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THE VELVET HAND

NEW MADAME STOREY MYSTERIES

BY

HULBERT FOOTNER

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FIRST EDITION

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

THE VELVET HAND
CAP'N SUE
QUEEN OF CLUBS
A BACKWOODS PRINCESS
MADAME STOREY
ANTENNAE
THE SHANTY SLED
THE UNDER DOGS
THE WILD BIRD
OFFICER!
RAMSHACKLE HOUSE
THE DEAVES AFFAIR
THE OWL TAXI
THE SUBSTITUTE MILLIONAIRE
THIEVES' WIT
NEW RIVERS OF THE NORTH
THE SEALED VALLEY
JACK CHANTY

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THE VIPER

I

It was on the very morning of Mme Storey's sailing for Paris for her annual vacation that Mrs. Daniel Greenfield came to our office. When I heard the name she gave I looked at her with an extraordinary interest. One of our most famous philanthropists, her name is on everybody's lips, but as she has always refused to allow a photograph of herself to be published, scarcely anybody knows what she looks like.

Well, I beheld an exquisite little old lady who looked more like a French marquise than the wife of an American millionaire. Decidedly a personality. She was so fragile she was obliged to support herself with an ebony stick, nevertheless, not an old lady who was asking for the consideration due to age. She met you on your own ground. Her dark eyes were still full of spirit, yes, and of beauty too, though she must have been close upon seventy. Her lovely clothes drew a nice line between the dignity of an older fashion and the modishness of the new. All in black, of course, for her husband was lately dead, but she eschewed the ostentatious widow's veil. She was accompanied by a nurse, or companion, a pleasant-faced woman, who had nothing of the usual dehumanized look of those who wait upon the rich. She was unaffectedly devoted to her mistress, which is something money can't usually buy.

At the moment Mme Storey was as busy as a nailer, trying to clear her desk preparatory to taking a taxicab to the pier, but one doesn't send a Mrs. Daniel Greenfield away. I carried her name in, and my mistress came out to greet her. Apparently they had not met before.

"I read in my newspaper this morning that you were sailing on the *Majestic* at noon," little Mrs. Greenfield said, with a great lady's disarming air of apology, "and I yielded to a sudden impulse to come to see you. I know I have no business to be troubling you at such a moment. I can only throw myself on your mercy. I assure you it is a matter of the most urgent importance—at least to me. Can you give me a few minutes?"

Her wistfulness, the wistfulness of a child, or of the very old, melted Mme Storey entirely. "An hour if necessary," she said at once.

Mme Storey led the way into her own room, and I went along after them. Mrs. Greenfield's companion remained sitting in my room.

"I assume that you wish to consult me professionally," Mme Storey said. "If that is so, you will not object to my secretary Miss Brickley being present. She will make the necessary notes."

Mrs. Greenfield accepted me with a courteous bow. So different from many of the men who come to consult us! We seated ourselves, I with my notebook. The sight of the great room made my heart heavy, thinking of the empty days ahead. I do not enjoy vacations. All the room's beauties were packed away or shrouded in cottons. Giannino had gone to board at the veterinary's. I would even have been glad to hear Giannino's chatter, the provoking little ape!

When the beautiful old lady applied herself to the telling of her business, one perceived that she was greatly harassed and worn. Her charm of address upon entering had hidden that. One received the impression of a great trouble proudly kept to herself. I remembered having read that she had no children. Poor lonely soul, that was why she had tried to adopt all the unfortunates.

"I must school myself to be very direct and brief," she began. "They say it is hard for the old. It is in relation to the death of my husband that I came to see you. You may have read of it—eight months ago?"

Mme Storey inclined her head.

"He had an apoplectic seizure in his office. He died instantly." The delicate wrinkled hands were trembling, but the voice was steady. "It is only fair to tell you at the start that there were no suspicious circumstances. There was an—an—I must speak of these things—an autopsy. The cause of his death was certainly a cerebral hemorrhage. Moreover, his affairs, as you may know, were found to be in perfect order, yet—yet—ah! do not smile at me even in kindness! Do not in

your own mind dismiss my story yet awhile! I am haunted by the conviction that he *did not* die a natural death!"

Mme Storey's beautiful face was soft and grave with sympathy. It expressed no surprise. As for me, I was one great Oh! inside. A mystery in the death of Daniel Greenfield! Here was a case indeed!

"I never make up my mind in advance about things," said Mme Storey quietly. "What reason have you——"

"Ah, that's the rub!" the old lady interrupted her despairingly. "I have no *reason*. I have only a feeling!"

"Well, I do not overrate reason," said my mistress. "I should not have used that word."

"I have no evidence," Mrs. Greenfield went on. "I have nothing but a dumb conviction in here"—she struck her breast—"that my husband was murdered—somehow. A conviction that *will not* be downed. Oh, I assure you I have struggled against it, argued with myself. It makes no difference. There it remains in my breast. I feel that he was murdered. I have spoken of my feelings to one or two men that I trusted—his best friend, a lawyer, a doctor—only to be listened to with a pitying smile. They tried to *soothe* me! What a humiliating experience! But men must have *evidence*! ... Ah, don't *you* pretend to sympathize and send me away. Hear me out—question me. You are my last hope. I wish I had come to you before. This thing is killing me—no, that is nothing; what is life to me now?—Worse, it's driving me out of my senses. I cannot go mad. I must remain cool and sane. If he *was* murdered, it is for me to live to see that his murderess is brought to justice. Then I could go in peace!"

"I am not a man," said Mme Storey softly. "You will not find me deafening my ears to the inward voices."

"Ah, thank you for that!" cried the old lady in a tone of heartfelt relief. "It is the first crumb of comfort I have had!"

"You said murderess," said Mme Storey. "Your suspicions have, then, a definite object?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Greenfield. "His secretary. Her name is Margaret Gowan."

"Tell me all about her," said Mme Storey.

As my mistress applied her mind to the case, her eyes sought the cigarette box desirously, but she refrained from helping herself. But the sharp-eyed old lady marked her glance and its direction, and she said quickly:

"Pray smoke, Madame Storey. Your cigarettes are famous. I am not narrow-minded."

"A detestable habit," said Mme Storey apologetically. "I am thoroughly ashamed of it." Nevertheless, she took a cigarette and, lighting it, luxuriously inhaled.

"Miss Gowan worked for my husband for twelve years," said Mrs. Greenfield. "She was an admirable secretary in every respect. Daniel relied on her completely. He was never tired of singing her praises."

"But you did not like her?" suggested Mme Storey.

"Ah, don't say that!" cried Mrs. Greenfield with quick reproachfulness. "That shows you are thinking the same that those men thought when I spoke to them of her, that it was just another case of an old woman's jealousy of her husband's young secretary. I assure you, Madame Storey, it is nothing of that sort. You must believe me. She was not at all the kind of young woman to make a wife anxious: a quiet, capable, businesslike person, nothing of the 'charmer' about her. She lacked that—well, you know what I mean—that appeal." Old as she was, and broken with trouble, Mrs. Greenfield's fine eyes still flashed with remembered power. "No, indeed! My mind was never troubled on that score. But she was deep!—deep! Ah, much deeper than Daniel ever guessed! Sometimes that thought used to cross my mind uncomfortably, but I liked the girl. I was grateful to her for easing my husband's burden. It allowed him more time to spend with me. No shadow of a suspicion that anything was wrong ever crossed my mind until after his death."

"And then?"

"It was the day of the funeral," said Mrs. Greenfield, her eyes darkening at the recollection. "I did not go downstairs. Miss Gowan sent up word to ask if I cared to see her. My heart was full of kindness toward her, they told me she had acted so splendidly, and I said by all means. And she came up. When she entered my room—how can I describe it to you?—something seemed to enter with her. When she came near me a strange rage seized and shook me. I was taken by surprise. A dreadful unthinking feeling. I could have attacked her had I been stronger. I wept at my own powerlessness. Yet her attitude was admirable. Everybody spoke of it: so quiet and capable and self-effacing; so sympathetic, so helpful, so unaffectedly saddened by her own loss. That is what everybody said. Well, everybody does not see very far. *I* saw in her demure and downcast eyes that she had killed my husband and was glad of her work. And I wished to kill her!"

The old lady paused, breathless and exhausted with emotion. How strange it was to see so much raw emotion in one so old and so elegant. It upset one's sense of values.

"Describe her appearance to me," said Mme Storey.

"That is difficult," said Mrs. Greenfield with contemptuous lips. "Nothing much to describe. A little woman; light brown hair, watchful gray eyes, repressed mouth. Not pretty; not ill-favoured, either. She must be about thirty-two now, but she scarcely looks it. There is nothing in her face to betray the passage of time. Looking back, one feels that she *willed* herself to be neutral, inconspicuous. I apprehend an iron will in the insignificant little creature. In what she revealed she was nothing but a reflection of my husband's tastes and wishes and ideas.

"Sometimes I used to wonder what sort of a life she led apart from my husband. Not much, apparently. Anyway, not on the surface. When this happened I had her investigated without telling anybody. The result was negligible. Apparently she has led an exemplary life—taking care of an invalid mother for years. Since the death of her mother has lived in the same boarding house for seven years. Apparently satisfied with the casual contacts she obtained there. A quiet, studious little person; no expensive tastes; no love affairs. In short, a life as open as the day. If you are interested, I will send you a copy of the report I received upon her."

"Please do," said Mme Storey.

"Have I conveyed anything to you?" Mrs. Greenfield went on. "But wait! She had one characteristic she could not modify: a peculiar walk; stiff-kneed and rising on her toes. One might call it a strut. Like this." The brisk old lady arose from her chair, and, as far as the infirmities of age would permit, proceeded to illustrate.

"I suppose Miss Gowan was of great assistance in settling up your husband's affairs," suggested Mme Storey.

"Oh, invaluable!" said Mrs. Greenfield. "The lawyers and the accountants could not praise her enough. All the details of my husband's affairs were at her finger tips. My husband was a peculiar man in some respects. In business he had no close associates, no advisers, no confidants. He kept no regular books. It was a saying downtown that Daniel Greenfield carried all his business under his hat. Yet the girl guided the lawyers unerringly in their investigation. And everything was always found to be just as she said it would be. Nothing was obscure, nothing unaccounted for, they said.... To me there was one suspicious circumstance, but I have not mentioned it to anybody. It is susceptible of many explanations, of course."

"Tell me," said Mme Storey.

The old lady lowered her head as if overcome by a painful recollection. "A few days before I lost my husband," she murmured, "he said one night, jestingly—he said that if he died that night he would cut up—such were his words, about ten million clear. Yet when everything was settled up there was only about nine million. It seems strange he should have made so great an error."

"I agree with you," said Mme Storey.

"Then you think—you really think my story is worth investigating?" Mrs. Greenfield asked with a rather piteous eagerness.

"I do," said Mme Storey simply.

The old lady partly broke down. She put a hand over her eyes. "Ah, it is sweet to find honest sympathy, understanding," she murmured. "Until now I often wondered if I was indeed mad."

"Tell me," said Mme Storey, "what did the lawyers have to start from in order to prove and trace and check up his property?"

"Nothing but a little red notebook," said Mrs. Greenfield. "What they call a loose-leaf notebook. It was kept in his own handwriting. It was a sort of statement of his assets on one side and his liabilities on the other. Whenever the statement got too much marked up to be legible, he would start fresh pages and destroy the old ones. Although he was so well off, he always owed a great deal of money here and there. Why, I never quite understood. Making other people's money work for him, he would say with his laugh."

"Was there any other writing in the little book?" asked Mme Storey.

"He used to make random notes in the back and destroy them when the occasion had passed."

"Where was the little red book found?"

"In the breast pocket of the coat he was wearing."

"Was it always kept there?"

"I think so. He would often pull it out and read to me what securities he had bought or sold. It pleased us both to talk over such matters, though I am afraid I had but a very imperfect understanding of the transactions."

"That little red book is still in existence?"

"Oh, yes. Furthermore, I insisted that all his business papers, the contents of his letter files, everything must be saved."

"Excellent!" said Mme Storey. "One obvious question. Was Miss Gowan remembered in your husband's will?"

"No. Several years ago he proposed to make her a legacy, but upon speaking of it to her she evinced such distress—even anger, he said—that he changed his mind. He was much pleased by the spirit in which she received the proposal. He raised her salary instead."

"Ah!" said Mme Storey drily. "Her unwillingness to receive a legacy might have had another motive."

"I understand you," said Mrs. Greenfield, very low. "Do you think for years past she had been plotting...?"

"Oh, I think nothing yet," said Mme Storey. "I am merely suggesting possibilities.... You say you read that I was sailing to-day. What was there in that announcement to bring you to see me?"

All during the old lady's story my mind had been running ahead, speculating on what effect it would have on Mme Storey's plans. It seemed too much to hope that she would cancel her vacation. I listened now with avid ears.

"I have been hesitating for a long while about consulting you," said Mrs. Greenfield. "The reference to your vacation in Paris decided me in a hurry. There seemed to be something providential in it. Miss Gowan is in Paris. At least, that was her ostensible destination when she sailed away two months ago."

My hopes went down. Nothing in this for me.

"Ah, gone abroad," said Mme Storey.

"She took care that it had nothing of the look of a flight," said the old lady. "All during the months while the estate

was being settled, she remained here in New York holding herself at the disposal of the lawyers and accountants.... She came to bid me good-bye before she left." Mrs. Greenfield's lip curled in bitter scorn. "I managed to conceal my feelings. She said that she felt she owed it to herself to take a long vacation before she looked for another position. That made me very angry, but I said nothing. Because it was not my husband's fault that she had had no vacation. He was always urging her to take one, and she refused."

"She had never taken a vacation?" asked Mme Storey.

"Well, not in a good many years. But when we travelled she went with us; when we went to the country she accompanied us. And when my husband was away from his office she had almost nothing to do. Just looked after his mail."

"So she went to Paris?"

"Yes. She said she had ten thousand dollars that she had saved out of her salary, and she meant to live in Paris until it was spent."

"And you want me to...?"

"To find her," said Mrs. Greenfield beseechingly. "They say you can read souls. Open the book of her soul and tell me what is written there."

"I'm afraid I am scarcely the magician you credit me with being," said Mme Storey soberly. "But I will do what I can."

"Ah, thank you, my dear!" said the old lady with tears in her eyes.

Mme Storey glanced at her watch. "I wish I had another day," she said, "But I can't change my ship. It's simply impossible to get berths at this season. We'll contrive somehow. After I have gone, one of my assistants, Mr. Crider, will call upon you. You will please give him the notebook, also the report you received on Miss Gowan, and any other evidence he may call for from time to time. His job will be to make a further investigation of her antecedents; to discover if she is corresponding with her acquaintances in this country, and to obtain a photograph of her to send me."

"Please do not take it amiss if I speak of money," said Mrs. Greenfield diffidently. "I am sure you understand that it is nothing to me what this girl may have stolen. It is the other thing: to clear *that* up I will gladly spend every penny I have. As for yourself..."

"There will be no difficulty about that," said Mme Storey carelessly. "I have my living to make, and I shall send you a bill, of course. But I am taking this case on its merits. Make your mind easy. I promise you, before we are through, we will either lay your doubts or prove them."

"Ah, you have taken a load off me already!" said Mrs. Greenfield. "The loneliness of mind was the worst. If everyone believes you mad, you might as well *be* mad. I feel that I have found a friend. That is an event in one's life!"

After she had gone Mme Storey sat for a few moments in a deep study, stabbing her desk blotter with a pencil. Then she lighted a fresh cigarette and smiled at me in the way that invites comment. I felt obliged to speak up for prudence.

"Are you sure that this conviction of hers may not after all be the product of a mind disordered by grief?"

"I am sure of nothing, Bella," she said, smiling.

"According to her own story, everything is against it," I pointed out.

"That is just what appeals to me. It brings up the old and never-to-be-settled controversy between reason and intuition. You know what side I fight on, Bella. I'm for intuition."

"How are you going to find her?" I said. "Paris is a city of how many millions of souls?"

"But the American colony is like a gossip village. If she's spending money I shall hear of her at once."

We both glanced involuntarily at our watches. It lacked just fifty minutes of sailing time.

"Bella," drawled Mme Storey in that tone she adopts when she wishes to plague me, "if I've got to work in Paris, you must come along with me."

My heart at the same time began to pound and flutter. My breath was taken away. I suppose I looked at my mistress like one moonstruck, for she laughed merrily.

"Why not? You're a free and unattached female like myself. Just telephone your landlady that you'll mail her a check in advance for your rent. We'll write out Crider's instructions on the ship and send it ashore by the pilot."

"But—but my things?" I stammered.

"You'll have to share mine. My maid will make the necessary alterations. In Paris we'll get you a new outfit. I've always wanted a chance to dress you, Bella."

"Every berth on the ship is sold."

"Yes, but I'm doing myself the luxury of a sitting room this trip. You shall bunk there. Fortunately, you have a passport. We'll have it visaed on the way to the pier. We can just make it. Leave everything as it stands."

I was silenced. I flew about locking things. I felt like a woman in a dream. Paris! Paris! Paris! was ringing in my ears like a chime. Sober, matter-of-fact me going to *Paris*! And with my beloved mistress! Well as I knew her, and many as had been our shared adventures, I guessed that there was a Rosika Storey in Paris that I did not know, and the most delightful of all, perhaps. I don't suppose I shall ever recapture the bliss of that moment. Oh, well, once was something!

II

The next six days passed in a dream of delight: the sunny sea, the spaces of the mighty liner, the amusing human show, the luxury that lapped us—Mme Storey and I actually had our own tiny private veranda on deck; one felt one's self translated to an urbaner sphere. Mme Storey condescended to fascinate the captain, and our voyage was made *very* pleasant. Nowadays one must go to sea for real undisturbed luxury; on shore life is full of discomforts even for the affluent.

And then Paris! Paris in June! Out-of-doors Paris! Paris under the night sky! Déjeuner at the Pavilion d'Armenonville in the Bois: dinner on Montmartre: ices, and *such* ices, any time of the day or night, at the Café de la Paix, the centre of the world! Paris, where you may ride in taxicabs as much as ever you want for the price of trolley rides at home! Oh, Paris was more than ever a heaven for Americans at this time, with francs at seventeen to the dollar! It was really a sin not to drink champagne with every meal. But I must not say anything more about its effect on me. I am telling another story now.

That story recommences on the seventh day, when I found myself lunching beside a window at Meurice's between Mme Storey and Mrs. Wynn Charlton: the latter a name to conjure with among Americans in Paris. I should say in the beginning that Mme Storey passed as a lady of leisure in Paris. Nothing was known of her professional activities. I was regarded as her friend. Mme Storey was at my right, Mrs. Charlton at my left, and I, facing the window, looked out on the Rue de Rivoli under the arcade, with the Jardins des Tuileries across the street. The world was full of sunshine, and I felt like pinching myself to see if this was really I. What is, I suppose, the best-dressed crowd in the world, streamed by under the arcade. Mostly Americans. The Rue de Rivoli in June is theirs. I couldn't tell you what we ate. It was brought, and it was taken away as in a dream.

This Mrs. Wynn Charlton was a remarkable woman. By sheer force of determination she got herself accepted as beautiful and clever. She had a lot of money, though, that helped. At the moment the most remarkable thing about her was her hat. A tall-crowned hat set at a rakish angle with three upright feathers in contrasting shades. Everybody turned around to look at that hat. A stroke of genius—but not Mrs. Charlton's genius. From under the brim of it her little eyes peered at you in a way that was intended to be languorous and alluring. The exotic was her note; but when she became excited she forgot and talked like a buzzing aeroplane. In a word, Paris engrafted upon Waterbury, Conn.

My dear mistress created a sensation of another sort. Whoso liked to be astonished stared at Mrs. Charlton's hat; whoso loved beauty offered the tribute of his glances to Mme Storey. I understood at once why she loved Paris so: it was her natural element; she seemed to expand and to glow in that air. With a sure instinct she dressed more plainly in Paris than in New York. We are all beauty lovers, but the French are less tender minded than we; less apt to accept the pretentious at its own valuation. Masters of dress, they see through it. Mme Storey, in her sand-coloured turban and straight brown dress, was beauty, and in Paris she received her due.

She had desired to hear the latest gossip of the American colony, and Mrs. Charlton was giving her an earful. It would require pages to set it all down, even if I could remember it all. I shall give you only that part which has to do with the story.

"There's a newcomer," said Mrs. Charlton, "a sensation, not only in our set, but *tout* Paris. A Mrs. J. Eben Smith of Ypsilanti, Mich. Mysterious. Entirely alone; antecedents unknown. But as far as that goes the antecedents of most everybody over here is—or should I say are? That's what makes Paris so fascinating. You never know. I suppose Smith must be her real name, because nobody would ever *choose* such an alias."

"A clever woman might," murmured Mme Storey, "just for that reason."

"Well, anyway, Gertie de Vimoutier wrote to the postmaster at Ypsilanti asking about her, and got an answer back saying he had never heard of such a person. Gertie is always doing things like that, and then telling about them. She has no sense of fitness. Anyway, Mrs. Smith should worry. Her money is real."

"Money?" said Mme Storey, cocking an eyebrow.

"Lashings, my dear. And no encumbrances, apparently. Some women have all the luck... A strange woman! None of us can make her out. She's something to talk about. Nobody can understand why such a woman was ever attracted to Paris."

"Why not her as well as another woman?" asked Mme Storey. With her chin on her palm my mistress mused smilingly, just dropping a question now and then to keep Mrs. Charlton keyed up.

"Well, my dear, sexless. Fancy that in this age of sex. A married woman (at least, she says she is) well over thirty years old, who still sports a virginal, remote air. Why, that sort of thing went out in the 'nineties. What does she want to come to Paris for? A Frenchman wouldn't know what to do with her. And our men are more French than the French, if you know what I mean."

"Well, she had to go somewhere," said Mme Storey, smiling.

"A strange woman, I tell you," insisted Mrs. Charlton; "she's not pretty, she has no allure, she's dumb as an oyster, yet in two months already she's a success."

"Two months?" said Mme Storey, glancing at me. Of course we couldn't know as yet that we were on the track of our quarry, but it was amusing to listen to Mrs. Charlton.

"... A success!" she rattled on. "She's in our set, and none of us can tell just how she got in. Sort of insinuated herself. Of course she *has* money. And there's nothing blatant about her. She can keep her mouth shut. The most significant set in Paris if I do say it. You know. The leading American women, and the ultra-ultra young French artists. Everything starts in our set. Why, my dear——"

"But about Mrs. Smith," prompted my mistress softly. "How do you account for her success?"

"Well, she's had the wit to put herself in the hands of the best men in Paris. Craqui raves over her type. I suppose it's really her absence of type that appeals to him. Being a nullity he can make whatever he likes of her. At any rate, Mrs. Smith is his pet this season; all his best designs are for her."

"His mistress?"

"No, indeed! I told you the woman was sexless. It is a purely artistic relation. They say that Craqui does her hair himself, and makes up her face in harmony with the costumes he designs for her. I assure you the ensembles are marvellous—marvellous! Egyptian, Chinese, or Central African effects. A lay figure on which Craqui spends all his art. Once it would have been thought outlandish, but nowadays you can't go too far. Everybody thought Craqui was spoiled by rich American tourists, but, after all, there is nobody like him. In Mrs. J. Eben Smith's gowns Craqui has come back. The woman creates a sensation wherever she appears, and that's all she does do, just appears."

"What's her colouring?" asked Mme Storey.

"Originally her hair was a lifeless light brown, I believe, but now, my dear! various new shades of red and gold woven together! It must be dyed strand by strand. The effect is astonishing. It never occurred to anybody before to dye their hair several shades at once. It's bound to become the rage.... Her eyes are a cold gray; extraordinarily steady, cold, contemptuous eyes; basilisk eyes; gives you the shivers to look into them. Smudged in and elongated with make-up, the effect is snaky in the extreme. Somebody does wonderful things to her with make-up; curious shadows about the lips that give the effect of petulance; a dead pallor with just a tinge of bistre; one eyebrow a little higher than the other. Oh, chic! chic! my dear! The sort of thing you can't copy!"

By this time Mme Storey and I had a strong suspicion that we need seek no further.

"Is she a particular friend of yours?" Mme Storey asked carelessly.

"A particular friend of nobody's, my dear. Everybody knows her and nobody *knows* her. Men like to be seen with her, she looks so expensive, but her silences, her basilisk eyes, make them uneasy. She doesn't play up. It's just as well, perhaps, that she *is* silent. Rochechouart told me they were lunching at Laperouse's, and in the midst of one of her sphinxlike silences, when he was wondering whether she was dreaming about voodoo or the lovers she had thrown to the crocodiles of the Nile, she looked down in her plate and said: 'Say, Prince, these peas are so *green*!' ... But you can't believe a word Hélié de Rochechouart says.

"I saw her first at the Jockey. That's a little place on the Boulevard Montparnasse where we go. New place since you were here, dear. It's Boué Say's hangout, and Exeideuil's and Dun le Roi's and Amasa Ounce's. The most advanced set in Paris. I don't know who brought her the first time. That night she was swathed in batik draperies representing tortoise shell with a necklace of enormous topazes and a peacock fan. Everybody in the room knew that Paris had a new celebrity when she entered with her stiff jerky little walk—a sort of a cross between the gait of an empress and incipient locomotor ataxia—but women don't have locomotor ataxia, do they? Anyhow, like everything else about her, it was effective."

Mme Storey and I exchanged another glance. We were sure now.

"I'd like to meet this remarkable woman," said my mistress.

"Nothing easier, my dear. You're dining with me to-morrow night. We'll go on to the Jockey after. General le Boutillier shall take us. She's sure to be there."

Mrs. Charlton chattered on about other matters.

Craqui, foremost among male dressmakers in Paris (or in the world), was an old acquaintance of Mme Storey's. His establishment is in the Rue de la Paix, naturally, and thither we had ourselves carried next morning. Ah! what a palace of tantalizing delights that was! A woman weeps at the difficulty of choosing. In the show window at the Place Vendôme corner there was but one amazing dress displayed; nothing more or less than a lopsided piece of goods in a queer chequered pattern of green and black on a white ground. Nobody but Craqui would have thought of using that material; and what art in its lopsidedness! Of the passers-by some laughed, a few admired, but none missed it.

Inside there was no hint of merchandising, of course. A series of elegant salons in the French style. A grand salon below for ordinary customers, and various delightful little chambers above for the more favoured sort. Into one of the most *recherché* of these we were shown, and a lady of the most exalted rank, one would say, came to inquire our pleasure. A greater honour was in store: M. Craqui himself came running to kiss Mme Storey's hand. A truly remarkable figure of a fat man in a sportive belted coat. He had a closely cropped brown beard—a sort of genteel bear of a man, and wore, of all things! a pair of dark smoked glasses. Whether this was to protect his eyes from the dazzling stuffs that were brought forth, or from the sight of too much female loveliness, I'm sure I can't say.

We sat in fauteuils, and a succession of young girls were admitted to the room one at a time, each one clad in a design of M. Craqui's more beautiful than the last. With what a clever effect they entered, moved about the little room, paused, turned, lifted their arms, went out. Each one had a highly impersonal air that our models do not seem to be able to attain to. The creator of it all leaned on the back of Mme Storey's chair and advised with her. They talked in French; talked so fast I missed some of the words, but I got the gist of it. At this time Craqui had just invented the famous "stove-pipe silhouette" which admirably became Mme Storey's tall slimness. She ordered it in a dozen different manifestations.

The mannequins were superb creatures. I had expected artificiality in the French, but I quickly learned they can appreciate nature. All the girls were very young, just arrived at the blush of womanhood, in fact, and, uncorseted and unhampered by much underclothing, their young bodies swayed with a barbaric and insolent grace. It struck me as rather strange that such fresh young things should be used to display clothes to the aging and exhausted rich women who must have constituted the majority of M. Craqui's patrons. One would think they might enrage the older women. But I suppose there is no woman so old she cannot picture herself as one of the mannequins. And then they do not often bring their husbands, of course.

M. Craqui was one blaze of excited gesticulation. In America we are given to smiling at men dressmakers—well, Craqui was absurd from our point of view, but he was also a great artist.

"Madame!" he said, striking an attitude, "I have a piece of crimson brocade. Ah-h! You must see it!"

"Monsieur! Remember I'm a poor woman. Positively, not another thing!"

"Madame! If you cannot pay for it, I will give it to you. This piece was woven for you. I could not bear to see another woman have it."

"Flatterer!"

"Thérèse! Fetch me the piece of brocade from my private *escritoire*. *Vite! Vite!*"

In due course it was brought.

"*Regardez, Madame, regardez*. Is it not imperial? ... Gabrielle! *Gabrielle!* GABRIELLE!!!"

Gabrielle, a brunette like Mme Storey, was introduced to the room in camisole and bloomers. M. Craqui seized a pair of shears and with scarcely a glance cut recklessly into the priceless stuff. All the women exclaimed in dismay. In a jiffy two lengths of it were hanging from Gabrielle's lovely shoulders. M. Craqui like lightning snatched pins from the trembling hands of Thérèse and jabbed them cunningly here and there.

"*Voilà! Voilà!* Caught over the shoulders in two points and hanging perfectly straight but for a slight fullness under the breast and my three wrinkles across the abdomen. Behold, Madame!"

Indeed, in two minutes there hung the glorious evening gown complete. Absolutely simple, yet stamped with the genius of Craqui.

"With that you may wear your pearls," he said. "But nothing else. Nothing in your beautiful hair. Part your hair not quite in the middle, draw it back loosely and give it a careless twist at the back as you might before going to the bath. That is the mode for *you*, Madame: disdainful simplicity!"

"I have no pearls," she said drily.

"Then get some. Dusky pearls. Not a long string. If they hang below the décolletage the effect is ruined. Twenty-six inches; no more; no less!"

"Dear sir, how husbands must hate you!" murmured Mme Storey.

He held an expressive shrug.

I was not overlooked. I too, was endowed with a luscious evening gown in the "stove-pipe silhouette." M. Craqui insisted that it must be made up in magenta velvet. Fancy red-haired me in magenta! But he was right, as it proved. The only trouble with the gown when I got it was that it made me look too fine for my humble station. M. Craqui besought me to have my straight hair bobbed, and worn clinging to the skull in the manner of a lad of the Fifteenth Century. I declined, gasping. Bella Brickley of East Seventeenth Street, N.Y., was unable to project herself that far back!

Mme Storey wanted clothes, but she had, as well, another object in visiting Craqui's that morning. At a certain stage in the proceedings she said with an aggrieved air:

"These are all very pretty, but you show me nothing to compare with the stunning designs you have created for Madame Eben Smith."

M. Craqui made great play with uplifted palms and raised eyebrows. "But that would be a sacrilege, dear Madame!"

Mme Storey affected to misunderstand him. "Am I not, then, worthy of your best?"

I thought M. Craqui would have a fit in his efforts to explain. "*Non! Non! Non! Non!* In dressing *you* I am forced to humble myself, Madame. I cannot adorn you! In a jute slip you would outshine any woman who came near you!"

"Ah, Craqui is not Craqui for nothing!" murmured Mme Storey, smiling at me.

"Now this Mrs. Smit'," he went on, "her figure is well enough, and her face has no positive blemishes, but she is just woman. One can take her like clay and mould her to any design. I do not deny that in Mrs. Smit' I have found an opportunity. I have never had a customer so ductile, so complaisant. Most women have notions about dressing themselves. Or if not their range is very limited. But Mrs. Smit' is willing to be anything. I can create her afresh each day, according to my mood. Decidedly, an opportunity. Moreover, she carries my designs into places where my mannequins cannot go. Oh, an advertisement magnificent, Madame."

"They say she's a strange woman," remarked Mme Storey. "Inscrutable."

He shrugged. "That inscrutability may hide anything or nothing," he said. "She comes here; she says nothing at all. She has a mysterious air—very good; that is valuable to me; I exploit it. My little mannequins, of course, wear their little hearts outside like breast pins."

"What is her idea?"

"She aspires to become the most-talked-of woman in Paris."

"She is very rich I suppose?"

M. Craqui shrugged in a different manner. He had a whole repertoire of shrugs. "I do not know. She pays her bills."

"You must know something about her."

"Nothing whatever, dear Madame. She walked into my shop one day. The only thing remarkable about her was that she insisted on seeing me. There she sat. In the end I had to go to her in order to get rid of her. She says she is a widow. I should have called her a mature mademoiselle. Certainly she is the least married woman I have observed. Possibly her husband was very old."

"Did you not ask for references?"

"Oh, her bankers. The Crédit Foncier. They reported merely that her account was satisfactory to them."

Mme Storey allowed the subject to drop, and the exhibition of dresses went on.

As we drove away from the shop I said: "I am prepared to believe now that there is something in Mrs. Greenfield's story. The ex-secretary could scarcely have obtained money enough to patronize Craqui except by criminal means."

But Mme Storey put her head on one side dubiously. "Not quite yet, Bella. We know she had ten thousand dollars. She may even have had more, honestly obtained. Ten thousand dollars will buy a lot of French francs at the present rate of exchange. She may be blowing in the whole in one magnificent gesture.... Still, it is rather significant she should choose a French banker—an American woman, speaking no French."

IV

I don't wonder that Americans love Paris; the wonder is they don't all fly there as soon as they have made their pile. The dinner party at Mrs. Charlton's passed off with *éclat*—something that we have not in America any more than we have a word for it. Not only was everything expensive, but there was a certain stimulus in the air. The diners were roused out of themselves. They talked.

The company dispersed shortly before eleven, leaving us three women to go on to the Jockey with General le Boutillier. He, I need only say, was an old gentleman with nothing whatever to him, but most distinguished to look at.

I was disappointed in my first glimpse of the Jockey, which Mrs. Charlton had assured us was the resort of resorts in Paris and very difficult to get into. Exactly like places of the sort in Greenwich Village. A dingy room with chairs and tables around the walls, and a square of linoleum in the centre to dance on. The drabness of the walls was relieved by a few startling post-cubist paintings. There was a subtle difference, though: the difference between an original and a copy. In Paris a Bohemian has a recognized place in the scheme of things and bears himself with a corresponding assurance. In New York the poor things have to fight against an inferiority complex.

There was one very palpable difference in the Jockey which made all the difference in the world: a flourishing bar in the corner served by American bartenders. How real they looked! In another corner there was a jazz band, and that was American, too.

The types were as those of the Village only more so. More complete and finished than we can produce. And yet I don't know. I was amused to discover that the most picturesque and *Vie de Bohémish* of them invariably turned out to be Americans. For example, there was a glorious young fellow with a black slouch hat and a flaming red beard. (How we sensible souls do love a swaggering pose!) They told me he was the American Bolshevik. Splendid to look at. But when he removed the slouch hat I saw that his hair was growing thin on top, and I felt rather let down.

At eleven, when we arrived, the place was empty; at midnight every table save the one next to us was filled. I was dizzied by the number of celebrities that were pointed out to me; Lady Evelyn Estabrook, the English Sappho; Boué Say, the cubist photographer; Otile Exeideuil, the inventor of Ga-Ga, which is not baby talk but a serious movement in art,

etc., etc. In addition to the habitués there was a sprinkling of rich American tourists. I observed that the attention of these was unobtrusively called to the pictures, and no doubt appointments were made to visit studios next day. Well, artists must live.

There was one feature of artist life that had not altered. The celebrated photographer Boué Say, who it appeared was late of Union Square, was talking to Mme Storey, and that brought next to me his charming little companion who had no other name but Toto. I was half scandalized, half thrilled. Really, quite a nice little thing. She had no English except a few naughty phrases that she got off with innocent gusto. But I made out to talk to her in my French. Toto, however, preferred to express herself in the universal language of making faces. Enough to make you die! Times have changed! Those great ladies Mme Storey and Mrs. Wynn Charlton talked to Toto as unaffectedly as they might to any pretty child, and Toto was not in the least abashed by *them*.

In an interval of the music we heard an uproar of talk and laughter on the pavement outside as a new crowd discharged themselves from taxis. It was like a fanfare off scene. The door was banged open and a half dozen men and women burst in. As soon as they were in they began to ask each other loudly: "Where's Mrs. Smith? Where's Mrs. Smith?" Whereupon they all turned around and looked through the door again. I never saw an entrance better stage-managed. She entered quietly, last and alone, her noisy companions falling back to give her passage.

Well, there she was! A little thing, smaller than me; not beautiful, not young, not even clever, they said, but the sensation of artistic Paris. To me she seemed the very incarnation of Paris, though I knew she had but lately stepped ashore from a transatlantic liner. She was all wrapped up in a cloak of rosy fur, flamingo colour. Who ever heard of rosy fur before? But why not? Above this pink cloud she seemed all eyes—dark caverns in which gleamed a pair of cold and watchful serpents. Her strange parti-coloured hair was drawn across her forehead in a wide band. A curiously wrought ornament of pink jade stuck out from her head at an angle. Her face was all deathly pale; her mouth a cold red splotch. Clearly the aim of this make-up was not to copy nature, but to set up a new criterion.

She allowed the rosy wrap to fall into the arms of a cavalier, and a little sound of astonishment escaped the beholders. Mrs. Smith was wearing a high-waisted dress! The only high-waisted dress that had been put on in Paris that night I am sure. How original of Craqui! It covered her entire too, with sleeves to her wrists, and a yoke that rose almost to her neck. It was made of some sheer white material embroidered with big pale pink dots, and was tied behind with an exaggerated thin wide bow with uneven ends, a Craqui touch.

Of course! Daring effects not being capable of supplying any further thrills, Craqui with one step had gone back to the prim. It was a humorous rendering of the Kate Greenaway period. Highly sophisticated primness. Around her pretty neck Mrs. Smith was wearing a glorious circlet of diamonds: twenty great flashing stones in an invisible setting.

A hint of grimness appeared in Mme Storey's eyes as she marked the diamonds, and I read her thought. Had an old man been murdered for those bits of carbon?

Mrs. Smith and her companions made their way to the table next to ours. I took note of the famous walk. It did have the effect of lending the little woman a sort of majesty. While the others talked back and forth, she sat facing the dancing floor like a sphinx. Nothing more than her tinted eyelids moved. She was like an expensive mechanical doll in the window of a toy shop at Christmas. Quite inhuman. One felt sorry for her. That was supposed to be a scene of gaiety, and she was not gay. On the other hand, there was neither pain nor ennui in the cold gray eyes. There was no expression whatever. All a pose, no doubt, but what on earth was the good of a pose that laid such a painful stricture on the natural motions?

In my mind I tried to reconstruct the millionaire's secretary, and failed utterly. What was hidden behind that inexpressiveness? Had she robbed and murdered in order to achieve her soul's desire only to find it dust and ashes in her mouth? Or was she satisfied? One could have speculated endlessly on the secret of her mask. The mask was what constituted her power.

The three young men in the party all waited upon Mrs. Smith with their subservient glances, and the other two women, manifestly, were only supers. One of the young men was favoured above the other two; he had the place of honour at Mrs. Smith's right ear into which he whispered. She listened but gave no sign. It appeared that the young man

was known to my ladies.

"Hélie," whispered Mme Storey to Mrs. Charlton with a humorous cock of her eyebrow.

So I knew him to be the Prince de Rochechouart of whom I had heard. "Roshaswarr" they called it. It is only just now that I have learned the spelling. A rosy and comely young prince.

The amount of masculine attention that Mrs. Smith received was displeasing to Mrs. Charlton, who said somewhat waspishly:

"Having rung all the possible changes on charm, the latest chic is to fall in love with a woman who has none."

"I should not say from the visible symptoms that Hélie was in love," remarked Mme Storey.

"Only technically speaking, of course," replied Mrs. Charlton. "I heard to-day that they were engaged."

"Ah!" breathed Mme Storey with a glance in my direction.

I was terribly excited. A *princess* next! How amazing! And yet, come to think of it, was it not in a logical sequence? I glanced at the so-called Mrs. Smith with an unwilling respect. She was certainly an out-and-outer.

Presently the Prince caught sight of Mme Storey and came hastening around the table to kiss her hand. Mine too; a new sensation for me, the lips of a prince. Many polite nothings were exchanged in indiscriminate French and English. Mme Storey asked him to lunch with us next day. As he turned to go she whispered, indicating Mrs. Smith:

"She is marvellous! Do introduce me when an opportunity offers."

It appeared that Mrs. Smith did not condescend to dance. When the music started Prince Rochechouart took advantage of the general movement to introduce the two ladies to each other. Less than two feet separated them. Mme Storey had only to turn around in her chair. She had arranged that beforehand. I sat on the other side of Mme Storey and could watch them both without moving. Mrs. Smith bowed and smiled without expressing a vestige of human feeling. The young man slipped away to seek a partner.

"You are a countrywoman of mine," said Mme Storey.

"Ah, you are American?" returned Mrs. Smith with a glance which suggested she didn't think any the better of her for it. "I should not have thought so."

Her voice was low and agreeable. She obtained an effect of foreignness by speaking slowly, and with a particular distinctness.

"Yes, from New York," said Mme Storey. "Of course you know New York."

"I have been there several times."

"Perhaps we know some of the same people."

"I know nobody in New York."

There the conversation hung fire for a moment. Mrs. Smith was never one to help a conversation out. I felt sorry for my mistress. Just like sitting down to talk to a china doll. What *could* one address to such a blank surface? However, I underrated Mme Storey's resourcefulness.

"I have been *so* anxious to meet you," she went on with an air of naïveté that would have caused anybody who knew her well to smile; "you are the most talked-about woman in Paris!"

The doll was galvanized into life. Her lips parted, and she turned a pair of unguarded and entirely human eyes on

Mme Storey. A blaze of egotism was revealed in their depths. It broke the spell that enveloped her. She could be flattered. One no longer shivered in awe of her.

"Who told you that?" she demanded with a strange eagerness.

"I hear it everywhere," said Mme Storey innocently. "From Mrs. Charlton, from M. Craqui..." She named other names.

Mrs. Smith, conscious that she had stepped out of her self-created picture, made haste to get back again. She shrugged. Her lip curled ever so slightly: her eyes became fixed in their orbits.

"Why should I be?" she murmured.

"Well, the reason seems perfectly clear to me," said Mme Storey, giving her more of the same. "You are a very remarkable woman."

With this line of talk Mme Storey assumed a somewhat foolish expression. It made me uncomfortable. I did not know which way to look. But she had gauged her victim to a nicety. Mrs. Smith swallowed it avidly. It gave me a new reading of the woman. It suggested that her terrifying inscrutability was after all only the inscrutability of a child or a savage in strange company. If so, it was her very unsureness that had the ironic result of making her famous—that and the genius of M. Craqui.

"One feels that you have had a wonderful, wonderful life!" said Mme Storey. "You are like a deep well into which life has flowed."

I don't know exactly what this meant, and I don't believe she did either, but it sounded impressive. Mrs. Smith kept the tinted eyelids down, because she could no longer look inscrutable, I suppose. One apprehended a flush rising under the make-up. No doubt many men had flattered her, but it was something new to get it from a woman, and a woman infinitely more desirable than herself. It affected her like a heady wine.

"You bring an exotic note into life," said Mme Storey. "One is grateful to you. Life is so ordinary."

Mrs. Smith laughed: a dry, nervous little cachinnation expressing the most intense gratification. Those left sitting at her table looked around in astonishment. I suppose Mrs. Smith had never been heard to laugh out loud before.

"You flatter me," she said.

"I don't feel that I *could* flatter you," said Mme Storey with a serious air.

"We must see more of each other," said Mrs. Smith. "Will you have *déjeuner* with me to-morrow?"

"Sorry, not to-morrow," said Mme Storey. "Any other day."

"The day after, then. At one-thirty. I live at the Ritz."

"I shall be charmed," said Mme Storey.

V

Next day we took Prince de Rochechouart to Voisin's, for lunch or, as the French call it, a fork breakfast. The first breakfast is a miserable apology for a meal: café au lait—ugh! I could never learn to like the nasty medicine. Voisin's is one of the dingy famous old Paris restaurants that the tourists do not often stumble on, a place where one obtains the *ne plus ultra* in eats.

The little Prince was an amusing study. Curious compound of boyishness and sophistication. Another notion about the French that I had to discard was that the men were all effete. Rochechouart was as fresh as a daisy, with cheeks like peonies and sparkling eyes, cornflower-blue. To be sure, he was half American, but there were many like him in Paris. It is later in life that they become hollow cheeked and blasé. To be a well-born, comely, and vigorous young man in Paris, what luck! But it needs a certain amount of imagination to appreciate it, and that he lacked.

I was determined to be democratic. He was no more than a scatter-brained lad, I told myself, like thousands at home; nevertheless, I confess I was impressed. That magic word "Prince" cast a sort of glory around him. Why, Mme Storey had told me his ancestors went on the crusades; and coming down to comparatively recent times, his three-times-great-grandfather had been guillotined during the Terror. The thought of that long, long family roll could not but be thrilling.

I was glad, though, that my ancestors were not in the crusades—as far as I know. Hélié still had the physique, but in the course of the centuries the moral virtues of the old stock had sadly fizzled out. To put it bluntly, he was as unprincipled a young scoundrel as you will see, but with delightful manners. His casual cynicism took my Anglo-Saxon breath away. He had only one virtue: he made no pretences. His candour, indeed, was disconcerting.

It was not difficult to make him talk. A few glasses of 1914 Bollinger and the cork was out of *his* bottle. Before we reached the entremets we were in possession of his life's whole history, the most of which I would blush to set down.

Mme Storey was looking superb, completely dressed in a certain shade of cold red that becomes her so well. Rochechouart made open love to her. It was nothing to him that he was engaged to marry another woman. My mistress listened with amused tolerance. Me he ignored, except when he remembered his manners with a start. I did not mind. I was well content to watch and listen to the comedy.

"I understand that you are to be congratulated," said Mme Storey.

"Well, I don't know," said the youthful cynic; "I'm going to marry Mrs. J. Eben Smith if that's what you mean. Were you surprised when you heard it?"

"Well, yes, rather."

"Ah, if *you* would only have me!" he said. "But, no! I don't want to marry you. You are too glorious. I would wish to stand in a dearer relation to you than that of husband!"

"Nobody attaches the slightest weight to what you say, Hélié," said Mme Storey teasingly.

"I know it!" he cried gaily. "So I can say whatever I like! How terrible to be held *accountable!*"

"What will your father say?" asked Mme Storey.

"Oh, he will make one noble gesture of indignation—and thankfully pocket the miserable sum he has been allowing me. What would you? I've got to marry. My father cannot support us both in the best society. He was disappointed in his marriage, as you may remember. My mother was an angel from heaven, but her dot was small. Just before *her* papa died he went bankrupt—expressly to embarrass us, I have no doubt. So it's up to me to look out for myself."

I forgot to mention that young Hélié talked good American, scarcely to be distinguished from that of Times Square.

"She's a good bit older than you," ventured Mme Storey.

"Oh, well, marriage is not the serious matter it used to be. This will do very well for a while."

"But how does she regard that?"

"She's a woman of the world. She has no illusions."

"Are there no younger heiresses to be had?"

"I don't want an heiress," he said drily, "but a possessor.... If you mean a French girl," he went on, "*mon dieu!* dear lady, I couldn't marry a French bourgeoisie. For why? Her vulgarities are *my* vulgarities. I should die of it! But an American girl, *her* vulgarity is the engaging naïveté of the savage. Quite a different thing, you perceive. *Très-chic*...."

"I have made my tour of America as you know. I looked them over, as they say over there. But nothing came of it. It appears that French titles do not command the best price in the American market because, forsooth, they are not recognized by the French state. I had a bad press. Indeed, such was my innocence, I failed to realize the importance of engaging an American press agent. Nevertheless, there were several sweet little things who intimated their willingness to become La Princesse de Rochechouart. But obstacles always arose. I myself became coy. Because it appeared that an American girl expects to *possess* her husband! Is that not an unnatural and a disconcerting thing? Then there was always the difficulty of the dot. You would not believe how difficult it is to persuade Americans to treat such matters seriously. Indeed, they affected to be horrified that one should wish to talk about settlements at all at such a time. A strange race! The papas of all these sweet young things were fabulously rich, but they balked at handing any of it over with their daughters. In America, it appears, the young people are expected to exist on the charity of their elders until the elders die. That did not appeal to me. I will be old myself then, and have less use for money. So I returned as single as I went."

He drained his glass. When he set it down his blue eyes were swimming happily. "Ah, how beautiful you are!" he said to Mme Storey. "You carry about with you an aura of golden light!"

"That's the champagne you have drunk," said Mme Storey drily.... "How does the situation of Mrs. Smith differ from these others?"

"Mrs. Smith has no papa," he said, laughing. "At least, I don't know whether she has or not. At any rate, he doesn't figure. She has the money."

"But you know nothing about her. None of us knows anything about her. She may be a—she may be anything at all!"

"What do I care, my dear lady? She has the money. Besides, she has, what do you say? made good in Paris. She is a success."

"In certain circles," Mme Storey put in.

"Ah, nowadays one circle's about as good as another," he said with a shrug. "The great thing is to get your head above the crowd; to become known. What does it matter how you accomplish it? ... I'll introduce her to the Faubourg St. Germain if she's interested in that stupid lot. They don't count at all any more.... Mrs. Smith is famous. She's more famous than I am. She will become more famous. I may be blamed for marrying her, but I will not be despised."

"Moreover, you are wrong," he went on. "I do know something about her. She has told me her story. It is not at all a grand story, and I see no reason to disbelieve it. Her name is not Mrs. Smith, and she has never been near that place with the droll name, what do you call it? Hipsolanti. She has not been married before, one might guess from her virginal air. Her real name is Margaret Gowan."

I do not often see my astute mistress astonished by a piece of information, but I knew by the quiver of her eyelids that she was astonished then. Needless to say, I shared it. What on earth could have induced the canny Mrs. Smith to tell her fiancé the truth about herself?

And this was not all. Rochechouart went on: "For seven long years she served one of your great money barons as, what is the word? private secretary. By the aid of confidential information supplied by her employer, what they call tips, she was able to speculate with her savings, and year by year to double, to quadruple, to multiply the amount, until, when he finally died last year, she found herself a rich woman in her own right."

"Hm," said Mme Storey ironically. "I should call that quite a grand story."

"You do not believe it," he said, undisturbed. "But she has her winnings to show for it."

"How much?"

"Eighteen millions of francs."

"About a million in our money. A tidy sum, eh, Bella? The goal that every money maker sets himself.... Are you *sure* she has it?"

"Ah, be sure, dear lady, I have not neglected so important a matter," he said with a smile. "I have accompanied my fiancée to her bankers'—she employs no less than five; all French houses of the solidest, and I have seen her wealth in her own strong boxes and have handled it. American securities, all—what is it they say?—gilt-edged, as even I could see. Liberty bonds, railway bonds, and others. On the morning of our wedding day one third of it is to be placed in my hands."

"I do congratulate you," said Mme Storey.

VI

Next morning, in our delicious little salon at the Crillon which looked out upon the glorious prospect of the Place de la Concorde, I was packing my bags preparatory to catching the boat train for Cherbourg. I was to board the *Leviathan* that night. My heart was rather heavy at the thought of leaving that intoxicating town—I had had but three dreamlike days of it—but Mme Storey had promised me that I should come back with her for a real vacation. Meanwhile, there was highly important work for me to do in America. We no longer had any doubt of Margaret Gowan's guilt; for, as Mme Storey said:

"One does not make a million by tips alone."

The next thing we had to do was to prove her guilt, and this promised to be no easy matter, for the trail was eight months' old now. We guessed, too, from her perfect composure, that it was cleverly hidden. All the evidence was in America; hence the overnight decision to send me home.

"This time we are opposed by a remarkable woman, my Bella," Mme Storey had said. "It is very stimulating. Conceive of the plain little stenographer who became the most-talked-about woman in Paris and set out to marry a prince!"

"Yes, and a precious pair they will make!" I said indignantly.

"Well, what can you do better with a pair like that than marry them off to each other?" said Mme Storey, smiling. "It will save some better man and woman from a ghastly fate, maybe. No, I do not feel that we are called upon to interfere to prevent that marriage."

"He might get away with his share of the loot," I suggested.

"I will guard against it," said Mme Storey. "How strange she should have told him so much of the truth about herself!"

"Why do you suppose she made her term of service with Mr. Greenfield seven years instead of twelve?" I asked.

"Oh, that's easy," said Mme Storey. "Have a heart, Bella. She's going to be married. Let her knock off a few years from her ostensible age. But why did she tell him at all? Since obviously it made no difference to him. That, I cannot explain to myself."

"Just a slip, perhaps," I suggested.

"Never," said Mme Storey. "She had a motive in it, as she has had a motive in everything she has done. It will

appear before we are through with her."

"I will remain in Paris," Mme Storey had said, "and while I am amusing myself I will keep an eye on her. If she ever suspected our activities, she and her million would vanish into thin air. You go back to New York and work up the case against her. I will give you daily instructions by cable, and you will report to me daily. It will cost a bit of money in tolls, but I suppose the Greenfield estate can afford it. From Nederhal of the United States Trust I will obtain two copies of the private code they use in cabling between their New York and Paris offices. We'll base our messages on that. Let Esmé be the code word for the woman and Leo for Mr. Greenfield. Register our New York address at the cable office, so I can save that seventy-five cents of each message. Address yours to the Crillon.

"There is a lot of patient spade work to be undertaken, Bella. This was no hasty and ill-considered crime. My guess is that cold, patient, determined little creature has been years about it. And struck like a viper when the moment was ripe. We will have to go back to the beginning. Take Mrs. Greenfield fully into your confidence. She will be your principal source of information. If Crider has not already done so, get from her the little notebook in which her husband entered the list of his assets and liabilities. That notebook must serve as the cornerstone of our structure. You had better cable me a copy of the statement and follow it with a copy by mail. Also get Mrs. Greenfield to give you several authentic specimens of her husband's handwriting—say, one or more of his private letters to her. Take letters and notebook to Cardozo, the handwriting expert, and find out if the entries in the notebook, or any part of them, may be a forgery.

"Next, with the aid of the correspondence in the dead man's files, trace back as many of the transactions entered on his balance sheet as you are able. I mean find out when and under what circumstances Mr. Greenfield purchased the securities he set down on one side, and when and under what circumstances he acquired the debts that he put down on the other side. If you find copies of his letters that seem to lead to anything, you must if possible obtain the originals from the men they were addressed to. But I do not need to tell you to exercise the greatest prudence. This case when it breaks will cause an extraordinary sensation. The merest hint of such a case would be good for scareheads. Any premature disclosure would ruin our chances of success.

"Through Rochechouart I will get additional information as to the securities the woman holds. But if, as I suspect, she has been clever enough to put the whole million into non-registered bonds of enormous issues, such as Liberty bonds, it will be almost impossible to trace them.

"Send me a detailed report of all the circumstances surrounding Mr. Greenfield's death.

"The first thing you should do upon landing is to hasten Crider's report on the woman's antecedents. I cannot wait for it to come by mail. Cable it. That report will suggest our next moves.

"Really, the only wasted time will be your six days at sea. I can reach you by wireless if I think of anything additional. Once you are in New York we can communicate as freely as if we were next door to each other. Great is Science! I'll use all the influence I possess to see that our cables are dispatched and delivered promptly. Don't forget the difference in time. When you're going to bed I'll be almost ready to get up next morning.

"Time to start now. On your way to the Gare St. Lazare you can drop me at the Ritz. It is time for my appointment with Mrs. Smith."

"Horrible woman!" I exclaimed. "How can you bring yourself to sit down with her?"

"I'm afraid I'm an unmoral soul, my Bella," said Mme Storey, smiling. "I shall enjoy her. I do not know when I have had so fascinating a subject."

VII

I append a selection from the cablegrams that Mme Storey and I exchanged. Those that did not lead anywhere I have

omitted. What an interesting illustration these messages afford of the way in which her remarkable mind bridged a three-thousand-mile gap!

BRICKLEY, *Leviathan* (via wireless)

June 17th.

Margaret was born in Weddinsboro, Ind. Let Crider follow that up as soon as he is able.

STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 20th.

Crider reports Margaret lived for seven years in boarding house Mrs. Pettigrew, — West 57th Street. Crider took a room there. Landlady refers to Margaret friendly manner, but never seems to have become intimate with her. Margaret very highly spoken of by all. A guest, Miss Bowlby, middle-aged woman independent means, regards herself as Margaret's most intimate friend. Appears, though, Margaret never really took her into her confidence. Miss Bowlby says Margaret came there death of her mother heart disease. Margaret living time Mother's death flat — West 82nd Street. Before that had cheap flat corner 135th Street, Columbus Avenue. Mentioned to Miss Bowlby had a hard struggle upon first coming to New York. Never said where she came from.

Miss Bowlby hinted romance in Margaret's life, but upon pinning her down it seemed there was nothing more in it than a young man who called on her twice and then came no more. No other man in Margaret's life. Margaret rarely went out. She and Miss Bowlby played rummy evenings. Went to a play every Saturday night. Margaret a great reader. Got her books from main branch Public Library, 42nd Street. Margaret has not written Miss Bowlby since leaving New York. Crider has now gone to Weddinsboro.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 20th.

See if Margaret's card is on file at the library. If so, hold it for future instructions. STOREY.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 20th.

Mr. Greenfield's statement received. Disregard assets. Concentrate on tracing notes of hand outstanding at time of death. Obtain assistance Ladbroke, United States Trust. I have numbered notes in order as listed. Refer to numbers in replying. Were these notes saved when paid by the estate? STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 20th.

Notes were destroyed when paid. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 21st.

By whose authority were notes destroyed?

STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 21st.

All persons concerned deny responsibility for destruction notes. BRICKLEY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 22d.

Mr. Greenfield occupied two offices Cosmopolitan Life Building for past twenty-five years. As his lease has not run out, the estate is trying to sublet with furniture remaining as it was. All records, papers, etc., removed to Continental Storage Warehouse. I am mailing plan of the two offices. In addition to Margaret, Mr. Greenfield employed Henry Besson as clerk for more than twenty years. Am in touch with Besson through Mrs. Greenfield. He looked after the details of Mr. Greenfield's real estate, personal and household expenses, check books, etc. Was not in Mr. Greenfield's confidence. Besson timid, conventional old man; afraid to commit himself to any positive statements. Speaks of Margaret in highest terms, but fancy there was friction there. Mr. Greenfield left Besson legacy with which he has purchased annuity. What questions shall I put to Besson? There was also a junior clerk, a lad, Frank Carter. Have not yet found him.

BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 22d.

Let me have Besson's account of Mr. Greenfield's death in his own words. STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 23d.

Quote Besson:

"It was on a Tuesday that Mr. Greenfield died; Tuesday the twelfth of October last year. That day which ended so dreadful for all of us began like any one of a hundred days before. All I can remember about the beginning of it is that it was raining. I know that because Mr. Greenfield did not go out to his lunch. He came in about eleven, as was customary. I did not see him because he entered his private office direct from the corridor. Often a whole day might pass without my seeing him, because he always went in and out by his own door to avoid the chance of meeting beggars or cranks in the outer office. We were considerably troubled by such gentry. But of course I always knew when Mr. Greenfield was in. Not having seen him, I cannot tell you if he looked any different from ordinary that day.

"He would get in along about eleven, read the mail Miss Gowan had ready for him, and dictate his answers. Then he'd go out to lunch at the Bankers' Club where we could find him if need be. Along about three or a little after, he'd drop back to sign his letters and see if there was anything new. Then go on home. 'I earned the right to take my ease, Besson,' he'd say to me, and then add with a laugh, 'but I guess I'd take it anyhow.' And often he'd urge me to close up early and go home. But I didn't. Not that I had too much work to do, but I wouldn't have known what to do with myself if I'd 'a' gone

home early.

"Latterly Mr. Greenfield did not see many people at the office. If anybody came with a proposition he'd say 'write it out first.' Only old friends, of course. It was raining on the day he died, and he had the boy telephone to the Exchange Café for two chicken sandwiches, white meat only, and a bottle of ginger ale. That was a regular custom in bad weather. A waiter brought it to our office, and the boy carried it in.

"It was some time after that; it was five minutes to two—Frank gave me the exact time next day—when Miss Gowan opened the door between the two offices, and her face was white as tissue paper, and she said stuttering-like, not loud at all: 'Oh, Mr. Besson, come quick, come quick!' Or something like that; I don't remember exactly. I ran in and saw Mr. Greenfield lying on the floor with his legs under his desk and his head under his chair. Miss Gowan said he had just groaned once and fallen back, then slipped down out of his chair to the floor, shoving the chair back a little. That was why we hadn't heard any fall outside. When I first looked at Mr. Greenfield his face was all blackish red, his teeth showing. But before the doctor came his colour was gone. We got a doctor in a few minutes. From the Cosmopolitan Life, because that was nearest. He was there in a minute or two. Cerebral hemorrhage he said, soon, as he looked. Dr. Strailock, Mr. Greenfield's own doctor got there in half an hour. He said the same. I knew that Mr. Greenfield had been warned about his blood pressure, but he was real careful. Dr. Strailock made all arrangements to take the body home. Mr. Greenfield's attorney, Mr. Conway, he came about the same time. Miss Gowan telephoned for them. I was too upset. Mr. Conway put seals on everything; Mr. Greenfield's desk, his private safe, and so on."

BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 24th.

When autopsy was performed, were contents of Mr. Greenfield's stomach analyzed? STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 24th.

No analysis made since death was clearly due to a cerebral hemorrhage. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 24th.

Use every effort to find the boy Frank Carter. Ask Besson following questions: (a) Was the door between outer and inner offices locked? (b) How long a time elapsed between the delivery of lunch and Mr. Greenfield's death? (c) Was Miss Gowan with her employer the whole of that time? (d) How was Miss Gowan dressed that day? (e) Find out from Besson or another when, where, and by whom the notebook was found. STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 25th.

Besson's answers: (a) There was a spring lock on the door as a safeguard against the numerous cranks who tried to see Mr. Greenfield. In addition to the usual means of opening it on the inside, there was an electrical device on Mr. Greenfield's desk so that he could let anybody in without getting up. Furthermore, Miss Gowan had a key to the latch so she could let herself in any time, and there was a spare key in Besson's desk, but that was never used, (b) He could not remember exactly. About an hour, (c) Miss Gowan had been in and out of the private office ever since Mr. Greenfield

came in. Besson had not noticed her for a long time before she appeared at the door to give the alarm, (d) Miss Gowan was wearing a dress of blue serge that Besson was very familiar with. A plain, straight dress all in one piece, with some red embroidery around the neck and a narrow belt of serge around the hips, (e) Mr. Conway searched the body in the presence of Dr. Strailock, Mr. Besson, and Miss Gowan. He found the notebook in the inner breast pocket of the dead man's coat, and kept it. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 26th.

Any pockets in Miss Gowan's dress? STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 26th.

No pockets. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 26th.

I wish to establish whether Miss Gowan had any hiding places on her person. Question Besson particularly.

STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 27th.

Besson says Miss Gowan had a little patent-leather handbag or pocketbook such as women carry about. It was a joke between him and Frank that she would not let it out of her sight. Even when she went back and forth between the outer and the inner offices, she carried it under her elbow. BRICKLEY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 27th.

Note No. 2, \$50,000, was given by Mr. Greenfield to George Hutt August 17, 1923, in payment 2,000 shares common stock New Idea Trunk Co. Hutt was promoting the company. It is now in operation. The shares were found among Mr. Greenfield's assets, as you know. I have seen Hutt. He was well acquainted with Mr. Greenfield, who had assisted him on several previous occasions to start worthy enterprises. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 28th.

Nothing in number two for us. Proceed with others. Whenever you locate the person to whom Mr. Greenfield issued a note let your first question be: Did he ever meet Mr. Greenfield personally and talk to him? If so, drop that line and start another. STOREY.

BRICKLEY, New York

June 29th.

Margaret and Hélie were married this morning. I was not invited. STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

June 29th.

Crider back. Weddinsboro a somewhat remote village in southern Indiana. The Gowans are remembered there. Joe Gowan did odd jobs of tinkering and work by the day. A drunkard and ne'er-do-well. Wife a confirmed invalid. Heart disease. They couldn't afford a doctor. Family lived in squalid surroundings. The girl was bright at school, but only half fed and clothed, and always sickly. A homely little thing. Neighbours pitied her but couldn't do anything, she was such a touchy and cross-grained little piece. Gave herself airs which hardly befitted persons in their situation. Had no friends among the young people of either sex. When she was old enough, girl went to New York and found work. Returned a year or so later and took her mother away with her. Father lived on in Weddinsboro, sinking lower and lower. Died three years ago County Almshouse. No word has ever been heard from the girl or her mother. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 1st.

Get Besson to give you further particulars of his employer's habits and characteristics. This is helpful.

STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 1st.

Notes 7 and 8 were both given by Mr. Greenfield to men he knew, so I have eliminated them. Note No. 5, \$75,000, was held by Hanover Trust Company at Mr. Greenfield's death. The original note came into possession of the bank six years ago and had been renewed from time to time. The original endorser was one Henry B. Blakeley, whom I have not been able to locate. Correspondence in files suggests Blakeley and Greenfield never met. The note was issued to Blakely in exchange for shares in the Simplex Taximeter Co. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 2d.

Find out if any official of Hanover Trust ever interviewed Mr. Greenfield in respect to renewing note.

STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 2d.

No. Seems it is customary in the case of known men for the bank to send a notice by mail of the approaching maturity of a note. A new note and check for the interest was always received from Mr. Greenfield in ample time, so no

personal call was ever made on him.

BRICKLEY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 2d.

Quote Besson: "Mr. Greenfield and me was just the same age. He always made a point of it. Made out in a joking way we was twins. But there wasn't much twins about it. He was tall and I am short; he was fat and I am skinny; he was a healthy man and I have my asthma; he had no children and I have five—not to speak of his being rich and me poor, which is the greatest difference of all.

"Mr. Greenfield was a rare easy-going man; that was his guiding rule in life; to take things easy. He wore his clothes real loose, and his collars with a wide opening at the front to give his neck plenty room. Everybody knows his picture, I guess, with the little sideburns white and glistening like spun glass and the pink skin showing through. A fleshy man he was, and real soft, but healthy. Never knew him to have a day's sickness. 'Look at me, Besson,' he would say; 'I am a living example of how not to live. I never did anything of the things I ought to do; never took a day's exercise; never denied myself anything; always did whatever I liked.'

"That was all very well to say, but he was an abstemious man; ate and drank very sparingly. He took his chief pleasure talking to his friends. He liked to talk to young men. Young men with ideas. Latterly almost the whole of his business consisted of his putting up capital to help young men float their ideas. When anybody praised him for it he'd turn it off by saying: 'Most profitable business in the world, my dear sir. Only make sure that they *are* ideas. Most men with money are more afraid of ideas than they are of spotted snakes; consequently ideas are to be had cheap.'

"He had his little peculiarities, as everybody knows. He was all for new *ideas*, but he hated to have new *things* around him. To the day of his death he and Mrs. Greenfield still took their airings behind a spanking team. He had to have a telephone in his business, but he wouldn't have it in his private office; no indeed, it was in the outside office, and nothing would ever induce him to talk over it."

BRICKLEY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 3d.

Blakeley died New Orleans, La., Sept. 19, 1921. That seems to close that line. Meanwhile, in respect to note No. 11 \$125,000. I have located Webster J. F. Cook to whom it was given in 1919. Cook was then organizing the New Process Smelting Works at Arcana, Ill. Mr. Greenfield took 2,500 shares at 50 and wrote a letter of recommendation which Cook says was the turning point in the flotation of the stock. The concern is now very prosperous. The whole matter was arranged by correspondence. Cook never saw Mr. Greenfield, so this seems to be what you require. What additional questions shall I ask Cook? BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 3d.

Cable me contents of Greenfield's letters to Cook regardless of expense. I don't want Cook's answers. If the originals of any of Mr. Greenfield's letters are still in Cook's possession, obtain them and carry them to Cardozo for examination of signatures. Establish from the transfer books of New Process Company when Mr. Greenfield sold his stock and to whom. STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 5th.

Webster Cook himself bought Mr. Greenfield's shares at par after the Company was on a dividend-paying basis. Mr. Greenfield wrote asking him if he wanted to buy. Cook says he thought Mr. Greenfield rather held him up in the transaction, but he couldn't say anything on account of the original benefit. Cook had to have shares, as his control was threatened. Cook put up the stock as collateral with his bank, the Sixth National Chicago. The cancelled certificates originally issued to Mr. Greenfield are still in the company's possession. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 5th.

Have Cardozo pass on Mr. Greenfield's endorsement of cancelled New Process certificates. Has Cook still got the cancelled check or checks that he gave Mr. Greenfield in payment for his stock? STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 6th.

Cook had cancelled check to Greenfield framed and hung over his desk. Was largest check he ever drew. Cook most obliging. Brought me cancelled check and certificates this morning, and I immediately carried them to Cardozo. Cardozo says signatures on Greenfield's letters to Cook, endorsements on stock certificates, and endorsement on check all written by the same hand. May be forgeries. Will give you a final opinion after he has made a further study of Mr. Greenfield's handwriting.

The check dated July 28th, a year ago. It was deposited in the Interstate National. Besson positively asserts Mr. Greenfield never had an account there, but bank officials state he kept a varying sum on deposit for nearly a year, and the account was closed only a short time before his death. President states he tried to establish personal relations with Mr. Greenfield, but though his letters were courteously answered, he never succeeded in seeing him. The account was opened by mail. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 6th.

Good work, Bella! See if you can trace through any stock exchange house the sale of a large amount of bonds to Mr. Greenfield in the days following July 28th a year ago. Don't go to the individual firms, but to the governors of the exchange, who have their own system of communicating with the members. Get the numbers of the bonds if possible. STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 8th.

Have found Frank Carter. Now working for Mackubin, Goodrich & Co. Intelligent and well-disposed lad of 19. Cable questions. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 8th.

From Carter I want full particulars of luncheon served Mr. Greenfield day of death. STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 9th.

Lunch consisted of two chicken sandwiches and bottle of ginger ale. Brought to the office at 1:15. Carter took tray from waiter and, carrying it into inner office, placed it on the table (D) just inside door. See plan I sent you by mail. Mr. Greenfield was then sitting at his desk by the window (A), with Miss Gowan at his right hand taking dictation. Mr. Greenfield turned as Frank entered saying: "Here it is! I'm thirsty." It was fifty minutes later when Miss Gowan raised the alarm of Mr. Greenfield's seizure. In the confusion that followed, the luncheon was forgotten until about 3:30, when the waiter came for the dishes. Mr. Greenfield's body had then been taken home. Frank gathered up the dishes and handed them to the waiter. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 9th.

More particulars. Vitally important. Have Frank enumerate every article upon tray and describe exact position and condition of every article when he gathered them up. STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 10th.

It was a small, round silver-plated tray covered with a napkin. Upon it (a) a plate bearing two chicken sandwiches white bread, white meat only, divided in half by a diagonal cut. (b) A pair of glass pepper and salt shakers with silver-plated tops, (c) A pint bottle of ginger ale, C. & C. brand. This was lying on its side, (d) A bottle opener, (e) A thick, plain glass like restaurants use. (f) A folded napkin, (g) A napkin spread over the whole.

Carter showed some hesitancy in answering my questions about the lunch, but I finally elicited the fact that he had eaten and drunk what remained and was reluctant to confess it. When he went into the private office to get the things for the waiter, the tray was still on the table inside the door where he had set it down. The bottle had been opened, and cap and opener lay on the tray. The bottle stood there half empty. The glass was beside it quite empty. Frank smelled of the glass to see if Mr. Greenfield had had a highball but couldn't smell anything whatever. The plate with the sandwiches had been carried over to Mr. Greenfield's desk. Also folded napkin and pepper and salt shakers. Only a single bite had been taken from one of the sandwiches. The napkin, partly unfolded, lay underneath Mr. Greenfield's desk.

Here is a new fact I drew from Frank. About fifteen minutes after he had carried the lunch into the private office, Miss Gowan came out and went to her desk, where she sat down but didn't do anything. Carter noticed that she was just fooling with a pencil. This was not like her. He was going to chaff her about it, but checked himself. She was not one that you could fool with, he said. After two or three minutes she got up and went back into the private office, letting herself in with her key. I put this up to Besson, and he confirms it. He just forgot to mention it in his statement. After Miss Gowan had gone, the boy glanced at the paper lying on her desk. Among aimless marks she had written the telephone number Plaza 5771. This is Dr. Strailock's number. BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 10th.

Fine! Is there a wash basin in Mr. Greenfield's private office? STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 10th.

No. Wash basin in outer office.

BRICKLEY.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 10th.

Was there a water cooler? None marked on plan.

STOREY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 10th.

Yes. Cooler supplied by Red Deer Water Co. Removed by them when offices were vacated. Hence not on plan. It stood alongside table (D), on your left as you entered from outer office. BRICKLEY.

STOREY, Crillon, Paris

July 11th.

Hasbrouck, James & Co., members N. Y. Stock Exchange, report on August 7th last year they purchased on Mr. Greenfield's account U. S. Liberty 3 ½s reg.; D. & H. cvt. 5s; L. & N. rfg. 5s; Iron Mountain gold 5s, totalling \$263,000. [The numbers of the bonds followed.] None of these securities appeared among Mr. Greenfield's assets.

BRICKLEY.

This correspondence closed with a surprising piece of news from Mme Storey.

BRICKLEY, New York

July 11th.

Hélie and Margaret sailed S.S. *Paris* Le Havre to-day. Booked under their own name without the title. Suite 625. Will arrive New York 18th. Have them kept under surveillance. I sail *Mauretania* Saturday; arrive New York 19th. Am booked as Mrs. Davidge in case you have to wireless. Meet me at pier. Should Hélie call me up on arrival, tell him I got back on the *Berengaria*. I am supposed to have preceded them home. Warn Matilda at my apartment to tell the same story.

STOREY.

VIII

On the day named, with Crider and another operative duly armed with passes, I made my way to the pier of the French line. With the jabbering on every side it was like a bit of Paris transplanted, that Paris which I only knew for three days, but which I shall be homesick for as long as I live. All we could see of the great ship were squares of black hull and white upperworks through the openings in the pier shed. She brought a good crowd for the westward voyage at this season. The majority of the passengers were foreigners coming to America for *their* vacations.

We stationed ourselves where we could get a good view of the first-class gangway. My job was to point out Margaret to Crider and his partner, who were to keep her in view until Mme Storey's arrival on the following day. I had not much fear that she would recognize me in my workaday clothes. Moreover, I was in the crowd, whereas the passengers had to pass one by one in review before us, as they gingerly picked their steps down the plank.

Hundreds of passengers descended before them, and I was growing anxious. Finally I saw them on deck, standing back with aristocratic reserve until the press should be over. It was Hélié's red cheeks that I spotted. He was quite unchanged, but in America he looked very French. As for Margaret, had he not been with her, I should have had to look hard before recognizing her. For with M. Craqui's assistance she had changed her role again. Nothing of the bizarre or the sensational in her appearance now. She was the high-born Princess on her travels. Her hat, suit, summer furs expressed the very perfection of well-bred distinction. Her make-up was absent—or discreetly appeared to be absent, and it surprised me to discover how good-looking she was without it.

But she was not extraordinarily good-looking; she was something rarer. For a thousand good-looking women there is I suppose one who can look and bear herself like a princess, and Margaret was that one. When she came stepping daintily and stiffly down the gangplank you could see all the lookers-on glance at each other as much as to say: "Here comes somebody. Who is she?" I could only ask myself helplessly: *Where* did she get it? Where *did* she get it? this daughter of the odd-jobs-man of Weddinsboro, Ind.

She looked around her with an amused interest, as might a Frenchwoman first setting foot on these shores. Technically, of course, she was a Frenchwoman now, and undoubtedly travelling under a French passport. She kept herself very much to herself, and left Hélié to attend to the luggage, of which they had a vast pile. Each expensive piece was marked with an R under a coronet. All the good Americans on the dock stared awestruck at the coronet. Yet nothing is easier, surely, than to have a coronet painted on one's trunks. I wonder if the million in securities was in one of the trunks. Probably not.

Leaving them there under the eyes of Crider and his partner, I returned to the office.

Later Crider reported that they held passage tickets to Shanghai, and that the greater part of their baggage had been forwarded through to Vancouver in bond. This was somewhat disconcerting. However, taking a trunk apiece, they had had themselves driven to the Madagascar, where they had engaged a suite for three days. At the Madagascar they had registered as Prince and Princesse de Rochechouart, and the reporters had already got hold of Hélié.

The interview, when I read the report of it in the evening papers, was merely the perfunctory thing which gives nothing away. Margaret had kept out of sight, and the reporters had not elicited the fact that she was an American.

Next morning I made my way to a different pier with very different feelings. This time I had no need to hide. I planted myself as close to the foot of the gangplank as they would let me. When my dear mistress ran down she gave me a good squeeze. She was dressed with extreme plainness, and was partially disguised by a comical little veil to the tip of her pretty nose. It appeared that she had kept as close as possible to her stateroom on the way over, and had made no friends aboard. True, she was recognized by reporters on the pier, but she smilingly asked them not to announce her return "for reasons of policy." Mme Storey is a great favourite with newspaper men, because she deals with them with absolute frankness, and they promised to respect her request.

She had brought but one tiny trunk home with her. As soon as we were alone in the taxicab she said:

"Well, where are they?"

"At the Madagascar," I replied. "Ostensibly for two more days."

"Hm! That doesn't give us much time, does it? I suppose you're keen to know what happened in Paris after you left. Well, nothing happened except the grand fact of their marriage and the announcement of their voyage to America. That astonished me, I confess. My one tête-à-tête with canny Margaret convinced me that I would never get anything out of her by direct methods. At our first meeting at the Jockey I caught her off her guard with a strong dose of flattery, but she evidently thought it over, and at the Ritz she was armed for me. So I appeared to let her drop. She thought I had a tenderness for Hélié and was jealous of her, and I allowed her to think so. The woman is a fool, my Bella, that's the extraordinary thing about her. One of the toughest problems that has ever confronted me, and yet, in a sense, a fool!

"After that I only met her by accident. I had them both kept in sight, of course. You can get such good men in Paris for almost nothing. A week before they sailed it was reported to me that they had engaged passage for America. This was playing right into my hand, if they meant it, but I could not be sure they might not slip off to South America instead. To have come back on the same ship would certainly have aroused the lady's suspicions, so I engaged passage on the *Berengaria* and bade good-bye to all my friends, and left Paris. But I let the *Berengaria* go, of course, and spent a glorious week in Rouen doing the Norman churches: Chartres, Coutances, Mont St. Michel; I had an adventure—but I'll tell you that some other time. When my Frenchman reported that they had actually gone aboard the *Paris* and she had cast off, then I cabled you and ran up to Cherbourg to catch the *Mauretania*.

"Bella, I'll bet a dollar you cannot guess where they are going next!"

"Shanghai," I said.

"Eventually, yes. But before that."

I shook my head.

"To Weddinsboro, Indiana."

"No!"

"That is why she was obliged to tell Hélié so large a part of the truth about herself. That is why she has brought him to America. Indeed, I believe that is the principal reason why she married him, as she does not seem to care for him particularly and sees through him perfectly. How stupid I was not to have foreseen it from the first. Crider's report from Weddinsboro throws a great white light upon her motives. The daughter of the village drunkard! An object of contemptuous pity to the village women. No young friends of either sex. One can imagine how that wound has been festering all these years. Now she is going back as La Princesse de Rochechouart to put it all over them.

"Can't you see her registering at the village hotel, if there is one; walking about the village streets for a day, clinging to the arm of her prince? She will donate ten thousand dollars for a war memorial, if they haven't got one already, or a village hall; then on to Shanghai, trailing clouds of glory! Can you imagine a more complete and artistic revenge? There are moments when I can scarcely bring myself to interfere with it!"

"Mme Storey!" I said indignantly.

"Moments, Bella, moments.... Seriously, in all my experience I have never met with so cold-blooded and devilish a crime. For at least seven years she lived with the thought of it, wholly absorbed. The Greenfields indeed nourished a viper."

"She was bold to venture back to America," I said.

"Not particularly," said Mme Storey. "From her point of view the incident is closed. She showed her boldness, superhuman boldness, when she remained on the job week after week assisting the lawyers to delve into Mr. Greenfield's affairs. They gave her a clean bill of health, and she feels she has nothing more to fear from the law.... You have been keeping in touch with Mrs. Greenfield?"

"Yes," I said, "but I didn't tell her in advance that Margaret was coming back. The old lady is so frail I feared the excitement——"

"Quite right," said Mme Storey. "Time enough to tell her when we've clinched the matter.... What does Cardozo say?"

"He will make a final report to you this afternoon.... Have you a case?" I added anxiously.

"For theft, yes, thanks to your work. For murder——"

She shook her head. "I know she did it. I even know how she did it, but I could not prove it to the satisfaction of a jury. We have a day of intensive work before us, my Bella. I must take action before they get out of New York."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because when Margaret gets to Weddinsboro, she is bound to hear at once that somebody has been there making inquiries respecting her past.... No, within the next twenty-four hours we must forge the vital link in the chain."

"And if we cannot do so?"

"I'll make a bold play to break her nerve and force a confession."

"Break that woman's nerve!"

"That seems visionary to you?" Mme Storey said, smiling. "But, after all, she's only flesh and blood like ourselves, however she may pretend to be superior."

Within an hour of our arrival at the office Mme Storey had the voluminous exhibits of the case organized and the contents at her finger tips. Nelson, the man who had the Rochechouarts under surveillance, reported by 'phone that the couple were on a sightseeing and shopping tour. At noon Crider came in to report in person. Crider said:

"Three days ago I found the doctor who attended Mrs. Gowan. A number of names had been furnished me by the drug store in the flat-building on One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street where the Gowans first lived in New York. Name Michelson; West One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street. His memory required considerable prodding before he recalled the people. They must have been cash patients, because their name did not appear on his books. It was the fact that Miss Gowan worked for Mr. Daniel Greenfield that brought it back. The millionaire's name had made an impression.

"On his first visit the Gowans had just moved in, Dr. Michelson said; their things were still strewn about. Mrs. Gowan was a heart patient; serious condition. He remembered seeing her several times in that flat: a chronic and progressive case; all he could do for her was to prescribe the usual stimulants and restoratives. He remembered calling on them once, perhaps oftener, in a more expensive flat at an address he had forgotten—that would be the Eighty-second Street place. The woman died there. He was called in after her death and issued the certificate."

"What could he tell you about his prescriptions?" asked Mme Storey.

"Nothing positive. He supposed that he had issued several, but he could not remember them after so many years. Doctors do not keep any record of their prescriptions. The first thing would naturally be a powerful heart stimulant, he said, and he wrote out for me what he would prescribe in such a case, without being able to state, of course, that it was exactly the same thing he ordered years ago."

Crider handed over a prescription.

"I then returned to the drug store which had given me his name," Crider went on, "but I was unable to find that such a prescription, or indeed that any prescription for Miss Gowan had ever been filled there. Yet people generally deal with the nearest drug store. Every one of the drug stores in the neighbourhood yielded the same result. That is what I have been doing the last three days."

Said Mme Storey: "You have not been able to find that such a prescription was filled, but can we be certain that it was not?"

"Yes, Madame," said Crider. "Prescriptions are never destroyed. The system of keeping them was the same in every place that I visited. They are pasted in a book as received, and given a serial number. A prescription always has the name of the patient written upon it and is signed by the doctor. As I knew the approximate date of issue, it was a simple matter to look them up."

Mme Storey puffed at a cigarette, and considered. "The Gowans were very poor at that time," she said, thinking aloud, "and had to count every penny. Margaret, knowing that she would be at a heavy expense for medicine, could hardly fail to think of the cut-price drug stores which were at that time just coming into prominence.... There are two possibilities, the shopping centre on West One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street where she must have gone sometimes to do her marketing, and the down town places.

"Bella," she went on to me, "you take One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street this afternoon. You will find a big cut-price drug store near the elevated station. As for you, Crider, one of the oldest and best-known of such places, Cadnam's, is on Broadway almost opposite the building where Mr. Greenfield had his offices. You go there. Meanwhile I will go through the Greenfield correspondence."

In three hours we were both back in Mme Storey's office. I had had no luck, but Crider had found what he went after.

"Dr. Michelson's original prescription for a heart stimulant is on file at Cadnam's," he said. "They have a system there of endorsing the date on a prescription every time it is refilled. This prescription was renewed no less than seven times during a course of years. It was filled for the last time in March, 1915, which would be shortly before Mrs. Gowan died."

"But there was something else?" said Mme Storey, reading his face.

"Yes, Madame, another endorsement, reading: 'Copy given Oct. 2, 1922.' This was just ten days before Mr. Greenfield's death."

"Go on," said Mme Storey.

"After a bit of a search the clerk was found who had made out the copy. The request for it had come by mail, he said. The address given was a post-office box in Newark, N. J. The letter was signed John Gowan. I should explain that, as customary, the prescription was merely headed 'Gowan' without any initial or prefix. The writer stated that he had had such a prescription made up at Cadnam's years ago, and being about to leave the country he wanted a copy of it in case he should ever require that medicine again. He had written to the doctor for it, he added, but had had no reply, so he supposed the doctor was dead or had moved away."

"A characteristic Margaret touch," murmured Mme Storey.

"The original package having been lost," Crider went on, "he was unable to give the number of the prescription, but he gave the date, the doctor's name, and the character of the medicine. And enclosed a dollar to reimburse them for their trouble."

"But the letter itself?" said Mme Storey eagerly.

"It was destroyed, Madame," said Crider. "In a big cash store there is no provision for filing letters."

An exclamation of chagrin escaped my mistress. She arose and paced the room. "Oh, the clever devil!" she murmured. "The clever, clever devil! How can I bring it home to her?"

Crider and I maintained a gloomy silence. We had nothing to offer.

Mme Storey returned to her desk and put a hand forth for the telephone. She called up the Madagascar and asked for Princesse de Rochechouart. Crider and I pricked up our ears. After running the usual gamut of operators and servants she got her, and this is what we heard:

"Ah, Princesse," in a bland voice, "I could not mistake your voice. This is Madame Storey, Rosika Storey—Paris, you remember; our déjeuner at the Ritz... Welcome to America, Princesse. I have just read the papers. I got in on the *Berengaria* a week ago. You are well, I hope? ... And Prince de Rochechouart? ... Splendid! I expect you are besieged with out-of-town invitations, but I hope I may have the pleasure ... What! Going to leave us so soon! Oh, Princesse! Can't we persuade you to linger even a few days... Your reservations are made. I'm so sorry! But at least you'll give me the pleasure of having you to lunch to-morrow. You and Prince Rochechouart. At my apartment. It's a tiny place, but it will be more intimate than a restaurant. Just ourselves and Miss Brickley, whom you met in Paris. She returned with me. I positively will not take a refusal...."

There was a pause here. Mme Storey smiled wickedly at us. "She's asking Hélié," she remarked, holding her hand over the transmitter.

"Yes, Princesse? ... That will be perfectly delightful! At one-thirty to-morrow. Have you a pencil? ... My address is — East Sixty-third Street. Got that? ... I shall be looking forward to it. Good-bye, and thank you."

My heart beat thickly thinking of the scene next day. Where would *I* be between those two terrible women? "How can I go through with it?" I murmured. "I am not made of steel, like you!"

"You have never failed me yet, Bella," said Mme Storey.

"*Must* I be there?" I pleaded.

"I have to have a witness," explained Mme Storey. "The husband could not be forced to testify."

IX

Mme Storey shares a house on East Sixty-third Street with her friend the famous Mrs. Lysaght. Those two talented women put their heads together and produced a dwelling that in New York, at least, was unique. It was an old-fashioned house remodelled. Outside, the plain brownstone shell differed in no respect, except the basement entrance, from dozens of its neighbours; but inside it was so amusing and convenient and charming, one wondered how people could go on building in the old conventional way.

The kitchen was alongside the front entrance. When you rang the bell a wicket opened in the wall, and the smiling face of Grace or Matilda looked you over. If you were all right, she pressed a button in the manner of a Paris *conciierge* and you walked in through an iron gate. Consider how admirable an arrangement in Manhattan, where the front doors are beset by beggars, canvassers, and nuisances of every sort.

You were not yet in the house, but in a passage paved with red tiles which led right through under a charming archway into a tiny formal garden at the rear. The front door proper was at your left hand where Grace (or Matilda) met you. Within, a tiny electric elevator carried you to the rooms above. Mme Storey's bedroom was in front, and the living room extended across the rear with a balcony overlooking the garden. The dining room was under the living room, with glass doors opening on a level with the garden. Mrs. Lysaght had the two floors above Mme Storey, and the servants of both households shared the top floor.

I was on hand at one o'clock next day, in accordance with my instructions. Mme Storey, armed with a letter of introduction to the postmaster, had made a dash over to Newark in a final effort to establish, if possible, who had hired a post-office box in which to receive the communication from Cadnam's. In case she were delayed, I was to receive the guests with suitable apologies. It was not a job I looked forward to. I spent a miserable half hour. I was all dressed up in one of my Paris dresses in order to look as much like a lady as possible.

I waited in the living room, which had been hastily divested of its summer covers and put in order for the occasion. I wish I could convey something of the especial character of that room. It had nothing of the stately splendour of Mme Storey's office. At home she left off splendour. It was above all *inviting* in the manner of the best English rooms—the rarest thing to find in the houses of rich Americans. Mme Storey, who could have had anything she wanted, had in her whimsical way chosen to suggest the period of 1850 in the decoration. But with a difference. Taste may make even 1850 beautiful. The carved walnut chairs and sofas were not covered with horsehair but with bits of mellow antique tapestries. There was a thick-piled "Turkey" rug on the floor, and the fireplace was surrounded by gleaming brass appurtenances. There was but the one door, so that you had the feeling you could not be taken by surprise. But as I write the features down the essence still escapes me. You will have to take my word for it that it was the most *satisfying* room I ever entered.

Immediately on the stroke of one thirty I heard the distant bell ring, and my heart went down. Mme Storey would not have rung, but knocked with her knuckles on the wicket in a particular way. In a moment or two Grace opened the door, and the little Princesse strutted in with her red-cheeked Hélié at her heels. To-day she was wearing a dress of rich leaf green, one of Craqui's artfully simple effects. I marked the famous three wrinkles across her tummy. On her head was a little hat of leaf-brown with a graceful hedge of aigrette all round, that wonderfully softened her rather hard little face. In step and glance she was still the Princesse. Hélié was his usual highly finished self. He made no secret of his curiosity to behold the place where the beautiful Mme Storey was at home.

I proceeded with my apologies. "Mme Storey regretted so much that she was called away. She hoped to be back before you came. But she asked me to say that she would not in any case be more than a few minutes late."

The Princesse merely said, "Oh!" and turned away rather rudely. She had already made up her mind I was a person she could afford to disregard. Not that I cared. Since Paris she had subtly changed in manner. Having achieved her prince I suppose she felt she could afford to give over the awful inscrutability which must have been a strain on her and let the natural woman show. It was not an agreeable disclosure. Poor Hélié! I thought.

He tried to fill up the hiatus. "We hope we have not discommoded her in coming to-day," he said.

Poor Hélié! It was only too clear that he was being put through a course of sprouts. His smile was strained, and the redness of his cheeks suggested an underneath haggardness.

"Not at all," said I. "Mme Storey expressed the greatest pleasure at the prospect."

"What a comfortable room!" said the Princesse with a half sneer. "So—so homelike! One would hardly have supposed after seeing Mme Storey in Paris..." She finished with a shrug.

"Oh, she was on parade then," I said.

The Princesse stared at me. I suddenly perceived that she was a stupid woman, just as Mme Storey had said. A clever stupid woman, if you get me; fiendishly clear in the pursuit of her own ends, and utterly obtuse in regard to everything else. Well, that is the sort that gets on, I suppose.

"Mme Storey is fortunate in being able to follow her impulses," said the Princesse. "Has she no husband?"

"She has no husband," said I.

"She is a widow, then?"

The cheek of the woman! the little no-account typist from Weddinsboro! I was boiling inside, but I managed to keep a smooth face, I hope. "I don't know," I said bluntly.

Again the stare.

"Perhaps Prince Rochechouart can tell us," I said wickedly. "He has known her longer than I have."

Hélie, thus appealed to, seemed to turn on the tap of his sprightliness. "Ah, Madame Storey is not the sort of person one asks questions of!" he cried. "So beautiful, so exquisite, so clever, one thankfully receives what she chooses to give! All Paris took her to its heart!"

His wife cast a thoughtful glance on him, which scarcely concealed the deepest malevolence. "We're in New York now," she said drily. "... She's an American, isn't she?" she went on. "Why does she call herself 'Madame' Storey?"

"You'll have to ask her," I said blandly.

"Whom does she know in New York?" was her next insolent question. Hélie bit his lip. After all, he was bred a gentleman.

"That depends," I said. "If you mean who are her acquaintances, well, everybody who is in the know. But her friends she picks rather carefully. They may be stenographers, charwomen, or the wives of millionaires."

"Really!" said the Princesse, staring. "There is a New York woman of whom I have heard, a Mrs. Dent Lysaght. Does Mme Storey know *her*?"

"Her most intimate friend," I said carelessly. "She lives upstairs."

"Really!" said the Princesse, looking around. "In a place like this?"

"Not so nice as this," I said.

I was so angry at the woman I no longer dreaded the scene that lay ahead. Indeed, at that moment I gloated over the prospect. "Aha, my lady, you're riding for a horrid fall!" I said to myself. I could not have kept up the pretence of politeness much longer. I was relieved to hear the elevator come up and the door into the front room close. Mme Storey had gone in to dress.

Mme Storey always dresses instinctively to suit the part she expects to play. She came in wearing a straight, clinging black dress without any touch of colour whatever. Her face was paler than its wont, and behind the conventional friendliness a relentlessness showed in her eyes. The whole effect of her was magnificent, and I saw a touch of awe appear in Hélie's regard. But the little Princesse was too besotted by her recent successes to be aware of anything ominous in the air.

Mme Storey repeated the apologies. "It was a professional matter that called me away," she said. "Something I could not ignore."

I was struck by her use of this word. Mme Storey does nothing carelessly. Evidently the dénouement was not long to be delayed. My heart began to beat. The Princesse marked that word too, and her eyes darted a little glance of inquiry, but she said nothing.

Hard on Mme Storey's heels came Grace to announce luncheon. In the general movement I had one second apart with my mistress and eagerly looked my question. She shook her head.

"Nothing," she murmured.

From that I knew that her design to make the Princesse convict herself held good. I shivered out of pure nervousness.

The Princesse walked with Mme Storey, and Hélie took me. We used the stairs, since all four of us could not crowd into the elevator at once without suffering a loss of dignity.

"I say, she's a crackerjack!" Hélie whispered to me in good American.

I heartily agreed. I had a sneaking regard for Hélie, scoundrel though he was. I found it in my heart to be sorry for

what was saving for *him*.

The little dining room was perfect in its unostentatiousness: simple, straight mahogany, a bowl of roses on the table; sunlight streaming under the awnings; golden arbor vitas and oleanders outside. The little Princesse's lip curled in an envy that she tried to make appear disdainful; there was something about it all that was beyond her; that rendered her royal airs a little ridiculous.

When we seated ourselves at the little round table, Mme Storey had her back to the windows with the Princesse facing her; Hélié was at her right hand and I at her left. The service was under the direction of the invaluable Grace, who can do everything. She had been to Paris with us. I shall have more to say of her on another occasion. She is as pretty as she is accomplished. Assisting her was one of Mrs. Lysaght's maids, borrowed from upstairs. The food would not have suffered by comparison with Meurice's, and every bit of it had been prepared by Matilda in her tiny kitchen.

The word used by Mme Storey upstairs stuck in the Princesse's mind like a burr. After we had been seated for some moments, and the conversation had ranged all over, she said: "You said you had been called away by professional matters. Surely you do not mean your own matters. Is it possible that you ...?"

"Yes, I'm a professional woman," said Mme Storey.

"How interesting!" said the Princesse with curling lip. "Hélié, why did you not tell me that Mme Storey..."

"I didn't know it," said Hélié.

"Is it something you are obliged to conceal, Mme Storey?" asked the Princesse with her little desiccated laugh.

"No," said Mme Storey. "In Paris I am what I appear to be, an extravagant idler. But in New York I have to work like the devil to collect the wherewithal."

"What is your profession, if one may ask?"

"I call myself practical psychologist—specializing in the feminine."

"Ah! I am afraid I do not quite understand. What do other people call you?"

"All sorts of names," said Mme Storey, laughing. "I have even been called detective, though I scarcely deserve that."

This word had the effect of the first big gun of an engagement. One might suppose that it would strike terror to the little woman's breast. I had scarcely the heart to look at her. But I need not have concerned myself. The spoon that was on its way to her mouth completed the journey without spilling a drop. She broke a piece of bread with steady fingers.

"Fancy!" she said with her insulting intonation.

Oh, a marvellous woman!

Hélié had opened his blue eyes to the widest possible. "A détectif!" he murmured. "It is impossible!"

"Oh, I lay no claim to that," said Mme Storey. "But psychological problems of all kinds interest me. It is a curious thing that you may have noticed: as the study of psychology is extended we seem to know less and less about each other. And a professor of psychology is the blindest of all. I suppose that is because his maxims are of no avail in particular instances. Intuition is everything, or nearly everything."

"*Mon Dieu!* I'm glad I didn't know it in Paris!" said Hélié. "The way I have chattered to you!"

"The people who talk the most are not necessarily the easiest to read," said Mme Storey, smiling.

"You console me," said Hélié. "Do you solve crimes?" he asked, slightly awestruck.

"Sometimes."

"Fancy!" said the Princesse, staring.

"But I think it is a fine thing!" said Hélié with spirit. "There's no such thing as *infra dig* any more. That's one encumbrance we got rid of in the war, thank God! One is lucky to have an exciting job these dull days. One doesn't need to apologize for it."

Mme Storey smiled broadly. She was not thinking of apologizing.

The Princesse was filled with a cold fury against Hélié. One was forced to the conclusion that she was not pretending; she was really not frightened at all. She had got so completely within the skin of her part that it did not occur to her a detective could threaten La Princesse de Rochechouart.

"Tell us about a crime," begged Hélié. "I adore crime!"

Mme Storey expressed a decent reluctance. "I don't want to monopolize the conversation."

"*Please!*" said Hélié. "We have no interesting conversation."

The Princesse looked down her nose.

"Well, I have a strange case on hand," said Mme Storey. "The strangest, in fact, that ever I had."

"Good!" cried Hélié.

"But it will take a long time to tell. If I bore you, you must interrupt me."

"But if you are a psychologist surely you will know without our speaking of it," said the Princesse with a polite and sleetly smile.

"I specialize in feminine psychology," said Mme Storey, "because women are so much more interesting to study than men."

"Oh, I say!" objected Hélié. "*I* might say that."

"Not intrinsically more interesting," she explained, "but greater realists. Men are conventionalized; much more likely to act by the book. This case concerns a woman."

"Better and better!" cried Hélié.

"Instead of propounding the problem to you and then proceeding to solve it, I think it will be more dramatic if I relate the whole story from the beginning as I have pieced it together.... But I am holding up everything! Let me finish my soup."

There was some general conversation while the plates were changed. I did not take part in it. I was wretchedly nervous. I do not enjoy suspense. "If they would only hurry and get over with it!" I thought.

When the next course was before us, Mme Storey resumed: "Let us call her Clara for purposes of identification. We find her first as a child in a country village, a backward sort of little place. Her parents lived in the most abject poverty; the father was a drunkard, the mother a hopeless invalid. Poverty, of course, is doubly hard to bear in a village where everybody knows you. The child was an object of pity to the crude, kindly village women, but they complained they could do nothing for her, she was so 'techy.' One can imagine the fierce pride that consumed the little breast. Remember that it is rather a great soul that I am describing to you, which received a fatal twist thus early. She was a sickly little thing and not well-favoured. She would have nothing to do with the other children nor they with her. She revenged herself on them by being easily first in school."

The Princesse *must* know now, I thought, and I stole a glance at her through my lashes. Her face showed no change; she was eating calmly. Just the same, she knew! Her indifference to the story was too perfect. She said in her clear, precise accents:

"May one ask the name of this delicious mixture we are eating?"

"Coquille St. Jacques," answered Mme Storey pleasantly. "I got the recipe from Marguéry. Matilda does it rather well, doesn't she? Though one misses the pink scallops' roe one finds in it in Paris. One must suppose that our scallops are celibate."

"She was easily first in school..." Hélié prompted impatiently.

"As soon as she was old enough," Mme Storey resumed, "Clara left home and came to New York to find work. How she ever got the money together to buy her ticket, not to speak of sufficient clothes, I cannot tell you. It is a character of invincible determination I am showing you. None of the smaller cities nearer home were good enough for her; it had to be New York. Nor can I tell you what experiences she had upon reaching there: difficult enough, no doubt. She next turns up as the personal stenographer to a very rich man. That would be the sort of thing she would set her heart on. As soon as she felt she had obtained a toehold in New York, she went back to her village to rescue her mother from that appalling poverty. So she was not all bad, you see."

"How about the father?" asked Hélié.

"Oh, I expect mother and daughter were both pretty well fed up with him," said Mme Storey drily.

Mme Storey did not appear to be watching the Princesse while she told her tale. As for me, I could not bear to watch her. I could only steal a glance now and then. She had drawn the mask of inscrutability over her face; the slight, insolent smile had become fixed there. Mme Storey's light words about her father caused her more nearly to betray herself than anything else. A flicker of emotion rippled the mask then.

"This is very interesting!" cried Hélié, with a school-boy eagerness. "Isn't it, Marguerite?"

"Fascinating!" she drawled.

"Life in a cheap flat taking care of an invalid on meagre wages could have been scarcely less cramped than the village," Mme Storey went on. "It must have been her dreams that kept her going. She had set her heart on becoming a queen of fashion."

"But you told us she was sickly, ill-favoured," objected Hélié.

"Quite so. That's what makes it so remarkable a case."

"In whom did she confide her dream?"

"Confide! The woman I am picturing never confided in any soul alive. She played a lone hand!"

"Then, pardon me, how do you know of what she was dreaming?"

"Well, for one thing I secured her library card, which gave me a list of the books she had read. Court memoirs; novels of the highest society. Her taste in reading was good. Henry James was her favourite novelist."

"Marvellous!" cried Hélié.

"No, obvious," said Mme Storey.

"But she did not realize her dream, of course."

"Ah, you are anticipating!"

"Forgive me. Please go on."

"Her first care was to make herself absolutely indispensable to her employer," said Mme Storey. "Just at what point she began to plot, I can't tell you. She showed a more than human patience. It must early have occurred to her that it was only through her employer she could hope to obtain the great sum of money she had set her heart on. No doubt she figured he was so rich he could spare what she needed without missing it. But seven years passed before she took the first steps. Within that time she had taught herself to imitate her employer's signature...."

"Oh, simple forgery," said Hélié, a little disappointed.

"Forgery, but not at all simple," said Mme Storey, smiling. "In the first place, the forgery was good enough to puzzle the greatest expert in the country. I doubt if we could convict her on the forged signatures alone. Fortunately, there is plenty of collateral evidence. Little by little she evolved the details of the most ingenious swindle I have ever come upon. Masterly in its completeness!"

"Do give us the details!" begged Hélié.

"All these years, remember, she was studying her employer. He was a man of rich personality; very downright in his likes and dislikes; full of quirks and oddities of character—all of which she traded upon. He was not a philanthropist in the ordinary sense: he left that to his wife; but he had a notion that he owed it to the community which had made him rich, to use his riches as far as he could in developing and marketing new ideas. To a new proposition he always lent a willing ear.

"He had to protect himself, of course. He could not see every Tom, Dick, and Harry who called upon him. He required that all propositions should be submitted by letter, and the preliminary investigations were always conducted by correspondence. Then, if he was sufficiently interested, he would see the promoter and let him talk. He was very shrewd. He was not often deceived. He made money out of most of his advances.

"Clara, in the course of time, came to have full charge of his correspondence. She opened his letters and brought to him such of them as she deemed worthy of his attention. Important letters she answered at his dictation, and unimportant letters she answered on her own account. She subsequently sent all his letters and copies of his answers to the office boy to be filed. Now do you begin to see her scheme?"

Hélié shook his head.

"From among the propositions that were made him by mail, Clara chose a few of the choicest and investigated them on her own account, always by mail, of course, and always in his name. All this correspondence was sent with the rest to be filed in his file."

"Why did she do that?" asked Hélié.

"You will see presently.... The employer, whom we may call Mr. X, never kept any great sum in cash lying idle. When he was ready to invest in a new enterprise, it was his custom to give his note for the required amount in exchange for stock. When Clara was ready to invest she did the same—only it was a forged note that she issued for her stock. Mr. X's paper was good in any bank in the country, and it was always some known man, you see, who discounted these notes at his own bank. When the forged notes fell due, Clara simply renewed them with fresh forgeries. One of them ran for as long as five years.

"Such was her scheme. Every possible contingency had been provided for. It was practically watertight. I may say that it was only through an accident that suspicion was finally aroused.

"It was Mr. X's custom to hold the stocks purchased in this way until such time as the new concern was on a paying basis. Then he'd sell out in order to have funds for the next promising new thing. Clara did the same, of course, only when *she* sold out she'd salt down the proceeds. There was one transaction in which she invested \$125,000 by means of a forged note, and in three years she sold out for \$250,000 in hard cash. That was her largest single operation."

"But why didn't she pay the note then and pocket the profit?" asked Hélié.

"Ah, why didn't she?" said Mme Storey. "If she had, I wouldn't be telling you the story. That would have been too slow for her. Sometimes there were no profits. She was not as shrewd as Mr. X. No, she never had any notion of putting anything back. The goal of her hopes rested in Mr. X's death. Did I mention that he was old? Once he was dead there was no way in which his executors could tell the forged notes from his other liabilities. When they proceeded to trace them back, there would be the correspondence intact in the files. Now you see why it was there. Mr. X's bookkeeping was of the most casual sort. In fact, he kept no books further than a loose-leaf notebook in which was entered a general balance sheet of his affairs."

"Then how *did* they find out?" asked Hélié. "Among the mass of correspondence, how could you pick out the letters *she* wrote?"

"She could imitate her employer's signature to perfection," said Mme Storey, "but she could not imitate his racy epistolary style, for that was the natural expression of his temperament. Her letters are somewhat dry in tone. Such was *her* temperament. It was easy to pick them out once you possessed that key."

"You are wonderful," said Hélié. Apparently he thought the story was finished.

"Wait!" said Mme Storey. "This is only Part One.... For years everything ran along smoothly according to Clara's plans, and at last she secured the sum she had set her heart upon. Then she began to get impatient. She had waited so many years. Youth was slipping away. An old woman could hardly hope to usurp the fashionable throne. To tell the truth, Mr. X was too slow in dying. True, his doctor had warned him his blood pressure was too high and that he must be careful. Unfortunately for Clara, he *was* careful; he avoided excesses and excitements of all kinds. There seemed to be no good reason why he should not live ten years longer. It was inevitable that Clara should begin to cast around in her mind—such a clever mind!—for the means to——"

"What, murder now?" cried Hélié, pleasantly aghast.

My eyes were dragged back to the Princesse. She, with unchanged mask, was delicately picking at *riz de veau* with her fork, and conveying morsels to her mouth with good appetite. She put down her fork, settled a bracelet on her left arm, and screwing up her eyes a little, looked out of the window. With something a little less than courtesy (for Mme Storey was still speaking), she said to me with her affected precision:

"How ugly the houses opposite! In America it's all front, isn't it?"

What sang-froid! What incredible effrontery! I could only stare, incapable of making any answer whatever. She didn't require any answer. She returned to the *riz de veau*, showing her excellent white teeth. Hélié never noticed because he was hanging on Mme Storey's words.

"That's what one comes to," said Mme Storey, going on with her tale. "She didn't have it in her mind when she started."

"How do you know?" asked Hélié.

"Because she took no steps in that direction until the time I speak of.... I expect she didn't call it murder," she added very drily, "but only hastening nature a little."

"How did she do it?" asked Hélié.

"That baffled me for a while," said Mme Storey. "It was the invaluable library card that supplied a hint. Among the court memoirs and novels of high society, she had on one occasion drawn Henderson, *On Arterio-Sclerosis*, a standard medical work. The date, which was just after she had made her biggest haul that I told you of, was highly significant. I got a copy of it, and projecting myself into Clara's state of mind as I imagined it, I sat down to read it. I came to one sentence which must have been like a bell ringing in Clara's mind. The book said: 'Of course, to a person in this condition anything in the nature of a heart stimulant would be excessively dangerous.' 'A heart stimulant!' I could imagine

Clara saying to herself; 'a *powerful* heart stimulant!' That was what I had to administer to my mother all those weary years! What meant life to that old body would be death to this one!"

"What a fiend!" murmured Hélié.

"Hm!" said Mme Storey, keeping her eyes down. "... I needn't detail the ingenious method by which she obtained a copy of the old prescription. By a lucky chance I was able to secure the letter she wrote for it under an assumed name. She got it, of course, and had it made up. She carried the phial around in her handbag awaiting an opportunity to administer the contents.

"That came one rainy day when Mr. X, instead of going out to lunch, had his boy telephone to a restaurant for light refreshments to be sent in. A bottle of ginger ale and two chicken sandwiches, white meat only. Such was his modest order. The office boy carried it into his employer's private office and placed it on the table just within the door. I should explain to you that Mr. X had a latch on the door of his private office so that even his employees were obliged to knock before entering.

"As the boy left the room he heard Mr. X say: 'I'm thirsty.' Clara must have immediately risen to fetch him his refreshments. Mr. X was a man of sedentary habit, and they were all accustomed to wait on him hand and foot. Clara did not bring the tray to his desk as it stood, but opened the bottle and poured out a glass of the ginger ale. While she was doing this their backs were turned to each other. How simple it was to empty the contents of her phial into the glass! She carried him the glass and the plate of sandwiches. One wonders if her hand shook. He was evidently thirstier than he was hungry, for he did not begin to eat right away.

"About fifteen minutes later—Clara all that time sitting at the flap of his desk taking dictation so demurely!—he began to feel very ill, and put down the sandwich, out of which he had taken but a single bite. He sent Clara to telephone to his doctor. The telephone was in the outer office. She did not telephone, of course. She merely waited outside long enough to let him suppose that she had.

"Shortly after that the stroke fell. The kindly old man had cracked his last joke. He slid down out of his chair to the floor without making any sound that could be heard outside. His face became tormented and blackened. Clara, the little mouse who had served him so well for twelve years, she made no sound either. I cannot tell you what went through her strange mind during those moments, but I can tell you what she did. She took the notebook out of his breast pocket, removed the leaves that contained his balance sheet, and inserted fresh leaves that she had already prepared. Since Mr. X had warning of the stroke, it is probable that death was not instantaneous. Unable to stir hand or foot, perhaps he was watching her...."

"*Mon Dieu!* what a scene!" murmured Hélié, genuinely moved.

"At the water cooler she washed out the glass from which he had drunk," Mme Storey went on. "What other things she did I cannot tell you. But forty-five minutes elapsed after the time he drank the ginger ale before she raised the alarm. Perhaps she was just sitting around waiting for him to die...."

"What a monster!" breathed Hélié.

"Well—that is my case," said Mme Storey.

I do not know if she looked at the Princesse when she said it, because I could not bear to look at either of them. No sound came from the Princesse.

"You have her safe under lock and key?" said Hélié.

"Not yet," said Mme Storey softly.

"Why do you delay? You have proved your case!"

"It is only within the hour that I have completed it."

"When did the murder take place?"

"Eight months ago."

"Eight months ago? *Mon Dieu!* Can you find her now? Where has she been all this time?"

"She went to Paris," said Mme Storey. "That was her ambition: to become a queen of Paris. And she actually realized it; at least, she became the most talked-of woman in Paris for a brief period."

I doubt if Hélié heard any but the first words. "Paris!" he stammered. "... *Paris!*" He suddenly jumped up, knocking his chair over backward. He stared at his wife with his blue eyes protruding from his head. His lips moved, but no further sounds came out.

I turned away my head. After all, he was a mere boy. He was a scoundrel, but surely he did not deserve quite this. It was he who was being punished and not the real criminal.

"Sit down, Hélié," the Princesse drawled. "You're making an exhibition of yourself."

He found his voice. "Is it you? Is it you?" he demanded hoarsely. "Is *that* where the money came from?"

"Certainly it was I," she answered coolly. "Why else should Mme Storey stage this little comedy?"

We all stared at her in a stupefied fashion.

She turned the sapphire bracelet on her pretty forearm. "It was I," she repeated in the unconcerned voice. Merciful heaven! One fancied one heard a ring of *pride* in it. "I will add an item that seems to be omitted from Mme Storey's array of testimony. It was in Hafker's drug store, Newark, that I filled the prescription."

"Oh, you monster! You monster!" cried Hélié, waving his hands before his face. In my heart I echoed his cry.

"Monster, what is that?" she said with curling lip. For the moment she dropped the affected speech. "You are merely theatrical. In your heart for the first time you respect me—you all respect me," she added, glancing around the table. "Well—I'm satisfied."

Nobody spoke.

The Princesse pushed away her plate and, drawing a silver box of cigarettes toward her, helped herself and lighted up. She resumed her precise drawl.

"Really, it was enormously kind of you to feed us so well first," she said, blowing a cloud of smoke. "Send for the police."

"They're already waiting," said Mme Storey.

THE STEERERS

I

After the arrest of the *Princesse de Rochechouart*, Mme Storey prepared to resume her interrupted vacation. She raised me to the seventh heaven of delight by suggesting that I accompany her back to Paris "as a reward for good work." I had had but a three days' tantalizing taste of that delicious city before I had been obliged to hasten back to America in connection with the *Rochechouart* case. At a week's notice we engaged accommodations on the *Gigantic*, the queen of all liners. The grand rush eastward across the Atlantic was now about over for the season, and we were able to obtain whatever we wanted. Two rooms en suite on D deck with a bathroom, at a price which took my prudent breath away. What a joy it was to study the plan of that amazing ship. I could almost say that I was familiar with every turn of her innumerable corridors before I ever went aboard.

I drove direct to the pier from my boarding house, and, as it happened, I arrived first. Once more I shared in the intoxicating confusion of sailing day. Before you mount the gangway a clerk looks at your ticket and checks you up on the passenger list. This person said to me:

"Miss Brickley? You are travelling with Madame Storey, are you not? Your rooms have been changed at the request of Captain Sir Angus McMaster. You have been assigned to C47, the Imperial suite."

The Imperial suite! I looked at him with my mouth hanging open. Why, the cost of this suite is \$6,000. A mere thousand a day for the voyage! I was speechless—but no comment was required from me. At the magic words "Imperial suite" all the stewards standing about began to bow, and I was wafted on board before I well knew what was happening to me.

I knew the plan, but the ship itself was a revelation to me. It was not like a ship at all, but a palace with soaring pillars supporting the domed ceilings, and noble, sweeping stairways. As for our quarters; well, I could only look around me with a sigh of half-incredulous pleasure. To come from a boarding-house bedroom to this! It was like a fairy tale. One entered first a delicious sitting room, set about with easy chairs and sofas; this led through two pairs of French windows to what they called the veranda, an outdoors room with a whole row of big windows opening to the sea. The sun streamed in, gilding the quantities of flowers blooming in window boxes. The furniture here was of wicker; it was like a garden.

The bedrooms opened from the veranda, right and left—Mme Storey's and mine. Each of these had its row of big windows opening over the sea. They were just such luxurious nests as a woman might dream of, the walls cunningly inlaid with rare woods, and the ingenious and beautiful appointments a continual surprise. Back of the bedrooms were bathrooms, wardrobe rooms, maids' rooms galore.

In a few minutes my beautiful young mistress arrived attended by a retinue of stewards. When they had gone, she broke into a laugh at the sight of my awestruck face.

"We appear to be in luck, my Bella," she said.

"Do you know the captain?" I asked.

"I have crossed on his ship before," she said; "but captains are a race apart. I did not suppose he would remember *me!*"

"He evidently has," I remarked.

There was a tap at the door, and I admitted an imposing maître d'hôtel, who bowed low, and conveying the compliments of the Ritz-Carlton restaurant, begged that Mme Storey and Miss Brickley would consider themselves the guests of the management during the voyage. He was followed by a boy bearing an armful of Radiance roses with more

compliments. It appeared that this marvellous ship even had hothouses somewhere up above. The third tap on our door (we were out in the stream by this time) was given by an immaculate apprentice, who said in his charming English voice:

"The commander's compliments, and would it be agreeable to Madame Storey to receive him before lunch?"

"It would be highly agreeable," said my mistress.

To me she murmured with a lift of her eyebrows: "Verily, the mountain is coming to Mahomet!"

Captain Sir Angus McMaster, R.N.R., C.V.O., and goodness knows what else besides. Ah! there was a man for you! Every inch the commander of men, and a gallant and simple-hearted gentleman to boot. There was that in his stern gray face with its rather melancholy eyes which induced instant and complete confidence; something, too, to make you shiver, if your conscience was bad. In his blue and gold, with a string of orders across his breast, he was magnificent without being in the least foppish or at all conscious of his grandeur. The simplicity of the man was his most conspicuous quality.

His eyes paid instant tribute to my mistress's beauty. "How glad I was to discover that you were making this voyage with me," he said.

"You remembered me among so many thousands of passengers!" said Mme Storey.

"That was not difficult," he said with a quiet smile.

"My secretary, Miss Brickley," said Mme Storey, bringing me forward.

The bow he gave to plain me was just the same as if I had been the grandest of ladies.

We all went out into that charming veranda with the sun on the flowers and the breeze from the sea and seated ourselves. Sir Angus accepted one of Mme Storey's cigarettes.

"I am not going to attempt to thank you for all this," said my mistress, waving her hand about. "You must know how we are enjoying it."

"It was all I could do," he said, "and little enough.... It would ill become a sailor to beat around the bush," he went on. "I come to you for help, my dear lady. I am in a quandary, and, of course, being the commander, I dare not confess it to anybody on board. I don't suppose it has ever occurred to you, but a captain leads rather a solitary life. It is not often that I may relax like this."

"You interest me extraordinarily," said Mme Storey. "I should be so proud if I could help. Please go on."

"It's quite a long story," said Sir Angus, "but rather a curious one. I hope it will not bore you."

"I know it will not."

"It began early last season," he went on. "On a westward voyage. My attention was attracted by a certain good-looking young couple among the passengers—a Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Dartrey. I can't say what it was about them that aroused my suspicions, for their actions on board were irreproachable; I suppose I had what you Americans so expressively term a hunch. I was convinced from the first that there was something queer about them.

"As you no doubt know, we have detectives mixing with the passengers—unpleasant to think about, but unfortunately necessary on so large a ship—and I desired that these people report to me concerning the Dartreys. The reports were nil. The man did not gamble; the lady, while much sought after by other gentlemen, was entirely discreet in her behaviour. Mrs. Dartrey was not by any means the conventional 'charmer,' for I could see for myself that she was very popular among the women passengers. The two of them occupied an expensive room and had every appearance of being well-born people of ample means.

"Still I was not satisfied. That hunch continued to tease me. So I proceeded to make friends with them myself as the opportunities offered. The man I found to be merely a handsome, aristocratic nonentity; it was impossible to talk to him; he merely made well-bred noises. But the lady was both sprightly and amusing. One of those impulsive women who are apparently all on the surface, and yet—and yet... To tell you the truth, neither of them gave me the slightest cause for suspicion, yet my suspicions grew.

"I had them followed when they left the ship. It was reported to me, to my surprise, that they simply went down West Street and boarded the *Allemania* of the Brevard Line, which was sailing that day. We were a day late. This gave me food for thought. This was in April. Six weeks later they again turned up on my ship, bound for New York. I overheard Mrs. Dartrey make a laughing remark to the effect that she only really lived on board ship, and her husband was obliged to humour her often. Again they took the *Allemania* back to Southampton on the following day.

"My curiosity was now thoroughly aroused. As opportunity offered, I communicated with the other captains of our line by wireless at sea. Melksham of the *Britannic* and Coxter of the *Oceanic*; also with the captains of the Brevarders *Baratoria* and *Ruritania*; and I had no difficulty in establishing that the Dartreys had spent the entire season in flitting back and forth between New York and Southampton on the six big express ships of the two lines. Our schedules are so arranged that they were able practically to jump from one ship to another at each end. We leave New York on Wednesdays, you see, and land our passengers in Southampton on Tuesdays, or, at the latest, Wednesday morning. Whereas the Brevarders leave Southampton Wednesday at noon and arrive in New York on Tuesdays. In six weeks, having made the rounds of all six ships, they were back on mine again, you see.

"I reported all this to my head office, and thereafter the Dartreys were followed by expert detectives. But nothing came of it. About the first of August they gave up their ferrying of the Atlantic and retired to a charming little flat in Sloane Street, London, where they entertained some of the smartest people of the fashionable world and otherwise proceeded to enjoy themselves. Dartrey, it appeared, was the younger son of an impeccable British family; his wife an American. It was shown that they enjoyed a highly respectable banking connection; their income, which amounted to no less than £10,000 a year, came to them in the form of dividend checks from great American companies. It was all in the lady's name.

"As a result of this investigation, my company intimated to me that I had discovered a mare's nest, and indeed I began to think myself that I had. Eccentric people, no doubt, but there are plenty of those; nothing in the world to suggest that they were crooks. But early this season they turned up again on my ship—only travelling eastward this season, and presumably westward on the Brevard Line. I am convinced that they are swindlers of the most dangerous sort, and I feel that I owe it to my passengers to protect them from such. My company is not backing me in this; I am dependent on my own efforts. It seemed providential when I learned that you were making this voyage."

"The Dartreys are on board, then?" asked Mme Storey.

"They are," he said with a dry smile. "In the pink of condition."

Mme Storey looked at me with a somewhat rueful twinkle.

"Why do you smile?" asked Sir Angus.

"This is the second time this summer that I have started off for a vacation..."

"Ah, I should have thought of that."

"No, I meant it as a joke merely. I am not really worked to death, you know. And you are a person who does not often ask favours. One regards it as a privilege therefore..."

"You are too kind," he murmured.

"Besides, it appeals to me," said Mme Storey. "As a diversion on shipboard. A sort of deck game.... But, I say, don't you think you have started off rather indiscreetly by displaying me so prominently in the Imperial suite?"

"Bless me! I never thought of that!" he said blankly.

She laughed at his simplicity. "Oh, well, I don't suppose it makes much difference. If these people are really experienced international crooks they probably know all about me, and I couldn't expect to accomplish much by direct methods. But there is Bella here. By a lucky chance we came on board separately; and none of the passengers can know as yet that she is my secretary.... Bella, would it break your heart to divorce yourself from the Imperial suite?"

"Not if there was anything interesting going on," I said.

"Good. Then, Sir Angus, can you furnish her with another room and another name for the voyage? And supply me with a young woman to play her part?"

He rose. "I am sure that can be arranged. The purser will help us. I shall speak to him at once. And, my dear lady, I cannot sufficiently thank you. Of course, if my suspicions prove to be justified, the company will..."

"Ah, don't speak of that," said Mme Storey. "You are the commander of us all now, and I am proud to be able to help, if ever so little."

II

It turned out that there was a certain Miss Gaul down on the passenger list who had failed to come aboard; and I therefore took unto myself her name and her cabin. The latter was 63, a large and pleasant room up in the bow; with one window looking forward and another to starboard. Within an hour that marvellous man, the captain, had a telephone installed, so that I was able to communicate freely and secretly with Mme Storey.

Only a step from my door were the great public rooms of the vessel, which were all on B deck: lounge, grand entrance, palm court, etc. These noble apartments were really two stories high, with domed ceilings that made them look even higher. The designer had had the ingenious idea of dividing the great funnels of the vessel and running them down at the sides, so as not to obstruct the view. One could therefore look through the whole magnificent suite. Flooded with sunlight, it was an unforgettable picture. The most ordinary-looking men and women moved in this vista with the dignity of eminences.

Meanwhile the niece of one of the engineer officers who was travelling in the second cabin was brought forward to play my part. She was a pleasant girl who looked both intelligent and ladylike. I confess it caused me a good many twinges of jealousy to see her privileged to associate with Mme Storey at all hours, eating with her in the restaurant, and so on; but I consoled myself with the reflection that I had the responsible job.

Mme Storey had said: "I am convinced that the captain's suspicions of the Dartreys are well founded. An honest man's instinct is not to be despised. The fact that he has never been able to get anything on them suggests to me that they are only agents or steerers in the game. They operate only in the early part of the season, when rich Americans are flocking to Europe; consequently, the real trick, if I am right, must be turned in London or Paris. We are lucky to catch them on an eastward voyage."

Later she telephoned me that she had learned from the second steward that the Dartreys were to eat in the regular dining saloon instead of the Ritz-Carlton restaurant, and that they had been assigned to table number 120. I was to be allotted a seat at 123 not close enough to attract their attention, but sufficiently near to afford me ample opportunities for observation. I was not to pay any particular attention to them, and above all must not appear anxious to make friends. Let the first overtures come from them, if possible.

If they did make up to me, I was to represent myself as the daughter of a wealthy, undistinguished couple in some large western city, say Cleveland. Let my father be a manufacturer of oil stoves who had sold out to the Standard Oil. I had lately been released by death from a long, dull term of servitude to my aged parents, and I was now making my first timid essay in the direction of Europe and culture. Further details Mme Storey left to my imagination. I objected that I

had no black clothes, but she said that made no difference; many people nowadays did not believe in wearing mourning.

Full of the liveliest curiosity, I went down in the lift to the grand saloon on F deck. I had picked out my table, on the plan. But when I took my place I saw that table 120 was as yet unoccupied, and for a few minutes I was able to apply myself to my luncheon undistracted. Comical it is, during the first meal aboard ship, to see everybody taking stock of everybody else.

While they were still fifty feet away from their table, I recognized my couple by intuition. Among that shipload of distinguished and expensive-looking people, nearly all heads turned to follow them as they passed through the saloon. What is the mysterious quality in people that causes all heads to turn? Personality, of course. Yet I have noticed that a determination not to be overlooked serves almost as well.

The lady walked first. My rapid first impressions ran: an ugly, attractive woman with a good-humoured smile; some years older than her husband, but sure of her power over him; frankly made up; hard to tell where nature ends and art begins; but made up with the view of accentuating her own personality; beautifully dressed in the extreme of the mode, but without overstepping the bounds of good taste. The sort of woman who has raised dress to the dignity of a fine art. In short, a highly interesting subject.

The man was more ordinary. He was of the type that used to be called the haw-haw Englishman. Very good-looking, to be sure, with curly dark hair, bright blue eyes, and a lazy, athletic frame. But rather sullen-looking. This I realized on closer examination was merely the result of stupidity. He was thick. But an uncommonly handsome animal. Some women ask no more of a man, of course. He was turned out in a masculine style as finished as his wife's in hers. The English have without doubt the best-dressed men in the world.

Their manners were better than those of most of the people in our vicinity. They looked at nobody but took their places without the least self-consciousness, and talked to each other in low tones with light smiles. You cannot be sure about married people on parade, of course; they might have been quarrelling fiercely. Still I gathered that the young man with his expression of haughty disdain (nothing in the world but stupidity) still looked on his wife as rather a wonderful person, and was like putty in her quick, pretty hands. And well he might; I thought her rather wonderful myself.

I was too far away to hear anything of their conversation; so my impressions were confined to the visual. I said she was an ugly woman; I mean her mouth was too wide and her nose too flat. I began to recognize her type, which is a rare one, and monstrosly effective. She had the air of flaunting her ugliness; as much as to say: my ugliness is more charming than the insipid beauty of other women. Ah, how clever that is! Such a woman is like a breath of fresh air in a hothouse. Mere beauty is a bit overdone. Indeed, I was so strongly attracted by her, I was finally obliged to pull myself up roundly. Look here, I reminded myself, she's a crook, and this charm of hers is her stock in trade.

The only thing that might possibly have suggested that Mrs. Dartrey was otherwise than as she seemed, was her continual alertness. She was always on the qui vive. But then many perfectly respectable people are like that. In fact, never to be caught napping is the essence of a smart, worldly manner.

When I had learned all that my eyes would tell me, I finished my luncheon and made ready to leave the dining saloon. My way out lay behind Mrs. Dartrey's chair. In the instant of passing I caught these murmured words:

"... cut up rough at this late date ..."

Which was piquant but not very informative.

I telephoned my impressions to Mme Storey when she returned to her cabin. "If you want to look her over you may know her by her costume," I added. "She is wearing a very smart sports dress of Paddy-green silk, with pleated bishop's sleeves caught tightly at the wrists, and a pleated skirt. A rakish little white hat with a tiny green feather stuck in the band."

"The deck steward has placed her chair next to yours on Deck B," said Mme Storey. "I shall have plenty of chances to size her up as I stroll by."

I sought my deck chair. Sure enough, the chair alongside was marked "Mrs. Dartrey" on its little ticket. I sat down prepared to await developments, with a book for camouflage.

But the passing throng was more interesting than the book. After the sultry pavements of the city, the sea air was delightfully invigorating; and it appeared as if nearly everybody on board had the impulse to promenade after lunch. What a throng! Soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, rich man—and, no doubt, if the truth were known, poor man, beggarman, thief. Not to speak of their ladies. After all, the crowd on board the queen of liners was much the same as the crowd on any liner, only there were more of them. There is a tradition that really distinguished people must keep to the seclusion of their cabins. I suppose it helps keep up the fiction of their exclusiveness, but it must be very dull for them.

After a while I saw my lady coming, her billowing green dress visible from afar. But she had no intention of stopping at her chair. Although we had been but three hours at sea, she already had three admirers: an elegant youth, a very solid business man, and a rather distinguished-looking foreigner. She was walking so fast as to make them all appear slightly ridiculous in their efforts to keep pace with her, and avoid colliding with slower promenaders.

I noticed that she was a little too broad for the pure line of beauty; the pleated dress was subtly designed to minimize it. Not that she seemed to care. She hastened along regardless, her long eyes sparkling, and her carmined mouth at its widest as she flung back a vivacious word now to one, now another of her followers. Every time they passed, I caught a snatch; but this time I did not feel that I was missing much. This sort of rattle is always the same.

After about half a dozen tours of the promenade deck she stopped in front of me and in her downright way plumped into her chair. "Run along now," she said coolly to the men. "I'm going to invite my soul. And perhaps I shall take forty winks. You may wake me up at tea time."

It was odd to see how, the moment they left her, the three men flew apart from each other with indifferent looks.

Mrs. Dartrey instantly turned to me with her attractively and disarming grin. "I adore men," she said; "but suddenly you tire of them, don't you?"

The suddenness of her approach disconcerted me rather, but of course it was quite proper for me to betray a little diffidence. "Well, I don't know," I said.

"Don't you like men?" she asked.

"Yes, but——"

Without waiting for me to finish she rattled on: "I'm so glad the deck-steward didn't put a man next to me, or I shouldn't have been able to escape the creature. Women are much more comfortable as a steady diet."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. The reason men tire you is because you cannot be honest with them."

"I should have said from what I overheard that you——"

"Oh, I only make believe to be honest with them. They like that. It flatters them. But if you were *really* honest, heavens! they would fly in terror!"

We laughed together.

"But the dear things!" Mrs. Dartrey resumed. "They lend a spice to life, don't they?"

"I have known very few men," I said.

"Really!" she said. "I suppose you're a sensible woman."

"Ah, don't say that! No woman wants to be thought that."

"I wish I had more sense," she said with a sigh. "It's high time. There's nothing in this game, really. But somehow, without a lot of men running in and out, the world would seem very empty to me. Do you remember the old song:

"Reuben, Reuben, I've been thinking,
What a queer wurruld this would be,
If the men were all transported
Far beyond the Northern sea."

"I have heard it," I said.

"You're too young to remember when it was all the rage," said Mrs. Dartrey.

"Too young!" I exclaimed. "I am certainly as old as you."

"Ah, my dear lady, if you knew!" she cried. "But I shan't tell you.... Not that I care much, either. For youth and beauty are not nearly so important as women suppose. I have neither, and I still attract men. I am much more popular than I was as a debutante.... What is important is zest. To be in love with life, to be in love with love! That is the thing. Apparently, when a person is really crazy about living, he or she gives off certain rays—I am no metaphysician and I can't explain it, but apparently it's irresistible. So, although my hair is growing gray under the dye, and my hips are elephantine, I am not worrying, because I cannot feel the slightest falling off in my zest. When I become absolutely raddled with age I shall live in Paris, because Frenchmen do not mind how old a woman is if she still has verve.... Do I shock you?"

"Ah, no! no!" I said quickly. "Please don't say that. One becomes so tired of small talk."

"Yes, and on shipboard it is particularly small," said Mrs. Dartrey. "Effect of the sea air, I suppose. I simply won't stand for it—except perhaps from a handsome man. They rarely have any sense. But not from women. I insist on saying whatever comes into my head, and if it's too strong for the dears, I move on."

"Well, please don't move on from me," I begged. Mindful of the character I was playing, I added: "I have had scarcely any experience of life, and such talk is like an invigorating breath from the great world."

"You have not the look of an inexperienced woman," she ventured.

"I've had a long struggle with myself," I said, "I suppose that makes me look like a veteran."

"Not a veteran, my dear, but a gallant young captain."

This provided me with opportunity to tell my simple tale. How I had been immured in a tiresome Middle West village for years and years, tending my father and mother and watching life slip by. How at length Death had released me, and I was venturing forth to seek experience, too late, I feared.

"Not too late if you have the wherewithal," she said, with rather a vulgar little gesture of counting money. She had many little vulgarities which, somehow, were not offensive in her.

"Oh, I have plenty of money," I said with a grand carelessness. "But I don't know how to—how to get on with people."

She did not rise to my little lure. If she had any scheme for helping me to get rid of my money, she kept it to herself. She merely made sympathetic sounds, and that kitten mind of hers darted off at a tangent.

"I can scarcely wait for evening! I have a duck of a frock to sport to-night. Picked it up yesterday in New York. Little shop on Forty-fifth Street. I prophesy that European women will soon be coming to New York to buy their clothes.

It's wonderful. Oh, how I adore pretty clothes! Black net, my dear, over strange bright shades of green and blue. Under the net there is black malines cut in panels which separate when you walk showing the vivid colours," etc., etc.

When I could get a word in, I cast another fly. "Would you advise Paris or London for me?"

"Do you speak French?" she asked.

"Oh, a little book French."

"Then I'd say London. Book French will order you what you want, but you cannot make friends on it. Except, of course, with Americans in Paris. Somehow, I always detest my own countrymen abroad. They're neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring."

In turn she told me a good deal about herself, but nothing very confidential. Much of it I had already heard from Sir Angus. I noticed one discrepancy. Mrs. Dartrey said that she and her husband were obliged to make frequent trips to and fro across the Atlantic, because they lived in England and all her husband's money was invested in America. I knew from Sir Angus that the money was hers. This seemed like unusual delicacy on her part.

We had a long talk. I liked the woman amazingly.

Promptly at four o'clock two of her swains were to be seen approaching from opposite directions. Mrs. Dartrey's eyes sparkled afresh.

"Ah, the dears!" she cried. "Having put them out of my mind for an hour, I am prepared to adore them again... You and I have had a good time, too, haven't we? It is so stimulating to meet an intelligent woman. We shall see more of each other. Adieu, for the present."

She sprang out of the chair like a girl, and with a swing linked arms with the two men as they came up. They paused for a moment, discussing what they should do. Mrs. Dartrey turned up her ugly nose at the suggestion of tea. The third admirer being seen to approach at that moment, it was decided to go up to the smoking room for a man's drink and a couple of rubbers of bridge.

I gave them ten minutes and then proceeded to make a tour of A deck myself. Through the windows of the smoking room I perceived that they were indeed absorbed in their game. Dartrey was there too, in another game. I decided that they were good for at least an hour and that I might safely venture to visit Mme Storey, who had told me that she would be taking tea in her own suite.

I found her on the enchanting veranda of the Imperial suite, clad in a lovely *négligé*, and reclining in a chaise longue, looking over the sea. The pleasant-faced girl was reading to her from "Le Mort d'Arthur," but my mistress was almost asleep.

"Ah, Bella, what heavenly comfort!" she murmured. "The sense of the book is lost on me, but the music of the old English charms my soul!"

The girl vanished. Mme Storey raised herself and lighted a cigarette. "What luck?" she asked.

I reported my conversation with Mrs. Dartrey word for word, as nearly as I could remember it. Mme Storey, listening with a half smile, made no comment except to murmur occasionally:

"She is cleverer than I thought!"

When I had done she asked: "What do you think of her?"

"I like her," I said at once. "Who could help doing so? An impulsive, scatter-brained, fascinating woman, full of vim and go. Such a person is like a stove in a cold room. I think Sir Angus must be mistaken. To me she seems perfectly transparent. To imitate that sort of thing would require a cleverness too infernal."

"Nevertheless, I believe she is just as clever as that," said Mme Storey. "She doesn't exactly imitate that honest air. She plays up her own natural self to gain her ends. The honest dishonest people, my dear, are the most subtle deceivers of all. And she's really attractive, of course, or she wouldn't have a soft job on the *Gigantic*."

I felt a little abashed. "I cannot doubt your insight," I said.

"This is not insight but oversight, my Bella," she said, laughing. "You see I happen to know that lady."

I looked at her in astonishment.

"I passed her on deck," she went on, "and I discovered that I had seen her once before. It must be all of eight years ago, but one would not forget that vivacious countenance. It was in Rector's of giddy memory. Inspector Rumsey pointed her out to me. She was then the companion of the famous 'Smoke' Lassen, the most brilliant confidence man that America ever produced. He has disappeared; dead, perhaps; he was an old man even then. The girl's name was Beatrice Breese; better known as Trixy Breese; and still more widely known throughout the underworld as Breezy Tricks."

"What can her game be?" I exclaimed.

"We shall find out."

"I gave her every opportunity and she didn't——"

"She wouldn't, the first day out."

"It must have to do with men."

Mme Storey shook her head. "No, she uses men as a cover for her real operations. Every word of hers to you suggests that women are her mark. I fancy that the seat of operations must be in Paris, since she refused to name Paris to you too precipitately. Ah, Paris is the home of the most subtle swindles ever evolved by the wits of man—as well as everything else that is ingenious and amusing. It is fortunate for us if it is so, since we are bound to Paris."

"What part do you suppose her husband plays?" I asked.

"No part—except the part of her husband. He is essential to her. Under the ægis of his respectable name and family connections she feels perfectly safe. I've been observing him. He's an easily recognizable type: a young aristocrat vitiated by every expensive appetite, and thrown on the world without the means of satisfying them. She provides everything he wants, and he is content."

"But they seem to be genuinely attached to each other," I objected.

"Why shouldn't they be?" said Mme Storey, smiling. "Love is not necessarily respectable, my Bella."

III

After dinner the magnificent lounge of the *Gigantic* was cleared for dancing. I watched from the side lines. All dances are called "brilliant," but this one really had a sparkling appearance, the great hall was so beautiful and all the women so well dressed. No self-respecting woman would have allowed herself to walk out on that floor had she not full assurance of looking her best.

Mrs. Dartrey made a late and effective entrance in the "duck of a frock," which fully justified her encomiums. The three admirers were now increased to half a score. Funny, isn't it, how a man likes to make one of a crowd about a popular woman. If I was a man, I'd be hanged if I would. And from the woman's point of view I should think the crowd would cut her off from anything real. Other women didn't think of this, and you could see them watching Mrs. Dartrey with a sickly envy out of the corners of their eyes.

I observed that the handsome, sulky-looking young husband crossed the floor when she entered, and it was to him that she gave the first dance. He was crazy about her. She danced ecstatically; dance after dance. I remained watching until after midnight, and she was still keeping it up unflinchingly. What astonishing energy! I wondered if, when her cabin door closed behind her, a reaction set in.

Next morning, at the women's hour, I met her in the Pompeian swimming pool down on G deck, deep in the hold of the vast ship. She was swimming tirelessly back and forth as if she still had superfluous energy to get rid of, and the other women were standing about looking at her. She gave me a gay wave of the hand as she went to her dressing room.

I did not have a chance to speak to her during the morning, but I saw her often: playing tennis up on the sun deck; promenading briskly; talking animatedly to this person and that. Her method was the same with all; she would march up to anybody she fancied and plunge into the very middle of a conversation. Most people were charmed by it; and if they were not, the insouciant Trixy simply went on to somebody else. There was plenty of material on board to choose from. She and her husband did not come down to lunch, and later I saw them the centre of a gay party in the Ritz-Carlton restaurant on B deck. The champagne was flowing copiously.

Later, she flung herself into the chair alongside me on deck. "I'm drunk, my dear," she announced merrily. "I do wish people wouldn't give me champagne. I am rattling with it."

I laughed encouragingly.

"Ah, this is good!" she said, stretching herself. "The one quiet hour of the day. Let's talk about men."

"Don't you want to sleep?" I asked.

"No! I grudge the hours given to sleep. Life is too short. I've been looking forward to a rational conversation with you." She glanced down the deck. "If only my husband does not interrupt us. The poor fellow complains that I neglect him on shipboard."

"He seems very devoted," I remarked.

She favoured me with an indescribably wicked, merry smile. "Oh, my dear, if you only knew! You would never imagine, seeing him so perfectly dressed, so indifferent looking—it is really quite terrible!"

"What is?" I asked.

"His ardour," she said, with eyes momentarily downcast.

"Oh!" I said.

"He is really too sweet!" she rattled on. "And I adore him. But it's just a leetle wearying sometimes to inspire a greater devotion than you feel yourself... Funny, isn't it, and me years older than he."

"How do you manage it?" I asked.

"I wish you were married," she said. "Then we could talk about things."

"Why can't we anyway?" I asked. "I'm grown-up."

She shook her head. "If you were married you would understand things—without explanations. To explain would be—horrible, you know."

"How long have you been married?" I asked.

"Two years. He is my third husband. One died; one I was obliged to divorce. Divorce is wonderful, isn't it? The greatest aid to marriage that was ever invented!"

This was a novel idea to me, and I suppose I looked my astonishment.

"I mean," she went on, "with the possibility of a divorce always present, married people cannot afford to get careless with each other. They must play up or expect to get the razz."

"I wish I had your art," I said with a sigh.

"I have no art," she quickly returned. "I am just myself. Heavens, my dear, I'm the laziest-minded woman alive. If I had to think and contrive how to attract men, I should still be *une vierge*. No, men just seem to fall my way. I can't help it."

To-day, with Mme Storey's hints to guide me, I was able to perceive that my irrepressible friend was *not* so spontaneous as she had seemed at first. Behind the merry, careless glances, there was the hint of something watchful. I became aware, gradually, that I was being subjected to a sharp scrutiny. We went on to talk of my supposed situation, and I felt as if a delicate, searching probe was being used on me. I was put to it to maintain my assumed character.

Somewhere during the course of our talk, Mrs. Dartrey made up her mind about me, and her manner began to change. She did not become rude or indifferent, but only cooled off. I anxiously cast back in my mind to discover what I could have said to put her off, but could not think of anything. It was impossible, I thought, that she could suspect me. Mme Storey had said, with a woman as clever as that, it would be dangerous to make overtures of any kind and that I had better hold myself perfectly passive and let come what would come. This I had faithfully observed, yet it seemed as if the skittish lady had taken alarm, somehow. She finally fell asleep in the chair beside me—or made believe to do so.

On the following afternoon, when I came to my chair, I was greatly chagrined to discover that she had had the deck steward move her chair away.

I had been looking forward to dining tête-à-tête with Mme Storey in her suite that night, but now my pleasure was all spoiled. Having made sure that the Dartreys had descended to the dining saloon, I went to keep the appointment, heavy with a sense of failure.

The little table was set out on the veranda of the suite, close beside the ship's rail. There was no light except one tiny bulb on the table under a rosy shade. Sitting there, we could look over the rail at the moon shining on the heaving sea. The delicious food was served piping hot from Mme Storey's own pantry. It was all perfectly enchanting—or would have been had not my spirits been so low.

"What's the matter?" asked my kind mistress.

"I have failed," I said bitterly. "Mrs. Dartrey has become suspicious of me. She has shaken me."

"There is no reason for you to feel cast down," said Mme Storey. "This was inevitable. She has not become suspicious of you. She has simply made up her mind that you are not timber suitable for her cutting, and, being a busy woman, she does not intend to waste any more time on you."

"I cannot think what I could have done," I said.

"You didn't do anything. Remember, she is looking for a gull. You are obviously not a gull, nor could you create the effect of a gull. She's a psychologist, too."

I began to feel a little better. "Still, I have failed," I said. "As far as she's concerned, my work is ended."

"I should say it was just beginning," said Mme Storey. "Your job now is to find the gull and attach yourself to *her*."

Well, my appetite came back, and I suddenly found the moonlight on the sea glorious. My chief fear had been that Mme Storey would be disappointed in me.

"I should say take plenty of time to it," she went on. "You still have three days and a bit before Cherbourg. Under the

circumstances it would be quite proper for you to sue for Mrs. Dartrey's favour a little. She will no doubt snub you, but you can be the least bit persistent, as if regretful at losing your vivacious friend. Find out if you can whom she has chosen for the slaughter, and approach them when they are together. If you can contrive to have Mrs. Dartrey introduce you to the other woman, the rest will follow quite naturally."

All of which was done as Mme Storey enjoined. I observed next morning that Mrs. Dartrey had had her chair carried around to the starboard side of B deck, where it was now placed beside that of a sallow, discontented-looking woman, very richly dressed. I wondered if this could be the prospective victim. On the other side of the woman sat a rather attractive man, her husband, apparently.

I let the whole day pass without making any move, closely observing Mrs. Dartrey whenever the opportunity offered. By this time she had a hundred intimate friends of both sexes. She was always in confidential chat with somebody, leaning over the ship's rail or perched on the edge of a chair, and it was not easy to decide which might be the chosen ones. She greeted me brightly but gave me no opportunity for conversation. However, when I saw her after tea in close confabulation with the sallow woman, I doubted no longer. Mrs. Dartrey's careless manner was exactly the same to this one as to any other, but her companion betrayed a secret, strained eagerness as she listened, which gave everything away. The husband's chair was empty.

I continued to promenade the deck until I happened by during a lull in their confidences. Whereupon I stopped in front of Mrs. Dartrey and said: "I miss you."

She looked up at me with a little start of recognition, subtly insulting. "Oh," she said, "I'm sorry I had to move my chair. But there isn't a breath of air around on the port side in the afternoons."

"That's so," I said, still hanging about.

"Why don't you move over here?" she asked with a glance down the line, knowing very well that the rank was filled.

"There isn't any room."

I purposely prolonged the awkward pause and glanced suggestively at the other woman. Mrs. Dartrey evidently thought, as I wished her to, that the easiest way out was to introduce us, and she said:

"Mrs. Ellis, Miss Gaul. Silly to introduce people, isn't it, when we all talk to each other anyway."

We laughed inanely. I was satisfied. I made some inconsequential remark and walked on. Nor did I make any further move that day to improve my acquaintance with Mrs. Ellis.

From the passenger list I learned that she was Mrs. John W. Ellis and that she and her husband occupied one of the best rooms on D deck, which suggested that they were people of wealth. The purser told me that they had booked from Minneapolis and that they were apparently inexperienced voyagers. I suppose he made further inquiries of the room steward or stewardess, for he later volunteered the information that the couple quarrelled a good deal in their cabin. I regarded the husband with interest. He seemed superior to his wife; a man of some distinction; but looked nervous and perhaps ill-tempered. They were going to Paris.

Next morning, when I started my promenade, I found Mrs. Ellis sitting between two empty chairs. So I dropped into one with an ingratiating smile at the sallow woman. She gave me a look none too friendly, but I made believe not to see it.

"Have you seen Mrs. Dartrey?" I asked.

"No," she said.

"Isn't she a wonderful woman?" I said. "So full of energy and spirits."

"Yes," said Mrs. Ellis in her graceless way.

She was clearly reluctant to talk about her friend, and it would have been highly foolish for me to pursue the subject. So I made up talk about anything and nothing. It was uphill work, for Mrs. Ellis was both suspicious and touchy. She hadn't anything against me personally; that was just her ordinary attitude. She was a woman of about forty, and would have been very good-looking, with her raven hair and good eyes, had it not been for her sallowness and her intensely disagreeable expression. I couldn't make up my mind whether biliousness had ruined her disposition or her bad disposition had soured her digestive juices. Either might have been true.

Finally I discovered that the key to unlock her nature was—flattery! I said: "I'm so glad Mrs. Dartrey introduced us. I should never have dared to speak to you without. One should on shipboard, I suppose, but I simply haven't the assurance. And I did so want to know you. You attracted me from the first."

A tinge of pink appeared in Mrs. Ellis's sallow skin, and her whole expression softened in fatuous gratification. I perceived that there was no danger of feeding it to her too strong. "What was it about me that attracted you?" she asked, keenly interested.

"These things are hard to explain," I said, "I suppose it was because you looked so superior to the other passengers."

"Oh, the others," she said with a sneering look down the line; "dreadful people, aren't they?"

"They look it," I said. "I haven't felt like talking to any of them."

"I never talk to people when travelling," said Mrs. Ellis. "One must maintain a certain reserve. One owes it to one's self."

"That was it," I said. "It was your air of reserve which attracted me."

I devoutly hoped that she wouldn't report my words to Mrs. Dartrey. The latter would have instantly comprehended that I was after something. However, there was little danger of such a thing happening: Mrs. Ellis was too much of a fool.

"I'm a queer sort of person," Mrs. Ellis went on, delighted with her subject. "Very few understand me. When I give my friendship, a warmer and more disinterested friend does not exist on earth. But I am slow to give it. I insist upon worth in the object. And I am implacable. I never forgive a wrong in friendship."

"You must have many devoted friends," I murmured.

"No," she said, "not many. My standards are too high. I scarcely know what women are coming to nowadays. Even the so-called best women I find to be unscrupulous liars and scandalmongers—if not worse. I will have nothing to do with such, whatever their position may be."

"It does you credit," I said.

"My husband is the most prominent attorney in Minneapolis," she went on: "counsel to the biggest corporations in the Northwest. As a leader, I am an especial object of calumny. It cannot touch me, of course, but as I will not compromise with such people the result is that I lead rather a lonely life."

"I suppose it is inevitable," I said sympathetically.

"You would not believe some of the stories I could tell you about the so-called best people of Minneapolis," she said viciously, and forthwith launched into an involved and excessively tiresome tale of country club machinations. I will not bore you with it. Suffice it to say that the teller appeared as the high-minded heroine, while all the other women

were hussies. Another tale followed, and another. Mrs. Ellis looked upon herself as the most beautiful, the cleverest and the noblest of women, and was enraged because nobody else would accept her at her own valuation. Evidently in her home town, she was avoided like the plague.

She was particularly bitter on the subject of philandering. Evidently all the other women of her set were engaged in more or less innocent flirtations, whereas no man ever looked at Mrs. Ellis. Consequently, she had rationalized herself into a very snowdrop of purity and was scathing in her animadversions upon sex. But, ah, what a tormented envy spoke in her words!

So much for my success with Mrs. Ellis. She always welcomed me after that, though of course I was no more to the egotistical woman than a sort of mirror in which she saw herself reflected as she wished. She never cared to hear me talk about myself. In order that I might not appear to be cultivating her acquaintance secretly, I used to stop sometimes when she and Mrs. Dartrey were together. At such moments neither lady betrayed overmuch friendliness, but I persisted until I had established my point. I would then pass on as if a little saddened by their lack of cordiality.

I must emphasize the fact that there was never the slightest suggestion of secrecy in Mrs. Dartrey's communications to her friend. She did not whisper, nor cast meaning looks, etc., but was always her impetuous and rather noisy self; and as far as I could judge the style of her talk was exactly the same as she had used toward me in the beginning.

I discovered another significant fact about Mrs. Ellis. Later that same day, as I passed along the deck, her husband was in the next chair, and I judged from their expressions that they were quarrelling in bitter whispers. Mrs. Ellis did not see me at all; her face was yellow and hateful; there was something unspeakably piteous in it, too; and in a flash the domestic situation became clear to me. She was passionately in love with her husband, whereas he was tired of her and exasperated beyond endurance by her foolishness. I was sorry for them both.

I made my next reports to Mme Storey with more confidence, and she was good enough to commend me unreservedly. I went on to describe Mrs. Ellis's wonderful jewels, her rope of pearls, her emeralds, her beautiful diamond ornaments.

"Those, I suppose, constitute the stakes of the game," I said.

Mme Storey shook her head. "Indirectly, perhaps," she said. "But we have nothing so simple to deal with as straight robbery. They could never have got away with robbery for two seasons without having a hue and cry raised against them."

IV

On the night before we were to disembark at Cherbourg, that immemorial function, the captain's dinner, was held in the grand saloon. This event was supposed to mark the culmination of the social activities aboard ship, and every woman saved her prettiest dress for it. All the dinners were so extraordinarily elaborate there was not much more that the steward could do; but what he could do he did; and upon glancing down the menu one realized that the four corners of the globe had been ransacked for delectable dainties. All the toys and favours were distributed that are considered to add to the gaiety of the feast.

Sir Angus, in dress uniform, was the most dignified figure present. One could worship such a man, with his urbanity, his sorrowful, stern face, and his cool habit of command. He very rarely appeared among the passengers. None but a fool would dare to approach so noble a figure with impertinent questions; but unfortunately the fools on shipboard seem to be even more in evidence than elsewhere. Sir Angus masked with polite smiles the tedium that the interminable dinner must have caused him.

There was a great treat saving for me afterward, because Sir Angus had asked Mme Storey and me to take coffee with him in his own quarters up on the bridge. What a delightful spot that cabin was, so cool and remote above the bustle of the ship. One could hear the steady rush of the wind outside, and the sighing voice of the sea. Here one was really

aware of being at sea. The furnishings were unexpectedly simple, and Sir Angus's private knick-knacks, scattered about, gave it a homely aspect. The dear man's artistic taste was not very highly developed, but one could not think the less of a sailor for that.

My mistress looked positively regal in a plain evening gown of a cool red brocade that the famous Craqui had designed for her earlier in the season. Sir Angus's face became soft and beautiful with a chivalrous admiration as he looked at her. It was a very fine tribute.

But Mme Storey insisted on bringing me forward. She suggested that I tell Sir Angus the story of the drama which was developing on board. I did so.

"I knew I would not be appealing to you in vain!" he cried. "I am sure this ugly business will be cleared up now. How do you suppose it will work out?"

"Unless I am very much deceived," said Mme Storey, "Mrs. Dartrey will furnish Mrs. Ellis with an address in Paris. That will finish Mrs. Dartrey's work. She goes on to Southampton, and, as the rush of rich Americans is slackening now, she will no doubt be free until next season, to amuse herself with her fashionable English friends. As to what is to take place at that address in Paris I cannot, of course, tell you yet. But Bella and I will make it our business to find out."

"You are wonderful women!" said Sir Angus solemnly.

Fancy my pride at hearing myself coupled with Mme Storey like that.

Sir Angus presented me, as a souvenir, with an ink-well in the form of a model of the *Gigantic's* bridge, with all the telegraphs reproduced in silver gilt. I believe it was among his most cherished possessions, and certainly it has become one of mine.

Next morning we dropped anchor in the harbour of Cherbourg, and as the tender came alongside there was a great business of good-byes among the company of passengers which divided here. Mrs. Dartrey, who looked very piquant in a white sports costume with Chinese embroidery, was most affable to me.

"When you come to London, do drop in on me," said she.

But she did not intend it to be taken seriously. I thought: "If I do come perhaps it will be on an errand that will astonish you."

Out of the tail of my eye I observed her parting with Mrs. Ellis. She was too clever to give anything away; all gaiety and carelessness; but the other woman was visibly moved. She whispered something to Mrs. Dartrey that I could not catch, but I read its purport on her lips. It was a murmur of thanks for some benefit conferred.

Mme Storey and I were to travel separately to Paris, of course. I had purposely omitted reserving a seat on the train, as I wanted, if possible, to get into the same compartment with Mr. and Mrs. Ellis. I succeeded in doing so, but obtained little benefit from it, for Mrs. Ellis, ill at ease in the presence of her husband, scarcely opened her lips to me the whole way. Moreover, I do not think she ever looked out of the window, though this was her first visit to France. She sat staring straight ahead of her, her twitching hands and tapping foot betraying a curious inner excitement. Her husband studied a copy of the Paris edition of the New York *Herald* that he had purchased on the *quai*. One wondered why such a couple had come abroad.

In the bustle of collecting our belongings as we drew into the Gare St. Lazare I forced Mrs. Ellis to take some notice of me.

"There are never enough porters, of course," I said with a laugh. "They run alongside the train as it comes to a stop, and the way to make sure of one is to pass your bags out of the window."

Mr. Ellis thanked me for the tip.

"It has been so nice to know you," I said to his wife in a lower tone. "I hope I may see something of you in Paris."

"Surely," she said. She did not mean it either. It was clear that even my flattery had no weight against the secret new excitement that filled her.

"Where are you going to stop?" I asked.

"—Er—the Continental," she said, with an uneasy glance at her husband.

When I got myself and my bags into a taxi, I put the Ellises out of my mind. I thanked my stars that my own heart was unclouded and I might freely give myself up to the delight of sniffing that rare atmosphere and feasting my eyes on the blithesome spectacle of the boulevards. Why is it—why is it that the mere thought of Paris moves one's heart to a gaiety that is almost painful? I can't explain it. I only know that I would rather go to Paris when I die than to heaven.

Although I had only known Paris for three brief days before, I felt as if I were coming home. I murmured over the names of the streets, finding the syllables sweet in my ears: Rue du Havre; Rue Tronchet; around the frowning Madeleine, and down the sparkling Rue Royale to the glorious panorama of the river.

Mme Storey and I were joyfully reunited in the same charming salon at the Crillon that we had had before. Its windows, which looked out over the Place de la Concorde, commanded the finest view in Paris, with the Jardins des Tuileries on one side, the Champs-Élysées on the other, and the river in front. We did not stop to unpack, but rushed out into the streets again. Mme Storey, not telephoning to any of her friends, gave up the rest of that day to me. We dined at an enchanting out-of-doors restaurant up on Montmartre and went to see the Ballet Russe.

Next morning I had to get into harness again. About eleven I set off down the Rue de Rivoli to call on Mrs. Ellis at the Hôtel Continental. I had a disappointment. They were not there. They had reserved rooms, I was told, but had not come, nor had any word been received from them. I went to the New York *Herald* office, but they had not registered there, as all good Americans do; neither was there any information forthcoming at the American Express. I was forced to the conclusion that Mrs. Ellis had persuaded her husband to change hotels expressly to avoid me.

Mme Storey took it with a shrug. "It's not fatal," she said. "Such a green pair, and so rich, could not lose themselves in Paris. I know a woman who will find them for us within an hour or so."

She telephoned to a certain Mlle Monge, who, it appeared, had served her before.

In less than an hour word came over the wire that the Ellises were at the Majestic on the Avenue Kleber, near the Etoile. Mme Storey instructed Mlle Monge to await me there in the foyer. She would know me by my red hair and chapeau vert.

To me Mme Storey said: "Point out Mrs. Ellis to her, and let her follow the American about Paris. I shall have to leave this case pretty much to you two, as I am obliged to let my friends know I am here. In Paris I am not supposed to have any serious occupation."

In the magnificent Hôtel Majestic I was approached by a charming brown-eyed person very modishly dressed in black, who introduced herself as Mlle Monge. She was not at all one's idea of the typical Frenchwoman, she had such a modest and reticent manner; but I was beginning to learn that, as of other peoples, there are all kinds of French. Her English was as good as my own, and I felt from the first that we should be friends.

It was now the hour for déjeuner, and the restaurant was thronged. All I had to do was to point out the Ellises where they sat by a window and leave the rest to Mlle Monge. It was arranged that she should call me up at the Crillon at three, or as soon thereafter as possible. I was then free to kick up my heels on the Champs-Élysées.

In due course I got my call. The Ellises had left their hotel together, Mlle Monge reported, and had driven to the Galeries Lafayette, where Mrs. Ellis had gone in. But she had only waited inside the door long enough for her husband to

drive away. She had then hailed another taxi and had herself driven to a house in the Rue des Tournelles in the Marais, a quarter of old Paris. She had remained in this house nearly an hour. Upon inquiring of the concierge, Mlle Monge learned that she had asked for a M. Guimet, who had the best apartment in the house. M. Guimet was a savant (scientist) and much respected in the neighbourhood, it appeared. Mrs. Ellis had then returned to the Majestic, where she now was. Mlle Monge was telephoning from there.

Mme Storey was not available at the moment. I felt that the first thing to do was to obtain further information about this M. Guimet. I so told Mlle Monge, and said I would immediately come to the Majestic to relieve her.

When I entered the Majestic for the second time, the first person I beheld was Mrs. Ellis, who was walking back and forth in the foyer in an uncertain way. She saw me at the same moment and came hastening toward me.

"What a surprise!" she cried. "How are you! It's so nice to see a friendly face!"

This was rather disconcerting. I was still more astonished by the change in her appearance. She was openly and feverishly excited now; a bright red spot burned in either of her sallow cheeks, and the pupils of her eyes were as much distended as if she had atropine in them. A dangerous excitement.

"Are you very busy?" she went on breathlessly. "I'm dying to go shopping and I don't know where to go or what to ask for."

I saw that I need have no anxiety about explaining my presence in the Majestic. "Just a minute until I make an inquiry at the bureau," I said. "Then I'll be happy to go with you."

In a shadowy corner of the foyer I saw Mlle Monge taking us in. It was not necessary for me to communicate with her then, as she had her instructions. I inquired for a mythical person at the bureau and then returned to Mrs. Ellis.

"My friend has not arrived," I said.

She was not in the least interested. As we stood on the sidewalk waiting for a taxi, her head kept turning from side to side.

"That man stared at me," she said with a simper. "I mean the young man in the shepherd's plaid suit who just went in. Oh, Paris! Paris! Paris!"

"You are happier than you were yesterday," I ventured.

With a lunatic change of mood she whispered dully: "Is it happiness? ... I don't know.... I'm terrified."

I wondered if she were a secret drinker. I had seen no signs of it on shipboard.

A taxi came up. I told the driver to take us to the Place de l'Opéra as a good point to radiate from. We hustled down the Champs-Élysées. Mrs. Ellis stared with an unwholesome eagerness into the faces of the people in the passing motors.

"It's more fun walking," she said. "More chance of an adventure. And yet, not an hour ago, when I was coming home in a taxi, a man in another cab raised his hat to me and smiled. Such a gentlemanly looking fellow with a gray Fedora and a monocle. I was quite flustered. And, my dear, he ordered his chauffeur to turn around and follow. But I lost him in the traffic.... I must tell you, I had taken the taxi in order to escape a young fellow in the street who brushed against me and smiled.... Isn't this a dreadful city? How it makes one's heart beat! ... It will seem very dull in Minneapolis. Our men are such stick-in-the-muds. No verve, no romance, no abandon."

"What is it particularly that you want to buy?" I asked.

"An evening gown. Something I can wear at dinner to-night. I want to charm my husband. My dear, I've gradually allowed myself to dress in as dull a style as if I were over forty!"

Which of course she was!

It is not so easy to buy good ready-made dresses in Paris, but Mme Storey had told me of a little shop in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré to which the great dressmakers sent their model dresses to be sold, and thither we had ourselves carried. I soon perceived that Mrs. Ellis had no intention of listening to any advice from me and ceased to offer it. She chose a snaky sheath gown covered with green sequins. It was a gorgeous affair, but most unsuitable for her; made her skin look as yellow as saffron.

Nevertheless, she stood clad in it before a long mirror, and raising her arms above her head, like a girl, murmured dreamily: "I am charming!"

She refused to leave the shop until she had seen the dress dispatched to the Hôtel Majestic by a midinette.

Out in the street again, she said with a sidelong look: "Let us go to a café. One of those places where we can sit out on the street and watch everybody. Which is the most famous rendezvous of them all?"

"The Café de la Paix, undoubtedly," I said. "They call it the centre of civilization. If you sit there long enough, everybody in the world will pass by, they say."

"In such a place we are sure to be spoken to," she said with a secret smile. "Would you be afraid?"

"Not at all," I said.

"What would you do?"

"Speak back again—if I liked the looks of the speaker."

"Oh, you're so matter-of-fact," she said impatiently. "That will never get you anywhere."

"Where do you want to get to?" I asked, smiling.

Her strained face showed no answering smile. "I want—I want—" she said incoherently—"I want everything life has to offer. After this I mean to take it as my right. I am no common woman. Colour! perfume! happiness! I will lavish my treasures! ... Will you agree this afternoon to follow wherever adventure may lead us?" she demanded breathlessly.

"Yes," I said. I felt safe in promising.

"I am utterly reckless!" she cried. "The spirit of a bacchante has entered into me. I mean to drain the cup of life to the dregs!"

You would have had to see the aging, sallow woman to appreciate how tragi-comic this sounded.

It suddenly occurred to her that it was hardly in line with her moral protestations on shipboard. "I expect you disapprove," she said with another sidelong look. "But I can't help it. Something within me is released. I don't care what happens."

"I am no moralist," I said. "I would like to cut loose myself."

"Then stick to me," she said with an insane archness. "Wherever I go, things are bound to happen!"

In a few minutes we were seated at the famous corner where all the streams of Paris converge. It was crowded, as it always is, by night or day, and we had to hang about until one of the little tables in the front rank was vacated and we could pounce on it. The passing throng all but trod on our feet. I could have been perfectly happy just watching. I suggested coffee, tea, or an ice to Mrs. Ellis, but she would have none of it.

"What are those people drinking?" she asked, indicating a particularly rakish-looking couple at the next table.

"*Fine à l'eau*," I said. "That is Parisian for brandy and soda."

"I'll have one of those," she said.

I did not expect to obtain any information from her by direct questioning; still, I thought it was worth trying. "What have you been doing since we got here?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing in particular," she said inattentively. "Just looking around."

"What did you do this morning?"

The secret look on her face intensified. "My husband and I drove around town in a taxicab," she said with a calculated vagueness.

"What I would like to see is a bit of old Paris," I hazarded. "If I only had somebody to take me."

"I am not interested in anything old," she said. "... The Englishman with the blue collar is staring at me."

I saw that it was useless to pursue my questions.

The woman beside me was obsessed. Her head kept turning restlessly this way and that, her distended eyes searching in the faces of the men who sat near. Fattish, complacent creatures, most of them; settled in their chairs as if somebody had squashed them down on the seats rather hard. I got no suggestion of the rampant male that Mrs. Ellis affected to perceive everywhere. A good many of them were staring at her naturally, her actions were so peculiar; but it was not at all in the manner that she fondly supposed. It made me rather uncomfortable, but it was all in the way of my job. Of course, nobody spoke to us.

For more than an hour she kept up the pretence that she was the cynosure of every eye. "I hope you'll forgive me for making you so conspicuous," she said archly. "I suppose you are not accustomed to it."

I assured her that was all right.

She ordered cigarettes and attempted to smoke one with airy grace, but choked over it. One noticed, notwithstanding her confidence, that she was excessively bitter in her censures upon such women who passed as had annexed a man.

And then, suddenly, the game seemed to be up. She rose abruptly. She had had several ponies of cognac and was slightly affected by it.

"I congratulate you on your success as a chaperon," she said, crassly ill-natured. "I will have to give you a testimonial: Warranted to keep men at arm's length! I don't know why I came out with you, I'm sure. I wish Mrs. Dartrey was here."

I consoled myself for her rudeness by thinking: "If she were here, my lady, no man would look at you!"

I put her in a cab and sent her to the Majestic. I knew she was expecting to meet her husband there and would be safe with him during the evening. And that liberated me. I returned to the Crillon with a light heart.

Mlle Monge reported that she had made further inquiries in the Rue des Tournelles but with small results. It appeared that none of his neighbours had a speaking acquaintance with M. Guimet, who was described as a studious and absent-minded scientist. He had been living in his present quarters for two years. Nothing was known of his antecedents. An elderly *femme de ménage* cared for his wants. She was well liked by the tradespeople chiefly because she was a liberal spender. A certain *éclat* attached to M. Guimet's establishment because of the handsomely dressed ladies who occasionally called upon him. Mlle Monge had then inquired at the Institut de France, and of the other learned societies, but had been unable to learn anything whatever concerning a scientific man by the name of Aristide Guimet. He was not known to the police.

V

Late in the afternoon of the following day I ran into Mrs. Ellis by accident as I crossed the Place Vendôme. That dependable Mlle Monge had her under observation. Mrs. Ellis looked at me point-blank without a sign of recognition. In order to get her attention I had to run after her and take her arm. A further extraordinary change had taken place in the woman. She seemed to have broken up overnight. Her hair was untidy and her eyes had the dulled look of one suffering from shock; her colour was ghastly.

At first I made believe not to notice anything amiss. "Fancy!" I cried, "of all the millions in Paris, you and I to meet here!"

"Let me alone," she muttered thickly. "I don't want to talk to you."

"Shall we go to Rumpelmayer's to tea?" I said.

She attempted pettishly to free her arm, but I clung to it. "You are ill," I said. "Let me help you."

"I'm all right," she muttered. "Let me go."

She was hardly a sympathetic figure; nevertheless, I was strongly affected on her behalf. After all, she was my countrywoman, and I had reason to believe her the victim of some devilish plot. I summoned the first passing taxi and put her into it. She was too apathetic to resist me. I told the man to drive to the Crillon. Mrs. Ellis's witless aspect scared me. I began to feel that this case was getting beyond me, and I determined to send Mlle Monge after Mme Storey, who was having tea with friends at the Ritz. I saw the Frenchwoman discreetly following in another cab.

I seated Mrs. Ellis in the little salon of our suite while I talked to Mlle Monge out in the corridor. She said:

"Mrs. Ellis made a round of the fashionable jewellery shops on the Rue de la Paix this morning. It was so early the shops were empty, and I couldn't follow her in without attracting attention, so I cannot state what her errand was. As far as I could see from the street, whenever she stated her errand, she was taken into a private room.

"She had déjeuner alone at the Majestic. Immediately afterward she had herself driven to the Rue des Tournelles again. She remained in that house about the same length of time as before. Neither before nor after that visit could I see any change from her usual look. She was always a little wild. She returned to the Majestic and had herself carried up in the lift. In a few minutes her husband descended, his face distorted with anger. I assumed that they had quarrelled. He left the hotel. Mrs. Ellis came down, and she then looked as you see her now. She left the hotel like one walking in her sleep. She walked the entire distance to the spot where you met her, seeing nothing."

I told Mlle Monge to ask Mme Storey to come at once, if she could, and to proceed directly to her bedroom, where I could speak to her before Mrs. Ellis saw her. I then returned to Mrs. Ellis.

"I am your friend," I said frankly. "Can't you tell me what is the matter?"

She struggled for some semblance of self-control. She wished to deceive me. "It is nothing," she said. "I feel a little ill. I am subject to it. I will just rest a little and then go home."

I appeared to be satisfied. "Is there anything I can get you?" I asked.

"Smelling salts," she suggested.

I fetched her the bottle. She sniffed of it gratefully and made out that she felt better. She kept her lids lowered to hide the look of blank agony in her eyes. It was very affecting.

"Shall I have tea brought up here?" I asked.

A nauseated look crossed her face. "No, please," she murmured. "I could not eat. I will go now."

By one expedient and another, I detained her for five minutes. At the end of that time I heard the door of Mme Storey's room close. I went to her and swiftly explained the situation. She returned with me to the salon.

"This is Mme Storey, Mrs. Ellis," I said.

It was too much for the nerves of the shaken woman. She lost her grip again. "What does she want of me?" she said hysterically. "Why was I brought here, anyway? I wish to go!"

There was a comfortable, sunny-tempered quality in Mme Storey's smile. "Let me explain myself first," she said. In a difficult situation, she always deals frankly. She described the nature of her profession and told how, upon boarding the *Gigantic*, Captain Sir Angus McMaster had asked her to do a favour for him.

"He believed that Mr. and Mrs. Dartrey were dangerous swindlers," she said.

Mrs. Ellis's jaw dropped. "The Dartreys, *swindlers!*" she gasped. "That can't be! ... At least they got nothing out of me!"

"Not directly," said Mme Storey. "But we believe they are working with somebody in Paris. Did they not send you to a man in Paris?"

The effect of this on Mrs. Ellis was startling. Her arms went up to her head in an utterly distracted gesture. "Oh, my God! ... Oh, my God!" she stuttered. "A swindle! It can't be so!"

"Was it M. Aristide Guimet in the Rue des Tournelles?" asked Mme Storey softly.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" cried Mrs. Ellis. "I never heard of that name or of that street!"

"We had you followed," said Mme Storey deprecatingly. "You were there yesterday and again to-day."

Mrs. Ellis, wild with terror, endeavoured to save her face by flying into a passion. "You had me followed!" she cried. "As if I were a criminal! How dare you! How dare you! My husband shall know of this! Have I not the right to go where I please?"

"Oh, assuredly," said Mme Storey. "I only wished to save you, you see. If I have failed to do so, I blame myself very much. But I had no idea it would happen so quickly."

"I have not the least idea what you are talking about," said Mrs. Ellis. "It sounds to me as if you were out of your mind."

"*Please*, Mrs. Ellis," said Mme Storey, with her most winning manner. "Let us talk this over reasonably. Suppose you have been fooled: that is no disgrace. It happens to all of us. If you have lost your money, don't you want me to get it back for you?"

"I don't know you," cried Mrs. Ellis. "How am I to know but that you are a swindler?"

Mme Storey smiled. "I have not asked you for anything but a little information," she said. "You can easily satisfy yourself about me by cabling to anyone you may know in New York, or, better, by sending a wireless to Sir Angus."

Mrs. Ellis abandoned that line. "I have lost no money," she said. "Where would I get any money to lose? Our funds are all in my husband's hands."

"Where are your jewels, Mrs. Ellis?"

The woman caught her breath sharply. A moment passed before she could command herself sufficiently to speak. "In my jewel case," she said tremulously. "Where else should they be?"

"What were you doing in the Rue de la Paix this morning?"

"Buying some new ones," she said with a laugh that was meant to be careless and offhand but only had a lunatic sound.

Mme Storey approached from another angle. "Sir Angus and I believe that this game has been going on for two years," she said. "Within that time many American women must have been deceived and robbed. And it appears to be such a devilishly clever game there's no reason why it should not go on indefinitely unless we break it up. Won't you help me to do that, Mrs. Ellis, for the sake of saving other women?"

An unnatural calmness descended on Mrs. Ellis. Her eyes were perfectly daft, but her voice was under fair control. "I would be glad to help you if I knew what you were talking about," she said. "But it sounds like rank melodrama to me."

"Prove your good faith by telling us why you went to see M. Guimet," challenged Mme Storey.

Mrs. Ellis hesitated blankly—then, evidently, a word of mine recurred to her. "I merely wanted to see a bit of old Paris," she said.

"Who told you about M. Guimet?"

"Somebody in America—I scarcely remember who. I am not in the least interested in M. Guimet but only in his old house. And now I hope I may be permitted to go. Unless I am being detained here by force."

"The door is unlocked," said Mme Storey. "But let me make a last appeal. Here we are, three American women in a foreign city. Surely we ought to stand together. There is evidently a devilish trap set for our women in this city. Won't you help me to destroy it?"

"Really, my dear lady, you are too dramatic!" said Mrs. Ellis. "You ought to go on the stage."

And with an affected laugh she passed out of the room with that corpselike face, and those eyes mad with pain or terror—or both. It was too dreadful to see. But we had to let her go, of course.

When the door closed behind her, Mme Storey sighed. "God save us from fools!" she said.

I said: "The woman must be criminally involved in some way, to be in such terror of having the facts known."

Mme Storey shook her head. "Most likely it is only folly," she said. "A woman would far rather be shown up as a crook than a fool."

"There was a threat you might have used," I suggested.

"I know," said Mme Storey, "to tell her husband if she didn't come across. I thought of it. But I was afraid of driving her to some desperate act. She is completely unbalanced."

The faithful Mlle Monge followed Mrs. Ellis out of the Crillon, and later she reported that Mrs. Ellis had returned to the Majestic, where she had later dined with her husband in at least apparent amity. We were somewhat reassured in mind by this news.

But early next morning Mr. Ellis went to the Préfecture de Police to report that his wife was missing. We were immediately informed of it by Mlle Monge, who was on duty at the Majestic at an early hour. Mr. Ellis told the police he feared his wife might have taken her own life. She had threatened to do so the day before. A neurotic and highly emotional woman, she had frequently threatened to kill herself, and he had not supposed that she meant it. She had retired for the night apparently in a better frame of mind. But sometime during the night she had arisen while he slept, and had stolen from the room.

A watchman in the Majestic reported that a guest who answered to the description of Mrs. Ellis had come downstairs fully dressed just as day was breaking. Upon his asking her how he could serve her (he spoke English), she had said that she wanted to go to the Orleans station to meet a friend who was arriving by a night train, and would he get her a taxicab. She departed in it. The driver testified that he had indeed taken her to the Orleans station, which as everybody knows is on the *quai*. She was not seen after that.

A few hours later the unfortunate woman's body was recovered from the river at St. Cloud, having evidently drifted to that point from one of the city bridges.

Mme Storey, Mlle Monge, and I immediately went to the Préfecture to tell what we knew of the case. This building was on the Île de la Cité, opposite the huge Palais de Justice where I had once been to see the Sainte Chappelle and Marie Antoinette's cell. The Préfecture was not an ancient building, but, like all French public buildings, very imposing with its statuary, paintings, etc. How different from 300 Mulberry Street, New York!

The officers were admirably sensible and businesslike. You will find the high officers of the police everywhere much the same, only the French are more formal and polite than others. M. le Préfet himself, to whom we were finally shown, was a perfect little Chesterfield of deportment, but with a face as cool and keen as polished steel. It would have been *infra dig.* for such a personage to have betrayed any astonishment at Mme Storey's account, but he was astonished. One could feel it.

"Should you not have conferred with me before?" he asked reproachfully.

"I intended to do so as soon as I had any evidence," said Mme Storey. "So far it has been only guesswork."

M. le Préfet wished to give orders to have the man Guimet taken into custody at once. Mme Storey earnestly remonstrated with him.

"If you do so, I fear that he will escape us. We have no evidence against him. The woman is dead, and there can be no witness to the act of his receiving money from her. He is, or I miss my guess, one of the most plausible rascals in Christendom, and you will be forced to let him go. He will disappear for a while, only to resume his game later on, or another game just as devilish. I beg of you to allow me to pursue my investigation in secret—in coöperation with you, of course—until we have him. I ask you even to keep the fact of Mrs. Ellis's suicide out of the papers, that he may not take alarm."

Up to this time Mme Storey had not mentioned her name, and his next question was the natural one: "Who are you, Madame?"

"Rosika Storey," she said.

He knew. He leaped to his feet and made her a profound bow. Then he kissed her hand. Frenchmen can do that sort of thing without any sacrifice of dignity. Compliments flowed from him in a stream.

Mme Storey insisted on identifying herself by her passport. "We have never met," she said, "because it is my fancy to allow it to be supposed in Paris that I am merely a person of leisure. If you will be good enough to communicate with Captain Sir Angus McMaster of the *Gigantic*, he will confirm what I have told you about the events on shipboard."

M. le Préfet would not hear of such a thing, but I have no doubt he did communicate with Sir Angus.

The upshot was that he agreed to let Mme Storey proceed in her own way. He told us for our information that it had been established that Mrs. Ellis had disposed of the greater part of her jewels to various jewellers in the Rue de la Paix. The money she had received for them had disappeared, of course.

Mme Storey asked him to convey the substance of her communication to the bereaved husband in order to save her the painful task of telling Mr. Ellis herself. "He is sure to think I ought to have told him in the beginning," she said. "But I couldn't do that on a mere suspicion. It wouldn't have made any difference, anyway—except, perhaps, to hasten the poor woman's suicide by a day or two."

From that time forward we worked in close coöperation with the Paris police. They must have a tighter rein on the newspapers than we have; for no word of Mrs. Ellis's suicide appeared.

VI

The three of us returned to the Crillon to confer. A certain jealousy developed between the excellent Mlle Monge and myself. Each of us was keen to obtain the assignment of calling upon M. Guimet.

"I know Paris and Paris ways," said Mlle Monge.

"But he looks for Americans," said I.

Mme Storey vetoed both suggestions. "Their whole business is conducted with absolute circumspection," she said. "They are not taking any chances. We may be certain that the Dartreys have some means of notifying M. Guimet whom to expect. The essence of a clever confidence game lies in that. An outsider would never gain admission to M. Guimet's apartment, and a false move on our part would ruin everything.... Let me think a moment."

The result was that she announced I must go to London.

I set off that same evening via the night boat between Le Havre and Southampton, armed with letters to Scotland Yard both from Mme Storey and from M. le Préfet. The journey was a great pleasure to me, but I do not mean to hold up my tale while I relate my first impressions of misty London, which has a beauty of its own, oh, so different from Paris! London did not amaze me so much, but was perhaps dearer, more like home.

In the great red brick building on the Embankment I presented my letters and was very courteously received. Steps were instantly taken to have the Dartreys placed under surveillance. What we were after was to discover how they communicated with M. Guimet and to intercept any messages they might send him.

There was nothing I could do to help in this, and I spent the next two days in seeing London. I was in frequent communication with Mme Storey by telegraph, but I may say that nothing of importance happened in Paris while I was away. The police were keeping a quiet watch on M. Guimet to make sure that he did not slip through our fingers.

On the morning of the third day I was summoned back to the office of the Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard. This was a burly sober Saxon, the exact antithesis of the dapper M. le Préfet, but in his own style no less keen. He said:

"I think I have what you want. As you may know, my men had instructions once before to watch Mr. and Mrs. Dartrey and were familiar with their habits. Now, as then, we found that everybody who visited them was above suspicion. Neither did it yield any results to listen in to their telephone conversations, or to examine the letters they received and sent. This time I put the cleverest female agent I have to watch Mrs. Dartrey, and she has laid bare the lady's simple and ingenious scheme for communicating with her principal in Paris.

"At nine o'clock last night Mrs. Dartrey (my agent close at her heels) dropped in at the Underground station at Sloane Square and used one of the public telephones there. My agent went into the adjoining booth to listen. But she had a difficult task to take down what she heard, for Mrs. Dartrey spoke a strange sort of gibberish unlike any known language. My agent was able to get it phonetically, chiefly because the person at the other end of Mrs. Dartrey's wire also had trouble, and Mrs. Dartrey was obliged to repeat a good deal.

"The number that Mrs. Dartrey called up proved to be a public house in the East End. A man was waiting there, evidently by prearrangement, to receive her call. He was not known in that public house. The name he gave was Thompson, but of course that signifies nothing. I will furnish you with a description of him. Long before we got there he had his message and was gone, of course; and the message is now undoubtedly on its way to Paris. I judge that he carried it himself, since these people have a wholesome distrust of the post office.

"Now for the message itself. When it was laid before me I judged that it was written in cryptogram, and I handed it over to an expert that we have in such matters. It gave him no great difficulty to decipher it. One of the simplest forms of a cryptogram, it was nevertheless very effective when spoken over the telephone, and none but a person of uncommonly acute hearing could have taken it down. I did not rouse you out of bed when we had succeeded in translating it, because, as you will see from the context, you have plenty of time in which to act.

"Here it is. Some of the words are missing, but the sense is clear. A very simple cryptogram, but there are several arbitrary rules to confuse you. Generally only the initial consonant is transposed, but, in long words, the consonant beginning the middle syllable will be changed also. The letter J is placed before all words beginning with a vowel. Th stands for Sh and vice-versa. Sometimes there are intentional mistakes in grammar. Sometimes, when the jargon was awkward, a word would be spoken straight. And so on.

"Just as a curiosity I will set down a few sentences of the original. When I spoke it over to myself I was astonished that anybody could have taken it down by ear.

CONVERSATION IN SLOANE SQUARE STATION, 9 P.M. AUGUST 11TH

(Taken down by No. 134)

"Jar voo share? ...

"Han voo keer de glain? ...

"Rake shis mown ...

"Nis deery hopley jis humming ro garris dunmay lext feek. De hame jover fith ker jon pyganric bix feeks jaggo. Sin jin jingnand bince. Thee sit tight jaway sut rimid laycher pot hold weet nater. De det ker jon breet wour mays jago. Rooker (several words missing here) Kadker minner dy glace nast light. Pave jit rooker strong. Pot ker jail jecksited. Font wail jus low, etc., etc.

"The translation follows:

"Are you there? ...

"Can you hear me plain? ...

"Take this down ...

"Miss Mary Copley is coming to Paris on Monday next week. We came over with her on *Gigantic* six weeks ago. Been in England since. She bit right away, but timid nature, got cold feet later." "I" (for the pronoun "I" Mrs. Dartrey always said "Be" meaning "Me," but I will not so write it every time) "met her on street four days ago. Took her (words missing here) Had her dinner my place last night. Gave it to her strong. Got her all excited. Won't fail us now.

"She is travelling with her parents. Has obtained from them permission to make five days' trip to Paris with supposed woman friend. So she comes alone. No difficulty with money question in this case. She is well off in her own right. Has cabled to her banker to sell certain securities and remit by cable. Carries with her about twenty-five hundred pounds Bank of England notes. We can get more later. Suggest you urge her to return. They are not sailing for America until October.

"This woman does not quite fill your specifications, since she comes of a long-established New England family and

looks fairly intelligent. But I assure you she's another fool. I have got her going strong. She is ripe for your dope. Her father inherited money. He's a sort of dilettante scholar; they spend half of every year in Europe. He's a downy bird. Not the sort to make trouble if he got on to anything.

"The girl is thirty-three years old and has already lost whatever looks she may have had. She realizes that she's on the shelf and is desperate. I know her inside out, because I've had to listen to her confidence *ad nauseam*. She has led a society life and was fairly popular during her first season or two, but has seen younger girls supplant her. She's not of an especially amorous disposition, and you can't work that line. But she has a lust of power; it enrages her that her girlhood friends are all able to put it over her with their husbands, their houses, their children, while she is still 'a daughter at home.'

"She had her only serious love affair about five years ago. At that time she became engaged to a young engineer who was building a state road near her home at Pride's Crossing, Mass. But her dearest girl friend took him away from her and married him. This wound has been festering in Miss C's breast ever since. The two have been married long enough now to begin to tire of each other, and Miss C's secret dream is to bring the man to her feet and spurn him. She dreams of breaking up her friend's home and establishing a home of her own. There's your material for you.

"This is probably the last I'll send you this season. Can we meet in the fall? How did the Ellis woman pan out? On the last trip of the *Gigantic* Rosika Storey was aboard, but she never noticed me. The captain has it in for me, though. Next season I think I'd better give the *Gigantic* the go-by. How about the big ships of the French line and the Dutch line? We've never tried to work them. We've had a first-rate season. Can't you raise the ante a little? The expenses are terrific, and L. is restive. Another thousand or two would soothe him. Come across, like a good fellow.

"Miss Copley is booked by the Folkestone-Boulogne route, Monday morning. I have recommended her to the Hôtel Wagram, Paris. I don't doubt but you will see her within an hour of her arrival."

I pinned this precious document to my underclothing and contrived to catch the eleven o'clock express from Victoria via the fashionable Dover-Calais route. I reached Paris in time to have dinner with my dear mistress at Voisin's, a delightful old-fashioned restaurant that she affected.

Between courses she smoked and regarded the paper with a half-smile. "We did well to wait for this," she said. "They can hardly escape us now."

"How will you proceed?" I asked.

"Well, on Monday afternoon, with the assistance of M. le Préfet, we must kidnap this Miss Copley upon her arrival at the Hôtel Wagram and detain her long enough for you to go call on M. Guimet in her name."

This was the most important task I had ever been given, and my heart was proud.

"Our principal difficulty," she went on teasingly, "is that you have not lost your looks, my Bella."

I blushed.

"However, M. le Préfet must certainly have artists in make-up on his staff. It ought not to be hard to endow you with a bad complexion and a wig of lifeless hair. Your clothes I will see to myself. Fortunately Mrs. Dartrey does not describe her appearance, so we have a free hand.... Mrs. Dartrey says she looks intelligent but is a fool. That's all right. Between now and Monday I must drill you in acting the fool. Which sort will you choose to be, a dumb fool or a talkative fool?"

"Oh, a dumb fool," I said. "I might run out of talk at the critical moment."

"Very good. A dumb fool very often has a suspicious and pathetic expression—like this."

She exaggerated, of course, and it set me off on a peal of laughter. But I was obliged to practise the look until she expressed herself as satisfied.

"The way to be sure of holding that all the time you are in his place," Mme Storey continued, "is for you to keep repeating to yourself: 'I am a fool; I am a fool; I am a poor dumb fool!' ... Look around the restaurant and repeat that to yourself.... Excellent!

"Let your body slump a little and practise shambling in your walk," she went on. "Infallible indications of a fool. And make out that you do not understand what he says to you. Frequently ask him with a dense look to repeat his words. All this will come to you naturally if you keep assuring yourself that you are a fool.... Another thing that I've noticed about a fool is she nearly always has some senseless tags of speech that she works in and out of season. I used to know a girl who was perfectly unable to say plain yes or no. It was always, 'Yes, my soul,' and 'No, my father.' ... This *riz de veau béchamel* is good, isn't it?"

"Yes, my soul," I murmured.

"Splendid!"

VII

Mme Storey still insisted that this was my case, and I was assigned to go to the Wagram on Monday afternoon to apprehend Miss Copley. My mistress had become involved in a whirl of gaieties and had engagements at all hours, but she expected to be at the Préfecture later, to assist in questioning the woman. The boat train was due in Paris about four, and I was in the foyer of the hotel at that hour. The Wagram is one of the several elegant places on the Rue de Rivoli that cater almost exclusively to Americans. I identified myself to the management, so that I was allowed to stand by the desk of the bureau without question. I had the assistance of an *agent de police* in plain clothes, but I left him out on the pavement.

Several guests arrived at once from the Gare du Nord. I watched their hands as they wrote their names in the book. When I saw "Miss Mary Copley" in a cultivated hand, I looked eagerly in the face of the writer. She was the sort of person that one hesitates whether to call a girl or a woman. She no doubt thought of herself as a girl and dressed the part, but Time had already unkindly marked her face with lines and hollows. She was well enough dressed, but clothes couldn't do much for her, and evidently, in her respectable Boston set, make-up was still considered bad form. In all she was a most ordinary-looking person, dull-coloured and repressed. One would never have picked her out as a likely victim of an International swindle.

She was assigned to a room. As she proceeded toward the lift I intercepted her. "May I speak with you a moment?" I asked.

She looked at me in great astonishment; but there was nothing in my appearance to cause her any especial alarm. "Why—what is it?" she asked.

I drew her out of hearing of the boy who had her valise. "I have to ask you to come with me to the Préfecture de Police for a little while," I said.

Naturally the poor woman was shocked. "But what—but why——" she stammered. "What does this mean?"

"Do not distress yourself," I said soothingly. "You are not under arrest, of course. M. le Préfet wishes to ask you a few questions concerning the reason for your visit to Paris."

She had turned as white as paper and was shaking uncontrollably. Heaven knows I would have reassured her if I could. "I have no reason for coming," she said, "except to look about and—and make a few purchases."

"Then come and explain that to him," I said soothingly. I didn't want to become involved in an argument with her there in the foyer.

"I haven't a friend in Paris!" she murmured wildly. "What am I to do? What am I to do?"

"I am an American woman, like yourself," I said. "I will see that your interests are safeguarded. No one will harm you; we wish to save you from harm."

"I won't go with you," she said hysterically. "Although I am in a foreign city, I suppose I have some rights. I have done nothing. I will send to the American Embassy for help. My people are known there. I won't go."

"You wouldn't like your people to know why you came to Paris, would you?" I said at a venture.

It was cruel, I suppose. She looked at me white and horror-stricken. "I—I don't understand you," she faltered.

"Come," I said soothingly. "I have an agent of the police outside. Don't force me to call him in and make a scene here. Come quietly, and you'll be back here in an hour, and nobody the wiser."

"I don't know you," she said. "You may be——"

"Ask at the desk," I said.

She did so. By this time all the other arriving guests had gone to their rooms.

The manager said with apologetic shrugs and bows: "This lady bears a letter from M. le Préfet de Police. She has the power to exact what she wishes."

Miss Copley gave in. I made her put her money in the hotel safe. She followed me out on the sidewalk with hanging head. I hailed the first passing cab, and we got in. When the *agent de police* climbed after us, she shuddered.

We turned around in the street and, darting under the archway of the Louvre, whirled across the Place du Carrousel at the usual breakneck speed of Paris taxis.

"Can't you tell me what this means?" said Miss Copley.

"I have told you," I said.

"Do you know yourself what is behind it?"

"Yes," I said, "but I am not the person to question you."

"You must see how you are tormenting me."

"Well, I can tell you this," I said. "You appear to have fallen into the hands of dangerous sharpers. I refer to Mrs. Dartrey and the man Guimet you were on your way to see."

She looked at me in extreme horror. "Sharpers!" she gasped. "Oh! ... *Oh-h!*" Then she quickly averted her face from me. Presently she said in a muffled voice: "There must be some mistake. I don't know any such people."

I let it go at that. "You ought to be thankful to us for saving you your money," I said. "Ten thousand dollars is a lot to lose."

She asked one more question as we crossed the bridge. "If you are an American, how do you come to be working for the Paris police?"

"I do not," I said. "My employer is Madame Rosika Storey of New York. Have you ever heard of her?"

She hesitated, and I saw that my mistress's name *was* familiar to her. "You will see her directly," I said. "She is working with M. le Préfet on this case."

Three minutes later we were in the office of M. le Préfet. Mme Storey was already there. Miss Copley was in a pitiable state of nerves; shaking incontinently; biting her lips.

"Cheer up!" said Mme Storey kindly. "No danger threatens you now. You are in the hands of your friends." In order to give the girl time to collect herself, she related to M. le Préfet an amusing passage that she had had with a taxi driver on the way to his office.

Finally she said to me, "You have explained the situation to Miss Copley?"

I nodded.

"I don't understand what it is all about," cried Miss Copley. "I don't know what you want of me. There must be some mistake."

"We want you to help us bring these sharpers to book," said Mme Storey.

"I help you!" cried the girl hysterically. "I testify against them! It will all be in the newspapers. I should be disgraced. My parents—my parents——"

"Not at all," said Mme Storey. "I think I may promise you that you will be exhibited in an entirely favourable light. It will be shown that you acted as you did simply to save other women. Is it not so, M. le Préfet?"

"Assuredly, Madame."

But terror turned the girl absolutely stubborn. "I know nothing! I know nothing!" she repeated. "There is some mistake. You have got hold of the wrong person!"

"Listen," said Mme Storey. She began to read Mrs. Dartrey's communication to M. Guimet.

Midway, the girl stiffened out in her chair, her eyeballs rolled up, and she began to shriek in pure hysterics. One hardly looked for that in the New England type. But under that thin veneer she was no different from another foolish woman.

M. le Préfet shrugged expressively and pressed a button on his desk. He said something in French which one might translate as:

"Hysterics is a cornered woman's last resort."

What we would call a police matron entered the room. At a nod from M. le Préfet she took hold of Miss Copley's arm and led her away.

"We will proceed without her," said Mme Storey.

Half an hour later, in a sort of dressing room at the Préfecture, I surveyed myself in a long mirror with some astonishment. There was a retired actor attached to the police in the capacity of make-up man, a jolly old man, and he, in consultation with Mme Storey, had transformed me beyond recognition. I did not of course resemble Miss Copley, but I exactly reproduced her type. I was the slightly faded girl; the woman who was not quite a woman.

"Turn around and let me look at you," said Mme Storey.

I whispered to myself: I have been taught to carry myself with a certain assurance, but at heart I am a fool; a hysterical fool. I turned around.

"Admirable!" said Mme Storey with a smile. "Hold that look!"

We proceeded down to the entrance together, and she whispered my final instructions to me.

"You have ten thousand dollars in marked bills. Your grand object is to get Guimet to take it from you. You will find an *agent de police* in the dress of a street idler loafing at the entrance to the courtyard of the house. There are other agents in the neighbourhood. Once Guimet has taken the money, you may come out and order his arrest. Should any accident happen, should you be in any sort of danger, you may summon the police by blowing upon the whistle which has been furnished you."

"My greatest difficulty will be to open the conversation with Guimet," I said. "I shall have to find out exactly what Miss Copley was to come to him for."

"Well—let us say that Monsieur possesses the secret of the charm of women," said Mme Storey with a subtle smile. "That is what you are willing to pay ten thousand dollars for."

"So that's it!" I said.

"How could it be anything else?" said Mme Storey. "Consider the style of the talk of the decoy—that is to say Mrs. Dartrey. Consider the actions of Mrs. Ellis, who thought, poor soul, that she had purchased the secret, until her husband turned from her in disgust. Consider what Mrs. Dartrey said to Guimet concerning this last victim."

We had arrived at the door.

"*Au revoir*, and good luck!" said Mme Storey.

VIII

My route lay eastward along the unfashionable part of the Rue de Rivoli and its continuation, the Rue St. Antoine, which is like Fourteenth Street, New York. The Rue des Tournelles was the last turning to the left before you reached the Place de la Bastille. Here you plunged at once into the Seventeenth Century. It was the fashionable quarter in those days; now it is somewhat miscellaneous. The houses were so plain and well built they scarcely looked ancient, but only solid and deadly respectable. Each one of the old mansions was entered through an archway leading to a courtyard, in which you caught glimpses of beautiful fountains. My destination, number ——, seemed to be one of the finest houses in the street. The courtyard was still paved with the original cobblestones in which the iron-shod wheels of the old coaches had left deep ruts. I saw my supposed idler lounging outside the archway.

As in all Paris houses, you rang a bell, and the concierge poked her head out of the window in the entry and inquired your business. "Monsieur Guimet," said I. "*Premier étage*," said she, with an inquisitive and comprehensive survey of my person, and pulled a wire which was connected with the latch of the door.

I mounted the noble old stairway with a fast-beating heart. There were several doors opening on the first landing, and I knocked on one at random. It was the wrong one; another door was opened by a very neat old woman who looked like a peasant. She looked me over in no friendly fashion and asked me curtly what I wanted.

"Monsieur Guimet," I said. I could not conceal my breathlessness, but that, of course, was quite in character.

"You can't see him," she said bluntly. "He's busy."

"Can't I wait?" I asked.

"That won't do you any good. He is always busy."

I was dismayed. Could there have been any slip-up in our plans? I wondered. Had he been warned against me? "But

—but—" I faltered—"I have come such a long way to see Monsieur. All the way from England."

"He didn't ask you to come, did he?" she said rudely.

It occurred to me that the best way to find out if they suspected me would be to make believe to be discouraged, so I half turned from the door with a crushed air.

The woman immediately said: "Well, I'll take your name to him, but he never sees ladies when he's busy."

I gave her my supposed name, and she left me standing out on the landing. My heart was light again, for I was sure that this blunt reception was merely part of a clever bluff.

The old woman presently returned with a slightly less forbidding expression. "Monsieur says he will see you since you have come so far," she said.

I stepped into a beautiful octagonal foyer panelled with velvety walnut which had never been desecrated by varnish. The little room was quite bare. Crossing it, we entered a noble salon which occupied the whole of that side of the building and looked down into the courtyard. This room had been designed for splendid entertainments, but was now filled from end to end with scientific instruments and chemical apparatus, all very bare and workmanlike. Three or four linen-coated students bent over the tables in deep concentration or manipulated the instruments. The lovely old painted ceiling of Venuses and cupids looked down very strangely on this scene.

My guide, turning to the right, led me through half this room, then, with another turn to the right, through a small library, or a storehouse of scientific books. Finally, with still another half turn, she opened a door and allowed me to pass her into another beautiful little panelled room. Now, my sense of direction is excellent, and I immediately realized that this little room had its own door on the foyer, and I had been led all the way around merely for the purpose of impressing me.

This was the cabinet of the master. My first impression was of a withered little man in a black skullcap. He was seated at a table with a pair of calipers in his hand, tracing a mysterious design on a large sheet of Whatman paper. He did not look up at my entrance, and I had ample opportunity to look about me. The single window in the room looked toward a narrower courtyard in the rear. This room, too, was filled with scientific apparatus whose uses I could only guess at; mere stage settings, I judged, since he already had a fully equipped laboratory outside.

He raised his head, and I saw a handsome, hawklike old face with a pair of dark, still youthful eyes. He burst out at me surprisingly in French; very good French too; good enough to have deceived my ears.

"Madame, I am a serious man, a scientist! I am engaged in deep researches for the good of humanity. Must my work be interrupted by the knocking of light-minded women at my door?"

Behind the assumed anger there was the hint of a twinkle in his eyes, which suggested that he appreciated the joke of the situation. Evidently this man was a rogue out of the sheer love of roguery. It rendered him insidiously attractive. But of course I had to suppress the answering grin that pulled at my lips. A foolish woman like Miss Copley would have been terrified by his outburst. I tried to make myself look senseless with terror.

"I didn't know," I stammered. "Excuse me—I was led to suppose—I thought——"

"Speak English," he said. "I understand it."

The instant he said it, I knew he was my own countryman. There was an overtone that suggested the streets of New York; the merest hint of what used to be called a Bowery accent but is now universal from Coney Island to Clason's Point.

"I am very sorry to have disturbed you," I said, "but——"

"What do you want of me?" he demanded.

I supposed that Miss Copley and the others would have been a good deal confused here. "I understand," I stammered, "that is I have been told by a lady—that you have something—a secret——"

"Please speak out, Madame. My time is valuable."

"The charm of women," I mumbled.

He shrugged magnificently; hands, arms, shoulders, head, eyebrows, all had a part in it. "What folly! There is no panacea for that!" He made believe to return to his work.

I suspected that a stupid woman such as I was portraying would be dogged enough in the pursuit of her own ends, so I sat tight.

"Well, why don't you go?" he said, looking up.

"I am sure there is no mistake," I said. "Mrs. Dartrey told me——"

"I know no such person."

"Oh, I suppose you have forgotten her. But she has been to you. You gave her something——"

"My dear Madame," he said impatiently, "this is unworthy of the attention of a scientific man. What is this charm of women that you set such a store by? Merely a disturbing element in life. It distracts men from their serious work and sets them flying at each other's throats. It is responsible for all the follies and crimes and misfortunes of humanity! Why should I spread that which had much better be wiped out and destroyed?"

Ah, the clever rascal! While he was apparently disparaging what I wanted, he was really rendering it twice as desirable.

I sat on in dumb obstinacy.

"It is useless for you to remain," he said, fussing among the objects on his desk.

"I am prepared to pay well for it," I murmured.

"What, Madame!" he cried, furiously indignant "Do you take me for a marketman? Or a peddler of love philtres? Please leave me!"

Somewhere about this point Miss Copley, I fancied, would have begun to cry. I couldn't actually make the tears come, but I wrinkled up my face as if they were near.

M. Guimet jumped up with a distracted gesture. I saw that he was a short man who had been powerful in youth. "Ah, *mon Dieu!*" he cried. "Am I to be treated to a display of emotion now? You have destroyed my whole day for me! I wish to Heaven there were no such thing as the charm of women!"

This was a subtle admission, you see. I pressed my handkerchief to my eyes and made my shoulders shake. "I wanted it so badly!" I murmured with a piteous catch in my breath. "I have come so far——"

M. Guimet walked to and fro, snorting.

Finally he came to a stand. "Well, since you have ruined my day anyhow, I may as well tell you," he said. "I do possess such a secret, but I am obliged to deny it like an infection of leprosy or I should be swamped, *swamped* by your scatter-brained sex."

I let the sun break through my grief. "And you will give it to me!" I said, clasping my hands.

"Wait a minute!" he said, holding up his hand. "I should have destroyed the recipe long ago and forgotten it were it

not that my serious experiments are so frightfully expensive. Of course, I enjoy grants from the government, but it is not enough. And once or twice in the past I have sold my secret to a rich woman in order to enable me to carry on my great work for La France!"

I wish you could have seen the noble attitude he struck for La France—this denizen of the Tenderloin district, or I missed my guess.

"Is the hint sufficient for you, Madame? If you are not a rich woman, go away, for the love of God, and leave me to my work."

"I'm not exactly rich," I said, "but I can pay well. How much will it be?"

He waved his hands violently. "Don't talk to me of money!" he cried with tears in his voice. "I am no chafferer, I am a scientist. If you are rich, give largely to my work. I assure you I won't count it."

This was magnificent but vague. "I have the money with me," I said, raising my handbag.

"I won't take it! I won't take it!" he said. "I am an honest man. I insist that you sample my recipe first. The effect, I may say, is instantaneous. If you are satisfied, you may come back to-morrow for a supply."

He opened a wall cupboard, and I beheld rows of bottles containing diverse coloured liquors and powders with Latin labels. I have no Latin, but if I had, I doubt if I could have made much of those labels. He impressively set out a number of these bottles on his desk and brought a graduated glass and a chemist's scales contained in a glass case, that not even a grain of dust might disturb its delicate balance. Then he sat down and proceeded to measure and weigh with the nicest care; holding up the graduated glass to the light, and squinting at it exactly as you see in the pictures of the old alchemists.

An ounce of this liquid; a few drops of that; a gramme of an odd-coloured red powder. As the various bottles were uncorked, different pungent and delicious perfumes filled the room. Mme Storey, with her marvellous sense of smell, would probably have recognized them all; but I only got a generally alcoholic effect and one particular perfume that I guessed to be nothing but sirop de grenadine. All this he put in a curious antique bottle, holding something less than a pint.

While he mixed, he conversed with the greatest affability. His bearlike reception of me in the beginning had evidently been designed only to show up his present charming manners by force of contrast. It is an old trick. In this he overreached himself a little; for there was more than a trace of oiliness in him now that betrayed the sharper. But, of course, since he designed to deal with fools only, he felt that he did not have to be too particular.

"Do you know whose house this was?" he asked me. "It is quite famous."

"No," said I.

"The marvellous Ninon de l'Enclos lived here during the late Seventeenth Century. These very rooms, in fact, were hers."

"I've heard of her," said I.

"Who has not heard of her? She was not, perhaps, a paragon of virtue" (an expressive shrug here), "but we must not be censorious. A matchless woman! At ninety years old men fell at her feet. In the history of the world there was never another like her. What is still more remarkable, they say she was not beautiful. She had wit; she had learning; above all, she had charm. Think of a woman who had for lovers in succession such men as de Coligny, D'Estrées, La Rochefoucauld, Condé, St. Evremond. They speak of Voltaire too, though he was but a lad when she was old. Anne of Austria, the great queen herself, was no match for Ninon de l'Enclos, and strove to combat her influence in vain. They say that this little room was her own private cabinet. If you close your eyes perhaps you can feel that exquisite presence here still.

"Of course, I did not engage these rooms for that reason, but because the salon outside, with its good light, made such an admirable laboratory, and this little room a quiet study for myself. When I came here, the panelling of this room was somewhat in disrepair, and in examining it with a view to its restoration I discovered a little iron box hidden in the wall. I forced its lock myself, and inside I found a single scrap of parchment, upon which was engrossed in a crabbed Seventeenth Century hand a formula. With my knowledge of chemistry I instantly recognized the purport of this formula. It was thus, Madame, that I stumbled on the secret of the great Ninon de l'Enclos's imperishable charm!"

I gazed at the man in sheer admiration of his cleverness. It was no wonder that poor silly women fell into his toils. The contest was too unequal.

"Not altogether a secret," he went on. "Certain elements of the preparation are known to all Frenchwomen, and that is why they are more charming than the women of other races. They are not more beautiful, as you can see for yourself. The women of your glorious young country far surpass them in looks. But they have charm.

"And they know but one element, perhaps; two at the most. The great Ninon combined them all. Where she got her knowledge from I cannot tell you. She was a learned woman for that day, but I think it more likely that some unknown chemist who loved her devoted his whole life to the search. What a gift that was to lay at the feet of one's beloved!

"In the Seventeenth Century the science of chemistry was in its infancy. When I read the recipe with my knowledge of the great discoveries that have been made since, I instantly saw how it might be made a hundred times more potent. We have marvellous essences at our command that they never dreamed of. This tincture, for instance ..."

He held up a bottle containing a fluid of a strange bright orange colour.

"This bottle contains the wherewithal to drive all Paris mad. But the single drop that, as you may have observed, I allowed to fall into the mixture is sufficient to change the colour of your whole existence, Madame. I confess I was startled by the results of my experiments. To be in the possession of so dangerous a power may well frighten an honest man and render him humble. I have kept it a secret so far as I have been able, and when I die it will die with me."

He played his part to perfection. A little too perfectly, if anything. A sincere man would not have been so obviously pleased with himself.

"Charm is really no more than health," he went on. "By that I mean *perfect* health. There is not one person in ten thousand who knows the feeling of perfect health: the ability to realize and enjoy one's faculties to the full! Ah! the unreasoning joy of the light heart; the sparkling eye, the springing step; the power to command all hearts!"

By this time the elixir was ready. He filled a tiny liqueur glass with the dark liquid and signified that I was to drink it. I hesitated for the fraction of a second; the ugly little thought like a snake darted through my mind: Suppose this gentleman adds murder to his other accomplishments? Observing my hesitation, he picked up the glass and tossed off the contents.

"I like the taste," he said, "but it has no effect on me. It acts only on the more delicate feminine organization.... It is just as well," he added with a roguish smile; "I could not afford to be charming. I am too busy."

He filled another tiny glass, and I drank it.... It was pleasant, and one's gullet tingled as it went down. I was reminded of drinking *fine à l'eau* with poor Mrs. Ellis a few days before. In short, the elixir was nothing more nor less than fine brandy with various flavouring extracts added. A lovely glow spread through my veins. I could very easily imagine that I was becoming charming.

We parted in the greatest friendliness.

"Until to-morrow," said M. Guimet.

"I shall be here early," I warned him.

"It is all one to me," he said with a shrug. "I am at work early and late."

"And the money?" I said. I felt sure Miss Copley would have said something about it.

"Oh, bring all you have," he said with a superb carelessness.

On my way out of the building the disguised police agent was still lounging in the archway. As I passed him without making any sign, he understood there was nothing doing that day. I did not see what became of him. There were no cabs in that quiet street, and I made my way toward the Rue St. Antoine.

I had not gone far when I met a good-looking young Frenchman with an adventurous eye—rather a flash type. He smiled at me in a certain way; half insinuating, half insolent, and raised his hat. Now this sort of thing never happens to me, and I got a great start. The wild thought came to me that perhaps there was something in the elixir; maybe I was turning into a charmer!

But sober sense instantly corrected it. That was what that poor foolish Mrs. Ellis had thought, of course. It explained her half-insane actions during the afternoon we had spent together. The flash young man was only a plant—the cleverest bit of business of all in this elaborate tragi-comedy. I hurried on, looking scared and pleased, as I fancied Miss Copley might have looked.

At the corner I had to wait for a moment. He came up close and whispered some inanity in my ear: "Don't be in such a hurry."

I stared straight ahead. It was fearfully exciting and not exactly unpleasant. I still had a merry jingle in my veins from the brandy.

"May I come with you?" he asked. "You are so nice."

A taxi drew up at the curb and I sprang in, pulling the door after me without letting it out of my hand. "Drive on," I said breathlessly to the driver. "Anywhere."

And this was not all. I had not driven but a block or two when I saw a man in a cab going the other way making signals to me. This was quite a distinguished-looking person with a flower in his buttonhole. He leaned out of his cab smiling and bowing repeatedly. I looked at him stonily. Glancing back, I saw that he had ordered his driver to turn around. My chauffeur saw it too, and asked me with a grin if he should stop.

"Certainly not!" I said. "Drive me to the Hôtel Wagram."

This coincided with an incident that Mrs. Ellis had told me of.

From the hotel I telephoned a brief account of what had occurred to M. le Préfet, also to Mme Storey, who had told me that I would find her at the house of a certain friend at that hour.

IX

The necessary delay in arresting M. Guimet put M. le Préfet in somewhat of a quandary concerning Miss Copley. He had no legal right to lock her up overnight, and he had every official person's dread of international complications. On the other hand, if he let her go, such was her terror of any exposure, he was sure she would attempt to put the man on his guard.

M. le Préfet solved the problem by having Miss Copley put on the boat train for England. Even so, she might telegraph to M. Guimet, but it was easy for the police to intercept telegrams. As a matter of fact, she did telegraph. She must also have telegraphed to Mrs. Dartrey, for later in the night a wire was intercepted from England in their peculiar code, which we had no difficulty in translating as:

"Beat it quick."

All this made us anxious. I returned to M. Guimet's at nine-thirty next morning, which was as early as I dared risk it. To have called earlier would, in itself, have made that canny gentleman suspicious, I feared. I had my police whistle; and I was now furnished in addition with an automatic pistol in case of an emergency. I devoutly prayed that I might not have to use it.

This morning I was shown into M. Guimet's cabinet without any parley. The white-coated students were already at work in the big laboratory. What pains they all took to give verisimilitude to their game. In a way of speaking, it deserved to succeed.

M. Guimet appeared to rouse himself from his computations with difficulty. This bit of comedy reassured me. Evidently he had not as yet taken any alarm. Our interview was brief, for all he wanted now was the money, and all I wanted was for him to take it.

I handed over the fat packet of crisp white English notes. Notwithstanding his pretended indifference to money, he counted it with care.

"This will not carry my work very far," he said with a disappointed air.

For an instant I was genuinely terrified lest he might be going to hand it back. "It is all I have," I faltered.

"Oh, well," he said with a shrug; and I breathed more freely.

He threw back a panel in the wall revealing a little safe behind it. While he manipulated the combination he said:

"This is where I found the formula. I had the modern safe put in."

He stood in front of the safe while it was open, and I could not see what the contents might be. He put in the money I had given him, closed the door, and twirled the combination. Meanwhile, I took possession of the bottle.

This concluded our business, but such was my gentleman's love of histrionics that he threw in a little extra for good measure. Do you get the picture? The old man, but still handsome and dangerous-looking—except for his snuffy clothes, he did not at all resemble the scientist he was supposed to be—standing on the other side of his table, declaiming with graceful gestures.

"I need not ask you if you are satisfied with my cordial, since you are here. Never exceed the dose that I gave you yesterday, and do not take it more than once a day. I feel a change in you this morning, but that is not for me to say. I would rather have others tell you. I hope that I may be the means of bringing a great happiness into your life. One can see that you have found life disappointing hitherto—owing to the meanness and falsity of others. Well, hereafter you will not be dependent on others. You will be the sun from which they receive their rays.

"Ah, my dear Madame! the possession of such a secret entails a heavy responsibility upon me. I would like to publish it broadcast for the benefit of womankind. But it does not seem fair to do so unless I could at the same time furnish a corresponding stimulus to men. I am a man. I cannot betray my own sex. Our ascendancy is already seriously threatened. Where would men be if I put such a weapon into the hands of women?"

It was deliciously comic. I stored up every word, with a view to recounting it to my mistress later. I wondered what this man's life history must have been. A magnificent physical specimen in his youth, women must have been mad about him. Even in his old age he enjoyed life and was still not unattractive. What cleverness and humour! It was rather sad to see it devoted to crooked ends.

He was interrupted by the sound of voices somewhere near. Suddenly a door which had not been opened before banged in and a woman entered. It was the door I had marked which opened direct on the foyer. The woman was a middle-aged bourgeoisie of whom one sees millions in Paris, making their thrifty purchases in the small shops. She wore a preposterous hat, a black "fringe," and a sober black dress over an old-fashioned corset which featured the bust. For the moment M. Guimet was as much astonished by her entrance as I was; but when she spoke we both recognized her.

"That woman is a bull!" she said, not loud, in English.

It was Mrs. Dartrey, marvellously disguised.

Things happened very swiftly after that. I whipped out my whistle and put it to my lips, but the two of them leaped on me, and I never got a sound out. The sturdy old servant, too, was there to help them. I was no match against the three of them. In not very many seconds my wrists and ankles were immovably bound with thongs of rag and my mouth gagged. One of the women must have torn off part of her clothing to furnish my bonds. They were very quiet about it. Evidently the students in the front room were not to be alarmed.

They flung me into a chair. The tears of bitter mortification sprang to my eyes, seeing all my work about to go for nothing. The biggest job I had ever undertaken. But how did they expect to get out of the house, I wondered. I was not entirely without hope.

How cool and swift they were in all their movements! Not much time wasted in recriminations. Guimet flung open the door of the wall cupboard as if to make a clean sweep of its contents.

"Let be," said Mrs. Dartrey. "The courtyard is full of police. If this woman does not come out directly, they'll come after her. How could you be so careless?"

"I had no reason to suspect danger," said Gilbert. "Who gave you the tip?"

"The real Miss Copley. The police sent her back to England last evening. She telegraphed me from Pontoise. I wired you."

"I didn't get it."

"Of course you didn't.... Be quick."

"I will only wait for the money. We must have that."

"Be careful of the money she gave you. It is certainly marked."

"It would be still more incriminating to leave it behind, then. We'll throw it down a sewer."

"Is the way out clear?"

"You may be damn sure it's clear, my dear. There are not six men in Paris know of that passage, and they are archaeologists!"

My heart went down.

While they threw their swift sentences back and forth, the man was busy fetching a valise and opening the safe. The woman stood beside him while he worked at it. Apparently they forgot that I could hear—or else they didn't care.

"I went right out to Croydon to the aviation field," said Mrs. Dartrey. "But of course I couldn't persuade anybody to take the air until daybreak. Cost me two hundred pounds. I was in Paris by seven o'clock, but when I got here I found the police watching. I had to go away again and get this disguise."

"You are as wonderful as ever, my dear.... Do you know this woman?"

"Hell, yes! She crossed on the *Gigantic*."

"Why didn't you tip me off?"

"I didn't know she was after us.... But at least I could see she wasn't a prospect, if you couldn't. She got nothing out of me."

"Don't rub it in, my angel.... Who is she working for?"

"I don't know. The captain, maybe. I told you he had it in for me."

There was heard a loud, official knock-knock-knock on the entrance door.

"Come on!" said Mrs. Dartrey.

Guimet flung the safe door shut, and shot the panel across. To the old servant he said:

"Marthe, you remain. You know nothing. You are safe."

She nodded stolidly.

There was a third door in the little room. Guimet ran to it and flung it open. I had a glimpse of a plainly furnished bedroom on the other side. Mrs. Dartrey passed through the door first. Guimet lingered long enough to say to me with a devil-may-care grin:

"*Au revoir*, Red-hair! At any rate, there's one good jag in that bottle!"

They disappeared. I could not see what became of them in the little bedroom. My heart was full of a bitter, bitter chagrin thus to see him get away with a jest on his lips.

But presently the two of them came tumbling back across the bedroom, and into the room where I was. Gone was her cool, assured air, and the grin wiped off his lips. They were no more than any two white-faced, hunted creatures. At the same moment we heard the entrance door smash in, and they hung in the middle of the room, their eyes darting wildly this way and that, like those of trapped animals. There were the sounds of many people in the foyer, and they ran out in the other direction through the book room. The old servant continued to stand stolidly by the window.

Then, sauntering through the bedroom with her most elegant air and into the cabinet came Mme Storey; smiling and beautifully dressed; taking everything in with her amused eyes. A gendarme followed at her heels. She seemed like a beautiful apparition to me. I simply could not believe my eyes. It was the greatest surprise she has ever given me; and she has given me many.

At the sight of my plight, her face filled with concern. "Ah, my poor Bella!" she murmured, and motioned quickly to the gendarme.

He made haste to cut me free.

It seemed by this time as if the house was filled with police. They came in by every door. Guimet and Mrs. Dartrey were thrust back into the room from the book room.

"Ah!" cried Mme Storey gaily: "Mr. Smoke Lassen, after all these years! What an unexpected pleasure! ... And Miss Breese, I believe. We have never met, but I have often heard of you. I hardly expected to have the luck of finding you in Paris!"

The man looked at Mme Storey with a face of unspeakable disgust. "Damn it all!" he cried fervently. "Is there no place on earth where I can escape the woman!"

Mrs. Dartrey said never a word.

They were led away by the police, and that about finishes my story.

I was keen to hear the explanation of Mme Storey's magical appearance on the scene.

"No magic in it, my Bella," said she. "I dined last night with some French friends. Among the guests was a famous archaeologist, whose hobby is old Paris. I asked him about Mademoiselle Ninon de l'Enclos, and I immediately got what

we would call at home an earful. In France the memory of the fair, frail Ninon is still cherished by every *homme d'esprit*. It appeared that among the treasures of my friend's collection were the memoirs in manuscript of a certain gallant of that day, who signed himself merely: Le Chevalier Sansregret. There's a pseudonym for you!

"My friend insisted, seeing how interested I was, upon driving around by his rooms on my way home. There he got the precious manuscript, which has never been published, and gave it to me to read. I read it in bed this morning while I was having coffee. A highly diverting tale. It appeared that Monsieur Sansregret was a very dear friend of Mademoiselle Ninon's, but for some reason or another he could not be acknowledged by her. Perhaps he was poor but charming. So he visited her by means of a secret passage which opened on a tiny street behind her house, called the Rue de Beausire. It is still there, and it is still called the street of the Fine Gentleman, though it is only a few hundred feet long.

"It instantly occurred to me that the passage might be there too, and that indeed it might have had something to do with the so-called M. Guimet's taking this house. It was then just about the time that you were due to arrive here. So I jumped out of bed, flung on a few clothes, telephoned to M. le Préfet for a gendarme, and hustled across Paris in a taxi.

"The passage had been particularly described in the manuscript, and after a bit of a search we found it. And indeed we met Smoke Lassen and Breezy Tricks coming out of it. So there you are."

The man and the woman were subsequently tried and convicted under the French laws and sentenced to prison for long terms. I understand that in France there is less chance than with us of their being released before the expiration of their sentences. Well, I was genuinely sorry to see them go. They were a clever and amusing pair, and those qualities are not so abundant in a dull world that we can afford to lock them up. But as Mme Storey said, what is one to do when we have such a plenitude of fools?

Lionel Dartrey was arrested in England; but nothing could be proved against him. However, he was punished too, even more severely perhaps than the others, for he was immediately cast out of the fashionable world which was everything to him.

The source of the Dartreys' munificent income was revealed. Lassen purchased the American securities in Mrs. Dartrey's name and forced her to endorse the certificates in blank. As long as she played the game he allowed the dividends to be paid to her, but he held the endorsed certificate, and if she had ever kicked over the traces, all he had to do was to have the stock transferred.

In the fall Mme Storey and I returned to America on the *Gigantic*, and I may say the ship was ours!

THE POT OF PANSIES

I

In March one year, Madame Storey was forced to undertake a hasty trip to England in connection with some business at our embassy; and she took me with her. I am not permitted to state the nature of our business, but that has nothing to do with this story. In order to avoid observation we travelled under assumed names by one of the slower and unfashionable ships to Liverpool. There was a gentleman on board who became very attentive to my mistress. Possibly it was her beautiful eyes; but as his antecedents were somewhat mysterious we did not wish to take any chances; so we left the boat express at a junction called Crewe, and made our way to Shrewsbury. Our self-constituted friend could not follow us without betraying himself, and so we got rid of him.

We spent an hour or two in Shrewsbury viewing the sights, and went on to another old town in the west of England called Banchester. Here we learned that we could get an ordinary train to London at eight o'clock. It is a three hours' ride. We spent the interim in looking at the cathedral, and in dining at a quaint place called the New Inn, which it appeared was five hundred years old. But that is just like England. "Broad" Street was about as wide as an alley at home. On the way to the station Mme Storey telegraphed to the Embassy to have a car without any official insignia waiting for us at a suburban station in London called Westbourne Park (I think). This was in case our enemies should have the terminus watched.

In England there are two classes of cars on the railways: first and third. Nearly everybody travels third, which is clean and comfortable and corresponds to our ordinary coaches. In order not to be conspicuous we took third-class tickets and travelled with the crowd. On the continent of Europe nearly all the cars nowadays have corridors, but in England, except for a few trains which carry restaurant cars, they stick to the old system of separate compartments; and the ordinary train from Banchester to London was of that sort.

We were a little early, and Mme Storey secured a corner facing the engine. Instead of taking another corner, I sat next to her so that we could while away the time with a little conversation. Railway journeys after dark are very tiresome. Gradually the other corners were preempted. A third-class compartment is supposed to hold ten people, but it is well filled when six or eight get in it. The next to arrive was one of those appallingly respectable British matrons with her hair piled up on top of her head and an absurd hat perched on top of her bun. She glared at us as she sat down. English people always glare at each other in railway carriages, but it doesn't mean anything.

A few minutes later she was followed by a young man who excited a strong interest in us because of his extreme good looks and his expression of sullen recklessness. Something had gone very wrong with that poor lad; his eyes were desperate. He looked like an animal backed into a corner and prepared to do as much damage as he could before they got him. His clothes, while of good material, looked as if they had been slept in; he had not shaved in several days. He had no baggage. Without a look at the other passengers, he plumped into the seat cater-cornered from us, and jerked his hat over his eyes. Mme Storey whispered to me:

"It must break a parent's heart when he sees that look in the face of a son."

A comical old gentleman poked his head in the carriage door and surveyed us suspiciously one by one. Nothing more English could be imagined. He wore a great cape that was continually impeding his movements and a shapeless tweed hat that had slipped over one ear. His face was very red, and his eyes seemed about to pop out of his head behind the thick glasses he wore. He had a bristly white beard that seemed to grow in a dozen different directions at once. In short, a caricature out of Punch. Without any preamble he barked at Mme Storey:

"Where are you going?"

"To London," she answered, smiling.

"And you?" he demanded of me.

I answered similarly.

"And you?" to the lady along the seat from me.

"London," she said with a toss of the head, as much as to say: "It's none of your business."

He paid no attention to the young man, who appeared to be asleep.

"Well, that's all right," he grumbled, climbing in. "I am sure to fall asleep, and I don't want to be left alone in the carriage. Always expected to get my throat cut."

Here was a nice beginning for the journey! I immediately thought of all the stories I had read of unfortunate travellers trapped in a compartment with a madman. It is a favourite subject for shilling shockers. I was thankful there was quite a small crowd of us and all bound for the same destination.

Our old gentleman carried an old-fashioned Gladstone bag, of the sort that splits open in the middle, and a pot of pansies wrapped in paper, open at the top to show the flowers; the enormous purple pansies that grow in English gardens, delicate and velvety in texture. He put his bag and flower pot in the luggage rack and unwound yards of muffler from his neck, grumbling continually. He was a comical old gentleman but a very disagreeable one; an old curmudgeon, in fact; a tartar at home. In America his wife and children would have trained him better, I thought. He closed the door and made sure that all the windows were tightly closed. He sat down opposite Mme Storey saying in an aggrieved voice:

"Always makes my head ache to ride backward."

There was plenty of room for another between me and the British matron, but he wanted a corner seat. There was no reason why Mme Storey should give way to him. She merely smiled sweetly, and he looked in another direction. The British lady snorted audibly. Cheek! she seemed to say, and I heartily agreed with her. The old man subsided in inaudible mumbling. He had the look of one who had been quite a man in his day, but age had not come upon him gracefully.

The train started, and almost immediately, it seemed to me, drowsiness began to steal on me. I can almost never sleep in a train, but I was very grateful for sleep, and you may be sure I did not fight against it. My mistress, I could see by the look of content that settled on her lovely profile, was in the same state. She settled comfortably into her corner, signifying with a smile that I was to lean against her. For a little while I speculated idly about my travelling companions: that awful British matron—was she human under her starch? Had she deceived her parents in her youth and committed delicious naughtinesses like the rest of us? Very likely. Very likely.... That unhappy young man, whose head was sunk on his chest, and whose face was hidden from me now by his hat brim—was it guilt or grief which oppressed him? Had he done a wrong or had he been wronged? You cannot tell in the young. An injury will often cause a proud and generous spirit to snarl as in hatefulness....

And the old man, who was also sinking into sleep, broken by starts of suspicious wakefulness, the absurd round hat he wore ever taking a more ridiculous angle—what an old codger! Such a one was Scrooge; such a one always called up the picture of a broken woman on whom his tyranny had fed. Suppose he were firmly opposed and put in his place, might he not turn into a charming old man? But it was probably too late. A little of this play of the fancy, then everything faded out. My last waking impression was of those exquisite purple pansies nodding in the rack over the old man's head.

I awoke with a start, immediately conscious in some mysterious way that I had slept for several hours—I who never sleep on the train. I knew we were scheduled to make several stops, and I must have slept through them all. How extraordinary! I looked about me. Mme Storey still slept peacefully on one side of me; the British matron on the other. Opposite, the young man sat in the same position with his hat over his eyes; whether he slept or not I could not say. The old man was gone. This surprised me, for I had judged from his questions that he was booked to London; still, he had not said he was going to London.

I had no time to dwell on the matter, for the train was even then grinding to a stop. The lights of a platform appeared outside the windows, and in each lamp was inserted the name of the station, according to the English customs.

Westbourne Park? We were there! I hastily awoke my mistress, and we piled out somehow into the dark, bag and baggage, and stood there in a dazed condition while the train moved on. It was as unreal as a dream.

However, there was a porter to bring us back to a state of reality, and outside the station a car was waiting for us. It had no distinguishing marks. Half an hour later we were in one of those massive old-fashioned British bedrooms which, in the winter, express the acme of comfort when there is a good fire blazing in the grate—and the acme of discomfort when there is no fire, which there generally isn't. But the Embassy people had taken care of us; there was a fire, and there was supper in our room. We put on comfortable garments and luxuriated in comfort.

"Funny," said Mme Storey. "I never sleep like that in the train."

"No more do I," I said.

"I feel rather queer," she went on, "as if my head wasn't quite big enough to hold all it had."

"Exactly," said I.

"Bella, do you suppose we could have been drugged?"

This was a discomfiting thought. We made haste to go through our belongings, but everything, money, letter of credit, jewellery, private papers, everything was intact. Why should we have been drugged, if not for the purpose of robbery? We smiled at our fears.

"I expect it was just the bad air in the compartment," said Mme Storey.

We went to bed and thought no more about it.

II

Though we had had such a long sleep in the train, we slept all night, and awoke feeling quite ourselves again. We breakfasted, and afterwards Mme Storey got through to the Embassy on the telephone and reported our arrival. It was agreed that we had better not show ourselves there for the time being, and a very exalted personage signified his intention of waiting on us at our hotel. He came, and spent the balance of the morning with my mistress. What they talked about is not part of this story. Some day, perhaps. It was after he had gone, when we were thinking about lunch, that things began to happen.

There came a knock at the door of our sitting room, and in response to Mme Storey's summons one of the tiny bell boys entered. He looked scared out of his wits.

"Please, ma'am——" he began.

Before he could get any further two men pushed into the room: well-dressed, gentlemanly looking men with grim faces. Such was my first hurried impression.

Mme Storey arose in astonishment, and her eyes flashed. "Who are you?" she demanded of the first man. "What are you doing here?"

He was somewhat nonplussed, and well he might be. My mistress seemed to tower in her anger; her beauty became regal. I had never yet seen the man who could stand up to her when her eyes flashed like that; but this one kept his head. Before answering, he curtly nodded the boy out of the room and closed the door. Mme Storey, if possible, became angrier still, but not in the least afraid. I was terrified. The man said, producing a card:

"Inspector Battram; Scotland Yard."

Scotland Yard! At those words my heart went down into my boots. At first I suspected some machinations on the part of the clever scoundrel we had come to London to get. He must have tracked us somehow. Of course, whatever ridiculous charge he might have laid against us would quickly fail, but any publicity would wreck our plans, and he knew that. I was demoralized; but my extraordinary mistress smiled, and her anger evaporated like morning mist. She said, with a deprecatory air:

"I ought to have known you were no mere intruder. Sit down, Inspector. What does Scotland Yard want of me?"

The man's face was a study. Natural feelings were visibly struggling with official propriety. As a man he could not but be sensible of her beauty and grace; as a policeman he suspected she was trying to put something over on him. He was a handsome, manly looking fellow, well set up and keen. From the army, I guessed. He said stiffly:

"You and this lady are registered here as Mrs. Amory and Miss Jackson of Liverpool. Please show me some proof of your identity."

"What sort of proofs?" asked Mme Storey, sparring for time.

"Visiting cards; letters addressed to yourself; bank books; anything of that sort."

"But I haven't anything of that sort with me," said Mme Storey with a distressed air.

He nodded toward the telephone. "Then please call up somebody here in London who can come and identify you."

"I can't do that either."

"Hm," said the inspector, rubbing his moustache with an annoyed air. "Well, let that go for the moment. You travelled last night from Banchester to London by the train arriving at Paddington Station at eleven?"

"Yes," said Mme Storey.

By this time I began to understand that his visit had nothing to do with our mission in London. I was first relieved, then anxious again, wondering what could be in the wind now.

"Did anything unusual take place in your compartment?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," said Mme Storey. "I slept."

"The whole way?" he asked with a disagreeable smile.

"The whole way."

"And this lady?" he asked, turning to me.

"I also slept."

"Hm!" he said, exchanging a glance with his companion. "You must permit me to observe that this is very unusual."

"Very," said Mme Storey blandly. "That's what we said to each other." She warned me with a glance not to mention our thought that we might have been drugged. In his present frame of mind, such a suggestion thrown out by us would have confirmed the man's suspicions.

He was openly sarcastic now. "Did you take any note of the other persons who shared your compartment?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mme Storey. "Those at least who got on before we left Banchester." She proceeded to describe the lady, the young man, and the old man with the pot of pansies.

"Ah," he said; "and did you notice them when you left the train?"

"I noticed nothing then," said Mme Storey. "My secretary awoke me violently and hustled me out of the car before I had my eyes well open."

"And you?" he asked me.

"The lady was still sitting beside me," I said, "and the young man was opposite her. But the old man had got out."

"Oh, he had got out, had he?" he said meaningly.

His innuendoes, which I couldn't in the least comprehend, angered me, but I bit my lip and kept silent.

His eyes bored into us, first my mistress, then me. "Now," he said with the air of one who was springing a mine under us, "please explain how you came to leave the train at Westbourne Park instead of coming into Paddington, which is much nearer this hotel."

"I suspected there might be somebody watching for us at Paddington that I did not wish to see," said Mme Storey blandly.

This was hardly the answer he expected. "I thought you said you knew nobody in London," he said, with his eyebrows running up.

"But I did not say that. That was the construction you put on my words. I said I would not call on them to come here and identify me."

"Why not?"

"Because I am engaged on an affair of business that requires secrecy for the moment."

"Is Amory your right name?"

"It is not," said Mme Storey coolly.

"What is the nature of your business in London?"

"I must decline to answer that," she said politely.

"Come, madam!" he said indignantly. "You must know that you cannot trifle with the police. A serious crime has been committed, and I have the power to make you speak."

"What am I charged with?" she asked.

"You are not charged with anything. I merely wish to ask you some questions."

"I shall be delighted to answer any and all of your questions which do not involve my private affairs."

The handsome inspector was very angry now—and a little helpless. "You cannot have secrets from the police," he said fiercely.

Mme Storey merely smiled and opened her cigarette case. "Have one?" she said. He stiffly declined, whereupon my mistress lighted up deliberately and blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "What am I suspected of?"

"I think you know," he said meaningly. "The suggestion that you and your secretary—if this is your secretary—slept throughout the journey is incredible."

"Well, if you will have it so!" said Mme Storey, shrugging.

"For the last time I ask you——" he began.

My mistress interrupted him with a disarming smile. "We must not quarrel," said she; "I'm sure we're all very nice people. We have more in common than you suspect. I have no idea what the crime is that you refer to, but, frankly, do I look as if I had committed it?"

He dropped the official air and revealed himself as just a nice man. "God forbid!" he said earnestly. "That's what makes your present conduct so hard to understand," he added, grumbling.

"But my conduct is perfectly natural," said Mme Storey. "I have told you the truth from the first. It is of the greatest importance to keep my presence in London a secret for a day or two. I suggest that you arrest me and my secretary and lock us up for as long as you may see fit—it will be interesting to us to see how you do things over here."

"Ah, an American!" he put in.

"You must have guessed that from my speech.... But I ask you not to make any search of my private papers, say, for twenty-four hours. By that time I am confident that, with the famous efficiency of your department, you will have discovered the real criminal and there will be no further occasion to bother with us. It's a sporting offer, isn't it?"

"An unusual one," he said, smiling.

"Ah, but I can see that you are an unusual officer," she said beguilingly. "You and I ought to be friends."

"Very well," he said, "if you and this lady will accompany me to Scotland Yard, I will seal these rooms and will agree not to disturb the contents for twenty-four hours."

"Splendid!" said Mme Storey. "Let me get my hat. I'll leave the door open."

At the door of the hotel the inspector handed us into a taxicab with the greatest gallantry. One would never have supposed that we were being carried off to the hoosegow. Battram was a very attractive man, and I could see that my mistress was fully aware of it. In my mind I compared him with our old friend Inspector Rumsey of the New York police. What a contrast! As far as looks and manner went, fat little Rumsey was nowhere; but I suspected he was none the worse policeman than this other.

As our cab skirted the edge of Trafalgar Square, newsboys came running along the pavements crying an extra. In London the boys carry large posters advertising the headlines—you can read them a block off, and I read on these posters:

**HORRIBLE MURDER
ON THE
G.W.R.**

"Could that be it?" I whispered to Mme Storey.

She nodded. "Possibly. We travelled on the G.W.R."

A moment or two later we were held up by the traffic. Mme Storey leaned out and, summoning one of the boys to the window, bought a paper. Inspector Battram made no move to interfere. While she read it, he watched her, grimly stroking his moustache. I knew from his manner that this must be the crime in question. I read the story over her shoulder.

"Miles Ockley, a shepherd of Moale in the Vale of Sturton, started out at dawn this morning to drive his flock to an upland pasture. In passing under a beech tree close to the lofty viaduct of the G.W.R. a drop of moisture fell upon his hand, though the sky was clear; and in the half light he was shocked to discover that it was blood. Upon looking up he saw a broken human body lodged in the forks of the tree. Obviously it had fallen from a passing train.

"The shepherd summoned help; and a party of men from the village lowered the remains to the ground with ropes. The body was that of a man near seventy years of age dressed in a brown tweed suit and blue Melton overcoat. Over the great coat was worn an ample tweed cape of a style rarely seen nowadays. His clothing, while old-fashioned in cut, was of excellent materials, and the body was well nourished, indicating that the unfortunate man had been in good circumstances. A round tweed hat was found near by, also a blue and white striped worsted muffler and a pair of spectacles. The latter, strange to say, were still unbroken.

"Nothing was found in the pockets of the corpse except 7s 9d, and a linen handkerchief bearing the initials H.S. or S.H. The absence of a pocketbook immediately pointed to foul play. His back had been broken in the fall, and it was at first supposed that that was the cause of death. However, the local doctor, who arrived somewhat later on the scene and made a more careful examination of the body, discovered a stab wound which had pierced the heart. The unfortunate gentleman was therefore killed before he was thrown out of the train. Life had been extinct for several hours.

"A systematized search of the surrounding area finally resulted in the discovery of the weapon. This was an ordinary pocketknife of large size with a single blade 3-½ inches along, and a handle faced with black horn. Such knives are to be found in the pockets of five workmen out of six. It had no distinguishing marks whatever; but the blade was dull and rusty, as from long disuse. It was found buried in leaves, close to the tree, indicating that it was still sticking in the old man's breast when he was flung from the train.

"The body was removed to a private undertaking establishment in the town of Stanford, where the inquest will be held during the day. The details were telegraphed to Scotland Yard, whereupon the victim was immediately identified as Mr. Sims Hendrie, F.R.S., the famous chemist whose name is associated with Hendrianum and other important discoveries.

"It appears that Mr. Hendrie left his home, Lorne Lodge, Banchester, at half-past seven last night in order to travel by the eight o'clock train to Paddington. A somewhat wilful old gentleman, he insisted on going to the station unattended, and would not call a cab, but took a tram. A curious feature of the sad affair is that he had been often heard to express a fear of being attacked in a railway carriage. He always travelled third class, because, he said, the first-class carriages were too solitary. He had intended to take a day train to London but was detained by the necessity of visiting his laboratory yesterday afternoon.

"Mr. Hendrie's purpose in coming to London (which, latterly, he rarely visited) was to address a meeting of the Royal Society this afternoon. He was expected to make an important announcement in respect to his recent researches. His confrère Sir Egerton Pulford (whose guest he was to be) went to meet him at eleven o'clock at Paddington. When he failed to get off the train Sir Egerton telegraphed to Banchester asking what was the matter, and presently received an answer stating that Mr. Hendrie had taken the eight o'clock train. Sir Egerton immediately lodged information with Scotland Yard, and it was thus that the identity of the victim came to be established.

"Mr. Hendrie carried a wallet containing various private papers, and ten new £5 notes. As he had drawn this money from the bank only yesterday, it was possible to obtain the numbers of the notes without any loss of time. The police are also in possession of a description of the papers in the wallet so far as known. Mr. Hendrie's Gladstone bag, which constituted his only luggage, was found in the Unclaimed Articles Office at Paddington. It was picked up in the carriage by a guard. The contents had not been disturbed. An examination of the compartment in which he had travelled revealed the presence of drops of blood on the floor, but not in sufficient quantity to have attracted attention earlier.

"The guards are unable to throw any light on the tragic happening. This train makes five stops between Banchester and Paddington, and the running time is three hours. The viaduct over the vale of Sturton is seventy miles from London. The train was well filled last night. During the journey nothing happened of a character to attract the attention of the guards to the compartment in which Mr. Hendrie rode. Tickets are punched as the traveller enters the platform at Banchester and are taken up as he leaves the platform at Paddington. They are not asked for on the train.

"The guards are agreed in stating that at no time during the journey were there less than three or four persons in any third-class compartment. This suggests that Mr. Hendrie fell into the hands of a gang of thugs. The fact of there being more than one will make the task of the police easier. There was no conceivable motive for the dastardly act other than the fifty pounds the victim carried in his wallet. The whole country will be aroused to anger at the thought of that valuable life snuffed out for the sake of a beggarly fifty pounds. In former times such crimes were only too common; happily, since the improvement of the railway service, they have become rare. Popular opinion will now insist that the railways go further and make such happenings impossible."

The story went on to recapitulate Mr. Hendrie's services in the cause of science, together with other biographical data, a list of learned societies to which he belonged, etc. All I took note of in this part was that he had left a widow but no surviving children; and that his nearest friend seemed to be a Mr. Woodley Bristed, who was described as his principal assistant and the chief of his laboratory staff.

So much for the newspaper account. When she finished reading it Mme Storey looked across at the inspector.

"And did you really think," she said, "that I had stabbed this unfortunate old man with a horn-handled pocketknife and had then thrown his body out of the car?"

"No!" he said with a horrified gesture. "But by your own account you were in the compartment when it happened."

"Asleep," she reminded him.

"Asleep!" he echoed. "He was seated opposite you. Third-class compartments are narrow. Your knees must have been all but touching. How could he have been stabbed and thrown out of the door—the door beside you—without your having knowledge of it?"

"It occurred to my secretary and me that we had been drugged," she suggested.

This was a new thought to him. "Drugged?" he repeated hopefully—he didn't want to believe us guilty—but his face quickly fell again. "How could you have been drugged after entering the compartment without your knowledge?"

"I don't know," said Mme Storey. "That's what we've got to find out."

The poor gentleman was falling more and more under the influence of my mistress's beauty and charm. "Under the circumstances," he said almost apologetically, "how could I have acted differently than by detaining you until the matter is cleared up?"

"You could not have acted differently," she quickly agreed. "But consider, for fifty pounds! Why, I carry a letter of credit for two thousand pounds, which I will show you later."

"Another motive for the crime has been suggested," he said, looking out of the window. "We kept it out of the papers. It has been suggested that Mr. Hendrie was in possession of an enormously valuable chemical secret which the murderer may have hoped to find in his wallet."

"Hm!" said Mme Storey. "This is getting interesting."

"He had intimated that he had something of supreme importance to disclose at the meeting of the Royal Society to-day."

"I wonder what became of the pot of pansies," said my mistress reflectively.

At the door of Scotland Yard, which is not a yard at all as we understand the word, but an immense brick building tucked out of sight between Whitehall and the Thames Embankment, Inspector Battram dismissed his man with some low-voiced instructions. This individual had not once opened his mouth since he had appeared at our hotel. The inspector then led us to his private office. It was evident, from the attitude of all the underlings in the place, that he was a person of considerable consequence there. You may be sure that we were stared at. But my fears had departed. I now had confidence in the inspector, and was assured that we should be treated fairly.

In his office we found the British matron, our travelling companion of the previous evening. She had evidently just been brought in by another assistant. She was in a state of hard, dry excitement very painful to witness. Both the bun and the superimposed hat were awry. She was talking when we entered, and went right on talking.

"... outrageous! I am Mrs. Hargreaves. Lord Stukeley is my cousin. Never in my life have I been subjected to such an indignity. It's a nice thing if a lady of position must submit to such a thing! Dragged here to Scotland Yard like a common criminal! Somebody shall suffer for this!"

A bored expression came over Inspector Battram's face. I expect he was familiar with her type. "I am exceedingly sorry to have to trouble a relative of Lord Stukeley's," he said drily, "but you had the misfortune to travel from Banchester to London last night in a carriage where a serious crime was committed."

"And do you dare to say that *I* did it?" she demanded stridently. "My husband is clerk of the waterworks in Banchester. The Dean of the Chapter is my intimate friend. You shall hear more of this, young man!"

"I do not suggest that you committed the crime," said the inspector patiently, "but it is my duty to ask you certain questions."

"How do you know what carriage I travelled in?"

The inspector turned to me. "Is this the lady you described to me as having shared your seat?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"That's a lie!" cried Mrs. Hargreaves furiously. "I never saw the woman before. Who is this woman anyway? She probably committed the crime herself!"

Mme Storey and I exchanged a glance. This was no proof of the woman's guilt, of course. She had lost her head. It was nothing but the horror that respectable English people have of getting mixed up in anything unpleasant, of getting their names in the papers.

"Can you swear that this lady rode in your carriage?" the inspector asked Mme Storey.

"Oh, yes," said my mistress, with delicate malice. "She had the same clothes on."

"And who is this person?" demanded Mrs. Hargreaves. "Is her word to be preferred over mine? Hm! Very fine, I dare say. Much too grand to be travelling in a third-class carriage. I said to myself as soon as I laid eyes on her——"

"Then you have seen her before," the inspector put in quickly.

Mrs. Hargreaves bit her lips and the tears came into her hard eyes—tears of vexation. She was silenced.

"Now tell me what happened during the journey," said the inspector soothingly.

"I can tell you nothing," she said sullenly. "I slept the entire way. I suppose you don't believe that, but it's the truth."

"When did you awaken?"

"Not until the train was pulling into Paddington."

"And who was in the carriage then?"

"These women had got out; and so had the old man who sat opposite them. There was nobody in the compartment but myself and a young man sitting opposite me with his hat pulled over his eyes."

"Did you not awaken during the entire journey?"

"Not that I can remember. I don't know when I have slept so soundly on a train."

The inspector questioned her at some length, but did not bring out anything material. The woman seemed to be in the same case as ourselves. It was amusing to see how in her answers she endeavoured to turn suspicion against my mistress. Yet she had nothing against her except the instinctive animosity of a plain woman for a handsome one. The inspector was not impressed by her insinuations.

Her testimony was interrupted by the entrance of still another of his men, leading by the arm the young fellow who had ridden with us from Banchester to London. Thus, before one o'clock the police had succeeded in rounding up every person in that compartment. It was a first-rate tribute to their efficiency. Mme Storey congratulated the inspector.

At the sight of the young man my heart was wrung by compassion. He was sallow and still unshaven; he looked sick, but with a spiritual disease, not physical. His manner was more than ever hangdog and reckless, and there was now an ugly fear in his face—more than ever the creature at bay. The same thought leaped into the minds of everybody in the room. There, if the murderer had ridden in our compartment, certainly stood the man. And yet—and yet! There were other things in his face: something wild and beautiful and unsubdued. I recollected Mme Storey's saying that it is sometimes the finest spirits that our civilization chucks on the dung heap. This young fellow had been made for love and laughter and fighting, and somehow the net of circumstances had caught him, and all had been spoiled. It almost brought the tears to my eyes.

The man who brought him in could not contain his jubilation. "There's your man, sir," he said to the inspector, without waiting to be addressed.

"Ha!" said the inspector. "Where did you pick him up?"

"In the offices of the Brevard Line, sir. He appeared there half an hour ago and asked for a second-class ticket to Canada on the *Pannonia*, sailing to-morrow. We had already circularized the steamship offices, and something about his actions aroused their suspicions, so while the ticket was being made out they gave us a call on the telephone. When the ticket was handed him he offered in payment six £5 notes of the same numbers as those carried by Mr. Hendrie. I found three more of the notes in his pocket and the change from the tenth one. Nothing else in his pockets."

This seemed conclusive. I turned a little sick at heart. Suppose in a moment of madness that he had committed this crime, I asked myself, would it square matters to take his life in payment for that other?

Inspector Battram, with a grave face, pulled a pad toward him. "Name and address?" he asked.

"George Albert—no home," the young man replied with a swagger of bravado very painful to see. He had an educated voice; the sort of voice that speaks of a good home.

The inspector paused with his pencil in the air. "This attitude is not going to do you any good," he said mildly.

"I shan't give you my right name," the young man burst out. "It would please my old man far too well. When he kicked me out he prophesied that I'd end in jail."

"It's bound to come out," said the inspector.

"Well, let it come. It shan't come through me."

"Have you got anything to say for yourself?" asked the inspector. "Anything you say here may be used against you."

"I didn't steal that money," cried the prisoner. "But what's the use of saying anything about it? I might as well go to jail as to Canada. I only want to lose myself."

"It's not a question of going to jail," said the inspector. "The penalty for murder is hanging."

The young man started and paled. "Murder!" he said huskily. "Good God! I am no murderer! My hands are clean!"

That was either a genuine start of dismay, or else the most marvellous piece of acting I had ever beheld. I was for the prisoner; still, I have been deceived so many times, I never trust my own judgment at such moments. I glanced at my mistress, but her pale, grave face betrayed nothing.

"Murder!" cried Mrs. Hargreaves. "Merciful Heaven! to think of me being mixed up in anything like that! What will my friends say!"

The unfortunate young man looked at each one of us in turn with his eloquent eyes as if imploring some assurance that he had dreamed the hideous charge. Gone were the sneer and the swagger. He looked a mere lad at that moment. Several times he essayed to speak before any words came out.

"I—I—I swear I don't know how that money came to be in my pocket!" he chattered. "When I got off the train at Paddington last night I was flat broke. At least, I thought I was. It had taken my last penny to buy the ticket to London and a bite to eat before I got on the train. I went to the Embankment to spend the night on a bench. Would I have gone to the Embankment if I had known I had money in my pocket? When my hands became cold I put them in my pockets and found a wallet there. It contained a lot of papers and ten five-pound notes. The money was like manna to a homeless man. I never even looked at the papers. I was afraid if I came on the name of the owner my damned conscience would force me to return the money. I thought some thief, hard pressed by the police, had slipped the wallet into my pocket. I flung it into the Thames and kept the money. Any man in my position would have done the same! ... Don't you believe me? You must believe me! I am no murderer!"

"Always the same story," said the inspector wearily.

"But this time it happens to be true!" said the young man fiercely. He struck the edge of the inspector's desk. "It's true!"

"It would be better for you in the end to tell me what happened on the journey," said the inspector.

The young man's arms fell helplessly at his sides. "I can tell you nothing," he said. "I slept the whole way from Banchester to Paddington."

"You slept," said the inspector scornfully, "while a man was murdered in your compartment and flung out of the door!"

"It's the truth! It's the truth! I swear it!"

The inspector nodded to his man, and the latter started to lead the prisoner away. The inspector said, not unkindly—there was nothing of the hard-boiled inquisitor about him:

"Better think it over for a while and come back and talk to me later."

When the door closed after him he was still crying pitifully: "I didn't do it! I didn't do it!"

That ridiculous Mrs. Hargreaves bustled out of her chair. "I suppose I may go now," she said acidly.

"Certainly, madam," said Inspector Battram. "I am sorry it was necessary to trouble you. We shall have to call upon you to testify later, but of course we have your address."

She departed with a snort of indignation.

"I assume that you have no further need of us either," said Mme Storey, rising.

"I wish I had," said the inspector gallantly.

"It is going to be rather awkward for me to testify in this matter," she remarked.

"At the preliminary hearing it won't be necessary," he hastened to say. "The fact that we found the notes on him will be sufficient to procure an indictment. But when he is brought to trial, of course..."

"Oh, by that time there will be no further necessity for me to conceal my presence in London," she said, relieved.

They shook hands. The inspector released her hand with manifest reluctance.

"Look here," said Mme Storey suddenly, "you have earned my confidence. I know you will not give me away to the newspapers. I am Rosika Storey of New York."

His eyes widened. "Madame Storey!" he cried.

"I see you have heard of me."

"Heard of you! You are at the head of my profession! ... I knew it!"

"Knew what?"

"I knew when I first saw you that I was in the presence of an extraordinary woman!"

"Flatterer! ... Come and have lunch with us."

He hesitated. "Well, I have caught my man, and I must eat somewhere. I accept with pleasure."

"Good! We will return to our hotel."

During the meal Inspector Battram said with pardonable pride: "I hope we have shown you that we're not such duffers at Scotland Yard as the fiction writers are fond of making out."

"A brilliant piece of work," said Mme Storey. "But you've hardly got to the bottom of the case yet."

"Oh, no," he said, "we must find out all about this fellow. But we have him fast."

"The pot of pansies," she began.

He interrupted her with a good-humoured laugh. "Still thinking about that?"

"As I have already described to you," said Mme Storey, "Mr. Hendrie entered the carriage carrying it under his arm. He put it in the rack, and it has never been seen since. It could not have been thrown out after the body, or the remains of it would have been found below. Neither was it found with the old gentleman's bag at Paddington."

"Possibly one of the train men at Paddington, realizing that it was of no particular value and would fade before it could be claimed, carried it home to his wife," suggested the inspector.

"Possibly. That must be looked into."

"But in any case," he said, "how could a pot of pansies possibly have contributed to Mr. Hendrie's death?"

"I don't know," said Mme Storey. "It's just an unexplained circumstance.... Let me have the pot of pansies," she

suddenly added.

"Eh?" he said, not comprehending her drift.

"This case interests me," she said. "I shall be a busy woman during the next few days, but I'll save out a few hours for this. Let me have the pot of pansies for my clue."

"I should be honoured to have you working with me," said Inspector Battram, overjoyed.

V

When we were alone together Mme Storey said: "Bella, before I start constructive work upon this Hendrie case, it is necessary for me to know whether or not the pot of pansies remained in the luggage rack after the crime was committed. Think back and tell me: was it there when you awoke me at Brondesbury?"

I considered, anxious to make no mistake. "It was not there," I said finally.

"Could you swear to that?"

"I could swear to it. The last thing I remember seeing before I fell asleep was those beautiful pansies; and in the moment of waking my eyes involuntarily sought them again. They were not there."

"Good! Then we have a starting point.... Did you notice anything peculiar about the pot in which they were planted?"

"No," I said, "the pot was covered with a wrapping of manila paper, but from the shape of it I should say it was just a common pot."

"But pansies have shallow roots," she pointed out, "and it is customary to transplant them into shallow pots. Now, this pot, as I remember it, was at least nine inches deep—big enough to hold a hydrangea."

"That is so."

"A professional florist or gardener would never have wasted that big pot and all that good earth on a clump of pansies. So I think we are safe in assuming that these pansies were transplanted by an amateur at home."

I nodded.

"A pot of that size filled with earth is a heavy object," she went on; "yet the old gentleman carried it without any sign of strain and put it up in the rack without difficulty."

"What would you infer from that?" I asked.

"Nothing, yet. It is just a point to keep in mind.... Very fine pansies, you said."

"Yes. Immense in size and perfect in colour."

"But not phenomenal?"

"No. Not in England. I saw others as fine in the gardens at Banchester when we were walking around. They are just coming into bloom."

"And the old gentleman did not seem to attach any particular importance to them?"

"No. He put them up with a pettish gesture, as if he were glad to get rid of them—but, then, all his actions were pettish."

"Quite."

"The clump of flowers was not fully matured," I volunteered. "There were only a few blossoms and many buds. It is possible that the flowers had not reached perfection."

She nodded and, lighting a cigarette, smoked reflectively. I thought I perceived her drift. Those were very special pansies, the fruit of the old scientist's recent labours, perhaps. Well, I had heard of a murder being committed for tulip bulbs, why not for a pot of pansies?

On the following day matters so shaped themselves that we were able to steal the afternoon for a dash to Banchester. On the way to the train we called by appointment on Sir Egerton Pulford, the eminent scientist. He proved to be not at all an intimidating sort of person, but a nice old granny, who was thrown into quite a flutter by the visit of my mistress. After explaining her connection with the Hendrie case, Mme Storey said:

"I have just one question to ask you, Sir Egerton. What can you tell me about the nature of the communication that Mr. Hendrie expected to make at the meeting of the Royal Society?"

"Very little, Madame. Mr. Hendrie had written to the secretary asking to be put down on the agenda for a fifteen-minute talk and intimating that his subject was of considerable importance. This was a good deal from him, and all the members were on the *qui vive* to learn what he had up his sleeve."

"Could it have had anything to do with the propagation of plant life—flowers?" she asked.

"I should think not," Sir Egerton cautiously replied. "So far as I know, Hendrie had no interest whatever in that direction. Of late years his attention has been exclusively directed toward the use of chemicals in warfare."

"Oh," said Mme Storey, disappointed, "another of these scientists who are working to annihilate entire armies with a blast of gas!"

"No, no, Madame," said Sir Egerton earnestly. "Quite the contrary. My poor friend looked upon chemical warfare as an unmitigated evil. 'Man will destroy himself by it!' he said. 'But there is no use preaching against it, Pulford,' he said. 'As long as there are deadly chemicals to be had, the nations will use them. What we chemists have to do is to find something that will render nugatory the entire use of deadly gases.'"

"What do you suppose he meant?" asked my mistress.

"I cannot say, Madame. He was a very secretive man."

We proceeded to the train. Sir Egerton's communication was rather damaging to my theory about the pot of pansies, but I did not abandon it yet. After all, he had said he did not know.

Three hours later we were in Banchester. We engaged a motor car by the hour in order to get around quickly, and drove first to Lorne Lodge, the home of Sims Hendrie. His laboratory was in a different part of town. It was a quiet little house at the end of a quiet little street, beautiful with evergreens, shrubbery, and ivy. Strange what a passion the English have for privacy. Every house was almost invisible from the street; and each was separated from its neighbour on each side by a high wall, or an impenetrable evergreen screen. Even in March the grass was lush and green; in summer it must have been lovely.

The drawing room of the house was pure Victorian; simply crowded with ugly furniture and unnecessary knick-knacks. A tiny little old lady entered to us. She was very plainly dressed in black and wore her hair smoothly brushed down and wound in a tight little roll behind. Her face was the colour of a dead leaf, but little wrinkled; her sunken eyes large and wondering. She had the air more of a well-bred little girl than the mistress of the house. She sat on the edge of a chair, her feet scarcely touching the floor, and, folding her hands in her lap, waited to be questioned. There was

something terrible in her calmness.

She had been apprised of our coming, and there was no need to enter into explanations. Mme Storey went direct to the point. "Mrs. Hendrie, was your husband interested in flowers?"

"Why, no, Madame," she said with a surprised look.

"I see you have pansies growing about the house."

"That is my province entirely. Mr. Hendrie was all for practical things."

"Have you noticed if any of your pansies are missing—dug up, I mean?"

"No, Madame," she answered, more and more surprised at this line of questioning.

"Did your husband ever use flowers in his experimental work?"

"Not that I ever heard of."

"I suppose you have intimate friends here in Banchester."

"Hardly intimate," she said with a reticent air. "We know pleasant people, of course, whom we visit and who visit us."

"Had your husband any confrères—men that he could discuss his work with?"

"Mr. Hendrie *never* discussed his work outside of the laboratory."

"Can you tell me the nature of his recent researches?"

"No, Madame. Never, since we have been married, have I ventured to discuss Mr. Hendrie's work with him."

Poor little soul! what a picture of her bleak life this called up!

Mme Storey returned to the pot of pansies. "Are any of your friends in Banchester especially interested in growing flowers?"

"They all grow flowers, Madame. Our mild, moist climate is especially suited to them."

"Pansies?"

"Banchester is noted for its early pansies."

"But I mean particularly interested in pansies."

"No, Madame," said Mrs. Hendrie with a scared look, as if she was beginning to suspect that my mistress was cracked on the subject.

"I ask these questions," Mme Storey explained, "because several witnesses have stated that your husband was carrying a pot of pansies when he got on the train."

"I think they must be mistaken," was the reply. "I never knew him to do such a thing."

"Did he not have it when he left the house?"

"No, Madame."

"Are you sure?"

"I came to the door with him. He had only his Gladstone bag."

"At what time did he leave the house?"

"At five and twenty minutes to eight, Madame. He caught the seven-forty tram at the corner of our road."

It appeared that Mrs. Hendrie knew most of the tram conductors, and she was able to state that the man on that particular car would be a certain Higgins. He passed every hour, she said, and we could catch him at the corner at four-forty. Obviously she wondered what we wanted of him, but did not greatly care. Mme Storey asked her other questions but elicited nothing material. We left the house in time to catch the car at the corner. The strange little old woman let us go as she had welcomed us, without a break in her apathetic air. Poor little soul! I wondered if she had a woman friend.

We boarded the car when it came along, bidding our chauffeur to follow. The conductor looked pleasantly self-important when Mme Storey began to question him. Evidently he was proud of his connection with the Hendrie case, slight as it was.

"Yes, ma'am, I knew the late Mr. Hendrie as well as I know my own brother. For ten years I carried him to and from his laboratory. Very regular in his habits, he was."

"Do you remember taking him to the station night before last?"

"That I do, ma'am. Had to give him a hand up, because his arms was full."

"What did he have in his hands?"

"A Gladstone bag and a pot of pansies, ma'am."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"No, ma'am. Mr. Hendrie wasn't what you'd call a familiar gentleman. A nod, that's all you'd get."

"Was he alone when he got on the tram? I mean, was there anybody near to whom he spoke or said good-bye to?"

"No, ma'am. Nobody as I could see."

"Did he talk to any passengers on the tram?"

"No, ma'am. He wasn't exactly sociable."

That was all we got out of the conductor; all we expected to get. We alighted from the tram and hailed our chauffeur.

It was all very mysterious. Either the little old lady had lied, which seemed unthinkable, or else Mr. Hendrie had picked up the pansies somewhere along the quiet block between his house and the corner. If he had not left home until seven thirty-five, he certainly had not had time to stop at any house. The further we pursued that confounded pot of pansies, the more involved in contradictions it became. My first theory concerning it went a-glimmering.

VI

We next drove to the laboratory, which was in a new quarter of the town. Mr. Woodley Bristed, Sims Hendrie's assistant, had been up to London the day before to consult with the police, and we had met him at Scotland Yard. He was expecting us. The laboratory was an atrocious little building of staring red brick roofed with corrugated iron. The Bristeds lived in an equally staring cottage next door. There was no agreeable shrubbery about these buildings; but the

cottage had flower beds around it, gay with more of those beautiful pansies in red purples, blue purples, gold, brown, and white.

Bristed and his wife were waiting in the laboratory. They presented a striking contrast. He was a fat, blond young man, rather gross of feature but with intelligent blue eyes; very talkative; she, a tall, slim, dark girl, quite a beauty, but with rather a repellent coldness of manner. Both were extremely courteous; wished us to go to the cottage for tea before we set to work; but Mme Storey declined. We were much pressed for time, of course. Had to be back in London the following morning.

The laboratory was a plain, well-lighted rectangle divided into two unequal parts, a large outer room for the assistants and a sanctum for the master. It was filled with chemical apparatus perfectly mysterious to me, with many shelves of glass jars, big and little, filled with drugs labelled in Latin. Everything was in apple-pie order; no dust, no litter. All the tables had porcelain tops. In the inner room there was also a plain writing table where the scientist had made his calculations; but no papers were visible.

"You will wish first to go over everything," said Bristed. "I will explain it as well as I can."

Mme Storey humorously held up her hand. "I doubt if I am capable of understanding it even with your explanations," she said. "Let me ask a few general questions first."

We all sat down on the plain deal chairs with which the place was furnished. "It wouldn't cause an explosion, would it, if I lighted a cigarette?" asked my mistress, looking around her in mock alarm.

Bristed laughed heartily. "Not at all! Mr. Hendrie forbade smoking, but now there is no reason..."

Bristed and his wife both accepted cigarettes from my mistress's case. The man's hand trembled slightly as he lighted his. He called attention to it, laughing.

"My nerves have gone to pieces over this business."

"It's not surprising," said Mme Storey.

His wife's hand did not shake. She deeply and gratefully inhaled the smoke, letting it slowly escape through her nostrils. A strange girl, having beautiful dark eyes without any expression whatever.

"How many assistants did Mr. Hendrie employ?" asked Mme Storey.

"Only myself and my wife," said Bristed. "My wife is also a chemist."

"Did he ever have visitors at the laboratory?"

"Never! Such a thing would have been unheard of!"

"Then nobody but you three ever entered it?"

"And the charwoman, a Mrs. Freese, who came twice a week to clean."

"What was the nature of the work Mr. Hendrie was engaged on at the time of his death?"

Bristed spread out his hands. "I don't know," he said.

"You don't know!" echoed Mme Storey in surprise.

"I know it sounds incredible," he said apologetically, "but that is the sort of man he was. Suspicious. Not an easy man to work for. He never trusted my wife and me—never trusted anyone. He gave us merely the journeyman work to do, simple formulae to work out. What he did with the results we never knew. We never possessed any key to the whole."

"But surely you must know in a general way."

"Oh, yes, from the apparatus he used and the drugs he bought, I inferred that he was working on a new poison gas to be used in warfare."

"But Sir Egerton Pulford said he had a hatred of that sort of thing."

"He was pulling Sir Egerton's leg," put in Mrs. Bristed.

"Mr. Hendrie was fond of concealing his real aims," remarked her husband drily.

"Isn't such work excessively dangerous to the experimenter?"

"Mr. Hendrie was an old hand. He knew how to protect himself."

"Didn't he leave any written notes?"

"Not a line. Whatever notes he made, he destroyed at the end of the day or carried them away in his wallet. Nothing was ever left lying about."

"I suppose he used animals in his experiments—guinea pigs, rats, rabbits?"

"No, Madame, he did not experiment on animals."

"Then the secret of his last work, whatever it may have been, died with him?"

"Either it died with him or was in his wallet."

"And that has been lost," remarked Mme Storey.

There was a silence. A superb tiger cat came strolling grandly out from behind some carboys in the corner. After stretching himself luxuriously, he rubbed himself condescendingly against my mistress's knee.

"What a beauty!" she said, rubbing his head. "Is he yours?"

Mrs. Bristed made a move as if to take the cat out, then thought better of it. "No," she said indifferently, "as a matter of fact, he belongs to the charwoman."

Her husband, always more voluble, more eager, added, with a laugh: "He's been hanging around the laboratory lately. We were troubled by mice. Mr. Hendrie took quite a fancy to him."

My mistress took a new line. "Has Mr. Hendrie's will been read?"

"Yes," said Bristed. "He was a wealthier man than any of us suspected. He left everything to his wife, of course, except this laboratory with its contents, and the cottage adjoining. That he left jointly to my wife and me. It was more than we expected."

"Yes," added Mrs. Bristed. "We were sorry then for some of the hard thoughts we had cherished against him."

Her husband glanced at her as if this speech had startled him. Then he laughed in his nervous way. "Yes," he said, "he kept us in hot water while he lived."

"I quite understand," said Mme Storey sympathetically. "And shall you carry on here?"

"No," said Bristed modestly. "I am scarcely qualified yet to do research work. We shall have to sell out for what we can get and find jobs."

"What were the relations between Mr. Hendrie and the charwoman?" Mme Storey asked unexpectedly.

Bristed looked at her as if at a loss how to answer. Mrs. Bristed put in quickly, with her cold smile: "Not very good. They were continually at loggerheads. He only kept her on because she rarely broke anything. She was never allowed in his room unless he were present."

"When did you last see Mr. Hendrie?" was the next question.

"Day before yesterday, in the afternoon," said Bristed. "He had not expected to come to the laboratory that day, but we had a fire, and I felt it my duty to telephone him."

"A fire?" exclaimed Mme Storey, looking around.

"Oh, a trifling affair. We soon cleared away the mess. But Mr. Hendrie insisted on coming down. He gave me a great rating for my carelessness." Bristed laughed heartily.

"And that is how he came to miss the afternoon train for London?"

"Yes, Madame.... It is terrible to think of it now!" he added with sudden gravity.

Later Mme Storey expressed a wish to be shown around the laboratory and especially the inner room. Bristed conducted us, and Mrs. Bristed brought up the rear of the procession, seldom speaking, but never ceasing to watch us with her cold eyes. Bristed was most anxious to make everything clear—too anxious, if anything. It occurred to me that there must have been a careful cleaning up since Mr. Hendrie's death. It did not seem possible that a man could have been cut off in the middle of his work like that and leave not a trace of it behind.

When we had completed our round Mme Storey said carelessly: "Where does the charwoman live?"

Husband and wife exchanged a quick glance and both started to make objections, voice answering voice in a sort of antiphony. "Such an ignorant woman! ... You couldn't get anything out of her! ... And absolutely unreliable.... Yes, what she didn't know she'd invent.... Lives in the worst quarter of town...."

"I am not afraid of a poor quarter," said Mme Storey with a smile. "The car I have waiting can take me there."

"In that case I had better accompany you," said Bristed.

"As you will," said Mme Storey pleasantly. I could see, though, that she had no intention of allowing him to be present at the interview.

We were driven to a mean little street lined by grimy two-story tenements, and with a swarm of filthy children in the gutters. There is a squalor, a hopelessness about the British poor that we do not see in America, thank God! From the house before which he stopped, however, issued the sound of a loud and unmelodious singing.

"That's her," said Bristed with a bleak smile. "Second floor front."

As we got out, Mme Storey appeared to be struck by a sudden recollection. "I have forgotten the station master!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Bristed, I wonder if you would attend to that for me, while I speak to this woman."

He looked sour but was obliged to consent, of course.

"Take the car," said Mme Storey. "The railway carriage in which the murder was committed goes up to London at eight to-night, on the same train. I want to reserve the compartment in which Mr. Hendrie travelled."

His face offered a study in chagrin and balked curiosity. However, with an outward appearance of courteous willingness, he hurried away.

Mme Storey and I exchanged a look as we turned into the house. "It isn't possible," said I, "that he should be so

ignorant of his master's work."

"Scarcely," she answered; "but you mustn't infer too much from that. He is probably in possession of the secret of Sims Hendrie's last work; but that doesn't connect him with the murder."

VII

I must confine my account of the exuberant Mrs. Freese within strict limits. If I gave her her head she would fill the balance of my pages. Talk foamed out of her in billows and cascades. There was no stopping her, no controlling her, we simply had to let her talk, and fish out what scraps of interesting matter the flood brought down. In ten minutes, I suppose, we were in possession of her entire life's history from her early love affairs to her latest quarrels with her neighbours. She was not in the least abashed by Mme Storey, but treated her immediately as an old friend. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Freese was not English but Irish, which explains a good deal.

Picture an elvish little woman with a wide mouth—only a whole tooth or two left—big ears, and a tight little twist of mouse-coloured hair. What she had to be cheerful about I don't know, but cheerful she was. The sordid room, no doubt her only room, was full of steam. She had her washtub on a chair, and she stood on a low box, bending over it. Having placed us on two other chairs, she returned to her tub and continued to scrub during our visit. And while she scrubbed she talked. Astonishing energy!

"Me and Mr. Hendrie, we understood each other. We got along good. My motter is: Never take people serious. Lor' bless you, nobody don't mean the half of what they say! He was a testy old gent, a temper like cayenne pepper, he had. He'd go off like a pack of firecrackers when you hang it up and light the bottom one. Lor', how he'd storm around that place when he mislaid anything, and it right under his nose all the time. If't had been a little yaller dog 'twould have bit him, I uster say. Ev'ybody was scairt stiff of him but me. But I seed he didn't mean nothin' by all his hullabaloo, an' I never let myself be put about by it. And he liked me because he seed that I seed that he didn't mean nothin' by it. It made the couple over there sore because he liked me; they wanted to run him theirselves. And you wouldn't believe all the dodges they put up to get me sacked—why, Mis' Bristed offered to clean up herself, but the old man wouldn't. Ah, he was an old bear, he was, but I miss 'im now 'e's gone! I'll look long before I find me another such a good place!"

"That was a fine cat of yours that I saw in the laboratory," remarked Mme Storey, apparently at random.

"Yes'm, Ruddy. Short for Rudyard Kipling. My young uns called him that because he looked like a tiger from India. I brung him home this morning when I got the sack, but he went right back again. They fed him too good over there for the likes of me to compete with."

"So you were sacked this morning?"

"Yes'm. Of course, I expected it."

"Were you there yesterday?"

"No'm. Yestiddy was my day home."

"Then you haven't been inside the laboratory since Mr. Hendrie's death?"

"No'm."

"How did you happen to take the cat over there in the first place?"

"Mr. Hendrie ast me if I had a cat, 'm. Said he was troubled with mice in the laboratory."

Mrs. Freese said this with so comical an air, primming up her lips and looking virtuous, that anybody not blind could have seen that she was holding something back. Repression was very difficult to one of her temperament.

"Come now, Mrs. Freese," said Mme Storey indulgently. "That's not the whole truth."

She shook her head and scrubbed hard. "I promised," she said.

"Promised whom?"

"Mr. Hendrie, 'm."

"But Mr. Hendrie is dead, and by foul play. I am trying to solve the crime."

Mrs. Freese looked greatly relieved. "Well, now, that do let me off my promise, don't it?" she said, and forthwith launched on her tale. "He said mice, 'm, and I had no reason to disbelieve him. But one morning, when I was cleaning, he called me in to do his room, forgetting that he was experimenting with Ruddy, and on the table I seed a box like, with a glass front to it, and alongside the box a little kittle sort of, with a pipe into the box; and inside the box my Ruddy stretched out flat with his toes curled so pretty. Dead as a door nail, 'm! Or so I thought at the time. Lor', but it give me a turn: I'm that tender-hearted!

"I let a screech out of me, and Mr. Hendrie began to storm something awful. We had it hammer and tongs there for a while. I wasn't a-scairt of him. I says: 'You brutal torturer!' I says; and he says: 'There isn't anything the matter with your cat! He's just having a nice sleep! I do this to him half a dozen times a day,' he says, 'and he waxes fat on it!' 'The more shame to you, then!' I hollers. Well, the upshot was, Mr. Hendrie says if I'd go in the other room, he'd restore my cat to me.

"So I went out, and pretty soon he calls me in again, and there was Ruddy outside of the box, sitting up and washing his face large as life and twicet as natural. Only he was sleepy yet, 'cause he yawned once or twice. I could have hugged him to my bosom, only I was afraid he might have gas on him still that would lay me out, so I just stroked him gingerly at arm's length, and Mr. Hendrie told me to take my cat home and be damned to me, but he didn't mean nothing by it, and when I see how good Ruddy looked I told Mr. Hendrie he could keep him for his experiments, and he gave me a pun note and told me to keep it to myself, and that's all."

"Did Mr. and Mrs. Bristed know about this?" asked Mme Storey.

"No, 'm, they wasn't in the laboratory at the time. They never knew that I took any particular notice of the box with the glass front. There was so many queer gadgets about that I didn't know the use of."

"You say there was a sort of kettle outside it."

"A glass kettle, 'm. I could see inside it. There was a brown powder in the bottom of it, and water in the top part, I think, but I didn't take very good notice, I was that flustered."

"Any fire under it?"

"No, 'm, no fire, as I recollect."

"Now, think well. Did Mr. Hendrie say anything else about the gas?"

"Well, 'm, he kept saying as how it was good for both man and beast; and he offered to put both me and him under the influence to prove to me that it wouldn't hurt. But I declined with thanks."

"What became of the box?"

"Nothing, 'm. It was always in his room. It was too big to put away."

"Did you wash the kettle?"

"No, 'm. My instructions were never to touch anything that had chemicals in it. And I wasn't anxious to. They washed them theirselves."

That was all we got out of Mrs. Freese that was material to our case, though it was not all she volunteered. We got out as quickly as we could after Mme Storey had presented the cheerful and indigent little woman with a five-pound note, which called down ten thousand blessings on her head. When we got down to the street Bristed had not yet come back with the car, and we stood there talking for a few moments. From behind the closed windows of the second floor issued the sounds of Mrs. Freese's singing, more vociferous than ever but not a bit more tuneful.

"Not a poison gas, but a lethal gas, Bella," said my mistress thoughtfully. "There's a big difference. That coincides with what Sir Egerton Pulford told us. The scattered pieces of our puzzle are beginning to come together. One begins to understand what Sims Hendrie's scheme to end warfare was. Imagine the advantage of possessing a gas which would put the entire opposing army sound to sleep without a struggle! It is magnificent!"

After a moment she added: "Bella, I wonder if you and I didn't get a whiff of that gas in the train night before last?"

"But how could we?" I said helplessly.

"I don't know," she answered simply.

"Very likely Mr. Hendrie may have been carrying a sample of it up to the Royal Society," I agreed, "but he wouldn't have set it off voluntarily in the train; and if it escaped from him by accident, it would have put the young man to sleep as well as the rest of us, and he couldn't have robbed and murdered Mr. Hendrie."

"Oh, quite," she said.

"And if it was a thief who got on our car by accident and found us all asleep, your clothing was far richer than Mr. Hendrie's: there was your watch, your rings—would he not have chosen you for his victim?"

"Surely," she said. "We are not yet at the end of our work."

VIII

Bristed came along in the car, reporting that he had reserved the compartment for Mme Storey as requested. "How did you get along with Mrs. Freese?" he asked with his loud laugh. He laughed too much.

"What a woman!" said Mme Storey, humorously holding up her hands.

"I shouldn't think she could tell you anything of value," said Bristed.

"She didn't. I wasted my time."

He looked relieved. "What next?" he asked.

"I've done about all I can do in Banchester," said Mme Storey.

"Come to my house and rest for a while," he said eagerly. "Mrs. Bristed and I would be honoured."

"You are very kind," said my mistress. "We will."

It was now past six o'clock and growing dark. There was an agreeable mildness in the air, and the sunset was beautiful. Particularly lovely at that dusky moment were the great pansies growing around the Bristed cottage. Mrs. Bristed came to the door, as we walked up the path, and, hearing Mme Storey's exclamations of pleasure, came out. The pansies were growing in a narrow bed all around the foundation of the cottage. Their fragrance—for pansies have a fragrance, faintly perfumed the air.

"How exquisite!" exclaimed my mistress. "I must see them all!"

"They are nice," said Mrs. Bristed with her casual air. "I can't do much with flowers, I have so many other things to do, but I always try to have a few."

We strolled slowly around the cottage. "Do you raise them from seed?" asked Mme Storey.

"They may be raised from seed, if you have hot frames; but I have not the time. I buy the clumps from the gardeners."

"In pots?" asked Mme Storey innocently.

"No, they come in little baskets. So much lighter to carry."

"Quite."

At the back of the house several of the clumps were obviously freshly planted. Indeed, the basket and the trowel were lying close by. "I have been putting some in to-day," said Mrs. Bristed. "Some of the first ones died."

When we entered the house Mrs. Bristed said: "I hope that you and Miss Brickley will have a bit of dinner with us before you go to the train. It will not be much, of course."

Mme Storey thanked her heartily and declined. "We could not think of descending on you like that," she said. "You and Mr. Bristed must dine with us at the hotel opposite the station."

Mrs. Bristed looked at her husband, who enthusiastically accepted for both of them.

The interior of the house was sufficiently well furnished but quite lacking in charm. It was odd, the total absence of personality that it exhibited, like one of those completely equipped flats that they set up in furniture stores. Still, I suppose it was what you might have expected to find in the house of a woman who was a chemist first and a housekeeper second.

"Better still," said Mme Storey, with a careless look that suggested to me something important was coming; "perhaps you and Mrs. Bristed would be willing to coöperate with me in a plan that I propose. It will keep you up all night, but you are young; and I know how keen you are to get to the bottom of this terrible affair."

They looked at her questioningly.

"The trainmen have not been able to give us any information," Mme Storey went on, "and it occurred to me if I reproduced the journey of two nights ago in every detail so far as possible, it might strike on some chord in their memories."

So this was her plan! The subtlety of it was characteristic. One for the trainman and two for the Bristeds, I thought. Whatever they may have thought, they made haste to agree.

"Splendid idea!" cried Bristed.

"Miss Brickley and I will play ourselves," Mme Storey continued; "Mr. Bristed may represent Mr. Hendrie, and Mrs. Bristed the lady who sat next to Bella. All we lack is the young man who sat in the other corner, but we can do without him."

"It will be fun!" cried Bristed enthusiastically.

"Fun!" I said involuntarily.

"I mean interesting," he amended, somewhat confused.

"I suppose you haven't anything out of which we could create a disguise for you," suggested Mme Storey.

"I have an old tweed hat such as he used to wear," said Bristed; "there is a pair of his glasses in the laboratory; and my wife has a great cape that I could put on over my overcoat."

"Excellent! We must also have a pot of pansies."

"Won't a basket do?" asked Mrs. Bristed.

"No, I think we ought to have a big pot exactly the same as he carried. If you will give Bella the name of a gardener, she will fetch it in the car while you are getting ready."

This was done. The gardener filled the pot with earth and planted the pansies in it, wondering, I suppose, why I insisted on such a clumsy pot.

"Hm!" said Mme Storey, weighing it when I got back. "How heavy it is! Yet Mr. Hendrie seemed to carry it without difficulty."

"Where on earth could he have got it?" put in Mrs. Bristed.

As we drove through the business part of town the boys were crying the evening papers, and we stopped to buy them. In the local sheet there was fresh matter in the case, new even to Mme Storey and myself. It appeared that an enterprising reporter had discovered the identity of the young man who called himself "George Albert."

"He is Harry Straiker, the second son of a highly respected resident of this place," so the Banchester story ran. "His father is Mr. Edward Straiker, manager of the Banchester branch of the London and Western Counties Bank. This tragic affair comes as the climax to a long series of escapades on the part of young Straiker at school and at Oxford. He was sent down from the University during his third term as the result of a peculiarly outrageous prank, the details of which his family refused to divulge. Since that time his father has made one attempt after another to set him up in a business of some sort, but each attempt ended in disaster. According to a member of the family, he never before exhibited any criminal tendencies in his excesses; they were the result simply of high spirits and an unconquerable levity of disposition.

"As his last attempt to give him a start in life the elder Mr. Straiker set up his son at his own request on a chicken farm in one of the Southern counties. Here for a time things went very well, until young Straiker was run to earth by a party of wild young fellows, his former associates at Oxford. It appears that they wished to emulate the meetings of the Hell Fire Club of unholy memory, and after several days of bacchanalian riot, during which the chicken farm was virtually wrecked and most of the birds escaped, local constables proceeded to the place for the purpose of taking the participators in charge. There were only three constables against five young men, and in the mêlée that resulted, the five succeeded in making good their escape, but without their car.

"They scattered, and two days ago young Straiker turned up at his father's house in Banchester, having walked the whole distance. A painful scene followed between father and son. The elder Mr. Straiker took the stand that his son must return to Cranstoun (the scene of his exploit) to face the music and serve a term in jail, if necessary, hoping that the experience might serve to sober him. The son refused to submit to the humiliation of arrest for what he termed 'a gentleman's private party.' After bitter recriminations on both sides, the son rushed from his father's house swearing that his family should never hear of him again. He must have gone direct to the station and boarded the train for London."

My heart bled when I read this story; it was so exactly what one might have expected after having seen that young man's desperate face. Surely there was nothing mean or crooked in him, but only a mad recklessness which would not submit to English decorum.

When Bristed read the story, he said: "It's lucky this should come out just at this moment. You will be able to question the fellow's father and mother before you leave Banchester."

But Mme Storey shook her head. "Those unhappy people could not tell me anything useful," she said. My heart warmed to her for that speech.

Dinner at the hotel followed. I cannot remember that anything significant transpired during the meal. Bristed talked in his impulsive, rather scatter-brained fashion, while his wife mostly kept her mouth shut and her eyes cast down. Bristed was an interesting study: he was of the blundering, garrulous type, whom one thinks of as being unable to keep anything to themselves; yet he was keeping the secret of the lethal gas very successfully. It reminded me afresh of one of Mme Storey's sayings, that a naturally open man makes the most successful liar when his motive to deceive is strong enough.

We then proceeded to the station. My mistress and I received a bit of a shock on the platform when we perceived standing by the train an almost exact replica of the young man whom we now knew to be Harry Straiker, our travelling companion of two nights before. The same fine eyes and well-chiselled features, and a similar look of despair. To be sure, this one kept his head up, and there was no shame mixed in his despair; also he was a little older. The same sort of soft hat and trench coat emphasized the resemblance.

"Must be a brother," Mme Storey whispered. "Let us speak to him."

We allowed the Bristeds to get into the compartment and then approached the young man. "Is your name Straiker?" asked my mistress.

An expression of pain crossed his face. "Richard Straiker," he said, bowing stiffly.

Mme Storey introduced herself and in a few words explained our business. "Perhaps you can help us," she said.

He looked at us with no friendly eye. "I cannot help you if you expect to prove my brother guilty," he said bitterly.

"I have no opinion," said my mistress mildly. "My business is to follow the clues wherever they may lead."

His face worked painfully. "He *couldn't* have done it!" he burst out involuntarily. "Anything in the nature of brutality was foreign to his entire nature! Why, the sight of brutality in others aroused him to a fearful rage. I know—I know him better than anybody. Oh, I know they're all against him because he was so wild, but it was a natural kind of wildness, not crime. He has a generous heart. We were all against him at home until to-night because he kept us in hot water all the time. But not a criminal! We'll stand by him now. My father sent me off to-night, and he'll follow to London to-morrow."

"If you're convinced of his innocence," said Mme Storey, "you needn't fear the truth. Will you help us?"

"How?" he asked.

"With the object of discovering what really happened on this train two nights ago, I am trying to reconstruct the journey in every particular as far as possible. I want you to play the part of your brother by taking the seat that he occupied."

"And what must I do?"

"Nothing—or, rather, we must all be guided by what happens."

He acquiesced. She had given him no encouragement, but he seemed to apprehend friendliness, to feel that he could trust her.

Mme Storey showed Richard Straiker the seat he was to occupy, and introduced him to the Bristeds. Husband and wife bowed with sharp glances of inquiry, but said nothing.

The conductor came to the door of the carriage, and Mme Storey explained what she wanted of him and of the guards during the journey. It appeared that it was the guards' duty to go along outside the train to make sure that every door was tightly closed as it left each station.

"What is the first station?" asked Mme Storey.

"Mortlake Road, madam, a suburban station for the convenience of persons coming out from Banchester. Few get on there."

"And the next station?"

"Stotesbury, a good sized town, forty-five minutes from Banchester."

"That is the last station before crossing the viaduct?"

"Yes, madam."

"Then at Stotesbury please have the guard pay particular attention to this compartment. I want him to try to recall just how it looked two nights ago."

He nodded.

"At the following station..."

"Redminster, madam, half an hour from Stotesbury."

"Please come and speak to me there before the train leaves."

"Yes, madam."

The train started. In the rack above Mr. Bristed's head the second pot of beautiful pansies nodded and swayed to the motion. Excepting Mme Storey, we were all very self-conscious, scarcely knowing how to comport ourselves in this queer situation, half play-acting, half reality of the grimmest sort. There, where the fleshy figure of Bristed now lolled, two nights ago the old scientist had sat, full of his testy humours and irritations, shortly to be stilled by death in its most horrible form. Queer! Queer! A sickly feeling of excitement possessed me. I heartily wished the affair were over and done with.

Bristed's excitement seemed to be of a more pleasurable sort. "Shall I put on the glasses and cape?" he asked like a child.

"Plenty of time," said Mme Storey; "nothing could have happened this side of Stotesbury, I think."

Straiker shot a contemptuous look sideways at Bristed. These two were bound to rub each other the wrong way, because Straiker, according to the English technicality, was a gentleman, whereas Bristed was not. These distinctions are difficult to explain.

The train stopped at the suburban station and afterward pounded on through the dark. I suppose it was full of people all bound on their various businesses, but we could see or hear nothing of them: our compartment was like a tiny world of its own. There was little conversation among us; the elements of our party were too disparate. The silence seemed to get a little on Bristed's nerves, and he made one or two explosive attempts to start something, but received no encouragement. His wife sat beside me, completely withdrawn into herself like a woman of marble.

From time to time Mme Storey glanced at her watch, and finally she said: "Time to get ready."

We all started nervously. There was nothing for her and for myself to do, since we were just playing ourselves. She placed Mrs. Bristed's hat on top of her head, and told her to sit up stiffly and look sour. These directions sounded comic, but nobody thought of smiling then. My heart was beating thickly.

"What must I do?" asked Straiker.

"Pull your hat over your face and slump down in your seat," said Mme Storey.

Meanwhile, Bristed had put on Mr. Hendrie's thick glasses, wrapped the cape around him, and jammed down the tweed hat as the old man had been accustomed to do. Of course, he did not look like the old man, really, but such is the power of suggestion, that I imagined I saw him sitting there and shivered.

The train began to slow down.

"Remember," said Mme Storey, "we are all supposed to be sound asleep."

We took relaxed attitudes and closed our eyes. The train gradually lost way, and stopped with a little jerk. A minute or two of tense suspense succeeded. We heard the doors of the carriages open and close, the shuffle of feet along the platform, the cries of the trainmen; then the moment of silence when all is ready for the start again. Suddenly we heard an exclamation outside our carriage. We opened our eyes to perceive the startled face of a young guard looking through the window. He opened the door.

"I remember now," he said excitedly. "Seeing you all asleep like that brings it back: the old man and the young man on one side, and the three women on the other. But night before last there was another person in this compartment!"

A long-drawn exclamation escaped from all of us: "Ahh!"

"What sort of person?" asked Mme Storey.

"A woman, ma'am."

This created a fresh surprise.

"A big woman—elderly—with gray hair and a shabby bonnet. She had a big shawl around her, or a cape; couldn't be sure which. The lights of the compartment were behind her, and I couldn't see her face very good. When I came along she was standing at the door. The door was fast, but she had the window all the way down and was leaning out a little. That was how she was as the train pulled out."

"On account of the gas," murmured Mme Storey *sotto voce*.

I did not understand her reference then.

The conductor and the other guard had come up. The second guard said: "That old woman got out of the last carriage. I marked her because she was so big and strong. I saw her get out but didn't see her get on the train again. She must have followed the passengers out to the exit gate and come back again."

"Was she carrying anything?" asked Mme Storey.

"That I can't say, ma'am."

The conductor was growing uneasy. "What are your wishes, madam?" he asked. His deference was due to the letter from Scotland Yard that my mistress carried.

"Let the train go on," said Mme Storey. "But come to me again at Redminster. I may have to ask you to hold it there for a moment or two."

With a relieved air he gave the signal to start.

We settled back in our seats. Young Straiker, his eyes burning with excitement, said: "This means—this means...?"

"Presumptive evidence in favour of your brother," said Mme Storey cautiously; but her glance was kind upon him.

"Oh, thank God!" he said. "This will be fine news to bring him!"

"Splendid!" said Bristed enthusiastically. His wife said never a word.

"A female thug!" said Bristed, with his ill-timed laugh. "That's something new!"

"Unusual," said Mme Storey drily, "but not unheard of in the annals of crime."

"She must have been thoroughly familiar with the line."

"Not necessarily," said my mistress. "It may have been pure accident that she flung her victim over the viaduct. Any place would have done."

I shuddered.

"What must we do now?" asked Bristed.

"You may take off your disguise. It has served its turn."

We fell silent. I suppose the same thought was in every mind. There was now a shadowy sixth presence riding in the compartment with us. She must have sat down between the two men opposite me. I pictured her cunning and brutal glance around at her sleeping fellow travellers. Was her purpose born in that moment, or had she entered the carriage with murderous intent? Perhaps the old man had awakened, or seemed about to awake, and it was that which had sealed his fate. I pictured her getting the knife out and opening it—how horrible in the hand of a woman! Had she gone through his pockets or stabbed him first? ...

The rumble of the train took on a hollower sound.

"We are crossing the viaduct," said Mme Storey.

Oh, it was too horrible! Involuntarily, I shut my eyes and clapped my hands over my ears. But clearer than with the eyes of my body I saw the door of the compartment open and that poor murdered body go hurtling down through the dark. When I opened my eyes we were on solid ground again. There was a sort of witless grin of excitement pasted on Bristed's face. "It is nothing to him but a newspaper sensation," I thought.

A few minutes later we came to a stop in the station at Redminster. The conductor and guard came to the door of our carriage. Mme Storey asked the latter if he could remember having seen the old woman leave the train at this place, but he could only shake his head.

"Can't say, madam. There was quite a number got off."

Mme Storey then asked the conductor for sufficient time to make inquiry of the ticket taker. She nodded to me to follow and indicated that I was to bring the pot of pansies. I wondered greatly what this was for. Bristed and his wife made as if to come with us, but Mme Storey asked them to remain in their seats.

"It would only make confusion," she said.

We were obliged to wait until the passengers had passed through the gate. Mme Storey whispered to me: "While I am questioning the man, stand in such a way that his eye must fall on the pot of pansies. I do not wish to suggest the word pansies to him, but hope that the sight of the thing itself may stir his memory."

The conductor identified Mme Storey to the ticket collector. Scotland Yard! the man's eyes widened at the sound; and his amazement visibly grew as he took note of my mistress's beautiful face in the light of the station lamps, and her

elegant attire. Not at all the sort of figure one associates with the police. I took care to stand where the light would fall on my pot of flowers.

"What can you tell me about the people who got off this train two nights ago?" asked Mme Storey.

"There was about twenty persons, ma'am," he said. "I can give you the exact number if you let me look up my record."

"Never mind that," said Mme Storey. "Do you remember any women among them?"

"Women?" he said, scratching his head. "Yes, there was women among 'em. What sort of a woman are you lookin' for?"

"I'd rather have you tell me what you saw."

"I mind one woman," he said, after a moment's thought: "big woman with a shawl around her shoulders. She was a rare ugly specimen, she was—that's how I mind her. Big gray eyebrows jutting out like an old man's, and a moustache like; and a few long hairs growing on her chin. Enough to stop a clock, ma'am."

"That will be the one," said Mme Storey. "Was she carrying anything?"

"Little old-fashioned satchel, ma'am. Squarish in shape."

"Anything else?"

"That was all I saw."

"Was the satchel big enough to have contained this pot of pansies?"

His eyes goggled at the flowers, but he answered readily: "No, ma'am."

"What was in her other arm?"

"It was hidden under the big shawl, ma'am."

"Then she might have been carrying quite a large object in it."

"Possibly, ma'am.... Come to think of it, she must have had something in that arm, because I mind how she had to put her satchel down in order to give me her ticket."

"Excellent," said Mme Storey. Turning to the conductor she said: "We will leave the train here."

I was sent back to fetch Mr. and Mrs. Bristed. We supposed that young Straiker would continue his journey to London; but he begged to be allowed to see the thing through, and Mme Storey made no objection.

As we made our way through the station Mme Storey murmured to me: "The pansies didn't serve us that time; but hang on to them; they will be useful later."

X

Outside the station Mme Storey looked for a taxi driver with the idea of getting further information; but it appeared that the cabs had all secured fares and driven away. There was a tramcar in the street, but that also moved away with its load. However, a train from the North was due to pass through in a few minutes. We waited, and the cabs presently began to straggle back. The first driver we spoke to was a typical English cabby. I am told they have changed very little

since horseflesh gave place to petrol. A burly man rendered still burlier by the amount of clothing he wore, he had a white neckerchief wound round his throat inside his coat collar, and his face was the colour of beetroot. You have seen his prototype driving stagecoaches in old English sporting prints; only nowadays he wears a cap instead of a pot hat.

"Yes, miss," he said hoarsely, "I remember the big woman that got off the Banchester train two nights ago. As it might happen me and my mates we made a bit of game of her among ourselves. Such a fearsome old grenadier. 'I'm glad she ain't my mother-in-law,' I says."

"What became of her?" asked Mme Storey.

"She come out the station and looks about her like a stranger. 'Keb, lady?' I says. She shook her head without speaking. The tram was waiting just the same as it was to-night, but she didn't take that neither, though it's a good half mile to the centre of town. She let it go, and she started walking."

"In what direction?"

"Down the main road, miss, with the tram line."

"You had never seen her before?"

"No, ma'am. I could almost swear she had never been seen in Redminster. That was a face you couldn't forget easy."

While Mme Storey was talking to him, the train came in. We waited to let the bustle subside. In some manner the news of our errand had got about the station and we were the objects of general attention. The size of our party made me feel rather foolish. I wished that Mme Storey and I were alone on this. When the train had gone on, the station guard, the one who collected the tickets, joined us. He hadn't anything to do, he said, until the last train from London to Banchester went through at eleven forty-five, and we would want a guide about town. Mme Storey good-naturedly accepted him, but turned down the cabman, who begged us almost tearfully to make use of his cab.

We set off on the trail of the old woman walking two and two like a parcel of schoolchildren out for an airing: first, Mme Storey and the guard; then the Bristeds, then Mr. Straiker and I. Straiker carried the pot of pansies for me. It was certainly an oddly assorted sextette, yet Mme Storey and the guard chatted away as if they had been acquainted for years. That is her way. The Bristeds had nothing to say to each other. They walked a little apart, as if estranged. I wondered what were the relations between those two. In looking back I could not remember having heard them address each other. A curious excitement filled me; the excitement of the hunt.

The suburban road wound away from the station first to the left, then to the right—English roads are never straight. There were a few shops at the station, then houses and dark gardens. Over the trees ahead we could see a brighter glow which denoted the centre of the town. The road kept winding downhill, and presently we came to a bridge, an ancient bridge with stone parapet. Mme Storey stopped and peered over.

"There seems to be a good bit of water here," she remarked.

"The Scar River, miss," said the guard. "Yes, miss, there's good boating about here."

"What a welcome find for a stranger who had something heavy to get rid of!" said Mme Storey reflectively.

"Eh, miss?" he asked, perplexed.

"Fetch me a constable," said Mme Storey briskly. "Tell him who I am and say that I would like to have this stream dragged under the bridge."

"A body, miss?" he exclaimed in tones of delighted horror.

"Nothing like that! Be as quick as you can, so that we can take the eleven forty-five to Banchester if we find what we want. We'll wait here."

He ran off, delighted with his errand.

Mme Storey hoisted herself on the parapet and lighted a cigarette. Straiker put down the pot of flowers near her. The few townspeople who passed stared at us curiously. It was a bit early in the season to be spooning on the bridge. Suddenly I became aware that a change had come over Bristed. He was still laughing in his fat way, making his inconsequential and enthusiastic comments, but his head had gone forward in a curious fashion, his whole attitude suggested a deathly fear. At the same moment in the light of a street lamp I glimpsed his wife's face. She was staring at him with distended eyes full of rage, contempt, or terror—perhaps all three. Straiker saw it too, and we exchanged a swift glance.

In a moment it was over, Mrs. Bristed lowered her eyes, Bristed straightened up, and we were all talking easily again. But thereafter Straiker never moved far from Bristed's side; and for my part I made it my business to keep an eye on the woman. Apparently Mme Storey had not noticed anything; but you never can tell about her.

They had a very up-to-date and efficient police department in that town, and naturally they wanted to exhibit it to a stranger. Their methods were a little too spectacular for our taste. A motor patrol came clanging downhill to the bridge with half the populace in pursuit. There were four smart young constables in the car, who jumped out and saluted Mme Storey. They had a sort of portable searchlight operated with power from the engine. They set this up on the parapet of the bridge, flooding the gentle little river below with an unnatural light.

"Constable Beddowe will be downstream directly with a boat, 'm," said the sergeant.

Within a minute or two there were five hundred people on the scene. The police, however, kept the bridge free, allowing nothing to cross but the tramcars. Our little group, of course, was the centre of attention. I hate to be made conspicuous in this manner. Mme Storey was quite undisturbed. The people, kept off the bridge, scrambled along the river bank on either side to obtain points of vantage, regardless of the carefully tended terraces and shrubbery. With that flaring light on the water, it was like some lurid scene on the stage.

A rowboat poked under the old bridge with a constable in his shirt sleeves at the oars. In the stern was a sort of dragnet weighted at the bottom, with ropes to pass ashore on either side. Seeing this significant object a hush fell on the crowd. They expected a human body at the least. The oarsmen took another man aboard to manipulate the net. The constables were but human, of course, and called back and forth to each other in important sounding voices. The sergeant stood on the parapet of the bridge to issue his orders. Mme Storey put the pot of pansies on the pavement, that it might not be knocked overboard in the excitement.

The dragnet was dropped astern, and a line passed to a waiting constable on either bank. Pulling the net into position, so that it filled the whole bed of the little river, they commenced to walk slowly along the water's edge, dragging it behind them. An uncanny silence fell on the crowd. All you could hear was the shuffle of new arrivals pushing for a look.

The constables had not much more than started to walk along the bank, when they stopped again. Turning, they played the ropes tentatively like a fisherman with a nibble. Out of the stillness one spoke low voiced to the sergeant:

"We've got something, sir."

A long breath escaped from the crowd: "Ahh!"

"Handle it gently," said Mme Storey.

"Pass the ropes back to the man in the boat," said the sergeant. "Let him haul in both together. Steady, now!"

It was done as he ordered. While the man at the oars kept the boat in midstream, the one standing in the stern pulled the two ropes in slowly hand over hand. The search-light was beating full on him like a spotlight on the stage. He began to take in the net itself. The silence was breathless now. Finally a heavy object was seen to be weighing down the bottom of the net. The constable leaned out to lift it clear. It came out of the water streaming; a big flower pot! A pot of pansies, the flowers broken somewhat but still fresh and vivid after their long immersion in cold water!

The crowd thought that the joke was on us, and a derisive laugh broke from them. Voices cried out: "Try again, old man!"

The sergeant looked questioningly at my mistress.

"That is what I wanted," she said, smiling.

"But, madam, all this trouble for a pot of pansies?"

"I shall be glad to reimburse you."

He waved this suggestion aside. An absurd look of perplexity filled his face. "You have one already," he said, pointing to the pot on the pavement.

"I was trying to match it," said Mme Storey, smiling.

He gave it up with a helpless shrug. The flower pot was passed up to the bridge and the boat sent home. The crowd, seeing that there was to be no more excitement, began to melt away, still laughing at what they supposed to be the discomfiture of the police.

A pot of pansies! It was the key to our whole case, and Mme Storey with her marvellous instinct had put her finger on it in the beginning. She received the precious find into her own hands. She would allow no one to examine it. She bent down on the pavement to drain the water out of it, concealing the operation from the rest of us with her own body. It took a little time. While everybody was twisting and craning to get a look at the pot, I stole a glance at Bristed. His face was sick with terror. He was not looking at the pot; his eyes were darting this way and that across the bridge, as if he were meditating flight. Straiker and I exchanged a glance, and Straiker edged around on the other side of him.

Mme Storey's voice came from the pavement. "This will drip for an hour. Lend me that old cape, Mr. Bristed, to wrap it up in."

This was the cape with which Bristed had impersonated the old man. It was still hanging over his arm. He passed it to Mme Storey. She wrapped the pot completely up in it, flowers and all, and gave it to Straiker to carry. The other pot was left standing on the pavement.

"What shall I do with this one?" said the station guard, touching it with his foot.

"Oh, that has served its purpose now," said Mme Storey carelessly. "Take it home and present it to your wife. But I spilled some water in it. Mr. Straiker, lend him your raincoat to carry it in."

She herself wrapped it in the raincoat and handed it to the guard, who bore it proudly as a souvenir of a great occasion.

XI

By this time the police had gathered their apparatus together. Mme Storey made them a handsome present for their trouble, good-byes were exchanged, and the motor patrol went clanging back up the hill. Once more the six of us were left alone on the bridge.

"Where next, ma'am?" asked the guard.

"Back to the railway station," she said. "We shall just be in good time to catch the eleven forty-five for Banchester."

"But how about the old woman?" he asked with a falling face.

"Well," said Mme Storey, "I infer that, having got rid of her incubus, she went back to Banchester on that train. That's where she came from."

"No, ma'am," he said positively, "she never came around the station again that night."

"Who did take that train?" asked Mme Storey, smiling.

"There was only one passenger that night—a man."

"What sort of man?"

"A rough-looking customer, ma'am. That's all I can tell you. Nothing about him in particular to notice."

"Wasn't he about the same size as the old woman?" she asked.

"Well, since you put it to me, yes, ma'am."

"And what was he carrying?"

"Let me see—a small satchel, squarish in shape—by Gad! yes, ma'am, the same sort of satchel *she* carried!"

"Exactly," said Mme Storey, lighting a fresh cigarette, "and the female clothes were then in the satchel. Being a stranger here, he wouldn't know where to hide them in safety, and he had to carry them back."

"By Gad!" said the guard admiringly, "but, begging your pardon, ma'am, how did you know she—he was going back?"

"Oh, that's easy," said Mme Storey; "a man who takes such pains to disguise himself doesn't mean to run away!"

In his enthusiastic admiration the guard quite forgot his British obsequiousness. "Now that's what I call a bit of head work!" he cried.

We returned to the railway station, Straiker carrying one pot, the guard the other. The one which had been fished from the river still dripped water on Mr. Straiker's clothes, notwithstanding the folds of the cape around it. In the station Mme Storey sent a telegram to Inspector Battram to report progress, while the guard went off to deposit his prize in his own quarters. He returned Mr. Straiker's raincoat.

We still had a while to wait for the train. The Bristeds must have been suffering the torments of the damned during this time. Mrs. Bristed, who never gave away much in her face, hid it best; her husband, still essaying to play the good fellow with his jokes, his enthusiasm, his loud laughter, looked positively ghastly. His limbs twitched, his face was streaked and discoloured, his eyes looked mad with fear. How he endured it, I don't know. I suppose, if Straiker hadn't been there, he would have made a break for it. As usual in such cases, their common trouble did not have the effect of drawing the couple together. The little glances they threw at each other were full of hatred. I suppose each was blaming the other for the pass they were in.

The train came along half empty, and we had no difficulty in getting a compartment to ourselves. The pot of pansies was carefully deposited in a rack. It had ceased to drip by now. Bristed's tormented eyes kept returning to it. At other times he kept glancing in a sick fashion at my mistress. He couldn't understand her tactics. Why not open the thing and put him out of his suspense? Yet he dreaded to have her open it. All this was written in his face while he kept up his inconsequential talk. Finally he could stand it no longer.

"What is the significance of this pot of pansies which the woman—or man—threw away?" he asked with his agonized grin.

"Well," said Mme Storey, smiling drily. "I fancy there is more in it than pansies. If I have reasoned correctly, there is a machine within the pot to generate the gas which put us all to sleep the other night and made it easy for the criminal

to enter the compartment and do his work."

"But," said Bristed, with a great air of bewilderment, "I thought Mr. Hendrie brought it on the train himself!"

"He did," said Mme Storey. "It was handed to him on the way to the station by an accomplice of the murderer. Ingenious, wasn't it, to make the old man put himself to sleep, in a manner of speaking, as well as any other persons who might be in the way. In fact, it was the most cleverly planned murder of my experience."

So much for Bristed. He laughed and clapped his thigh and cried: "By Gad! By Gad!" while his face was perfectly livid.

Yet he was somewhat relieved, because he understood by Mme Storey's words that she did not mean to open the package immediately.

That extraordinary woman, my mistress, settled herself comfortably in her corner and proceeded to go to sleep. She did not even take the precaution to tell me to watch our precious piece of evidence in the rack overhead; but of course there was little danger that I would forget it. I was on wires; no sleep for me; nor for Straiker either, especially since Mme Storey had told him what the flower pot might be expected to reveal.

The wretched Bristed talked jerkily on, while his wife watched him through eyelids narrowed in contempt. "By George! what a woman! what a woman! ... You might know she was an American... Strange she should have happened to be riding in the very carriage where the murder was committed ... with her trained mind! Marvellous! ... It's a privilege to be associated with her.... That is, of course, if her theory is correct..."

While his tongue wagged in this fashion, his sick eyes expressed a very different language. Pure hatred glittered out of them when they fell on Straiker or on me. He would gladly have made away with us if he could. Ever and anon his glance travelled furtively up to the shrouded flower pot in the rack, and then toward the window. I think he would have taken a chance on pitching it through the glass could he have been sure that it would be completely destroyed along the right of way.

Sometimes he would fall silent, and you could see the fine beads of sweat spring out on his forehead. He would surreptitiously wipe his face and burst into talk again. Poor wretch! Yet when we rumbled back over that horrible viaduct he never even noticed it. One inferred that it was not remorse that was eating him, but simply a craven fear for his own skin.

We reached Banchester at one o'clock. As we alighted from the train Bristed said facetiously: "Well, what next?"

"I can do nothing further until morning," said Mme Storey.

He stammered with a painful eagerness that he tried in vain to hide: "Perhaps you and Miss Brickley would come and spend the rest of the night with us. We would try to make you more comfortable than the hotel."

I thought he had a great cheek to ask us. But I suppose he still flattered himself that he had not given anything away—that he was still unsuspected.

To my astonishment Mme Storey accepted. "Thank you very much," she said. "We will come with pleasure."

My heart sank. If ever there was a desperate man Bristed was he. His look suggested that he would stop at nothing in order to get us into his power—or, it would be more proper to say, to get that incriminating piece of evidence away from us. But of course I could not say anything. Mme Storey always knows what she is doing. I could not appear to hang back. I just had to swallow my fears and make out that I, too, was grateful for the invitation.

We parted from Straiker at the train gate and took a taxi back to the little cottage alongside the laboratory. There was no other house very near, and such houses as one could see showed no light. An ideal situation for murder. If Bristed was already faced by the prospect of hanging, what was there to restrain him from further murders?

They switched on lights, and I placed my burden on the centre table of the little drawing room. At this moment Bristed was worked up to the highest pitch of excitement. His legs and arms jerked like a jumping jack's. I suppose he expected the flower pot to be opened up there and then and had nerved himself up to a desperate deed. Hysteria was gripping my throat. But Mme Storey said with a careless air:

"I'm not going to look at this thing until Inspector Battram comes. I have telegraphed for him."

I heard a long breath escape from Bristed. He had obtained another reprieve. He relaxed.

Mrs. Bristed said we must have a bite of supper before turning in. She took Mme Storey upstairs to freshen up after our hours in the train and went off to prepare the food. I remained in the drawing room to guard my charge. Bristed stayed with me, alternately sitting down and jumping up again; moving around the room, talking all the time, of course, while his furtive eyes strayed from my face to the shrouded object on the table and back to my face again. Momentarily I expected him to spring on me. How thankful I was when I heard my mistress come running down the stairs again.

She stayed in the drawing room while I went up to wash, and brush my hair. When I returned supper was on the table: a simple meal of bread and butter, cold meat, cheese, and beer. And in spite of the secret tenseness of the atmosphere we did it justice. The door between drawing room and dining room stood open, and from where I sat I could watch the flower pot. Since I had been upstairs a subtle change had taken place in Bristed's manner. Some of the haggard lines were smoothed out of his face, and a bit of colour had returned to it. He still talked extravagantly, but I was aware of an increased ease and assurance in his manner. It made me vaguely uneasy.

When we had finished eating we began to talk of bed. We passed into the drawing room, and I picked up my flower pot to carry it upstairs. There was nothing in it! With a cry I put it down and flung off the cape. Underneath there was a jardinière somewhat of the same size and shape as the flower pot but perfectly empty.

"It's gone!" I cried.

XII

They crowded around the table. "Good God!" cried Bristed with an admirable assumption of astonishment. "It must have been substituted somewhere en route!"

"Substituted nothing!" I cried angrily. "Do you think I wouldn't know the difference between a full pot and an empty one? I brought it into this house!"

He never changed a hair. "Heavens!" he cried instantly. "Then some interested party must be hanging around the house, peeping in at the windows. What a terrible thought!" And he had the effrontery to look around him as if in terror.

"Nothing of the sort!" I said. "He changed it himself! He changed it while I was upstairs. I could see the difference in his manner when I came down."

"Bella, Bella," said my mistress rebukingly, "you must not make charges that you can't substantiate. It's quite true that while you were upstairs I left the room to help Mrs. Bristed lay the table. But I'm sure Mr. Bristed never touched the thing."

This capped the climax for me. I burst into tears. Mme Storey ignored me. She was playing for a big stake, and a few tears from me could not be allowed to sway her. Bristed was greatly heartened by her seeming rebuke to me.

"I wouldn't have had this happen in my house for a thousand pounds!" he cried fervently.

"It's too bad!" cried my mistress bitterly. "Our whole night's work gone for nothing! The murderer will escape scot free because of this! We must have been spied upon throughout!"

And so on. She was really giving a very good imitation of the chagrin and disappointment she might have been supposed to feel; but I who knew her so well was not deceived by it. If she had been really put about by the loss of the pot of pansies she would have set her teeth and said nothing. So I cheered up again. I had not the least idea of what her game was.

"But we must find it!" cried Bristed. His self-confidence was increasing every minute. "As you may remember, I was out of the house while you were helping Mrs. Bristed. I went out to the laboratory to see if all was right there. He must have slipped in then!"

We gravely went through the comedy of making an exhaustive search. We found that the front door could not be opened from the outside; but there was a window in the hall which had been thrown up on our entrance as the house seemed to be close.

"That was where he came in!" cried Bristed.

We searched the yard surrounding the cottage, and the laboratory. Afterward, at Bristed's insistence, we went over the cottage from ground floor to garret. English houses have no cellars. During this part of the search, I noticed that Mme Storey's eyes were busy, and I guessed that she was looking for more than the pot of pansies.

It must have been close on three o'clock when we had finished. We returned to the drawing room.

Bristed was still voicing his regret in extravagant terms when we heard a motor car approaching through that silent quarter. It came to a stop in front of the cottage. I saw Bristed and his wife slowly stiffen. A moment later the doorbell rang.

"That will be Inspector Battram," said Mme Storey carelessly. "He has motored down from London."

Bristed did not immediately move to open the door. "But how—how did he know you were here?" he stammered.

"Oh, I told Straiker to wait for him at the hotel and fetch him along," she said.

Bristed's new-found confidence slowly wilted. However, he went to open the door with a good face. The handsome inspector came in smiling, with Richard Straiker at his heels. Two more men followed—detectives, by the look of them—who closed the door and stood in front of it. The sight of these two grim figures and the significant action seemed to affect Bristed more than the arrival of the inspector. He gazed at them with a whitening face.

The hall was narrow, and we passed, as a matter of course, into the drawing room. Straiker was carrying something on his arm. A slight thump on the centre table sharply recalled Bristed's attention to it. He beheld, wrapped in an old coat, an object strangely reminiscent of the pot which had rested on the table earlier in the evening.

"What's that?" he gasped.

Straiker, at a glance from Mme Storey, threw off the wrappings, revealing a pot of pansies, the flowers and leaves now a good deal broken and wilted. I myself swallowed a gasp at the sight of it, but, knowing my mistress, I guessed what had happened. Bristed stared at it wildly.

"But—but—but——" he stammered.

"Oh, the one you hid was the pot which Bella obtained from the gardener before dinner," said Mme Storey with the utmost nonchalance. "This is the one we fished out of the Scar River at Bedminster. I didn't want to take any chances, so I changed the pots on the bridge. The station guard put this one in the luggage van for me, and Mr. Straiker claimed it when we got here."

It was a sickening blow to Bristed. It seemed to stupefy him for the moment. A look of hard defiance came into his wife's face. She saw that the game was up.

"The one he hid?" put in the inspector.

"Yes," said Mme Storey calmly. "He buried the other one under the compost heap in the garden of the cottage next door until he should have a chance to destroy it. He was in a hurry, or he would have noticed that it was the wrong one."

"Did you see him do it?" said Battram.

"No. Shreds of vegetable matter were clinging to his trousers when he came back," answered Mme Storey, with her inimitable air of unconcern.

The two of them made believe to ignore Bristed for the time being. Inspector Battram was bending over the pot of flowers. "It appears to be two pots nested together," he remarked.

"I expected something of the sort," said Mme Storey.

With his penknife the inspector succeeded in prying them apart. Out of the big pot came a shallow pot such as pansies are usually planted in. In the space beneath it there was a simple apparatus the nature of which we could all understand at a glance. A little tin tank was fitted in the top with an infinitesimal opening through which water had dripped on a chemical placed in the bottom of the pot. There was also a rubber tube which had been run up through the top pot and had issued among the leaves of the pansies. Through this tube the gas had escaped.

"How simple!" said Inspector Battram.

"And how effective!" added Mme Storey.

Bristed was pulling at his collar and struggling for speech. In that moment he had cracked. "I'm done!" he cried hoarsely.

His wife turned on him like a tigress. The change in her was electrical. Gone were her dullness and lassitude. In that moment she was as beautiful as the angel of evil. One of the detectives, supposing that she was actually about to assault her husband, hastily stepped between them.

"Be quiet!" she cried.

But Bristed continued to wail: "I'm done! I'm done!"

"You fool!" cried the woman. "There is no evidence to connect you with this crime! The woman is just trying to break you down with her stage tricks. That has been her object from the first!"

Bristed, having cracked, was helpless now. "I know it!" he cried hysterically. "And she's done it! I'm done, I tell you; I can stand no more! Oh, God! nobody knows what I have been through to-night! It is more than flesh and blood can bear!"

"Be quiet, you fool! You snivelling coward!" she cried with blazing eyes. "You are hanging yourself!"

"You're all right," he said. "You're not in it. I did it all. I'll protect you!"

"Ah, be quiet!" she said, turning from him with a violent gesture of disgust. "I'm done with you! All night you've been playing the fool. She made you dance to her tune like a marionette on strings! Ah, God! if I was married to a man!"

After that Bristed completely lost control of himself. He howled and beat his fists against his head. It was an ugly sight. Straiker, thinking of his brother, listened to the confession with burning eyes; Mme Storey was as cold as Nemesis. Remembering the hideous brutality of the murder, she felt no pity.

"I did it! I did it! I did it!" screamed Bristed. "Does that satisfy you? I prevented the old man from travelling by daylight. I prepared the scheme to gas him. And it worked, too! When I entered the compartment you were all sleeping like the dead. I took the old man's pocketbook. I got what I wanted out of it, and slipped it into his pocket. He was

nothing to me." He pointed at Straiker. In his hysterical state he evidently confused the identity of the brothers. "I stabbed him!" he went on. "It was an old knife which had been among my tools for years. It would never have been missed. I stabbed him! I flung his body out of the door! Now you know it. If you want any more details ask her"—pointing to my mistress—"she's got it all down pat!"

"What did you take out of the pocketbook?" asked the inspector.

"The formula for making the gas," said Bristed. "He was going to place it in the archives of the Royal Society."

"But if you knew how to make the gas, what good was the formula to you?"

"It was my discovery!" cried Bristed. "And he wouldn't give me credit for it!"

"That is no doubt a lie," said Mme Storey coldly.

Bristed whirled on her. "That woman is a she-devil!" he screamed. "She's not human! She kept at me and at me till I near went mad! She ought to have been in the Spanish Inquisition, she should! What's she doing over here, anyway, plying her trade? Aren't there enough murders in America? She wasn't content with arresting me and letting me stand my chance at my trial. Wanted to torture me for her pleasure. Made me go back over everything on the pretext that she thought it was somebody else and I was helping her catch him. Step by step over everything! God! it was like being dissected alive, nerve by nerve!"

"No advantage in listening to this sort of thing," said Inspector Battram, low-voiced, to my mistress.

He nodded to one of his men, who thereupon stepped up to Bristed and snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. The act had the effect of shutting off the man's wild cries. He fell into a helpless, shaken weeping, while his wife's lip curled. The second detective approached Mrs. Bristed with a pair of steel bracelets. She proudly drew herself up.

"Keep your hands off me!" she said.

The man hesitated. Inspector Battram looked at Mme Storey, who said coldly:

"I recommend you to take her too. In my opinion she got the whole scheme up. It would never have been conceived in the man's muddled brain. In any case, it must have been she who handed the pot of pansies to Mr. Hendrie. There was not time for Bristed to have disguised himself after doing so and still have caught the train."

So Mrs. Bristed's graceful wrists had to submit to the steel. She became apathetic again. One could feel sorry for her. Under that dull exterior slumbered a fiery spirit. The man was merely contemptible.

"Take them to the local police and make the necessary affidavits," said Inspector Battram. "Then come back here for us."

Bristed and his wife left their little cottage, never to return to it. Neither gave it a backward look.

XIII

When they were taken away we had a chance to relax. It had been a strenuous twelve hours. Mme Storey and the inspector lighted cigarettes.

"A fine piece of work!" the inspector said with generous enthusiasm. "If it was anybody else I would feel sore thus to have my own trade taught me. But from Madame Storey I can learn with humility!"

"Nonsense!" said my mistress, affecting to scorn his flattery, but not at all ill pleased by the same. "I just blundered into this case by accident. You would have solved it if I had never appeared on the scene."

"I hope so," he said modestly. "And I hope this will not be the end of our association," he added wistfully. It was the man, not the inspector, who spoke then.

"Come to America and see how we do things there," said Mme Storey, smiling.

"I will," he said meaningly.

We fell to discussing different aspects of the case. Said the inspector:

"The man was certainly lying when he claimed to be the discoverer of the gas. They all do that. What did he expect to get out of the murder, anyway?"

"After a year or two they would have come forward as the discoverers of the gas," said Mme Storey. "Sims Hendrie was so secretive about his work that no one knew what he was doing."

"And is it then so valuable?" said Battram.

"Ah, consider all its possible uses! A new and better anaesthetic, perhaps, without the dangerous qualities of ether; a cure for insomnia, one of the scourges of mankind. And this is not to speak of its advantages in warfare. Put your enemy to sleep and he would be yours!"

"Tell us something about how the case shaped itself in your mind," said the inspector persuasively.

"In the first place," said Mme Storey, "I suspected that Bella and I had been drugged in the railway carriage, and the question was, how could the murderer have drugged us without coming into the carriage with us; and how, if he had been in the carriage, could he have drugged us without drugging himself at the same time? A fascinating problem. As soon as I learned that the pot of pansies had disappeared, I suspected that that had been the medium.

"Secondly, something in the quality of young Straker's voice assured me that he was not guilty of murder. But intuitions are not sufficient in our business—that is, they're not sufficient to convince judges and juries. So I had to go to work.

"Thirdly, when I talked to Bristed, as soon as he claimed not to know the nature of the work his employer had been engaged on, my suspicions fastened on him. Such a statement was simply incredible. It was Bristed's one fatal error in tactics. Later, when I learned from the charwoman that he had lied about the nature of the gas, I was morally certain that Bristed was the murderer; but you can't go into court with moral certainties, either; I had to prove my case.

"By this time I had discovered that I was up against an exceptionally astute and prudent pair. Nobody had seen Mrs. Bristed hand the pot of pansies to the old man. No doubt she met him outside his house, as if she had been on the way there with it, and begged him to carry it to her sick sister in London, or something of that sort. Moreover, since the murder, they had been over the laboratory and the cottage with a fine tooth comb and had collected and destroyed every scrap of evidence. That woman made no mistakes. Bristed's disguises, the satchel, and so forth; all had been burned, and completely burned, you may be sure.

"So my only recourse was to force a confession from the man. I have had to do that before when my evidence was insufficient. It was for that reason that I staged the reproduction of the fatal journey, using the same compartment where the murder was committed; and casting Bristed in the role of the victim. But remorse for his crime didn't affect him in the least, all he felt was fear of discovery. He would have caved in quicker if I had left the woman at home. She was of much tougher fibre; her presence stiffened him.

"When the pot of pansies was fished from the water and he still did not cave in, I changed the pots with the idea of letting him think for a while that he had saved himself and then springing the truth on him. A cruel trick, but a brute like that deserves no better. That worked, as you saw. And that's all there is to it."

The car was heard returning, and we all stood up. None of us was anxious to linger in that poor little house. Mme Storey pressed out the fire in her cigarette and smothered a yawn.

"Hum!" she said, "and now I must get back to London."

"London!" exclaimed the inspector. "My dear lady, you need sleep."

"I must snatch what I can on the way. Do you suppose I can get a car at this time of night?"

"Come with me!" he said eagerly.

"You are sure you have room?"

"There are only four of us, including the chauffeur, and the car holds seven."

"Splendid! Let's go."

"Wouldn't you like to sleep for a few hours?" he said solicitously. "I can wait."

She shook her head. "Impossible. Bella and I are due at the Embassy at nine. That's our main graft, you know. This was only a side issue."

"What a woman!" he murmured, his eyes fixed on her, big with admiration.

Poor fellow! He was going the way of all the others, I could see. And such a handsome man! There were plenty of women in England, I had no doubt, who would have been glad to put his slippers to warm in the evenings.

"Inspector, could I—could I make the seventh in the car?" asked young Straiker, his voice trembling a little with eagerness. "If I could only be the first to tell Harry of what has happened."

"Oh, yes, do take him!" said Mme Storey warmly.

"By all means!" said the inspector, looking at her, not at the young man.

We were in London by eight o'clock and drove direct to the prison where Harry Straiker was confined. All obstacles smoothed by a word from Inspector Battram, Richard Straiker was admitted directly to his brother's cell. A few minutes later we followed him. The two brothers were sitting side by side on the cot, the elder with an arm around his junior's shoulders. Their faces were beaming. Seen side by side like that they did not look so much alike. Harry was much the handsomer. There was a power either for evil or for good in that young man. They sprang up.

"This is the lady who saved you," said Richard.

Harry took the hand that she held out. But his tongue failed him. "I can't say what is proper," he murmured.

"Don't try," said Mme Storey promptly.

"We'll have you out of here in an hour or two," said the inspector cheerfully. "There are certain formalities that have to be attended to."

"Then what are you going to do?" asked Mme Storey.

He shrugged rather helplessly.

"You want a new start," said Mme Storey. "Come to America. I'll give you a job to start with, and you'll soon find your own feet."

"Oh, you don't know!" he said with a painful air. "About me, I mean, what I've been."

"I know all about you. That's why I offered."

He flashed a look of perfect devotion on her and quickly veiled his eyes. "All right," he said brusquely, "I accept. That is if my father approves. I must consult him."

And so it was done. I need only say that Harry Straker finds the wider spaces of America more congenial than confined England. He's raising cattle in the Big Bend country of western Texas.

THE LEGACY HOUNDS

I

Our visitor was a dignified little old gentleman in an old-fashioned Prince Albert and round white cuffs which came down partly over his hands. The quaint cuffs somehow stamped him as a prosperous country lawyer and such he proved to be: Mr. D. J. Riordan, Stanfield, Connecticut. "Village lawyer" was the phrase he used, deprecatingly, to describe himself.

"But you would hardly call Stanfield a village," said Mme Storey.

"It was a village when I started to practise there," he said. "And I am afraid we old-timers like the self-dependent village that it was better than the great and wealthy suburb it has become."

"What can I do for you?" asked Mme Storey, smiling. I could see that she liked the quaint little gentleman.

"Well, in order not to waste your time unnecessarily," he replied, "I will ask you at once, plainly: would you be attracted by a fee of five hundred dollars (it is all I am empowered to offer) for a service which will require three hours of your time some afternoon; with the promise of an additional five hundred in the event that you are successful in the undertaking I am to suggest to you?"

"The fee is sufficient," said Mme Storey, "provided the undertaking is one which I am qualified to carry out."

"Oh, eminently, eminently," he said. "My friends and I have heard you described as a practical psychologist, specializing in the feminine. That is precisely what we require."

"Is it a crime which has been committed?" asked my mistress.

"No, Madame. It is a measure designed to forestall a crime."

"So much the better," said Mme Storey. "Proceed." Helping herself to a cigarette, she prepared to listen.

"We have in Stanfield," he began, "a conspicuous local character called Mrs. Genevieve Brager—perhaps you are familiar with the name?"

"Vaguely," said Mme Storey, "but I cannot remember in what connection."

"Doubtless you have heard of Hyman Brager, her husband, a wealthy manufacturer of enamelled ware. He created the enamelled-ware trust, and died a few years ago, leaving his widow upward of ten million dollars without check or hindrance."

"Ah," said Mme Storey. "A nice little sum."

"Mrs. Brager is sixty-seven years old," the lawyer went on. "She is childless; indeed, she has not a relative in the world. Moreover, she is a woman so flighty and ill-advised that she has never succeeded in making any friends in Stanfield, though she has lived there for over thirty years."

"I begin to picture the situation," said Mme Storey. "The legacy hounds have tracked her down."

"Exactly, Madame. An admirable phrase! These persons, both men and women, are of the most sinister types. God knows where she picks them up!"

"Oh, they pick her up," put in my mistress.

"It has become a public scandal. Brager's Asylum is the phrase coined by my townspeople to describe the establishment."

"Then they live in her house?"

"Yes, Madame, a swarm of them. Mrs. Brager is of a miserly character and keeps them all on short commons. She retains a hold on them by scattering promises of legacies. She plays them off one against the other. She is continually making new wills. You can readily conceive what hideous passions this must set loose. We feel certain that it must end in an appalling tragedy."

"Which would sully the fair name of Stanfield," put in Mme Storey.

"Exactly, Madame. For a long time the situation has troubled me vaguely, but it was not my province to interfere. It was nobody's business to interfere. There is no question of having the woman declared incompetent, even if it was anybody's interest to do so, because her wits are as sharp as yours or mine. She handles her great fortune skilfully; and since she spends nothing it increases by leaps and bounds."

"What finally led you to act?" inquired my mistress.

"Three days ago Mrs. Brager sent for me (she employs every lawyer in Stanfield by turn) and required me to make a will leaving everything she possessed to one of her hangers-on, a scoundrel who has the impudence to call himself 'the Honourable' Shep Chew."

"A proved scoundrel or only a suspected one?"

"Proved, Madame. I have learned that he has served a term in prison in Ohio for malfeasance in some minor political office: under sheriff, I fancy."

"Hence the 'honourable,'" said my mistress drily.

"His scoundrelly character is written in his face," Mr. Riordan went on. "I am convinced that he does not intend Mrs. Brager shall live to make another will."

"Hm!" said Mme Storey; "a highly explosive situation. But what can I do?"

"I drew up the will," said Mr. Riordan, "since nothing would have been gained by my refusal to do so. I then consulted with Thomas A. Braithwaite, the president of our Chamber of Commerce, who called in Mr. Eckford, president of the First National Bank, Mrs. W. Atlee Bryan, president of the Woman's Club, and one or two others of our leading people; and a committee was formed to deal with the situation."

"Who suggested coming to me?"

The little old gentleman's eyes gleamed behind his glasses. "I did, Madame. I have long followed your career. I have made a study of your cases: the Ashcomb Poor case, the Teresa de Guion case; the strange murder of Mrs. Norbert Starr. And, if I may be permitted to say so, it is a great occasion for me thus to come face to face with you at last."

He bowed with no little impressiveness. Mme Storey, smiling, bowed in return.

"Nor were you by any means unknown to the other members of the committee," he went on. "When I mentioned your name they jumped at it. 'Madame Storey! Ah, if she will only help us!' they cried. They subscribed the sum I have named, on the spot, and pledged themselves to double it if you were successful."

"What do they want me to do?"

"Persuade Mrs. Brager to create a living trust, so that, although she will continue to enjoy her income, the control of her vast principal will pass out of her hands."

"Hm!" said my mistress, "this is no small order."

"With your extraordinary insight into feminine psychology, you are the one person for the job!" cried Mr. Riordan enthusiastically. "She is a timorous old woman—work upon her fears. And inordinately vain. Persuade her to leave her millions to found a great philanthropic institution. By announcing her intention in advance she can enjoy all the glory during her lifetime."

"What sort of institution?"

"Anything, anything she likes. My committee, in order to prove to you their disinterestedness, do not even stipulate that it shall be built in Stanfield—though of course it would be a fine thing for the town."

"Oh, it might as well be Stanfield as any place else," said Mme Storey.

"Then you will help us?"

"One moment. How could I be introduced to Mrs. Brager in a natural-seeming manner?"

"Oh, that will offer no difficulties, Madame. Mrs. Brager is always trying to get decent people to come to her parties."

"Ah, poor soul!" murmured my mistress.

"And if the great Madame Storey deigned to honour her house——"

"No!" interrupted my mistress quickly, "that would be fatal. I should be introduced under a pseudonym."

"Of course, if you thought best. Then you will...?"

"I will," said Mme Storey.

"Thank heaven!" cried the little lawyer.

"I assume that Chew knows about the will in his favour," said Mme Storey.

"Yes, Madame. Mrs. Brager gave him a copy."

"Then we should act at once."

"I am asked to a tea at Mrs. Brager's house to-morrow afternoon," said Mr. Riordan, with a rueful smile. "If you and your secretary could be at my office at four we might go together."

"Expect us at three-thirty," said Mme Storey. "And have your committee on hand in your office so that I may have a few words with them before we start for Mrs. Brager's."

"Yes, Madame."

II

We motored up to Stanfield on the following afternoon. It took a little longer so, but the quiet of our own car permitted us to do some work on another case. In Mr. Riordan's respectable office we found the committee waiting, all obviously impressed by the prospect of meeting the great Madame Storey face to face. The male members had brought their wives. My mistress plainly told these eminent ladies and gentlemen of Stanfield that if they had shown more neighbourliness to the lonely old widow they might have handled this case without outside assistance. They all pledged

themselves thereafter to act exactly as she enjoined. With Mr. Riordan, we then proceeded to Mrs. Brager's.

I was keenly interested in this case. The vastness of the sum involved arrested the imagination. Moreover, it was much more agreeable to be working to prevent a crime than to solve a crime already committed. But I must say there was nothing about the house to suggest ten millions. It looked more like a second-rate boarding house than the home of a woman rich beyond the dreams of avarice. It was on the Boston Post Road, just outside of town. Picture a big square wooden house with a cupola in the style of the 1870's, standing in full view of the street. The house was sadly in need of paint, the wooden fence was broken in several places, the evergreen trees were decayed and dying, and patches of naked earth showed amid the neglected grass. To come upon such a place in fashionable Stanfield, where everything was trimmed, cut, and rolled to a finish, was like finding a leering old tramp at a garden party.

The inside of the house was in keeping. You know the plan of such houses: a wide and lofty hall running through the centre, with two drawing rooms on one side, dining room, pantry, and kitchen on the other. The hall was cluttered with the stuff that was considered stylish thirty-five years ago: hall rack, "cosy-corner," statuettes and jardinières. I suppose all this had been expensive in the beginning, but it had never been in good taste and was now shabby and dilapidated to a degree. The air contrived to be both stuffy and chilly. I noticed that the only means of heating the house was an old-fashioned hot-air furnace. From the amount of heat issuing through the register, it must have been kept on short rations of coal. How strange that an old woman as rich as Mrs. Brager should not even permit herself the creature comforts!

A maid, neat enough, and polite, admitted us and, indicating that we were to enter the drawing room on our left, disappeared at the rear. From the drawing room came a thin babble of talk. I shall never forget my first glimpse of that room. It was like an ugly old picture; like a second-hand salesroom. The two rooms together, I suppose, were nearly sixty feet long, yet they were so filled with stuff it was difficult to make one's way. There were fancy chairs and useless tables; what-nots, tabourets, stools, screens, ottomans, and big pictures on easels; and everything was encumbered with "drapes."

At the front of the room with her back to the windows sat a caricature of an old woman with carmined cheeks; and ranged at each side of her were half a dozen of as scoundrelly looking "guests" as I ever expect to see, all dressed up, drinking tea, and going through the motions of fashionable conversation. While the tongues of the six dripped honey, their eyes were fixed on the wasted little woman with an expression which I can only describe as murderous; and in her eyes, while she twittered and simpered, dwelt a look of plain terror. I thought to myself we had not come any too soon.

Can you conceive the effect of my mistress's entrance into that room? The beautiful and serene figure seemed to emphasize the second-rateness of it all. The six guests, as one, recognized an enemy in her and turned looks of fear and hostility in her direction. Their thought was—one could read it clearly: If such a one as this enters the chase, where will we be? Mrs. Brager herself looked at Mme Storey in a strained and confused way. It is likely that the old woman's sight was failing and she was too vain to admit it. Mr. Riordan hastened forward. He said:

"Allow me to introduce Mrs. Pomeroy and Miss Hastings, whom I telephoned you I should bring this afternoon. They have long wished to make your acquaintance."

The old woman put her head on one side and simpered. "Pleased to meet you.... Pleased to meet you," she quavered, extending to each of us, in turn, a claw of a hand covered with glittering old-fashioned rings. "You will find my house very out of date, I am afraid. We are plain people. Sit down, ladies. Signor Oneto, the bell, please. We will have fresh tea."

False teeth, dyed brown hair, rouged cheeks, and those killing airs and graces. And all the time the faded old eyes looking at you so wistfully. One felt ashamed for her, and deeply sorry, as for a silly posturing child. She was wearing a very smart blue silk costume which hung strangely on her wasted frame; around her shoulders she had a little scalloped crocheted shawl of gray wool, which went better with the furnishings of the room. She was continually fidgeting with her draperies, putting her handkerchief to her nose, twisting her rings, or shoving the heavy bracelets up her skinny arms; and the simpering smile came and went without any meaning.

Whenever she simpered, a reflection of the same simper promptly appeared in the six hard faces that surrounded her; whenever she spoke, the six voices murmured in agreement. Four women and two men: an incredible exhibition.

They had placed their chairs as close as they could get to Mrs. Brager, and all held themselves as if brooding solicitously over her. The two women who had succeeded in getting places on either side of her were continually arranging the little shawl, patting her hand, and so on. When she dropped one of the rings the two men scrambled for it, all but bumping their heads together. Yet none of the six pairs of eyes ever lost what I called their murderous look. It was clear, too, that they hated each other poisonously. Oh, it was a sweet household.

Fresh tea was brought by the maid. Mrs. Brager was obviously too shaky to manipulate the tea things, and it was poured by a fat blonde woman in a scanty pink slip, who had ex-manicure and beauty culturist written all over her. One expected her to address Mrs. Brager as "Dearie," and one was not disappointed. She handed us our cups with an expression in her glassy blue eyes that said she hoped it might poison us. And such a to-do about sugar and cream! For all her fatness she had a face that, as Mme Storey said later, you could have broken rocks on.

Mrs. Brager introduced her to us. "My dear friend, Madame Rose La France, ladies."

It was a full-blown rose, indeed!

"Mr. Chew, will you pass the cake... The Honourable Shep Chew, ladies."

I looked at him with strong curiosity. He was a big man dressed in a braided cutaway and striped trousers. The fashionable garments accorded ill with his coarse face. In his youth he may have been handsome, but it could not have done him much good, for nobody would ever have trusted those false and greedy black eyes. Now his features had taken on the flabby smoothness of the glib hypocrite. His loose, thick lips emitted a stream of sticky platitudes in a gobbling sort of voice; but his eyes always gave him away. He permitted himself a proprietary air in Mrs. Brager's drawing room which was no doubt due to his knowledge of the latest will.

"Charmed, ladies, charmed. It gives me the greatest pleasure to welcome you to our little circle here. Mrs. Brager does not care for general society but prefers to gather a few choice spirits around her in her own home...." Gobble, gobble, gobble.

"Oh, Mr. Chew, how can you!" protested Mrs. Brager, simpering. "An old woman like me is not interesting."

All six raised a chorus of indignant denials. "Old! ... *You!* ... Oh, Mrs. Brager, how can you! ... Nobody would ever think of you as being old! ... You're the youngest among us!" etc., etc.

When the chorus had died down the younger man, who had left the circle for the moment to get a cigarette, added in a languorous drawl: "You are not old, Genevieve."

The poor old soul gave him a killing glance. "Perhaps not to you, Raymondo."

He was of the type which nowadays is variously termed cake eater, lounge lizard, sheik. You can picture the slick black hair, the incipient side whiskers encroaching on his cheeks, the big, shallow black eyes. Though handsome in its way, he had, I think, the worst face of any there: slinking, mean, and cruel. But not so dangerous, perhaps, as the Honourable Chew's, because it was weak.

"Signor Oneto and I are engaged," added Mrs. Brager, for our benefit, with her silly, tragic simper.

You would have thought that even a lounge lizard must have blushed thus to have his shame exposed before a beautiful woman like my mistress; but not a bit of it; with perfect effrontery Oneto continued to grin at the old woman in the same cruel, die-away fashion. It was like a comic opera or a nightmare, whichever you prefer.

I have forgotten the names of the other three women present. It doesn't signify, since they played no part in the tragic events which followed. They were all Stanfield wives in shoddy finery, a type which is common in every fashionable suburb; desperate hangers-on who will go to tea with anybody who does not expect to be asked in return.

In the beginning Mme Storey and I had seated ourselves opposite the semicircle formed by Mrs. Brager and her admirers. This did not suit the old lady, and after a while she bounced the woman on either side of her and established us

in their places. Thereafter she addressed her conversation to us, while the others darted little looks of suspicion and hostility in our direction and stretched their ears to hear what was said. Mme Storey, with her kind smile, and a word or two, friendly without being fulsome, had already established herself in the old lady's good graces.

She asked with a curious eagerness: "Do you live in Stanfield, my dear?"

"No," said Mme Storey, "but I have many friends here."

"Whom do you know in Stanfield?" asked Mrs. Brager breathlessly.

"Well, there are the Braithwaites, the Eckfords, the Bryans," said my mistress carelessly; "the Van Loars, the Teagues, the Dilwyns..."

These were the most prominent families of the place. I silently commended my clever mistress's line of attack.

"Oh!" gasped Mrs. Brager. "Do you really know all these people?"

"Why, yes," said Mme Storey casually; "don't you?"

"Oh, of course, of course," she said hurriedly, "but we do not exactly visit. I go out so little."

"I am sure they would all like to know you better," said Mme Storey. "I have heard them speak about you so nicely."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Brager excitedly, "do you think—do you really think ... how is one to make the first move? After all these years I couldn't be the first to call—and they couldn't be the first. Oh, dear!"

"But a woman in your position," said Mme Storey, "why not write to these ladies and ask them to come see you?"

"Oh, I wouldn't have the face! What! Mrs. Bryan! ... Do you think it would be proper?"

"Certainly! Everybody knows Mrs. Brager."

"Oh! Oh!" she gasped in a perfect flutter. "Do you think they'd come?"

"I am sure of it."

"I'll do it! I'll do it!" She broke off and looked around the circle. "Er—perhaps——"

Mme Storey whispered: "Yes, I think perhaps it would be better to have them here by themselves the first time."

"And will you come that day?" asked Mrs. Brager like a little girl. "I shall be so nervous."

"I should love to," said my mistress.

After this, of course, Mme Storey was first and the rest nowhere. Mrs. Brager patted my mistress's hand, saying:

"Do throw off your wraps, dearie, or you won't feel the good of them when you go outside."

"Thanks," said Mme Storey drily, "but I think I had better keep my coat around me."

"Oh, do you find it cold in this room?" said Mrs. Brager with a horrified look. She glanced around the circle for confirmation, and instantly the chorus was raised.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Brager.... It is just right for me! ... Most pleasant, I say.... Indeed, I am if anything too warm.... If there is anything I detest it is these overheated rooms!" And so on. Every face among them was pinched with cold.

Mme Storey was not to be shouted down by this crew. When she could make herself heard, she said with a good-

humoured smile: "I am afraid I am spoiled. I do like to have it warm indoors."

Mrs. Brager looked at me. "And you, dearie?"

"It is a little cold," I said.

A visible struggle took place in the old woman's face between avarice and the desire to stand well with my mistress. The better feeling prevailed, but not easily. "Oh, dear!" she said despairingly. "Mr. Chew, please touch the bell."

The maid was instructed to ask Mrs. Marlin to step in. The person who came in response to this summons, and whom I took to be the housekeeper, astonished me, she was so different from the other inmates of that weird household. A handsome young woman of thirty, say, with a businesslike, self-controlled air. She was very neatly and trimly dressed, and everything about her bespoke character, resolution, and decency. In fact, she seemed to bring a ray of clean sunlight into the slightly foetid atmosphere. I took to her instantly, and so, as I learned later, did my mistress.

"Mrs. Marlin," said Mrs. Brager in her affected way, "could we have a little more heat, if you please?"

In the housekeeper's quick glance at her mistress there was a hint of amused surprise. "Why, certainly, Mrs. Brager. The fire box is only half full." She turned to leave immediately.

"Just a *little* more heat," said Mrs. Brager anxiously. "A shovelful of coal."

Mrs. Marlin, with a bow of acquiescence, continued toward the door; but the struggle was still going on in the old lady. "How is the coal holding out?" she asked.

"I will order more to-morrow," said the housekeeper quietly.

At that the ruling passion had its way. "Nothing of the sort!" cried Mrs. Brager in the querulous voice of the very old. "You must make what we bought this month last out, do you hear? I won't have any more coal ordered! They are all robbers. I won't submit to it!"

Mrs. Marlin, bowing again, went on out without speaking. What a difficult role was hers, I thought. She carried it off with dignity. Mrs. Brager turned her pathetic, faded old eyes on us, still mumbling her grievance as if scarcely aware of what she was saying.

"Robbers—swindlers—all of them! I've already ordered two tons this month. Soon be in the poorhouse if I didn't make a stand...."

She did not lack for sympathy from her faithful chorus. "It's simply scandalous, the prices they charge! ... I'm sure I don't know what we're coming to! Where is it going to end? ... My husband says..."

Mme La France said with a hateful glitter in the glassy blue eyes: "It is Mrs. Marlin's fault. She shows no management."

The Honourable Chew affected to be good-humoured about it, but the thick lips curled in an ugly sneer. "That young person thinks to put us all in our places, I fancy."

"I don't see how you can be willing to put up with her, Genevieve," drawled Oneto. "I would undertake to furnish you with a better person to-morrow."

No doubt! No doubt! I was glad to see that the old lady did not rise to this suggestion. I felt that Mrs. Marlin was honoured by the hatred of such people.

Mme Storey sought to pour oil on the troubled waters by saying, as one might to a child: "What a pretty dress, Mrs. Brager!"

Instantly the old lady was all smiles and simpers again. "Oh, do you think so, dearie? I've got a much prettier one upstairs. I'm afraid it is a weakness of mine!"

"I'd like to see it," said my mistress. "I love pretty clothes."

"Then come right up to my room," she said, rising at once. "And you too, dearie," she added in my direction. "We'll be back in a minute," she said to the others generally.

I had been wondering how Mme Storey was going to accomplish the feat of separating her from her parasites, and here it was done as easily as turning over in bed. You can imagine the sort of looks that followed us out of the room. I was sorry for Mr. Riordan, left amid that crew.

III

The better we became acquainted with that household, the odder it appeared. On the second floor, as in all houses of this type, there were four big square bedrooms, one in each corner, and a fifth room between the two front rooms and over the entrance hall. It was into this middle room that Mrs. Brager led us. There was much less of a clutter in it; things were arranged in better taste. It was used as both sitting room and bedroom, one guessed. We found Mrs. Marlin sitting by the window sewing. She looked up pleasantly, but did not speak.

"This is Mrs. Marlin's room," said Mrs. Brager. "I have to go through it to reach my room."

I wondered why this should be.

"What a nice room!" remarked Mme Storey, who wished, I could see, to draw the housekeeper into the talk.

Mrs. Marlin coloured with pleasure. The young woman was positively beautiful when she allowed her feelings to break through her self-controlled mask. "Mrs. Brager is good enough to let me fix it the way I like," she said.

"Hmph! Pish! Modern notions!" grumbled the old woman.

Reaching the door in the right-hand side of the room, Mrs. Brager, to my astonishment, produced a key on the end of a long chain and inserted it. The door was fitted with a Yale lock. It admitted us to one of the big corner bedrooms where, as in the rest of the house, we were back in the era of 1890. You know the sort of thing: lace bedspreads and pillow shams; lambrequins, splash cloths, and a crowd of ornaments on the mantel.

Mrs. Brager herself seemed to feel that some explanation of her peculiar sleeping arrangements was necessary, for she said: "I am timid about sleeping; that's why I keep a spring lock on my door. Nobody has a key to it but Mrs. Marlin and me. The door from my room directly into the hall has been screwed up. I sleep easier knowing that nobody can get to me except through Mrs. Marlin's room, and she a light sleeper."

Before closing the door behind her, Mme Storey said to Mrs. Marlin: "Mrs. Brager is going to show us her pretty dresses. Won't you come in too?"

The young woman put down her sewing with a smile and followed us.

In the big corner room Mme Storey seated herself in a broken-sprung "easy" chair before the empty fireplace, and I in a plain chair opposite her. It was even colder in here than downstairs, and my mistress presently rose and sidled over in front of the wall register to get the benefit of what little heat was coming through it. Meanwhile Mrs. Brager was bringing out her dresses. It was not sufficient to show them to us: the ridiculous old woman, with the assistance of Mrs. Marlin, must needs struggle in and out of each dress in turn and parade up and down in it with all the affectations of a mannequin. An absurd and piteous spectacle.

And how strange it was to observe the relations between mistress and housekeeper. Though Mrs. Brager had just

given us the best proof possible of her trust in the younger woman, it appeared that she could not get along without continually abusing her. Nothing that Mrs. Marlin did succeeded in pleasing her. As Mme Storey pointed out to me later, this is characteristic of the very old. It is those closest to them who have to bear the burden of their infirmities.

While my mistress and I sat there making believe to talk to each other, we would hear from the back of the room: "That piece fastens in front, stoopid! Oh, your fingers are all thumbs! Now look at it! look at it! When you are through with me I look like a perfect frump! I declare you do it on purpose to plague me! There is no bearing with you. You want to wear me down, don't you. You will be glad when I'm gone. Well, I warn you, miss, I warn you as I've warned you a hundred times before, you'd better take care of me if you know what's good for you, for you won't profit one cent by my death! Not one cent!"

This was very embarrassing for strangers to have to listen to. That admirable young woman neither put on the air of a Christian martyr nor answered back. She took it all in a matter-of-fact way, as if she was thoroughly used to it. Only once, when Mrs. Brager was looking elsewhere, did she permit herself to exchange a deprecating glance of amusement with us.

"Please hold your arm up while I fasten this. There's a little too much fullness here. I will take it in after you take the dress off."

"Don't you dare to touch it! With your bungling fingers you would ruin my frock."

"Very well, Mrs. Brager."

"Besides, I like it better as it is. It makes me look plumper. And with this new tonic I am taking, I am already beginning to fill out."

"You would do better to leave the tonics alone," murmured Mrs. Marlin.

"Hold your tongue, miss! What do you know?"

When the dresses had all been tried on and duly admired, Mrs. Marlin quietly disappeared. From the grateful heat which presently came stealing around us, I guessed that she had gone downstairs to stoke up in spite of her mistress. Mrs. Brager was for returning downstairs, but Mme Storey settled herself in the broken-sprunged chair.

"Now we can have a good talk!" she said. "Do you mind if I smoke? I'm a slave to the weed."

"By all means," said Mrs. Brager, "I am not puritanical, I hope."

"Perhaps you will join me," said Mme Storey, offering her case.

"I don't mind if I do," said Mrs. Brager, helping herself with a simper. It was a treat to see the rakish way in which she held it and puffed smoke toward the ceiling. But after a puff or two I noticed she allowed it to go out.

"It's such a relief to get away from men for a while," said Mme Storey.

"Didn't you like Raymondo and Mr. Chew?" asked Mrs. Brager coyly.

"Well, frankly, no," said my mistress. "They are not nice enough for you, dear Mrs. Brager."

The old lady looked surprised at this line of attack; but she was pleased.

"You are not serious, of course, in intending to marry Oneto?" said Mme Storey.

"Oh, not serious," said Mrs. Brager, simpering; "but I hate to send the poor boy about his business, he is so devoted to me! Isn't he just too sweet?"

"Oh, quite!" said Mme Storey drily. "As for Mr. Chew, his manners are pleasant, but the look in his eyes makes me

shiver."

"Me, too," said Mrs. Brager unexpectedly. She shivered when she said it. Here was the truth popping out, in spite of every affectation. My mistress has the faculty of bringing it out.

"But I understand from Mr. Riordan..." she said in assumed surprise.

"I know," said Mrs. Brager, rapidly nodding her head; "the will; I only did that to placate Mr. Chew. I was afraid not to do it. I can always make another will."

"But, my dear Mrs. Brager, consider what a frightful temptation you are putting in the way of a penniless man! After all, human nature is human nature, and terrible things happen."

The old lady seemed about to cry like a child, then. "I know," she wailed, all but wringing her hands. "But what was I to do? I can't get rid of him!"

"You can easily remove temptation out of his way," said Mme Storey, "and out of the way of others like him."

"How?"

"By putting the principal of your fortune out of your own control—I think they call it creating a living trust—and letting everybody know what you have done."

"Then they would all leave me!" cried the old woman piteously. "I am old. I must have friends around me."

"Make yourself real friends."

"I don't know how!"

Mme Storey considered. "You ought to take a more prominent part in Stanfield affairs," she said. "To a woman of your position it is really a duty."

"They don't want me," said the old woman querulously.

Mme Storey ignored this. "Why don't you found a great institution at your death," she said, gesticulating with her cigarette, "that would make your name remembered in Stanfield as long as the town exists?"

"Charity doesn't make friends for you."

"Not in the ordinary sense, but it brings charitably minded people around you. You would naturally appoint the best people as the trustees of your fund." My mistress slyly named the magic names again. "Mr. Braithwaite, Mr. Eckford, Mrs. Bryan, Mr. Teague, Mrs. Van Loar. They would be proud and happy to serve on such a board. It would bring them into the closest association with you."

"I couldn't give away my money while I was living!" cried the old woman passionately. "I couldn't! I couldn't!"

It was useless to combat blind avarice like this, and Mme Storey made no attempt to do so. "Of course not," she said easily. "You create the living trust which is to be devoted to this purpose after you are gone. But in the meantime you have to plan out all the details, to make sure that the thing shall be done as you wish. You could have all the fun of that while you are alive."

Mrs. Brager began to nibble. "Nobody takes care of old ladies who lose their money," she said. "If I did anything it would be a home for aged gentlewomen."

"Splendid!" cried Mme Storey. "Can't you see the beautiful big home where they may enjoy every comfort, standing in the midst of its lovely grounds?"

"Could I change the trustees if I wanted?" demanded Mrs. Brager.

"Why, certainly!"

"So that if anybody did not accept the trust in a proper spirit I could replace them with others?"

My mistress's eyes twinkled, but she answered gravely: "A very wise provision."

That marked the turning point. Mrs. Brager still raised a hundred objections, but in reality the idea had won her. As she became eager, my mistress cunningly appeared to be holding her back, and thus increased her eagerness. Finally, Mrs. Brager declared that she would give Mr. Riordan his instructions to draw up the necessary papers that very afternoon. As a matter of fact, anybody could persuade that old lady to make a will, but this time, I was hoping, she would get one that would stick. I was sent down to the drawing room to fetch him. The summons to the lawyer threw the Honourable Chew *et al.* into a visible panic, as you may suppose.

While Mr. Riordan explained the nature of a living trust to Mrs. Brager, I remained in the adjoining room talking to Mrs. Marlin. "How do you stand it here?" I said.

She laughed good-naturedly. "You haven't heard the half of it! I go through a regular circus once a month to get the money to pay the household bills. But it isn't as bad as it seems. Mrs. Brager and I understand each other. I don't let her get under my skin. I should be sorry to lose the place."

There are some people you do not waste time in making friends with. Mrs. Marlin let down the bars of her reserve completely. I learned that she was a widow with three small children to support. They lived with her sister near by and came to see her every day at the noon recess. She confessed that she wished to marry again. Her fiancé was a brilliant young chemist called Dr. Sanford Brill. She seemed to think that I ought to have heard about him, but I had not, of course. Unfortunately, he was poor, and their marriage was likely to be long delayed. Mrs. Marlin had some hopes of interesting Mrs. Brager in Dr. Brill's discoveries. The old lady had promised to receive him on the following day.

Meanwhile, in the next room everything was proceeding smoothly. Mr. Riordan was instructed to draw up the agreement creating the trust, also a new will to carry out its provisions, and to bring them to be signed at four the next day. Like a child, when Mrs. Brager got started, there was no stopping her. She wanted the news given to the papers that night. Mme Storey was dead against it. "Nothing should be published until the papers are actually signed," she said. Mrs. Brager pished and pshawed impatiently.

Before we got out of the house, she sent after Mr. Riordan again. We waited for him in the lower hall in no little anxiety. There was no knowing where you had that old lady. But he rejoined us with an undisturbed face. Mme Storey looked her question.

"A codicil to be added to the will," he said. "I am pledged to secrecy."

"But it does not invalidate the whole scheme?"

"Oh, no," he answered, smiling; "it reveals a kindness of heart you would not suspect in the old curmudgeon."

It was close on seven o'clock. By the time we got back to New York it was far too late for me to think of getting supper at my boarding house, and my mistress, with her customary kindness, took me to dinner with her at one of the fashionable new restaurants on Park Avenue. While we were discussing the excellent potage St. Germain, a boy walked through the room paging:

"Mrs. Pomeroy—Miss Hastings—Mrs. Pomeroy—Miss Hastings."

Conceive of our astonishment. The names under which we had been introduced at Mrs. Brager's! Who could have known that we were in this restaurant? For a moment we looked at each other blankly; then the obvious explanation suggested itself.

"Somebody followed us here from Stanfield," said Mme Storey, "and then went somewhere near by to call us up."

We went to the telephone. Mme Storey made me answer it first. I heard a gruff, common man's voice saying: "Who is this?"

"Miss Hastings," I replied.

"Well, Mrs. Pomeroy's the one I want. Is she there?"

"Yes."

"Let her come to the 'phone."

I stood by the open door of the booth while my mistress talked. I could not hear what he said, but I witnessed her comedy. She was making her voice sound terrified. "Why—what do you mean! ... How dare you! ... Who are you, anyway? ... Mrs. Brager is nothing to me.... Just a friendly call..." And so on.

Coming out of the booth she said scornfully: "Clumsy work, Bella. The gentleman called up to say if we wanted to know what was good for us we'd stay away from Mrs. Brager."

"What an extraordinary growling voice!" I said. "It didn't suggest the voice of either of the men we saw there."

"It wouldn't," said Mme Storey. "Come on, let's finish our dinner."

IV

Notwithstanding Mme Storey's advice, Mrs. Brager herself called up the Stanfield newspapers that night and announced her intention of founding the Brager Home for Aged Gentlewomen. The news created a sensation locally when the papers came out next morning.

Shortly before we were to close the office that day, Mr. Riordan called up from Stanfield in distress. When he took the papers to Mrs. Brager to be signed she had refused to see him. Evidently the gang had been at her. He had succeeded in getting her to promise him an appointment at eleven the following day; and he wanted to know if Mme Storey would accompany him to her house. My mistress good-humouredly consented. We were very busy at the time, but this case had intrigued her interest.

So for the second time we motored up to Stanfield, taking our work with us. It was a clear and frosty day in February. We picked up Mr. Riordan at his office and went on. No suspicion of what lay before us troubled our minds, I remember. We anticipated merely a repetition of the scene of two days before. Mme Storey had no doubt of her ability to bring the weak-minded old woman around again. Mr. Riordan had the papers in his pocket, and we hoped to get them signed for good and all before leaving the house.

The maid informed us that Mrs. Brager was not up yet. We asked for Mrs. Marlin, who presently came hurrying to us in the drawing room. For Mme Storey and me she had a delightful friendly smile, very different from the guarded look that she customarily wore on her face in that house. She was apologetic.

"Mrs. Brager awoke at seven," she said, "and claimed to be feeling unwell. She said she would remain in bed this morning and Mr. Riordan would have to come another day. It was only an excuse to get out of seeing him, of course. What could I do?"

"Well, here I am," said Mme Storey, smiling. "I've come all the way from New York. She can't in common decency refuse to see me."

"I'll fix it," said Mrs. Marlin, and scampered away up the stairs.

We did not bother to sit down in the chilly room, but stood waiting near the open door, laughing among ourselves at the absurd old woman's childish pretexts. I heard Mrs. Marlin open her door; she left it standing open. I heard her knock on the second door, then she unlocked it. A moment later her shriek rang through the house.

The sound froze us where we stood. It had the dreadful staccato quality of shock. A brief cry, followed by silence. Mme Storey ran for the stairs and sprang up like a man, two steps at a time. Riordan and I followed more clumsily. We burst through Mrs. Marlin's room. Just inside of Mrs. Brager's room we found Mrs. Marlin clinging to the door handle, her face ashy, her eyes witless from shock. She pointed to Mrs. Brager's bed.

"Dead—dead..." she whispered.

A look was enough. The old woman lay in her immense, ugly wooden bedstead, her eyes closed, a half smile on her face, like one in a happy sleep. But her flesh had taken on a yellowish waxen consistency, and her face bore an expression of awful dignity such as had never visited it in life. Oh, there was no mistaking it! Mme Storey glided to the bed and touched the hand that lay outside the spread—it no longer looked withered. "Cold," she murmured, and automatically glanced at her wrist watch. "Eleven-five."

There was no sign of any disturbance: the whole house was in order; and for a moment I hoped that the old woman had died from natural causes and that we were to be spared a hideous sensation. But my mistress, with a quick glance around, pointed without speaking to two brass cages which hung one in each of the front windows. Apparently they were empty; but as I approached, I saw in each a tiny yellow form lying on its back with piteous claws in the air. This discovery was unspeakably horrible. It sickened me worse than the dead human figure on the bed.

"Mrs. Marlin," said Mme Storey crisply, "telephone for the doctor."

The young housekeeper, though very pale, had by this time recovered her self-command. It was the shock that had unnerved her. She whispered imploringly: "Do not let *them* come in here!" And ran downstairs.

We knew to whom she referred.

"Mr. Riordan," Mme Storey went on, "you had better take my car and go for the police. We don't want to telephone that call."

The good little man was aghast at the prospect. "Must we—must we?" he stammered.

"Instantly," said Mme Storey.

He went heavily out.

My mistress placed me at the door while she conducted one of her characteristic searches of the room and the adjoining room. It is wonderful to watch her at such moments: like a divine hound, all her senses are brought into action, guided by her beautiful intelligence. Eyes, nose, and finger tips all take part. She moves with incredible swiftness, leaving everything exactly as it was, making no sound. After five minutes I am sure she could have written a book about what she discovered in those rooms, had she cared to. She did not confide her findings to me.

"You had better close the door between and stand outside of it," she said. "Let no one enter." She then departed to conduct her lightning search through the rest of the house before she might be interrupted.

Meanwhile the maidservant and the fat cook had come to the outer door of Mrs. Marlin's room, where they stood gasping and carrying on as such people always do. They appeared to be enjoying their own horror. I heard the front door close, and somebody came up the stairs. It was Oneto. Seeing the servants in the doorway, he broke through them into the room.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Brager is dead," I said.

He was young and had not yet acquired full control over his features. An ugly triumphant grin overspread his face. "Are you sure? Are you sure?" he eagerly demanded.

Disgusted, I refused to answer.

"Let me in there!" he cried.

"You can't go in there."

He ran to the door and violently rattled it. "I will go in! Nobody has a better right."

"Well, I haven't the key," I said.

Mme La France was the next to appear. I suppose she came from out-of-doors too, since she was wearing hat and cape. Her unwholesome flesh turned mottled in her excitement; her hard eyes bored into me. I have never seen such baleful eyes. They were at once bright and thick looking, if you get what I mean: like a blue glaze on cheap china.

"Who found her?" she said thickly.

"Mrs. Marlin," I said.

She laughed hatefully. The whole atmosphere was charged with hate and suspicion. Oneto and the La France woman measured each other up and down with ugly sneers.

"Aah, you cur!" the woman said suddenly.

He retorted with an unprintable epithet. "You'll soon find out where you get off!" he added.

"Is that so? Is that so?" she retorted. "You wait!"

Suddenly, as if seized by a common impulse, they turned and shouldered each other out of the room. Oneto, being the more active, gained the stairs first and ran down, with the woman following heavily. I couldn't guess what they were up to.

The next thing I remember, Mrs. Marlin was bringing the doctor in. He was a grave, decent, middle-aged man, that I was glad to see. She opened the door of Mrs. Brager's room for him to enter, while she hung back to whisper to me:

"Your friend says please telephone for Crider and Stephens to come at once. They are to apply at the back door."

Crider and Stephens, as you know, were two of four best operatives. I went down to do Mme Storey's bidding. The telephone was under the stairs. Oneto was using it, while Mme La France waited, biting her fingers in impatience. As well as I could make out, each was calling up a lawyer. They hung about to learn what I wanted with the 'phone, but I contrived to speak so that they could not hear. Stephens was keeping the office during our absence; and he knew how to get in touch with Crider.

Oneto and the woman followed me back to Mrs. Marlin's room. Mme Storey was there, having completed her survey of the house. The servants had returned to the kitchen. My mistress, who had put on a silly-seeming air, immediately sidled over to the two behind me and said, goggling with affected horror:

"Oh, isn't it terrible?"

They looked at her suspiciously, not knowing how to take this.

The doctor (his name was Patten) came out of the further room, followed by Mrs. Marlin. The young woman had regained complete control of herself. Her face was a dead-white mask. Dr. Patten said gravely:

"Mrs. Brager is dead of suffocation. She has been asphyxiated."

Mme Storey uttered an affected little scream of horror. "Oh, how awful!"

I was watching the remaining two persons in the room. Oneto turned very pale and then flushed deeply. He quickly lowered his eyes, but the whole air of the man proclaimed that he was swelling with a secret joy. Mme La France was not giving so much away. Her face still showed that mottled look under the make-up, and she was breathing hard; but her blue eyes remained staring defiantly ahead of her, impervious as earthenware. I could not understand it. Suppose Mrs. Brager had been murdered, they could not have done it together, since they hated each other so intensely. And apparently neither of them was going to profit by it anyway.

"Oh, Doctor, oh, Doctor, how can that be?" gabbled Mme Storey—my mistress is most dangerous when she is playing the part of the foolish, pretty woman. "When we went in there awhile ago the air was perfectly good. There was no smell."

"I cannot explain that, Madame," said Dr. Patten. "It is a matter for the police."

V

Mr. Riordan presently returned with two policemen, who took up their watch within Mrs. Brager's room. It appeared that nothing could be done without the Public Prosecutor; and as this official was absent in a near-by village, we had to wait until he could motor back. Our friend Mr. Riordan was somewhat disconcerted by the role that he found Mme Storey had assumed. Fearful, perhaps, of betraying his uneasiness, he waited downstairs.

Mrs. Marlin's room, while smaller than the corner chambers, was nevertheless of a good size for a bedroom: say, fifteen by twenty. Opposite the door from the hall was a triple window which must have been immediately above the front door of the house. There was another door corresponding to the door into Mrs. Brager's room, but this was closed up. Mme La France's room lay on that side. The two men occupied the rear chambers on this floor.

As I have said before, Mrs. Marlin had arranged her room as a bed-sitting-room. As you entered from the hall, the narrow bed was on your left, a couch on your right. At the front there was a bureau on one side, a writing desk on the other, and in the centre of the free space a table which bore a china tea service on a tray, together with a little brass kettle suspended over a spirit lamp. Two or three comfortable chairs completed the furnishings. On the walls hung many photographs of Mrs. Marlin's children at different ages, and of an intelligent-looking man with the eyes of a dreamer, whom I supposed to be her fiancé, Dr. Brill. The entire drama was played out in that room with the different characters continually coming and going. At a moment when we were unobserved, Mme Storey instructed me to remain there and to take particular care that nobody tampered with the brass kettle or tried to remove it.

Oneto and Mme La France, having been away to remove their outer things, returned to the door of the death chamber, whence nothing could budge them. Mme Storey curried favour first with one, then the other, and by degrees got herself accepted by both as a harmless sort of fool. Her method was to talk a great deal and apparently never to listen. It is surprising what a lot she can pick up that way. I could overhear but little of their low-voiced talk.

Then the lawyers came, the woman's first. He was fetched up to the room where we all were, a lanky young man with a prominent Adam's apple, who seemed to be well-nigh overwhelmed by the magnitude of the situation. His name was Mr. Deisel.

"Have you got the will?" barked Mme La France.

He nodded, swallowing hard.

"Read it to these people."

He drew the document from his pocket. It was contained on a single sheet of foolscap. He read it tremulously. In effect it constituted "my dear friend Mme Rose La France" the sole benefactor. The woman, unable to contain her

feelings any longer, broke out into a vulgar, shrewish cry of triumph.

"Now! *Now*, who is the mistress here?"

Oneto had listened to the reading, posing with one hand on his hip and a hateful, conceited smile on his face. "And the date?" he drawled.

The lawyer named a day in November.

"I see," said Oneto, grinning still, "a Thanksgiving present!"

Mme Storey immediately went up to the woman with fulsome congratulations and side glances of contempt for Oneto. The two women drew aside toward the window, Mme La France flushed with triumph, confiding eagerly in my mistress. I could not hear what she said.

Oneto's lawyer, Mr. Paulson, was an older man and more urbane than Deisel; his present errand was clearly not to his taste. He remonstrated quietly with his client, but in vain. He too was forced to take a will from his pocket and read it aloud to us. In phraseology it was similar to the first, but in this case the beneficiary was "my dear fiancé Raymondo Oneto." Mme La France was left a legacy.

"And the date?" drawled Oneto with his hateful smile.

"December twenty-fourth."

"Mine was a Christmas present, you see."

A shocking change had taken place in Mme La France. Her face seemed to have turned black, and the blue eyes protruded. She gasped for breath, one hand clutching her fat throat. At last a vitriolic stream of abuse issued from her lips, directed at Oneto. She brought up the very dregs of foul speech. I can convey no idea of it. The burden of it was: "You killed her! You killed her!"

To which Oneto retorted: "Why me any more than you? You thought you were the heir."

All this in the very antechamber of death, remember. It was a disgusting exhibition.

Rage overcame the woman. She staggered and fell into a chair, half fainting. One could imagine the hell of disappointment in her breast. Mrs. Marlin, with a cold air of disgust, fetched her a glass of water. Presently she got to her feet and made her way slowly out of the room, supporting herself from object to object. The rest of us looked on the ground, shamed by the scene.

Curiosity soon brought her back again, looking like a wreck of her former self. Her face was strangely streaked and discoloured, her hair disordered, her dress awry. I saw then that she must be nearer sixty years old than the forty I had supposed.

Meanwhile, Mme Storey, unabashed, was making up to Oneto with alluring smiles and much play of her fine eyes, and the young man quickly fell for it. It was the first time a woman like that had ever come his way. Mme Storey's actions seemed perfectly natural to these people, since it was exactly the way they would have comported themselves under the same circumstances. They whispered together, while the La France woman watched them with a sick sneer.

A car drove up outside, and the Hon. Shep Chew came hastening upstairs. Evidently he had learned the news outside; he was prepared for the scene which met his eyes. There was nothing crude here: he was perfectly master of himself and of the situation; full of pious expressions of grief, and displaying courtesy toward all. But how those greedy black eyes glittered! Throwing his hat and coat on the bed, he immediately undertook to tell us all in the nicest way where to get off at. He reminded me of a high-priced undertaker.

He tackled Mme Storey first. "My dear Mrs. Pomeroy, what a dreadful thing has happened! It was so good of you to

come and see us again, but under the circumstances I am sure you will..."

His object was to get her out of the house, but she displayed a bland obtuseness. "I'm waiting to hear what the Prosecutor says," she answered with a silly smile.

He had to give her up. He then tried to waft us all out of the room with motions of his outspread arms. "Let us wait down in the drawing room," he said unctuously; "it will be more seemly."

"Who the hell do you think you are, giving me orders?" said Oneto.

Mr. Chew looked inexpressibly grieved. "I speak in the name of the common affection that we all bore to the dear one who has left us," he said gently.

"Speak in the name of what you please," said Oneto. "I stay here."

Without another word Mr. Chew walked out of the room. Oneto swaggered and plumed himself but was perhaps not quite so confident as he wished to appear. Mme Storey soothed his vanity. He whispered to her. And then Mr. Chew returned, dragging a very reluctant Mr. Riordan after him.

"Mr. Riordan," he said impressively, "be good enough to explain to this young man what relation I stand in to the late Mrs. Brager."

Mr. Riordan scowled, removed his glasses and violently polished them. I doubt if in his whole career he had ever had a client that he liked less than his present one. He said huffily: "All I know is that at Mrs. Brager's request I drew up a will for her which is now in my office safe. After making a number of unimportant bequests, she named Mr. Chew as her principal beneficiary."

"What was the date?" cried several voices at once.

"February ninth; eight days ago."

A fleeing laugh broke from Mme La France. Having nothing more to lose herself, she was delighted to be a witness of Oneto's discomfiture. That young man's voice scaled up like a woman's.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "I'll believe it when I see it and not before. Mrs. Brager and I were engaged to be married. We made an agreement."

The woman redoubled her laughter.

Mr. Chew held up his hand in pious horror. "Pray, dear Madame La France, not here! not here! Think of the respect that is due to the dead!"

"Judas!" she hissed at him.

Oneto's face was working like that of a child who is about to burst into tears. "You damned mealy-mouthed hypocrite!" he cried. "I see it all now! You read the papers yesterday morning, didn't you? You didn't intend that she should make another will which would throw yours into the discard! You are the murderer!"

For an instant the smug mask dropped from Chew's face. "You read the papers yourself, I believe," he snarled.

By this time the rest of us were so fed up with sensations that this had little effect. We were only disgusted. I wondered what Mme Storey made out of all these recriminations. For myself the fog only became thicker and thicker. It was clear that all three of them had had the will to kill the unfortunate old woman; but which had succeeded? And how?

The scene was interrupted by the entrance of a new character, who came pushing in, followed by three satellites. The room was already too crowded without them. Mr. Riordan introduced the newcomer.

"Mr. Walter Dockra, the Public Prosecutor."

He was a young man for the job; good-looking and very smartly turned out. He had a clever, forceful face, but, it seemed to me, was a little puffed up by the sense of his own importance. As a matter of fact, the enormous publicity that he foresaw in connection with this case completely turned his head. The very likable young man began to behave as you will see, like a second-rate actor in the part of district attorney. The three men he brought with him were typical small-town sleuths. Need I say more?

Fully aware of the value of a good entrance, he came to an abrupt stop in the centre of the room and looked at each one of us in turn with his compelling eye—hoping to see us quail, I suppose. When he came to Mme Storey he met with a check. She had attached herself to the Honourable Chew now. Mr. Dockra knew her at once and changed colour.

"Madame Storey!" he said, amazed. "Madame Rosika Storey! This is indeed unexpected!" There was a curious conflict of feelings in his face: admiration, respect, and a deep chagrin. He saw his precious publicity threatened by a figure which dwarfed his own.

The speaking of that famous name produced an electrical effect in the room. Every pair of eyes was turned on my mistress in wide astonishment. In especial, Rose La France, Oneto, and Mr. Chew looked at her in horror. One could see them casting frantically back in their minds to see if they had made any dangerous admissions to this terrible woman.

It must have annoyed Mme Storey thus to have her hand forced; but she took it in good part. "Very much at your service," she said, bowing to the prosecutor.

VI

I need not go into the first stages of Mr. Dockra's investigation, since nothing was brought out but what you already know. He asked the obvious questions to which he received the obvious replies. I may say that during this period Crider and Stephens, our two operatives, arrived from town, and were immediately dispatched by Mme Storey on different errands. I did not then know the nature of their errands. The prosecutor and his men had made a search of the two rooms. Mr. Dockra himself had examined the brass kettle with the greatest care. He put it down without comment, but I was aware thereafter that he was watching it as carefully as I was.

Half an hour later found five of us in Mrs. Marlin's room; to wit, Mrs. Marlin, Mme Storey, Mr. Dockra, one of the detectives who was acting as clerk to the prosecutor, and myself, who was taking notes for Mme Storey. I am sure that Mr. Dockra was none too pleased to have us present; it made him nervous to have Mme Storey sitting by, quietly watching; but he could not very well dismiss the famous psychologist. The others had been banished to the drawing room downstairs, where they sat, one may suppose, each in company with his secret thoughts. A policeman guarded the door of the room. The reporters were herded in another room.

It was Mrs. Marlin's turn to be interrogated. She sat at the foot of the bed facing the windows, her hands loosely clasped in her lap, pale and entirely composed. There was a curious look of indifference in her beautiful face, a remote look. One might have said that she secretly scorned us all. Mr. Dockra paced back and forth across the room, shooting out most of his questions sideways. Mme Storey lounged in an easy chair with her long legs crossed, taking everything in without appearing to.

"It is only fair to warn you," said Mr. Dockra, "that anything you say here may be used against you later."

My mistress sent me a glance of humorous despair. Oh, these clever men who will take the obvious view of a case and ignore the inner truth! Pride themselves on logic and refuse to listen to the still small voice of intuition. My mistress and I are continually up against that sort of thing, and will always be, I suppose. I think Mr. Dockra caught her look at me and was annoyed by it.

"I have nothing to conceal," said Mrs. Marlin proudly.

"How long have you been working for Mrs. Brager?"

"Three years."

"Was she a good mistress to you?"

"She paid me good wages."

"That is not what I mean. Was she kind to you?"

The hint of a smile flitted across Mrs. Marlin's face. "She meant to be."

"Be good enough to give me plain answers," he said in an annoyed way. "Is it not true that you were continually quarrelling with her?" (You will perceive by this that the Honourable Chew had had the prosecutor's ear.)

"Quarrelling, no!" said Mrs. Marlin. "She was always scolding me, if that is what you mean. It was just her way. It meant nothing."

"Just her way?" sneered Mr. Dockra. "Do you mean to say she scolded all the inmates of the household: Mr. Chew, Madame La France, Mr. Oneto?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Marlin simply. "She was afraid of them."

He smiled in a superior way, and I saw a spark of annoyance appear in Mme Storey's eyes.

"Sound psychology, Mr. Dockra," she murmured.

He bowed in a manner that suggested she was entirely mistaken, but he was too much of a gentleman to question a beautiful lady's statement.

"What did she scold you about?" he next asked.

"Everything," said Mrs. Marlin. "The principal trouble was over the bills. Mrs. Brager always refused to make me a regular allowance to run the house on; consequently, at the end of the month there was a row over almost every item of every bill."

"Were the bills excessive?"

Again the slight smile in Mrs. Marlin's face. "I was required to keep the expenses within three hundred dollars a month. You would hardly call that excessive at the present prices of everything."

"Had Mrs. Brager ever discovered any irregularities in the bills?"

"No."

"Then what was the trouble about?"

"It was Mrs. Brager's peculiarity that she could not pay out a dollar without agonizing over it."

"You are accusing your mistress of being miserly."

"Surely that is notorious," said Mrs. Marlin quietly.

"Then how did you succeed in getting good wages out of her?"

"I made myself indispensable to her," said the young woman proudly. "Before I came she had had twelve housekeepers in a year."

"And having made yourself indispensable, you brow-beat her into paying you good wages."

"That is not a question but a statement of your own," said Mrs. Marlin quietly. "It calls for no answer from me."

Mme Storey lowered her eyes to hide the glint of amusement. She loves to see a woman score off a cock-sure man, and so do I.

"Hm!" said Mr. Dockra. "Now, let us take up the question of these peculiar sleeping arrangements. How long is it since Mrs. Brager had the door from her room into the hall fastened up and a Yale lock put on this door?"

"About two years."

"Did the suggestion come from her or from you?"

"From her. I opposed it as long as I could. The arrangement destroyed what privacy I had in my own room."

"You and she had the only keys to that lock?"

"Yes."

"Your key has never been out of your possession?"

"Never. I pledged myself not to let it leave my person. Mrs. Brager gave me this thin chain from which I wear it suspended. She kept hers on a similar chain, which is still around her neck."

"But the spring lock could be caught back, of course. Was that ever done?"

"Never."

"I understand that you were the last person to see Mrs. Brager alive. Please describe the circumstances."

"At seven o'clock this morning I carried a cup of tea and a biscuit in to her, according to custom. She would not allow the maid to enter her room at that hour. She told me she felt unwell and would not get up until lunch time."

"What was the nature of her indisposition?"

"I did not inquire."

"Why didn't you?"

"From the way she spoke, I gathered that it was merely an excuse to avoid seeing Mr. Riordan, with whom she had an appointment at eleven."

"As far as you could see she was quite well, then."

"Quite well."

"You noticed nothing unusual about her, about the room."

"Nothing."

"Were the birds singing?"

"No. The sun was not up."

"Hm! Then what did you do?"

"I dressed and went down to breakfast. Afterward I swept and dusted the drawing room, according to custom. At quarter to nine I went down town to do my marketing."

"What shops did you visit?"

Mrs. Marvin, with her faint smile, named them.

"What time did you get back?"

"A few minutes after ten."

"Did you come up to this room?"

"Yes, for a moment."

"Did you open that door?"

"No."

"Will you swear that you did not open that door?"

"Yes, when the proper time comes."

"Why didn't you open it?"

"There was no occasion to."

"Did you hear anything from that room?"

"No."

"Weren't the birds usually singing?"

Mrs. Marlin shrugged with a touch of impatience, "Oh, sometimes birds sing and sometimes they don't."

Mr. Dockra then took her over the scene of the discovery of the body, which I have already described to you. Nothing of moment was brought out.

"Had the lock been tampered with?" he asked.

"No."

"Did you notice a peculiar smell in the room?"

"No."

"Were the windows open?"

"No. Closed and locked. It was Mrs. Brager's custom."

"If the windows had been closed all night, did not the room have a close smell?"

"Not perceptibly. It is a very large room."

"Don't you see how damaging your own answers are to yourself?" said Mr. Dockra. "According to you Mrs. Brager was alive and well at seven o'clock and dead at eleven. And nobody but yourself could have got into the room in the meantime."

"Why should I have killed her?" asked Mrs. Marlin quietly. "I had everything to lose and nothing to gain by her death."

"We can see that now," said Mr. Dockra, "but you may have had expectations of something different."

"Mrs. Brager was continually telling me that I need expect nothing at her death."

Mr. Dockra permitted himself an incredulous smile.

"Madame Storey heard her," said Mrs. Marlin.

"Did you?" he asked of my mistress in surprise.

"Yes. Two days ago, on my first visit to Mrs. Brager, I heard her use these words to Mrs. Marlin: 'I warn you, miss; I warn you as I've warned you a hundred times before; you'd better take care of me if you know what's good for you, for you won't profit one cent by my death. Not one cent!'"

Mr. Dockra coughed in a disconcerted fashion. "Hm!—Ha!"

For fifteen minutes longer he kept after Mrs. Marlin, leading over the same ground, without succeeding in tripping her. She answered apparently without even stopping to think. Her indifferent air was exasperating to her questioner. I need not repeat all this, since nothing new was brought out.

The prosecutor was interrupted by another of his men, who whispered a communication in his ear.

"What! another lawyer?" said Dockra. "Well, bring him in."

A young man with a keen and resolute face entered briskly. He and Mr. Dockra were acquainted; rivals possibly. They exchanged curt nods.

"Well, Blick?" asked the prosecutor.

The newcomer wasted no time in beating around the bush. "I have a will," he said crisply, "drawn up by me at the request of Mrs. Brager and signed by her. Her instructions were that any time I should hear of her death I was instantly to proceed to her house and take charge."

"What is the date of this will?" asked Mr. Dockra.

"February tenth—one week ago."

"Ha!" cried Mr. Dockra; "let us hope that this is really the last one!" He held out his hand for it.

An uncomfortable premonition of the truth came to me. I waited on tenterhooks.

As Mr. Dockra read, his face became suffused with gratification. "Ha!" he cried again, in quite a different tone. "Just what I expected. Listen!" He read a single sentence: "'All the rest and residue of my estate I hereby devise and bequeath to my loyal friend and servant Mrs. Clare Marlin.'"

Mrs. Marlin leaped up with a cry of the purest surprise. "Oh! I never knew!"

Mr. Dockra smiled. I groaned inwardly. Not that I doubted the poor girl; the production of this latest will did not really alter the status of the case; but I foresaw what capital the logical male mind would make of it.

"Under what circumstances was this will made?" Mr. Dockra asked.

"Six times during the past two years," Mr. Blick answered, "Mrs. Brager has come to my office and instructed me to draw up a will of this nature, each time with a new date."

"When was the last time?" asked Mme Storey.

"Just before Christmas, Madame."

"And the time before that?"

"Somewhere around Thanksgiving."

"Then it is clear she always intended Mrs. Marlin should inherit," said my mistress. "The other wills were merely blinds."

"Quite so," said Mr. Dockra.

"I never knew!" cried Mrs. Marlin, like one stunned with surprise. The dawning gladness in her face was eloquent of the truth of her words; but that logical man refused to see it.

"Who came with Mrs. Brager to your office?" he asked.

"She was alone," replied Mr. Blick. "She always came alone."

"She pledged you to secrecy?"

"She did. She said nobody was to know about this will but herself, myself, and the beneficiary."

"The beneficiary, eh? Well, there you are!" cried Mr. Dockra, spreading out his hands.

"She never told me!" cried Mrs. Marlin.

"I am sorry, my dear Mrs. Marlin," said Mr. Dockra, delighted at having seemed to prove Mme Storey wrong, "but circumstances are against you. I shall have to detain you in custody for the present. You may wait in one of the rooms upstairs, where you will not be the subject of vulgar curiosity."

The poor girl, still dazed, was led away by a policeman. She glanced imploringly at Mme Storey and at me. We smiled at her encouragingly; it was all we could do.

When the door was opened the Hon. Shep Chew was to be seen hovering outside. He had evidently witnessed the coming of the new lawyer and was visibly tortured with anxiety to know what it portended. He stuck his head into the room.

"Can I be of any help?" he asked insinuatingly.

Mr. Dockra ignored him; to give him credit, he had no use for the slimy hypocrite. It was my mistress who, with her most winning smile, invited him in.

"Another will has turned up," she said, "post-dating yours. It leaves practically everything to Mrs. Marlin."

You should have seen his face!

"Unfortunately," Mme Storey went on, "there are some very unpleasant circumstances—very unpleasant circumstances..."

A crazy hope sprang up in his eyes. Naturally, if Mrs. Marlin could be proved to be guilty of the death of Mrs. Brager, her will would be set aside and his be good. "Of course," he said eagerly, "none of the rest of us ever doubted who did it!"

"But how?" murmured Mme Storey as if more to herself than to him.

"Haven't you brought out the facts about clarium gas?" he asked.

"What is that?" asked the prosecutor sharply.

"Dr. Sanford Brill's discovery. He has produced a gas which is instantly fatal to all breathing creatures. They wanted Mrs. Brager to finance him. He came here only yesterday, and gave her a demonstration. She turned him down."

"Ha!" cried Mr. Dockra. "Let this Dr. Brill be brought here immediately," he said to his clerk. "And if he is giving demonstrations of his gas, let him be prepared to give me a demonstration."

VII

Dr. Brill was that unusual type, the stalwart young scientist, a man of intellect and muscle. I could readily understand how Mrs. Marlin had fallen in love with him. He had a handsome head, covered with tousled, shining black hair, and deep, brooding gray eyes. His look was at once open, thoughtful, and manly. What was more, the carelessness of his dress suggested that he needed a woman to look after his clothes and to see that he was properly fed. He had not the least notion of how attractive he was.

Such a man, buried in his laboratory, would be the last to hear a piece of news. He was shocked beyond measure to hear of Mrs. Brager's death, and demanded to be allowed to see Mrs. Marlin. When this was refused him, when he understood that Mrs. Marlin was suspected of having had a hand in it, his amazement turned to anger, and I thought we were going to have a fight on our hands.

"What nonsense!" he cried. "How could she have done such a thing?"

"By means of clarium gas," suggested Mr. Dockra, watching him.

All the anger suddenly went out of Dr. Brill. He paled and his eyes widened; he became very quiet. The prosecutor, of course, did not fail to mark these evidences of an inward dismay. A man like Dockra, I may say, the clever, ambitious opportunist, was perfectly incapable of understanding one of Dr. Brill's type; consequently, he disliked him at sight, though he was careful to preserve the outward forms of courtesy.

We had Dr. Brill into Mrs. Marlin's room, and the investigation proceeded.

"Please tell me about this clarium gas," said Mr. Dockra.

"It is a discovery of mine," said Dr. Brill, "a gas lighter than hydrogen, lighter than helium, and which may be produced at a fraction of the price of helium."

"Poisonous, is it not?"

"Yes. That's the trouble with it."

Mr. Dockra stared. "What's it to be used for, then?"

Dr. Brill looked at him as much as to say: "What a foolish question." "It solves the problem of the navigation of the air by heavier than air vessels," he went on, as one might explain to a child. "By the use of clarium airships may be made much smaller, hence more manageable, and the cost brought within the limits of commercial possibilities."

"Where did the name come from?"

"I called it after Mrs. Marlin, whose name is Clare."

"You are engaged to marry Mrs. Marlin?"

"Yes."

"Why have you and she not got married before this? ... I hope you will pardon these personal questions, Doctor. In my position I have no choice but to ask them."

"I have no objections to answering any proper question," said Dr. Brill simply. "We have not got married because we could not afford to."

"Then clarium has not paid?"

"I have not tried to realize on it as yet. I do not consider that my work is complete. Though I have tried to keep it as much of a secret as possible, such things will leak out; and I may say that I have been approached by an agent of the government with a handsome offer for the formula, besides a very good contract to take charge of the manufacture. But I declined the offer."

"Why?" asked Mr. Dockra in astonishment.

"Because of the poisonous nature of the gas."

"Oh, you are afraid that it would kill everybody who handled it."

"Not at all. Safeguards could easily be provided against that. I manufacture it and experiment with it without the slightest danger. What I fear is that, in case of any trouble, the government would turn it to the uses of chemical warfare. By increasing its density, a simple matter to a chemist, it could be made frightfully destructive. I could not take the responsibility."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I shall not let the formula out of my hands until I have succeeded in making the gas harmless. It may be done. But it will take time."

"Meanwhile you need money," suggested Mr. Dockra bluntly.

"I do," returned Dr. Brill, with his admirable simplicity.

"Mrs. Marlin tried to interest Mrs. Brager in the discovery."

"She did."

"Please describe what happened when you gave your demonstration in this house yesterday."

"It was a very simple demonstration," said Dr. Brill. "That was all I was permitted. It was held in the double rooms downstairs. Besides Mrs. Brager, Madame La France, Mr. Chew and Mr. Oneto were present. And Mrs. Marlin, of course."

"Had you ever met these people before?"

"Never. But Mrs. Marlin had talked to me about them."

"What do you mean by saying you were only permitted a very simple demonstration?"

"The whole atmosphere was antagonistic. Of course, I had expected it would be. Mrs. Marlin had warned me that nobody yet had ever succeeded in getting Mrs. Brager to put up money for anything. So it was just a forlorn hope. Still, I might have succeeded in interesting the old lady if it had not been for her hangers-on. They acted as if I was threatening their interests."

"Well, describe the experiments."

"I had brought with me three little tanks containing respectively hydrogen, helium, and clarium; and a handful of rubber skins, such as are used for children's balloons. I blew up a red skin with my breath, a green skin with hydrogen, a yellow skin with helium, and a purple skin with clarium."

"Suppose the purple balloon had burst?"

"It would have done no harm—such a small quantity of the gas, unless it had burst directly in my face. And I took care of that. Clarium rises very quickly."

"Go on."

"The red balloon fell to the ground, of course; the other three rose. I then demonstrated, by using small boxes of matches as units, how much more weight the purple balloon would support than either of the others."

"I suppose many questions were asked you."

"Oh, innumerable questions," answered Dr. Brill ruefully. "Most of them quite beside the point."

"And then?"

"Mr. Chew said: 'But how do we know that this is clarium, this helium, this hydrogen?'"

"A natural question?"

"Oh, quite. I would not have expected Mrs. Brager to put up her money without engaging some qualified person to check up my claims. But Chew's tone suggested that I was trying to cheat her, and she believed it. And—well, that was all. I was given no opportunity to prove my claims."

"It was a bitter disappointment?" suggested Mr. Dockra.

"I can hardly say that," answered Dr. Brill composedly, "since I had expected nothing else."

"I suppose you and Mrs. Marlin often talk about clarium?"

"It is often mentioned between us, naturally. We do not discuss it because my thoughts on the subject are of a highly technical nature that she could not follow."

"But she is fully informed as to the properties of clarium?"

"In a general way, yes."

"Dr. Brill, are you prepared to give me a demonstration of clarium?"

"I am." The doctor opened his satchel and showed us a small tank. "I have brought the same container that I used yesterday." He then produced a small pasteboard box and opened it. "I have also several ounces of the powder of clarium."

"Be careful! Be careful!" cried the prosecutor sharply.

"In powder form it is entirely harmless," said Dr. Brill with a smile. To prove it, he put the powder to his nose and smelled of it. Little prickles ran up and down my spine.

"How is the gas produced?" asked Mr. Dockra, still fearful of the stuff.

"By heating the powder in a retort."

Mr. Dockra sent outside the room, and one of his men came in carrying a cage with a canary in it. I do not know

whether they had found it in the house, or had sent out for it. I foresaw what was coming, and shivered.

"What I want," said Mr. Dockra, "is a demonstration of the effect of clarium gas on a breathing organism, such as this bird."

"Nothing easier," said Dr. Brill, rising.

"Not here!" said Mr. Dockra.

"There is no danger," said the chemist. "An infinitesimal amount will be sufficient. If the cage is placed up high the gas will lose itself under the ceiling. A few minutes after its release it becomes innocuous. All I require is a piece of impervious material such as rubberized cloth."

One of the detectives handed him a raincoat.

"You have not given Dr. Brill the customary warning," remarked Mme Storey.

Mr. Dockra looked annoyed. "You understand that the result of this experiment may be used against you later."

"Nothing is to be gained by refusing to make it," said Dr. Brill simply.

Mrs. Marlin's writing desk had a high back, with pigeonholes, etc., and shelves for books above that. Such an article used to be called an *escritoire* when I was a child. Removing the books from the top shelf Dr. Brill placed the cage upon it, and covered it carefully with the raincoat. I had a final glimpse of the tiny bird hopping from perch to perch in wild affright. The doctor then ran a rubber tube from the cock of the gas container into the cage under the covering, and sat down. Mr. Dockra made believe to have business out in the hall at that moment. I was nervous myself; but as my mistress remained sitting quietly in her chair I had to do likewise.

Dr. Brill turned the cock of the gas tank. There was a tiny hiss, and he shut it off again. He looked around him, saw Mr. Dockra's walking stick, where he had laid it on the bed; lifted the raincoat off the cage with the stick; carried the coat to the door, gave it a shake, and handed it back to the man who had lent it to him. The little bird lay dead on the floor of the cage.

Mr. Dockra called for Dr. Patten. When the physician entered, the prosecutor said to him significantly:

"You know what you have to do."

Dr. Patten carried the cage with the dead bird in it into Mrs. Brager's room and closed the door behind him. There was a long wait. Dr. Brill sat throughout without moving, his head lowered, lost in thought. Mr. Dockra whispered with two of his men. Mme Storey left the room.

Dr. Patten returned, and made a whispered communication to the prosecutor. "You can testify to that?" asked Mr. Dockra. Dr. Patten nodded.

My mistress returned in time for Mr. Dockra's announcement. "Dr. Patten has established the fact that the two birds in Mrs. Brager's room met their deaths in the same manner as the bird you have just seen killed by Dr. Brill. There are certain peculiarities in the effects upon the respiratory organs. It follows therefore that Mrs. Brager was killed by inhaling clarium gas."

VIII

Dr. Brill was still under examination. "Can anybody have stolen the formula for making clarium gas?" asked Mr. Dockra.

He shook his head. "It has never been written down. It is all in here," he tapped his forehead.

"When you were in this house yesterday, did you leave any of the gas or the powder here?"

"No."

"Could it have been abstracted from among your things without your knowledge?"

"No."

"Have you at any time ever allowed any of the gas or the powder out of your possession?"

This was evidently the question that Dr. Brill dreaded. He became very pale. "Yes," he murmured low.

"Ha!" cried Mr. Dockra. "Under what circumstances, please?"

Dr. Brill hesitated painfully. "What I am about to say has an ugly look," he said slowly: "but there could not be anything in it; there could not!"

We pricked up our ears at this.

"Never mind about the look of it. Say it."

"Yesterday, shortly after I had returned to my laboratory from this house," Dr. Brill continued, "I was called to the telephone. A man who said he was the Honourable Shep Chew was on the wire. He told me that Mrs. Brager had changed her mind in respect to clarium gas; that if I was willing to fulfil the condition she laid down, she would advance the money I required. The condition was that I mail to Mrs. Marlin sufficient of the powder to experiment with; Mrs. Marlin was to carry it to a firm of independent chemists, and if their findings agreed with my claims the money would be placed at my disposal."

"Well, what did you do?"

"I immediately did up three ounces of the powder in a tin box and put it in the mail."

Mr. Dockra's lip curled incredulously. I confess that the story sounds far-fetched when I repeat it; but no observant person who watched the simplicity with which it was told could very well have disbelieved it.

"Did you recognize Mr. Chew's voice?" asked Mr. Dockra.

"I cannot say that I did," said Dr. Brill with his dogged honesty.

"You had heard him speaking an hour before."

"I know; but his voice had not impressed me."

"Did it not seem strange to you that Mrs. Marlin herself had not called you up?"

"Mr. Chew had appeared to be Mrs. Brager's principal mouthpiece."

"And you did not question this telephone call at all?"

"No, I was too happy about it," said Dr. Brill simply. "When a thing that you wish for so much comes about, you do not naturally question it."

"It appears not," said Mr. Dockra sarcastically.

"May I ask a question?" put in Mme Storey.

Mr. Dockra bowed to her gallantly.

"Was it not strange that Mrs. Marlin should not call you up afterward about such an important thing, such a fortunate thing?" she asked.

"I have an aversion to talking on the telephone," said Dr. Brill.

"Is that generally known?"

"Mrs. Marlin knows it. We never talk over the telephone.... I sent her a note and enclosed it between the tin box and the paper wrapping."

"That is against the postal regulations," said Mme Storey, smiling.

"Well, I couldn't find an envelope."

"At what hour did this conversation take place?" asked Mr. Dockra.

"My laboratory is in Fordham. I reached there at six o'clock. It would be about ten minutes later."

Mr. Chew was called into the room.

"Mr. Chew," said Mr. Dockra, "Dr. Brill states that he was called up at his laboratory at six ten last evening by a man who gave your name."

"It's a lie!" cried Mr. Chew excitedly. "I never called him up in my life. At ten minutes past six, you say? At ten minutes past six I was talking to a friend in the lobby of the Stanfield Arms. I can prove it! What does he say that I said to him?"

Mr. Dockra motioned to him to be silent. "Now, Dr. Brill," he said to the other, "you have heard his voice again. Was that the voice that spoke to you over the telephone last evening?"

"I don't think so," said Dr. Brill heavily. "It was a sort of growling voice."

I glanced at Mme Storey in astonishment. Was it the growling voice we knew? Her face gave nothing away.

Mr. Chew, much against his will, was dismissed from the room, and the maidservant Maud Pickens was brought in. The girl was paralyzed with fright, and it was with the greatest difficulty that we could get anything out of her. However, we finally established that: she had taken the mail in at a few minutes before nine; she had laid it on the hall table; she remembered seeing the little package addressed to Mrs. Marlin; Mrs. Marlin had already gone to market when the mail came; she thought that Mr. Chew, Mr. Oneto, and Mme La France had all come out into the hall to see what was in the mail; Mrs. Marlin had returned from market at five minutes past ten; she had come into the kitchen; she had a number of packages; the witness could not state if she then had the little package that had come in the mail.

Afterward Mr. Chew, Mme La France, and Oneto each stated in turn that they had seen the little package when it arrived, and that it was still lying on the hall table when they had gone out.

"Well, my case is beginning to shape up," remarked Mr. Dockra, glancing at my mistress as much as to say: "We won't need you in this."

"I congratulate you," said Mme Storey dryly.

After the last three had testified, Mr. Dockra allowed them to remain in the room. He was not averse to making a grand-stand play, as you have seen, and he thus made sure of his gallery. During all this Dr. Brill had remained sitting at the foot of the bed in an attitude of the deepest sadness, arms folded, chin sunk on his breast. I have never seen a man sit so still under stress of emotion.

"Now, Dr. Brill," said Mr. Dockra briskly.

The young chemist raised his pale, drawn face. He foresaw, of course, that worse was coming.

"You have stated," the prosecutor went on, "that you were in need of money. Within the past few days, has not that need become acute?"

Dr. Brill did not answer immediately.

"Is it not a fact that you have been given notice to quit your laboratory unless you can pay the arrears of rent?"

"Yes."

"May I ask a question?" put in Mme Storey.

Mr. Dockra was none too well pleased to be interrupted; however, he bowed.

"You spoke of answering many questions yesterday," said Mme Storey, "when you were demonstrating clarium. Did you describe to the company how to produce the gas from the powder?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Well, who asked you that question?"

One could feel the suspense tighten in the breast of every hearer. Unfortunately Dr. Brill made the worst possible witness for himself. He spread out his hands helplessly.

"I cannot tell you, Madame. It is possible that I volunteered the information without being asked."

"But everybody in the room heard you describe how to do it?"

"Yes, Madame."

Mme Storey bowed to Mr. Dockra; and he proceeded, after letting his eyes travel around the circle to make sure that he had our attention.

"Dr. Brill, have you ever discussed with Mrs. Marlin the possibility of using a makeshift retort for releasing the gas?"

"I cannot recollect doing so."

"Be careful what you say, sir!"

Dr. Brill looked at him suddenly and full. "I am always careful what I say, sir."

Mr. Dockra wagged an inquisitorial forefinger at him. "Have you ever discussed the possibility of using a common kettle for the purpose?" This was where the prosecutor sprung his great surprise. "Such a kettle as this, for instance?" He snatched up the brass kettle from its stand and handed it to the doctor.

It was not a complete surprise to me, because Mme Storey had warned me about that kettle. But it made me anxious, to see the prosecutor thus stealing our thunder. I stole a glance at Mme Storey. She was calm.

Dr. Brill turned the kettle over in his hands unsuspectingly. "Certainly we have never discussed this," he said.

"Examine it closely!" said the prosecutor raspily.

Dr. Brill removed the cover and looked inside. Suddenly his eyes became intent. He carried the kettle hastily to his

nose and sniffed it. Turning it upside down, he examined the bottom. A startling change came over his face; his eyes bolted; I saw the fine drops of sweat spring out on his forehead.

"Well, sir, what do you find?" barked the prosecutor.

The tortured man moistened his pale lips. "Nothing," he stammered.

Mr. Dockra pressed him mercilessly. "Do you not find that clarium powder has lately been burned in that kettle? It has not even been washed out! A fatal error, but perhaps there was no time!"

"I refuse to answer," muttered Dr. Brill.

"You have already answered me sufficiently for the present," said Mr. Dockra, with a satisfied smile. "Later you will have to answer."

Dr. Brill suddenly rose. "Let me see Clare," he said hoarsely, "here, before you all. Then I will answer you!"

"Oh, very well," said Mr. Dockra, not at all displeased by the suggestion. He expected further disclosures. One of the detectives was sent upstairs to fetch Mrs. Marlin.

I dreaded what was coming. I never doubted the innocence of that little woman; but I was terrified at the strength of the case which the wily prosecutor had built up against her. I could see no loophole of escape. When all that was presented to a jury, how could they do otherwise than convict? I looked at my mistress. How I longed to have her uncover her guns! But she gave no sign. From her I looked at that precious trio: Chew, La France, and Oneto; each of their faces bore a similar ratlike look of mean exultation. They were delighted to see Mrs. Marlin, as they would have said, getting hers.

She was brought in with her head up. She went straight to Dr. Brill, who took both her hands in his. They were oblivious to everybody else in the room.

"Oh, Clare! ... Oh, Clare...!" he murmured brokenly.

"Hush, San," she whispered. "Everything will be all right."

He schooled his feelings. "Answer me one question," he said simply. "Have you used that kettle for any purpose this morning?"

"No."

"Look at me, Clare."

She lifted her clear eyes to his, and his glance plumbed the depths of her soul. A great breath of relief escaped him. "Thank God!" he cried, and lifted her hands to his lips. Such a natural and beautiful gesture.

"Now, Mr. Prosecutor," he said, turning around, "I'm ready to answer your question. Somebody has, as we chemists say, cooked clarium powder in that kettle."

Mr. Dockra had watched the little scene with a sneer. "Thank you, Dr. Brill," he said sarcastically. "That about completes my case. I believe you have been an involuntary accessory, but the degree of your responsibility will have to be established by a jury. I shall have to order both you and Mrs. Marlin taken into custody."

Dr. Brill looked at him as an angry mastiff might look at a terrier; his arm went around Mrs. Marlin instinctively. She drooped pitifully within it.

"Oh, my children!" she murmured.

Mr. Dockra had gone on to my mistress. Scaling the dizzy heights of gratified vanity, he murmured with affected

gallantry: "Madame Storey, I cannot tell you what a privilege it has been to have you present at this inquiry. Stanfield is honoured that one whose time is so valuable should have given..."

"Oh, I can give a couple of hours more to it," drawled Mme Storey. "Let's get to the bottom of it while we're about it."

He dropped her hand as if it had been red hot. "My case is complete," he said, staring.

"Oh, absolutely," said Mme Storey dryly; "except in one particular."

"What is that?"

"Mrs. Marlin could not possibly have killed Mrs. Brager."

If you could have seen the beautiful hope and joy break in the faces of those lovers. And how they hung, waiting for her next words.

"I should be glad to have you explain yourself," said Mr. Dockra stiffly.

"It has been established that Mrs. Marlin left the house at quarter before nine," said Mme Storey, "and returned at five minutes past ten. Allowing her only fifteen minutes to make her preparations, she could not have committed the deed before ten-twenty. At eleven five, when I touched the body, it was cold."

The young prosecutor was brought down from his dizzy height. Before his men, too. He rubbed his lip to hide his bitter chagrin. Mme Storey's simple demonstration was unanswerable. As for me, I could have cheered. Ah! my wonderful mistress, she has never yet failed the cause of the angels.

Finally Mr. Dockra said sulkily: "Perhaps you will tell us who it was then."

"That I propose to find out before anybody leaves this room," said Mme Storey significantly.

IX

After the scene I have just described Mme Storey took charge of the proceedings. Mr. Dockra never ventured to oppose her. One could not help but feel a little sorry for the deflated young prosecutor. He was not a bad fellow at heart; but he had been carrying too much pressure. Imagine the small-town attorney thinking he could show Mme Storey a thing or two! She softened the blow as much as she could by making believe to consult him at every point, etc. Everybody remained in the room, and my mistress turned from one to another as questions occurred to her. It was much simpler.

"Mrs. Marlin," she said, "when you went out, was it your custom to lock your door?"

"No, Madame, it never occurred to me to do so. In fact, I had no key to the lock."

"Thank you." My mistress picked up the fateful kettle and tapped it reflectively with her finger nail. "Dr. Brill," she said, handing it over, "look at this again, please. It is a cheap kettle, you see, the metal is very thin. If this kettle, not having any water in it, were suspended over a flame, how long would it be before the metal fused?"

"It would depend upon the flame, Madame."

"I am referring to the flame of the alcohol lamp that goes with it."

Dr. Brill lighted the little lamp and put it out again. "Between six and eight minutes, Madame. The bottom of the kettle is badly discoloured and warped. Another minute and it would have burned out."

"Thank you. How long would you have to cook the clarium powder before it began to give off its gas?"

"No time at all. As soon as the heat penetrated it the gas would be released."

"I see. When the gas is released, how long a time must pass before it becomes innocuous?"

"Fifteen minutes, Madame."

Mme Storey turned to Mr. Dockra. "An elementary sum in arithmetic," she remarked. "If Mrs. Marlin carried the kettle into that room and lighted it, unless she went back in eight minutes to put out the flame, the bottom of the kettle would burn out. Yet it has not burned out, you see. On the other hand, if she went back inside of fifteen minutes, the fumes would kill her too. It won't work out."

The young man's face became longer and longer, seeing his case crumble to the ground. "According to that, nobody could have done it, then," he said sullenly.

"But somebody did do it," said Mme Storey, "for Mrs. Brager lies dead in there."

"How did they get the gas in there, then?" said Mr. Dockra. "Mrs. Brager didn't come out of the room, because the birds are dead in there with her."

"Through the hot-air flue from the furnace," said Mme Storey softly.

A little sound of astonishment went around the circle of listeners. The prosecutor gaped at my mistress. We all did.

She turned to Mme La France without pausing. "Will you please give an account of your movements this morning?"

"Certainly, Madame." The fat woman had by now succeeded in concealing the rage that gnawed her vitals. During one of her absences from the room she had fixed her hair and repaired her make-up. She faced Mme Storey with a hard smile. "After breakfast I sat in the dining room reading the paper," she began.

"Waiting for the mail?" put in Mme Storey pleasantly.

"We all were. When it came we went out into the hall to see what there was. I seen the little package addressed to Mrs. Marlin——"

"You have already testified as to that. Was there anything for you?"

"No, Madame. Afterwards I went upstairs and put on my things, and left the house. I went down to Ye Gilded Lily Shoppe—that's a beauty parlour in the town—where I had an appointment for a head shampoo."

"At what hour was your appointment?"

"Ten o'clock."

"That leaves a whole hour to be accounted for."

"Well, I didn't hurry none. I took my time about getting my things on. I suppose it would be about nine twenty when I left the house."

"But it only takes ten minutes to go downtown on the car. Less than that by taxi."

"I walked, Madame. I am reducing."

"Oh, I see. Did you leave the house before or after the gentlemen?"

"I can't say. I didn't see them when I went out."

"Then nobody saw you leave the house?"

"Nobody that I know about."

"Did you meet anybody you knew on the way downtown?"

"No, Madame."

"I suppose you are known at the beauty parlour?"

"Oh, yes, Madame, they all know me there."

"What time did you leave there?"

"Eleven. And come right home by car. You was already here then."

"You were wearing a cape when I saw you. Is that your custom?"

"No, Madame. Only when I'm walking. It gives me more freedom, like."

"That is all, thank you," said Mme Storey. "Now, Mr. Oneto."

The young man faced her with a look at once nervous and sulky. His eyes quailed; he passed his handkerchief over his face. This looked hopeful.

"You, too, were waiting in the dining room after breakfast?" suggested my mistress with an ironical air.

"Yes."

"Reading the paper?"

"No, she had it."

"What were you doing?"

"Nothing."

"Waiting for the mail?"

"Oh, I don't look for much in the mail. I'm no hand to write letters."

"But you went out in the hall when it came?"

"Yes."

"Get anything?"

"No."

"Then what did you do?"

"My hat and coat were downstairs. I took them and went out. Mr. Chew saw me go."

"Where did you go?"

The young man scowled even more blackly, and his eyes darted from side to side like something trapped. "Went to see a friend," he muttered.

"Who?"

He hesitated. "I won't say," he muttered.

"Hm!" said Mme Storey. "You understand what that implies."

"Aah, what difference does it make?" he burst out. "Chew saw me go out right after the mail came; and you all saw me come in again after eleven o'clock. It couldn't have been me."

"How do we know that you didn't come back in between?" suggested Mme Storey quietly.

"I didn't have a latchkey."

"It would have been a simple matter to leave the door on the latch."

"Well, I didn't," he muttered.

"There is a door opening from the side yard directly onto the cellar stairs," Mme Storey went on. "It has not been used in many years; not since the house was last painted, in fact. But this morning it was opened, and somebody entered that way, after having put down a board over the soft earth outside to avoid leaving a footprint."

Oneto stared at her. "Well, it wasn't me," he said sullenly, "and you can't hang it on me."

"You will be under suspicion until you can account for your movements."

"Aah, I went to see a lady friend," he said with a hang-dog air. "It wouldn't do any good for me to give her name, because she'd deny I was there if you asked her."

"Why should she deny it?"

"Because her husband don't know me."

A smile travelled around the circle at this answer. But Oneto had no intention of being funny; he was sweating. To my disappointment, Mme Storey let him go for the moment.

"Mr. Chew," she said.

There was no hesitancy about this witness. He was too eager to testify, too full of virtuous protestations. "After the mail came I went back into the dining room to look at the paper," he said. "Nobody gets a chance at it when Mme La France is around. I didn't see Oneto leave the house. He may have done so, but he can't prove it by me, because I wasn't taking any notice of him. I didn't read the paper long—only the headlines. The dining room door was closed to keep in the heat, and I didn't see Mme La France go out. Maybe she did. My hat and coat were up in my room, and after a few minutes I got them and went out."

"Where did you go?"

"Well, you'll think it's funny, Madame Storey, but I got on a car and went down to a sort of little club that I know of called the Acme Social Club, and played pool with some men there. I assure you it's not my custom. But this morning I was to talk over some business matters with Mrs. Brager, and when the housekeeper told us at breakfast that she was indisposed it left me at a loose end, so to speak, and I——"

"Quite so," said Mme Storey, cutting him short. "With whom did you play pool?"

"Well, there was quite a crowd: a fellow they call Fred, and a fellow they call Spike, and Dan—you see I don't know them outside the club, and I'm not sure about their last names; Dan's last name is Potter, I think."

"But they could be found at the club?"

"Certainly, Madame Storey."

"At what time did you enter the club?"

"I couldn't tell you exactly. It would be about twenty-five past nine."

"Mr. Chew, can you produce a witness who will swear that he saw you enter the club before half-past nine?"

A panicky look came into the greedy, darting black eyes. "How do I know if I can?" he gobbled. "There was a crowd there; fellows always coming and going. I don't know if anybody noticed me particularly coming in or could tell the time to a minute." He darted off on a new tack. "Nobody who ever saw me and Mrs. Brager together would ever suspect me of meaning harm to her!" he cried with tears in his voice. "Why, we were like brother and sister together, like mother and son; a hundred times she has termed me her son."

Those of us who knew the old lady and her pretensions to youthfulness smiled at this.

"Why, when a fellow come into the club and said that a rumour was going around town that Mrs. Brager was dead, I almost dropped where I stood. Ask any of them how I took it! My friend! My benefactor! I rushed out of the place and jumped in a taxi and came right here. I am still so overcome by this shocking event, I scarcely know what I'm saying!"

My mistress was bored by these protestations. "I noticed, when you came in, that you were wearing your overcoat across your shoulders," she said. "Why was that?"

"It is just a way I have got into," he said.

"Madame La France," said my mistress, "have you seen Mr. Chew wearing his overcoat in that manner?"

"No," was the blunt answer.

"That's a lie!" cried Mr. Chew excitedly. "That woman has it in for me. She——"

"Oh, please!" said Mme Storey, holding up her hand. "No recriminations. That is all, thank you, Mr. Chew."

Things began to happen then.

X

A battered figure appeared in the doorway. It was Crider, the best man we have; one of his eyes was puffed up and beginning to blacken; his cheek was cut; his collar was torn open. I gasped at the sight; but my imperturbable mistress never batted an eye.

"Did you get your man?" she asked coolly.

"Yes, Madame," he said grimly.

"Good!"

The room had become so crowded we could scarcely breathe. Mme Storey suggested that it be partly cleared; and the flock of lawyers was requested to wait in the hall. Mr. Dockra also sent his men outside, except the one who was taking notes. The door had to be left open for air; and during the subsequent proceedings there was a whole bouquet of heads there, peering and listening. Even for those who remained in the room there were not seats enough, though some sat on the bed and some on the couch. I doubt if any of those who stood ever became conscious of weariness, for minute by minute the tension increased, as one might slowly screw the strings of an instrument higher and higher. It became almost unbearable.

Crider was looking at Mme Storey for further instructions. "Speak out," she said; "the Public Prosecutor is waiting to hear what you have to say."

"From the cook downstairs," Crider began, "I got a tip that the man you sent me after would be going to St. Agnes' school after leaving here. He visits the school four times a day. I followed by the route he would naturally take. According to your instructions, I searched all places that would likely suggest themselves as hiding places for a small object he might want to dispose of. I found that my route carried me across the Stanfield River, and I realized, of course, that that would be the place, if any. It is a small tidal stream, and at the time I crossed the bridge was just a narrow creek flowing out between mud flats. I did not feel that I ought to take the time myself, so I hired some boys to drag the water under the bridge, and I went on.

"From having to stop so many times, I found the man gone when I got to the school. But they had his address, and I went there. It was a lodging house in a poor quarter. I found him at home. He had just got there. He refused to come back with me. In fact, I had considerable trouble with him. He was a heavier man than me. But I managed to hold him until the people in the house, who were scared by the racket, sent out for a policeman. I told the officer who I was and took the liberty of adding that the Public Prosecutor wanted the man at Mrs. Brager's house, and the officer took him in charge for me. I searched his room but did not find any of the things you told me to look for. I followed behind to make sure he did not throw anything away in the street.

"When we approached the bridge, I saw that the boys had found something, so I let the officer and his man walk on ahead. The boys gave me this, which they had found in the water. The man does not know that we have it. He is down in the kitchen under guard."

Crider handed Mme Storey a crumpled piece of tin. It had the look of a small box which had been squeezed flat so that it would sink when thrown into the water. Mme Storey, pulling the sides apart, examined it all over, while everybody in the room waited in a breathless silence.

"Dr. Brill," she said at last, "do you smoke Demiopolis cigarettes?"

"Why, yes, Madame," he said, astonished.

"Do you buy them in boxes of one hundred?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Did you use one of the empty boxes to mail the clarium powder to Mrs. Marlin?"

"Yes, Madame," he said, with rising excitement.

"This will be it, then, I fancy," she drawled. "You had better take charge of it, Mr. Dockra." She handed it over. "You will find the name of the maker stamped in the tin."

A little sound of wonder travelled around the room.

Amid an electrical silence, the mysterious man in the case was led into the room and told to sit down in the chair at the foot of the bed. I shivered with repulsion at the sight of the murderer, as I then supposed him to be. He looked like a murderer, which murderers seldom do: a Hercules of a man, now somewhat gone to fat, with a ridged, bony head and completely brutalized features. The sort of man whose only retort is a guffaw of coarse laughter. His little swimming pig eyes held no expression whatever. The coarse and dirty clothes betrayed his occupation. He wore no overcoat.

"What is your name?" asked Mme Storey mildly.

"Henry Hafner," he growled.

Instantly Dr. Brill cried out: "That is the voice I heard over the telephone!"

It was on my tongue's tip to echo him. I too recognized that growling voice! But Mme Storey has taught me to restrain my impulses at such moments. I could see that she was annoyed by Dr. Brill's cry. She looked at Mr. Dockra meaningly. He said:

"There must be no interruptions, or we will have to clear the room."

In order to lull his suspicions, my mistress was adopting a painstakingly friendly attitude toward the brute. "Married, single, or widowed?" she asked.

"Single, 'm."

"Age?"

"Fifty-one."

"I shouldn't have thought it," said Mme Storey politely. "How long have you lived in Stanfield?"

"Eight months, 'm."

"Then you're not well known here?"

"No, 'm. I keeps myself to myself."

"What is your occupation?"

"Sort of odd jobs, 'm. In the winter I tends furnaces. Summers I gardens and mows lawn.... Can I make a statement?" he asked.

"I'd be glad to hear it," said Mme Storey.

"Well? 'm," he began with an aggrieved air, "when this guy here"—a jerk of the dirty thumb in Crider's direction—"come to my room and says, 'Come with me,' I says, 'What t' hell,' I says, 'a man's got his rights. A man's house is his castle,' I says, 'who are you to come buttin' in here?' He says: 'I'm Madame Storey's man,' or some such name. Well, I don't know who Madame Storey is, and I tell him so. 'Show me your badge,' I says. And he ain't got no badge. 'Nothin' doin',' I says, 'get the hell out of here.' Then he tried to drag me, and I pasted him one and we mixed it up, sort of, till the cop come. The guy tells the cop the Public Prosecutor wants me. He didn't tell me that. Soon as he says Public Prosecutor, I goes with him like a lamb. I just want you to get me right, lady: I don't set up to resist no lawful authority."

"That's all right," said Mme Storey; "your resistance to my agent will not be counted against you. Let us get on. I understand that you attend to the furnace in this house?"

"Yes, 'm."

"How long have you been working here?"

"Since the fire was lighted last fall."

"Who got you the job?"

"I got it by astin' at t' kitchen door."

"What time do you come here every day?"

"A little before seven in the morning, and again between nine and ten at night. At this house they won't give no key, so I has to wait for the cook to let me in mornings."

"Then you enter by the kitchen?"

"Yes, 'm."

"Why don't you use the door direct from the yard into the cellar?"

"Is there a door from the yard?" he said with a cunning look. "Oh, sure, I mind seein' that door on the cellar stairs. But that there door has been bolted up since before my time. I suppose the missus wants the kitchen help to keep tab on all who comes and goes in the cellar."

"You came back a second time this morning, didn't you?" said Mme Storey carelessly.

The little eyes darted an uneasy look in her face; but he answered readily: "Yes, 'm."

"What for?"

"Well, you see, 'm, the first time I come the fire was so near out I couldn't fill her up. I just had to put a little on and wait for it to catch good. So I told Mis' Morris, that's the cook here, that I'd be back."

"What time did you come back?"

"Some'eres about nine."

"Where had you been in the meantime?"

He named three houses that he had visited.

"But it wouldn't take you two hours to fix three furnaces."

"No, 'm, I was waitin' round to give the fire time to burn up good."

"It wouldn't take two hours for the fire to come up."

"Not if the dampers was opened right, 'm. But they won't let me do that here. Burn too much coal. They buy it every month, and I gotta make two ton last out. They ought to burn four."

"I want to fix the exact time of your return, if I can," said Mme Storey. "Did you meet the letter carrier making his first round?"

"Not that I rec'lect."

"Are you sure?"

It evidently occurred to Hafner that the letter carrier might have been questioned. "Sure, that's right, I met him," he said. "I just forgot for the moment. Fella name of Smitty. Me and him's well acquainted."

"Had he been to this house, or was he on the way here?"

"He'd been."

"Had you been waiting for him?" asked Mme Storey slyly.

But she didn't catch him. "Why should I?" he asked with an innocent air.

"I don't know," said Mme Storey, just as innocent. "What did you do when you came back?"

From this point on he weighed every word of his answers. As you have perceived, he was by no means as stupid as he looked. That debased exterior concealed a world of low cunning. He made a good witness for himself.

"I went down cellar."

"Did you find anything out of the way there?"

"No, 'm, nothin' out of the way. The fire was still sulkin'. I opened all the drafts and went up to the kitchen while she burned up."

"Right away?"

"No, 'm. I can't say as it was right away. I fooled around a bit, watching her—drawing out a clinker or two. Then I went up."

"What did you do in the kitchen?"

"I sat down and talked to cook and the girl."

"Oh, you sat down and talked. What about?"

"Deed, I can't tell you that, 'm. Nothin' particular. Just talkin' like." Then, reflecting, no doubt, that the cook was at hand to corroborate this part, he added: "But I remember one thing."

"What was that?"

"While I was sittin' there cook wanted to send the girl down cellar for potatoes and I stopped her."

"Why?"

"Because of the coal gas. The furnace was givin' out gas somepin' fierce. I had opened everything up to drawr it off, and I opened the cellar window, too. I told the girl she better wait awhile."

"But you just told me you'd been fooling around down there."

"Oh, I'm used to the gas. Don't notice it a-tall."

"Did the furnace often give off gas?"

"Yes'm. Plumb wore out that furnace was. Weren't no use to complain. Wild horses wouldn't have drug the price of a new furnace out of the old missus."

"Then you went down cellar again?"

"Yes, 'm, I went down again."

"Closing the cellar door after you."

"That was along of the gas."

"Oh, I see. Did the girl go down with you?"

"No, 'm. She didn't come down till I hollered up that the gas was out."

"How was the fire then?"

"Not so good. I fooled around awhile yet, waitin' for it, then I couldn't wait no longer, so I fixed it up the best I could and left."

"Did the girl get her potatoes?"

"Oh, yes, 'm, she got her potatoes all right."

At this point the questioning was interrupted by the entrance of Stephens, the second operative, who had come out from town with Crider. He stood just within the door, waiting to catch his mistress's eye.

"Well, that's fine!" Mme Storey said to Hafner; "just excuse me a minute while I speak to this gentleman."

Stephens handed her a slip of paper on which was a written memorandum. After reading it Mme Storey folded it and kept it in her palm during what followed. I guessed by that that it was something of first-rate importance. Hafner's little eyes watched her with an agonized curiosity. He would have given something to know what was written on that paper. Mme Storey then whispered further instructions close in Stephens's ear, and he left the room again.

XI

Up to this moment Mme Storey had shepherded Hafner along so gently that he thought he was picking his own way. He was cunning, but not cunning enough. He thought he was getting along fine; but I, who knew Mme Storey so well, could see that by the apparently plausible answers she was drawing out of him she was making him weave the rope that would later hang him.

I say hang him, but of course I could see by this time that he could not be the principal in this affair. He had no access to the upper part of the house; and he had nothing to gain directly by the death of Mrs. Brager. He was a tool in the hands of one of the three interested persons. I glanced at that precious trio where they sat in a row on the couch near the door: La France, Oneto, Chew. Each face showed the same wary mask, each was awaiting Hafner's answers with the same secret tenseness. Were they all in it? I wondered.

Mme Storey now changed her tactics. With an unexpectedness that caused the witness visibly to jump she said: "Hafner, for what reason did you follow my car back to New York night before last?"

He made his eyes as big as possible with astonishment. "I never followed you, lady," he said in an aggrieved voice. "I never seen you before I come into this room."

"I saw you." (This was not so, of course.)

"Maybe you did, but I wasn't follerin' you.... What kind of a car was I in?"

My mistress bit her lips to control a smile. Brute though the man was, his readiness of wit pleased her. "Never mind that," she said. "You followed me and my secretary to the Restaurant Lafitte on Park Avenue. You then went to a pay station near by and called me up."

"You're mistaken, lady. If somebody called you up, it wasn't me."

"You should butter your voice before you call up folks on the 'phone," remarked Mme Storey dryly. "... Who pointed me out to you and told you to follow me?"

"Nobody, 'm, because I didn't foller you. I ain't been to New York since Christmas."

"Well, let's get back to the cellar," said Mme Storey. "You say the second time you went down you didn't see anything out of the way."

"No, 'm. Nothin' out of the way."

"Well, that's funny," said Mme Storey carelessly, "because when I went down I immediately noticed that the tops of all the hot-air pipes leading out of the furnace had been dusted off."

Hafner's eyes flickered with fear; but he answered without hesitating: "You don't say. Must 'a' been done after I come up, for that would be a thing I'd notice. Everything down cellar was covered with dust."

"Yes. Seems funny anybody would go to the trouble of dusting off all those old pipes."

"You're right, lady." She had him sweating now; but his answers still came out pat. He started to pull a handkerchief out of his back pocket and then shoved it back again.

Mme Storey's voice rang out: "Give me that handkerchief!"

Jumping to his feet with a snarl, he clapped his hand over the spot. But resistance was useless, of course, in that crowd. The handkerchief was taken from him and handed to my mistress. It showed the unmistakable dark brown stains of thick dust. Mme Storey gave it a flirt, and a little cloud of fresh dust flew out of it.

"How did it get so dusty, Hafner?" she asked softly.

His tongue failed him then. "I—I—I—" he stammered—"I used it to dust my room with this morning. I hadn't nothin' else to use."

"Your room must have needed it," remarked Mme Storey, looking at the thick brown accumulations on the handkerchief. "Mr. Dockra," she said, brusquely raising her voice, "I would like to have this man searched."

Hafner crouched; showed his teeth like a trapped animal; glanced desirously toward the door. Useless to think of escape. Mr. Dockra called two of his men in.

Mme Storey said carelessly: "I expect to find on him a pair of pliers, a pair of gloves of some sort, a knife—of course, the knife won't prove anything, because every workman carries a knife. If you can also find some scraps of rubber and wire, it will help prove my case."

While the man was being frisked, she turned indifferently away. One after another the objects she had named were thrown on the table: the pliers; a pair of coarse cotton gloves, new, but stained on the palms with the same brown dust; a penknife; two pieces of rubber which looked as if they might have been cut from an old inner tube. Only the wire was missing.

Mme Storey glanced over these things. "We can do without the wire," she said.

Everybody else in the room looked on open mouthed, like a crowd of yokels at a side show.

"These gloves I think were worn for the first time this morning," said Mme Storey, calling attention to their clean backs. "What did you want gloves for, Hafner?"

"To protect my hands," he muttered.

If you could have seen those dirty, calloused hands! A laugh travelled around the room.

Hafner sat down again, breathing hard; but he was not yet beaten; for when Mme Storey said: "Has there been anything wrong with the heating flue leading to Mrs. Brager's bedroom?" he answered readily:

"Not as I knows of."

"Because the next thing I noticed in the cellar," she went on, "was that that flue had been disconnected and joined up again. There was an edge of bright tin showing at the joining of the old pipe. It was at the point where the horizontal flue from the heating chamber joins the vertical flue which runs up through the walls. There is a sort of square tin box there, which receives the round pipe from the furnace."

My mistress's quiet, matter-of-fact voice was too much for Hafner's nerves. "What's all this about?" he suddenly burst out. "What you gettin' at, anyway? A man's got the right to know what he's suspected of!"

Mme Storey stepped to the door into Mrs. Brager's room. We all held our breath. The key had been left in the lock; she opened the door. "Come here and see," she said quietly to Hafner.

His face turned greenish. Showing all his teeth, he strained away, like an animal on a leash. "I won't!" he cried hoarsely. "None of your tricks! I asked you a plain question—can't you give me a plain answer?"

Mr. Dockra looked at his man. "Make him look in there," he said.

But Mme Storey held up her hand. "It's not necessary," she said. "He knows what's in there." She closed the door.

Hafner dropped into his chair again. You could not help but pity the wretch.

"I disconnected the pipe again," Mme Storey resumed, "and looked inside that square box. That had not been dusted out—a fatal oversight! In the bottom of it was collected the dust of thirty years which had sifted down through the register in Mrs. Brager's room. It was, I suppose, a quarter of an inch thick. And in the dust I found three fresh marks in the shape of a triangle, three marks which correspond to the three legs of the standard which supports this kettle. I was careful not to disturb these marks; they are still there."

She paused to flick the ash off her cigarette, and one could hear a little sigh travel around the room as the pent-up breath was released.

"Hafner," asked Mme Storey, "how do you suppose those marks came there?"

"How do I know?" he said. "I couldn't have come up here to get that kettle."

"How did you know that kettle belonged in this room?" she asked quickly.

"I didn't know it," he retorted. "That was just in the way of speaking."

There was an interruption here. The servant Maud pushed through the crowd at the door to say that Miss Rose Schmalz was wanted on the telephone. Mme Storey looked inquiringly at Mrs. Marlin.

"Never heard of such a person," said the housekeeper.

The maid was instructed to say that there was nobody of that name in the house, and she returned downstairs. At the moment I saw nothing in this incident but what appeared on the surface; but it was to have an important bearing on the result, as you will see.

Mme Storey resumed: "I'll tell you how I have figured out what happened, Hafner. Set me right if I go wrong.... The same person who instructed you to follow me into town two days ago told you to watch this house this morning for the first call of the letter carrier and to come back after he'd gone...."

"It's not so," muttered Hafner. He kept interrupting Mme Storey throughout with denials, but I need not set them all down.

"On your way down cellar, you opened the door into the yard—I could see where the old film of paint on the outside had been freshly broken. You then disconnected the flue leading to Mrs. Brager's room. You wore the gloves to avoid leaving finger prints on the pipes. In working over the pipe you disturbed the dust, therefore you were obliged to dust all the pipes alike. Your companion joined you, entering from the yard, and bringing the little brass kettle and the tin box containing the powder."

Mme Storey held up the two pieces of rubber. One piece, a rough ring, had obviously been cut out of the other. "The ring was for a washer to make the lid of the kettle fit snugly. In this manner." She showed how the rubber ring had been snapped around the lid of the kettle. "After the powder had been emptied into the kettle," she resumed, "the lid was wired down. Here are the marks of the wires on the kettle. The wire itself came from one of the supports of the flues. All

this business of making the lid tight was perfectly unnecessary, by the way; for the gas would have puffed right up the flue even if the lid had been off; but you and your friend were not chemists enough to know that.

"You were in momentary fear of being surprised by one of the servants in the kitchen," she went on; "therefore you left your companion to light the flame under the kettle and to blow it out before the bottom of the kettle burned through. You went up into the kitchen and stood guard over the cellar door. When you heard your companion pass out into the yard by the door on the cellar stairs, you returned. You bolted up the door into the yard. You connected up the heating flue again. Your companion had taken the kettle, and you concealed the other evidences of your activities. You then called up to the kitchen that the gas was out.... The gas was out," she gravely concluded, "and so was the spark of life in the old woman who lies in the next room."

Hafner was breaking fast now. "It's not true!" he panted. "I know nothing about it!"

"Then how came you in possession of the tin cigarette box in which the poison was mailed?" asked Mme Storey. "You tossed it into Stanfield River when you crossed the bridge this morning." She held out her hand, and Mr. Dockra passed the box back.

Hafner's nerve went completely. A strangled cry broke from him. He held out his hands toward Mr. Dockra as if inviting the handcuffs. "Take me away!" he bellowed. "Take me away from that woman! Lock me up! Send me to the chair! I don't care what you do to me! ... Take me away from her! She's not a natural woman. Nothing can be hid from her!"

It was a horrible and grotesque sight. The sweat was pouring down his face in drops as big as tears; his eyes were devoid of all sense; his brutal mouth was working like an idiot's. I turned away my head from that sight. "Take me away from her!" he kept shrieking.

"One moment," said the prosecutor coldly; "you have not yet told us the name of your companion in the cellar."

"I'll never tell you that!" cried Hafner. "I don't care what you do to me. Send me to the chair! Won't that satisfy you?"

"Oh, I guess we know how to make you tell," said Mr. Dockra grimly.

Mme Storey turned quickly. "Don't do it," she said with a note of compassion in her voice. "It's his last shred of decency. Give him credit for it. I know who his companion was."

"Who?"

Mme Storey pointed to the fat woman sitting on the end of the couch. "There is the real murderer," she said quietly.

"Madame La France!" cried Mr. Dockra.

"If you like," said Mme Storey. "She goes by several names. She is most commonly known as Rose Schmalz. She betrayed herself when I caused that name to be spoken at the door awhile ago." She unfolded the slip of paper that she had kept in her hand all this time. "I had previously been informed that Rose Schmalz and Henry Hafner were married in South Norwalk on October 24th last."

I do not know if the woman had seen this coming. She got to her feet. There was a hard peasant strength in her, and she uttered no sound; her face remained composed. But that ghastly mottled look returned to her skin, and her hand stole to her throat.

"That was how she secured to herself the accomplice she was in need of, by marrying him," Mme Storey went on—there was no compassion in her voice now. "She herself takes marriage lightly. According to the reports of my agent she has been married at least three times before. That was as far as he could go into her past in two hours' telephoning. Her room adjoins this, you remember. It was she who stole out of the house, carrying the kettle under her cape; and stole back with it later, knowing that the men had gone out."

The woman, still without having uttered a sound, suddenly swayed forward, crashed against the bed opposite, and collapsed in a huddle on the floor. A heart attack. How like man and woman, I thought—his frantic self-pitying cries, and her collapse without a sound. That ended the proceedings.

XII

I must say that Walter Dockra took his humiliation at the hands of my mistress very handsomely. After the excitement was over he marched up to her like a man saying:

"Madame Storey, that was the finest piece of work I ever saw in my life. I consider it a privilege that I was there to see the whole thing worked out. Allow me to congratulate you and to express my regret that I ventured to differ from you, even for a moment."

"Oh, you give me far too much credit," said my mistress, smiling. "In this case, as it happened, I enjoyed an exceptional advantage through having been introduced to the house before the tragedy occurred. It was what I learned then that gave me my line. It was obvious that the three legacy hounds hated Mrs. Marlin poisonously. When I found the kettle with the remains of the poison in her room, I knew it was a plant."

"Why did they hate her?" he asked.

"Because her decency and good feeling were a perpetual reproach to them."

"Nevertheless, it was a wonderful piece of logical reasoning," he insisted.

My mistress smiled suddenly and merrily. "I'm afraid I don't think as much of logic as you do," she said.

"Why not?"

It would have been useless to try to explain. She just smiled on.

Dockra was a young man, and I think the lesson did him permanent good. I have never seen a trace of bumptiousness in his manner since. He remains our very good friend, and sometimes comes to consult my mistress concerning the knotty points that rise in his practice.

When the Schmalz woman and Hafner came to trial, they had not a leg to stand on. Both pleaded guilty and threw themselves on the mercy of the court. But as it had come out that they had been plotting the old woman's death for months, they did not receive much mercy. There is a prejudice against executing a woman; and as they could not execute the lesser criminal and let her live, both received life sentences.

They had first planned to lead common illuminating gas into the heating flue, but gave it up because the odour would have betrayed them. They next prepared to suffocate her with coal gas from the furnace. By tampering with the rusted smoke flue where it passed through the heating chamber, Hafner had already worked a hole in it. Then, if the smoke flue had been stopped up and all the heating flues shut off in the cellar except the one leading to Mrs. Brager's room, the old woman would certainly have suffocated before morning, and it could have been made to appear an accident. However, before they had time to carry this out, they learned of clarium gas.

As for the Hon. Shep Chew and Raymondo Oneto, they quietly disappeared, and I have never heard of them since. No doubt they have gone sleuthing after other legacies. I understand it is quite a business.

As a result of this case we also added Dr. Brill and Mrs. Marlin to our circle of friends—or Dr. and Mrs. Brill as they now are. Their happiness was beautiful to see. Under the last will signed by Mrs. Brager Mrs. Marlin inherited practically her entire fortune, and it seemed as if nothing could be more just and right. But that ridiculous and high-minded pair were one in refusing to touch the money; and this in spite of the fact that Dr. Brill was actually evicted from

his laboratory and Mrs. Marlin had lost her job. The money must be disposed of according to the terms of the last will drawn up by Mrs. Brager's orders, though not yet signed by her, they insisted. In other words, the aged gentlewomen were to benefit. There was a legacy to Mrs. Marlin in this will, but not sufficient to support her.

Well, the trustees accepted the money, but I'm happy to say that their first act was to set aside a trust fund that will relieve Dr. Brill and his wife of the necessity of worrying during the rest of their lives. Perhaps they are happier than if they had the millions. Clarium gas has not yet been rendered harmless, and I do not know if it ever will be; but I do know that the Brills' is one of the most delightful houses that I am privileged to visit. There is nothing like having escaped a hideous danger to give one an edge for joy.

THE END

[End of *The Velvet Hand* by Hulbert Footner]