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SINFULLY RICH

Books by

HULBERT FOOTNER

SINFULLY RICH
THE MURDER THAT HAD EVERYTHING
THE NATION'S MISSING GUEST
THE DEATH OF A CELEBRITY
THE OBEAH MURDERS
THE DARK SHIPS
THE ISLAND OF FEAR
THE MURDER OF A BAD MAN
SCARRED JUNGLE
THE MYSTERY OF THE FOLDED PAPER
EASY TO KILL
DEAD MAN'S HAT
THE RING OF EYES
MURDER RUNS IN THE FAMILY
DANGEROUS CARGO
THE WHIP-POOR-WILL MYSTERY

*Harper & Brothers
Publishers*

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By

HULBERT FOOTNER

**Harper & Brothers Publishers
NEW YORK AND LONDON**

SINFULLY RICH

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FIRST EDITION

Chapter 1

As noon approached, Mike Speedon cleared his desk preparatory to leaving his office in the Recorder-Press Building. It was a very small office, but the fact that he had an office of his own testified to his importance on the premises. He was usually called Society Reporter, which he didn't like; "Social Commentator" or "Columnist" pleased him better. His column was more and more widely syndicated and he had become a big figure in the smart life of the town and, in fact, of the nation. And nobody knew it better than Mike himself. He didn't have to keep office hours any more, but he attended every morning from nine to twelve because of what he called his Puritan conscience. In other respects he was not exactly a Puritan.

The telephone rang and he picked up the instrument. It was Warner Bassett, City Editor. Hearing the silky quality in Warner's voice, Mike frowned; around the shop he wanted to be treated as one of the gang. Since he had become a "feature" on the paper, Mike was no longer under Bassett's direct control.

"Hi, Mike! Stop by a moment on your way out, will you?"

"Sure!" said Mike, thinking: What the hell does he want of me? Something I don't want to do, that's certain.

As he picked up his hat, he considered his engagements for the day; 1 P.M., lunch with Peggy Rhineland *et al.* at the Colony; a dull bunch but the food would be good; ought to be able to get away by 2:30. Then home for a good sleep. This afternoon nap was Mike's secret. He posed as a superman who didn't require more than three hours' sleep in the twenty-four. 5 P.M. cocktails at the Alexanders'; 6 would be plenty of time to get there. Half an hour was enough for the Alexanders. Must look in at Mrs. Overton's afterwards; that woman had the commanding eye of a rising star. Home to dress; 8 P.M., Sloan dinner at the St. Regis; big bow-wows; wear the jeweled gardenia and Inverness cape. Get away in time to look in at Gilbert Miller's first night before the show let out; then a quick round of Jack and Charlie's; Stork Club; El Morocco. Promised to join the Paley's party at 12:30. And at 1:30 ... Paradise! Mike smiled to himself. No danger of forgetting *that!*

He passed through the littered city room and into Warner's enclosure in the corner. Warner, keen, gray-faced, chewing an unlighted cigar, was the picture of a city editor. He was only a year or two older than Mike. Looking up at the latter's fresh complexion he asked sourly:

"What time did you get to bed this morning?"

"Somewhere around three-thirty."

"How the hell do you keep it up?"

"It's a gift."

"Yeah, a gift," said Warner bitterly. "Christ! you have it soft! Look at me! Look at all the boys here! It takes this whole damn manure pile to produce one perfect blossom like you! You stink like a gardenia!"

There was no unfriendliness in this, and Mike merely grinned. "Sure! But you didn't ask me here to talk about the flowers. What?..."

"Mrs. Charles Warrington Ware is going to conduct a hay ride up Broadway at midnight tonight," said Warner abruptly. "I've just been tipped off."

"Sure you've been tipped off. And every other newspaper in town. Why else give a hay ride?"

"You're supposed to be a friend of hers," said Warner.

Mike said nothing.

"Have you been invited on this hay ride?"

"I have."

"Are you going?"

"Can you see me?"

"No," grumbled Warner, "but I don't know the requirements of your job. I reckon you have to pay for your fun one way or another."

"I'm getting to the point where I can pick and choose," said Mike. "I've got better copy for my column than old Flora Ward's hay ride."

"The woman is batty!"

"Aren't we all?"

"Sixty-seven years old, and trying to outdo the debutantes!"

"She's not insane, if that's what you mean," said Mike. "For forty years she was the meek and uncomplaining wife of Charles W. Ware, the nickel king."

"Cut out the headlines!"

"Headlines to the headliner," murmured Mike.

"Save it! Save it!"

"You know what old Charlie Ware was; he reduced everybody around him to a mush of concession. Especially his wife. He allowed her twelve hundred a month out of which she had to keep up two big houses. She scarcely had a dollar to spend on herself. Close-mouthed old so-and-so; she never knew how rich he was until after he died. He was so busy making money he could never stop to draw up a will, and she inherited three million a year without any strings to it. She's lost her head, that's all; at sixty-seven she's having her first taste of life."

"All the leeches in town have fastened on her."

"Oh, not all of them. She has a head leech who does her best to keep the others off."

"Mrs. Bethesda Prior?"

"Sure. Bethesda's the one who thinks up the hay rides and other scintillating stunts."

"They're all batty, I say," cried Warner.

"No," said Mike, "publicity-drunk.... You ought to have seen Flora Ware the night Ciro's opened. She spends the whole day at Helena Rubinstein's getting fixed up for an occasion like that. Her entrance stopped the show. A white satin gown from Hattie Carnegie's like a bride's; a drift of white fox around her skinny shoulders and a diamond tiara like a sky sign! She was like nothing in the world but an animated waxwork in technicolor. She ordered champagne for the reporters and press photographers and sat down to tell them about herself. 'Boys,' I heard her say as I passed by, 'my hair is all my own, too; and if you don't believe it, pull it, pull it!'"

"Sure," said Warner, "but what can I do?"

"Give her the silence treatment. She would die of chagrin."

"You let her have plenty of space in your column."

"Once I did; not now. Leave her to the tabloids. She's their dish. This is a newspaper."

"It used to be," said Warner sourly.

"You're in a position to take the initiative," urged Mike. "Call up the other papers and get them to agree to boycott this wacky hay ride."

"You're an idealist," said Warner. "They'd rat on me; they're all hyenas; I'm a hyena, too."

Mike shrugged.

"No!" said Warner briskly; "she's worth sixty million, and she's news. I can cover the hay ride all right; what I wanted from you—as a favor—was the inside story. The others won't have that. You're one of her gang. Why, they said for a while that you were engaged to her."

"Oh, my God!" said Mike with a mock shudder.

"You don't have to sign the story," urged Warner, "and you can make it satirical if you want—but not too satirical."

"Nothing doing," said Mike. "Sorry."

"Why not? It's your line."

"That's just the reason. This café society or saloon society, or whatever you call it, is an A-1 racket; it helps sell the paper; it's money in our pockets ..."

"Particularly in your pocket," put in Warner.

"Sure. But at that I'm not kidded by it.... Nothing lasts forever and a woman like Flora Ware threatens my profitable racket. Everything and everybody she is associated with is smeared with ridicule. Nothing in this fair land of ours can stand long against ridicule. Glamour is my stock in trade, and if Flora and her like peel all the glamour off saloon society, I'll be looking for a new job."

"Maybe so," said Warner, "but that's too long a view for the editor of a daily paper. I've got to play up Mrs. Charles Warrington Ware while she lasts." He returned to the papers on his desk. "Get out! Who are you lunching with today, Tallulah or Ina or Libby?"

"No such luck. I'm out on hire today."

"Lucky stiff! Give 'em my love anyhow, and the hell with them!"

Chapter 2

Mrs. Charles Warrington Ware occupied a triplex apartment at the top of the most expensive building on the Avenue. Bethesda had leased it for her. Two walls of the vast living room were painted white and the other two black, thus immediately establishing a modernistic atmosphere. Down at one end was an arrangement of primitive African sculpture—very primitive; other decorations included big wooden bowls of colored glass balls placed here and there on the floor; modernistic sculptured animals on stands and surrealist paintings on the walls. In the beginning Mrs. Ware had felt obliged to avert her eyes from the primitive sculpture and the surrealists, but she became accustomed to them in time, and all her sophisticated friends agreed with Bethesda, that the whole effect was *très-chi-chi*.

At nine o'clock on the morning following the over-publicized hay ride, Miss Day Radnor rang the bell of the apartment as usual, and was admitted by Cummings, the butler. Brown-haired Miss Radnor, who favored severely tailored suits and hats as if she was determined to hide how pretty she was (but only thereby emphasized it), looked a little out of place among the grotesques, but she worked there. She said:

"Weren't you up very late last night, Cummings?"

"Moderately so, Miss."

"And already on the job?"

"Well, I like to see that things get properly started in the morning, Miss."

Cummings did not run quite true to type; his attire lacked something of a butler's superhuman neatness; his coarse black hair had a tendency to fall over his forehead, his features were rugged. But his manner was smooth enough—too smooth, Day Radnor felt; too watchful. It was not quite natural that Cummings should always be the last to go to bed and the first to get up. However, she told herself, it was not her put.

"Have you seen this morning's papers, Miss?" asked Cummings.

"No," said Day, "and I don't want to."

Cummings shook his head sympathetically and sadly.

Day was not going to be drawn into a discussion of the hay ride with the butler. "What time did the party break up?" she asked.

"Madam ordered me to stop serving drinks at one-thirty, Miss. That is earlier than usual. Of course, they soon went after that. I went to bed myself, leaving Alfred on duty. Alfred told me they were all out shortly after two."

"I see." Day was thinking. Evidently the hay ride did not make much of a hit.

"I think Madam had words with Mrs. Prior last night," ventured Cummings. "Alfred told me that ..."

Day shut him off. "Much mail this morning?" she asked briskly.

"The usual basketful, Miss.... Mostly begging letters, I should say," he added sourly. It was odd, Day thought, how jealous Mrs. Ware's beneficiaries were of all her other beneficiaries.

"Naturally," she said.

To the right of the entrance door there was a small, plainly furnished room that was called the "office." This was Day's hangout between the hours of nine and five and often later. Mrs. Ware rarely visited it; indeed. Day sometimes did not see her employer for several days at a time. Her instructions would be transmitted through Cummings or a maid.

Cummings followed Day into the office now. Nothing could discourage his attempts to establish an alliance with the secretary.

"That will be all, thank you," said Day; and with a hard look through his lashes he silently went out.

Day dutifully attacked the big basket of mail. Same old sniveling appeals. What a world! Mrs. Ware insisted on having a complete written report of the beggars, and, if she happened to feel in a good humor, would send out checks recklessly without further investigation. How nicely I could use a check! thought Day.

At ten o'clock she rang for a servant, and Cummings promptly appeared again. "Has Mrs. Ware rung?" asked Day.

"No, Miss."

"Then I think she ought to be wakened now."

"Yes, Miss; but we have a standing order not to rouse her until she rings."

"She has an appointment at Helena Rubinstein's at eleven, and you know how important that is to her." Day consulted a memorandum on her desk. Today Mrs. Ware was to have a complete check up from the physician at the beauty clinic, followed by a workout and relaxation under the infra-red rays. After that she had not decided whether to take massage and the ultra-violet rays, or a pasteurized milk bath. She would lunch there, and after lunch she was down for an electrotonic facial, a molding treatment and a hot-oil manicure. Chiropedicure at the same time, of course, a personality make-up and a coiffure for the evening.

"If she's late it will upset the whole schedule."

"Very well, Miss, I will instruct Kinsey to waken her."

Kinsey, Mrs. Ware's own maid, was lingering over her coffee in the servants' hall. Neat, prim and elderly, she had served some of the greatest ladies of England, and her wage and perquisites from Mrs. Ware amounted to double the earnings of a school teacher. Kinsey knew her own worth. She had to put up with a lot from her aging mistress, and she was apt to take it out on her fellow servants. They called her the Duchess, which did not displease her.

When Cummings entered, Alfred, the second man, was hovering in the background. Alfred was a young fellow who had been chosen for his fine figure. He would have been handsome but for his shifty eyes. This morning the eyes were rimmed with red as if from lack of sleep, and his manner was jittery. When Cummings' eyes fell upon the young man, he said sharply:

"What are you idling about for? I put out the silver to be cleaned."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Cummings," said Alfred, moving toward the door. However, he contrived to delay his departure until he heard what Cummings had to say to Kinsey.

"Miss Radnor says you're to waken the Madam now."

The elderly maid stiffened her already straight back. "What's she got to do with me, I'd like to know! Miss Reduced Gentility! I'm not in the habit of taking my orders from *her*!"

Cummings glanced at her with indifferent dislike. "Madam has an appointment at the beauty parlor at eleven. She's booked to get the whole works today."

Kinsey jumped up. "I didn't know the hour. I ought to have been informed of it before!" She flounced out.

Alfred, who had no more than stepped out of the pantry door, came in again. His face was as white as paper, his hands clenched as if to keep them from shaking. "Excuse me, Mr. Cummings," he whined, "but I don't feel good. Could I go out to the drug store to get me some medicine?"

"What's the matter with you?" asked Cummings.

"It's my stomach, sir."

"Nonsense! Get cook to give you a dose of bicarbonate. You know you're not permitted to go out on your own business."

Alfred went into the pantry with his head hanging.

When Cummings was left alone his whole expression changed. He stood by the table with his head lowered, thinking hard. His foxy eyes drew closer together; there was power in his dark face; power and infinite cunning. After a while he went to the kitchen door and called Alfred in again. He showed a smoother front to the young man now.

"This man Keppel who came to see the Madam yesterday morning; are you sure that was his name? It's not in the telephone book."

"Keppel or Keppler or Kaplan or some such name," mumbled Alfred.

Cummings clenched his teeth. "She sent me away on purpose!" he muttered. Then to Alfred: "You're certain he was a lawyer?"

"It was on the card he gave me. Down in the corner of the card a string of names and under it 'Attorneys-at-Law, 120 Broadway.'"

Cummings burst out: "Oh, my God! What a fool you are! I told you to watch her carefully while I was out."

Alfred cringed before him. "After he'd gone I watched her," he whined. "And when she came down to lunch I went into the boudoir and looked for the card so I could copy it off for you, but she'd torn it up."

"How did she receive him?" demanded Cummings.

"Real friendly. He stayed an hour. After I showed him into the room she locked the door. I put my ear to it and I heard her say to him: 'I am surrounded by snoopers and spies!' And he said: 'We will keep our voices low.' Then I couldn't hear any more."

Cummings paced the room, struggling to hold in his anger.

"Martin drove her down to 120 Broadway late yesterday afternoon," said Alfred. "You could ask him whose office is there."

"You fool!" cried Cummings. "That's the Equitable! Biggest office building in town. Thousands of tenants!"

"Well, I didn't know," whined Alfred.

Cummings, pausing, looked Alfred up and down with an ugly smile. "Maybe Miss Radnor knows something about this lawyer. Look, you're a good-looking young fellow. And well turned. Can't you get it out of her?"

Alfred's eyes shifted away. "Treats me like dirt, she does. Looks right through me as if I wasn't there."

Cummings started to speak; heard uneven footsteps on the service stairs, and took warning from it. "Get out!" he snarled.

Alfred slipped through the pantry door, flattened himself against the wall behind it, and listened, breathing fast.

The elderly maid, Kinsey, ran into the servants' hall from the corridor with open mouth and starting eyes. "She's gone!"

Cummings seized her wrist and, dragging her back into the corridor, pulled the door shut. "Quiet, for God's sake! Do you want to start a panic here!"

"Gone! Gone!" whimpered Kinsey.

Cummings pulled her along the corridor and into his own little office, closing that door also. "Now keep your head. Miss Kinsey. What do you mean, gone?"

"She's not in her bed. She hasn't slept there all night."

Cummings affected to laugh it off. His face was ghastly.

"Maybe she had a fancy to try another bed."

"I looked in all the rooms. And the bathrooms. And the boudoir. She's not there."

"Maybe she came downstairs. Let's go through the rooms."

They soon satisfied themselves that Mrs. Ware was not in any of the reception rooms. Cummings put his ear to the door of the office. He shook his head.

"Better ask her," whispered Kinsey.

"No! Keep her out of this. She's against us all!"

They returned to the butler's office. "Maybe Madam went home with some of the guests," Cummings suggested. "Alfred says he didn't see all of them go."

"She wouldn't do that," moaned Kinsey. "She had taken a dislike to her friends last night."

Cummings wiped his face. "Oh...she was always taking dislikes. But after a glass or two, you understand...."

Kinsey kept shaking her head. "She wouldn't stay out all night in her evening clothes! How could she show herself in the morning?"

"When she wakes up she'll call up to tell you to bring her things to her."

Kinsey's voice began to break. "Well, telephone, telephone, and find out where she is!"

Cummings hesitated, scowling. "God! It would start such a story going! It would be on the streets in an hour!... Wait! I'll ask the night elevator man. I can bribe him to keep his mouth shut!"

He called up the building superintendent. Yes, the night elevator man slept in the building. He was sleeping now, but he could be roused up if he was wanted.

Cummings sent Kinsey upstairs to open Mrs. Ware's wardrobe and check her evening wraps.

The young elevator man presently came in by the service entrance. He was still partly asleep, and had his coat collar turned up to hide the lack of a shirt beneath. His name was Walter. It woke him sharply when Cummings presented him with a five-dollar bill and swore him to secrecy. When the question was put, he said that Mrs. Ware had not gone out again the previous night after she had come home. He could go on the stand and swear it, he said. It would have been impossible for her to get out of the building unless she had walked downstairs, and as there were twelve flights of stairs, this hardly seemed likely. Cummings promised him another five dollars if he kept his mouth shut until he was released from his promise, and sent him away.

Kinsey came down to report that all of Mrs. Ware's evening wraps, the white brocade with white fox, the green with a

Kolinsky collar, the sable coat, the chinchilla, the mink, and the three ermine coats and wraps were all hanging in their usual places. "She wouldn't go out at this season without fur around her," wailed Kinsey.

Cummings considered, scowling and stroking his chin.

"Do you realize...do you realize what this means?" gasped Kinsey.

"What are you getting at?" he demanded harshly.

"It means that... that she is *still here!*" Hysterics threatened.

"Not necessarily," said Cummings. "She might have been carried down the stairs.... In an elevator building nobody watches the stairs."

Kinsey's eyes widened; she caught her breath preparatory to a scream. Cummings, with a lightning move, stopped it with a hand over her mouth. "Shut up!" he said in her ear, not loudly but with a force that rendered the woman limp.

"What are you going to do?" she whispered. "The police?"

"I'll call her attorney, Mr. MacKelcan," he muttered. "He can take the responsibility."

Sanford MacKelcan lost no time in obeying Cummings' summons. Mrs. Charles Warrington Ware was by far his richest client. "A matter of importance," Cummings had said over the wire in a calm voice, so as not to throw the attorney into a dither before he got there. MacKelcan was the sort of lawyer who never pleads in court; estate management was his dish. He had developed the art of handling rich widows to a fine point; he and Mrs. Ware had always got along famously. He indulged all her whims, and drew up a new will whenever she demanded it. MacKelcan got along well with Cummings, too—on the surface; there was an unacknowledged working agreement between them. They traded information. MacKelcan went out of his way to court everybody who was in any way connected with his client.

Cummings let him in. The butler had recovered his usual smoothness. MacKelcan was a very tall man with a small head having but little hair left on it. His legs were like pipe stems within his trousers, but he had a neat round belly that stuck out unexpectedly above, and for some reason he featured it by wearing a white waistcoat and letting his jacket hang open. He was very energetic; always striding along at top speed with his coat flapping. Also extremely voluble; fond of asking questions and seldom pausing to hear the replies.

"Well, Cummings, how is every little thing? I was surprised to get so early a call. Luckily, it caught me just as I was leaving the office. Dropped everything, of course, to wait upon her exalted majesty, Queen Flora. How is my gracious lady this morning? Nothing wrong, I hope. The spiteful newspapers! You can't believe a word you read!"

"She hasn't seen them, sir."

"Good work! Keep them from her, Cummings; keep them from her; and I'll divert her mind into other channels. Pass on, that's my motto; always pass on to pleasanter things!"

Cummings led the lawyer into the living room so that their voices could not carry through the door of the office.

"Something is very, very wrong, I'm afraid, sir."

MacKelcan naturally was appalled when he heard Cummings' story. But he was not nearly so great a fool as his flatulent talk might have suggested; he kept his head; he questioned the butler shrewdly. Yet he was genuinely dismayed; he kept saying: "I can't understand it! I can't understand it! She *must* be here and she is not here." MacKelcan and Cummings each recognized in the other a superior intelligence; they deferred to each other politely—and never let up in their watchfulness. But everybody (except Day Radnor) who was connected with the rich woman acquired that watchful air.

MacKelcan said to Cummings: "I'm glad you didn't warn any of the people who were here last night, because, of course, if the worst *has* happened, suspicion will fall upon them first."

Together they made another tour of the apartment, omitting only the office. They overlooked the quiet secretary in there. They opened all the closet doors and looked under the beds. On the third floor there was an immense game room where Mrs. Ware gave her dancing parties, with a garden terrace outside. There were also servants' rooms on this floor. They went through them all. Nothing doing.

MacKelcan attempted to question Kinsey about her mistress' movements the night before, but the lady's maid became so upset he had to give over. They called in Adele to calm her. This Adele, a very pretty girl, was first housemaid. She had come into the household in the first place without Mrs. Ware's previous knowledge, since that lady did not care to surround herself with young and pretty maids. Cummings had engaged her.

While Adele was bringing Kinsey around with smelling salts, Mr. MacKelcan decided that there was no help for it but to call the police.

Chapter 3

At the same hour, in his little office in the Recorder-Press Building, Mike Speedon was sweating over his column. Few could have guessed the labor that went into the shaping of those screwy paragraphs, apparently tossed off with so idle an air. When he got stuck, Mike jumped up, took a turn between desk and door, and stretched to test his muscles. Hell of a job for a husky guy, he thought; writing these footling japes! By rights I ought to have an ax to swing!

The telephone rang and he picked it up. A sweet, uncultivated voice came over the wire: "Is this Mr. Speedon?"

"In person," said Mike. "Who is it?"

"Adele."

Mike ran over a swarm of girls' faces in his mind, trying to fix the name to one of them. "Adele who?" he asked.

She snickered. "Just Adele. You know, at Mrs. Ware's. Have you forgotten?"

"Now I get you!" cried Mike. "Adele with the dimpled shoulders. So nice to bite!"

She snickered again. "Oh, you!... I'm serious now, Mr. Speedon. Is it worth a ten spot to you if I give you an important piece of information?"

"Depends upon its importance, darling."

"It's important all right." After a moment's hesitation she went on. "All right, I'll trust you. You wouldn't let a girl down ... Mrs. Ware has disappeared."

"Good God!" said Mike. "Disappeared? Where to?"

"If they knew where she was, she wouldn't be disappeared, would she? Nobody outside knows it yet. Mr. MacKelcan has just telephoned the police."

Mike had been a reporter before graduating to the features, and all his old instincts leaped into play. "Be there in fifteen minutes," he said. "You'll get your ten if you don't tell anybody else."

He ran to the city room and spoke low to Warner Bassett.

"Boy! what a chance!" said Warner. "Will you take care of it? Nobody else could get inside the place."

"I'll take care of it," said Mike, and ran on.

He took the subway, the quickest method of getting through town, and bettered his quarter of an hour by a minute or two. Cummings opened the door of the Ware apartment and Mike, seeing by the butler's forbidding expression that he was not going to be admitted, adjusted his tactics accordingly.

"Morning, Cummings. Can I speak to Miss Radnor for a moment?"

"Certainly, Mr. Speedon." Cummings knocked on the door of the office, and opening it, announced: "Mr. Speedon." When Mike went in he closed the door.

Day Radnor rose from her desk blushing pinkly. In order to divert attention from it, she said quickly: "Mike Speedon! You shouldn't surprise a girl like this!"

"Why?" asked Mike. Day had a way of taking him back.

"It's not fair! So handsome and shining! You drop from the clouds like the Archangel Michael and my heart goes pit-a-

pat!"

"Ahh," said Mike, "I wish you were a little less frank in your admiration. Then I might think there was something in it."

"I mean every word of it."

"You do not. You think I'm a heel."

The blush had faded and Day was herself again. She pushed the cigarette box toward Mike and seated herself at the desk.

"Not a heel, darling, a phenomenon. Sipping honey from every flower. If I was a man that's the part I'd play too. That is, if, like you, I had what it takes."

Mike changed the subject. "I must say you appear to be taking the situation coolly."

"What situation?"

"I hear that Old Miss has disappeared. Didn't you know it?"

"No. Nobody in this house tells me anything.... Anyhow, I don't believe it. You've been hoaxed."

"I don't think so—judging from Cummings' face."

"Then it's just some new publicity stunt."

"We'll see. Mind if I set the door open?"

"No. Are you afraid of me?"

"Absolutely."

Mike opened the door wide, and returning to his seat studied Day with mixed pleasure and exasperation. She had a distinguished profile; she used no make-up except lipstick and her light brown hair was drawn back in a loose twist. After all the chi-chi she had a tonic quality.

"What do you mean, nobody here tells you anything?" he asked.

"They all hate me," said Day calmly, "not that I care. From the Madam down."

"I can understand the servants," said Mike. "They're just spiteful. Why should the Madam hate you?"

"She suspects me of being critical, though I never say anything. Perhaps it's because I keep my mouth shut."

Mike chuckled. "If she hates you, why doesn't she fire you?"

"Because, God help me, she knows I'm honest. Anybody else in this job could do her out of thousands without her knowing it."

"You're too good for this crazy house. Why don't you fire yourself?"

"Because I need the money, dear one."

"You could always get a job, A girl like you."

"Sure. But not at the same pay."

The doorbell rang, and Cummings appeared in the foyer with suspicious suddenness. He cast a vicious glance into the office, but Mike was looking at him with a smile, and he did not venture to close the door. He admitted two men, keen, wary, stalwart, well-dressed; headquarters detectives, unmistakably.

"This way, gentlemen," Mike sang out. "Use this room for your office."

They came in, Cummings' face was black, but he was out-manuevered; he couldn't say anything.

"Lieutenant of Detectives Radigan," said the first man, introducing himself. "This is Sergeant Hodges."

"Glad to meet you," said Mike. "I'm Michael Speedon, a friend of Mrs. Ware's. This is Miss Radnor, her secretary."

"Mr. Speedon is on the *Recorder-Press*," put in Cummings spitefully from the background.

"Sure, we all know who he is," said Radigan.

Cummings tried again. "Mr. MacKelcan, Mrs. Ware's attorney, is waiting to see you, gentlemen."

"Bring him in here," said Mike, and the butler was checkmated again.

MacKelcan, having heard the voices, was already approaching through the foyer with his lapels flying. He was none too pleased with the situation as he found it, but Mike was in control. Everybody drew up chairs—Cummings being invited to sit with the others—and the investigation opened. Mike and Day, without giving anything away in their faces, learned for the first what it was all about.

Cummings said: "Mrs. Ware invited some of her friends on a hay ride last night as a kind of novelty ..."

Radigan interrupted him. "We read that in the papers. Start at where she came home last night."

"They got here about twelve-twenty," said Cummings; "Mrs. Ware and eight guests." He named them. "They were all in country costume, you understand, boots and jeans and farm hats for the men; gingham dresses and sunbonnets for the ladies. But it was so cold they had to wear fur coats over them. Mrs. Ware seemed upset ..."

"What about?" put in Radigan.

"I couldn't say, Lieutenant. I had no conversation with her. She went upstairs and I served drinks to the others. I and Alfred, the second man. Other guests came in. There were thirty-one in all; just a small party." Cummings proceeded to name them. He had a remarkable memory.

"You were here," Radigan said to MacKelcan.

"Yes, Lieutenant. My client was kind enough to ask me to her social parties. Last night I had a bit of business to talk over with her, but I got no opportunity."

Radigan fixed on another name. "Norbert Besson? Isn't that the young fellow Mrs. Ware is engaged to?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Wasn't he on the hay ride?"

"It seems not. He came in later. He was in ordinary evening dress."

"Did he come alone?"

"No. He came with Mrs. Payne Laval."

Radigan whistled noiselessly. "Payne Laval! These are big names to throw around."

Mike, unobtrusively taking notes in the background, put in: "I might say for your information, Lieutenant, it's a matter of common gossip that Mrs. Payne Laval and Norbert Besson are, well, that way. Have been for a year."

"I wouldn't advise you to print it in your paper," said Radigan dryly.

"Not going to," retorted Mike.

"Did Mrs. Ware know about the affair between these two?"

"I doubt it," said Mike. "Who would tell her?"

Cummings continued: "In about twenty minutes Mrs. Ware came downstairs again. She had changed to evening dress and put on her jewels ..."

"Describe her jewels."

"You'll have to ask her maid, Lieutenant. All I noticed was, she was all aglitter.... When she came in Mrs. Prior went up to her...."

"Who is Mrs. Prior?"

"Mrs. Bethesda Prior. She... she ..." Cummings was at a loss how to explain her.

Mike came to his assistance. "Bethesda Prior is the Mistress of Ceremonies around here, Lieutenant. She puts on the shows."

Cummings continued: "Madam, I mean Mrs. Ware, was short with Mrs. Prior. She was angry...."

"What did she say?"

"I wasn't near enough to them to hear. Mrs. Prior tried to smooth her down, but she got more angry, and people began to look. I went toward them, and I heard Mrs. Prior say: 'But we can't talk about that here, darling.' And Mrs. Ware said, very angry, 'I'm not your darling! Come upstairs and we'll end this once and for all!'"

"And then?"

"The two ladies went upstairs. I accompanied them to the door of the elevator—I mean our private elevator, and my mistress said to me: 'I shan't come down again. Stop serving liquor at one-thirty, and let them go home.'"

"Was that the last time you saw your mistress?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"And Mrs. Prior?"

"In a little while, say fifteen or twenty minutes, she came down alone and went home without speaking to anybody. She was very upset."

"Did *anybody* see your mistress after that?"

"No, Lieutenant. Not as I know of."

"Not her maid?"

"She had sent her maid to bed before."

There was a silence. Each of the six persons present was pursuing his own grim thoughts. MacKelcan broke the spell by

driving his fist into his palm and exclaiming: "By God! this looks bad for Mrs. Prior!" The faces of the two detectives were like masks.

"Mrs. Prior telephoned about an hour ago to ask for Madam," Cummings volunteered. "I told her she wasn't up."

"That may have been a stall," said Radigan. "What else can you tell us?"

Cummings spread out his hands. "Not much, Lieutenant. At half-past one or thereabouts, I locked up the liquor and went to bed, leaving Alfred to see the last of the guests out, and switch off the lights." Cummings then described his search that morning for Mrs. Ware.

"Whereabouts did the interview with Mrs. Prior take place?" asked Radigan.

"In the private sitting room upstairs, Lieutenant. What the Madam calls her boudoir."

"You're sure about that?"

"I am sure. Standing at the foot of the stairs, I heard the door of that room close when Mrs. Prior came out."

Kinsey's examination followed. Pretty Adele accompanied her to the door of the office, but as the girl was not invited to enter she had to go away again. The prim lady's maid had recovered from her hysterics. She was enjoying a certain feeling of importance now. The gist of her information was that Madam had returned from the hay ride all unstrung. She put her head down on her dressing table and cried like a baby. It seemed she had started out from the Monte Carlo on the hay ride feeling fine; had greeted the people in the streets and waved to them, but they only answered with bronx cheers and rude remarks. Somebody had called out: "Time you were home in bed, Granny," and the whole crowd laughed. So they drove home as quickly as possible through side streets. Madam blamed Mrs. Prior for getting her into it, and said she was done with her. And a good thing, too, because in her (Kinsey's) opinion that woman was no better than a crook. She had spent thousands and thousands of Madam's money, and got a rake-off on everything.

Kinsey went on to say that she had tried to soothe her mistress. She persuaded her to dress and go downstairs again to show everybody she didn't care. She put her in her blush-pink satin from Molyneux, freshened her make-up, and brought out jewels for her to choose from. Kinsey listed the jewels worn by Mrs. Ware; her diamond tiara with the emeralds; four diamond bracelets on her right arm, two on her left; her big diamond drop earrings, each having an emerald in the center; a ring on the third finger of each hand and an emerald and diamond brooch.

"Have you any idea of the value of these articles?" asked Radigan.

"Yes, sir. Madam often mentioned how much she had paid for them in my hearing. The emeralds were among her most valuable pieces. There's one in the middle of the tiara worth fifty thousand dollars alone." Kinsey borrowed pencil and paper from Day Radnor and made a list. When she handed it to the detective, he whistled.

"Over half a million!"

"Yes, sir," said Kinsey.

"All insured?"

"No, sir, only some of the pieces. Madam was careless. She kept putting it off."

"Why didn't her attorney see to it?"

"Madam wouldn't let him know how much she spent for jewels."

"When she was dressed," Cummings said, "she told you to go to bed."

"Yes, sir. Ordinarily I lie down for a nap in the dressing room and give Madam her treatments whenever she comes in,

but last night she said she wouldn't bother with her treatments because she was going to Madame Rubinstein's today."

"And you didn't see her this morning?"

"Oh, no, sir. I never go in in the morning until she rings."

"Tell me," said Radigan. "This young man she was engaged to, Norbert Besson, was he in receipt of large sums of money from her also?"

Kinsey made a picture of outraged British propriety. "I'm sure I couldn't say, sir. You'll have to ask her legal adviser."

MacKelcan flung up his arms without waiting for Radigan to speak. "Not a word! Not a word! I must plead professional privilege, Lieutenant."

Radigan shrugged and turned to Cummings. "One more question. Did this man, Norbert Besson, have any talk with Mrs. Ware last night?"

"How could he, Lieutenant? Madam went upstairs as soon as she came in, and when she came down again it was only for a minute."

Radigan telephoned to Headquarters for two more detectives, a fingerprint expert and a photographer.

"Now let's look through the rooms," he said.

Day Radnor preferred to remain at her desk. The others accompanied the two detectives upstairs. They began with Mrs. Ware's bedroom, modernistic, a symphony in gray and chartreuse with a scarlet chair for a high note. The floor was covered with a thick-piled carpet, and Radigan made the others stand out in the corridor looking in. "A rug like this will keep the impression of footsteps for many hours," he explained.

The bedroom gave them nothing important, and they proceeded to the dressing room adjoining. This was an unadorned chamber, surrounded on three sides by deep wardrobes, and having a continuous window in the fourth side. The whole room focussed on the dressing table, which stood with its back to the long window, spread with all its appurtenances like an altar. There was a wall safe in this room. The combination, written on a piece of paper, was in the drawer of the dressing table. The balance of Mrs. Ware's jewels were found to be intact, so far as could be established at that moment. There was also a box of keys in the safe; nothing else.

During the examination of these rooms the additional men arrived from Headquarters. Detectives were placed at the front door and the service door of the apartment with instructions to allow nobody in the household to leave. Fingerprint expert and photographer went to work in Mrs. Ware's rooms.

As the search proceeded from room to room, the tension increased. Nobody spoke. The last was the boudoir, a pleasant corner room with south and west exposures. Here the old lady spent all her time when she was alone, and she had refused to have any surrealist paintings or modernistic sculpture in it. The decorator had furnished it with beautiful pieces of no special period; the floor was strewn with priceless Oriental rugs. Mrs. Ware had never been seen to leave this room, and the observers looked into it with eyes full of dread. Kinsey was pressing a handkerchief to her lips.

Radigan immediately placed his hand on a high, carved, oaken cabinet standing against the north wall. It was an ancient Jacobean piece, waxed to a high finish, standing on turned legs about four feet above the floor. It had double doors with long hinges and an escutcheon of wrought iron. A panel of antique velvet was thrown over the top. The cabinet was about five feet long and eighteen inches high. All stared at it, struck with horror by its significant shape.

"What's kept in here?" asked Radigan.

Kinsey answered tremulously: "Nothing, sir. It's just a showpiece."

Radigan tried the door with his thumbnail. It was locked. "Where's the key?"

Kinsey's jaw dropped. "Why... why... why..." she stammered, "the key was in it. I've seen it there hundreds of times!"

Radigan beckoned to his partner. Each took an end of the cabinet and lifted it from the floor. It was too heavy to be empty.

When attention was first directed to the cabinet, Cummings had gone downstairs. He presently came running back with a strong steel claw such as is used for opening packing cases. His face was livid and sweating. He handed the tool to Radigan, saying huskily: "Force it! Force it!"

The detective inserted the point between the two doors of the cabinet and one flew open. Inside they saw a huddle of pale-pink satin; one elegantly shod foot; Radigan, hardened as he was to such sights, started back. The lady's maid screamed insanely. Cummings turned on her in a passion.

"Quiet, you fool!"

Radigan said harshly, "This can't be kept a secret now."

Kinsey sank down fainting. Mike picked her up, and turning through the corridor, kicked open a door at random and dropped her on a bed. He shouted for Adele—the household might as well be roused now, and in ten seconds he was back in the boudoir.

The two detectives were lifting out the pitifully twisted figure in its silken garments. They laid her on a sofa and straightened the stiffened limbs as well as they could. Her dress was partly unhooked and slipping off one scrawny shoulder. The sunken face was terrible to see. Cummings had turned his back on the sight, but the grotesque MacKelcan was staring as if turned into stone. There was no visible wound on her; no stain of blood. Her jewels were gone. Radigan examined her with a puzzled scowl.

"Can't make it out," he muttered. "Looks as if she might have died naturally—she was old; then robbed afterwards and stuck away to hide the robbery." He produced a magnifying glass from his pocket. "There's a slight abrasion on the ear lobe where the earring was pulled off. It didn't bleed."

Mike borrowed the glass and confirmed it.

Radigan addressed his comrade: "Report it to Headquarters, Hodges. Ask for a medical examiner." He turned to the others. "Where does this Mrs. Bethesda Prior live?" Three voices furnished the address. "All right. After you've phoned Headquarters, go there, Hodges. Try to get her to come back with you. Tell her anything you like, but handle her with gloves. We've got no case yet. If she refuses to come, phone for further instructions, and don't let her out of your sight."

Hodges went out. As Mike was making to follow him, Radigan said somewhat sourly:

"I suppose you're going to phone your paper."

"Anything against it?" asked Mike good-naturedly.

Radigan shook his head. "If I could conduct this investigation without publicity I might get somewhere," he grumbled. "But that's impossible. Go ahead. Only don't point the finger of suspicion at anybody yet."

"I shan't," said Mike. "The story is good enough without it."

Chapter 4

Lieutenant Radigan was questioning Mrs. Bethesda Prior in the music room of the Ware apartment. Upstairs the various experts connected with the police department were doing their jobs. The body had been removed to the morgue for an autopsy.

Radigan had a police stenographer taking notes, and Mike was sitting in as an observer. Through Mike, the *Recorder-Press* was still enjoying exclusive privileges. Radigan had been troubled when the main reportorial pack picked up the trail. "I can't let them swarm over the apartment," he said. "It wouldn't be decent."

"Certainly not," said Mike blandly.

"But if I keep them out, I've got to put you out, too."

"You can't do that," said Mike. "In the absence of family, I'm one of Mrs. Ware's most intimate friends. Why, unless the old lady was lying to me, you'll find that I'm a beneficiary under her will."

Radigan gave him a look of suspicion that caused Mike to laugh and clap him on the back. "It's all right, old fellow, I didn't push her over the brink."

Radigan was a good sleuth and a good fellow, but his mental processes were not exactly lightning-like. "If I was to favor one paper, the others would hound me off the force," he grumbled.

"You can't help yourself this time. I'm in what they call a strategic position. But you needn't worry. I'll take care of the boys; and I'll play fair with them, too."

"MacKelcan, the attorney, ought to be the one to say who ..."

"I'll take care of him, too," said Mike. "Seriously, Lieutenant, I can help you in this case. I know all the people who are mixed up in it; I know their characters; I know their histories; I know their motives."

"If it's only a robbery, I'll be taken off it directly," said Radigan. "I'm a homicide man."

"It was murder!"

Radigan glanced at him sharply. "What makes you say that?"

"It smells of murder!... Look, Radigan, an old woman as rich as that, without any natural protectors, and so foolish and confused in mind, she was asking for it!"

"Maybe so, but there's no evidence."

"Well, let's wait for the report of the medical examiner."

Now they had Mrs. Prior before them. Unknown to her, the police had obtained a warrant, and were searching her apartment during her absence. Mrs. Prior was a flabby-looking woman in her forties, not too well preserved. She was very expensively dressed, but without taste; the tall-crowned hat she wore was ridiculous without being chic. She was one of the unlucky women that the smart shops can't do much for. Her mouth drooped at the corners; her voice was flat; only her eyes were sharp and hard. She had enjoyed a kind of success because Mrs. Ware was so fantastically rich; behind her back the smart gang laughed at this would-be social director.

She had not been told that Mrs. Ware was dead until she reached the apartment. Naturally she was upset, but she evinced no real grief; on the contrary, there was almost a note of satisfaction in her flat, inexpressive voice. Radigan watched her keenly; experience had taught him that a devilishly clever woman may take cover behind a stupid, foolish front. Mrs.

Prior bore his scrutiny calmly. Mike, she hated, and made no scruple about showing it. The examination had been going on for half an hour, and Radigan had not yet tricked her into making any damaging admissions. She was now telling them how she had first met Mrs. Ware during the previous year.

"I read in the paper that her husband died, and I made up my mind to go and see her...."

"Without any introduction?"

"Oh, there was a connection. My sister-in-law's mother attended the same church as Mrs. Ware in Tarrytown where the Wares lived in summer."

"Was your sister-in-law's mother acquainted with Mrs. Ware?"

"No, but the same pastor called on them both."

"I see."

"So after the funeral I went to see Mrs. Ware. I knew she would be surrounded with expensive flowers so I just took a single white rose and sent it in with my card. It touched her, and she sent for me to come up and we just talked as one woman to another. I told Mrs. Ware all about the death of my dear husband...."

Mike rubbed his upper lip to hide a grin.

"And she told me about hers. 'Now that he is gone, everything is ended for me,' she said; and I said that it was wrong for her to talk that way. She was one of the richest women in the world, I told her, and a full and useful life lay before her. 'Just think of all the good you can do,' I said. She cheered up a little at that, and we talked over different schemes of philanthropy...."

"Which were never carried out," put in Radigan.

"They would have been! They would have been—if she had not been taken!" Mrs. Prior touched a handkerchief to her perfectly dry eyes. "She was always talking about it! But she had been such a quiet home-keeper, she knew nothing about life, and I said before putting her money into anything, she must come out of her shell; she must go about; she must meet important people. At whatever cost to herself. Of course, this didn't all happen during that first talk. But we soon became the warmest friends!"

"You have been receiving large sums of money from Mrs. Ware," suggested Radigan.

"No such thing!" said Mrs. Prior sharply. "I never took a cent from Flora. Our relations were on the basis of pure friendship!"

"Now, Mrs. Prior!" Radigan consulted some notes that Hodges had given him. "Charles W. Ware died in October and that's when you became acquainted with his wife. At that time you occupied a small flat in Jackson Heights costing fifty dollars a month. You kept no servant. In December you moved to 1075 Park Avenue where you are paying two hundred and fifty a month, and employ two maids and a chauffeur. You own a Cadillac car. Where did the money for all this come from?"

"I have private means," said Mrs. Prior haughtily.

"You have helped Mrs. Ware to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars. I assume that you received a commission on her purchases. Be careful how you answer. I can easily check it."

Mrs. Prior was indignant. "I don't know why you should take this tone toward me, Lieutenant Radigan. You will regret it later.... What if there were commissions in some cases? Flora knew all about it. She said to me: 'Take it, Bethesda, you've earned every cent of it, because you don't let them overcharge me.'"

Radigan took a new tack. "Let's come down to last night, Mrs. Prior. You and Mrs. Ware quarreled."

"Unhappily, yes." The handkerchief came into play again. "Oh, it's awful! awful! to find her dead without having had a chance to make it up again!"

"You suggested this hay ride to her?"

The handkerchief came down quickly. "No such thing! I advised against it!"

"Several persons have stated to me that it was your idea."

"Oh, if you wish to believe the tattle of servants! All the servants here hate me because I keep a sharp eye on them. Flora was too easygoing."

"Does everybody in this household hate everybody else?"

Mrs. Prior disdained to answer.

"Well, anyhow, you quarreled."

"It wasn't serious. We should have made it up today."

"If it wasn't serious, why were you so upset? You ran out of the house without speaking to anybody."

"Of course I was upset. I was tenderly attached to Flora. I'm a sensitive woman."

Mike and Radigan exchanged a glance of dry amusement.

Said Radigan: "Mrs. Ware was overheard to say in positive terms that everything was at an end between you."

"It was Cummings told you that. He's a liar! You'd better investigate *him*!"

"All in good time, Mrs. Prior."

"Cummings is too big for his shoes! I distrusted him from the first. I warned Flora against him, but he managed to talk her 'round."

"Where did she get him?"

"Through an employment agency, Mrs. Sully's. Apparently he had good references."

"How long has he been with Mrs. Ware?"

"Six months. Cummings is a sinister character! Always watching and listening! Always trying to poison Flora's mind against me! A kind of Svengali. Made my flesh creep. Trying to gain the mastery over poor Flora, and make her do everything *he* said!"

"Why didn't she discharge him?"

"Well, the truth is, though I hate to say it, but he *had* got the upper hand of her. She was always telling me what a good servant he was, and how grateful she was to get one who didn't drink to excess, and how he kept the other servants in order and all that, but as a matter of fact, she was deathly afraid of him. Why, sometimes he completely forgot his place! I have come upon him sitting down in her presence as if he were her equal!"

"If Mrs. Ware stood for it, what of it?"

"She was afraid of him, I tell you."

Radigan fixed her with a hard-boiled eye. "Mrs. Prior, my belief is that you are only raising a dust to conceal the real issue." His forefinger shot out. "I put it to you that Mrs. Ware was dead before you left here last night!"

She faced him out. "That's nonsense! She was well enough to stamp her foot and screech at me!"

"I thought you said it wasn't a serious quarrel."

Mrs. Prior changed her tone. "Poor Flora! She was so dreadfully upset about the way the people in the streets mocked her, she didn't know what she was saying!"

"I'm not suggesting that you brought about, or even hastened her death," said Radigan in a milder voice, "but that she had some kind of a stroke in your presence."

Mrs. Prior was right back at him. "You *are* suggesting that I killed her! First you say I was getting money out of her and then that I killed her. Well, if I was making a fortune out of her, I wouldn't kill her, would I? You don't make sense!"

Mike rubbed his lip. She had Radigan there. The entrance of a policeman saved the Lieutenant's face. The officer laid a penciled note before Radigan, and went out again. Mike tried to read the note upside down, but it was too badly written.

Radigan said: "That will be all now, Mrs. Prior.... And thank you for your assistance," he added sarcastically.

"Am I free to go home?" she demanded.

"I ask you to remain here until after a report is received from the medical examiner. If you insist on leaving, I shall have to provide you with an escort."

"And what am I going to do while I'm waiting on your pleasure?"

"There is plenty to read in the apartment. If you would like the society of another woman, Miss Radnor is in the office."

"Thank you for nothing!" she said, marching out.

When the door closed, Mike relieved himself with a chuckle. "She shifted her ground too swiftly for you, Rad."

"Oh, yeah? If it had been you, you would have matched her, I suppose?"

"I wouldn't say that. Only one thing occurred to me while you were questioning her, but I didn't think it was my place to prompt you."

"What was that?"

"Why didn't you ask her about the old woman's will?"

"What about it?"

"Well, if Bethesda's down for a big sum in the will, and they quarreled finally, it would give her a strong motive for liquidating the old woman before she had time to change her will."

"I have that all in mind," said Radigan. "I'm not done with Bethesda Prior yet by a damn sight."

"What's written on that paper?" asked Mike.

Radigan turned it around and Mike read: "None of the missing jewels found in Mrs. Prior's apartment." Radigan said: "Of course that doesn't alter the situation. She wouldn't be fool enough to leave them around her own place. If she did get them, we don't know where she may have gone last night. That woman is a hundred per cent liar!"

"Not a hundred per cent, Rad," said Mike. "Only dopes lie a hundred per cent. The artistic liar dresses up his lies with

the truth. He keeps inside a twenty per cent margin."

Chapter 5

When the police experts finished with Mrs. Ware's boudoir, Lieutenant Radigan took it for his office, since it provided more privacy than any of the downstairs rooms. Mike Speedon was with him. A bit of cork lay on the desk between them and Radigan was examining it through a magnifying glass. The cork had been found lying under the davenport sofa in that room by the police searchers.

"I can't see that it means anything in particular," said Radigan. "There are corks lying around every house."

"Not a house like this," said Mike.

"I suppose the old lady ordered up some drink and the cork rolled under the sofa, and she couldn't find it."

"That cork wouldn't fit any of the usual kinds of drinks. It's too short."

"A medicine bottle, then."

"It's too big around. Besides, the cork to a medicine bottle is always picked up.... Let me have the glass a moment."

Radigan passed it over.

"This looks like the cork out of a whisky or a wine bottle," said Mike. "It has been cut in half by a very sharp instrument. Notice how clean the cut is. Unluckily, this is the bottom half. The top half usually has the name of the bottler branded in it. Originally this cork was used for a legitimate purpose. You can see the spiral hole made by the corkscrew. But there is also a transverse cut, a clean cut, across the top, made perhaps with the same instrument."

"Quite a Sherlock, ain't yuh?" said Radigan ironically.

"Well, corks are one of my specialties. What do you make of it?"

Radigan shook his head.

"Well, put it away with the other exhibits until the right clue turns up."

Before their conference broke up, they had an opportunity to obtain some further light on the cork. There was a knock at the door, and upon being invited to do so, Kinsey entered. The elderly lady's maid had recovered from her hysterics, but when her eyes fell on the tall oaken cabinet, she paled again and swayed on her feet.

"A glass of water?" said Mike, jumping up.

She shook her head. "I'm all right." She refused to look at the cabinet again.

"What can I do for you, Miss?" asked Radigan.

"There's something you ought to know," she said. "I don't know what it means, but you ought to know it."

"Well, spill it," said Radigan.

Kinsey went to the front of the room. On the right-hand side there was a kind of corner cupboard or whatnot, with a whole rank of open shelves decreasing in size as they went up. All the shelves were crowded with bibelots such as old ladies love to collect; miniature portraits, snuff boxes, ivories, porcelains and so on. Kinsey pointed to an object on a middle shelf that she appeared to be afraid to touch.

It was a paper cutter in the form of a dagger with a *repoussé* handle in silver gilt. The design was of intertwined acanthus leaves; it was obviously a rare piece of craftsmanship of the Renaissance era.

"What about it?" asked Radigan.

"It wasn't there yesterday," said Kinsey hoarsely. "Madam wouldn't let anybody but me dust her things. I know everything that belongs here."

"We took no special notice of it when we searched the room," said Radigan. "Among the other gimcracks. When did you see it first?"

"When I was in here a while ago. But I was too upset to speak."

"You haven't touched it?"

"Not me!" cried Kinsey. "I'm not leaving my marks on it."

"*Repoussé* work don't show fingerprints," said Radigan.

Just the same, Mike took the precaution of using his handkerchief to pick the dagger up. "Good God, Rad," he said; "this is no paper cutter. It's as sharp as a razor!" He snatched up the magnifying glass. "It has *recently* been sharpened. Look!" Mike pulled a hair out of his thick thatch, and holding it up, sliced it neatly.

"But the old lady didn't die by that," said the puzzled Radigan. "There was no mark on her!"

"All right," said Mike, "it wasn't brought to this room for any good purpose, either."

Radigan, seeing he had something more to say that he didn't want the woman to hear, bowed Kinsey out politely. "Thank you very much, Miss. I sure am obliged to you. I'll take good care of this here dagger until I find out whose it is."

"Where's the cork?" asked Mike when she had gone.

Radigan produced it from the envelope where he had stowed it, and Mike, with delicate fingers, showed him how exactly the point of the dagger fitted the slit in the top of the cork.

"So what?" said Radigan.

"The person who carried this had no sheath for it. So he stuck the point in the cork to keep it from cutting his clothes. Many's the time I've seen my mother do that with the points of her scissors to keep them from injuring her workbag."

"And then?"

"My guess is, that the cork worked itself off the point and the dagger slit its pocket and was lost."

"How did it get laid on the shelf so neat?"

"That's for us to find out."

Cummings entered to announce Mr. Sanford MacKelcan, and the dagger was put out of sight. Cummings glanced at it strangely out of the corners of his eyes. Having made his announcement, he was forced to retire. His face had turned yellow with chagrin, as if his bile had overflowed. To be kept out of all these examinations and conferences, not to know what was going on, was almost more than he could bear. He had been ordered to attend the front door. The news of Mrs. Ware's death was now on the streets and all kinds of people were trying to get into the apartment.

MacKelcan bustled into the room, talking as he came. He was always talking. With his small head, protuberant belly and elongated legs, he had the look of a stork—an aging stork when he perched his glasses on the end of his beak. He had brought Mrs. Ware's will. Seating himself fussily and spreading the document, he said.

"I must warn you gentlemen that I can't guarantee this to be my client's last will."

Radigan glanced at the date. "It's less than a month old."

"That makes no difference. She was never satisfied."

"But if there was another will, you would know about it, wouldn't you?"

"Perhaps not. I have reason to believe she may have gone to another lawyer."

"What reason?"

MacKelcan cleared his throat deprecatingly. "It's a delicate matter! I mustn't betray the confidence of the dead!... You see, gentlemen, my client wished to take a certain course of which I strongly disapproved. We argued about it—she was a very imperious woman, but on this point, I *could* not give in, my conscience wouldn't let me! And so she threatened to employ another lawyer."

"When was this?"

"Three days ago."

"Well, let's read this anyhow."

It was a lengthy document since Mrs. Ware was in the habit of making all kinds of odd and capricious bequests and of canceling them as soon as made. This will already had seven codicils. There were three paragraphs of special interest to the detective.

I give and bequeath to my dear friend, Bethesda Prior, the sum of two hundred thousand dollars, over and above all taxes.

To my friend, Michael Speedon, one hundred thousand dollars over and above taxes, because he is a gentleman.

All the rest and residue of my estate to my nephew, James Fawcett, the son of my deceased sister, Emmeline Jones Fawcett, of Newcastle, England. It is my wish and desire that the said James Fawcett, after setting aside a sum sufficient for his own needs, should employ the bulk of my husband's fortune to establish a foundation for the support and education of orphan children of both sexes without respect to race or creed. It is my own intention to carry this out, and I lay this charge upon my nephew only in case I may be taken before my plans are matured. My nephew is to be advised in this matter by my friend and executor, Sanford MacKelcan, and such other persons as may be qualified to advise him.

All the servants employed by Mrs. Ware were put down for various sums except, oddly enough, Cummings. Day Radnor was not mentioned. Mrs. Ware appointed her nephew and MacKelcan to be her executors, and stipulated that the latter should receive twenty-five thousand dollars a year for his services to the estate.

When the reading was finished Radigan said dryly: "Congratulations, Mike."

"Thanks, Rad."

"You don't appear to be surprised at the news," the lawyer remarked.

"Mrs. Ware discussed this will with me at the time it was drawn," said Mike.

"Did you make any suggestions?"

"Only one—but she didn't carry it out. I thought she ought to have named an institution, a bank or a trust company as one of her executors."

"You lacked confidence in me, eh?" put in MacKelcan sourly.

"Not at all. But in the case of so large an estate it's customary."

"What did she mean by this 'gentleman' stuff?" asked Radigan.

"I have no idea," said Mike. "Maybe Mr. MacKelcan can tell us."

The lawyer shook his head. "She insisted on having it written in that manner, but she didn't say why."

"I didn't know there was a nephew," said Radigan.

"Mrs. Ware had never seen him," said MacKelcan. "Over half a century ago her sister married beneath her and went to England to live, and her family lost touch with her. When Mr. Ware died last year, this man Fawcett wrote to the widow and sent proofs of his identity. He wanted to come over and see his aunt. He was a very plain fellow, a coal miner, in fact, and at the time he wrote, he was on the dole. Mrs. Ware naturally didn't want to be associated with persons of that sort, and, in obedience to her instructions, I wrote sending Fawcett two hundred dollars, and telling him he could depend upon receiving the same amount monthly as long as he remained in England. It has been sent regularly. Two hundred would be riches to people like that, and I expect they have been living high. They have moved to London."

"Sixty millions will destroy them!" said Mike.

"Oh, it will be my job to see that the orphans get the bulk of it."

"This Fawcett will have to come over now."

"Surely. I'll cable to a lawyer in London with whom I have connections, and ask him to get the fellow off on the next ship."

"Strange that Cummings should have been overlooked," said Mike.

"I spoke to Mrs. Ware about that. She told me that Cummings himself had come to her that very day, saying he had heard gossip in the servants' hall that she was going to make a new will, and that all the servants were to be remembered. She told me that Cummings, almost with tears in his eyes had asked her not to name him. He had only been working for her a few months, he said, and if she should die, it would make talk. 'Wait till I have time to prove myself in your service,' he said."

"Hm! Sounds a little too good to be true!" said Mike.

There was a knock on the door, and Alfred entered. The young second man was badly shaken by the day's events, but nobody paid any attention to him. He handed a card to Radigan.

"The gentleman said he wanted to see the detective in charge, sir. Mr. Cummings talked to him. Mr. Cummings said it was important."

"All right. Bring him up." Radigan showed the card to MacKelcan. "Do you happen to know him?"

MacKelcan glanced at the card calmly. "Keppelman? Slightly. He's said to be a good man."

Mr. Keppelman was shown in; a prosperous, dignified man; he looked as if he had a nice little place at Greenwich, a son at Yale and a daughter at Smith. He seemed embarrassed to find MacKelcan in the room, but quickly concealed it. Radigan invited him to be seated, and he took a folded document from his breast pocket.

"At Mrs. Ware's request, I came here yesterday to discuss drawing up her will. I had been recommended to her by the Washington Trust Company, where she banks. When she had made her wishes clear, I returned to my office and had it written accordingly. Yesterday afternoon she came to my office unexpectedly. She had thought of several changes and

additions she wanted made, and the document had to be typed a second time. Here it is according to her final instructions."

"But not signed," said MacKelcan.

"Not signed. It has no standing in law. However, since the police have considered it necessary to investigate Mrs. Ware's sudden death, I thought they ought to see it."

Radigan took the document. "By all means. And thank you very much for your co-operation, Mr. Keppelman."

"Read it," said MacKelcan.

Radigan did so. In certain particulars it was the same as the former will. Bethesda Prior and Mike Speedon were still to get their legacies.

"This was before the ill-fated hay ride," murmured Mike.

The servants were remembered as before, excepting Cummings, who was still omitted. The nephew, however, was now cut off with fifty thousand dollars, which Mrs. Ware had no doubt figured would continue to yield his two hundred a month. The estate was left to "my beloved husband-to-be, Norbert Besson." Besson was enjoined to establish a foundation for the orphans in the same words that Mrs. Ware had previously used. The executors named in this will were Norbert Besson, George Keppelman, Sanford MacKelcan and the Washington Trust Company; Keppelman and MacKelcan were each to receive twenty-five thousand a year for their services.

When it had been read, Mr. Keppelman said: "Well, gentlemen, I feel that I have done my duty. This paper is of no further value now." He reached for it.

"Don't destroy it," said Mike quickly. "You never know!"

Radigan folded it. "With your permission I'll keep it for a while," he said to Keppelman.

"By all means." The lawyer got up. "I'll bid you good day, gentlemen."

"Good day, Mr. Keppelman, and thank you again."

MacKelcan unwound his long legs and accompanied him to the door. The tall man was extremely affable. "So sorry we're not going to be in this together, Keppelman. It would be a pleasure to serve with you in so worthy a cause. When I form a board of trustees for the Ware Foundation, perhaps ..." He left the sentence in the air. "In the meantime, you must send in a bill to the estate for drawing the will."

"Thank you, I shall," said Keppelman dryly.

"Well, that's that!" said MacKelcan, rubbing his hands together when the other had gone. "It appears that my will is okay. I must immediately notify the heir by cable. See you later."

He went out. Radigan and Mike lighted cigarettes.

"What the hell do you make of this will business?" asked the former.

"Can't say offhand. It needs thought."

"I believe these two lawyers are in cahoots."

"Why?"

"MacKelcan must have known about that second will beforehand. He never turned a hair when it was produced."

"Why should he? He profits just the same under the one as the other."

"Sure. And he must have known it in advance. Would Mrs. Ware have told MacKelcan that she was going to hire Keppelman?"

"Not on your life! She would never face a disagreeable scene."

"Then the two lawyers *are* in cahoots."

"It's arguable," said Mike, "but I think you're wrong.... Did you notice how put out Keppelman was when he found MacKelcan here? And that last speech of MacKelcan's when he was leaving certainly got under his skin. That doesn't look as if they had an understanding."

"Then why should MacKelcan appear as an executor in Keppelman's will?"

"It would be like the old girl to keep MacKelcan for an executor just to let him down easy. She was a soft-hearted old thing; didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings."

"Can you dope out why she wanted a new lawyer?"

"Yes. MacKelcan had persuaded her not to name the bank as an executor, but she felt in her heart that I was right about it, so she sent for Keppelman. We've got to dig deeper, Rad."

Mike went downstairs, and on the pretence of inspecting the guard at the back door, passed through the service rooms, looking for Adele. He found the maid in the servants' hall demurely eating her lunch, but as the sharp-eyed Cummings had followed him back, he could only exchange a glance with her and pass on.

He returned upstairs. Soon after, he heard a feminine voice casually humming an air on the other side of the door, and went out. It was Adele, making believe to be busy on the landing with a dustcloth. She smiled seductively.

"Hello, Mike."

"Hi, beautiful!"

He gave her the ten-dollar bill he had promised her. "Look, girl," he said, "if you're smart you can earn more of the same during the next couple of days. See all you can, hear all you can, and keep your pretty mouth tight shut."

She nodded. Adele belonged to the cuddly type. She leaned against Mike's broad chest and, looking up in his eyes, murmured: "I would do anything for you, Mike."

Just at that moment the elevator door slid back, and Day Radnor stepped out. Adele jumped away, but Day's eyes had already taken in the little tableau and an amused smile crept over her face. Adele was still holding the ten-dollar bill between thumb and forefinger. Mike ground his teeth together. If it had been anybody else he wouldn't have minded, but Day's smile raked him with sharp points.

She went on into the boudoir. Mike sent the girl away and followed. Radigan was busy with some reports at the far end of the room. Day was still smiling.

"Damn it all!" muttered Mike. "Damn it all!..."

That caused Day's smile to break into an outright laugh.

"Don't laugh at me!"

"But you look so sheepish! It's funny to see a sheepish look on *your* confident face."

"It's not what you think. I pay the girl for doing a little espionage for me."

Day pulled an aggravating face. "I'm so disappointed! I thought I had surprised something really naughty."

"Don't you believe me?"

"What difference does it make? You and I have no illusions about each other. Why can't we be natural?"

Mike gritted his teeth again. "Sometimes I'd like to strangle you! Yes! To put my thumbs against your beautiful windpipe and press hard!"

"But why, for Heaven's sake?"

"You're too damn cool!"

Day laughed again. "Maybe it's just as well for both of us that I am... Be yourself! I came up to tell you that the assembled reporters are waiting in my office. They say you promised them another statement at two o'clock."

"All right, I'll be down," growled Mike.

Chapter 6

Mike and Radigan were again in the upstairs sitting room when the report of the medical examiner arrived. The gist of it was that Mrs. Ware had died from natural causes. Her organs showed the changes and deteriorations natural in one of her age, and it was indicated that her heart had suddenly failed, possibly as a result of emotional excitement or shock. There was no wound or bruise anywhere upon her, and no trace of poison in her organs. The contents of her stomach revealed that she had taken a somewhat heavy dose of phenol-barbitol shortly before her death, but not in a lethal quantity. There was also a suggestion of alcohol. The examiner had been informed that she was in the habit of taking this drug to induce sleep. The bottle had been found in her bathroom.

This report came by way of Police Headquarters, and with it instructions to Lieutenant Radigan to turn over the case to Detective-Sergeant Mahaffie, who would handle the robbery angle, in association with John Carpenter, the well-known detective employed by the insurance companies in such cases. Less than half the pieces of jewelry worn by Mrs. Ware were insured. The companies had listed the insured pieces and were offering a reward of fifty thousand dollars for their recovery.

Mahaffie and Carpenter were already in the apartment conducting a search of their own. It had been established that none of the servants had been out since Mrs. Ware was last seen alive.

"Well, robbery lets me out," said Radigan.

"Rad, we *can't* drop it now," said Mike. "There are too many loose ends."

"How can we go behind the medical testimony?"

"A medical examiner is not infallible."

"What do you mean, loose ends? It seems clear to me that Mrs. Ware had heart failure while she was fussing with Bethesda Prior. Bethesda took her jewels and beat it."

"Maybe so, but I doubt it. Bethesda's no fool. It would be too dangerous for her to try to get away with that. Such a woman wouldn't know how to dispose of stolen jewels."

"Maybe she expected to stow them away for the future like a squirrel."

Mike continued, shaking his head. "Mrs. Ware didn't swallow that dose of phenol-barbitol before she went downstairs, and when she came up she brought Bethesda with her. She didn't take that dose *until after Bethesda left her.*"

Radigan was shaken.

"And besides," added Mike, "I don't believe a woman could have lifted the body four feet from the floor and stowed it in the cabinet."

"Oh, you've got plenty of reasons," grumbled Radigan, "but I'm not through with Bethesda yet."

Mike drifted around the room while he talked. "Maybe somebody else was up here last night. Mrs. Ware had a fire as you can see by the ashes. We've got to find out when that fire was lighted. Cummings' peculiar actions have not been explained. We don't know if he went to bed when he said he did. And we haven't even looked at the Norbert Besson angle."

"Norbert would never have rubbed her out until he got his will signed."

"No. But suppose he miscalculated. Suppose he had reason to believe that it had been signed? I don't believe the old lady seriously intended marrying Norbert. She knew he was a heel. It just flattered her vanity to put her brand on the

number one glamour boy."

"She put him in her last will."

"She didn't take any of her wills seriously. Making wills was her hobby. I'm convinced that Besson saw her last night. Cummings was either lying or misinformed when he said he didn't. Besson had to be on his best behavior hereabouts. If he had come to the house and left again without speaking to his fiancée, she would have considered it a deadly affront, and he knew it ... Rad, I *know* somebody besides Bethesda was in this room last night."

"How do you know?"

"Here's the old lady's chair by the fire. She always sat in this chair. Here's a little table beside it and on the table is a ring left by a glass. Here on the other side of the fire is another chair, with a little table beside it and on the table is the mark of another ring. You can't tell me that the old lady sat sipping her barbitol beside the fire, and moved back and forth from one chair to the other. There were two persons here, and it wasn't barbitol they were drinking!"

Radigan eagerly examined the marks. "There was a glass found in the bathroom and it was still wet inside," he said. "I supposed that she took her medicine in it. Only one glass, Mike."

Mike considered. "Suppose you wanted to have a drink with the old lady—and, by the way, she loved her toddy—suppose there was only one glass, and you didn't want to arouse the house, what would you do?"

"I'd fetch a glass from the next nearest bathroom."

"Exactly!" Mike ran out of the room. In a minute he returned bearing a glass in his handkerchief. "Here it is, still wet in the bottom, though that bathroom is not used. I'm afraid it has no fingerprints, though. It has been well washed."

"You've got something there, Mike."

"Look, Rad, the public believes that this woman was murdered, and you can see by the stories already out that the press is prepared to play up to it. I'm a beneficiary under the will and some of the dirt is going to stick to me. My enemies would never pass up such a chance to get back at me. I've *got* to solve this case, and I need your help."

"You don't need to say any more. I'm with you."

"Get the Inspector to accept this report publicly for the time being," urged Mike, "and appear to drop the murder case. Then you'll have what you always wanted, a chance to investigate without any publicity."

"I'll still have you looking over my shoulder," Radigan said, grinning.

"All right. This is a personal matter with me, now. And I'm not going to let a peep out of me until the whole truth breaks."

"Okay. I'll go down to Headquarters for new instructions. Couldn't phone stuff like this."

"Let's go round to the morgue on the way and view the body for ourselves."

The New York City Morgue masquerades as the Pathology Department of Bellevue Hospital, but a morgue under any other name is no less gruesome. The dingy building, in the commonplace style of most civic architecture, is neither old nor new enough to be impressive. Mike had become familiar with it in the days when he was a leg man, but he didn't like it any the better for that. He had the same old sickish feeling as they mounted the stairs to the autopsy room.

In this wide, strongly lighted room another autopsy was now being performed. A pink-fleshed man was lying on a wheeled operating table with his feet turned up as if he were taking a sun-lamp treatment—but certain essential parts of his body which a man never sees were exposed beside him, and Mike hastily looked away. The operator conducting the examination was reading off his findings in a droning voice, while a student beside him took it down on a report sheet pinned to the board resting against his arm.

The doctor who had examined Mrs. Ware was not on duty at the moment, and the pathologist in charge received them. Everybody had a keen interest in the Ware case. "Yes, she's still here," he said. "We're done with her, and they can take her away when they like."

He gave an order and a sheeted form was wheeled up on another table; a pitifully meager form, strangely flattened against its hard bed. In this place the fabulously rich old woman was treated like any other clay. The awful contrast between Mrs. Ware dressed, beautified and jeweled for the cafés and *this*, didn't occur to anybody. The pathologist pulled the sheet down to her shoulders and Mike was obliged to look.

"A very good specimen for her age," the doctor said with professional enthusiasm. "The trouble with her was, she couldn't be her age. The pace was too swift for her."

Mike, looking at the pitiful remains, thought of Mrs. Ware as he had last seen her, all decked out and posing for the press photographers with a too-sweet smile.

"Why did you want to see her?" asked the pathologist.

"There are certain pieces of evidence that point to murder," said Radigan.

The doctor shrugged. "Sorry to disappoint you. We can only report on what we find."

Mike was asking himself the question, why *had* they come there?

Radigan said: "I see the doctor hasn't washed the make-up off her arms and neck."

"He wouldn't do that. It might destroy evidence. That film over her skin would reveal fingerprints if anybody had tried to choke her or twist her wrist."

"And nobody did?"

"Nobody touched her."

"Now that you've got all the evidence," said Radigan, "would it be all right to wash the make-up off?"

"Sure! Makes no difference now."

The pathologist called to an attendant to bring a sponge. The powdery film came off easily enough except for one white spot on the under side of the left wrist. The attendant had to rub harder there. When it was removed a tiny bluish speck appeared.

"A prick of some kind," said the pathologist. "She must have stuck a pin in her or hooked herself on a piece of jewelry when she was dressing. She received this, of course, before she was made up for the evening."

"Not necessarily," said Radigan quietly. "All the make-up materials were right handy. The damage to the make-up could have been repaired afterwards."

"What are you getting at?" demanded the doctor.

"Couldn't that mark have been made by a hypodermic syringe?"

"My God!" exclaimed the doctor. He called for a magnifying glass, and bent low to examine the tiny wound. When he straightened up, his face was white. "You may be right. The skin is punctured!... But there's no poison... no poison in her! I can swear to that. I checked the reagents myself!"

"Aren't there poisons which are absorbed so quickly that no trace is left?" asked Radigan.

"Oh, you hear of such things, but I never met anything of the kind in my practice."

"Still, she *was* stuck with a hypodermic," insisted Radigan. "Why?... Notice that it's right on a vein."

"A vein!" The doctor's eyes widened. "Oh, my God, yes!... I must look at her heart."

Mike walked away while this was going on.

He was presently called back. The doctor's hand was shaking. "I was right," he murmured. "When you said vein, it brought to mind our animal experimentation. When it is necessary to kill an animal, we inject air into a vein and the animal dies in a few seconds.... That is what happened here, gentlemen."

After a silence, Mike said: "There's your case, Rad."

The detective's face was a mask of amazement. "But... but how would she have submitted to being stuck without putting up a struggle?"

"That's where the phenol-barbitol came in. She was put to sleep first."

"This will be bad for our office," muttered the pathologist. "You can't blame the doctor; he didn't find it because he wasn't looking for it. Such a thing has never been heard of before!... The publicity will be terrible!"

"Say nothing about it for the present," urged Radigan. "I can do my work better without any publicity. Let the murderer think he's safe. I'll explain everything to the Inspector."

Radigan and Mike proceeded to Headquarters.

Chapter 7

Three-quarters of an hour later, Lieutenant Radigan and Mike were on their way back uptown in a taxicab. They rode in silence for the most part, each looking out of his own window. A curious relationship was developing between these two; they were alternately drawn together and forced apart. They liked each other, and in the chase they were engaged on, each was indispensable to the other, but there was jealousy mixed up in it, too. Like all able males, each wanted to run the show. In particular, Radigan, because it was his job, was inclined to resent suggestions from a rank amateur like Mike.

After they had driven for twenty blocks Mike said: "It's certain now that we have two separate crimes to deal with."

"I think so myself," said Radigan, "but how can you be so sure about it?"

"The murderer was clever and the robber was stupid; they don't fit. If it had not been for the robbery, the murder would never have come to light. The robber gummed up the murderer's game."

"Well, our job is the murder; we can leave the robbery to Mahaffie and Carpenter."

"No. We've got to keep the robbery in mind all the time, too. It is through the robbery that we are likely to lay hands on the murderer."

"Well, you have your own ideas," grumbled Radigan.

They got out at the Hotel Bathurst. At the telephone desk, Radigan asked for Mr. Norbert Besson, and they were presently bidden to go up to his apartment. Besson himself admitted them. Though it was four in the afternoon, he was still wearing a dressing gown, a fine affair of plum-colored brocade made in the style of the eighteenth century. It had cost some woman a pretty penny.

"Hello, Mike," he said. "They didn't tell me there were two of you."

"Mike is acting in an advisory capacity," explained Radigan, "as a friend of the family."

"Whose family?"

"Mrs. Ware's."

"Didn't know she had any. Sit down, men, and smoke up."

Mike and Radigan studied him covertly. He was called the handsomest young man in New York, and it may well have been true. Starting as a photographer's model, he had become a photographer himself, and subsequently the darling of café society. He had thereupon dropped the camera, and lived by his beauty alone. His profile was perfect; Grecian nose, short upper lip, a mouth that women thirsted for, and long dark lashes that gave his face a wistful expression. And with it all, the complete heel! thought Mike.

"I'm glad we found you in," said Radigan as an opener.

"Oh, naturally, I canceled all my engagements today," said Norbert.

The complacent face expressed no sorrow, and Mike thought: "In spite of all the money she lavished on her favorites, the old woman has no mourners."

"I suppose you're investigating the robbery," Norbert went on. "It's a ghoulish crime, robbing the dead."

Radigan did not enlighten him. "Sure is!" he said.

Norbert looked at Mike spitefully. As with most male beauties, there was some of the cat in his make-up. "But I don't see where Mike comes in on this."

"I'm down in the old lady's will for a fat legacy," said Mike, watching his face. "And I'm bound for my own sake to see that all mystery is cleared up."

Norbert's smooth face showed no change. "Oh, has the will been read?"

"Yes, by the police."

There was a silence. The other two could see that Norbert was craving for some assurance that he had been taken care of, but they would not say anything.

"Did you talk to Mrs. Ware last night?" asked Radigan.

"No. She was so busy fighting with Bethesda, I didn't have an opportunity."

"How is it that you didn't go on the hay ride?"

Norbert glanced at Mike again. "If I wasn't going on record, I could speak more freely."

"I give you my word that nothing you say here will be printed," said Mike.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I thought it was a silly exhibition, and I didn't want to be seen on it. So I told Mrs. Ware my old father was coming to town, and that I would have to spend the early evening with him."

"You have no old father?"

"Not that I know of," drawled Norbert.

"You spent the early evening with Mrs. Laval."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, you came with her."

"We met by accident in the foyer downstairs."

"Didn't you think Mrs. Ware would think it strange your leaving the house without speaking to her?"

"That was up to her. I hung around the place for more than an hour after Bethesda cleared out, but she never showed up or sent me any word. I couldn't very well go up to her private suite without being asked."

"Then you left with Mrs. Laval?"

"As it happened. And others, too. The party was breaking up."

"Where did you go?"

"I came home here."

"Could the people downstairs verify that?"

"I doubt it. I never stop at the desk."

"Which elevator did you use last night?"

"Darned if I could tell you. There are a dozen elevators." Norbert scowled blackly. "Say, what the hell are you

questioning me along this line for? Do you think *I* robbed Mrs. Ware?"

Radigan allowed himself to look really distressed. "No, indeed! I know you wouldn't do such a thing."

"Then what's the idea?"

"Well, there is evidence that somebody was with Mrs. Ware last night after Bethesda had gone, and we have to find out who it was."

"Somebody else with her, eh?" drawled Norbert. "That's interesting."

"Where did you spend the early evening?" asked Radigan.

"Took a friend to the theater.... Wait a minute!" He got up and going to a closet in the entry, fished in the pocket of his evening clothes and brought forth two bits of pasteboard. "Here are the ticket stubs."

Radigan looked at the date. "Okay." Then he sprung his mine. "This certainly is unfortunate for you, Norbert. You have my sympathy!"

"What the hell!..." put in Norbert with an insolent scowl.

"I suppose you know that Mrs. Ware planned to leave you her entire fortune after certain bequests had been made. She died before she could sign the will. A nephew gets it."

Norbert sat where he was, staring at Radigan. His face blanched to the color of soiled wax. His expression was clownish from shock. Several moments passed before he could speak. "How do you know?" he asked huskily.

"We read both wills this morning."

"It's not true!" Norbert suddenly cried out. His high strained voice startled his hearers. "I know better. She told me...."

He jumped up and started for the windows, but pulled himself up and came back without finishing his sentence. He dropped back in the chair with his chin resting on his breast and his clenched hands pressed against his thighs.

"What did she tell you?" asked Radigan softly.

Norbert did not answer. The other two, watching him, dimly perceived the hell of disappointment into which they had plunged the soft, luxury-loving young man, and the necessity he was under of concealing it. Mike thought: For once the heel has to take it!

Norbert made an attempt to carry it off. "Naturally it *is* a blow," he said with a broken laugh. "Why should I try to hide it? You men can understand."

"Sure," said Radigan, without relaxing his hard scrutiny.

"You'll be all right," added Mike.

Norbert suddenly showed his teeth at Mike. All his jealousy and hatred flamed out. "Oh, I'll be all right, will I? You're all right as it is, aren't you? You got yours! What the hell did *you* do to earn your hundred grand?"

Mike slowly arose. He said nothing, but his mouth hardened and his eyes were fixed. He took a step toward the younger man and Norbert cringed.

"Sorry, Mike ... I didn't know what I was saying. Forget it, old man."

"Don't old man *me*, damn you!"

"I said I was sorry."

Mike relaxed and turned away. It took him a moment or two to cool off.

"I want a drink," said Norbert shakily. "You fellows'll join me. We all need it. It's in the next room. I'll fetch it." He went through a door on the right, taking care to close it after him.

Mike turned around. "There's somebody in that room, Rad."

"Sure, I know it. When we first came in here the door was closed, and the next time I looked it was open a crack."

"It's probably Mrs. Laval."

"I don't doubt it."

"Don't you want to throw open the door?" asked Mike, grinning.

"Good God, no!" answered Radigan, with what was almost a look of fear.

It was curious to see the hard-boiled Radigan betraying such compunctions. "Why?" asked Mike.

Radigan scowled. "Aah! Payne Laval's a big name around this town. It stands for something. It's respected. To shame the woman openly would be like... like... I can't explain it."

"I get you. You're a good fellow, Rad."

Radigan had gone to the desk by the window and with delicate fingers was turning over the papers on it. He said: "Stand by the door, Mike, and give me a sign if you hear him coming."

Mike obeyed. "What are you after?"

"Did you notice how he started for this desk, and then thought better of it. Maybe there's something here."

A moment later Radigan drew out a sheet of note paper and whistled softly. "Here's a piece of evidence!" He hastily copied the note on the back of an envelope.

"He's coming back," warned Mike.

Radigan thrust the letter back in its pile and strolled away from the desk, putting the envelope in his pocket. Mike seated himself. Norbert re-entered, with bottles and glasses on a tray. He was bent now on removing the bad impression he had made before.

"I got this Scotch from a steward aboard the *Caledonia*. It's the real thing. They don't export it. Take a good one, boys. What'll you have for a chaser?... Drink hearty! Here's to crime!"

Mike and Radigan drank and got out as soon as they could.

Going down in the elevator, Mike asked: "What's in that note?"

"Wait till we're in a taxi."

A minute or two later Radigan was reading his notes to Mike. Mrs. Ware's letter was headed five o'clock Tuesday (the previous afternoon). It ran:

"My darling black-haired boy...."

"Ugh!" put in Mike, "wouldn't that make you regurgitate?"

Radigan read on: "The new will is made, dear one. I have just come from the lawyer's office, and now I am settling down to rest and daydream about my boy. I am so sorry you can't come on the ride tonight. There won't be any pleasure in it now for me. I'd give the whole thing up if I could, but it's too late. Come to me later. I have a surprise for you. I'll be counting the minutes until I see you. Ever your own Flora."

"Could you believe it!" said Mike.

"No wonder Norbert was upset by our news," remarked Radigan; "to learn, if he *is* the killer, that he had killed too soon!"

Chapter 8

The Ware apartment had now been combed from top to bottom by two of the most expert searchers in the business. The jewels had not been found, and this appeared to exonerate the servants. All persons who had made deliveries at the service door were being checked (in case the loot had been handed out) and the guests quietly investigated. Carpenter, the detective employed by the insurance companies, did not really expect to find the thief until an attempt was made to sell the jewels. He frankly declared himself at a loss in this case, because it was apparently the work of an amateur thief, and you could never tell which way an amateur would jump.

Radigan and Mike now divided their forces for the time being. The former went back to Headquarters, where he had a lot of routine work to start going. He had to try to establish through police channels what sales of hypodermic syringes had been made within the past few days. The hospitals and so on were to be circularized to discover if the theft of such an article had been reported. The pathologist had told Radigan that one of the bigger syringes had been used, one with a capacity of 22 cc. or more. This narrowed the field. Radigan was also to order the sewer catch-basins in the neighborhood to be cleaned out, and the contents examined.

Mike wanted to have a talk with Cummings. He had been struck with the change that had taken place in the butler since morning. Cummings now looked like a man who had received good news. His bile had receded; he was his own man again, directing the affairs of the big household with a firmness that brooked no nonsense. Mike asked him to bring the makings of a highball up to the private sitting room. When the butler entered with the tray, he said, in friendly fashion:

"Forget your place for a while, Cummings. Mix a drink for yourself and sit down."

The butler was not at all put out of face. "Thank you, Mr. Speedon. You are very kind." He poured himself a stiff one, added a little soda, and calmly seated himself beside the fireplace opposite Mike. Mike, studying him, wondered if he had been sitting in the same chair the night before. According to Bethesda's testimony, he was accustomed to sit down with his mistress; that, however, was only on the word of a spiteful woman.

"Cummings," said Mike, "you knew your mistress better than anybody."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, sir."

"You knew her tastes, her habits, her associates. What do you think happened here last night?"

"I'm afraid there's no doubt of that, sir. Mrs. Ware was struck down by an attack of heart failure and somebody, finding her like that, yielded to the temptation of stealing a fortune in jewels."

"But who?"

"I thought everything pointed to Mrs. Prior, sir?"

Mike took mental note of a discrepancy here in the butler's story. If Mrs. Ware had been "found" lying dead or dying, it could not have been by Bethesda, because the two women had come upstairs together. Mike, of course, was not giving anything away. "Maybe," he said, "but what other possibilities are there?"

Cummings took a swallow of his highball and considered before answering. Mike watched him without appearing to. He was an unusual type with his coarse, plentiful black hair, seamed features and foxy eyes. All his actions bespoke a man of powerful will. Why should such a one have entered domestic service? Mike was aware that he himself was being watched and measured. Cummings kept his eyes down, for the most part, but there was a deadly quality in his swift glance that warned Mike he was in the presence of danger. Mike thought: Whether or not he killed the old woman, this man is capable of murder.

Cummings finally said: "I can think of nobody, sir."

Mike thought: There are plenty of thoughts turning over in that crafty brain, but you have decided that it is safest to keep your mouth shut. He said: "Couldn't one of the other guests, Norbert Besson, for instance, have come up to this room?"

"I don't see how such a visit could have been hidden, sir.... I am convinced that my mistress died of natural causes," he went on with an earnest air; "if that is what is in your mind."

Mike thought: You mean, you want to convince me of it. He said: "She appears to have had a fire here last night."

"There's no significance in that, sir. The fire was always laid, ready for her. Kinsey mentioned that Mrs. Ware had her light it when she first returned from the hay ride."

Mike said: "Well, I guess you're right about her death. We still have the robbery to deal with. Have you considered the possibility that it was Alfred who got the jewels? That lad acted very strangely this morning."

"Yes, sir, I noticed it, of course, but I laid it to shock. He is better now. If Alfred got the jewels, where are they now? He has not been out of the apartment, and he couldn't have provided for their disposal beforehand."

"That seems to let him out."

"I will take care of Alfred," said Cummings in a voice that caused Mike to glance at him quickly. The butler lowered his eyes.

Mike took a new line. "What will you do now, Cummings?"

"Me, sir? I hadn't taken any thought about myself. This has been a blow to me, Mr. Speedon. Nobody will believe it, but I was sincerely attached to the Madam."

Mike thought: I wonder! He said: "Yet you were the only one of her servants who wasn't remembered in the will."

"Oh, I don't mind that, sir. That was by my own wish."

Mike thought: Something fishy here! He said: "Well, what are you going to do?"

"I would like to get away from it all, sir, but I suppose that's impossible." The butler's sorrowful words were not borne out by his eyes. "It is my duty to remain here as long as Mr. MacKelcan sees proper to keep the apartment open. I suppose it will take a while to settle things up."

"I asked you the question," said Mike, "because I have a cousin who has a large establishment at Westbury, and I happen to know that she is dissatisfied with her present butler."

"Very kind of you to think of me, sir, but I should not care to take another position right away. I have some money saved up. I'd like to travel a little."

"Where did you work before you came here?"

"I was for ten years with a Major Abbey, sir, a retired army officer, and wealthy."

"Where?"

"Here in New York, sir. He was a widower without children, and a semi-invalid. Something over a year ago, his health got worse and he decided to try the baths of Europe. So he closed his apartment here and went abroad to live."

"Where were you born, Cummings? You don't talk like an American."

"In Australia, sir. I got my early training in Sydney. After the war things were so bad that I came to America to try my luck. Major Abbey was my only American employer."

"I suppose he gave you a good recommendation?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I'm proud of it. I would like to show it to you. He said...."

Cummings was interrupted by a knock at the door. Jumping up, he concealed the highball glass behind a vase on the mantel.

"Come in," said Mike.

It was the second man, Alfred. His appearance bore out Cummings' statement that he had largely recovered from his "shock." "Beg pardon, sir. It's Mr. Cummings who is wanted. There is a man with a bill...."

"Send him to Mr. MacKelcan's office."

"I told him that, sir. And he said as it was you ordered the goods he would be glad if...."

Mike wanted to get rid of the butler now. "Go ahead, Cummings. Okay his bill. You and I will have plenty of chances to discuss things later."

Cummings and Alfred retired.

Mike had a strong desire to delve further into Cummings' past. He looked in the telephone book for the number of Mrs. Sully's employment office. Office hours were about over for the day, but he took a chance on calling her. In addition to the house phone, Mrs. Ware had a direct wire from her desk to the exchange, and he used that. He got Mrs. Sully.

"This is Michael Speedon speaking."

"Mr. Speedon of the *Recorder-Press*?"

"The same."

The lady's voice warmed. Such is the power of publicity.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Speedon?"

"About six months ago, Mrs. Ware engaged a butler through your office named Cummings. I don't know the first name."

"I remember him. His first name is John."

"I assume that he was well recommended. This is a question of getting him another position, you understand."

"Extremely well recommended, Mr. Speedon. He had worked ten years for a Major Abbey here in New York. He also had some Australian references, but I disregarded those."

"He had a letter from Major Abbey?"

"Yes, Mr. Speedon, a very strong letter. Cummings has the original, but there is a copy in my files which I will read to you if you wish."

"Please do, Mrs. Sully."

She presently came back on the wire, and read the letter. It was an enthusiastic testimonial, but it told Mike nothing.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Sully. Did you communicate with the Major personally?"

"That would have been difficult, Mr. Speedon. He was living abroad, and anyhow, Mrs. Ware did not require it."

"I see. Does that letter happen to bear the Major's former address in New York?"

"He lived at Marbury Towers on Central Park West."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Sully."

"Not at all, Mr. Speedon."

Mike looked at his watch. He had a date to meet Radigan for dinner, but there was time to spare, and he decided to visit Marbury Towers in the hope that the house staff might remember Cummings.

It was one of the huge new apartments on the West Side which are among the most magnificent in town, but which, for some reason, are considered less smart than those across the Park. Mike addressed himself to a deferential hall man.

"You used to have a Major Abbey living here."

"He lives here now, sir."

"What!"

"Major Abbey went abroad for his health over a year ago, but the climate did not suit him. He returned to New York two months ago and took another suite in this building."

"Please send up my name," said Mike.

He wrote "Recorder-Press" in the corner of his card and it was phoned upstairs. The Major lived a very retired life and he could not guess how the newspapers had got hold of his name. He detested personal publicity, but he thought it would be safer to find out what the fellow was after.

So Mike was presently admitted by a correct, elderly manservant, who conducted him into a study opening off the foyer; a man's room with leather upholstery, sporting prints, and the smell of good tobacco in the air. The Major, the wreck of a fine physical specimen, sat in an easy chair by the window with a rug over his knees. His dark eyes were resentful of his own weakness and his speech was blunt.

"Well, sir, what does the press want of me?"

Mike liked him on the spot. "Nothing, sir. I wrote that in the corner of my card to identify myself. The question I have to ask you has nothing to do with my job. I was surprised to find you, because I had been told you were living abroad."

"Didn't do me any good," growled the invalid, "and I preferred to come home to die."

"Not for many a long year yet, I hope, sir."

The Major waved this aside impatiently. "What's your question?"

"You used to have a man working for you called John Cummings."

"He's working for me now. He just showed you in here."

"Well, I'm damned!" murmured Mike.

"Come, come, sir," rasped the Major. "I'm not interested in your reactions. What's all this about?"

"Give me time, sir.... I suppose you read the newspapers."

"Of course! It's all I can do, now.... What's on your mind?"

"You're entitled to an answer, sir, but I'm going to ask you to treat it as confidential. In the public interest."

"I must be the judge of that. Spit it out!"

"You have read of Mrs. Ware's death. As a friend of hers I'm helping the police in their investigation. Did you happen to see in the paper that Mrs. Ware employed a butler named Cummings?"

That caught the Major's interest. "Why, yes, I did. I pointed it out to my Cummings and chaffed him about it. But the name of Cummings is a common one, and we thought nothing of it."

"Mrs. Ware's Cummings claims to have worked for you for ten years. He has a letter of recommendation."

"He's a liar!"

Mike quoted a phrase or two from the letter.

"That was in the letter I gave to the real Cummings when I let him go. Now I've taken him back again."

"I get you. Somehow or other the false Cummings got hold of that letter and forged a copy of it."

It was then the Major's turn to ejaculate: "Well, I'm damned!... I can see why you ask me to keep my mouth shut," he presently went on. "You want to build up a case against this scoundrel before he takes alarm."

"Exactly."

"All right, I give you my word. But for God's sake, young man, let me hear from time to time how the thing goes on. I sit here all day without a damned thing to occupy my mind!"

"I'll do that, sir."

Mike and Radigan met at Bonifacio's, an excellent small restaurant on Third Avenue that had not yet been discovered by the mob. Mike let Rad satisfy his appetite, and then with the cigars, nonchalantly told his story, slyly watching the detective's sober, honest face.

Radigan's eyes opened. "Good God! This is positive evidence that Cummings is a crook!"

"Not a doubt of it!"

"That puts an entirely new aspect on the case."

"Sure. But how do you mean?"

"Cummings got into the house in the first place for the purpose of stealing the old lady's jewels, and killed her for them. A professional thief who never operated around these parts before. European, probably. He had his hide-out for the jewels ready in advance, and that's why they haven't been found. He stole out by the service entrance late last night and came in again that way. He used the stairs and so he wasn't seen. Any man would walk up twelve flights for half a million...." Noticing Mike's grin, Radigan broke off, demanding: "Well, what's the matter with that theory? Have you got a better one?"

Mike shook his head. "Why should he have killed her? To hit her over the head would have been enough. And after he had succeeded in getting into the house, why should he have waited six months before pulling off his job? And why should he have stuck around after getting the loot?"

"Ahh, you're always stuck on your own notions," grumbled Radigan. "Anyhow, I'm going down to Headquarters to see if we have his photograph."

Cummings' photograph was not on file at Police Headquarters.

Chapter 9

Shortly after twelve o'clock on the same night, Mike entered El Morocco, that highly publicized focus of glitter on New York's East Side. He could not neglect his job altogether; he had scamped one column, and somewhere he must find plenty of copy for next day. He was in a difficult position as regarded his copy; the Ware "robbery" was the topic of topics; but he could not say what he knew about it, and he had a professional repugnance to printing what he knew was not true.

In addition to picking up general news, Mike knew he would find some of the people at El Morocco who had been at Mrs. Ware's the previous night, and he hoped with a few innocent-sounding questions to obtain new leads through the maze that confronted him.

The long, narrow room was crowded from wall to wall; a haze of tobacco smoke rose from the tables, and a muffled roar of talk like the jungle after nightfall. A jeweled jungle, Mike had called it in his column, a scintillating stew; such phrases were a part of his stock in trade. Yet the place had elegance, too; the most exquisite women in the world were to be found there, dressed with supreme art; lovely, fragile orchids that made a man's heart ache. Also the women who lacked beauty and attracted attention to themselves by the sheer grotesquerie of their get-ups. These were apt to be more amusing to talk to. Mike enjoyed it as a man always enjoys the show in which he plays a leading part—but he was not kidded by it.

He was hailed from table after table. "Hi, Mike!... come and sit down!... Give us the low-down, Mike!... Mike, here's a chair we've been saving for you.... Mike, darling, you can have half my chair!"

He perceived that he had acquired an increased importance in the eyes of the crowd through his connection with the Ware case. But there was something more in it, too, a morbid eagerness in the way some of the women's eyes fastened on him that he could not interpret. It made him uneasy.

It was November and the season at El Morocco was in full swing. The elegant John Perona, an important figure in the social world, moved among the tables, not like the proprietor but an honored guest. A mere glance or the slightest gesture to his captains was sufficient to keep the situation under control.

At a table near the door where he could survey all who came and went, sat the rotund and vivacious Maury Paul, dean of society reporters, better known to the world as Cholly Knickerbocker, with Nancy Randolph and Judy Robb, smart sisters of the press, at his table. At other points of vantage Mike saw Mrs. Rhinelanders Stewart, most ethereal of beauties, and Mrs. Harrison Williams, the best-dressed woman present, who had no need to make herself look queer. Miss Elsa Maxwell, built low and wide, was the center of another laughing tableful, which included an Austrian archduke, a plain duke of Italian extraction and a Russian baron. Jerry Zerbe, camera in hand and focussing glass fixed in his eye, passed from table to table taking pictures amidst roars of laughter.

A bar ran across the front of the room and here stood the stags looking 'em over and watching their chances. In the distant corner of the room sat the visitors from Montclair and New Rochelle looking on wide-eyed. They came not to be seen but to see. The music was perfect but the dancing-floor shrank smaller and smaller as more people came in. Dancing only provided an excuse to hug your partner and sway in rhythm. There was no pretence of furnishing other entertainment; the famous customers provided the floor show.

Answering the greetings from his friends, Mike made his way toward a woman who had not raised her voice but only invited him with a smile. She sat on the zebra-striped settee against the wall with a man on either side of her and a little table pushed up in front. It was the celebrated Mrs. Burton Fentress who was both beautiful *and* grotesque. She was swathed in eccentrically-draped veils of contrasting colors like Salome. Her face was made up dead white; her dark eyes were shadowed and enormous. She wished to give the impression of a woman swooning with passion, and many men fell for it. She was drinking champagne. Mrs. Fentress had been at Mrs. Ware's party and Mike knew that nothing

escaped those seemingly sleepy eyes.

"Darling!" she breathed, extending a white arm across the table; "I've been sitting here with my eyes fixed on the door waiting for you to appear!"

"Darling!" said Mike. "This is so sudden!"

"Move over a little," said Mrs. Fentress to the man on her left; "I have something private and particular for Mike's ear."

He rose. "In that case," he said stiffly, "I'll be pushing off."

"Come back soon, darling," said Mrs. Fentress with insulting sweetness.

Mike took his place. Mrs. Fentress turned her gleaming shoulder squarely on the other man, and he, too, took the hint and moved away in search of a warmer climate. Mrs. Fentress pressed Mike's hand.

"Darling, I couldn't wait until I got the real low-down on the Ware case."

"Is that why you wanted me?" said Mike. "I thought it was my bright eyes!"

"It is," she murmured, letting her dark glance convey the unutterable. "To me you are the Ware case."

Mike felt vaguely uncomfortable. "I don't see why a jewel robbery should be so exciting."

"Don't play the innocent kid with me, darling. I *know* it was more than robbery."

"How do you know it?"

"My hunches never play me false. Hunches are more important than evidence."

"To a woman perhaps."

"Everybody believes that Mrs. Ware was murdered. And what everybody believes to be so, becomes so."

"The newspapers ..."

"The heck with the newspapers. You are liaison officer with the press. They only know what you wish to tell them. I want some more champagne."

Mike ordered it.

"Well, if it was murder, I wish you'd tell me who did it."

Mrs. Fentress merely smiled enigmatically.

"You were there last night," said Mike. "Did you see anything suspicious?"

"Oh, I'm so scatterbrained, I never notice anything."

"You wouldn't fail to notice Norbert Besson, every woman's heart throb!"

"Not mine!"

"Just the same, you would make up to Norbert to annoy Maud Laval."

"Don't be catty, darling."

"Did he leave the party while you were present?"

"Are you trying to hang it on Norbert? You disappoint me!"

"Not trying to hang it on anybody."

"Norbert didn't get a thing out of it! Norbert and Maud Laval were seen dining at the Bathurst tonight, and they were crushed."

"I know. Answer the question."

"Well, as a matter of fact, Norbert did leave the party. Maud also. From the living room I could see into the music room, and I was curious enough to look into the dining room. They were not there. I didn't see them steal away; they were there; they were not there; and after half an hour or so they were there again. I don't know where they went."

"Did Norbert look upset?"

"Norbert always looks wooden. His line is the strong, silent man. My God! Maud was glum."

"What time was this?"

"About a quarter to two. I went on to the Monte Carlo." Mrs. Fentress drained her champagne glass and pushed it toward Mike to be refilled. "The heck with Norbert. Maud can have her heart throb. I want a man!... Norbert was cut off without a cent but you got yours, darling! Why didn't you play for the whole stake? Sixty million! You could have had it. She bought Norbert for an ornamental neckpiece, but you she was really crazy about. She called you the last gentleman. Once when she was high, she was overheard telling how she had proposed marriage to you, and how you turned her down so nicely that she felt honored."

"Good God!" said Mike. "Who started that story?"

Amy Fentress laughed. "It's true! I can see it in your face! You think you know everything that's going around, but nobody tells you the stories about yourself!" She fondled his clenched hand. "Your fist is too hard!... What a man you are!" Her eyes narrowed. "I would enjoy being beaten by you," she murmured. "... Fill my glass and let's drink to us."

Mike poured the wine, but stopped her from raising the glass. "Just what are you getting at, Amy?"

She pressed closer against him. "Oh, Mike, I was so thrilled when I heard it today, thrilled to the marrow!"

"Heard what?"

"I am so sick of tame men! I adore wickedness! *Great* wickedness! You disdained her millions! What a magnificent gesture! I shall die of bliss when you take me in your arms!"

With growing horror he perceived her drift. "You think that I?..."

"Don't look so startled," she pouted. "It doesn't become you. Brazen it out! Brazen it out, and nothing can touch you!"

"And everybody thinks?..."

"They know it. By grapevine. What do you care? There's no proof. You took good care of that. How clever you are! I adore you!"

So that was why women were staring at him with fascinated eyes. Mike felt a little sick with disgust. Hardest to bear was the pressure of Amy's shoulder against his arm. He would as lief have been caressed by a snake. But with half the people in the place watching him, he was forced to go on playing his usual part. He laughed.

"That's the way to take it," said Amy. "Give me a toast."

He raised his glass, "Here's the toast of the detective I've been playing around with all day. It's all he knows.... To crime!"

"To crime!"

Chapter 10

As soon as he got home, Mike wrote up his notebook. These notes were for his own future guidance, not his paper. His problems did not permit him to get much sleep. He went to bed sore and woke up sore a few hours later. By leaving Amy Fentress flat, he knew he had made a powerful and implacable enemy. She would undoubtedly whisper to all her intimates that Mike Speedon had "*admitted* it, darling!" Not that I give a damn, Mike told himself, but it drives me crazy that such a woman should be able to get away with it! She ought to be locked up with a diet of bread and water! As a matter of fact, Mike cared a good deal what people said.

At nine o'clock he was at work in his office in the Recorder-Press Building. He found it impossible to write a word about the Ware case. All he could do was to dig up some reserve copy that he kept for emergencies. It was none too fresh. Doggedly hammering it out on the typewriter, he was finished by eleven, and already correcting proof. Hamilton Wade, big boss of the *Recorder-Press*, came in smiling slyly. Such condescension was unusual. Nearly everybody around the shop jumped at his approach, but Mike was too sore; he merely looked up. He knew he was in for trouble and he waited for it.

"Morning, Mike. Through already? Let's have a look at your stuff today." Wade's eyes were bright with an unholy curiosity.

Mike silently pushed his proof across the desk. Wade ran his experienced editor's eye down the middle of it, taking it all in without reading it. He frowned.

"Hang it all, Mike! The whole town is waiting today with its tongue out to hear what you have to say about the Ware case. And you don't mention it! You can't let us down like this!"

"What can I say about it?" growled Mike.

"What can you say? You're at the very seat and center of the whole thing! There is everything to say!"

"I'm too close to it," muttered Mike.

Wade held out the proof. "Honestly, Mike, do you regard this as good copy?"

"No, it's putrid!"

"Well, then, you can't afford to let it go through. You've taught your fans to expect something better. I appreciate your difficulties, but you owe something to the paper, too. Through the paper you lead a hell of an amusing life. Here's your chance to repay us. You're in a position to give us an exclusive story today. I give you absolute *carte blanche* to say what you please. Come out in your own person and give your slanderers hell! Defend yourself. I know you can put up a defense that will make them look silly."

Mike jumped up. "Mr. Wade, if the hot seat was waiting for me outside that door, I would not use my column to defend myself! I'm damned if I would!"

Wade was hardly accustomed to this. His eyebrows went up. "Why not?"

"It's too foul! To notice such lying gossip by defending yourself only inflates it, only keeps it going. My enemies are licking their lips while they wait to see what I'm going to say. Then they'd have me!"

"I don't get your point of view," said Wade stiffly.

Mike quieted down. "I get yours," he said, "and I'm sorry I can't fall in with it. The best thing to do would be to drop me out of the paper until this mess is cleared up. There are plenty of good men on the staff to pinch hit."

"I don't care to do that," said Wade. "You are our columnist, and there are the syndicate contracts to be considered also." He dropped the proof on the desk. "Think it over. I can't make you write. You have a couple of hours before the deadline. It doesn't matter if you miss the first edition. It's up to you."

When he had gone, Mike grimly okayed the proof and sent it upstairs. Let Wade kill it if he wanted to, and fire him.

Half an hour later, Mike was ringing the bell of the Ware apartment. Yesterday he had had only the curiosity of an amateur in this case; today it was different. Only by solving the murder could he silence the lying tongues and make his enemies look foolish. Alfred opened the door.

"Is Lieutenant Radigan here?" asked Mike.

"No, sir. He's at Police Headquarters, I believe. Mr. Cummings can tell you."

Cummings, hearing the voices, came out into the foyer. As always, smooth and watchful, he said: "Good morning, Mr. Speedon. I left the Lieutenant at Headquarters an hour ago. There was a jewel thief arrested last night, and the Lieutenant asked me to come down to the line-up to see if I could identify the man. But I had never seen him before ... Let me take your coat, sir."

Mike suspected that there was more in this trip to Headquarters than Cummings was aware of. Radigan was concentrating on the Cummings angle today.

In the living room, Sanford MacKelcan and a well-known dealer were taking inventory of Mrs. Ware's art and household furnishings. Cummings was helping them. Mike asked himself why the attorney hadn't appointed a clerk to do this tedious job, and the answer immediately presented itself. Because this gives him an excuse to stick around here.

Mike lit a cigarette and watched the proceedings. He had no interest in the art dealer, but to see MacKelcan and Cummings together started him thinking. Both men were hiding something; they feared each other; they were too polite, too careful to avoid stepping on each other's toes. Both crooks, thought Mike, with this difference; MacKelcan probably knows enough about the law to keep within it. On the other hand, Cummings was the stronger personality; MacKelcan talked too much.

The latter, with his hand on a tall Chinese vase, was saying: "Now this piece is excessively valuable. It's the delicate, biscuit-colored glaze that makes it so rare. Mrs. Ware told me there was no other vase of this description in existence outside of the Emperor of Japan's collection."

The dealer was matter-of-fact. "Whoever told her that was pulling her leg. It's a good piece, but by no means unique."

Mike, unable to deal with either man while this was going on, went back into the foyer. Moved by an obscure need of finding balm for his sore feelings, he drifted over to the door of the office and knocked. A calm voice invited him to enter.

Day Radnor, in a crisp silk shirtwaist, was sitting behind the desk with a pile of mail before her. There was something in her natural and honest air that made Mike feel the world was not after all a completely filthy mess.

"Still here?" he said.

"As you see. There is more mail than ever this morning. Somebody must take care of it. My fate rests with Mr. MacKelcan. He has not yet spoken."

"Got anything in view if he does speak?"

"Nothing definite."

"Got any money?"

"Sufficient."

"I'm fired," said Mike.

"I don't believe it."

He described the scene in his office, but the sympathy he craved was not forthcoming.

"You're not fired—yet," said Day coolly, "and you won't be. The *Press-Recorder* is not going to hand over your column to the *Sun* or the *World-Telegram*. It's unique."

"Ahh, you know you despise my column!" he said scowling.

"I would if you took it seriously. As it is, I read every word. I think it's a darned good racket. It takes gameness and a sense of humor to get away with it. Those are qualities anybody admires."

"I hate my job!"

"Oh, your vitality is low. You didn't get enough sleep last night."

"I'm glad to see you're feeling so flip this morning."

"What else can a poor girl be?"

"Don't rile me any more," he muttered. "Already my teeth are worn down from grinding!"

Day laughed—two silvery notes only. "You want sympathy," she said with the clear look that always stirred him. There was nothing flip in that. But it was gone immediately. "I can't sympathize with you. You've been too lucky. You have everything."

"And you think for me to be up against it is good for my soul, eh?"

"The heck with that stuff. I'm no soul doctor."

"What *are* you?" growled Mike. "I wish I knew. I don't get you at all."

Day, smiling, commenced to slit envelopes quickly and to toss out the contents. After a moment Mike got up sorely. Hearing the sound, she jerked up her head and was about to speak. But she caught herself and went on with her work.

Mike went out, as sore as when he had entered. Adele was hanging about at the back of the foyer. She signaled with her pretty eyes. Hard to tell if it was meant to be amorous or conspiratorial. He went to her.

"Anything new?"

"Mr. Cummings and Alfred had a quarrel last night. Up in Alfred's room."

"What about?"

"I couldn't hear. It's up on the third floor and I'm on the second. I couldn't go up there without being caught."

"That's not worth good money," said Mike. "You've got to get me particulars."

Adele made her eyes soft. "I don't do this only for the money," she murmured.

Mike made believe not to get it. He was off women today. "Well, keep up the good work," he said, turning back toward the living room. She had started a maggot working in his brain. Cummings and Alfred quarreling? It must be looked into.

A bell sounded in the distance. The softly stepping Alfred appeared, making his way toward the door. Mike noted that the young man had lost his fresh color this morning. Alfred answered an inquiry at the door and closed it again. Mike intercepted him on the way back.

"What's the matter, Alfred?"

"Matter, sir? Nothing as I'm aware of, Mr. Speedon."

"Been having trouble with Cummings?"

A terrified look came into the second man's face. "Oh, no, sir," he stammered earnestly. "Mr. Cummings, he's an exacting man, he wants everything done just so, but he's fair. We none of us got any complaint against Mr. Cummings, sir. Oh, no, sir. We respect him."

Mike thought: He protests too much.

Alfred said anxiously: "Why do you ask me that, Mr. Speedon?"

"No particular reason. But you look bad this morning."

Alfred laid a hand across his middle. "It's my stomach, sir. I suffer in my stomach."

Mike let him go. When he got a chance later, he tackled Cummings on the subject, "Anything new turn up about Alfred?"

Cummings gave him a sharp look. "Nothing new, sir. Alfred is too dumb, too timid, to get away with robbery. I'm satisfied there's nothing in it."

Mike thought: I'm not.

Chapter 11

When luncheon was served the art dealer went away to look after his business, and Mike and Mr. MacKelcan seated themselves opposite each other in the dining room. At Mike's suggestion, Miss Radnor had been invited to join them, but word came back that she begged to be excused. It was an excellent lunch; a cup of green turtle, a pheasant with a salad; port de salut instead of a sweet; the whole washed down with a bottle of Montrachet that made Mike's stomach purr softly.

Mike was amused to see MacKelcan acting the part of master of the establishment, giving orders to the servants and pressing this and that upon his guest. At such an informal luncheon for two men, there was no call for Cummings himself to wait upon the table, but the butler remained in the room, attentive to their every want. Finally, when the coffee was poured and cigars lighted, there was no further excuse for him to linger. He passed softly into the pantry.

MacKelcan murmured out of the corner of his mouth: "I distrust that fellow! His eyes are everywhere! Have you noticed his eyes?"

"Can't say I have," said Mike offhand.

"Terrible eyes! I bet he's listening at the pantry door this minute."

"He seems to have been devoted to his mistress."

"So *he* says. I doubt it!" The attorney dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand. Tapping his glass, he went on: "That was a good wine! An excellent wine! I have a weakness for good wine, but unfortunately my pocketbook does not permit me to indulge often!"

"It will be easier now," suggested Mike.

"I don't gain anything by Mrs. Ware's will," MacKelcan said quickly, "if that is what you are referring to. Not a cent! Mrs. Ware has been paying me a retainer of twenty-five thousand a year since I first became her attorney. She said she wished to remove temptation from my path. Just her little joke!" Here the attorney laughed—it sounded a little too hearty in Mike's ears. "Indeed, I lose under the will," he went on, "because when I did special work for my client she paid me for it. Most liberally! And now, of course, I cannot expect anything beyond the twenty-five thousand a year. Ah! you're young yet and you don't know all the calls that are made on a family man! Not to speak of the little benefactions one makes without wishing to say anything about it! There is never a cent left for the old man!"

Mike paid small attention to what MacKelcan *said* because he had learned that the attorney wagged his tongue, not for the purpose of expressing his thoughts, but to hide them. You learned more from watching the man, and Mike watched him now.

MacKelcan dressed with a good deal of care, but somehow looked untidy. He put on a fresh white waistcoat every morning, and it immediately became wrinkled, because the waistcoat has not yet been designed that will fit snugly over a protuberant belly with a hollow chest above. His jackets were always much too big for him and too long, because he believed that it helped his meager chest and shoulders; his flapping pants only called attention to the extreme thinness of his legs.

He was never still while he talked; he twisted first to one side of his chair, then the other, and flung his long legs about like flails, ceaselessly crossing and uncrossing them. His hands, too, were always busy about nothing; moving his wine glass back and forth, playing with a fork, grasping a lapel of his jacket, pulling down the waistcoat that wouldn't stay down. He had ugly hands, clay-colored, with warped fingers having spade-shaped tips bitten to the quick.

Mike wondered if all this movement were not a kind of defense mechanism to distract attention from his eyes. His eyes gave him away and he probably suspected it. Small eyes, pale in color; a kind of dirty gray. Mike thought: I suppose

they're what a novelist would call yellow. Yellow eyes! that's what they are! The yellow eyes never seemed to see anything; they were not still long enough; yet one got a feeling that somewhere behind all this flickering dwelt an unswerving will. MacKelcan was not an antagonist to be despised.

He said: "I wanted to tell you the arrangements I have made." He said "arrangements" in a solemn voice like an undertaker. "Yesterday evening I had Mrs. Ware moved to Green's Funeral Parlors, and it was announced in the papers—just to put the public off, you understand. In the middle of the night I had her secretly carried to another establishment in White Plains, where the real funeral will take place on Saturday. Thus we will avoid a pushing crowd of curiosity-seekers in the street and all such distressing scenes."

"Good!" said Mike.

"I won't announce the funeral, of course—that would defeat my whole purpose, but if you will give me a list of her close friends—those to whom she was really dear—I will notify them privately."

"Don't do it!" said Mike. "She wasn't dear to any of them. A lot of flatterers and spongers. Let the poor soul be buried in quiet with only you and I and Cummings for mourners."

MacKelcan looked shocked. "Oh, dear, no! That wouldn't do at all! No! No! We can't have any secrecy about the obsequies. It would give rise to the darkest suspicions! You know what people are! Everything must be done in the open."

Mike shrugged. "In that case I advise you to have her put in a receiving vault until the heir comes, and let him decide. He's her only relative."

"You may be right," said MacKelcan, nodding his head. "I'll take it into consideration."

"Have you heard anything from the heir?" asked Mike.

"My associate in London has acknowledged my cable. That's all so far."

Mike considered how he could get past his defenses. "Mr. MacKelcan," he said, "this is the first chance I have had to talk privately with you...."

"Keep your voice down," warned the lawyer.

"I will.... What is your theory about the robbery?"

"Oh, I leave that to the police. I can't follow the workings of the criminal mind. My experience has been entirely civil, entirely civil."

"The problem teases me," said Mike. "I can't put it out of my head.... At what stage was the party here, night before last, when you left?"

MacKelcan switched around in his chair. "What do you mean?"

"Were you the first to leave or the last?"

The other man puffed out his cheeks. "Are you suggesting that I...."

"Good God, no! I want you to help me place the other guests."

MacKelcan cooled down. "The party was very distasteful to me. Most distasteful. The guests were drinking too much; some of them showed the effects. It made me indignant to see my client's hospitality abused. But I lingered on because I was hoping to get a word or two with Mrs. Ware. But she didn't come downstairs again and finally I gave up hope of it, and went home. I may not have been the first to go, but it was near it. I can tell you the exact hour. It was one-forty. I had

been here an hour. Several other guests left with me."

"Who were they?"

MacKelcan named them. "We went down in the elevator together. The Bradstreets had a car at the door. They gave me a lift to my little house in Sixty-fifth Street. Very pleasant people."

"Well, that lets out the Bradstreets and the others who left with you," said Mike. "What about Norbert Besson?"

"He was still here when I left. And that shameless woman, Mrs. Laval. I couldn't help noticing him. He hates me because he knew that I considered Mrs. Ware's association with him most unfortunate! and he didn't try to hide it."

"Had he left the party during the time you were here?"

"Yes, he had, now that you speak of it. But I took it that he and that woman had stolen away into some corner.... I could easily believe that Besson was the thief, but why should he rob Mrs. Ware if he expected to get it all?"

Mike wasn't giving anything away. "I don't know," he said. "But I don't want to overlook any possibility." He took a new line. "Did you know that Mrs. Ware had retained another attorney?"

"What's that got to do with it?" MacKelcan demanded, at once suspicious.

"I'm still thinking about Norbert Besson," Mike said with an innocent air.

MacKelcan accepted it. "Yes, I knew it."

"How did you know it?"

"Mrs. Ware told me herself."

Mike thought: That is certainly a lie. "When?" he asked, thinking to catch him there.

MacKelcan corrected himself. "What I should say is, that she had threatened to go to another lawyer if I wouldn't give in to her about Besson. I didn't give in, and so I supposed she had. That was three or four days ago."

Mike thought: You would have given in to her if she had wanted to make Beelzebub her heir. You always gave in to her in order to gain your own ends. He said: "But you knew the second will had not yet been signed."

"I didn't suppose there had been time to draw up a new will and execute it. That was what I was waiting for on Tuesday night. To make one last appeal to Mrs. Ware not to sign any such will. I thought it my duty."

Mike nodded as if satisfied. All right, old man, he was thinking, but your story doesn't *quite* hang together, and I'll take it apart before I'm through!

Soon afterwards, Cummings entered to say that Mr. Dufresne (the art dealer) had come back and was awaiting Mr. MacKelcan's pleasure in the living room. The lawyer jumped up and ran out with his coat flying open. Cummings followed more soberly, and Mike was left at the table smoking and thinking over what he had heard.

The pantry door opened a crack and he distinguished a bright eye in the aperture. Seeing that he was alone, Adele entered. Both her eyes and her mouth were open.

"Did you know about this?" she asked breathlessly. "An extra. One of the boys just brought it up in the service elevator."

Across the top of the newspaper she was holding up, Mike read in letters four inches tall:

MRS. WARE WAS MURDERED

He shrugged. So the secret was out. Radigan would be annoyed at this. However, it was inevitable. No secret could be kept for long nowadays.

He tipped Adele and sent her away. Reading between the lines of the story, it was clear to a newspaperman what had happened. One of the underlings in the medical examiner's office had tipped off the press to the mistake made by the first assistant, and when the chief pathologist was faced with a direct question he had had to tell the truth. It was all here now; the make-up on the old lady's arms; microscopic puncture; hypodermic needle; the real cause of her death. Mike could almost feel how the whole town was throbbing with the news at this moment.

There was a sentence in the story that caused Mike to grit his teeth again. The writer made it clear as to whom he was referring:

"In the light of this new development the name of a man has been mentioned who is very prominent in the night life of the city, and was closely associated with Mrs. Ware."

This was a rival sheet, delighted, of course, to get back at one of the stars of the *Recorder-Press*. Mike cursed it from the bottom of his heart.

As he cooled off, it occurred to him that he now had an excellent opportunity to observe the effect of this news on Cummings and MacKelcan. He carried the paper into the living room where they were still droning over the business of the inventory.

"Look at this," he said. "It has just come."

Cummings and MacKelcan were standing side by side in front of Mike as he held up the newspaper. Cummings' face grew as still as a waxwork; he lowered his eyes.

"Murder! how terrible!" he said in an expressionless voice.

MacKelcan became violently excited. "Murder!" he screeched, snatching the newspaper out of Mike's hands. His eyes ran like rats over the story. "You knew this already!" he flung at Mike accusingly. "You've known it since yesterday morning! Why wasn't I told?"

Mike shrugged. "The police ordered me to keep my mouth shut."

MacKelcan strode up and down waving the newspaper. "It is outrageous! Outrageous! That I shouldn't have been told!"

"What difference does it make?" asked Mike coolly.

MacKelcan, with a poisonous glance, suddenly shut up. Flinging the paper from him, he dropped in a chair and wiped his face. "Well, gentlemen," he said, assuming his usual busy manner, "after all, this is a matter for the police, for the police. We must get on with our inventory."

Mike left the apartment with fresh food for thought; Cummings' terrible stillness and MacKelcan's irrelevant anger; what did they signify?

Chapter 12

Mike left the apartment because he had some telephoning to do that he didn't care to risk in that place of snoopers and eavesdroppers. From a pay station he called up one after another, Mrs. Bradstreet and each of the persons MacKelcan had named as having left the Ware apartment on Tuesday night at the same time he did. Each corroborated MacKelcan's story, and Mike was faced with another dead end.

He proceeded to the Hotel Bathurst and had no luck there, either. Norbert Besson was out—or at any rate Mike was told that he was out. Mike then taxied downtown to the Equitable Building to see Mr. Keppelman. Here he picked up an interesting bit of news, though it did not advance his case much.

"Yes," said Keppelman, when the question was put to him. "I noticed myself that MacKelcan seemed to have advance information about the will I drew up for Mrs. Ware, and as soon as I got back to my office I started an inquiry. I am sorry to say I discovered that MacKelcan had been tampering with one of my clerks. I have discharged her, of course."

"Did your clerk know that the will had not been signed?"

"She could not have known that."

"How could MacKelcan have learned so quickly that Mrs. Ware had sent for you?"

"I have reason to believe that he had a spy in the bank. It was the bank, you will remember, that recommended me to Mrs. Ware. MacKelcan probably knew that I would be sent for before I knew it myself."

"What is his professional reputation?" asked Mike.

"He can scarcely be said to have any. His business is of such a nature that nobody knows anything about it.... Don't misunderstand me. It is a very choice business. God knows how he secures it! Such an ignorant man!"

"But pertinacious."

When he had left Mr. Keppelman, Mike, according to his custom, called up the office to ask if there was anything for him. There was a memo, he was told, asking him to call Lieutenant Radigan at Police Headquarters as soon as he received it. Mike dialed Headquarters, and when he got Radigan, heard a new hardness in the Lieutenant's voice that caused him to stiffen.

"You wanted me to call you, Rad?"

"Sure.... Where you been all day?"

"Oh, around. I've got a job, you know."

"Where you calling from now?"

"Cigar store, Equitable Building."

"Can you come around to Headquarters to talk things over?"

"Surely."

"Okay. I'll be waiting for you in the main entrance hall."

In ten minutes Mike was in Center Street. Several press photographers were loitering outside Headquarters. "Wait a minute, Mike," they cried. "Look this way!... Hold your head up!" Mike stalked on with a set jaw. In the past he had always had a fellow-feeling for the press photographers; they had a thankless job which they performed gamely. But now

he longed to smash their damned cameras. It makes a difference whose ox is gored.

Inside the building, Radigan, waiting at the top of the steps, greeted him with the sardonic friendliness that characterizes the New York cop in dealing with the criminal classes. The change in his manner made Mike sore because he liked the man; but what the hell. Mike steeled himself for trouble. Radigan led him to the elevator.

"Where we going?" asked Mike.

"Inspector Stillson's office. Inspector wants to hear your ideas on the case."

Stillson was the chief of the detective force and Mike knew him of old. He was the kind of officer who presents a handsome front to the world and is in no danger of getting nervous prostration through overwork. He greeted Mike with a heavily facetious air that warned him afresh he was a suspected person. "H'are yeh, Mike! Sit down and light up."

Mike obeyed, waiting for a lead. Out of the tail of his eye he could see Radigan, seated on his right, watching him with a scowl. Once a suspicion was planted in that slow-moving mind, whatever Mike did would only confirm it, and Mike, knowing it, felt reckless.

The Inspector went on with his jocose air: "They're saying around town that it was you gave old lady Ware the air."

"So I hear," said Mike coolly. "Who started the story?"

"I was hoping you could tell me."

Mike shrugged.

"Trouble is, you've been getting too much publicity," said the Inspector sententiously. "Comes a point where it sours on a celebrity. Look at Lindbergh. You're getting the reverse publicity now."

"Are you telling me?" said Mike.

The Inspector suddenly changed his tone. "Do you know a girl at Mrs. Ware's called Adele?"

"Sure! Damn pretty girl."

"So they tell me. You've got an eye for beauty, haven't you?"

"I hope it may never fail me."

Mike's flippancy annoyed the officers. They looked on that as their perquisite. The Inspector's forefinger shot out. "That girl is in your pay!" he rasped.

"Sure!" said Mike, running up his eyebrows. "Why the excitement?... Since yesterday morning only," he added pointedly, "She called me up at my office to tell me Mrs. Ware was missing, and was the information worth a ten spot to me? I'm a newspaperman. I was glad to give her the money, and to offer her the same for other bits of exclusive information."

"That's all right if that was all. But it started before yesterday."

"Oh, a kiss behind the door," said Mike. "I'd do that for any pretty girl."

"Where there's smoke there's fire," said the Inspector heavily. "What the whole town is saying can't be wrong. I advise you to take this more serious, Mike."

"I can't, Inspector. Why, if I was mixed up in this old woman's death, would I be spending all my waking hours trying to solve the mystery?"

"It's a clever dodge. Wouldn't be the first time it was tried on."

"Ask Radigan if I haven't worked hard on this case."

"I have asked him."

"You know a lot more about it than you ever told me," growled Radigan.

"Well, there are things that a man doesn't tell anybody. But I was on the square with you."

"Oh, yeah?"

"In the beginning, you were convinced that the woman died from natural causes; you all were. It was I who kept the case open."

"Oh, you were smart," said Radigan bitterly. "Nobody would deny that!"

"This is just foolishness," said Mike. "There is no evidence."

"We have evidence," said the Inspector grimly.

"What is it?"

"All in good time. You might tell us first what you were doing Tuesday night."

"Sure. I attended the Sloan dinner at the St. Regis. Left at ten o'clock. Saw the last act of the Gilbert Miller first night at the Booth. Then to Jack and Charlie's and to the Stork Club. Talked with people at both places. Joined the Paley's party at El Morocco at twelve-thirty."

"How long did you stay with them?"

"About an hour."

"What time did you get home?"

"About three-thirty."

The Inspector smiled disagreeably. "And between one-thirty and three-thirty?"

"That's my affair," said Mike. "I could lie to you but I won't. I'm not going to say anything."

"Sure, sure," said the Inspector, with heavy sarcasm. Always the gentleman, of course. Can't divulge the lady's name.... It's not good enough, Mike. On Tuesday night at one forty-five you were seen entering the service door of the building where Mrs. Ware's apartment is."

"That's a lie," said Mike. "At one forty-five I was much more agreeably engaged."

"You'll have to prove it."

"On the contrary, you'll have to prove that I wasn't.... Who told you I entered that house?"

"I'm looking for information, Mike, not handing it out."

Mike smiled. "That means you don't know. It was an anonymous tip; over the phone, I take it. And I bet I know where it came from."

"I'm not saying whether it was or not," said the Inspector. "You're familiar with police work; you know that tips are always valuable to us."

"Sure. But anonymous tips are not evidence. You've got to dig up corroboration. I wish you luck of it."

The inspectorial forefinger shot out again, and for a while they had it back and forth, hammer and tongs. Mike had no difficulty in keeping up his end; he had seen too many poor devils subjected to this sort of bulldozing. He knew the technique. Moreover, it was clear that the Inspector had not even a phony case against him. Finally Stillson, very red in the face, said:

"That's all now."

"Am I under arrest?" asked Mike ironically.

"Don't try to play with me," rasped the Inspector, "or you soon will be!... I'll talk to you again tomorrow."

Mike took out his little book. "At what hour?" he asked politely.

The Inspector struck his desk. "Any time I please, see?"

Mike left the office smiling—and inwardly wild with rage. There were some reporters hanging about downstairs. They waited for him with curious expressions, half friendly, half derisive. It was a novel experience for them to interview one of themselves in this building.

"Hello, Mike! What's the dope?... We're for you, Mike. They haven't got anything on you or you wouldn't be walking out alone.... Tell us your side of it, Mike."

Mike knew very well that it would be the part of wisdom to pause and chat with them. They were disposed to be friendly. But he couldn't do it; he was too full of rage against the world. "Sorry, fellows, nothing to say," he muttered, pushing through them. He never looked around, but he could picture their meaning grins behind his back.

Hailing a cab in the street, he had himself driven to his own flat. It didn't lessen his rage any to find a detective loitering across the street. It was not a man that Mike knew, but with his neat, sober dress, cagey eyes and broad-soled shoes, it was impossible to mistake him for other than he was.

Mike, who disliked hotels, had found a retreat after his own heart in a dignified Victorian dwelling on Lexington Avenue in the Murray Hill district. He occupied the rear of the first floor and a couple of additional rooms in the basement. Here he lived in great comfort, surrounded by his own Early Victorian treasures, and waited upon (when he desired it) by the adoring Takaku, who looked on Mike as the king of men. There was no elevator in the old house, and no hallboy to spy on the tenants. The rooms were somewhat unconventionally arranged, because you entered the bedroom and passed through it into the long living room which occupied a rear extension to the original building. It had a fireplace and the view of an ailanthus tree in the yard. Downstairs, there was a kitchen and dining room, so that Mike was able to give a little dinner at home when he had a mind to.

Takaku was a treasure. Valet, butler, cook, he was equal to any emergency. The arrangement that Mike had with him suited both to a T. Takaku kept a little store on Madison Avenue where he sold Japanese art and curios, but since the Japanese had become so unpopular, business had fallen away, and the little man was very thankful for the stipend that Mike paid him. He came every day at noon to clean up the place and see to Mike's clothes, and departed a couple of hours later. But he was always available for additional time when Mike wanted him.

They didn't meet often, but kept up a regular correspondence through the medium of the typewriter on Mike's desk. Mike wrote out his instructions for Takaku and left them in the machine; and Takaku left his answer in the machine when any was required. Takaku was the master of a picturesque style. His spelling was perfect because he always had a dictionary in his pocket. From dictionary and newspapers, he had acquired an extensive vocabulary, but his notions of English syntax were a little sketchy. There was a letter in the machine now.

Mr. Mike Sir

Please, so-called lady come today. Insert herself through door. I hesitate throw out because if woman

make great cry, what they do to Japanese man? Claim she sent by Star newspaper. Ask multitude questions; I make out dumb. She walk through rooms, look at everything and write down. But I not let her open any drawers. Over my dead body, I say. Please, if your Honor extend approval, I order chain put on door.

Your obedient servant,

Takaku.

Mike, in a rage, reached for the telephone. He knew the city editor of the *Star* tabloid, and he felt that it would be a pleasure to give him hell. But he drew his hand back again. Why provide the *Star* with an additional story?

He paced up and down his living room struggling to see clearly. After a while he cooled down sufficiently to realize that it would be fatal to sulk in his tent under a charge like this. Though he felt that he hated the whole race of mankind, it was necessary to go out and show himself among them and play the fool, as usual. He shuffled over the invitations on his desk. Mr. and Mrs. Van Benthuyzen, 270 Park Avenue, cocktails, six o'clock. They were conspicuous people; it would do.

He dressed with particular care; the black jacket and gray trousers he had had made in Paris—a man did not ordinarily patronize French tailors, but the cut of these garments was just *outré* enough to be smart and amusing. With them he wore the double-breasted waistcoat he had himself brought back into fashion. This one was dove-colored, bound with black braid. He had spats to match it and a gray Homburg made on a new block, the first of its style to be shown in New York. In his lapel he stuck the gardenia that was his trade-mark after office hours. Takaku put a fresh supply in the *Frigidaire* every day.

As he drove away from his door he looked through the rear window of his taxi and saw the detective following in the next car. Much good may it do him, Mike thought; he's only wasting the taxpayers' money. When he crossed the Park Avenue sidewalk at 270, a boy thrust the latest edition of a tabloid under his eyes and he read in staring type: MIKE AT HEADQUARTERS. The balance of the first page was filled with a photograph of his scowling self that enraged him afresh.

He enjoyed a lurid success at the Van Benthuyzen's foolish party. A new kind of fame clung around him today. All talk ceased when he entered the rooms, and immediately afterwards everybody started making up to him. It was sickening because he knew very well what they had been saying before he came, and what they would say when he had gone. He exulted in the fascinated eyes of the women and the fawning smiles of the men—but it didn't make him feel any better. In a man like Mike, pain manifests itself in the form of rage, but it is pain just the same. He hated the whole roomful of them and stared them down one after another, daring them with his eyes to bring up the subject of the Ware case. Nobody had the courage to do so; Mike's smile was too forbidding. The more cocktails he drank, the sorer he got. If this keeps up, he thought, I *will* kill somebody, just to get square.

Chapter 13

Just after Mike had returned to his flat to dress for dinner, Radigan came. The Lieutenant's honest phiz had undergone another change of expression; he now looked like a schoolboy caught in mischief.

"Well, Mike," he said self-consciously.

Mike was not disposed to relent. "What can I do for you now?" he asked.

"Got to talk to you," mumbled Radigan. "Can I come in?"

"Surely."

Mike took him into the living room and gave him a drink because he wanted one himself. Radigan obviously was having a hard time coming to the point, and Mike left it to him. Mike said:

"Excuse me if I start dressing. I'm going to be late as it is. I'll leave the door open. I can hear all you say."

There was a long silence from the living room while Mike was pulling off his clothes, and he smiled to himself. Radigan was evidently on the grid; well, he could damned well stay there. Finally he heard Radigan say: "Nice place you got here, Mike."

"Not bad. Not bad. It suits me."

Another silence.

Finally Radigan appeared in the doorway. "Damn it all, Mike, I'm sorry!" he blurted out.

"God bless my soul!" said Mike. "And you a cop? This will never do!"

"Aah!" growled Radigan. "Can't you see I'm sorry? What do you want to razz me for?"

"Sorry for what?"

"Because this afternoon I thought you done it. I went to the Inspector with the story, and it got in the papers and all. I know better now."

"What has brought about this miracle?"

"Quit your razzing, can't you? I feel bad enough already.... I'll tell you. About half an hour ago I was called to the phone. I was still at Headquarters...."

"Working on the Mike Speedon case!"

"Cut it out!... It was a woman. She asked me if I'd stay there until she got down, and I said sure, and she came down. She's a peach, Mike! A peach! You know who I mean."

Mike shrugged and held out his hands.

"She was absolutely on the level. Gave me her name and all. She said she had just read in the paper that you were suspected of the Ware murder because you refused to tell where you were on Tuesday night, so she felt it was up to her to come forward and tell that you were with her."

Mike's attention was sharply caught then. "My God!" he murmured.... "*Her!*"

"She said she hoped I could keep it to myself because it would just about wreck her if it was published..."

"Sure, it would!"

"... But if there had to be a showdown, she would come forward and testify."

Mike was staring at Radigan like a man transfixed. A pleasant warm current was stirring in his breast. "After all," he murmured, "there are women who are on the square!"

"Maybe she's lying," said Radigan, "a woman will always lie for one man, but..."

"That's the wonderful part of it," Mike interrupted; "I am not the one man in the world for her. I was merely a diversion, you understand, *pour passer le temps*..."

"Aah! speak English!"

"Have you told the Inspector?"

Radigan scowled. "What do you think I am? He would make her tell her story to him. I wouldn't want to put her through that!"

"Good boy!" said Mike warmly.

"What's bothering me now," Radigan went on, "is how to let the press know that we haven't a thing against you."

"The heck with them!" said Mike. "Let them spin their yarns. What do I care as long as I have a real friend or two back of me. Like yourself, for instance, and the woman who came to you." Mike stood with hanging arms, having entirely forgotten his dressing. "It took nerve for her to go to the police!" he murmured.

Radigan eyed his naked torso approvingly. "Gee! you'd make a dandy recruit on the force.... You'd better get a move on or you'll be late for your dinner."

Mike came to. "Have you eaten, Rad?"

"No."

"Then *à bas* big shirt fronts! I'm going to put on my working clothes and eat at Bonifacio's with you."

"But if you've got a date..."

"No! It isn't every day that a man is accused of murder. I'm the most famous man in New York tonight! They can't expect to capture me for their footling dinners!"

"You're talking crazy!"

"Not so crazy as I sound, old omadhaun! You and me have a job on our hands. I turned up some new leads today and I reckon you did, too. We've got to put our findings together, and dope out the answer."

Soon afterwards, in a booth at Bonifacio's, the two were discussing a dish of troglie. "Boy! this is A-1 chow," said Radigan. "Like fried clams, sort of. What the heck is it, Mike?"

Mike waited until Radigan had cleared his plate. "Octopus," he said wickedly.

"O my God!" cried the Lieutenant. "That's a dirty trick to play on a man! I see them things on the fish stalls every time I go down First Avenue. Give me some wine, quick!"

When they had finished eating, Mike told Radigan what had happened in the Ware apartment that day. When his turn came, Radigan said:

"I guess you doped out for yourself why I had Cummings down to Headquarters this morning."

Mike shook his head. "I figured you were putting up some kind of game on him."

"I had the real Cummings in the audience at the line-up to give the fake Cummings the once-over when I brought him in. He told me afterwards that he had met our man nine or ten months ago when they were both hunting jobs. The fake Cummings made up to him in an employment office—not Mrs. Sully's, and treated him to a drink after, and for a while they used to eat together and sit in each other's rooms. The fake Cummings was then passing under the name of Wilson. Their talk was mostly about jobs, naturally; they showed each other their references.

"The real Cummings was struck by the questions his friend 'Wilson' was always asking him. Wilson asked him hundreds of questions about a butler's duties, and it seemed funny that he didn't know the answers already, but Wilson explained that service was very different in Australia, being a new country. The real Cummings recommended a butler's manual to Wilson that would tell him all such things. This book was found in our Cummings' possession, you remember, and bears the marks of frequent thumbing. After a while, the real Cummings said, 'Wilson' disappeared, and he had never heard from him after."

"This proves," said Mike, "that as long ago as last winter our Cummings was already plotting to get into Mrs. Ware's household."

"Sure. I am convinced that Cummings is our best bet."

"Maybe so; but if it was the jewels he was after, why should he wait six months before lifting them? He had plenty of chances before that. And why is he still sticking around? No, Rad, you only have to take a look at that man's eyes to see that he's playing a deeper game. What is it?"

"That's what we've got to find out."

"Sure, and while working on him, we mustn't neglect the other leads. Bethesda Prior is not cleared yet, though I admit *at this moment* she doesn't look very promising. But something may turn up that will change the whole set-up. Also, the second man, young Alfred, is mixed up in it somehow; it looks now as if he was Cummings' confederate and as if they had quarreled over the swag. Then there is Attorney MacKelcan, he's a deep one, always trying to persuade you he's a fool. He stood to gain nothing under the will, but he's playing his game, too. And finally there is Norbert Besson. He had the best reason in the world for wiping out the old woman."

"How?"

"As the fiancé of a woman sixty-seven years old he was a laughing stock of the cafés—he's not twenty-seven himself, and it galled him. The moment he believed that the will in his favor was signed, he would be wild to rid himself of such an incubus. Imagine having to make passionate love to a wrinkled old woman every day! The moment he was in possession of the sixty million, Norbert knew he would have the laugh on those who had laughed at him. That's the way of the world."

"A pretty dirty world, if you ask me," said Radigan.

"All right, old stove-in-bottom! I didn't make it."

"The defect in that theory," said Radigan, "is that Norbert is as boneless as an earthworm..."

"Not entirely," said Mike, "if I can depend on my informants."

Radigan ignored the interruption. "I can't see a punk like Norbert plotting and carrying out a cold-blooded murder."

"Neither can I. But that's where Mrs. Laval comes in. There is nothing slack-twisted about her! She has a stake in it too, remember. She is infatuated with Norbert and was enraged against the old woman for separating her from her heart

throb. Maud Laval has no money of her own, and is therefore forced to hang on to her rich husband. But if she was able to help Norbert to sixty million, she could then divorce Payne Laval and marry Norbert. That's what she would figure, anyhow. As a matter of fact, if Norbert got his hands on that much money, I doubt if he would saddle himself with a woman so much older. Did you ever see Mrs. Laval, Rad?"

"No."

"She's a lulu! I must introduce you. There's a kind of antique wickedness in that woman that you don't often see in these degenerate times. Lucrezia Borgia stuff. So long as she can pull the wool over Payne Laval's eyes, she absolutely doesn't give a damn what she does.... Think this over, Rad. Two persons who were at the party on Tuesday night have told us that Norbert Besson and Maud Laval *both* disappeared for a considerable time."

"Mrs. Ware would never have received Mrs. Laval in her private sitting room."

"No. She hated the woman. And Norbert knew better than to take his mistress up there. But Mrs. Ware's suite consists of three rooms with communicating doors. Why couldn't Mrs. Laval have been waiting in the dressing room while Norbert went into the boudoir to prepare the way? He had a drink with the old woman, say. Hers was loaded with barbitol, and when she went to sleep the other woman came in and did the job. A hypodermic syringe would be just the sort of weapon a woman like Mrs. Laval might choose."

"What about the jewels?"

"The heck with that. It's the murderer I'm after."

"Sounds plausible," said Radigan, "but how the hell can we prove they went to Mrs. Ware's suite if nobody saw them?"

"That's up to us. We've got to concentrate on the Laval-Besson angle."

"I haven't neglected it. I haven't had a chance to tell you yet. The look I had at Norbert's correspondence made me want to see more. I searched his rooms while he was at dinner last night."

"Without a warrant?"

"We have to take that chance sometimes. The house detective at the Bathurst is a friend of mine, and I persuaded him that it was in the public interest. We got Norbert and Mrs. Laval placed at dinner, and we knew they would be good for an hour."

"What did you find?"

"A whole lot of stuff, but nothing as far as I can see that helps us much."

"Does he own a pocket flash?"

"No.... There was a whole pack of letters from Mrs. Ware, and from other women, too; each woman's letters tied in a separate bundle."

"That's Norbert's capital," said Mike.

"But nothing from Mrs. Laval. Not a line!"

"She's too smart to write letters."

"I didn't bother about the other women's letters; there wasn't time and there were none of recent date anyhow. I read everything that Mrs. Ware had written him. Although she was seeing him all the time, she wrote him near every day. A lot of lallygagging that would sicken you, but nothing that applies to this case."

"What else did you find?"

"Well, for one thing, a ring that Mrs. Ware had given him."

"How do you know it was from her?"

"On the inside of it was engraved: 'To N. B. from F. W., October 27th.'"

"Three weeks ago. That was when they announced their engagement.... What kind of ring, Rad?"

"An unusual-looking ring. It had a flat, oval stone, dark green in color with red flecks in it. A very handsome setting."

"Bloodstone. You don't see them often nowadays.... Were there any references in Mrs. Ware's letters to this ring?"

"One reference. She said: 'I have ordered the ring from Tiffany's.'"

"By God! we may have something here," said Mike. "It takes time to make a ring. What was the date of the letter in which she spoke of the ring?"

"I couldn't tell you," said Radigan. "It didn't strike me as of any particular importance."

"Ah, you dope!" groaned Mike. "And I was just on the verge!"

Radigan didn't mind, because it was said with a grin. "It was one of the later letters, because it was near the top of the pile."

"You should have taken the ring, Rad."

"Ahh! I didn't like to do that."

"But as long as you were in wrong, you might as well have been in a little wronger. It was a mistake for him to have kept the ring, and if he finds himself seriously suspected, he is certain to dispose of it.... Where did you find it?"

"In the middle drawer of his desk; on the right-hand side away at the back under some papers. It's in a little box."

Mike was silent for a moment or two, studying hard. Finally he looked at his watch. "Only nine o'clock. Drink up your wine and let's go."

"Where?"

"Around to the Ware apartment. If we can get hold of Kinsey we may learn something. The old lady talked pretty freely to her.... Wait a minute! I've got a better idea. Take your time over your wine...."

"What the hell!..."

"The person who called you up today and tipped you off that I had been seen entering the service door on Tuesday night, was it a man or a woman?"

"I took it for a woman, but it might have been a man speaking high. It was a whispering voice, like."

"I think I know who it was, but I might be mistaken. Maybe it was somebody who was interested in driving a wedge between you and me, Rad."

"That's possible."

"In that case, we ought not to be seen too much together. We ought to let this person think we have been separated. You sit here over your wine and I'll drop around to the apartment. Back in half an hour."

"Okay, Mike."

Cummings admitted Mike to the Ware apartment. A flicker of surprise passed over his masked face. "Anything new, Mr. Speedon?"

"The new thing is that the police are determined to hang the murder on me," said Mike casually.

"That is ridiculous, Mr. Speedon. You weren't here at all that night. I would be glad to testify to that, sir."

"Thanks, Cummings. You and Kinsey between you may be able to save me. I want to see Kinsey if she's still up."

"She has retired to her room, sir, but I will request her to come down immediately."

"Oh, don't do that. Just warn her I'm here, and ask her to throw something around her. I want to ask her just one question."

Mike didn't trust Cummings any farther than he could see him, and when the butler started away, he coolly followed. Cummings didn't say anything. They went up in the elevator together. Kinsey's room was at the back of the second floor. Some parley through the door was necessary before Cummings was permitted to open it. As Mike was within hearing, the butler had to deliver his message straight. Kinsey was scandalized at the idea of admitting a strange gentleman to her bedroom, but her curiosity was stronger than her sense of propriety, and, after some hasty adjustments were made, Mike was bidden to enter. The elderly lady's maid was sitting up in bed with what the English call a "woolly," pink in color, thrown over her head and clutched around her bony breast. Cummings stood by with the evident intention of chaperoning the meeting.

"Thank you very much," said Mike with a hard look that the butler could not face out. He retired, bowing.

Mike made sure that the door was tightly closed. "Let it stand open!" said Kinsey sharply.

"Surely," said Mike, opening the door. He knew better than to argue with an apprehensive woman. "Let's speak low, though," he said, approaching the bed. "All the doors of this house seem to have ears!"

Kinsey had picked up a good bit of American slang. "You said it!" she agreed primly.

"I wanted to ask you a question or two...." began Mike.

She didn't wait for him to finish. "I shan't say another word! I've talked too much already! I'll answer no questions except those put to me by the police!"

"That's very sensible of you," said Mike smoothly. "Everybody seems to want to rush into print. But I could see from the first that you were different. It's so rare that you find a woman with the finer feelings." He sat down on the edge of the bed. Kinsey's mouth dropped open, but he paid no attention. Experience had taught him that no matter how they may carry on, prudes love to be shocked. He drew out his cigarette case. "Will you join me since it's after working hours?"

"I don't indulge," said Kinsey sourly, but she watched him lighting up with fascinated eyes. Perhaps in daydreams she had pictured a handsome man sitting on her bed smoking a cigarette.

Mike proceeded on the theory that no woman is too old or too bony to be cajoled. "It's so nice to have a quiet chat with you. You remind me of Jane Austen, the novelist. Have you read her works?"

"My favorite author," said Kinsey stiffly.

Lucky hit! thought Mike. He went on: "You're so quiet and reserved and penetrating. I can see that you are not easily

deceived. I feel that you can read me like an open book!"

Kinsey found his smile irresistible. She melted fast. "I didn't believe those stories about you in the newspapers, Mr. Speedon."

"I knew *you* wouldn't, Miss Kinsey. It's so good to feel that you have one friend."

"I'm not saying that I'll answer your questions," said Kinsey, "but you can let me hear what they are."

"Did you know that Mrs. Ware had had a ring made for Mr. Besson?"

"Certainly. She showed it to me. A bloodstone in a very handsome setting."

Mike concealed his eagerness. "When did she give it to him?"

"She never had a chance to give it to him. It was sent home from the jeweler's on Tuesday afternoon. It was waiting for her when she got home, and she showed it to me."

"Didn't she send it to Mr. Besson afterwards?"

"No. She said she wanted to slip it on his finger herself. It was still here late that night. After I had dressed her and she had gone downstairs, it was still in the drawer of her dressing table. I saw it when I was cleaning up. In the morning it was gone, of course. The murderer got it with her other jewels."

"Thanks," said Mike, rising quickly.

"Oh!..." said Kinsey. "You haven't finished your cigarette."

"I'll be seeing you," he said, making for the door.

He hastened back to Radigan at Bonifacio's.

After telling his story, he said: "So now we have positive evidence that Norbert Besson was with Mrs. Ware on Tuesday night during the party."

"My God!" murmured Radigan. "Could a man accept a ring from a woman and kill her immediately afterwards? Or stand by and let another kill her?"

"Why not? If their plans had been carefully made in advance, they wouldn't let a little thing like a ring stop them."

Chapter 14

On the following morning, when he got down to the *Recorder-Press*, Mike discovered that the tide had turned in his favor. He was asked to come up to Mr. Wade's private office, where he found Warner Bassett, City Editor, closeted with the big boss. Mr. Wade was noncommittal, Warner's greeting friendly.

"Mike," he said, with studied casualness, "on the level, was it you who liquidated Old Lady Ware?"

Mike felt a sudden warmth toward the harassed and overdriven editor. A square-shooter! "It was not," he said, as offhanded as the other.

Warner turned to their employer. "Well, there you are, Mr. Wade. I have no more to say. Have I your permission to go ahead?"

"Go ahead," said Wade.

While Warner was leading Mike down the hall, he explained that they had decided it would be good newspaper policy while the rest of the press was still raising a hue and cry against Mike, for the *Recorder-Press* to come out in his defense. He gave Mike a clap on parting, saying: "We're putting our money on you, Mike. God help you, if you let us down!"

"You're taking a risk," said Mike.

He returned to his own office feeling much better.

Later, in his flat, while Mike was dressing for the afternoon, Sanford MacKelcan called. He had visited Mike's rooms on several occasions, and he always said about the same things. "Man! you've got a smart place here! So much more distingué than one of these damn new hotels that are all alike. There is class to this! Do you ever eat at home?"

"Oh, yes. There's a dining room and kitchen downstairs, and my little Jap's a good cook when I require it."

"Man! I bet you have many a snug little party here just for two, eh boy?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? That's the line to take. Man! I wish I could be young again!"

He drifted around the living room, pawing the different objects in a manner that Mike detested. However, he let him run on while he waited to find out what he had really come for. After a while it came out.

"A very strange thing, Mike," MacKelcan said in a voice of exaggerated solemnity. "Extraordinary! My London associate cables me that he can't find James Fawcett. It seems that the London address Fawcett gave us is that of a small tobacco store which receives letters for its customers. Fawcett has been in the habit of sending a child to call for my letters and remittances. The family is not known in the neighborhood. And so many thousands of money orders pass through the London General Post Office every day, there is little chance of tracing him there. My agent is continuing the search, of course."

After he had gone, Mike sat scowling and thinking it over. What the devil was MacKelcan up to? It was to his interest, of course, to delay the appearance of the heir as long as possible; in the interim the attorney was in full control of the estate. Had he ever cabled to England? On the other hand, the story of Mrs. Ware's death and the Englishman who had inherited sixty million dollars must have been published in all the London papers. Why hadn't Fawcett come forward of his own account? Was there such a man as Fawcett? Perhaps MacKelcan had invented him for his own purposes. Thus he could go on handling the estate indefinitely. There was no evidence that Fawcett existed except on MacKelcan's say-so. MacKelcan might easily have put over an imaginary nephew on Mrs. Ware during the days when she was under his

influence.

Mike had good friends in London, and as a result of his cogitations he started a little investigation of his own by cable.

Afterwards, he taxied up to the Ware apartment to see what was doing. Somewhat to his surprise, the door was opened by Adele; this was supposed to be the duty of a manservant. There was nobody in sight, and Mike as a matter of habit turned up the girl's chin, and saluted her fresh lips. It was cheaper than tipping her—besides being pleasanter. He asked where Cummings was.

"I think he's up in his room."

This was odd, because Cummings was on the job every moment, early and late.

Mike knocked on the door of the office and was invited to enter. Day Radnor was at her desk, looking as crisp as a flower that had opened an hour before. He searched her face to discover how the newspaper stories of the past two days had affected her. The old expression of friendly mockery was unchanged and he felt better. Day said:

"I see that you are your own man again today."

"I wasn't fired," said Mike. "On the contrary, the *Recorder-Press* is starting a campaign in my behalf."

"They would," said Day. "You are one of their important assets, and they can't afford to let you be depreciated."

"Don't you think I have any friends?"

"You don't need friends."

"Oh, yeah? You're not half so cynical as you like to make out."

Day laughed and let it go at that.

Mike described the events of the past twenty-four hours. A man had the comfortable assurance in talking to Day that he was safe with her. It wasn't necessary to swear her to secrecy. She was secretive anyhow.

"I'm not usually vindictive," she said when he was through, "but it would please me well to see you hang the murder on Norbert Besson. He affects me like a bad smell."

There was a tap on the door and Adele entered. She avoided looking at Mike. "Did you ring, Miss Radnor?" she asked demurely.

"No," said Day. Her cool look at the girl suggested: And you know quite well that I did not.

Adele was not in the least abashed by it. "Pardon me," she said, "I must have read the indicator wrong." She went out again.

"Your girl-friend is evidently looking for you," said Day to Mike. "You'd better go to her."

Mike was determined not to let Day have any change out of him today. "Reckon I had," he said, rising at once. "I'll be seeing you."

"Tell her," said Day, "that she has nothing to fear from me."

There was an acid edge to her voice that delighted Mike. "Oh, she doesn't mind you," he said, and went out well-pleased because he had insinuated the last word.

Adele was making believe to busy herself in the foyer. "Cummings and Alfred are at it again," she whispered to Mike. "Up on the top floor. You'd better go up if you want to find out what it's all about."

"Thanks," said Mike, making for the elevator.

He ascended to the game room on the roof of the building, with its garden terrace outside. The vast room was in perfect order, but it had the forlorn look of a place that is not used. The garden was wintry. As soon as he stepped out of the elevator, Mike could hear distant sounds of distress. A creature somewhere was moaning in pain. He opened a service door and heard it louder; a man's voice, a young voice, rising to a suppressed shriek of agony; dying away in a moan.

Running across the pantry, he opened another door. The voice had fallen silent. In front of him lay a corridor with several rooms opening off one side. These were the quarters of the menservants. The door of the first room stood open. It was empty. In it stood a vast, old-fashioned brass bedstead, Mrs. Ware's conjugal bed that she had brought with her to her apartment for sentimental reasons, and had stuck away up here. This room was not used. Mrs. Ware's present chauffeur was a married man and slept at home.

The next room Mike knew, from the reports of the police search, was Cummings'. The door stood open likewise, and the room was empty. Suddenly the agonized male voice was raised again, almost at his elbow, it seemed. It was Alfred's voice, coming from the adjoining room, broken and quivering.

"Oh! don't do it again!... I didn't, I tell you! I swear I didn't!... Oh God! don't hurt me any more!"

Mike ran to the door. He would have liked to listen for a while, but he could not stand those sounds of pain. The door was locked. He pounded on it, and an instant silence fell on the room inside. Mike pounded again. "Open the door!" he commanded, "or by God I'll smash it in!"

After a moment, the key turned and the door was thrown open. Mike found himself faced by Cummings, white-faced and sullen. The butler had thrown off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves; Mike was astonished by the development of his hairy forearms. Where did a house servant get such muscles? The ugly pallor of Cummings' face and the glitter in his eyes, struck a momentary fear into Mike. Can I handle him alone? he asked himself. Behind Cummings he saw Alfred collapsed in a chair with his chin on his breast, apparently half swooning.

"What the devil is going on here?" demanded Mike.

Cummings struggled hard to recover his usual smoothness, but he was breathing fast and his nostrils were dilated; the savagery in his eyes bordered on insanity. "I'm sorry you heard this, Mr. Speedon.... This man is a bad servant.... I'm trying to teach him."

"Pretty primitive methods," said Mike.

"I have found that it works very well, sir, with the young," murmured Cummings.

"What did he do?"

"He will not obey me, sir."

"In what way?" Mike persisted.

"Oh, it's just a matter of household discipline, sir. It's not worth your attention."

Mike took no stock in this. He addressed Alfred. "You tell me what is the matter."

"Don't notice it, Mr. Speedon, sir," mumbled the broken wretch from his chair. "Mr. Cummings ain't to blame. He's mistaken in what he thinks. I'm a good boy, Mr. Speedon."

"*What* does Cummings think?"

"Don't notice it, Mr. Speedon. I can take it, sir. There won't be no more trouble. I'll work my fingers to the bone!"

Cummings listened to this with a hideous smile. Mike thought: My God! a hyena! Cummings was saying smoothly:

"If Alfred considers himself badly used, he is always free to go. Mr. MacKelcan will be glad to save his wages. There is not enough work for all now."

"Oh, no, Mr. Cummings, sir," stammered Alfred. "I'm satisfied here. I got no kick coming."

For some reason this answer angered Cummings afresh. Losing all self-control, he snarled, "Well, I'm sick of it, do you hear? You can go. Pack your things and get out!"

An awful look of panic came into the young man's face. "Oh, God, no! Don't say it, Mr. Cummings! I ain't done nothing! I'm a good boy! You can't do this to me! Don't turn me off, Mr. Cummings. I got no place to go. Give me another chance!"

"Pack your things!" snarled Cummings. "If you're not out in an hour I'll throw you out!"

Alfred fell forward out of the chair to his knees and scrabbled to Mike's feet. Alfred was a big, handsome, young fellow and it was horrible to see him cringe like this. "Please, Mr. Speedon, speak a word for me," he pleaded. "I'm a good boy, Mr. Speedon. I don't give no trouble...."

"I've got nothing to do with it," said Mike. "It's between you and Cummings."

Alfred scrambled to his feet and, snatching up his coat, ran out of the room, struggling into the sleeves. Following him, they heard him run down the service stairs. He did not go on down the second flight, but ran forward through the corridor toward Mrs. Ware's private suite. He entered the boudoir. Cummings and Mike were not far behind him.

In the boudoir Sanford MacKelcan was seated at Mrs. Ware's desk, going over her papers. Alfred was already in the middle of his plea. "... I'm a good boy, Mr. MacKelcan, sir. I'm a hard worker. I won't make no trouble. Ask him not to turn me off, sir. I got no place to go!"

"What's this? What's this?" blustered MacKelcan. "Do I understand you have discharged him, Cummings?"

Cummings had pretty well recovered his smoothness. "Should I have consulted you first, sir?" His tone was respectful, but his scorn and hatred of MacKelcan were apparent.

"Not at all! Not at all!" said the attorney, blowing out his cheeks. "You are responsible for the servants. What did he do?"

"He's not a good servant, sir. His particular offenses are not important, but I thought as there was no longer work for all I might as well...."

"Quite! Quite!" MacKelcan had no more love for Cummings than Cummings had for MacKelcan, and the attorney was not sorry for this opportunity to exhibit his superior authority. "You are entirely right, Cummings, but after all, we're not exactly obliged to pinch the pennies, you know. If the young fellow's offense is not serious, I think we might keep him on until he has time to place himself elsewhere."

Cummings' face was like a mask. "Very well, Mr. MacKelcan, just as you say, sir." Over his shoulder he said coolly to Alfred: "Go back to your work." Alfred beat it hastily. Cummings said to MacKelcan: "Will you be dining here tonight, sir?"

"Not tonight, Cummings," said the attorney grandly. "After all, I have a home of my own."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

Cummings softly footed it out of the room, and Mike followed him. He wanted an explanation of the extraordinary scene he had witnessed, but he was not anxious for MacKelcan to hear it.

"Cummings," he said, "you and I are supposed to be working together. On the level, what is behind this trouble with Alfred?"

Cummings had the effrontery to look surprised. "Nothing but what appears on the surface, Mr. Speedon. A willful, careless servant. He's had a good fright now, and he'll do better for a while."

Mike thought: Well, the hell with you! I'll find out in my own way. He went on downstairs and out, having a date to meet Radigan.

Chapter 15

After a hasty lunch, Mike and Radigan taxied to the Hotel Bathurst. Radigan's friend, the hotel detective, said that Norbert Besson was in his rooms. "But don't tell him I told you," he added. Mike and the Lieutenant proceeded directly to the twelfth floor. From the handle of the door to Norbert's suite hung a card reading: "Don't disturb." Nevertheless, Radigan knocked. From within, Norbert's angry voice answered:

"Stay out! Can't you read?"

The Bathurst was one of the hotels that maintain a telephone switchboard on each floor, with a girl to operate it, and incidentally to watch the comings and goings. This young woman, who was sitting near by, said to Radigan severely: "If you're not expected, you should phone before you come up."

Radigan showed her his badge. "I'll trouble you to have the door opened, Miss."

The alarmed girl phoned down to the office for instructions, and was told that if the police demanded admittance she must obey. She summoned a chambermaid, and told her to open the door. Mike stood back out of sight. Radigan took a look into the room and beckoned to him to follow. The handsomely furnished sitting room was empty. From the bedroom alongside came Norbert's voice:

"Who's there?"

Radigan went on into the bedroom, while Mike remained in the sitting room by the open door. He heard Norbert say:

"You!... Who the devil let you in?"

"You shouldn't blame the servants," said Radigan dryly. "When I flashed my badge they had to open the door." He advanced farther into the bedroom. "Still in bed, I see."

"I'm under the doctor's care," snarled Norbert.

"Well! Well! I suppose it was the disappointment over Mrs. Ware's will that made you sick! It's just too bad, because you're going to feel sicker before I'm done with you!"

The listening Mike scowled. Clumsy work! If Radigan put the young fellow's back up, it would only give him the more strength to stand out.

"Don't get up," Radigan went on sarcastically. "It's more cosy-like, with you lying in bed. I'll sit here and you can make out I'm the doctor."

"What do you want?" asked Norbert defiantly.

"I want to know why you lied to me when I was here before."

"A dick can always insult a man and he has no comeback. I'm not aware that I lied to you."

"It won't pass, Bertie. I have the proof now, that you saw Mrs. Ware on Tuesday night and talked to her."

"That's a lie!"

"She was waiting in her sitting room for you to come up, and you went up. You were with her a good half hour."

"What proof have you?"

"Ah, wouldn't you like to know? You were the last person to see the old lady alive, and naturally we want to know what

you talked about."

Mike heard fear come into the young man's voice. "It's a lie, I tell you! There is no proof! There couldn't be! You're only bluffing!"

"You mean, nobody saw you go up. You took care of that, eh? However, there is a mute piece of testimony, my boy. Something that speaks louder than words."

"That's an old police trick," said Norbert. "I'm not frightened by it." There was a silence. Mike heard certain little sounds that suggested Norbert was lighting a cigarette.

"If you're not frightened, why does your hand shake?" asked Radigan.

"I told you I was sick. And this isn't doing me any good."

"You have a right to be sick. The old lady was kind to you. She did everything in the world for you. Her last gift to you was a ring, and as you took it from her, you killed her!"

"I did not! I did not!" cried Norbert.

"Then the person who was with you killed her, while you stood by and looked on."

"Nobody was with me!"

"Ha!" cried Radigan. "So you were there by yourself!"

"I was not there, and nobody was with me."

"Where was your girl-friend while you were upstairs talking to Mrs. Ware?"

Outside the door Mike shook his head in chagrin. What a bonehead question! Norbert instantly perceived the opening that Radigan had given him, and acted on it.

"As far as I can judge by your crude language, you are referring to Mrs. Laval. That lady is above scandal. It was a stupid party, and Mrs. Laval and I went up to the game room in the elevator where we could talk in quiet."

"Is that so? That doesn't account for the ring Mrs. Ware gave you. When did she give you the ring?"

"I never had a ring from her."

Mike, while still listening to what was being said in the next room, moved softly to the desk by the window. Easing out the flat drawer in the middle, he thrust in a hand and felt around. His fingers met with no hard object. He pulled the drawer farther out and turned over all the papers. There was no ring box. He shrugged in disappointment, thinking: Rad will never break him down now.

On his previous visit, Mike had noticed that, though this was Norbert's sitting room, he kept his evening clothes hanging in a closet just within the entrance door. Mike wanted to have a look at the coat Norbert had worn on Tuesday night. He disappeared into the closet and in a minute or two emerged, grinning and holding a tail coat rolled up under his arm.

After he had returned to his post beside the open door, the telephone in the bedroom rang. Norbert answered it, and Mike heard half of a brief conversation. "Hello!... Oh!... No. There's a man with me ... Radigan.... How can I?... Sure!" Suddenly Norbert's voice became very agitated, "No! No! You mustn't do it! You mustn't!... Hello! Hello!" He jiggled the instrument, but the connection was broken.

About three minutes later there was a tap on the bedroom door. "Don't pay any attention," whispered Norbert.

"Oh, we must see who it is," cried Radigan. Mike heard his heavy tread; heard him open the door; heard his confident

voice fail: "I ... I beg pardon, lady. I didn't know ..."

A voice answered as clear and brittle as glass: "Shut the door. And don't stand staring at me like that." Maud Laval! thought Mike. When she spoke again, she was beside Norbert's bed. "My poor Norbert!" However, there was not much tenderness in the glassy voice. Some whispering followed, and Radigan broke in uncomfortably:

"Look here, people, you can't ..."

Little Mrs. Laval evidently faced him like a lioness. Mike couldn't see her, but he could feel the electricity she discharged. "Is this Mr. Besson's private room?" she demanded.

"Why, sure, but ..."

"Is he under arrest?"

"No, but ..."

"Then leave us!"

Radigan was so flustered that he actually obeyed. Coming through the door, he faced Mike, hunching up his shoulders, spreading out his hands in a pantomime of helplessness. Mike wanted to laugh, but the situation was too serious. He sternly jerked his head toward the door, and his lips shaped the words: "Go on in there, and don't let her bluff you."

The moment Radigan reappeared, Maud Laval opened up on him. "What do you mean by this intrusion on a sick man? Have people in our position no protection from the brutality of the police? Must we submit to being treated like common criminals?"

"Wait a minute, lady! Brutality! I'm not going to take that ..."

"Be quiet! I'm not interested in your feelings. I came upstairs because Mr. Besson is obviously not in a fit state to be badgered. Put your questions to me, and I'll answer them."

"All right." Radigan's voice hardened. "Where were you on Tuesday night while Norbert was talking to Mrs. Ware?"

"Norbert, Officer?" Mike could picture how the penciled eyebrows ran up.

"Well, Mr. Besson," grumbled Radigan. "Where were you?"

"Mr. Besson didn't see Mrs. Ware on Tuesday night," she answered calmly.

"Then when did Mrs. Ware give him the ring?"

"He never had a ring from Mrs. Ware. He knew that she was having one made, but was not aware that it was finished."

"Then what did he understand from her letter to him Tuesday afternoon, saying that she had a surprise for him?"

"So you have been reading his private letters?"

"Never mind that. Answer the question."

"He didn't know what she meant by the surprise."

"And wasn't he curious to find out Tuesday night?"

"Yes. But Mrs. Ware was obviously indisposed on Tuesday night, and he thought he had better not disturb her. He's not like a policeman."

Radigan's voice grew harsh. "I'm sorry, lady, but somebody is lying. That ring was in the drawer of Mrs. Ware's dressing table up to twelve-thirty Tuesday night. And at eight o'clock Wednesday night it was lying in its box in the middle drawer of Norbert's desk in the next room."

"That's a ridiculous story!" said Mrs. Laval coolly. "How do you expect to prove it?"

"I saw the ring with my own eyes. I had it in my hands."

She pounced like a cat. "Were you provided with a search warrant?"

"No."

"Did you take the ring?"

"I did not."

"Why? Such an important piece of evidence!"

"I'm not a thief. I'm a detective officer trying to do his duty."

"Don't try too hard; you might injure yourself.... Shall we go in and see if the ring is there now?"

"It's not there," said Radigan sorely, "or you wouldn't make the offer."

"Really, Mr. whatever your name may be," drawled Mrs. Laval, "your story doesn't do much credit to your powers of invention. Even a detective is expected to think up something better than that."

"Ahh!..." growled Radigan.

The brittle voice shut him off. "Suppose there was a trial, would you have the face to go on the stand and tell such a flimsy tale?"

"I sure would!"

"Your superiors wouldn't allow it. It would bring too much discredit on the force. Searching a man's home in his absence without a warrant! That strikes at the very root of our liberties! And if you were allowed to testify, do you suppose any judge or jury would believe you? That you found a piece of evidence absolutely vital to your case, and you left it where it was, and it never could be found afterwards. You'd be laughed out of court, Mr. Lieutenant!" She laughed herself to show him what it would sound like.

Every time Radigan started to speak, she raised her voice and beat him down. There was a towering arrogance in the woman. When Mike saw the inevitable conclusion coming, he stole out of the sitting room and waited for Radigan by the elevators. He had Norbert's tail coat hidden under his own topcoat. The Lieutenant presently joined him, smoking with baffled rage like a soft coal furnace.

"Well, you balled up that situation nicely," said Mike.

"Go to hell!" growled Radigan. "I don't have to take that from you!"

Mike laughed. "You took it from the little woman, all right."

"Shut up, I tell you!"

"Why didn't you shut her up?"

The elevator door opened and they descended in silence.

When they reached the lobby, Radigan had cooled down a little. His voice was almost humble. "Ahh, forget it, Mike. I didn't mean nothing. I was just sore."

"That's all right," said Mike. "We need a drink now." He led Radigan into the bar.

Standing in front of the mahogany, Radigan muttered sorely: "I never was up against such a high society dame before. She put it all over me with her highy-tighty airs. Keep your place, my man, and all that. And her no more than a common strumpet, coming to the bedside of a man not her husband! Norbert had nothing on but his pajamas. The face of her, Mike! the face of her!"

Mike laughed. "They're all face! The trouble with you is, Rad, you're decent. It's gone out of style. The heck with her social position. She's only a woman like any other, and her methods are exactly the same as the street-walker you arrest on Sixth Avenue for soliciting."

"I'm not on the vice squad," growled Radigan, and Mike had to laugh again.

"They all talk loud and fast with the object of putting a man in the wrong. Why, damn it, you let her question *you!*"

"Well, if you think you can handle her any better, let's go back up and you show me!"

"No," said Mike. "We'd be at a hopeless disadvantage now. We've got to shift our ground. We'll execute a flank attack."

"What do you mean?"

"Let's go to her apartment and send for her to come up there."

Radigan stared. "She won't come."

"Oh, I think she will! I think she will!"

Mike's confidence was infectious and Radigan said: "All right, I'll try anything once.... Just let me telephone to Headquarters to see if anything has come in."

Chapter 16

When Radigan rejoined Mike at the bar, he said: "Dowell had made a report. He's the man who was assigned to tracing the sales of hypodermic syringes."

"Did he turn up anything?"

"Yes. Emory and Almond, well-known dealers in surgical instruments, state that they sold two syringes of the type wanted to Dr. Walter Patton on Friday last. That was four days before the murder. Dr. Patton is one of the best-known surgeons in the city. It was a mail order on the doctor's own letterhead. Dr. Patton is an old customer of the house, he runs an account there, and the mail clerk was perfectly familiar with his signature."

"These syringes were probably wanted for a legitimate purpose," put in Mike.

"Wait a minute. When Dr. Patton was asked about it, he said he had never ordered any syringes and had never received any. But when the order was showed to him he said it was certainly his letterhead and his signature. However, he was able to show that the body of the order, which had been typed, could not have been written on either of the machines in his office. The order was then submitted to our chemist at Headquarters, who reported that the original communication on this sheet had been erased with an acid, leaving only the signature, and the pretended order had then been written in above."

"How about the delivery of the syringes?"

"I'm coming to that. Dr. Patton was made to say in the order that he wanted to use these articles at home, and that they should be sent to him at a certain box in the Stamford post office. Dowell then chased up to Stamford and learned that this particular box was rented in the name of John Jones."

"Nice easy name to forget," put in Mike.

"It was rented four months ago," Radigan continued, "and the rent paid half a year in advance. The Stamford post office is a busy place, and none of the clerks had any recollection of what this Jones looked like. He had never been seen to empty the box, and in fact, the sorters said, when it was called to their attention, that they could scarcely remember ever having anything to put in that box. The little package containing the syringe would be addressed to Dr. Patton, naturally, but as the box number was plain, it would have been put there as a matter of routine. It was probably collected after hours. The section of the post office where the letter boxes are is always open."

"Man!" exclaimed Mike, "we're dealing with a superior scoundrel here! We'll have to bestir ourselves to get ahead of him—or her! He'll never return to this box now, of course."

"We must find out if Mrs. Laval is a patient of Dr. Patton's."

"That won't prove anything. Patton has thousands of patients."

"The Inspector told me to find out if you had ever been a patient of his," said Radigan slyly.

"I have not," said Mike. "Thank God, I'm no doctor's patient. I'm as healthy as a new-laid egg."

Mike paid for the drinks, and they taxied up town to the Laval address. It was in upper Fifth Avenue in that section that has been termed the Gold Coast, and not a great distance from the building where Mrs. Ware had lived. While it had not quite the cachet of the latter sumptuous building, it was still one of the choicest addresses in New York. Payne Laval was president of one of our oldest and most conservative banks. When they drew up at the door, Mike said:

"I can get in here easier by myself. You drive on to One Hundredth Street and back, and ask for me at the door of the Laval apartment."

"Okay," said Radigan. "This is your show."

Mike gave his name to the servant who opened the apartment door; the man knew who he was for house servants are the most assiduous readers of smart gossip. He said respectfully: "I'm sorry, sir, Mrs. Laval is not at home."

"Oh," said Mike nonchalantly, "I was talking to her a while ago, and I thought she'd be here by now.... I say," he went on, as if struck with a sudden thought, "what's your name?"

"Taplow, sir," murmured the butler, pleased to be noticed by the celebrity.

"Well, Taplow, Mrs. Laval is calling on a friend who lives at the Hotel Bathurst. It's suite number 1220. You might phone and ask if I'm to wait here for her. Tell her I want to show her a story that has been sent me."

The telephone was close by. While the man was getting his number, Mike carelessly tossed the tail coat he had been concealing on a bench, and his own topcoat on top of it. The servant stared, but said nothing.

Whatever Mrs. Laval may have thought of this telephone message, she was not one to take servants into her confidence. She received the message and answered it succinctly.

"You're to wait, sir, if you please," said the man, hanging up.

He ushered Mike into the living room. This was a superb apartment fifty feet long with a row of tall windows opening on a balcony with a stone balustrade. Central Park lay below. The long room exhibited a kind of compromise between the tastes of wife and husband. Mrs. Laval was known as a "decorator" among her society friends, and sometimes condescended to do a house for one of them. Her own living room exemplified some of the latest foibles; polished red floor, heliotrope walls, primrose hangings and starkly plain modern furniture. Payne Laval, on the other hand, was a collector of curios of the old-fashioned sort, and here and there around the room Mike saw beautiful pieces of antique enamel or metal work that represented his contribution.

Mike came to a stand in front of a small table and his eyes bugged out. On the table lay a paper cutter in the form of a dagger with a *repoussé* handle, silver gilt. At first glance, it was a replica of the one they had picked up on Mrs. Ware's whatnot. Upon closer examination, he saw that this was a modern piece of inferior workmanship. Moreover, the *repoussé* design was not exactly the same. However, the resemblance was startling enough, and it gave Mike furiously to think. He paced up and down the room, staring at it with each return. He tried the edge of the blade. It was as dull as a paper cutter ought to be.

Radigan arrived directly. The manservant brought him to Mike in the living room. "Pardon me, Mr. Speedon," said the servant, "but will this gentleman be waiting?"

"Yes," said Mike nonchalantly. "It's all right, Taplow. Mrs. Laval is acquainted with him."

Radigan put up his hand to hide a grin.

When the servant had gone, Mike led his partner to the little table and silently pointed to the dagger.

"My God!" murmured Radigan. "Another one?"

"Not quite the same," said Mike, "but too near like to be just a coincidence."

"What does it mean, Mike?"

"I don't know, but I mean to find out before we leave."

Chapter 17

Mrs. Laval arrived hard on Radigan's heels. Mike took care to be in that part of the living room which commanded the foyer, and he therefore saw her enter and Norbert Besson behind her. Norbert immediately ducked through another door. Mike sang out: "Come on in, Norbert. It's only me."

Norbert, however, did not immediately reappear.

Mrs. Laval got the surprise of her life when she came to the door and saw that Radigan was with Mike. She was a small woman with a trim figure and the glance of an eagle. She had handsome black eyes, hard as onyx, yet capable of flashing grandly. Arrogance was her keynote. She was obviously not young, yet you couldn't call her old, either. The beauticians had rendered her ageless. That she was a brunette helped. With a sure instinct, she dressed with absolute plainness, and wore no jewels except a string of pearls, not especially big, but of marvelous sheen and color. Her black hair was neither curled nor coiffed, but drawn straight off her forehead and twisted behind. Her skin was colorless, her lipstick not too red. The total result was an extraordinary chic. Mrs. Laval could not have been mistaken for other than a Personage.

Her eyes flashed at Radigan. "What are you doing in my house?"

Mike answered for him with a smile. "He's with me."

Her eyes seemed to become incandescent with anger. "I don't care who he's with. He has no business in my house. Get out! Get out both of you!"

Mike's smile broadened. "Now, Mrs. Laval!..."

"Get out, do you hear? Go print your dirty stories about me! I don't care what you say. I don't care what anybody says about me! I've never yielded to a threat in my life, and I'm not going to start now. Get out!"

"Waaait a minute!" drawled Mike. "I've got no stories about you to print. I only used that as a decoy to get you here. And it worked, you see."

"Then what *do* you want?" she demanded.

"I'm helping Lieutenant Radigan."

"So you've become a stool pigeon," she sneered. "I can't say I'm surprised. However, you can both get out, and quickly, too, or I'll have you thrown out."

Mike's smile hardened. "Sorry," he said, "but we're not going. Radigan's a pretty husky guy, and I'm not exactly a weakling. Call in your servants if you want, but I wouldn't advise it. Of course, you have Norbert, too, but he's not very athletic."

It seemed impossible that Mrs. Laval could become any angrier, but she did. Her eyes blazed on Mike. "Such insolence!" she breathed. Without thinking what she was saying, she added: "I'll call the police!"

Mike laughed out loud, and Radigan, though he was abashed by the fiery lady, could not help but laugh too. "You haven't got far to go for a policeman," said Mike.

She was stumped for an answer then. She had sprung her mine and her enemies laughed in her face. But with her it was no surrender. She paced the room with clenched hands and clenched teeth, inwardly fuming. If eyes could kill, Mike would have fallen dead.

After a moment, Mike said soothingly: "We only want a little quiet talk with you and Norbert...."

"He's not here," she snapped.

"Pardon me," said Mike. "I saw him come in with you.... The Lieutenant complains that you got so angry with him a while ago, he couldn't finish his story, or ask you the questions he has in mind."

"I will answer no questions," she said with her chin in the air.

"I'm sorry," said Mike, "but you have *got* to answer them. I am sure you would not want the Lieutenant to carry you down to Headquarters in a police wagon."

"How dare you! How *dare* you!" she breathed.

Mike was unimpressed. "Believe me, the wagon is no respecter of persons. You could be carried in the wagon as well as any other woman."

For seconds their eyes contended for the mastery. However, Mike was sure of his ground, and she was not. It was her eyes that fell.

"Must Norbert be present?" she murmured.

"He must."

She left the room. Norbert must have been listening behind an open door close by, because she immediately returned with him.

"Ask your questions," she said sullenly.

"First we have something to *tell* you," said Mike. "You shut Radigan up so quick before, he couldn't get it out.... When Radigan was searching Norbert's rooms he wasn't alone."

"Who was with him?"

"I was."

Radigan glanced at Mike, surprised and admiring. What a cool liar! his look said. Norbert's pale face became paler, but Mrs. Laval only smiled scornfully.

"I don't see what difference it makes."

"It makes this difference. I saw the ring, and I can add my testimony to Radigan's." Mike waited for a moment to let this sink in. "If Norbert will admit that he had the ring," he went on, "we'll get along much faster."

Norbert opened his mouth to speak. Mrs. Laval said sharply: "He admits nothing!" and he closed it again.

"All right," said Mike. "We know he had it. Here's the first question. Where were you when Mrs. Ware gave him the ring?"

"Why do you want to drag her into it?" Norbert burst out. "She hadn't anything to do with it!"

"So you went to Mrs. Ware's room alone?"

"He didn't say so," flashed Mrs. Laval.

Mike turned to her. "You disappeared from the party at the same time Norbert did. It's hardly conceivable that you went wandering around another woman's apartment by yourself. If you will tell us whom you were with at this time, there's your alibi."

"I have nothing to say," she answered haughtily.

"Then we must assume that you and Norbert went upstairs together."

"Assume what you like."

"That's nonsense!" cried Norbert. "Mrs. Laval would never go to Mrs. Ware's rooms."

"I believe you," said Mike, "but she might wait in the adjoining room with the door open."

"What on earth for?"

"To back you up."

"You are simply being ridiculous," said Mrs. Laval languidly. "I was never in Mrs. Ware's dressing room in my life!"

"Then how did you know that the next room was a dressing room?"

Norbert caught his breath on a gasp, but Mrs. Laval kept her chin up. She said: "A dressing room is always next to a boudoir."

"Not always," said Mike. "Very often it's a bedroom."

"You know all about bedrooms and boudoirs, don't you?"

"It's part of a young man's education."

"You forget," she said, "that Mrs. Ware's rooms were carefully described in the newspapers. There was a plan showing boudoir, bedroom and dressing room."

Mike smiled at her cleverness. "You just remembered it." That gasp from Norbert told him that he had made a strike.

"How long do we have to put up with this?" said Mrs. Laval with a bored air. "You're not getting anywhere."

Mike, however, when he looked at Norbert's pale, sweating face, felt that he was getting somewhere. A little more pressure and the man would break. Radigan thought so, too. His glance at Mike said: You're doing all right, fellow.

Mrs. Laval said: "What motive could Norbert possibly have for ..."

"Can you ask me that?" said Mike. "Tied to that absurd old woman when ..." He left his sentence in the air. "She wrote to him on Tuesday afternoon, telling him that she had made a will in his favor. The will had been 'made,' but it was not signed."

"This is fantastic," she said haughtily.

A bell rang. Looking into the foyer, Mike saw the manservant go to the door. He admitted an old gentleman, handsome and dignified. Mike knew him. It was Payne Laval. The servant took his hat and coat. Hearing voices in the living room, Mr. Laval approached the door with the pleased expression of one preparing to meet guests.

"Well, my dear," he said to his wife.

A change came over her, and Mike saw that there was one person in the world whom she condescended to propitiate. But still she showed no fear. "Well, Payne," she said pleasantly.

He was a good deal older than his wife, beautifully groomed, a personage in his way, too; not very bright, perhaps, but supported by the immense prestige of inherited wealth. He undoubtedly belonged to the Union League Club for political reasons, and to the Metropolitan Club for social contacts; and he and all his friends shuddered at the name of Roosevelt.

"How are you, Norbert," he said amiably.

Norbert mumbled something. Luckily for him, he had his back to the windows, and the old gentleman could not read his face.

"How do you do, Mr. Laval," said Mike. "We have met. I'm Michael Speedon."

"Ah, how-je-do," said Mr. Laval, sheering off a little. He had an old-fashioned distrust of newspapermen. "And who is this gentleman?"

"My friend, Mr. Radigan," said Mike, wishing to spare his feelings.

"Ah, how-je-do, Mr. Radigan. A very pleasant afternoon for the season, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," said Radigan.

Mr. Laval was not so old but that he could sense something unpleasant in the air. He had no desire to be drawn into it, and he was already preparing to leave the room when Mike said:

"You're an art collector, aren't you, Mr. Laval?"

"Oh, in a small way, a small way," he said with a wave of the hand.

"I was admiring this Florentine dagger," said Mike, picking it up.

"Ah, yes. I got it in Rome. They told me that it came from the workshop of Benvenuto ..." He suddenly pulled up, staring hard at the object in Mike's hands. "Pardon me," he said, taking it. His mouth dropped open. "My dear," he said, turning a distressed face to his wife, "this is not it. This is a modern piece which has been substituted for my dagger. It's been stolen!... the servants ..."

Out of the tail of his eye, Mike saw Norbert turning greenish with terror. He sauntered away to the window with his back turned as if this scene bored him. Mrs. Laval, on the other hand, never turned a hair. She had courage. She went to her husband, expressing sympathy and concern—at least on the surface.

"Are you sure, my dear?"

"Look for yourself," said the old gentleman. "The police must be notified!"

"It could hardly have been one of the servants," she said. "Where could a servant have obtained the dagger to substitute for it? More likely a guest; a fellow collector who had been coveting your Cellini dagger for a long time, and had procured a substitute to leave in its place so that the loss would not be noticed. It may have happened weeks ago. We seldom have any occasion to look at it closely."

Mike could not but admire the quickness of her wits.

"True! True!" Mr. Laval said, sadly shaking his head. "How terrible when one is not safe even with one's friends!"

"It's a serious loss," said Mrs. Laval, "but do you really wish to notify the police? They would make such a story of it in the papers."

"You are right, my dear. I'll say nothing about it unless other objects are missing. I'll go and consult my inventory." The distressed old gentleman did not forget his manners. "Good day to you, gentlemen; Norbert, I'm sorry to have inflicted this unpleasant scene on you. Mr. Speedon, please do not say anything about it."

"I'm not a reporter, Mr. Laval. I shall say nothing."

"Thank you. Good day, Mr. Madigan. Happy to have met you." He went out.

Having let him get well away from the room, Mike said to Mrs. Laval dryly: "I congratulate you."

"What on?" she said haughtily.

"A marvelous piece of acting!"

"Do you have to insult me?"

"His dagger is in the possession of the police."

"You're lying."

"Who's insulting now?... On the level, it was picked up in Mrs. Ware's boudoir on Wednesday morning."

"It wasn't in the papers."

"Whoever found it first thought that it was a curio off one of her shelves and put it back again ... The point had been stuck in a cork to keep it from cutting. They found the cork, too, under the sofa. The theory is that somebody had it in his pocket, the cork worked loose, and the dagger slit the pocket and dropped out. It had been freshly sharpened. It had an edge keen enough to split a hair."

"I am not interested," said Mrs. Laval. But from the window Mike could hear the sound of Norbert's hoarse breathing.

"Not interested! In your husband's Cellini dagger?"

"What's it got to do with Mrs. Ware's murder? Is there any suggestion that she was stabbed?"

"No. The theory is that the idea of killing a person by injecting air into a vein was so new that the murderer doubted its efficacy. And so he took along the dagger as a second string."

"Still not interested," said Mrs. Laval, with her head high.

"What's the use of bluffing?" said Mike, almost with regret. "You know and I know that it was Norbert who carried the dagger to Mrs. Ware's boudoir in the tail pocket of his evening coat, and it was no doubt in the ardor of embracing his elderly fiancée on the sofa that it got away from him."

"You are imagining all this!"

Mike went out into the foyer and came back with the tail coat. "Here's Norbert's coat. Notice the slit in the tail pocket. Any expert could tell you that that cut was made with a *very* sharp implement."

Mrs. Laval was breathing fast now, but her eyes were still full of a defiant fire. "There's no proof that this is Norbert's coat. All dress coats are alike."

"Look!" said Mike. He turned over the edge of the inside breast pocket. "Here's the tailor's label. All custom tailors use such labels. His own name and the date of making, and the customer's name. See! Norbert Besson, Esquire."

"Is this what they call the third degree?" drawled Mrs. Laval.

Mike knew he would never break her down. "Norbert, come and look at this," he said.

The young man uttered a choked cry and clapped his hands to his head. "Oh, for God's sake, stop it! stop it! I can't stand any more!"

Mrs. Laval whirled on him. "Be quiet!"

He was too far gone to listen to her. He staggered to a chair and dropped in it, holding his head and moaning: "Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Mrs. Laval turned away with a despairing shrug. There was no weakness in her face. Mike followed up Norbert.

"Is this your coat?" he asked sternly.

"Leave me alone! Leave me alone!" Even in hysteria, Norbert took care not to cry out too loud. "You know it's my coat! But I didn't do it. I swear it! Oh, God! nobody was ever in such a jam!"

"What were you carrying the dagger for?"

Mrs. Laval turned around. "I had given it to him for a keepsake."

"Your husband's dagger?"

"My husband would never have noticed the substitution if you hadn't called his attention to it."

"And sharpened like a razor? That's hardly good enough, Mrs. Laval."

"I never harmed the old woman!" whined Norbert. "Look! you've got to listen to me, Mike! It couldn't have been me. I never heard of such a thing as shooting air in a person's veins until I read it in the paper!... And where would I have got a hypodermic syringe?"

"We'll find that out before we're through."

"Oh, God, you've *got* to listen to me! I had no reason to kill her.... We talked about the will and she told me she hadn't had time to sign it yet."

"He's lying there," put in Radigan suddenly.

"Certainly he's lying," said Mike. "When we told him that the will wasn't signed, he almost passed out from shock."

"Oh, won't you believe me?" wailed Norbert. "I swear I never harmed her."

"You were the last to see her alive?"

"No! No!... Listen! I was talking to her there in the boudoir and there was a knock at the door. And she said: 'You mustn't be found here at this hour. Go back downstairs.' And hustled me into the dressing room alongside and closed the door."

"Who was it knocked?" asked Mike.

"I don't know. She closed the door, I tell you. And they talked low. She was all right when I left her. I swear it!"

"Not a very likely story," said Mike.

"You'll have to come with me," said Radigan. "Best come quietly for the lady's sake."

Norbert gave up. "I'm not going to make any trouble," he whined.

Radigan patted him all over to make sure he was not armed.

"Does he carry a flask?" asked Mike.

Radigan shook his head.

Mrs. Laval disappeared for a moment, returning with hat and coat.

"Don't you come," said Mike quickly. "There's no need of it."

The penciled eyebrows ran up. "Allow me to be the judge of that."

"I was thinking of the old gentleman."

"Thank you. My husband doesn't require *your* sympathy."

God help him! thought Mike.

When they hustled Norbert through the lobby of the apartment house, the eyes of the hall men almost popped out of their heads. Mrs. Laval held her chin high. Norbert had practically to be carried across the sidewalk to a cab. They thrust him into the back seat. Mrs. Laval slipped in beside him and took him in her arms, daring the other two with fiery eyes to blame her. Norbert clung to her, weeping. It was a pitiful exhibition. Mike and Radigan felt personally shamed by it, and, sitting on the two folding seats, stared ahead through the windshield.

Having accomplished his object, Mike had no desire to prolong the scene. That was the business of the police. Instead of feeling any elation, he was disgusted with the business: murder, illicit love, disgrace for a harmless old man. He thought longingly of his farm on the Delaware; the clean November landscape and a fire on the hearth. If he could only get away to it! If he could take Day Radnor there! But she would never come.

He had them drop him off at the French Building, where MacKelcan had his offices.

The attorney occupied a small and soberly furnished suite at one of the choicest business addresses in midtown. He employed a pale young clerk who never appeared to raise his eyes from his desk and never spoke unless he was spoken to. His real right hand man was his secretary, Miss Lottie Bedford, an excessively plain young woman who, like so many secretaries, exhibited a kind of burlesque of her employer's effusive, talkative manner. With all this pseudo-animation, her eyes remained as expressionless as a dead person's. Mike wondered how deep she was in MacKelcan's confidence. Being a woman, she could, of course, be cajoled, but he shuddered at the task. There was something about this girl that turned a man clammy.

"How do you do, Mr. Speedon," she gushed. "I read your column every day. So clever! Isn't it lovely weather? One hates to have to stay indoors. Mr. MacKelcan is alone. You can go right in."

"Thanks," said Mike.

As he entered the private office he was thinking about flasks. How had Norbert carried the whisky with which Mrs. Ware presumably had been doped? Consequently, he received a slight shock when the first thing he saw was a silver flask standing on MacKelcan's desk. The outer cap served as a jigger. The attorney was in the act of swallowing a drink.

"Ha, Mike!" he cried. "Just in time! Will you join me in a spot of whisky? There's a paper cup alongside the watercooler. Straight or diluted?"

Mike was staring fascinated at the flask. He quickly lowered his eyes to avoid giving too much away. "I'll take a little water in mine."

"I see you looking at the flask," MacKelcan went on. "Nobody carries them any more since prohibition was repealed, but I've reached the age where I need a little boost toward the end of the day, and a man in my position, you know, I can't be seen in a bar. So I always carry it on me!"

"Very sensible of you," said Mike. "I just dropped in to ask if there was any news from England."

MacKelcan raised his shoulders, spread out his hands, and mugged to express complete bafflement. "Not a word! I have had a cable, two cables, in fact, but my agent can find no trace of the heir. James Fawcett seems to have vanished into utter nothingness."

Mike thought: Radigan must hear about that flask.

Chapter 18

From MacKelcan's office, Mike proceeded to his own rooms. What he had learned increased his uneasiness. At home there was a cable waiting for him which he eagerly tore open, hoping for light. But it brought him up against another blank wall. For, according to the report of his own agent in London, MacKelcan had been telling the truth—so far as London was concerned. MacKelcan *had* cabled to his agent instructing him to communicate with James Fawcett; the agent *had* been looking for Fawcett and was unable to locate him. And Mike's agent couldn't find him either.

Mike cabled his man to transfer the search to the city of Newcastle, where, as mentioned in Mrs. Ware's will, Fawcett was supposed to have lived and worked before moving to London.

At six o'clock Radigan called up from Headquarters. "Are you dining out tonight, Mike?"

"All social engagements are off until we get our job done, Rad."

"Okay, fellow. Meet me at Bonifacio's at six-thirty."

"Anything new?"

"No, but I want to talk things over. Norbert has been grilled for a couple of hours; he sticks to his story. He's being detained here. Mrs. L. has gone home."

"All right. See you at six-thirty."

Radigan's stolid face bore a worried frown when he sat down opposite Mike in the restaurant. So did Mike's face.

"Mike," said the former, "I'm not satisfied that this case has broken."

"Neither am I," said Mike. "Tell me first what your doubts are."

"It's that typed order for the syringes that was received by Emory and Almond. There is not a single typographical error in it. It must have been written by somebody who was familiar with the typewriter. Well, so far as I can find out, Norbert Besson has never done a tap of work in his life, and certainly Mrs. Laval has never flattened her elegant finger tips on the keys. Neither of them possesses a typewriter or is in any way connected with a place where typewriters are used. And it don't seem likely that they would hire anybody to do it for them. Too hellish dangerous. Being lovers, they had to trust each other, but not an outsider."

"You're right, Rad.... Why the hell do you suppose the murderer required *two* syringes?"

"You can search me!... What are your doubts?"

"Well, to start with, the old lady could not have been stuck with the syringe while she was conscious. It had to be too carefully placed. The autopsy indicated that she had been doped with a heavy dose of barbital, and our own investigation suggested that she and her murderer had partaken of a little drink together in which the barbital was no doubt administered. The old lady loved her whisky, and after all the excitement she would be wanting a drink. But no container for whisky was found. If it was Norbert who gave her a drink, what did he carry the whisky in?"

"That's a hard one, Mike!"

"On the other hand, I learned today that Sanford MacKelcan carries a flask at all times."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" said Radigan, staring. "... But wait a minute, Mike. MacKelcan had no motive for liquidating the old woman."

"A motive is beginning to appear. No trace of the supposed heir, James Fawcett, can be found, and it looks as if there

never was such a person. MacKelcan may have invented him. While the search drags on, MacKelcan will be in sole control of the estate, and he's clever enough to hypothecate a share of it to his own use without leaving any traces. As soon as he heard of the other will he had to act quick, because that will would have brought in Keppelman and the bank as co-executors, and given the estate to Norbert Besson."

"The letter box was hired four months ago."

"MacKelcan may keep that for all sorts of shady transactions."

Radigan considered it for a while in silence. "There's a hole in your theory," he said at last. "It won't hold water."

"How come?"

"The action of barbital is not instantaneous. An ordinary dose takes about an hour to have any effect. Perhaps a strong dose might work in half an hour, but in any case MacKelcan—if MacKelcan was there—couldn't have given the old lady a drink and seen her pass out before his eyes. He couldn't have been with her long. He was out of the place by one-forty. We have conclusive evidence as to that. It won't work, Mike."

"Damn!" said Mike, "All our theories fall down before we've finished building them, like houses of cards."

"You'd better not let go of Norbert. Though we can't at the moment establish a container for the whisky, there's still a case against him. Possibly Norbert, knowing the old lady's tastes, had in his pocket an ordinary pint bottle or half pint that he bought in a liquor store, and threw it away afterwards."

"I'm not letting anybody go," said Mike, "but I'm convinced that MacKelcan is playing a deep game."

"He's one of those men," said Radigan, "that always makes you feel he's playing a deep game. He makes a mysterious business even of sitting on the john."

Mike laughed.

"Let's take a look at what happened in the old lady's apartment Tuesday night," Radigan continued. "She got home from the hay ride about twelve-twenty. She had eight guests with her. Others came in. About thirty in all. Mrs. Ware was good and sore because people in the street had given her the bird. She went upstairs and togged herself out in her satin and diamonds. She came down again about twelve-forty.

"Meanwhile the guests downstairs had been hitting it up on the free booze. Mrs. Ware accused Bethesda Prior of being responsible for the hay-ride flop, and they quarreled. They went back upstairs to have it out, Bethesda left the apartment at twelve fifty-five or one o'clock. As for Norbert, he has confessed that he went up to Mrs. Ware's boudoir soon after he saw Bethesda leave. He found Mrs. Ware all excited, he said, but he calmed her down. He wasn't with her more than fifteen or twenty minutes, he said, when there was a knock at the door. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that he's telling the truth, and somebody did come to the door. MacKelcan, let us say. It must then have been one-ten or one-fifteen. Which would give Mack only fifteen minutes to do his job."

"Hardly enough," said Mike.

"Let's go over the suspects, one by one," Radigan went on, ticking them off on his fingers. "First, Bethesda Prior...."

"You can have Bethesda," interrupted Mike. "As far as I'm concerned, she's out."

"Why?"

"We are agreed that this murder was the result of days or weeks, maybe months of plotting. Bethesda was making too good a thing out of the old lady to plot her murder in advance. They quarreled, yes, and then Bethesda saw her two hundred grand go glimmering. But she couldn't have foreseen that quarrel."

"Okay, I'll drop Bethesda until something new crops up. Next we have the Besson-Laval combination. That is still our best bet. They have everything. Next MacKelcan, whom you favor. But you can't convict Mack just because he carries a pocket flask. There's no evidence yet that he ever saw Mrs. Ware on Tuesday night."

"I'll look for it," said Mike.

"Finally, there are the two servants, Cummings and Alfred. Alfred is too dumb and ignorant to have pulled off such a job alone...."

"These dumb bunnies often have a cunning of their own."

"Sure; but if Alfred's in it, I believe it is a Cummings-Alfred job. If Norbert was cleared, I would lay it to the servants, simply because they had all the time in the world for the job after the guests went home. There is nothing to prove that either one went to bed at all that night. Here's another point against Cummings. He lied to us. Norbert says that when he first started for Mrs. Ware's room, he saw Cummings entering the elevator with a drink of whisky on a server. That drink must have been for Mrs. Ware, because there was nobody else upstairs. So Cummings *did* see the Madam after the Prior woman had left. Norbert waited until Cummings came down before he went up."

"No motive has been shown for Cummings to do it."

"Maybe he was acting for another; maybe he was hired to do it. Somebody could afford to pay well to have Mrs. Ware eliminated."

"That would be the mysterious James Fawcett, the heir, who apparently does not exist. So we are back where we started."

"Wait a minute. That suggests a new combination. Suppose Cummings is working for MacKelcan?"

"That's hard to believe when you see how they hate each other."

"Accomplices often hate each other like poison," said Radigan, "but they are forced to stick together by their crime."

"Sure; but Cummings and MacKelcan are making no pretense of sticking together. They're working against each other every minute."

Between mouthfuls they argued it back and forth. Radigan spoke with the voice of experience, while Mike was the gifted amateur. They had finished eating and were lighting cigars, when a waiter came to the booth to say that Lieutenant Radigan was wanted on the phone.

"I left word at Headquarters where I was going to eat," Radigan explained to Mike as he got up.

He presently returned wearing the expression of one who brings news. "Part of the Ware jewels have been recovered. It is the part that was insured. John Carpenter, the insurance detective, is bringing them to Headquarters, and the Inspector wants me to come down. His Nibs is giving off live steam through his clothes."

"Why?"

"Because Carpenter made no effort to take the thief.... You'd better come along with me, Mike."

"I'm not popular at Headquarters," said Mike, grinning.

"Oh, the Inspector has got to have somebody to sound off at. It was you yesterday, it's Carpenter today. He's satisfied now that Norbert Besson did the job, and he'd be glad to make it up with you."

"Well, I'll oblige him," said Mike.

They taxied down to Headquarters. In the corridor, while still some yards away, they heard angry voices issuing from Inspector Stillson's office. The Inspector was giving Carpenter hell, and the latter wasn't taking it. As they entered, the Inspector, very red in the face, was saying:

"You're compounding with robbery!"

The other man returned: "Why get excited, Inspector? You've known for years what my job is. I'm paid to recover stolen jewels and no questions asked."

"I never liked it!" cried the Inspector, pounding the desk.

Carpenter grinned aggravatingly. He was a round-headed man with a clipped mustache, so usual-looking as to defy description. He had had a lot of favorable publicity owing to the promptness with which he had acted in various famous robberies, and he was pretty sure of himself. It had been suggested by his enemies that he was really in cahoots with a ring of jewel thieves, but it could not be proved.

On the Inspector's desk in a glittering pile lay four of Mrs. Ware's gorgeous diamond bracelets, and the pin with the Madhrapur emerald, surrounded by diamonds. These baubles with their enormous potentialities for evil, hypnotized the eyes of the beholders.

"This is less than half the loot!" stormed the Inspector. "You let him get away with the rest!"

"It's not my job to recover uninsured jewels, Inspector."

"There's more in this crime than robbery. Murder is involved!"

"I thought it was the theory of the police that the murder and the robbery were committed by different persons."

"One led to the other. You helped a murderer to escape!"

"I neither helped nor hindered him. I have my job to do, and the police have theirs."

"Such actions are anti-social!" shouted the Inspector. He liked the sound of the word and repeated it. "Anti-social! Anti-social!"

The Inspector paid little attention to the entrance of Mike and Radigan. His curt nod in Mike's direction merely signified that in the Inspector's estimation Mike was readmitted to the society of honest men. Mike smiled to himself and let it go at that.

Neither he nor Radigan took any part in the wrangling match that was in progress. Carpenter got somewhat the better of it, because he kept his temper. By listening and putting one word with another, Mike learned what had happened. Immediately after Carpenter's advertisement had appeared, offering a reward of fifty thousand dollars for the return of the insured jewels, a man had called him on the phone at his office.

"Would you know his voice again?" demanded the Inspector.

"I doubt it, Inspector. It was not a natural-sounding voice."

The man told Carpenter that the wanted jewels were in his possession, and asked how he could return them and collect the reward with safety to himself. Carpenter told him to send the jewels to his office, and if they were all right, he would send the reward in bills addressed to any name the man wanted to give in care of General Delivery, New York Post Office. "This is my usual method," Carpenter had explained to the man. "I expect to be in this business for a long time to come, and I can't afford to let you down."

On the following day the jewels arrived in the mail. Carpenter had brought along the wrapper to show the Inspector. An ordinary piece of stout manila paper which, judging from its wrinkles, had been used before. The address had been

pasted on in capital letters cut from newspaper headlines. It had been mailed at Station D, New York. Whereupon Carpenter had mailed the money to Henry J. Jackson, care General Delivery, as instructed, and after waiting twenty-four hours to give the man time to get it, had come to the police. It was as simple as that.

"Did you mark the bills?" demanded the Inspector.

"That is not our custom," said Carpenter firmly.

"You're no better than a fence! A kid glove fence! You encourage robbery!"

"Well, that's for my employers to decide, isn't it?"

Sanford MacKelcan had also been sent for, and the scene was brought to an end by his arrival. MacKelcan gave Carpenter a receipt for the jewels, and the latter rose to go.

"I presume you will want to reinsure the jewels," he said to MacKelcan.

"Well, yes, yes, I suppose so," said the attorney, who could never say anything out and out. "Why, yes, Mr. Carpenter, I suppose it is up to me to reinsure on behalf of the estate."

"I'll see that a new policy is sent to your office tomorrow, sir."

The air was sulphurous for a while after Carpenter had left. "You see what we're up against!" cried the Inspector. "And my hands are tied. By God! I'm going to ask for new legislation to control this infamous jewel robbery racket!"

"May I make a suggestion?" put in Mike mildly.

"Anybody's free to make a suggestion," grumbled the Inspector.

"The thief will be feeling pretty good just about now," said Mike. "Having received his fifty grand without any trouble or danger to himself. I suggest that Mr. MacKelcan immediately advertise a reward of seventy-five thousand for the return of the remaining jewels, and no questions asked. In this case there will be no strings on the action of the police, and the thief will be off his guard."

"Good!" cried the Inspector. "Will you do that, Mr. MacKelcan?"

"Yes, sir. Certainly! Anything to assist the ends of justice, Inspector."

The advertisement was written out on the spot and dispatched to different newspapers.

"If you receive any communication as a result of this, you will of course consult with me before acting on it, Mr. MacKelcan."

"Why, of course, Inspector."

The meeting broke up.

Chapter 19

On Saturday morning the discovery of Mrs. Ware's murder was three days old. Today the newspapers were able to dish up a fresh sensation in the arrest of Norbert Besson—or, as it was put: "his detention at Headquarters." Mike Speedon disappeared from the news columns, and the *Recorder-Press* quietly abandoned its campaign on his behalf. It was no longer necessary.

Mrs. Laval was not detained, but she had destroyed herself by accompanying Norbert to Headquarters. The sly suggestions in the press of her relations with Norbert were much more exciting than the fact of his arrest. Everybody in her brittle world knew about it already, but it is quite another matter to have it printed in the newspapers for all the common people to read. As a social figure, Mrs. Laval was finished.

In the same issues, the story of the recovery of a part of the jewels, and Sanford MacKelcan's offer of a huge reward for the return of the balance, provided secondary sensations.

When his work was done at the office, Mike taxied to the Ware apartment to see what effect, if any, these published items were having on the members of that household. When he looked in to refresh his eyes with a sight of Day Radnor, to his disgust he found Sanford MacKelcan sitting in her office, ceaselessly crossing and uncrossing his skinny legs, twisting on his fundament, pulling at his lapels and emitting a copious flow of irrelevant conversation.

Mike took a chair, grimly determined to sit him out. It made the lawyer nervous to have anyone looking at him steadily, and he left before long.

"What the heck was he after?" asked Mike.

"I'm fired," said Day. "After next Saturday he says he would no longer feel justified in charging my salary against the estate."

"But he was *after* something," said Mike, scowling. "I could see it."

"Well, he offered me another job."

"In his own office?"

"No, in a new office he is opening. Office of the Ware Estate."

"Then the estate would still be paying your salary."

"You don't understand, beloved. He fires me first in order to bring a little pressure to bear...."

"Will there be other employees in the Ware office?"

"Not at present."

"I see," said Mike grimly. "So he will have an opportunity of enjoying a tête-à-tête with you whenever he has a mind to. Don't take it, Day!"

"The salary is excellent," she said provokingly.

"The man is slimy!"

"I shan't have to touch him."

"Have you accepted his offer?"

"You came in before I had time to. I must take it or leave it today, because he has another person in view."

"Turn him down. Day!" he said earnestly. "Look, I'll chase around and scare up some kind of a job for you...."

"I don't want a job scared up. I want a real salary."

"What's he going to pay you a big salary for?"

"Don't you think I can take care of myself, darling?"

"For God's sake, don't darling me! Sure, you can keep him off, but you'll only be fired, if you do. Promise me you won't take his job."

"Oh, no promises," she said airily. "It all depends on how I feel when he comes back for his answer."

Mike flung out of the room with a muttered oath. Day laughed when the door slammed. Bedeviling Mike Speedon is the chief diversion of a dull life, she thought.

Meanwhile MacKelcan was watching Mike, and as soon as the young man was safely out of the way, the attorney returned to Day's office. "Well, how about it? What's the decision?" he asked jocosely. "Shall we be starting in together next Monday?"

Day gave him a steely smile such as Mike had never seen. "Sorry," she said. "I am very much obliged to you for your offer, but I have decided not to accept it."

"Oh, indeed!" said the astonished MacKelcan. "Indeed, Miss! Well, just as you please! Just as you please! Just as you please!" He backed out as if somebody was threatening him, and left the apartment.

Mike had started for the upstairs sitting room. In the upper corridor he met Kinsey, who was for passing him with her nose in the air, and the hint of a sniff. It came to Mike that he had all but made love to this woman for his own purposes two nights before, and she had reason to resent his present obliviousness. He might have use for her again.

"Why, Miss Kinsey," he said, "I was studying so hard over this ugly business I almost passed you!" He opened the door of the boudoir. "Come in here for a moment. What do you think about the latest development?"

Kinsey stiffened righteously. "Norbert Besson may well have done it, Mr. Speedon, but why didn't they arrest the woman with him? He was merely a tool in her hands."

"I agree," said Mike.... "You are bearing up well under this awful situation," he added admiringly.

Kinsey bridled in her elderly ladies'-maid fashion. "Nobody considers what *my* feelings may be, Mr. Speedon."

"You're wrong. Miss Kinsey. I was just saying to Mr. MacKelcan how wonderfully you took it."

"Mr. MacKelcan just gave me my notice," she said acidly. "A week!"

"Would you like to stay on longer?"

"Well, I'd like a chance to settle myself."

"And I don't want to lose you, either," said Mike. "You just leave this matter to me. I'll arrange it."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Speedon."

"We must have other talks together, Miss Kinsey. I'm depending on you!"

Observing the woman's cold gray eyes and censorious air, Mike thought: She had every opportunity to murder her

mistress—but I don't know any reason why she should.

Mike's next encounter was with Cummings, who came to the door of the room and asked permission to speak to him. Today something had again interrupted the orderly progress of Cummings' metabolism. His bile had overflowed; his eyes were savage with rage, however demurely he kept them lowered and smoothly spoke. Mike thought: If this man is not a murderer, it is not because he lacks the will to murder.

The butler murmured: "Mr. Speedon, I know it's a liberty, but I wanted to ask you what took place at Police Headquarters last evening. Of course, I know the newspapers didn't tell all."

"You mean about Norbert Besson?"

"Oh, not that," said Cummings impatiently.

Strange! thought Mike, if he has such a keen interest, that Norbert's arrest should be of no importance.

"I mean about the recovery of the jewels," Cummings went on. "Have the police any clue as to the robber? Are they taking steps to arrest him?"

Mike had no intention of satisfying him. "What I learned at Headquarters was given me in confidence, Cummings. Sorry, but my mouth is padlocked."

"Of course, sir. Naturally." Cummings lingered.

"But if you have any theory as to the robber you can help by telling it to me," Mike suggested. "It will be received in confidence."

"How should I know anything, Mr. Speedon? I never get out of the house."

This answer struck Mike as curious. Why should it be necessary to leave the house?

Cummings was summoned downstairs to deal with a persistent applicant at the door. Adele, who had evidently been watching her chance, ran in.

"Well, beautiful!" said Mike.

"Oh, Mr. Speedon," she said breathlessly. "I think Alfred is sick up in his room. He lies there moaning. Nobody ever goes up on the third floor except Mr. Cummings."

Mike refused to betray any excitement. "I'll attend to it, darling. Run away before Cummings comes back, and say nothing to the other servants."

"Oh, what do you suppose has happened now!" she breathed.

Mike went to her. "Nothing very serious, I expect.... At any rate, it hasn't hurt your looks, pretty thing! Kiss me and beat it!"

"Oh, isn't it terrible!" she murmured, clinging to him for a moment. Nevertheless, it was clear that she was enjoying the excitement.

Mike closed the door after her, and made haste to call Radigan at Police Headquarters on the private phone.

"Rad," he said softly, "I want you to do something for me. Think up some trick to get Cummings down to Headquarters again, pronto. He's having a rag baby to know what's going on, and you can get him that way. I must get him out of the house for an hour. I'm on the track of something here. I'll explain later."

"Okay, Mike."

"Here's another thing. I learned this morning that MacKelcan is getting ready to break up this establishment. We don't want to have these people scattered. Let the Inspector give Mack a tip that it would oblige the police if he kept everything going here until the murder is solved, or at least until the police have to throw up their hands."

"I'll do that, Mike."

"So long. I'll be calling you later."

Cummings had already knocked at the door. Mike kept him waiting until he had hung up. Cummings knew that Mike had been telephoning, and when he entered, his face was pinched and hateful with balked curiosity.

A futile conversation followed, Cummings most respectful; Mike very offhand; each trying to elicit information without giving any, and neither deceiving the other.

In a few minutes, Adele came to the door again. "If you please, Mr. Cummings, you are wanted on the phone."

Cummings, so obsequious toward Mike, was in the same measure arrogant with the under servants. "Who is it?" he asked curtly.

"The man wouldn't say, sir. He had an important voice."

Cummings, turning to Mike, became silky again. "Was there anything more, Mr. Speedon?"

"Nothing more, thank you, Cummings," said Mike, swallowing the desire to laugh.

"Very well, sir. Thank you, sir." He and Adele went away.

In ten minutes Adele returned to say that Cummings had left the apartment. "He didn't tell anybody where he was going or when he'd be back, but I was watching, and I saw him slip out the service door."

"Fine," said Mike. "You go back to your work and I'll look after Alfred."

Her face fell. "But I want to know what's the matter!"

"I'll tell you later. We don't want any fuss raised now."

Adele went down the service stairs while Mike went up. On the floor above he entered Alfred's room without knocking. The big young man, partly dressed, was lying across his bed, moaning softly, and holding his arm. His naturally high color had faded to a livid pallor. Mike asked him no questions.

"Let's have a look at that arm," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Speedon, I don't know what to do! I don't know what to do!" mourned Alfred.

From the look of the limb and the pain Alfred was suffering, Mike judged that the arm was broken, or at least fractured. He marveled at the strength of one who could break a man's arm by twisting it.

"Look here, this can't go on," he said bluntly.

"The man will kill you before he's through. There's murder in his eyes today."

"Don't I know it!" wailed Alfred. "Oh, whatever shall I do?"

"You've got to make a clean breast of the whole thing now. What is he torturing you for?"

"If I tell, he will certainly kill me!"

"The police will protect you from him. Whatever you've done, you'd better tell. Anything would be better than being murdered."

"I haven't done anything, Mr. Speedon. I'm a good boy!" He started up in a kind of weak anger. "It's him! It's him, I tell you! He's a bloody-minded brute! He takes a pleasure in hurting me. Oh, I hate him! I hate him! I wish I could kill *him!*"

Mike considered the pitiful creature grimly: so big and so soft; little better than simple-minded; the typical male domestic. Yet there was that cunning in his face that appertains to simple minds. "That wouldn't do you any good," said Mike. "The truth has got to come out now."

Alfred hesitated in an agony of indecision. "Where is he?" he asked hoarsely.

"He's been summoned down to Headquarters."

"What for?" Alfred demanded in fresh terror.

"Nothing. It was just a trick to get him out of the way. He can't get back under an hour, and by that time I'll have you in a hospital. He can't get at you there."

"Oh, I'm afraid to tell!" mourned Alfred.

"Why?"

"I'm only a poor ignorant boy. I'll be done out of my rights...." With his good hand he reached for Mike's hand and pressed it fawningly. "You wouldn't do me wrong, would you, Mr. Speedon?"

Mike jerked his hand away. "For God's sake, whatever it is, it will be given full publicity. When there's publicity, nobody can do anybody."

"If I tell where the jewels are, I'm entitled to the reward," Alfred said sharply.

"Did you steal them?"

"No! No! Mr. Speedon. It was Cummings stole them! He knows that I know he stole them and he said he'd kill me if I told. That's what all the trouble's about."

"Certainly you're entitled to the reward if they are recovered through you. Where are they?"

Alfred's face worked like a child's from the pain in his arm and the agony of making a decision. He hesitated so long that the impatient Mike said: "Ah, the hell with you," and turned toward the door.

"Don't leave me! Don't leave me!" squalled Alfred. "I'll tell!" He swallowed hard. "They're... they're in the brass bed in the next room!"

"The brass bed!" repeated Mike, staring. "That bed was thoroughly searched. They cut the mattress to pieces."

"I know, but they never thought to look inside the posts."

"The posts?"

"They look solid, but they're hollow, really, and the ornament on the top unscrews. I saw Cummings dropping the jewels inside. I woke up Tuesday night and heard a noise, and I knew nobody had any business in that room, and I crept to the door and looked in, and I saw what Cummings was doing. It's the right-hand post at the foot of the bed."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Mike. "How simple!"

When he had recovered a little from his astonishment, he said: "I'll take you to the hospital first."

"No!" said Alfred. "I don't want to leave them here. I've suffered too much for them things. I can stand the pain a little longer. Get them out before we go."

"I want another witness present," said Mike. "I'll phone for him."

"Oh, hurry! hurry!" wailed Alfred.

Mike ran back to the boudoir and got Radigan on the wire. "Rad," he said, "can you come up here quick?"

Radigan was all attention. "Has the case broken?"

"The robbery end has. Listen! can you fix it so that Cummings is detained for a little while at Headquarters? I want you to get here first."

"Okay, Mike."

"Listen! if your car has a jack in it, fetch it up to the apartment under your coat."

Radigan borrowed the Inspector's red car with a siren and a demon driver, and arrived in ten minutes with a jack. In the meantime, Mike had been helping Alfred to get his clothes on.

Mike told Radigan what had happened while they worked over the bed. Alfred sat watching them, nursing his arm and apparently almost fainting with pain. It was the work of a minute or two to jack up one corner of the heavy bed. Mike, with fingers that trembled a little, unscrewed the bottom member of the brass post. When it came off in his hand, a little flood of glistening diamonds and emeralds poured out on the floor. After the jewels came the key to the antique oaken cabinet. Mike and Radigan stared at each other and severally expressed the conviction that they would be damned.

"This will make the searchers look silly," said Radigan.

Mike said: "The simplest hiding places are the best."

The balance of the loot was all there. The famous emerald and diamond tiara had been broken in several pieces in order to get it into its narrow hiding-place, but the bracelets were intact, the magnificent earrings and the ring with the immense square-cut emerald.

"Put the stuff out of sight and let's get out of here," whined Alfred. "Cummings may come."

"What difference does it make now?" said Mike.

Alfred's voice scaled up. "I don't want to see him! I'm afraid!"

"Radigan and I will protect you."

They made lists in duplicate of what they had found, and both signed them. Radigan took one list, Mike the other, and Radigan scooped up the sparkling bits of loot.

"Miss Radnor will give you a box to carry them in," said Mike; then to Alfred: "Come on, you."

As they turned toward the door, Cummings appeared noiselessly in the opening.

"Oh, Christ!" gasped Alfred, starting back.

Cummings' face was like a yellowed mask, only the eyes alive. The eyes took note of the jewels in Radigan's hands. "Where are you going?" he asked Alfred in a level voice.

Alfred was speechless. Mike said dryly: "I'm taking him to the hospital. His arm appears to be broken."

"And you're coming with me!" put in Radigan grimly.

"What for?"

"Robbing the dead."

Cummings actually laughed, a dry sort of cackle. "So he told you I stole them, eh? Can't you see for yourselves that *he's* the thief? Look how he shakes!"

"Naturally; he's all in," said Mike, "thanks to you."

"Where were they?" asked Cummings.

Alfred edged closer to Mike. "You know where they were!" he squalled. "Inside the brass post. I saw you put them there!"

Cummings clamped his teeth together and was silent for all of five seconds. His face seemed to become a tinge yellower. "You're a liar!" he said in the same level voice. Mike could understand Alfred's terror of him. The man's stillness was diabolic. He turned to Mike.

"Do you believe his story, Mr. Speedon?"

"What's your story?" countered Mike.

"It's true I've been hurting him," said Cummings coolly, "but I didn't mean to break his arm—if it is broken. I knew from the first that he must be the thief, and I was trying to force a confession from him."

"He's lying!" shouted Alfred. "He's trying to lie me into the penitentiary!"

Cummings ignored him. "If I was the thief, what reason would I have for hurting him?"

"To scare him into keeping his mouth shut," suggested Mike.

Cummings shook his head. "If I hurt him *before* he said anything, it would only make him desperate."

"My word is as good as his!" Alfred cried out.

"Sure," said Mike, "but no better."

"I don't know," put in Radigan. "Alfred got in his story first. Cummings is just trying to shake it."

"Alfred can't get away with anything like that," said Cummings. "I'm satisfied to go with you, Lieutenant, and let the whole police force question me. But I warn you not to pay the reward to this rat, because I'll recover it in the end."

"Big talk. Buddy!" said Radigan. "Being as you've got your hat and coat, let's go."

After Alfred had been lodged in the Lenox Hill Hospital (his arm *was* broken) and Cummings in a detention cell at Headquarters, Mike and Radigan got together to talk it over. Mike tended to believe in Cummings' story, and Radigan in Alfred's.

"Cummings is fooling you," said Radigan. "He's a smart guy. He knows all the answers. And Alfred is just a poor damn fool. You have to learn to distinguish.... What the hell are you laughing at now?"

"Skip it," said Mike. "I've got a screw-ball sense of humor."

"I'll say you have," grumbled Radigan. "... Cummings can afford to be so cool and sure of himself," he went on, "because he's got that young lad frightened silly, and he knows it. Alfred can't stand up to him. But that don't affect the rights of the matter."

"Why should Cummings have tortured Alfred?"

"He's a psychopathic case and takes a pleasure in hurting the lad."

Mike shook his head. "I grant you that Cummings may be the murderer; in fact, I wouldn't put any crime past him. But in this particular instance, his story has the sound of truth."

"You can't go by the sound of a story."

"Sure, you can! What have we got instincts for?"

"You can't take your instincts into a court of law, son. You've got to have evidence."

Mike laughed.

Chapter 20

Upon learning from Takaku over the phone that there was a cable message for him at his flat, Mike went to get it. His little bespectacled servitor greeted him with a toothy smile. Takaku, while working around the flat, always wore a capacious striped apron that covered him from neck to knees. He had been having a hard time in this era of anti-Japanese feeling, and was filled with a passion of gratitude toward his master because Mike still treated him as a human being, though Japanese.

"Hello, Mister Mike. Please, you well?"

"I am well, Takaku. And you?"

"I very well, sir. Thank you very much. I happy to see you."

"For God's sake, why don't you close up that store, Takaku, and work here all the time?"

"That make too great a loss, sir, thank you very much. All my savings in that store. Please, I think I hang on for a while. Better times coming."

The cable had originated in Newcastle, England, and its contents were surprising enough. Once again, Mike's theories about the case were knocked into a cocked hat.

James Fawcett well known in mining circles here. Ralph Maxwell, president miners local, intimate friend twenty years. Has not heard from Fawcett since he went to London. Fawcett often told Maxwell his aunt was married one of richest men in America. Shall I cable Maxwell's full story?

Mike deliberated on this for less than one minute. A newspaper advertisement informed him that one of the Atlantic clippers was flying from England next day. It would be expensive, but he decided it was worth it. He glanced at his watch. A little after hours, but the officials would still be at the bank. He could get the money as an accommodation.

He taxied to the bank, received the money, and, proceeding to the New York office of the clippers, paid for a passage. Then from a near-by cable office he sent the following message:

Send Maxwell by clipper tomorrow to testify New York. Passage paid this end.

Mike returned to his rooms. His next job, as he had promised Radigan, was to look for evidence, if any such existed, that MacKelcan had talked to Mrs. Ware after Norbert Besson had left her on the fatal night. Unfortunately, Mike had no line of approach to MacKelcan except through his office employees, and when he recollected the glassy-eyed Miss Bedford, MacKelcan's secretary, he knew that to go to his office for information would only be to expose his hand without getting anywhere.

There was nothing for it but to make a frontal attack. Mike got out his little book and studied the notes he had made of each of his talks with MacKelcan. He found, as he had expected, that during lunch on Thursday the attorney had given him an opening which he had allowed to pass at the time, because he didn't want to arouse his suspicions.

Mike reached for the telephone. MacKelcan was in his office. "Can I have a little talk with you?" asked Mike. "About the subject we are both most interested in?"

"Sure! Sure! At your service, Mike. Any time. Come on over now if you're disengaged."

"No. I don't want to interrupt business. What time are you leaving your office?"

"Oh, five-thirty or quarter to six."

"Meet me at Jack and Charlie's for a drink at six."

A pleased note came into MacKelcan's voice. "Very nice! Very nice! But ... er... that's a very exclusive place. I've been told you can't get in if you are not known to the doorkeeper."

"Oh, Jimmie's a pal of mine. I'll fix it."

"Most pleased," said MacKelcan. "At six, then."

Mike, suspecting that the attorney would be prompt, took care to arrive at the restaurant a few minutes ahead of time. "Jimmie," he said to the doorkeeper, "I'm expecting a long-legged guy in a white waistcoat. Name of MacKelcan. Do me a favor, will you, and treat him as if he was the Duke of Windsor? It's a racket."

"Okay, Mr. Speedon, MacKelcan, is it? Don't you think I read the papers?"

"Gosh!" said Mike. "I keep forgetting how famous we all are."

The pretty hat-check girl herself brought MacKelcan to Mike's table in the back room, a mark of unusual distinction. The attorney was grinning from ear to ear and throwing his legs out wide. To smarten himself, he had bought a white carnation as big as a saucer.

"Where's the wedding?" asked Mike.

An alarmed look came into MacKelcan's face. "Isn't this correct at this hour?" he asked, prepared to snatch out the flower instanter.

"Sure! Sure!" said Mike. "Enjoy yourself in your own way. Sit down! Smoke up! What are you drinking?"

"What does one drink here?" asked MacKelcan self-consciously.

"Everything in the world from applejack to zinfandel!"

MacKelcan gave him a sharp look signifying: I see you have had several already. Which was precisely what Mike wished him to believe.

Mike was in no hurry to come to the point. Let MacKelcan get a couple of drinks under his belt first. They ordered daiquiris. It was a busy hour at Jack and Charlie's with people continually coming and going, and lined up four deep at the bar. Face after face that passed by was familiar to every reader of the newspapers. MacKelcan was so impressed that he was almost silenced.

"This is the real cheese!" he murmured.

Many paused at the table to exchange a word or two with Mike; marvelously turned out women such as MacKelcan had scarcely ever been so close to, and men that he was continually reading about. Mike made a point of introducing them all to the attorney. MacKelcan at the moment was enjoying a good deal of publicity in connection with the Ware case, and they looked at him curiously. This interest in him that real celebrities were displaying went to his head like wine.

"I have led too restricted a life," he confided in Mike. "Too narrow! Too narrow! After all, I'm not an unsuccessful man. I could afford to spread myself a bit. Hereafter I mean to live a man's life."

Mike thought: Counting on rich pickings from the Ware estate.

"You said you wanted to talk to me," said MacKelcan at last.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Mike. "The Ware case has pretty near got me down! But we must talk about it, I suppose. I'm right up against it. With your trained legal mind, you ought to be able to help."

"Always delighted to be of assistance," said MacKelcan. "Always delighted. Put your difficulties before me. I had made up my mind it was Norbert done it."

"Maybe he did," said Mike, "but there are important links missing in the evidence. We haven't been able to connect him with the hypodermic syringe. Dr. Patton says he doesn't know either Besson or Mrs. Laval."

"That's nothing. Almost anybody could write to Dr. Patton in such a way as to draw a reply from him on his letterhead."

"That's worth noting."

"And anyhow, maybe the old lady wasn't killed with a syringe at all. It's only a hypothesis. The prick left by a needle would be hard to establish after twelve hours had passed."

"But she was certainly killed by little bubbles of air in her heart... little bubbles of air!"

"Well, I can't help you with the medical evidence. I'm a complete ignoramus there.... What about Cummings?"

"No evidence. I suppose you've read the evening papers. All that between him and Alfred throws no additional light on the murder."

"I distrust that man!" said MacKelcan feelingly.

"Same here."

"He has a sinister face."

"Do you know," said Mike very carelessly, "you said something at lunch on Thursday that has been bothering me ever since."

The other man turned wary. "What was that, Mike?"

"You said that Mrs. Ware told you she had not signed the second will."

MacKelcan puffed out his cheeks. "I couldn't have told you that, Mike, because it ain't so! She never told me; I just surmised that she hadn't had time yet to sign it."

"But you did tell me that she told you, because I made a note of it right afterwards."

"You take notes of everything?" said MacKelcan, staring.

"Sure. That's the only way I can keep it all straight in my mind."

"What do you take all that trouble for, your paper?"

"No. This is a personal matter. Don't forget that I have been as good as accused of this crime. They seem to have forgotten me for the moment, but I haven't been cleared."

"Well! Well!" said MacKelcan. "You ought to be on the force."

"When did Mrs. Ware tell you that she hadn't signed?"

"I have no recollection of telling you any such thing!" blustered MacKelcan.

"Then your recollection is at fault," said Mike politely, "because I wrote it down."

"It was a slip of the tongue."

"You knew that Keppelman had called on her Tuesday morning and that she had gone down to his office in the afternoon."

"How was I to know a thing like that?"

"You bribed a clerk of Keppelman's to tell you."

"For God's sake, who told you that?"

"Keppelman. He fired the girl. But that girl did not know that the will was not signed."

"Well, you *have* been a busy little cup of tea!" said MacKelcan, laughing. It had a sour sound.

"It must have been late in the day when Mrs. Ware told you," persisted Mike.

MacKelcan began to grow ugly. "I talked to her on the telephone."

"Your recollection is at fault again," said Mike pleasantly, "because Kinsey gave me a complete account of Mrs. Ware's doings on Tuesday. It was after four when she got back from Keppelman's office. She called Norbert Besson but did not get him. She then wrote him a note and sent it by messenger. She made no other calls nor did she take any. She lay down to rest. You called her up, remember? and Kinsey told you she was sleeping. She took no calls while Kinsey was dressing her for the fancy-dress dinner. I have a complete account of the dinner, and she was not called away from the table. The hay ride followed, and the party in her own home. It must have been then that she told you."

"I have already told you that I didn't see her at the party."

"Of course, I understand why you would say that, under the circumstances," Mike said with a soothing air.

"Are you intimating that I'm a liar?" demanded MacKelcan.

"My dear Mack! We all have to lie every day of our lives! Let's look at this realistically."

"Maybe you think I killed her!"

"Don't be silly! Would I be sitting here buying you drinks if I did?"

At a near-by table sat a ravishingly pretty girl who was trying to attract Mike's attention in the hope that he might mention her in his column next day. Mike, wishing to smooth MacKelcan down now, smiled at her, whereupon she popped up and came over. After she had gushed a little, Mike introduced MacKelcan.

"Not *the* Mr. MacKelcan! Oh, I'm so glad to meet you, Mr. MacKelcan. I've been reading about you every day. I was wondering what you were like...."

MacKelcan's vanity was deliciously tickled. He played the gallant male while Mike rubbed his lip to hide a smile.

When the girl returned to her escort, Mike decided to experiment with a lie. "Mack," he said in a friendly way, "I think I ought to tell you that the police have evidence that you talked with Mrs. Ware on Tuesday night."

MacKelcan was brought back to earth with a thud. "What are you saying? What sort of evidence?"

"Norbert Besson told them that while he was talking to Mrs. Ware in her boudoir, you knocked at the door...."

"He's a liar!"

"Quiet!"

MacKelcan looked around uneasily to see if anybody had taken notice.

"Norbert told them," Mike went on, "that she hustled him into the dressing room saying that you mustn't find him there."

"What proof has he that it was me knocked?"

"He says he put his ear to the dressing room door and heard you and Mrs. Ware talking."

MacKelcan was careful to keep his voice down, but his tone was vicious. "An accused murderer snatching at any lie to save his own skin! What value has such evidence?"

"None whatever," said Mike. He saw that MacKelcan was shaken, and ventured to top his lie with another.

"Unfortunately, there appears to be corroboration."

"What sort of corroboration?"

"Somebody else overheard you and Mrs. Ware talking in the boudoir."

"Who was it?"

"Sorry, Mack, but I pledged my word not to reveal that as yet."

"It's all lies!"

"Don't take that line, Mack," urged Mike with affected earnestness. "Take a friend's advice. A man in your position can't afford it. If the police put two witnesses on the stand who have no connection with each other, they'll discredit you. It will lead to all kinds of surmises. It will look bad for you. The thing for you to do is to come out with it, before they have a chance to testify."

MacKelcan considered it, scowling. Mike had him in a corner. Finally he growled: "All right, I *did* have a talk with Mrs. Ware Tuesday night. So what?"

"No reason in the world why you shouldn't," said Mike. "... By God! that clears Besson, then. You should have come out with it yesterday and saved the poor fellow a night in jail."

"What is Norbert to me?" said MacKelcan. "I wouldn't soil my lips by naming what he is. Jail is too good for him... Besides, I haven't cleared him. If I interrupted his teet-a-teet with Mrs. Ware, what was to prevent his running back upstairs and finishing the job after I left? I left him in the apartment, remember."

"Sure, it's very likely," agreed Mike. "What did you and Mrs. Ware talk about?"

"Not much. She wasn't herself."

"What do you mean, not herself?"

"Well, she was dopey, kind of; half falling asleep."

"That's interesting. Maybe she was just putting it on to get rid of you."

"No, those yawns were genuine, one after another."

"What did you say to her?"

"My purpose in going up, as I told you before, was to find out if she had signed that will in Norbert's favor, and to make a last appeal to her not to sign it."

"And what did she say?"

"She wouldn't talk about it. Said she was too sleepy. However, I extracted a promise from her that she wouldn't sign until she had talked it over with me, and so I left her."

"Had she been drinking?"

"How do I know?"

"Well, did you see any bottles or glasses around?"

"I didn't notice any."

"Did you offer her a drink?"

MacKelcan stared. "How should I be offering her a drink?"

Mike laughed. "You can't get away with that, Mack. A long time ago Mrs. Ware told me that one of the nicest things about you was that you always had a flask of good whisky on you, and that you and she had many a nip together. She hated ordering a servant to bring her a whisky, she said, they always looked at her so funny."

MacKelcan's face was a study. "Well ... well..." he stalled, puffing to give himself confidence. He decided to laugh it off as between man and man. "Well, if she told it, it's all right with me. I didn't want to give the old girl away, you understand."

"Sure."

"As a matter of fact, I offered her a drink, but she wasn't having any then. Said it would stimulate her, and all she wanted was to sleep. So I left her, and immediately afterwards I went home, as you know."

Mike made believe to consider this. He said: "It's very likely that Norbert had drunk with her and had doped her, and that he slipped upstairs afterwards and finished the job. But how in the world are we going to hang it on him?"

"That's up to the police."

"I'm sorry that it looks so bad for you," said Mike.

"Why me?"

"Because, as far as the evidence shows, you were the last person in the world to see her alive."

MacKelcan scowled and fidgeted. After a space he muttered: "I was not the last. There was another went to the boudoir after me."

"For God's sake!" said Mike, genuinely surprised now. "Who?"

"Cummings."

"Can you prove it?"

"Certainly I can prove it.... Listen! While I was talking to the old lady I had a feeling that there was somebody listening at the door. Not the dressing-room door, but the corridor door through which I had entered. You know how you get those feelings. Maybe I heard a little sound out there. When I went out, there was nobody in sight, of course. I closed the door so it could be heard, and hummed a little to myself, and I rattled the elevator door when I went down. There was nobody in the foyer at the moment and I ran softly back up the stairs until I could peep over the top step. I saw Cummings knock at the door of the boudoir and go in."

Mike wondered if he were lying. Impossible to guess from his face, which always had a false expression, whatever he

was saying. "How long did Cummings stay in there?"

"I couldn't tell you. I just established the fact that he went in, and then I beat it."

"Why in the world didn't you tell this before?"

"Well, I couldn't tell it without admitting that I was up there myself. I thought you and your friends the police would solve the mystery without my testimony."

"But you're prepared to go on the stand and swear to it now?"

"Sure, if I'm needed."

"Had Cummings anything in his hands?"

"Not so far as I could see."

"Could you see his face?"

"Not very good. He looked murderous to me, but I never did like the man."

"What you have told me puts an entirely new aspect on the case," said Mike impressively.

MacKelcan looked pleased.

Mike wanted to get rid of him now. He glanced at his watch. "Man! how time flies! I've got to beat it to dress. This has been darned helpful, Mack. We must have further talks."

MacKelcan had completely recovered his confidence. "Look," he said, "if I come back to this place alone or with a friend, would I be let in?"

"Sure!" said Mike, "you're a member in good standing now."

Chapter 21

On Saturday night at dinner, Mike and Radigan discussed MacKelcan's latest story without coming to any conclusion about it.

"Would the so-and-so swear another man's life away?" said Radigan.

Mike laughed. "You're pretty soft-hearted for a hard-boiled cop. Sure, he would! When a man starts lying, how is he going to stop? What is a life to him? *If* he's lying."

"I wouldn't hang Cummings on his say-so."

"Neither would I. But if he has given us a straight tip it's up to us to find corroboration."

On Sunday there promised to be not much doing in the case. Mike had no desire to sit in at the long questioning of Cummings at Headquarters. It would be a brutal business, and what was worse, tedious. If they should get anything out of Cummings, he would learn about it soon enough. As for Alfred, he had had a kind of collapse after reaching the hospital and could not be questioned at all.

It was a fine day and smart society had flown to Lenox or Pittsfield or Old Westbury, or even farther afield. Mike decided to follow. He had an invitation from Amy Fentress. Evidently her rage against him had cooled off, or else she was finding that it was wasted. As with all her lot, Amy's emotions were as unstable as water. He wrote his column for Monday's paper and motored up to Amy's place at Mount Kisco for lunch. After all, Amy had been present at Mrs. Ware's on Tuesday night and her eyes were as keen as a lynx's, however she might make believe that she saw nothing. In the light of what he had learned during the past three days, she might give him an additional clue.

When he arrived at the Fentress' vast place on top of a hill, the guests were being too, too informal. Clad in slacks or shorts, the women with halters knotted around their necks, they were sitting or lying on the sand in a lofty, glass-roofed conservatory, playing that it was the tropics. The fronds of tall palms drooped over their heads and branches of citrus trees, with golden or yellow fruit. Orchids in bloom hung from the forks of the trees. The sand was pleasantly warmed by pipes running underneath. There was a gaudy bandanna spread on it, and the whole party, grouped around, was shooting craps to the accompaniment of raucous cries picked up in Harlem. Greenbacks fluttered through the air like autumn leaves. Each player had a highball within reach.

The newcomer received a noisy welcome. "Hi, Mike! When did they let you out?... Shh! the dicks go with him wherever he goes! They're waiting outside.... Cheese it! Hide the money!... Take off your clothes and come on in, Mike."

"Sorry, I didn't bring my trunks."

"That's all right. Your scanties will do!"

Amy Fentress' pale face flushed briefly. She scrambled to her feet, an alluring figure in her thick-soled red sandals, white doeskin slacks and scarlet halter. She was really crazy about Mike, but he was not deceived by it. It was not for his bright eyes, but because he stood out against her. She slipped her arm through his, and led him down a green alley to a bench out of sight of the crap-shooters.

"I didn't expect you," she murmured. "You didn't answer my note."

"Didn't think I could come," said Mike. "Then found I couldn't keep away. You're adorable."

"Adorable my foot! Be human!... Where's your bag?"

"Didn't bring any. Must go back after lunch."

When they had finished quarreling about it, Mike said: "I suppose you're horribly disappointed because they have dropped the case against me."

"Horribly! If I could once be loved by a murderer, I'd die happy!"

"Who's inhuman now? How can a man act human with a woman who poses as an ogress?"

"I know I'm decadent," she said with affected sadness. "How can I help it? I have experienced everything...."

Mike thought: Everything except bearing a child.

"Consequently I'm bored to tears!"

On the bench she settled herself within his arm, and let her head fall back against his shoulder. Mike didn't get even a faraway thrill out of it. However, he played up to her dutifully until she was in, for her, a thoroughly good humor. Finally he said casually:

"I suppose you've been following the Ware case in the papers?"

"Following it! I devour the newspapers, column by column, searching for your name."

"Well, don't lose heart. They're likely to revive the case against me at any time.... They arrested the butler yesterday."

"So I saw. Do they really think he did it?"

"Too soon to say yet."

Amy sat up, bright-eyed. Any mention of murder excited her. "Oh, it would be lovely if it was he!"

"Lovely?"

"Yes, a kind of poetic justice, because he looks the part."

"You took notice of him, then, at the party."

"I should think I did. He made an impossible evening tolerable for me. I have never received such an impression of pure wickedness. And outwardly so quiet, so respectful; fire burning inside. Fancy, finding that in a butler! Most butlers look like eunuchs. But that one is a man! Did you ever notice his hands? Not much like a butler's hands; a plowman's—or a strangler's! They made me shiver deliciously."

"Did you have any talk with him?"

"I certainly did. I spoke to him each time I saw him. He scorned me. His eyes burned with scorn of me, and that made it all the more exciting. I asked him if he was married, and he said: 'Pardon me, that can't be of any interest to you, Madam.' And he wouldn't tell me! Later I saw him go into the dining room and I sauntered in there. There wasn't anybody else in the room. He was filling a small flask from a bottle of whisky...."

"Hey?" said Mike, sharply interested.

"I said to him," Amy went on, "'Who is that for, Cummings?' And he answered, staring at me as cool as you please, 'For myself, Madam.' And I said: 'What would your mistress say if she knew you were taking the whisky? I've a good mind to tell her,' I said, just to plague him. He slipped the flask in his pocket, saying, 'Just as you please, Madam. My mistress has confidence in me.' And went out through the pantry door. What a man! Do you think I could get him to work for me?"

"Surely. If and when he gets out of jail.... What you have told me may be important. Can you fix the moment at which it happened?"

"It was near the end of the party."

"Did you notice if MacKelcan was around at the time?"

"That absurd man! I wasn't interested."

"But think, think. Where was he when this happened?"

Amy went through the motions of thinking. "I went through the rooms, looking for Bobo to take me home, and I suppose I saw everybody. I don't remember MacKelcan. No, I'm sure he wasn't there. It was about this time that Norbert and Maud came back from wherever they had been. But I did see MacKelcan again. When I went to the powder room for my wrap, MacKelcan was leaving. We left five minutes or so later."

"If Cummings was brought to trial," Mike asked, "would you be willing to repeat what you have told me on the stand?"

"To testify at a murder trial! Just give me the chance, that's all. If I were a witness, would I have a seat in the court every day, and hear and see it all?"

"I suppose so."

"And I'd be photographed entering and leaving the court, holding my handbag up to hide my face, but not hiding too much! Darling! I would almost commit a murder myself for such a thrill!" She twisted her head so that she could look up into his face. "What a beautiful corpse you would make!"

"Go as far as you like," said Mike.

Putting her hand up, she caressed his throat. "I wonder where the jugular vein is?"

"But don't talk about your evidence in advance," he warned her, "or it will be valueless."

"Mum's the word, darling."

On his return to town Sunday evening, Mike wrote Radigan a memo of what he had learned so that the Lieutenant would have it before him first thing in the morning.

Chapter 22

On Monday morning Mike learned that Cummings, after having been questioned all day Sunday and through the night, still stuck to his original story. He answered every question as briefly as possible, and volunteered no additional information. Hard, self-controlled, defiant, he never gave an inch. He displayed more stamina than his questioners; they were brought up in relays and one after another he stood them off.

At the hospital on Sunday Alfred had recovered sufficiently to be questioned. The police were more gentle with him. He, too, stuck to his story, Radigan said over the phone, and volunteered some additional statements very damaging to Cummings.

This morning Alfred was able to leave the hospital and Radigan was bringing him down to Headquarters. It was the Lieutenant's idea to confront him with Cummings and see what came of it. The Clipper was due at the same hour from England, and Mike, not wishing to miss the scene at Headquarters, sent a man to meet the plane and to bring his guest to him.

Radigan secured a sound-proof examination room. He seated himself behind a desk with Mike on his left. Cummings and Alfred were brought by uniformed officers, who waited outside. The two were placed on opposite sides of the room, facing each other. Cummings had now been under examination on Saturday, all day Sunday, and again at intervals during the preceding night, and Mike was startled by the change in his appearance. The butler's face was gray and his eyes sunken. But though he was at the point of exhaustion, he had not weakened; his glance was still charged with hatred and defiance.

Alfred's coat was buttoned over his hurt arm, which was in a cast and sling. After one sidelong glance at Cummings, he never looked at him again. Seeing the state that the butler had been reduced to, Alfred was not so much afraid of him today. On the other hand, Cummings fed his hate by staring fixedly at the other man.

"Alfred," said Radigan, "repeat what you told me yesterday about seeing Cummings in the pantry on Tuesday night."

"Yes, Lieutenant; certainly, sir." Alfred was trying to impress Radigan with the contrast between his willingness and Cummings' sullenness. "I was washing some glasses in the pantry and Mr. Cummings come in. He never said anything to me, but went on out the door to the corridor, and up the service stairs."

"Is this true?" Radigan asked Cummings.

"Sure."

"Where were you going upstairs?"

"To my own room."

"What for?"

"To go to bed."

"Without locking up the liquor?"

"I forgot it."

"How could you forget it when you had just been filling a flask of liquor in the dining room?"

Cummings sneered. "So you know that, too! The lady told you."

"She did."

"I hope she told you what she said," Cummings went on. "She was too free-spoken a lady for my taste. It made me mad because I could not speak my mind to her. Even a butler has the feelings of a man. That was what made me forget the liquor."

Mike wondered at the quickness with which he turned the incident to his own advantage.

"Not a very likely story," said Radigan. "You went to your room, you say; then what?"

"I remembered about the liquor and came downstairs again."

"It was a good fifteen minutes before he came down," put in Alfred.

"Wait until I question you," said Radigan. He addressed Cummings sarcastically. "Why did you stay up there so long?"

"No particular reason," said Cummings. "I started to undress. I put on my clothes again and came down."

Radigan turned to Alfred. "Go on with your story."

"When he came downstairs again, I was pouring some drinks in the dining room and Cummings said to me: (Alfred dropped the respectful 'Mister' at this point and Cummings' deep-set eyes burned.) Cummings said to me: 'The Madam says no more drinks tonight....'"

"Can I speak?" put in Cummings.

Radigan signed to him to go ahead.

"That is wrong," said Cummings. "I said nothing about the Madam. I just said no more drinks tonight."

"That's not so!" cried Alfred excitedly. "Cummings said 'the Madam says,' and by that I knew he had just been up there!"

"He's lying now!" said Cummings, "I had not been up there."

"Quiet, both of you!" ordered Radigan. "I'll find out who's lying."

Mike leaned over and suggested a question to Radigan.

Radigan said to Cummings: "You told us in the beginning that Mrs. Ware had told you to serve no more drinks after one-thirty. When did she tell you that?"

"When I saw her for the last time. When she and Mrs. Prior started upstairs."

"You were seen carrying her a drink after Mrs. Prior left."

"That's true," said Cummings. "I had forgotten it. It was then that she said to me: 'Get rid of these people as soon as you can, Cummings. Serve no more drinks after one-thirty....'"

"He's still lying!" cried Alfred.

"Prove it!" snarled Cummings.

"I can and I will prove it!... When Cummings come back to the dining room after carrying a drink to the Madam about one o'clock the whisky was running low—all the guests was drinking scotches and sodas, and I asked him to get out more, and he says: 'My Lord! what a bunch of guzzlers!' And I says: 'How long will they stay?' And he says: 'Damned if I know!' and got out four fresh bottles of Scotch. Well, if the Madam had just told him to stop at one-thirty, he would have mentioned it then, wouldn't he?"

"Sure," said Radigan. "... And you are the liar!" he flung at Cummings.

Cummings snarled: "Everything that rat says I said is twisted a little to incriminate me."

"Well, what *did* you say? I'm waiting to hear it."

"Aah! what's the use? I'll speak when I get a lawyer and a fair trial."

Mike saw a look of desperation come into the man's eyes as he perceived the net closing around him. But he still fought back.

"You went to Mrs. Ware's room a second time!" cried Radigan, shooting a forefinger at him.

"I did not!"

"You're lying!"

Cummings glared at his tormentor like a trapped animal.

Radigan went back a little. "That flask which you said you filled with whisky and carried to your room. What became of it? It was not found in your room next day."

"I had no occasion to use any of the whisky," said Cummings coolly. "I carried it back to the liquor closet next morning and it's there still, and still full."

"That won't help you any," said Radigan. "You could always fill it again."

At this point an officer knocked and entered to tell Radigan that Mr. MacKelcan was outside and would like to know if he was wanted. Radigan had staged this.

"He comes just at the right time," said the Lieutenant. "Ask him to step in a minute."

MacKelcan breezed in with his lapels flying. "Good morning! Good morning, everybody ... Lieutenant ... Mike ... Cummings, I'm sorry to see you in such a situation... How's the arm, Alfred?"

"Doing nicely, thank you, Mr. MacKelcan. Have my chair, sir."

"Mr. MacKelcan," said Radigan formally, "will you please repeat what you told my friend, Mr. Speedon, on Saturday evening?"

MacKelcan shook his head lugubriously. "I am sorry to have to say this; very, very sorry! On Tuesday night of last week, at or about one-thirty-five A.M., I saw Cummings knock at the door of Mrs. Ware's boudoir and go in."

Cummings sprang up as if electrified. "There's another liar!" he shouted. "Where does he say *he* was when he saw me?"

"On the stairs," said MacKelcan. "I was standing part way down, looking over the top step."

"He lies! He lies!" cried Cummings, beside himself with rage. "He went down in the elevator!"

Instantly he saw that he had betrayed himself. He dropped back in the chair and covered his face. Everybody else in the room guffawed with laughter—except Mike. It gave him no pleasure to see a man baited in this fashion, however guilty. At the sound of the cruel laughter, Cummings raised his head again and glared at his tormentors.

Radigan said: "Much obliged, Mr. MacKelcan. I shall have to ask you to retire now. When this man is put on trial you will be a witness against him, and it would not be right for you to hear what he says."

"Surely, surely, Lieutenant, I quite understand. I will wait in the outer office in case I should be needed again." He retired.

"Well, Cummings," said Radigan jocosely, "I take it you won't deny any longer that you went to Mrs. Ware's room a second time."

Cummings shook his head morosely.

"What did you want to lie about it for?"

"It was natural for me to lie. I wasn't going to put myself in the position of being the last to see her alive. You're all against me!"

"You'd better come all the way clean now," said Radigan threateningly. "It'll be easier for you in the end."

"What are you trying to pin on me?" Cummings parried. "Robbery or murder?"

"Both! The murder was for the purpose of robbery!"

"That's foolish," said Cummings contemptuously. "I've been working for Mrs. Ware six months. I had fifty better opportunities to rob her. Everybody in the house knew how careless she was. If Kinsey wasn't there to undress her, she would throw her jewels down on the dressing table or any place until morning."

"So you say."

Cummings' eyes narrowed as he concentrated on his problem. "Wait a minute!... I can *prove* that it wasn't me who stole her jewels."

"Let's hear it," said Radigan with a grin of disbelief.

Cummings said: "The thief telephoned to the insurance detective that he had the jewels. Well, that might have been me. The detective told him to mail the jewels. He had to go out to do that. And he had to go out a second time to pick up the reward at the post office. Well, up until Saturday, I had not been out of the apartment but once, and that was only because I had been sent for to come down here!"

Radigan was momentarily shaken by this answer. "Well, I reckon you have friends on the outside to help you."

"You will have a hard time finding them, Lieutenant. I have no friends.... On the other hand, I don't suppose you're interested, but Alfred here, once the servants were cleared by the police, was out every day and sometimes more than once on errands for the household."

Alfred burst out: "Now he's trying to pass it back to me!"

"Quiet!" said Radigan. To Cummings he went on: "The robbery is only incidental. Murder is my job.... You were the last person to see her alive."

Cummings was still fighting. "You don't know that. Norbert Besson was still in the house when I came downstairs."

"Never mind him now. What took place during your last talk with Mrs. Ware?"

Cummings said: "I asked her if she would like a drink. That was why I had filled the flask. She had told me earlier that she didn't like the servants to see me bringing her whisky. She refused the drink, saying that she had had one."

Radigan asked: "Did she seem sleepy, dopey, sort of?"

"Not at all. She was her usual self."

Mike broke in. "Think what you're saying, man! There's no call for you to put the rope around your own neck...." He caught Radigan scowling at him and pulled up. "Sorry, Rad," he said in an undertone. "I forgot myself."

"I am telling the truth," said Cummings. "She was not sleepy or dopey, as you say. But she seemed depressed. I asked her if she wouldn't go to bed, and she said she would as soon as she had seen somebody."

"Did she tell you who she wanted to see?"

"She did not. I assumed that it was Norbert Besson."

Mike thought: A point for Cummings.

"You were on pretty friendly terms with your mistress, according to you."

"When the other servants were not around, Mrs. Ware treated me as a friend. There is plenty of evidence as to that. She said she trusted me."

"And this is how you repaid her trust!"

"You haven't proved yet that I betrayed her."

"We've come pretty close to it, man. It's been established that Mrs. Ware was doped with a drug administered in whisky. You brought her whisky twice. You were the last to see her...."

Cummings interrupted him. "You can't hang a man without showing that he had a motive. What reason had I for killing Mrs. Ware?"

"I'm not here to answer questions but to ask them," said Radigan dryly. "What else did you and Mrs. Ware talk about?"

"I don't recollect anything else," said Cummings. "She told me to get the people out as soon as I could. I returned downstairs and locked up the liquor, and gave Alfred his instructions."

"What instructions?"

"I told him not to pick up any more empty glasses. If any guest asked him for a drink he was to put it off on me. He was to say that he was sorry, but the butler had retired, taking the keys."

"And then?"

"I went to my room to keep out of their way. They knew I had the keys. It was the easiest way to get rid of them."

"And went to bed, I suppose," said Radigan sarcastically. "You are so fond of your bed."

"I went to bed," said Cummings stolidly.

"Did you get any sleep that night?"

"I slept. I had no reason to expect any trouble."

Radigan suddenly cut loose. "You left the old lady lying dead in her boudoir," he shouted, "and you went to bed and slept!"

Cummings hardened. "I did not kill her. I had no reason to."

"You killed her!"

"You will never get me to admit that," said Cummings stubbornly. "Not you and all your mates together! Not though you kill me!"

There was a knock at the door and the same officer entered. This time he had a message for Mike. "It's from the man who

is waiting for you outside. Another man brought him and left him a while ago. He wants to know if it's all right for him to go out and get a bite to eat."

Mike consulted, low-voiced, with Radigan. "It's the witness from England. I'll send him up to my flat to wait until we're ready for him. Takaku will feed him."

"Let's have a look at him first," said Radigan. "Bring the man in," he added to the uniformed officer.

The latter presently returned, bringing a burly north-countryman, with the powerful shoulders and pale, thin jaws of a miner. He was wearing a loud, new suit, and was somewhat overcome by the strangeness of his surroundings. A slow-thinking man but no fool, judging from his face, and as honest as the day. All glanced at the newcomer, and Cummings was overlooked for the moment.

Mike went to meet him. "How are you, Maxwell? I'm Michael Speedon."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Speedon."

"Hope you had a good trip."

"Amazing! Amazing!" muttered the confused newcomer. "Yesterday I was in London; today I am in New York! I don't rightly know where I am!"

Mike introduced him to Radigan. "This is Mr. Maxwell, who has come over to tell us what he knows about James Fawcett. Shake hands with Lieutenant Radigan, Maxwell."

"The honor is mine, Left'nant," said Maxwell, offering an enormous paw.

"We certainly are obliged to you for coming so far, Mr. Maxwell. We've got a hard nut to crack here. A little later we must talk things over."

"Meanwhile, take a taxi up to my place," said Mike. "I'll give you a note to my man."

During this exchange, Alfred with an ugly smile was saying: "Sst! Sst!" and calling their attention to Cummings. The three looked at the butler simultaneously. Cummings' face had turned greenish, and his deep-sunk eyes were wild with terror.

"Damn me! here's Jim Fawcett right here!" cried Maxwell. "I didn't see you when I come in, Jim! Why didn't you hail me?" His face was lighted up with pleasure, and he thrust out his big hand.

"You're making a mistake," said Cummings huskily. "My name is Cummings."

Maxwell, still holding out his hand, stared at him in astonishment. Then his face flushed with anger. "Damn me! Do you think I don't know you? After twenty years! Would you make me out a liar before these gentlemen?" He turned to Radigan. "Lieutenant, I could bring fifty men, a hundred men from Newcastle who know Jim Fawcett."

"It isn't necessary," said Radigan with a hard smile. "We accept your identification."

Maxwell, all in a maze, turned back to Cummings. "What's the matter, Jim? What for do you want to deny me?"

Cummings muttered: "You have thrown me to the wolves, Rafe."

Maxwell stared at him in complete confusion.

Mike, who was almost as stunned by the disclosure, but was not showing it, said: "Come on, Maxwell. I'll explain as we go." He led the dazed Maxwell out.

Radigan said: "Do you still deny that you had no motive for killing Mrs. Ware, Fawcett? When she was on the point of

signing a will that would have cut you out of the Ware millions?"

Cummings was mute.

Chapter 23

Mike returned and the examination proceeded. Alfred was bursting with confidence. The dejected Cummings, or Fawcett, no longer looked at him.

"Come clean!" shouted Radigan, pounding the desk.

"I did not kill Mrs. Ware," said Fawcett dully. "She was my mother's sister."

Radigan laughed. "A fat lot of difference that made to you!... Did she know who you were?"

"No. I was going to tell her when I had gained her confidence. I kept putting it off."

"How did you get to be a butler, anyhow? A miner like you."

Fawcett's eyes flashed briefly. "I got to be a butler because I made up my mind to it. I wouldn't let nothing stop me. I knew I was the legal heir, and I came to New York to watch over my interests. As my aunt had refused to receive me, the only way I could get near her was to enter her service. I spent months watching and learning and preparing myself for it. I made friends with other butlers and pumped them about their jobs. One of them told me about a butler's manual which I studied until I knew it by heart. This man's name was Cummings. I copied his recommendations, and that's why I took the name of Cummings."

"We know all about him," said Radigan.

"I made out that I was an Australian to account for my accent, and I forged Australian recommendations. Finally, last spring, I got the job in Mrs. Ware's house that I was after. Then I set out to make myself indispensable to her; I ran the house efficiently; I kept the servants in order and stopped their stealing; also the tradesmen."

"All for love of your aunt?"

"No. I figured that what I saved would come to me some day. And for the same reason I wanted to protect her from sharpers and swindlers. I soon learned in the servants' hall about her nephew who was a miner in England, and that she had made her will in his favor and ..."

"And your prime object was to make sure that she never changed that will, eh?" put in Radigan. "And when you found that she was about to sign a new will, you stopped her!"

"I did not kill her. I did not know she had made a new will."

Alfred cried out: "That's a lie! I can tell you something about that, Lieutenant."

"Well, let's hear it."

Alfred began confidently: "Last Tuesday morning, Mrs. Ware sent Cummings up to her house in Tarrytown on some made-up business that kept him there the whole day. She was expecting a lawyer to call, and she wanted to get Cummings out of the way...."

Mike interrupted him. "One moment!... Can I put a question?" he asked Radigan.

"Sure."

"How could you know what was in Mrs. Ware's mind?"

"It was Cummings himself let it out he was so mad about it."

"Go on."

"In the morning the lawyer came, and in the afternoon the Madam drove downtown to his office. Martin, the chauffeur, told me that. When Cummings got back he was wild when he heard it, and asked me a hundred questions about the lawyer. And the next morning he was at me again about it."

Cummings spoke up in his own defense. "I knew she had sent for a lawyer and naturally I was interested. But I didn't know what for. And what this liar didn't tell you was that he couldn't answer my questions. He couldn't even tell me the lawyer's name. Moreover, if I had already killed Mrs. Ware, why should I go back to Alfred for information after it was over?"

Mike thought: Point two for Cummings-Fawcett.

Radigan addressed Alfred. "Is that so?"

Alfred was losing some of his confidence. "Well, I could almost remember his name," he said lamely.

Radigan said to Fawcett grimly: "Well, since a lawyer *had* called, you made up your mind you had better be on the safe side and not wait any longer, eh?"

Some of Fawcett's old fire came back. "If you've made up your mind not to believe anything I say, why do you keep on questioning me?"

"Well, I seem to be getting at the truth in spite of you," retorted Radigan.

Fawcett stood up suddenly. "Turn your attention to him for a while!" he said with a passionate gesture in Alfred's direction. "It's nonsensical to accuse me of the robbery now. Once Mrs. Ware was dead, the jewels were mine! Why should I steal my own?"

Radigan exchanged a glance with Mike. The latter's expression said: We can't go behind that, Rad.

Fawcett, seeing that he was having some effect, went on: "I knew from the first that Alfred was the thief and I tortured him to make him tell where he hid them. The jewels were mine! It made me mad when he was paid for the return of a part of them, and I swore to myself that *I* would not pay for the return of what was mine! There sits the thief! Look at him! Look at him!"

Radigan did look at Alfred, and with a new expression. The young man cringed under it, and seemed to shrink in his chair. "By God, he's right!" Radigan cried, striking his desk. "As far as the robbery is concerned." He jumped up and strode to Alfred's chair. "You are the thief!" he shouted with accusing forefinger.

Alfred writhed in his chair, in intolerable terror. "No! No! No!" he squalled. "As God is my judge, it wasn't me, Lieutenant. He's a liar. You know he's a liar! So help me God, it wasn't me!"

"You lie!" shouted Radigan. "Confess!"

Radigan, standing over the young man with blazing eyes, terrible voice and commanding forefinger, was like the very embodiment of the outraged Law and the weak creature soon crumpled. Presently it came tumbling out:

"I did it! I did it! Oh, God, I don't know what made me do it! Oh, God, what will my mother say when she hears of this! Oh, I wish I was dead, I do!"

Radigan strutted back to his desk, well-pleased.

Mike, full of curiosity, said: "Tell us how you did it, Alfred."

The writhing creature snarled: "I don't have to answer *your* questions."

"You can tell me!" shouted Radigan, thumping his desk.

Fawcett sat through this with a face like a mask, with two burning eyes showing through it.

"It was a sudden impulse," whined Alfred. "I'm not a bad fellow. She was so careless with her things! 'Tain't right an old woman should have so much. I thought about it all the time. I knew she had told Kinsey to go to bed that night, and they said she always left her jewels lying on the dressing table when Kinsey wasn't there. And... and I knew she took dope to make her sleep. She was hard to rouse. So I waited in my room for a long time. More than an hour, I guess. And then I went down the stairs—the front stairs because the service stairs creak and there were too many sleeping near. I went in through the boudoir because that was further from the Madam's bedroom, and I could get into the dressing room from there; the door was usually open. And... and..." He covered his face with his hands. "I can't go on. It's too awful."

"Tell the whole story," commanded Radigan, "or you'll be charged with murder, too!"

"No! No!" squalled Alfred. "She was dead when I got there! I'll tell! I'll tell!..."

Radigan drew a sheet of paper towards him and wrote as Alfred told his story.

The young man was sweating and breathing unevenly. "When I went into the dark boudoir I ... I ... Oh, God! I stumbled over her. She was lying on the floor. I let a little squawk out of me, but nobody come. Nobody sleeps near there."

"What time was this?" asked Radigan.

"About three-thirty, Lieutenant, as near as I can figure."

"Was the body cold?"

"Oh, yes.... I knew she was dead as soon as I touched her. I didn't know if she was murdered or just died. I had a flashlight, just a little one. Wasn't any blood.... I wanted to run back to my room, but the jewels sparkled so in the light... they sparkled so... I took them off her. I thought... if she was murdered... they would think the murderer took them...."

"I didn't rightly know what I was doing.... I had a notion to put her in her bed... and I started to unhook her dress. But I realized it was a fool notion... because I couldn't make her look like she looked when they put her to bed. And I couldn't hook her up again... my hands trembled so...."

"Then I wanted to hide her.... I knew if I ran out of the house then, they'd know it was me and I'd surely be caught.... And maybe charged with murder, too. But if I could hide her so she wouldn't be found for a while, I could show myself in the morning.... And get out and hide the jewels somewhere, and come back afterwards. And they'd never know it was me took them.... I saw the old carved cupboard... just the right size.... And I put her in there... and took the key.

"But in the morning... before she was found, I mean, Cummings wouldn't let me go out... I was in a fix, then... I near died, I was so scared.... Just by chance when I was passing the bedroom next to Cummings', I saw the old brass bed and that gave me an idea. It was so heavy everybody thought it was solid brass.... But once when I was helping to move it, I noticed one of the knobs was loose.... So I took it off and dropped the jewels down the hole and the key after them.... And screwed the knob back tight...."

"Where's the reward you collected?"

"I shoved the bills down the other post at the foot of the bed."

"Anything else to say?" asked Radigan.

Alfred miserably shook his head.

"Then sign this. You go to the Tombs."

Fawcett spoke for the first time. "What about me?"

"You are held on a charge of murder," said Radigan.

Alfred was removed from the examination room. All this time Sanford MacKelcan had been waiting in the outer office in case he should be wanted, and Mike suggested that he be brought in again. He was sent for.

When the attorney pranced in, flinging out his legs and twisting his long neck like a crane, Radigan said with dry humor:

"Well, there's your rich client, Mr. MacKelcan. That's Jim Fawcett of Newcastle, England."

MacKelcan started back, open-mouthed, quite honest for once. "Oh, my God, what are you saying, Lieutenant? It can't be true! No! No! No! You're joking!"

"It's true, all right. Ask him yourself."

Fawcett sneered. "I'm not just the kind of client you were expecting, eh, MacKelcan? You looked for a poor boob of a miner that you could twist around your finger!"

"Oh, this is terrible!" moaned MacKelcan. "You shouldn't talk to me that way, Mr. Fawcett! After all, I am your attorney."

Fawcett, ex-Cummings, could at least have the satisfaction of being honest now. He no longer had to crook the neck and bend the knee. "Damn your eyes!" he cried furiously. "I don't want you! I'd as lief have a crocodile for my attorney!"

MacKelcan glanced at the grinning Radigan and Mike. "Don't talk like that, Mr. Fawcett," he said beseechingly. "Before others, too. We're co-executors under the will. We can't escape our responsibilities. We're bound together."

"You'd better refuse to serve, then," growled Fawcett. "I've been watching you for six months, MacKelcan. I know you through and through! And I'm damned if you'll ever diddle me out of a penny!"

"Oh, this is a terrible situation!" moaned MacKelcan.

"Of course, if Fawcett is convicted of murdering his aunt," said Radigan dryly, "he won't inherit. That's the law."

"In that case, what will become of the Ware fortune?" said MacKelcan. "There is no other known heir."

"I have children," said Fawcett.

"I doubt if the children would be allowed to inherit," said Radigan. "What say, Mack?"

MacKelcan clapped his hands to his head. "Give me time! Give me time! This awful shock... But in any case, I am indispensable to you, Mr. Fawcett. I know the law of this country..."

"The hell with you!" said Fawcett. "You can't cozen me. I'll have another lawyer, and you can deal with me through him!"

"Oh, this is terrible!" moaned MacKelcan.

Chapter 24

The search of the sewer catch basins in the vicinity of the Ware apartment, ordered by the police, had yielded a curious variety of objects but no hypodermic syringe. All the objects that could not be accounted for had been saved. At the time of Norbert Besson's detention, a further search had been ordered of the basins adjacent to the Hotel Bathurst, and on Monday, this day, the findings came in.

The syringe was found in a basin not a hundred feet from the hotel door. It had been crushed flat and bent over; the plunger broken off; but the plunger was found in the same deposit of mud, and in the hands of the police department experts the syringe was so skillfully reconstructed that the firm of Emory and Almond could identify it as one of the two they had mailed, as they thought, to Dr. Patton.

Mike and Radigan met at Headquarters to examine the object. Radigan said:

"I can't believe Norbert would be such a fool as to drop this in a place that would lead us directly to his door. It's a plant."

"Very likely," agreed Mike.

"It was Cummings-Fawcett who planted it there. After he had done his job, he had to get rid of the syringe quick. He left the apartment—he had keys, of course, to the service door and the service entrance downstairs—and after he had dropped his little tool, he came in the same way. How simple!"

Mike said nothing.

"Damn it!" said Radigan irritably. "Do you still refuse to believe that it was Fawcett did it?"

"I am not convinced."

"You and your instincts!"

"Well, once or twice my instincts have proved to be right."

Radigan ignored it. "After the way he has been lying from the start, do you actually believe he was telling the truth this morning?"

"I neither believe nor disbelieve. Fawcett is too deep a man for me to fathom. He doesn't conform to any of the usual types. I can't figure what's passing through the mind of a man like that. *But!*..."

"Oh, yeah! There's always a 'but' with you!"

"One or two things he said have raised a doubt in my mind."

"What, for instance?"

"When he said: 'She was my mother's sister.' He wasn't laboring to convince us that he loved the old girl. He just mentioned it casually, and let it go at that."

"What else?"

"When he broke and said to Maxwell: 'You have thrown me to the wolves, Rafe!' I swear that doesn't sound to me like the cry of a guilty man."

"Ah, you're always hearing funny sounds! As for me, I'm satisfied it was Fawcett. He has everything the murderer must have had. By his own words, we know that he has been plotting and scheming for months past. In all my experience, I

never met with such a patient schemer. We know, too, that he's a forger. He is just the one to have cooked up that fake order for the syringes."

"Okay," said Mike. "However, since this syringe does lead to Norbert's door, I suppose we'll have to look down that alley, too."

"Oh, sure."

"Not much use questioning Fawcett further. He's told us all he knows—or all he wants us to know."

"Sure. I want to ask Alfred a few questions. Will you come down to the Tombs with me?"

"Sure."

While they were waiting in the prison for Alfred to be brought to them, Mike said: "Bear in mind, Rad, that Alfred wants to pay off Fawcett for his broken arm. He won't help you to shift suspicion away from the Englishman."

"I wasn't born yesterday," said Radigan.

The red-lidded, disheveled young second man was led into the waiting room. There was a crazy hope in his eyes, but it faded when he saw Radigan's expression.

"Sit down," said Radigan, "and answer my questions."

Alfred fawned on him. "Certainly Lieutenant. Anything at all, sir. I only want to help.... Lieutenant, will the District-Attorney be easy on me if I testify freely against Cummings?"

"That's up to the D-A.... This morning we brought you up to the point where Cummings or Fawcett gave you his last orders and went upstairs for the second time."

"Yes, sir."

"Now I want you to tell me with the greatest particularity what happened after that. Take it slow, and tell me every little detail."

"But, Lieutenant," objected Alfred, "by that time ..."

"Be quiet!" rasped Radigan. "Do as I tell you. I'm not interested in your ideas about the case."

"Certainly, Lieutenant.... After Cummings went upstairs (Alfred could not accustom himself to his boss' new name), I went back into the living room. People were leaving and I went into the foyer to open the door for them. It was Mr. MacKelcan and Mr. and Mrs. Bradstreet and ..."

"Never mind them. I have a note of their names."

"The next thing I remember Mrs. Fentress asked me for a drink, and I said what I had been told to say and she cursed me...."

"Do ladies curse servants?"

"Modern ladies, yes, sir. They don't mean nothing by it."

"Go on."

"Mrs. Fentress said to the man she was with—she called him Bobo; I don't remember his right name—she said: 'Let's get out of this dump,' and I let them out. Others went, but I can't remember the exact order...."

"Did Mr. Besson and Mrs. Laval leave?"

"Not then, sir. About half the guests were still in the living room, talking loud. They kept asking me for drinks, and it was so embarrassing I went back to the dining room to keep out of the way. A couple of gentlemen followed me, but I showed them there was nothing to drink, and they went out again."

"Was one of these men Norbert Besson?"

"No, sir."

"How long were you in the dining room?"

"About ten minutes, I should say. Then there was a general movement to leave, and I went back to the foyer to let them out."

"Where was Norbert Besson while you were in the dining room?"

"In the living room, sir, with the other guests."

"You can't see into the living room from the dining room?"

"No, sir. You have to go round by the foyer."

"You can't see the elevator from the dining room?"

"No, sir. It's on the other side."

"Then how do you know Norbert Besson didn't leave the living room while you were in the dining room?"

"I would have heard the elevator door if he had opened it."

"That's not so. I have tried that door and it opens and closes without a sound unless you try to make a noise."

"Mr. Besson couldn't have gone upstairs, Lieutenant. There wasn't time."

"Certainly there was time for him to have run up to say good night to Mrs. Ware and come down again."

Alfred felt gingerly of his hurt arm. "It was Cummings did it," he said viciously.

"You can leave that to me," said Radigan. "What time did Norbert Besson and Mrs. Laval leave the apartment?"

"About two, Lieutenant, or a little before."

"Were they the last to leave?"

"No, sir. But all were getting ready to go then. All except two of the gentlemen who were arguing in the music room. They wouldn't go until I brought in their coats and laid them over the backs of chairs."

"What time was it when the last guest was out?"

"It had struck two just a little before."

"What did you do then?"

"I carried all the glasses and the ash trays into the pantry to be washed in the morning. I put out the lights and went to my room."

Mike interrupted: "Lieutenant, what kind of locks are there on Mrs. Ware's front door and on the service door? I never

happened to notice."

"Burglar-proof bar locks on both doors. They can't be opened by any master key ever made, and they can't be jimmed open."

"Thanks. Go ahead."

Radigan addressed Alfred. "You have to pass the butler's room to reach your own?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was his light still burning? I suppose when you turned out the last light you looked."

"Yes, Lieutenant. There was no light burning.... But, of course, while he was sitting there waiting for me to go to bed, he wouldn't leave no light burning."

"Well, that's all we want from you now. Take him away, guard."

Alfred's face worked in a mean, pitiful fashion. "Lieutenant ... Lieutenant, don't be too hard on me! Speak a word for me to the District-Attorney, will you, sir?"

"Why the hell should I?" said Radigan, with a hard stare.

Alfred was led away.

Radigan and Mike walked up Center Street to Police Headquarters. The former grumbled:

"We didn't get much out of him. Supposing Cummings-Fawcett was telling the truth this morning, and the old lady was all right when he left her, don't seem likely she would be in such a state just a few minutes afterwards, that Norbert could jab her with the needle without her hollering."

"Not likely," agreed Mike.

After they had walked for a block in silence, Radigan asked: "Got any new ideas, Mike?"

"My mind is running on locks and keys," said Mike. "Amongst the stuff that was recovered from the catch basins near Mrs. Ware's place, weren't there some keys?"

"Yes. Two keys tied with a bit of white string."

"Funny anybody should throw keys down a sewer opening."

"You find everything in the sewers."

"Look, have you got Fawcett's ring with all his keys at Headquarters?"

"Sure."

"Let me have it for a few minutes, along with the two keys that were found. I want to dope something out."

"Okay."

Leaving Mike to study the keys, Radigan went away to see to some other details. In addition to the white string that bound the two keys together, each had a little loop of strong thread attached to it. When Radigan returned, Mike said:

"The keys found in the catch basin are for the service door to Mrs. Ware's apartment, and the general service entrance to the building, in the basement."

Radigan, staring, uttered a mighty expletive.

Mike went on: "This opens up an entirely new vista."

"Sure! Sure! Let me dope it out."

"If it was Cummings who went out by the service entrance to lose the syringe, why should he carry an extra set of keys?"

"Must have left his regular keys home," muttered Radigan.

Mike smiled. "In that case, if he threw the extra set away, how would he get in?"

Radigan clapped his forehead, "Sure, I'm loony."

"Cummings was never without his own key ring. It was chained to a pants button. He slept with it under his pillow. He certainly had it with him. Why should he carry duplicates? Why should he throw keys away?"

"He had several sets of back door keys."

"Sure. Three. He issued them to the servants on their nights out and collected them in the mornings. He kept them in a locked drawer in his office, and showed them to the police when they searched the place."

"Then he had four sets."

"Maybe. Or fourteen. Or forty. What difference does it make? But why should he throw one away?"

"I get you," said Radigan slowly. "It looks now as if Norbert had the extra set of keys, and came back after the party was over and did the job."

"Something like that."

"Where in hell would Norbert get the keys?"

"That's for us to find out."

"By God!" said Radigan, "the house detective of the Bathurst told me Norbert didn't get home until 4 A.M. last Wednesday. That takes on new meaning now."

"Can I ask Fawcett a few questions about keys?" said Mike. "Let me talk to him alone, will you? You always put his back up and then he turns stubborn."

"Sure, go on and talk to your English pal," said Radigan derisively. "Would you like tea served?"

Mike clapped him on the back and ran downstairs. The butler was in a Headquarters cell.

Mike got anything but a friendly reception. Fawcett sat in his cell like a stone man. He answered Mike's questions curtly, without any comment of his own. Mike was back in five minutes. He said:

"Fawcett, in addition to his own keys, had three front door keys and three sets of back door keys that he issued as needed. All the keys were in his possession on the morning after the murder. No servant had been out the previous night. In addition to these keys, he said he had been told that Mrs. Ware kept a complete set in her safe."

"Yes, I remember," put in Radigan, "There were some keys found in the safe."

"Fawcett said he had never seen these keys, having had no occasion to ask for them, since none of his had ever been lost. He says he never had the combination of the safe. Nobody had it but Mrs. Ware. She couldn't remember it and had it written down on a piece of paper which was continually getting lost. He believes that Kinsey knows the combination,

because she usually opened the safe while Mrs. Ware read off the numbers to her."

Radigan said: "The keys are still there. Want to go up and check them over? The combination of the safe is here amongst the other exhibits."

"Okay. I'll also take the occasion to ask old Kinsey a question or two."

As Mike was putting on his coat, one of the Headquarters clerks entered and laid some papers caught together with a fastener on the desk in front of Radigan. The clerk gave Mike a hard look, inquisitive, derisive, sneering, and went out again. Mike thought, without greatly caring: What the hell is biting him?

As Mike was making for the door, Radigan said: "Wait a minute."

A change had come into his voice that caused Mike to turn very quickly. Radigan's face had become as hard as stone; his glance was both sore and furious.

"What?..." began Mike.

"Read that," said Radigan, shoving the papers toward him.

The top sheet was a report from one of the Headquarters experts. It said:

These two communications were written on the same typewriter. That can be seen even without the use of a magnifying glass. The machine is a Corona portable, number three, with three banks of keys and two shifts. This model was discontinued some time ago and there are not many still in use. The type shows many signs of wear and some of the most frequently used letters are out of alignment, the a and the e hitting a little above the line and the i below it.

Note the little piece broken from the top of the w, and note that the bottom of the o is worn almost smooth. Many other points of resemblance can be detected with a magnifying glass.

Mike quickly turned the report over. Under it lay the memo he had written Radigan the night before, and under that was the order for two hypodermic syringes bearing Dr. Patton's signature.

"For God's sake!" stammered Mike. "For God's sake!..."

"Aah! cut the comedy!" snarled Radigan, "That sort of mugging ain't going to help you now!"

"Rad, you don't think that I!..."

Radigan rapped the papers. "This makes a lot of things clear to me. Now I understand why you were so anxious to defend your pal Cummings. So it was a Speedon-Cummings combination, eh? Cummings on the inside and you on the outside. Very pretty work!"

Mike grew hot. "Don't be a fool!"

Radigan jumped up with an oath. "A fool, am I?"

"Like all cops, you're hipped on 'evidence.' For God's sake, use a little common sense for a change! For five days now, you and I have been working together on this case. We have investigated every lead together, and have discussed it for hours at a time. Would it be possible for me, for any man, to keep this up for five days and five nights without giving himself away?"

"Save your arguments for the jury," said Radigan. He rapped the papers again. "This is incontrovertible evidence!"

"Take these two keys. You never noticed them. If I had chucked them down the sewer, would I call the fact to your attention?"

"Aah, you're smart!" sneered Radigan, "I don't know what your game is. You're too damn smart to live!"

"If I had written that order for the syringes on my typewriter, would I sit down and write to you on it? Was that a smart thing to do?"

"Everybody makes one mistake."

"Aah, your talk doesn't make sense!" retorted Mike.

"It don't make sense, eh? Well, how do you explain this report?"

"I can't explain it off hand, but I will if you give me time."

"Sure! Sure! You could explain the nose off your face if I gave you time!"

"The hell with it!" said Mike. "Am I under arrest?"

Radigan considered.

"You would only make yourself ridiculous," said Mike.

Radigan made up his mind. "You couldn't make a getaway. You're too well known. If I let you go, what would you do first?"

"Try to find out what I could about these keys."

"Bluffing to the end!" sneered Radigan. "All right. Go ahead."

Chapter 25

Mike left the building in a blind rage. In the entrance lobby, the sight of Mrs. Laval entering below recalled him to his surroundings. Coming to visit Norbert, he supposed. Norbert was to be arraigned this afternoon, and it was expected that he would be released on bail. Mike was struck by the change in the woman. It is all right to live your own life defiantly—as long as it doesn't get in the newspapers. Mrs. Laval was a social outcast now; her husband had gone to live at his club, and it was said that he would divorce her. She still carried her head high—the hangers-on in the lobby knew who she was; but all the beauty doctors in town could not hide the ravages that the last two days had left in her face.

They met on the stairs. Mrs. Laval stared at Mike, her eyes glittering with a venomous hate. Mike, refusing to be bluffed by it, raised his hat and greeted her as usual. She paused as if about to speak to him bitterly, but thought better of it and went on. It is always disconcerting to find oneself hated like that. Mike jeered at himself for being affected by it, but the look in her eyes was unforgettable.

Twenty minutes later, he was at the Ware apartment. Adele let him in. Mike was not going to let her see the rage that was eating him. He had to forego the salute that she expected, because the door into the office was standing open.

Adele, with the air of a pretty conspirator, whispered: "Anything new?"

"Plenty," said Mike grimly. "I'll talk to you later. Is Kinsey in?"

"In her room."

"Ask her to meet me in Madam's boudoir."

He looked in on Day Radnor. She greeted him with an aggravating smile.

"Sorry I had to leave the door open."

Mike showed her a smooth brow. "Why apologize?"

"Well, I hate to be a spoil sport."

"Oh, you and I understand each other."

"When Cummings was arrested, Mr. MacKelcan put me in charge here," she explained.

"Naturally," said Mike. "Have you accepted his other offer?"

"I'm still thinking about it."

In spite of his resolution, Mike began to grow hot. He thought: She has the advantage of me, because she doesn't give a damn. He said with false heartiness: "Well, that's fine! Mac is such a gentleman!"

Day laughed delightedly. Confound her! thought Mike. She can always get my goat!

He told her the nature of his present errand. "Know anything about the safe in Mrs. Ware's dressing room?" he asked.

Day shook her head. "Outside my department. There's a safe in this room for securities and legal papers that I'm responsible for."

"You can't tell me, then, if anybody besides Mrs. Ware had the combination of the upstairs safe?"

"I never had it," said Day smiling, "so it can't be me.... Anybody *may* have had it. Every now and then, Mrs. Ware would lose the paper on which it was written down, and there would be an uproar until it was found again. After this had

happened twice, I told her she ought to have the combination changed, but she refused to take the trouble."

"Well, I'll talk to Kinsey about it," said Mike. "See you on the way out."

"I'll be waiting breathlessly."

He found the elderly lady's maid in the boudoir. The sight of her cold gray eyes and sharp nose affected him unpleasantly, but he whipped up his gallantry. "Good morning, Miss Kinsey. How well you're looking! Throughout all this horrible affair, you have never lost your poise."

Kinsey was not proof against flattery—perhaps because she had had so little. She bridled and smiled thinly. "Well, I'm sure I always do my best, Mr. Speedon."

After a few pleasant exchanges, Mike got down to business.

"Miss Kinsey, the police are interested in a box of keys that was found in Mrs. Ware's wall safe in the dressing room. Do you know about them?"

"I saw the little box whenever I went to the safe, Mr. Speedon. I never had any occasion to open it."

"You knew what it contained, though?"

"Oh, yes. I asked Madam what was in it and she said duplicate keys to the different doors in the house, the liquor cupboard, the silver chest, and so on."

"Did she ever take out any of the keys?"

"Not that I am aware of, Mr. Speedon."

"Did anybody have the combination of the safe except herself?"

"I learned it in time," Kinsey answered readily, "through having opened the safe for her so many times. I told her I had learned the combination by heart and that she had better have it changed if she did not trust me, and she said: 'What nonsense! If I did not trust you, I would not keep you about me.'"

"Let's go in and check up the keys," suggested Mike.

The wall safe was concealed behind a framed picture. The picture swung out, revealing the little round door with the combination lock in it. The safe contained nothing now but the small wooden box of keys. An instant's investigation convinced Mike that the two keys found in the catch basin had come from this box. Each of the remaining keys had a similar loop of strong thread with a label attached to identify it.

"Madam was very careless about locking the safe," Kinsey volunteered. "Many and many's the time I have found it open and locked it myself, and sometimes got scolded for it, when she couldn't find the combination."

"Who was accustomed to visit this room besides yourself?" asked Mike.

"Well, Cummings frequently came here to consult with Madam and receive her orders. The other servants had no call to come here. I cleaned the room myself, and I was usually sitting here with my sewing when Madam was out."

"Mr. Besson?"

"Naturally, Mr. Besson frequently sat here while Madam was having her hair dressed or her nails done. And Mrs. Prior, of course, besides other ladies with whom Madam was friendly. You yourself sat here more than once, Mr. Speedon, during the time when you were visiting Madam."

"That's a fact," said Mike morosely. He arose.

"I hope I have been of assistance to you," said Kinsey in her prim way.

"You have been very obliging," said Mike, "but I can't say that I'm any forrader. All I've learned is that the keys could have been lifted by any one of a dozen persons including myself."

"Nobody could think such a thing of you, Mr. Speedon."

"Thanks," said Mike dryly.

He returned to Day Radnor's office feeling sunk. He wouldn't let Day see it, and she had no mercy on him. Still, it was a comfort to be with her, because he was well assured that whatever phony evidence might turn up, Day would never believe that he had had a hand in the murder. While Day was chaffing him, Adele entered and handed him a note left at the door by a messenger. Mike's face lighted up when he read it. He showed it to Day with a grin. "In Takaku's inimitable style."

Mister Mike Sir

Please, a boy messenger proffer insignificant package from Stamford Conn. at 2 P.M. Boy assert he forbidden to deposit package in any but your honorable hands personally. Boy prophecy he return 4 P.M. Please, I not knowing if this package important to your honor's concern, so I write.

Your obedient servant,

Takaku.

P.S. Please, I am going to my store now.

Mike instantly felt better. "Stamford?" he said, thrusting the note in his pocket. "That's where the murderer hired a letter box. There may be something in this. It might be the much-wanted second syringe. It's close to four. I'll toddle 'round to my place and see. Be seeing you."

Chapter 26

Mike ran up the steps of his decorous brownstone front, too full of anticipation to give a thought to possible danger to himself. Who looks for danger at home? Lexington Avenue was quiet at the moment, the evening rush northward not having begun. He thought, as he had often thought before, what a pious, old-timey street it was, standing in dignified aloofness from the swank and bustle a little to the west. In the vestibule he struggled for the thousandth time with his letter box, which was too small to contain the big, stiff envelopes then in fashion. How the postman must curse it! he thought.

He opened the house door and covered the ten paces to his own door at the rear of the hall. He opened his door and shut it behind him with his foot. He took three steps into his bedroom. Just as he received the impression that there was a smell in the room which did not belong there, a woman smell, a crashing blow descended on the back of his head and he passed out.

Consciousness returned by degrees. As in a nightmare, he became aware that his eyelids and lips were tightly sealed with surgeon's tape, and his arms and legs bound. The binding process was not finished. He was lying on his stomach and a pair of knees was pressing into his back. His overcoat had been removed. Hearing was the only faculty that remained to him. From far away came the hum of traffic in the streets. As in a dream, he cried out with all his might and heard only a strangled groan issuing from his throat.

A voice beside him said in a tense whisper: "He's coming to."

Another replied—this was the man kneeling on him: "It's all right, I have him fast."

Mike twisted and rolled with the strength of desperation, but did not succeed in dislodging the crushing weight on his back. He bumped his head against the floor but without hope of attracting attention, for it was his own rooms that lay beneath. The whole house was rented by bachelors who would all be out at this hour. Mike then, for the first time in his life, knew panic fear.

The whispering voice beside him said—he judged it to be a woman: "Don't pull the ropes too tight. If they leave marks on him it will arouse suspicion."

The man muttered: "I have it in mind."

He tied the last knot and got up. Instantly Mike began to thrash and roll and strike out with his bound feet like a maddened animal. He heard them laugh softly together.

"Watch out for his feet," the man whispered, in a voice shaken with laughter.

Mike, finding his struggles in vain, became quiet. Better save his strength. The man whispered:

"See if he's got the letter we sent him. That mustn't be found. I'll hold him."

Slim fingers, as nimble as rats, began to go through Mike's pockets. "I have it," she said.

"Put it in your stocking. You might as well see if he has any dangerous evidence in his pockets."

The slim hands continued to explore Mike's clothes. "Here are the service door keys," she said.

"Damn! Give them to me!"

"It's risky. If he was known to have them on him, it will raise a doubt...."

"Give them to me, I say." Presumably she obeyed.

She got up. "What'll I do with his hat and coat?" she asked. "I don't know where he hangs them."

"Just throw them on the bed. If he came home to kill himself, he wouldn't bother to hang them up."

An icy chill stole through Mike's veins. These were not human beings, but fiends.

The man said: "I'll drag him close to his desk so it will look as if he had slipped out of his chair after writing the note."

He caught Mike under the arms and started dragging him towards the bedroom door. He was not a very strong man, for he struggled and panted with his burden. Before he reached the door, the telephone bell suddenly shrilled. He dropped Mike with an exclamation.

"Christ! what a start that gave me!" he whispered shakily.

The bell continued to ring at intervals. The two waited. Mike's whole being yearned towards the instrument. If he could only reach it!

"Will the damn thing never stop!" muttered the man. "How can I do anything with that going on!"

The woman said: "I'll stop it with paper." Her voice was steady.

The bell was heard no more. The man again lifted Mike under the shoulders and dragged him over the threshold of the door into the rear room. He was dropped again alongside his desk, as he supposed.

"Take a look around," said the man. "Make sure we haven't dropped anything."

"I have taken good care of that," she said.

"The letter is in the machine where the servant will find it?"

"Sure."

"Don't you think it will arouse suspicion because it's not signed by hand?"

"No, not if it's left in the machine. He is accustomed to leave letters that way for his servant."

"Turn him over on his face so you can get to his arm."

Mike was turned over.

"Have you the syringe?" asked the man.

"Here."

A cold sweat broke out all over Mike's body. Before his mind's eye, his whole life unrolled in a flash. Living was so pleasant!

"Let the box and the cover lie on the desk as if he had just opened it."

Mike was galvanized into action again. He humped up his bound body; he twisted; he shook violently. The man's knees dropped in his back, but he couldn't hold Mike. He cursed him thickly and pounded his neck with his fist.

"Stop it!" whispered the woman sharply. "You'll leave marks."

Mike succeeded in throwing the knees off his back and the man flung himself on him full length to hold him down. A button came in contact with one of Mike's bound hands. His fingers closed around it and it parted from the fabric. Mike clenched his hand over it.

"I can't hold him... can't hold him!" whispered the man.

"Give me the syringe," she whispered. "My hand is steady!"

There was a shrieking inside Mike. She-fiend! She-fiend! The man turned himself around and kneeled between Mike's shoulders. The woman dropped on his legs. He could no longer move his body but he kept jerking his bound hands out of her grasp. She actually laughed.

"Like trying to kill a cat," she whispered.

The man leaned forward, pressing Mike's clenched hands into the small of his back. "Jab it in the blue vein!" he whispered.

Mike redoubled his struggles. He heard the sound of his own hoarse sobbing for breath as if it came from another. God! the poor fellow's heart will break! he thought. Better so! Better so! Once he succeeded in throwing the man off his back, but the knees soon dropped between his shoulders and his hands were pressed down again.

"Jab him! Jab him!" the man whispered furiously. "It's no matter if you miss the vein. You'll hit it next time!"

"No!" she said coolly. "If he was doing it to himself he wouldn't miss."

Mike hung in expectation of the stroke of death.

It was not given. The house bell rang, and the two on top of him froze into stillness.

"Christ! somebody at the door!" whispered the man.

"What difference does it make?" she said coolly, "They can't get in."

Mike heard bells ringing all through the house, and waited with his heart standing still. Nobody home! Nobody home! The man and woman jumped up, waiting. They *did* get in. The house door banged, and there was a rush of feet through the hall.

"We're dished!" muttered the man, "Downstairs and out the basement door." He administered a parting kick in the ribs to Mike, and they silently fled. A burning current of joy coursed through Mike's veins. He had said good-bye to life, and he was not dead!

The apartment door crashed back against the wall, and two people, running to his side, dropped to the floor. The strips of tape were tenderly pulled from his eyelids and he saw Day Radnor and little Takaku. "Mike, oh, Mike, are you hurt?" Day was crying. The little Jap's teeth were clenched in rage and pity. The moment half of Mike's lips were freed, he hissed:

"Quick, Takaku! Gone through the basement! Head 'em off in front!"

The Japanese ran out.

Never had Mike seen such a look in Day's eyes. "Hi, Day!" he said, grinning. "Just in time!"

With a little groan, she raised his head on her arm and, stooping, pressed her lips to his.

"Gosh! I'm glad I'm here to take it!" murmured Mike. "Give me another dose of that medicine!"

She shook her head, smiling.

"How did you make it?" he asked.

"After you had gone I got to thinking about that letter from Takaku. It *sounded* all right, but why should he have written a

letter and called a messenger instead of telephoning? So I called up Takaku at his store and he said no, he had sent you no letter. I called Radigan then, and jumped in a cab. I got here first, but I couldn't get in! I couldn't get in! But Takaku was close behind me, and he had the keys."

Takaku came running in. "They gone, Mister Mike. No can see anywhere!"

Mike shrugged. Takaku sawed through the ropes with a butcher knife, hissing and whimpering with sympathy. They helped Mike to his feet and he stood wavering.

"No bones broken?" demanded Day anxiously.

He shook his head. "Only a bit stiff and sore," he said, smiling. "I'll feel worse before I'm better." He flung his arms wide in a sudden passion of thankfulness. "But, Oh, God! I'm here! I'm here!" He dropped in a chair.

A sudden squall of rage was heard from Takaku. He stood beside the desk pointing to a letter that had been left on the roll in the typewriter.

"Don't touch it!" warned Mike. "Let Radigan see it just as it is!"

Day read out the letter. "At the top it says: 'Takaku, deliver this to Lieutenant Radigan at Police Headquarters.' Then below: 'Dear Rad: I can't keep it up. It was I who killed Mrs. Ware. My creditors were hounding me and I wanted the legacy. I plotted the whole thing and carried it out by myself. Cummings, the poor boob, had no part in it. God! it was exciting always to keep just one jump ahead of you, but it got so at last that I couldn't sleep nights. I'm going to fluff out before I start picking the sheets. You'll find the second syringe beside me. All the time you and I were looking for it, it was in my pocket. I kept it handy in case anything went wrong. Well, it was a great life, but I've weakened. Yours, Mike.'"

They were silent. Day said at last in a strained voice:

"Not a very good imitation of your style!"

Mike was beyond wise-cracking. "Oh, God! how close I came to it!" he murmured. "How close...!"

Day began to cry silently. Day in tears! Mike could scarcely believe his eyes. Takaku was muttering imprecations in his own tongue.

In the excitement the doors had been left open, and Radigan presently walked in on them, followed by his side partner, Sergeant Hodges. Hasty explanations were made; the syringe and the letter were pointed out to Radigan. The hard-boiled Lieutenant actually turned pale.

"This letter would never have fooled me!" he cried violently.

"Oh, yes, it would," said Mike, smiling. "It would fool anybody. And you were already convinced that I was guilty!"

"I'm sorry," mumbled Radigan. "I'm sorry, Mike.... Well, you were too damn smart!" he burst out.

Mike laughed weakly.

"What was their motive, anyhow?" asked Radigan.

Day spoke up. "That's easy. They believed that Mike was about to bring the murder home to them. Mike was the one they feared."

"Oh, yeah?" said Radigan, not too well pleased. "Do you know who it was?" he demanded of Mike.

Mike slowly shook his head. "I couldn't swear to it..."

"Think, man! They were close to you! You heard them; you felt them!"

"It was a man and a woman. The man seemed like a big fellow, but he wasn't very strong. It was all he could do to drag me from the bedroom in here. The woman was small and active. Her hands were like claws. She had the stronger nerve of the two. A she-fiend!"

"Well, we know who *they* are," said Radigan, smiling. "Norbert was released at three o'clock and he and Mrs. Laval left the court together."

Mike shook his head again. "It wasn't Mrs. Laval. This woman had a different smell."

"Then who?..."

"I couldn't swear to it...."

Day spoke up suddenly. "Mike, what have you been holding in your hand all this time?"

Mike extended his clenched hand and opened it. On the palm lay a white pearl button.

They looked at each other.

Ten minutes later, they were entering Sanford MacKelcan's office, Mike and the two detectives. Business appeared to be going on as usual, the pale clerk writing at his desk and Lottie Bedford making a great clatter at her typewriter. The latter jumped up in her usual effusive fashion; talkative, watchful, self-assured. She looked each man in the eye, but Mike noted that she was lividly pale under her make-up. The hastily applied rouge stood out on her cheeks in circles of carmine. Without waiting to be asked, she said:

"Oh, gentlemen, I'm so sorry Mr. MacKelcan is out. He was called up to the Bronx to see a client. The man is sick and was unable to come to our office. Mr. MacKelcan said he would call me at five-thirty, and if there is any message you would like to send him, I'll see that...."

She was talking louder than was necessary. Was it to enable her words to carry into the next room? Mike slipped out into the corridor again, and was just in time to come face to face with MacKelcan quietly issuing out of his private office next door. Guilt and terror were written in his face. Mike saw red. Hauling off, he delivered a blow in the attorney's face that stretched his lean figure on the mosaic floor.

"That's for the kick in the ribs," said Mike.

Wrapping his arms around his head, MacKelcan rolled on the floor whimpering: "Don't hurt me. Don't hurt me!"

Radigan was quickly beside Mike. Hodges came after, bringing the woman. MacKelcan was helped to his feet.

"Why, Mac!" drawled Radigan. "You have lost a button off your vest."

Chapter 27

Once the police got their hands on the real criminals, their task was much easier. Many additional bits of evidence were forthcoming. The taxicab driver was found who had picked up MacKelcan and Lottie Bedford as they ran from Mike's apartment. This man had driven them to Grand Central where, no doubt, they had taken another cab to MacKelcan's office. Late that night, when the streets were cleaned, a sweeper in Lexington Avenue picked up the two pairs of keys where they had been dropped from the taxicab window, and turned them over to the police.

Witnesses were found who were prepared to testify that on several occasions they had seen either MacKelcan or Lottie in the neighborhood of Mike's apartment. Lottie, upon being taken to Stamford, was identified by a post-office employee as a woman who had been seen to visit the letter box hired in the name of John Jones. A search through Dr. Patton's letter files turned up a letter signed by "John Jones" of Stamford. It was Dr. Patton's answer to this letter which had served as a foundation for the order for hypodermic syringes. John Jones' communication was written on a typewriter in MacKelcan's office. So it went. Finally, a locksmith was found who identified Lottie as the woman who had ordered him to make the two keys for Mike's place from samples which she brought with her.

MacKelcan denied everything. He engaged one of the most conspicuous criminal lawyers in New York to defend him, and between them they tried hard to shift suspicion back to Norbert Besson. MacKelcan told how he had picked up the dagger on the floor of Mrs. Ware's room, and, supposing it to be one of her curios, had placed it on the shelf. There was little doubt in the public mind that Norbert and Mrs. Laval had gone to Mrs. Ware's suite with the object of killing her, but their purpose had been defeated by the arrival of MacKelcan at the door. Norbert and Mrs. Laval were able to bring forward a watertight alibi to account for their movements on Monday afternoon.

When the police had built up a pretty complete case against the prisoners, Lottie Bedford suddenly offered to turn State's evidence, and from that moment MacKelcan was doomed. The woman's story supplied several missing links in the chain of evidence. She told how, from the time that Mrs. Ware first retained him, the lawyer had been working to obtain the kind of will he wanted, which would give him full control of the Ware millions without exciting suspicion.

Just as soon as Mrs. Ware had signed such a will, he started plotting to kill her. Because he knew how capricious she was, he was assured that no will would be allowed to stand for long. He laid his plans with the greatest patience and skill, but in the end he was obliged to act swiftly, and some of the final details had to be left to chance. Nevertheless, had it not been for Alfred's stealing the jewels, the murder would never have been discovered.

That was MacKelcan's aim, but at the same time he was taking no chances, and from the first he had plotted to hang the crime on Mike in case anything went wrong. It was MacKelcan who had called up Police Headquarters to give them the tip against Mike. On one of his early visits to Mike's rooms, he had seen a spare set of keys hanging on a hook alongside the door and had quietly annexed them. He gave them to Lottie to have duplicates made, and the originals were returned to their place before their loss was discovered.

MacKelcan had learned about the daily correspondence between Mike and Takaku. Mike kept a bundle of Takaku's letters in a drawer of his desk for the sake of their quaint expressions. MacKelcan studied them on his secret visits to Mike's flat, and so familiarized himself with Takaku's style. MacKelcan had soon learned that Mike's flat was always empty between the hours of nine and twelve in the morning and could safely be visited then.

As to the murder, MacKelcan had been in possession of the keys to the service entrances for some time, Lottie said. While sitting with Mrs. Ware in her dressing room, it had been a simple matter for him to lift them from the unlocked safe when she was called to talk on the telephone in the next room. All the keys were labeled.

On the night of the murder, MacKelcan had drunk with Mrs. Ware, having seen to it that her drink was loaded with barbitol. She had probably taken another dose of barbitol after he left her. He went home, taking care to leave with other guests, and to arouse some of his family so that they would be in a position to testify as to the hour. However, his wife

unwittingly let slip the fact that he had made some excuse to sleep in another bed for the balance of the night.

He had returned to the Ware apartment by the service entrance and service stairs. He found that Mrs. Ware had fallen asleep in the corner of the sofa in her boudoir. He killed her. He laid her body on the floor in such a manner that it would appear she had fallen in a heart attack. He left the apartment the same way he had come. By this time he had learned that Norbert had visited the old lady during the evening. He broke up the syringe and dropped it in the sewer basin nearest Norbert's hotel, in case it should turn out to be easier to hang the crime on Norbert.

So far, everything had gone off according to schedule, but Alfred's theft of the jewels made a mess of his well-considered plan. MacKelcan had to improvise measures to meet the new situation. Later, he received another upset when he discovered that Cummings was no other than his client, James Fawcett. This really shook MacKelcan's nerve, and his subsequent actions did not exhibit his usual cleverness. Nevertheless, his plot came within an ace of succeeding.

MacKelcan finally paid the extreme penalty for his act. Lottie Bedford got off with a comparatively light sentence.

When Cummings-Fawcett was released from durance, he returned to the Fifth Avenue apartment in the character of its master. The romantic story of this man capped the climax of the sensational Ware case. For a while, Fawcett was the most talked-about man in New York, and his fame increased in proportion as he refused to capitalize on it. He would not be interviewed nor allow himself to be photographed. He answered no letters and declined to talk over the phone. Such obduracy in a darling of the public had never been met with. Crowds hung about the door of the apartment house and followed him wherever he went. After a few experiences of this sort of thing, he refused to go out any more. He and his friend, Ralph Maxwell, were reconciled, and fantastic rumors were circulated as to the amount of whisky they disposed of together.

Warner Bassett was always after Mike to get a story out of Fawcett, but Mike flatly refused. "Let the man keep a little human dignity," he said. "It's rare." However, in the absence of any real information, the stories about Fawcett became so fantastic that Mike was finally stirred to go and see him on his own account.

The pretty Adele admitted him to the apartment. She instantly advertised to Mike by her demure and stand-offish air, that the situation between them was changed. Mike enjoyed an inward laugh. Who could blame the girl, he thought, for seeing which side her bread was buttered on? She was wearing a string of real pearls.

"Will you see if Mr. Fawcett will see me?" Mike inquired blandly. "Tell him it's not on account of the newspaper, but a personal matter."

"I'll see, sir."

She presently returned, saying: "Be good enough to step this way, sir."

Mike could no longer contain his laughter. Adele bit her lip, but was presently forced to join him. Whereupon they felt more comfortable with each other.

"How are things?" asked Mike.

"Nothing to complain of," said Adele demurely.

"Where is his nibs?"

"In the boudoir—I mean the master's study."

"Okay, I know the way." Mike ran up the stairs. In the upper hall, another exceedingly pretty girl in a maid's uniform fluttered away. The old devils! thought Mike.

He found Fawcett and his side-kick Maxwell in their shirt sleeves drawn up in easy chairs before a blazing fire. Each man had his feet on a little table and another beside him bearing a whisky bottle. Both were mellow, though it was only

three o'clock in the afternoon. Neither moved at Mike's entrance.

"How are ye, Mr. Speedon!" cried Fawcett. "Draw up and fill up and smoke up!... Mr. Speedon is a white man," he added to Maxwell. "He plays fair. He never hounded me."

Mike drew up a chair and accepted a drink. He let the two miners run on in their pleasantly drunken fashion. Under the influence of prosperity and ease of mind, the ex-butler was completely metamorphosed. The old foxy, vicious look was gone.

When he got an opportunity, Mike asked: "What are you doing about your newly acquired riches, Fawcett?"

"Nothing!" said Fawcett with a grand wave of his hand. "Do we appear to lack anything? It's true my Missus wants me home, but she can occupy herself spending the money I'm sending her."

"This is swell," said Mike, "but you can't spend the rest of your life sitting in front of the fire drinking whisky."

"Why not?" said Fawcett. "Anyhow, me and Rafe is going to keep it up until we get used to the idea that we can have as much whisky as we want, and of the best."

"What are you doing for money?" asked Mike.

Fawcett tipped a portentous wink to his brother miner.

"I suppose you mean you're selling the stuff in the apartment."

"There's a godless amount of stuff in the place that fetches big prices."

"Sure. But if anybody informs the court of what is going on, you can get into a hell of a lot of trouble."

"Ain't it mine?"

"It is when the court says so. There are certain simple formalities to be gone through with first. The will has to be offered for probate and letters of administration granted. A lawyer will take care of all that."

Fawcett scowled. "I don't want no truck with those gentry."

"You can't help yourself."

"Let the Law make the first move."

He was not to be budged from this position, and Mike took a new line. "Well, how about me? I want my legacy. Am I not entitled to it?"

"Sure! Sure! Mr. Speedon. I'd hand it to you on the spot if I had it."

"You never will have it until the will is probated."

"Lawyers are slippery customers. Especially Yankees." (To the Britisher, all Americans were Yankees.)

"Why not go to Keppelman? He's honest. You can apply to the court to have Keppelman and the Washington Trust Company appointed co-executors with yourself. The bank is an institution; they couldn't cheat you. And neither could Keppelman with the bank sitting in."

Fawcett heaved a gusty sigh. "Well, I suppose I'll have to do it."

Mike followed up his advantage. "Are you going to establish the trust for orphans that Mrs. Ware wanted?"

"The hell with it!" said Fawcett violently. "If she wanted an orphan asylum, why didn't she build it herself? I hate orphan asylums! They rob the children of their manhood and womanhood!"

"What would you like to do with your money?" Mike asked offhandedly. "You can't spend it all on whisky."

"I'd like to help miners!" said Fawcett, slapping his thigh. "They have the hardest job on earth. American or English miners. But especially English miners. Thousands and thousands of them have been on the dole for years. That destroys men. I wouldn't offer them charity, you understand, because they're men just as proud as you or me. I'd like to give them work!"

"Well, why don't you?"

"How could I?" asked Fawcett, staring. "With my twelve million pounds? Government can't seem to solve the problem with its billions."

"Here's one thing you could do," suggested Mike. "Build generating plants at the pitheads and turn the coal into electricity."

"Aye," said Fawcett eagerly, "but there's too many idle pitheads. You couldn't sell all the electricity."

"At other pitheads you could build reduction plants for turning the coal into gasoline. That can be done, you know. And there's no lack of sale for gasoline."

"Man! you've got ahold of something there!" murmured Fawcett.

"This is the way I'd go about it, if it was me," Mike continued. "Form a corporation to be known as the Coal Institute to study the development and improvement of the industry. Hire the best technical men in the world. You and Rafe Maxwell would sit on the Board of Directors as practical miners, and you, of course, would head the whole thing. It would bring you into contact with the best men of your time—as an equal. The darn thing would probably make money, and you could then spend the earnings in giving the children of miners (including your own and Rafe's) the finest education they were capable of taking."

Cummings-Fawcett, miner, butler or millionaire, was a powerful personality, and his eyes began to glow. "Man! what a dream!" he murmured. "You and me together, eh Rafe?" Suddenly he got up.

"Where are you going?" asked Mike.

"I'm going to phone Mr. Keppelman. We've got to get this damned business of the will out of the way."

As to the other actors in the tragi-comedy, Alfred went to state's prison for robbery, and Mrs. Payne Laval to Reno for a divorce. But when she came back Norbert Besson did not marry her. Norbert laid low. Mike could picture what a hell the fiery little woman was plunged into, cast off by society and her lover alike. She disappeared from the New York scene, and Mike subsequently heard of her as drifting from one resort hotel to another with a Pekingese.

Norbert remains in New York, where he still enjoys a lurid notoriety, but is not quite so much in demand at the hottest spots as formerly. He is looking for another rich old woman to marry, but after the disclosures concerning the dagger in the Ware case, even the most feather-brained old women are leery of him.

Bethesda Prior lives in great comfort, not to say style, in Bloomfield, New Jersey, on the income from her two hundred thousand dollars. She belongs to the legacy-dangler type, tyrannizing over a circle of unfortunate nieces and nephews, while she elects first one, then another, to her favor. In the quiet circles of Bloomfield, Bethesda is an important figure, though it may be guessed that the Bloomfielders are growing a little weary of her talk about her darling friend, Flora

Ware, who was so cruelly done to death.

Kinsey took her legacy and returned to England. She married a retired policeman and they have set up a public house in Ealing.

When Fawcett first took possession of the Ware apartment, his mail was far greater than Mrs. Ware's had ever been. Apparently, every begging letter-writer in the U.S.A. immediately sat down to indite a heart-breaking appeal to the new millionaire. Fawcett asked Day Radnor to stay on and take care of the flood, but she declined. Consequently, the letters remained unopened and unanswered. All that literary effort was wasted.

Day took a position as corresponding secretary for the League of Women Voters. She is not especially interested either in women or politics, but the job rates good pay. Mike Speedon continues to drop in on her—because he cannot stay away. In their verbal sparring matches Day enjoys the advantage because Mike is divided in his mind; torn between his desire to master the provoking Day and his horror of marriage. When he feels himself beginning to weaken, he stays away for a while. Day is perfectly well aware of the struggle in his soul, but as for her own feelings in the matter, she hides them.

THE END

[End of *Sinfully Rich* by Hulbert Footner]