely untenable. I'm going to find out who killed him, Uncle George, if I move heaven and earth to do so. I have heard of a man, a scientific criminologist I believe he is called, who is quite famous in his way. I want him if he is to be had. His name is Wade Terhune."

A swift glance passed between the inspector and McCarty and the former shrugged with a slight smile. McCarty grinned in answer. So once more Terhune with his little scientific recording instruments and trained analytical mind was to be pitted against the routine methods of the force and McCarty's own efforts! It seemed a stroke of fate that the ex-roundsman, the inspector and the crime savant should be again upon the trail and the former looked forward with grim humor to Terhune's appearance on the scene.

"Mr. Terhune has often been called in by the department, and my special deputy, here, and I have worked personally with him on more than one case." Inspector Druet turned to Mrs. Creveling who still preserved her stoic calm.

"I have the telephone number here of his private, unlisted wire; shall I have him summoned for you?"

"Myra!" Mr. Alexander put in a final, futile remonstrance. "Think well what you are doing! If Eugene were really—er—murdered I am sure the inspector is fully capable of finding the guilty man. These private detectives are always looking for press notices and the notoriety will be hideous! Do you realize—?"

"I realize everything, Uncle George, and my mind is made up," Mrs. Creveling replied with a quiet finality of tone which brooked no further opposition. "I do not imply that the police department is incapable of handling this—this crime, but I want to feel that I myself am leaving no stone unturned to discover by whose hand my husband came to his death. If the inspector will give you his number I wish you would go and call up Mr. Terhune yourself for me. Tell him to name his own price, anything, but to come at once."

When Mr. Alexander, accompanied by the inspector, had retired to the study upon his reluctantly assumed mission McCarty stepped forward with one eye still on the valet and coughed deferentially.

"I'm the special deputy Inspector Druet put on this case with himself, ma'am. McCarty's my name. Is there any one else you want sent for? Any relative or friend, I mean?"

Once more Mrs. Creveling shook her head.

"Neither Mr. Creveling nor I have any relative beside my uncle, Mr. Alexander," she responded. "My maid will follow on the next train from Long Island and the butler and cook will probably return at any moment now as I was expected home this morning in any event. I do not want my friends about me, I want to be alone, to think."

To think but not to grieve. One look at that stern countenance, as immobile as that of some goddess carved in marble, would have shown to far less astute eyes than Mc-

Carty's that Myra Creveling would permit no breakdown, no unleashing of her emotions until her dominating purpose was achieved. That she had jumped so hastily to the conclusion her husband had been murdered pointed to the probability that she also strongly suspected the identity of the murderer but it would be futile to question her on that score at the moment.

"Of course that's only natural, ma'am." McCarty spoke soothingly. "Still I'm sure you'll be wanting to give us all the help you can and every minute counts now. In a case like this where we've got practically no clew and nothing to go on we'll have to find out what we can from Mr. Creveling's friends. I believe you said that Mr. Waverly was not at Broadmead last night. Were any other of your friends there? Mr. Alexander mentioned a Mr. and Mrs. O'Rourke, a lady named Culp or Kip—"

"Oh, they are in our set, of course, but none of them were at Broadmead," Mrs. Creveling interrupted. "There was no house party; I was just visiting there quietly for a few days."

"Where was Mr. Waverly last night? Was he expected out at his home?"

"No, he was at one of his clubs, I suppose. He telephoned out before dinner that he would be detained in town overnight. Mrs. Waverly and I were alone at Broadmead with the servants." She paused and then spoke in a quickened tone. "Mr. McCarty, you said just now that you had no clews. If my butler and cook have been away since yesterday, who was the man who summoned my uncle and the woman who telephoned to me? If those calls could be traced I should think you would have a very real clew to material witnesses, at least."

McCarty nodded gravely.

"We may be able to learn their identity, though 'twill be no easy matter; they might have 'phoned from pay stations, you know, ma'am. 'Tis unlikely that either of them

was the murderer, if murder was done. Mr. Alexander must have been called up after four o'clock and you say the message came to you a little before five. Now, Mr. Creveling's body was discovered a few minutes past two and according to the opinion of the medical examiner he must have been dead an hour before that; plenty of time, you see, for the murderer to have got clean away. Does the Waverlys' butler know your cook?"

"It is possible; I'm sure I don't know." There was a touch of hauteur in her tone.

"I was only wondering whether he recognized her voice or whether the woman told him who she was," McCarty explained mildly. "Do you know a Mr. Cutter?"

The slender, white hands resting on the arms of her chair gripped tensely at the sudden question, but she replied without hesitation or surprise.

"Nicholas Cutter? Certainly. He is one of our closest friends."

"And the O'Rourkes and Fords and the lady named Culp or Kip?" McCarty persisted. "Will you give me their full names and addresses, please? Are they all in the same set?"

"They are all in my immediate circle of friends, if that is what you mean." As if suddenly conscious of those betraying hands she lifted them and let them fall idly into her lap. "Of course, Mr. Creveling had many casual friends of whom I know nothing, clubmen and business associates, but those you mention have been our social intimates for years. Mr. and Mrs. Lonsdale Ford live at the St. Maur apartments on Madison Avenue; Mrs. Baillie Kip, if that is who you mean, has a house on East Sixty-third Street, and Mr. and Mrs. John Cavanaugh O'Rourke have taken the Hartington residence a few blocks above us on the Avenue, here. The Waverlys' town house is two blocks south."

McCarty had scarcely heard the last sentence. His face flushed and with shining eyes he repeated:

"John Cavanaugh O'Rourke! Would you know, Mrs. Creveling, if he came from the old country, from near Dublin?"

"Yes. He and his wife both came from there about six years ago. She was Lady Margaret Sinclair." The even voice responded without show of interest.

"Little Lady Peggy!" McCarty murmured softly to himself. "She and the son of 'the' O'Rourke! To think of it! The years do be sliding along fast!"

He was apparently absorbed, although the light in his eyes had suddenly misted, in jotting down the addresses on the back of an old envelope and as he replaced it in his pocket he looked up with a return of his deferential yet businesslike air.

"Your housekeeper has gone back to Scotland, I understand. Did she leave all the keys of the house with you, ma'am? Did the servants who were dismissed turn theirs in?"

"I suppose so. At least, Mrs. Jarvie gave me a small box filled with keys all labeled. I can show them to you later." Mrs. Creveling rose as her uncle reentered from the study accompanied by the inspector. "Did you reach Mr. Terhune, Uncle George? Will he undertake the case for me?"

"He will be here as soon as his car can bring him," Mr. Alexander replied. "I fancy my call got him out of his bed, however, for it isn't quite eight o'clock yet and it will take him a short time at least to dress. If you wish to retire in the meantime to your own rooms and compose yourself for your interview with him I am sure that Inspector Druet will have no objection. We must not put too great a strain upon you after this fearful shock."

"There is just one more question I should like to ask Mrs. Creveling now." The inspector stepped forward hastily. "Had your husband any cause to fear for his life? To your knowledge had he any enemies, Mrs. Creveling?"

McCarty did not hear the lady's reply. The tail of his eye which had never left the valet's spare, black-clad form caught him slinking toward a door on the other side of the staircase and as the man disappeared within it he was close upon the other's heels. Hill moved swiftly with his accustomed noiseless tread and so intent upon his errand was he that he did not hear the careful but heavier steps behind him. The door led into a rear hallway and the two proceeded beyond the back stairs and around a turning past the pantries and kitchen toward the tradesmen's entrance.

A tall, angular, middle-aged woman was advancing along the hall, and behind her appeared the shorter, more rotund figure of a man evidently some years her senior. Both were dressed in the simplest of outdoor attire and their bearing betrayed their identity even before the woman spoke.

"Don't you remind us that we're late, Frank!" she said sharply. "We've had a dreadful night; fire in the flat below Rollins' sister's, and never a wink of sleep for any of us! I'm sure I wish Mr. Creveling would have his parties somewhere else and leave us in peace—!"

She stopped abruptly on catching sight of the stranger behind the valet and her close-set eyes seemed boring him through like gimlets. Before Hill could interpose the fat elderly man spoke over her shoulder.

"Lizzie couldn't 'elp the fire but Sarah will have 'er—'Ullo! Who's this?"

Hill darted a swift glance behind and for the first time McCarty caught a glimpse of the man's countenance with the mask off. It was drawn and distorted and a gleam of incalculable cunning shone from the narrowed eyes. The next instant with a twisted smile he had stepped aside.

"Perhaps you'd like to tell them yourself, sir." He waved his hand toward the newcomers. "It's Rollins and Sarah."

The two stood rooted to the spot as McCarty stepped forward.

"Police Headquarters," he announced bluntly. "You are Sarah Rollins, the cook here? Did you telephone out to Broadmead where Mrs. Creveling is staying during last night?"

"Police!" the woman gasped in a shrill whisper. "Whatever's been goin' on!—What would I telephone to Mrs. Creveling for? I'm one that minds my own business and makes no trouble!"

Unfeigned astonishment was blazoned upon her thin, acidulous face but no sign of apprehension, and satisfied that he had been answered McCarty turned to her husband.

"You're the butler? Did you telephone to Mr. George Alexander about half-past four this morning?"

"'Mr. Alexander'!" Rollins repeated in evident stupefaction. "At 'alf after four I was trying to settle to a bit of sleep again in my bed at my sister's. The house she lives in took on fire at two, and we were all routed out in our—as we were, sir. I 'ad no occasion to telephone to Mr. Alexander or any one else. What is it? What's been going on 'ere, robbery?"

"Mr. Creveling was shot to death here in his study sometime during the night." McCarty watched the effect of his words narrowly. "Do you know who was supposed to have had supper here with him?"

"Shot!" It was the cook who uttered the exclamation and her husband turned on her before she could continue.

"We know nothing about it!" His ruddy face had paled and the assertion although seemingly addressed to McCarty was as obviously intended for the woman. "This is terrible business, sir! 'Ow—'ow did it 'appen?"

"That's what I'm here to find out," McCarty retorted grimly. "Did you know why Mr. Creveling gave you a little holiday yesterday?"

"Why, yes, sir," the butler stammered. "I'd asked 'im

for leave to run up to Boston overnight sometime this week to see my brother-in-law on business, and yesterday Mr. Creveling told me to go last night and take Sarah with me if I liked; I understood that Frank would be 'ere to look after the 'ouse."

"Why didn't you go to Boston, then?" demanded McCarty quickly.

"Because my brother-in-law 'ad returned to the city. I 'phoned my sister to tell 'er we were going and she said 'e 'ad come home; that's why we went to 'er flat 'ere instead."

"And stayed overnight instead of coming back here to your own rooms to sleep?" There was contemptuous incredulity in McCarty's tones. "Why did you do that?"

"Because we talked late and my brother-in-law and I split a bottle that he'd got 'old of somewhere." Rollins spoke sullenly and then as if in afterthought roused himself to what was probably expected of him. "Mr. Creveling dead! This is 'orrible, sir, 'orrible! A fine, free-handed gentleman he was. Did a burglar break in, do you think?"

"I'm asking questions, not answering them," McCarty asseverated sternly. "If you're not more frank with me than this fellow here has been it's likely to go as hard with you as it will with him! Who had supper with Mr. Creveling here last night?"

"I don't know, sir, strike me pink! No more does Sarah. We're paid to do our work and keep our place and we've done both, as Mr. Creveling 'imself would tell you if 'e was alive to do it. Mr. Creveling has entertained gentlemen 'ere now and again but we didn't know he expected any one last night. Has Mrs. Creveling been sent for, sir?"

"She is here."

"Here!" Sarah threw up her hands. "And her rooms not in order, and me with all that lobster and stuff from the caterer's to clean up!—Let me pass! Police or no, I've got my work to do. I don't know anything about what happened to poor Mr. Creveling, and you needn't be afraid

I'll run away. You'll find me here when you want me!"

McCarty opened his lips as if to speak, then thought better of it and obediently stepped aside, but he gazed after the woman's departing figure with a quizzical look in his twinkling eyes. When she had disappeared he turned once more to the butler.

"How long have you and your wife been employed here?"

"Three years," Rollins replied. "I've never worked for a nicer family—in America, that is. Always extra 'elp when they entertained and I could 'ave 'ad a second footman any time I'd wanted to ask for one. This will be a bad job for us, getting mixed up in scandal at our time of life, and we've always been so particular about our positions too!"

"Where does this sister of yours live, Rollins?" McCarty cut short the flow of lamentation.

"Just across the park, sir, in West Ninety-fourth Street, a door or two from Columbus Avenue. I'll write the address down for you." The butler's hands fumbled shakily in his pockets. "Her name is Mrs. William Carroll and she can tell you that both Sarah and me were with her all night."

McCarty smiled to himself. He would have surer proof than that, for the engine and hose company which his particular crony, Dennis Riordan, adorned with his presence was located in the same precinct; Denny would have the best of reasons for knowing if there had been a fire at two that morning.

"'Tis just a matter of form," McCarty remarked. "Now, Rollins, come clean! That stuff about keeping your place is all right but you are in a position to know the truth and I want it. You've heard all the family conversation at table whether you wanted to listen or not; did you ever hear Mr. Creveling speak of any one he hated or who hated him? Was there any one who would be glad to get him out of the way?"