

The Winter Murder Case

The
Philo Vance
Series

S. S. Van Dine
1942

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THE PHILO VANCE SERIES

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THE GRACIE ALLEN MURDER CASE
THE WINTER MURDER CASE

THE PHILO VANCE SERIES

**THE
WINTER
MURDER CASE**

A PHILO VANCE STORY

By

S. S. VAN DINE

Stem Winter loves a dirge-like sound.

—*Wordsworth*

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PREFACE

It was characteristic of Willard Huntington Wright, known to the great public as S. S. Van Dine, that when he died suddenly on April 11, 1939, he left *The Winter Murder Case* in the form in which it is published, complete to the last comma. Everything he ever did was done that way, accurately, thoroughly, and with consideration for other people. It was so with the entire series of the Philo Vance mysteries.

He has himself told the story of becoming a writer of mysteries in an article called, "I Used to be a Highbrow, and Look at Me Now." He had worked as a critic of literature and art, and as an editor, since he left Harvard in 1907. And this he had done with great distinction, but with no material reward to speak of—certainly no accumulation of money. When the war came it seemed to him that all he had believed in and was working for was rushing into ruin—and now, twenty-five years later, can anyone say he was wrong? There were other influences at work on him perhaps, but no one who knew Willard and the purity of his perceptions in art, and his devotion to what he thought was the meaning of our civilization as expressed in the arts, can doubt that the shattering disillusionment and ruin of the war was what brought him at last to a nervous breakdown which incapacitated him for several years. He would never have explained it so, or any other way. He made no explanations, or excuses, ever, and his many apologies were out of the kindness of a heart so concealed by reticence that only a handful ever knew how gentle it really was. So at last all that he had done and aimed to do seemed to have come to ruin, and he himself too.

Only a gallant spirit could have risen up from that downfall, and gallantry alone would not have been enough. But Willard had also an intellect—even despair could not suppress it—which worked on anything at hand. One might believe that if his fate had been solitary confinement he would have emerged with some biological discovery based on the rats that infested his cell. Anyhow, his doctor finally met his demands for mental occupation with the concession that he read mysteries, which he had never read before. The result was, that as he had studied painting, literature and philosophy, he now involuntarily studied and then consciously analyzed, the mystery story. And when he recovered he had mastered it.

He was then heavily in debt, but he thought he saw the possibility of freeing himself from obligations a nature of his integrity could not ignore, or in fact endure, by what he had learned in his illness. He wrote out, at some ten thousand words each, the plots of his first three murder cases, thought through to the last detail, footnotes and all, and brought them to the Century Club to a lunch with an editor of the publishing house that has put all of them before the public.

This editor knew little about mystery stories, which had not been much in vogue since Sherlock Holmes, but he knew Willard Wright. He knew from far back in Harvard that whatever this man did would be done well, and the reasonable terms—granting the writer's talent—that Willard proposed were quickly accepted.

It is now thirteen years since Philo Vance stepped out into the world to solve The Benson Murder Case and, with that and the eleven others that followed, to delight hundreds of thousands of readers soon hard pressed by the anxieties and afflictions of a tragic decade. Each of these famous cases was set forth, as were the first three, in a long synopsis—about ten thousand words—letter perfect and complete to that point in its development. After the first three of these synopses, the publisher never saw another, nor wanted to, for he knew beyond peradventure that the finished book would be another masterpiece in its kind. Nor did he ever see the second stage of development, but only the third, the final manuscript—and that he read

with the interest and pleasure of any reader, and with no professional anxieties. But this second stage in the infinitely painstaking development of the story was some 30,000 words long, and it lacked only the final elaboration of character, dialogue, and atmosphere. *The Winter Murder Case* represents this stage in S. S. Van Dine's progress to its completion, and if the plot moves faster to its culmination than in the earlier books, it is for that reason.

They say now that Philo Vance was made in the image of S. S. Van Dine, and although Willard smoked not *Régies* but denicotined cigarettes, there were resemblances. Both were infinitely neat in dress, equally decorous and considerate in manner, and Vance had Willard's amazingly vast and accurate knowledge of a thousand arts and subjects, and his humorously sceptical attitude toward life and society. But in fact the resemblance would stand for only those with a superficial knowledge of Willard Huntington Wright. Vance in so far as he was Wright, was perhaps the form under which a gallant, gentle man concealed a spirit almost too delicate and sensitive for an age so turbulent and crude as this. Willard was not one to wear his heart upon his sleeve—but there were daws enough to peck, as there always are, and they found it where his friends always knew it to be, near the surface, and quick to respond.

As for the principles upon which he based his writing, and which brought new life into the craft of detective literature, they were succinctly set down by him in his famous twenty rules which are to be found at the back of this volume.

CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK

PHILO VANCE

JOHN F.-X. MARKHAM

District Attorney of New York County.

ELLA GUNTAR

Companion to Joan Raxon.

CARRINGTON REXON

Owner of the Raxon estate.

RICHARD REXON

His son.

JOAN REXON

His invalid daughter.

CARLOTTA NAESMITH

Prominent society girl.

DOCTOR LOOMIS QUAYNE

The Raxon family physician.

JACQUES BASSETT

A friend of Richard Raxon.

ERIC GUNTAR

Father of Ella Gunthar. Overseer on the Raxon estate.

MARCIA BRUCE

The Raxon housekeeper.

OLD JED

The Green Hermit. Former overseer on the Raxon estate.

LIEUTENANT O'LEARY

Lieutenant of the Winewood police.

LIEF W ALLEN

A guard on the Raxon estate.

GUY DARRUP

Chief carpenter on the Raxon estate.

JOHN BRANDER

Coroner.

HIGGINS

The Raxon butler.

DAHLIA DUNHAM

Political aspirant. }

SALLY ALEXANDER

Singer and impersonator. }

BEATRICE MADDUX

Famous aviatrix. } Guests at the

STANLEY SYDES

} Raxon estate.

Treasure hunter. }
PAT McORSAY }
Racing driver. }
CHUCK THROME }
Gentleman jockey. }

CHAPTER I AN APPEAL FOR HELP

(Tuesday, January 14; 11 a.m.)

“How would you like a brief vacation in ideal surroundings—winter sports, pleasing company, and a veritable mansion in which to relax? I have just such an invitation for you, Vance.”

Philo Vance drew on his cigarette and smiled. We had just arrived at District Attorney Markham’s office in answer to a facetious yet urgent call. Vance looked at him and sighed.

“I suspect you. Speak freely, my dear Rhadamanthus.”

“Old Carrington Raxon’s worried.”

“Ah!” Vance drawled. “No spontaneous goodness of heart in life. Sad. So, I’m asked to enjoy myself in the Berkshires only because Carrington Raxon’s worried. A detective on the premises would soothe his harassed spirits. I’m invited. Not flatterin’. No.”

“Don’t be cynical, Vance.”

“But why should Carrington Raxon’s worries concern me? I’m not in the least worried.”

“You will be,” said Markham with feigned viciousness. “Don’t deny you dote on the sufferings of others, you sadist. You live for crime and suffering. And you adore worrying. You’d die of ennui if all were peaceful.”

“Tut, tut,” returned Vance. “Not sadistic. No. Always strivin’ for peace and calm. My charitable, unselfish nature.”

“As I thought! Old Raxon’s worry *does* appeal to you. I detect the glint in your eye.”

“Charming place, the Raxon estate,” Vance observed thoughtfully. “But why, Markham, with his millions, his leisure, his two adored and adoring offspring, his gorgeous estate, his fame, and his vigor—why should he be worrying? Quite unreasonable.”

“Still, he wants you up there instanter.”

“As you said.” Vance settled deeper into his chair. “His emeralds, I opine, are to blame for his qualms.”

Markham looked across at the other shrewdly.

“Don’t be clairvoyant. I detest soothsayers. Especially when their guesses are so obvious. Of course, it’s his damned emeralds.”

“Tell me all. Leave no precious stone unturned. Could you bear it?”

Markham lighted a cigar. When he had it going he said:

“No need to tell you of Raxon’s famous emerald collection. You probably know how it’s safeguarded.”

“Yes,” said Vance. “I inspected it some years ago. Inadequately protected, I thought.”

“The same today. Thank Heaven the place isn’t in my jurisdiction: I’d be worrying about it constantly. I once tried to persuade Raxon to transfer the collection to some museum.”

“Not nice of you, Markham. Raxon loves his gewgaws fanatically. He’d wither away if bereft of his emeralds. . . . Oh, why are collectors?”

“I’m sure I don’t know. I didn’t make the world.”

“Regrettable,” sighed Vance. “What is toward?”

“An unpredictable situation at the Raxon estate. The old boy’s apprehensive. Hence his desire for your presence.”

“More light, please.”

“Raxon Manor,” continued Markham, “is at present filled with guests as a result of young

Richard Rexon's furlough: the chap has just returned from Europe where he has been studying medicine intensively in the last-word European colleges and hospitals. The old man's giving a kind of celebration in the boy's honor——”

“I know. And hoping for an announcement of Richard's betrothal to the blue-blooded Carlotta Naesmith. Still, why his anxiety?”

“Rexon being a widower, with an invalid daughter, asked Miss Naesmith to arrange a house party and celebration. She did—with a vengeance. Mostly café society: weird birds, quite objectionable to old Rexon's staid tastes. He doesn't understand this new set; is inclined to distrust them. He doesn't suspect them, exactly, but their proximity to his precious emeralds gives him the jitters.”

“Old-fashioned chap. The new generation *is* full of incredible possibilities. Not a lovable and comfortable lot. Does Rexon point specifically?”

“Only at a fellow named Bassett. And, strangely enough, he's not of Miss Naesmith's doing. Acquaintance of Richard's, in fact. Friendship started abroad—in Switzerland, I believe. Came over on the boat with him this last trip. But the old gentleman admits he has no grounds for his uneasiness. He's just nervous, in a vague way, about the whole situation. Wants perspicacious companionship. So he phoned me and asked for help, indicating you.”

“Yes. Collectors are like that. Where can he turn in his hour of uncertainty? Ah, his old friend Markham! Equipped with all the proper gadgets for just such delicate observation. Gadget Number One: Mr. Philo Vance. Looks presentable in a dinner coat. Won't drink from his finger-bowl. Could mingle and observe, without rousing suspicion. Discretion guaranteed. Excellent way of detecting a lurking shadow—if any.” Vance smiled resignedly. “Is that the gist of the worried Rexon's runes by long-distance phone?”

“Substantially, yes,” admitted Markham. “But expressed more charitably. You know damned well that old Rexon likes you, and that if he thought you'd care for the house party, you'd have been more than welcome.”

“You shame me, Markham,” Vance returned with contrition. “I'm fond of Rexon, just as you are. A lovable man. . . . So, he craves my comfortin' presence. Very well, I shall strive to smooth his furrowed brow.”

CHAPTER II

GLAMOR IN THE MOONLIGHT

(Wednesday, January 15; 9 p.m.)

Markham notified Carrington Rixon, and we left New York the following afternoon in Vance's Hispano-Suiza.

It was a cold, clear day, and fresh snow had fallen during the night. The drive to Winewood in the Berkshires would ordinarily have taken about five hours, but the roads north of the city were deep in snow, and we were late in arriving at the Rixon estate. Darkness had settled early, but the night was white with stars, and the moon was luminous.

It was nearly nine o'clock when we turned in through a wide stone gateway that marked the outer limits of the vast estate. There was no one to direct us, and when we had reached the crest of a high rocky hill, Vance was confused as to which turning to take. There were half-hidden tracks in one of the forks of the narrow road, and we turned to the right to follow them.

A mile or so farther on, the road sloped gently downward into a narrow snowclad valley at the far end of which precipitous cliffs rose to a tree-crested plateau. Vance let the car coast noiselessly into the still white fairyland.

As we reached the base of the long incline the sound of faint music came to us through the trees on our left. There was no habitation visible, and the music intensified the fantasy of the setting which spread before us.

Applying the brakes, Vance stopped the car and, stepping out, moved towards the source of the lilting notes.

We had gone scarcely a hundred yards when, through the trees which hid us from view, we spied a small frozen pond on which a girl was skating. The music came from a small portable phonograph placed on a rustic bench at the edge of the pond.

The girl, in a simple white skating costume, seemed unreal in the light of the moon and stars. She was going through one difficult skating figure after another with serious repetition, as if trying to perfect their intricacies. Vance suddenly became attentive.

"My word!" he whispered. "Magnificent skating!"

He stood fascinated by the girl's proficiency as she executed various school figures and complicated free routines.

The phonograph ran down and, as the girl completed an involved jump and spiral spin, Vance approached her with a cheerful greeting. At first she was startled; then she smiled shyly.

"You must be new guests at the Manor," she remarked in a timid voice. "I'm so sorry you caught me skating. It's sort of a secret, you see. . . . Maybe you won't tell anyone," she added with a note of appeal in her voice.

"Of course, we shan't." Vance studied the girl critically. "I believe I remember you—I was at the Manor some years ago. Weren't you the friend and companion of Miss Joan?"

She nodded. "I was. And I still am. I'm Ella Gunthar. But I don't remember you. It must have been when I was a little girl."

"My name is Philo Vance," Vance told her. "I was just driving to the Manor, and lost my way. When I heard your music I came over in the hope of finding my bearings."

"You're not seriously lost," she said. "This is the Green Glen and if you go back up the hill and take the narrow road to the right for about a mile, you'll see the Manor just ahead."

Vance thanked her, but lingered a moment. "Tell me, Miss Gunthar: if you are Joan's companion at the Manor, why do you skate on this little pond so far away from the main

house?”

The girl's lovely face seemed to cloud for a moment.

“I—I don't want to hurt Joan's feelings,” she answered cryptically. “I always come to the Green Glen at night when my duties are over at the Manor, to do my skating.”

“But the phonograph,” said Vance; “isn't it frightfully heavy to carry all this way?”

“Oh, I don't keep it at the Manor.” She laughed. “I keep it in Jed's hut, just around the curve in the road, by that big cypress tree. And I keep my skates and skating clothes there, too. It's all a secret between Jed and me.”

Vance smiled at her reassuringly.

“Well, I promise the secret will go no farther. But it's really a magnificent secret. You know, don't you, that you skate beautifully? You're one of the most talented performers I have ever seen.”

The girl blushed with pleasure.

“I love skating,” she replied simply.

A few minutes later we had turned into the driveway to the brilliantly lighted Raxon Manor.

As a bald elderly butler led us through the lower hall we could hear the boisterous hilarity of many guests in the drawing room—snatches of popular music, laughter, raised voices: a gay and youthful clamor.

Carrington Raxon, alone in his den, greeted us with old-world dignity. It was the first time I had met him, but I was not unfamiliar with his features, as pictures of him had frequently appeared in the Metropolitan press. He was a tall, slender, impressive man in his sixties; aloof and stern, and with an imperious air of feudalism. He vaguely suggested Sargent's famous portrait of Lord Ribblesdale.

“Ah, Vance! It was generous of you to come. Perhaps you think I am unduly apprehensive.

...

The door opened and a dark, serious young man of athletic build stood on the threshold.

Raxon turned without surprise.

“My son Richard,” he informed us with undisguised pride. Then: “But why are you deserting our guests?”

“I'm a bit fed up.” Then the young man shrugged his shoulders apologetically and smiled. “I guess I'm not used to it. It's such a change——”

A girl of about twenty-five appeared in the doorway and looked about.

The elder Raxon somewhat relaxed his stern manner and presented us. Her likeness, too, I had seen many times in the New York papers. Carlotta Naesmith had been a vivid and gifted debutante a few years before. She was a colorful auburn-haired young woman, animated and vital, with sagacious eyes and an air of self-assurance. She nodded to us casually, and turned to young Raxon.

“Completely overcome, Dick? Has the gaiety got you down? Come, don't desert the ship just when the sea's getting stormy.”

“I think Carlotta is quite right, Richard,” Carrington Raxon commented. “You came home for relaxation. Forget your scalpels and microbes for a while. Go on back with Carlotta, and take Mr. Vance with you. He'll want to meet your friends.”

CHAPTER III THE BOURBON GLASS

(Wednesday, January 15; 10:30 p.m.)

An unusually gay and colorful sight confronted us in the great drawing room. Groups of young people stood about joking and laughing; others danced. A spirit of carefree revelry animated the scene.

Carlotta Naesmith was a capable hostess. She led us through the boisterous throng, introducing us haphazardly.

"This is Dahlia Dunham," she said, snaring a wiry and tense young woman of perhaps thirty. "Dahlia's a political spellbinder, full of incredible phrases, and death to hecklers. She'll stump for any cause from Socialism to Fletcherism——"

"But not for prohibition, dear," the other retorted in a raucous unsteady voice, as she withdrew her arm from Miss Naesmith's and hurried toward the miniature bar.

Another girl came up, complaining.

"A hell of a place! No landing field! When you snare the Raxon millions, Carlotta, see to it that Dick builds one."

She was blonde and frail, with liquid eyes that dominated her pointed face. I recognized the much publicized Beatrice Maddox before Carlotta Naesmith presented us. She had recently won fame as an airplane pilot, and only a governmental veto had stayed her proposed solo flight across the Atlantic.

"What's up, Bee?" came a rumbling voice behind me, and a young Irish giant threw his arms about Miss Maddox. "You look glum. Out of gas? So am I." He whisked her away to the bar.

"That was Pat McOrsay," Miss Naesmith told us. "He drives 'em fast. Won last year's auto grind at Cincinnati. He's sweet on Bee, but she holds mere auto racers in contempt. Maybe they'll compromise. I did want you to meet Pat—he's such a beast. . . . But wait. There's another speed demon of a kind over there. . . . Hi there, Chuck," she called across the room. "Stop trying to tout Sally and come over here a moment—if you can make it."

Chuck Throme, the internationally famous gentleman jockey who had won the last Steeplechase at Aintree, staggered stiffly up. His eyes wouldn't focus, but his manner was impeccable.

"Sit down, darling, and meet Mr. Vance," Miss Naesmith exhorted. "Don't try it standing up. Your stirrups'll bend."

Throme drew himself up indignantly to his five-feet-five and bowed with a Chestertonian flourish. But the supreme gesture was not completed. He continued his obeisance to the rug and lay there.

"That's one race Chuck didn't win," laughed our *cicerone*. "Let's move on. Some assistant starter will put him back in the saddle. . . . Isn't it positively disgusting, Mr. Vance? Liquor is a frightful curse. Saps the brain, undermines the morals, and all that. . . . Which reminds me: let's take an intermission in our round of social duties and have a drink."

She led us to the bar.

"I'm very demure—for Richard's sake. I drink only Dubonnet in public. But don't let my girlish restraint affect your batting average. Everything's available, including trinitrotoluene."

Vance drank brandy. As we stood chatting a tall, rugged, sunburnt man came up and put his arms possessively about Miss Naesmith.

"I'm still yearning to know your answer, Carlotta," he blustered good-naturedly. "For the next-to-the-last time: Are you, or are you not, coming with me to Cocos Island when Dick returns to his bone-sawing?"

"Ha!" Carlotta Naesmith swung about and pushed him away playfully. "Still crooning your Once-Aboard-the-Lugger ditty. You're inelegant, Stan. And right under Dick's nose."

Richard Rexon showed no annoyance. He came forward and, putting one hand on the other man's arm, introduced him to us. It was Stanley Sydes, a young society man with too much money, who spent his time on expeditions in quest of buried treasure.

Vance knew of his exploits, and a brief discussion took place.

"A playboy bulging with good money who spends it hunting dirty doubloons!" Carlotta Naesmith laughed. "There's a paradox—or is the whole world crazy except me?"

"Not a paradox, Miss Naesmith," Vance put in pleasantly. "I understand Mr. Sydes' urge perfectly. It's really not the treasure, y'know. It's the quest."

"Right!" boomed Sydes. "The joy of outwitting others, of solving riddles; and the acquisition of the unique. . . . Hell, I'm talking like a collector—Forgive me, Richard. No offense to your eminent sire." A noisy group opposite attracted his attention, and he joined them.

His place at the bar was taken almost immediately by the girl who had been bantering with Throme.

"My God, Sally!" Miss Naesmith greeted her. "Really alone? Hasn't your gentleman jockey regained his mount? . . . Gentlemen,"—she turned to us—"we have here none other than Sally Alexander, the inimitable—pride of the Purple Room, off-color raconteuse and pianist extraordinary. A one-woman slum. She carried the Blue Book to the masses—and made 'em like it. A feat, egad!"

"I'm being maligned, gents," Sally Alexander protested. "I'm elegant, no end."

"I quite agree," Vance defended her. "I've heard Miss Alexander sing, and never once have I blushed."

"That must have been when she sang in the village choir, in her sub-deb days."

"Just for that," retorted Miss Alexander, "I'm going to take Dick away from you." And, slipping her arm through Richard Rexon's, she led him to the dance floor.

Miss Naesmith shrugged. She looked at Vance.

"Had enough of this, Sir Galahad? There are other exhibits in the zoo. Nothing really special, however. Am I not an honest guide?"

"Honest and charming." Vance set down his glass. "But isn't there a Mr. Bassett?"

"Oh, Jacques . . ." She looked round the room. "He's Richard's friend, you know. A more or less imported specimen, I believe. Anyway, he came over on the boat with Dick and is always comparing our ski runs with those of Switzerland—to the detriment of ours, of course. Maybe he does yodel and live on goat's milk. I wouldn't know. Though I do know he speaks American with a prairie accent—if my ears don't lie."

She caught sight of Bassett.

"There's your man, in the far corner, drinking lustily by himself. Come along. You can have him gladly. Then I'll go and rescue Dick. Sally'll be at the risqué-story stage by now."

Jacques Bassett sat at a small table, drinking Bourbon. He was tall, dark, aggressively athletic. His heavy eyebrows met over a broad flat nose.

He talked about Europe. Vance showed interest. Swiss winter resorts came up. Vance asked questions. Bassett expatiated. He was eloquent about the toboggan runs and the ski trails at

Oberlachen in the Tyrol. Vance mentioned Amsterdam. But the subject had no interest for Bassett. He wandered away.

Vance turned his back. Then he threw his handkerchief over the glass from which Bassett had been drinking. Slipping it into his pocket, he left the room abruptly.

A little later I found Vance with Carrington Rixon in the den. Another man was seated with them before the log fire. He was in his late forties, with steel-grey hair, and a soft voice which seemed to cover a tension: obviously a man of the world, with a highly professional manner which was rigid, but not without ingratiation. I was not surprised to find that he was Doctor Loomis Quayne, the Rixon physician.

“Doctor Quayne,” Rixon explained, “dropped by to see my daughter Joan. But the excitement of so many guests has wearied her and she retired long ago.” His voice was wistful.

(Vance had told me during our drive to Winewood something of Joan Rixon’s tragedy: how she had fallen and injured her spine while skating, when she was only ten years old.)

“Joan’s fatigue need not worry you, my dear Rixon,” the doctor assured him. “It’s natural in the circumstances. This little excitement may do her good, in fact—stimulate her interest, lead her mind along new lines. Psychological therapy is our chief recourse just now. . . . I’ll drop in again tomorrow. I hope I’ll see Richard then, too. I’ve hardly talked with him since he came. But I’m glad to find him looking as well as when I saw him on my trip abroad two years ago.”

“Dick’s in the drawing room now,” Rixon suggested with a twinkle.

The doctor smiled. “No, not this evening. I must be going soon. I left the motor of my car running so I won’t have to bother priming it. These cold days the starter doesn’t work so well. . . . And I think I prefer the quiet of your den, if I may sit and finish my highball.”

“Can’t say that I blame you, doctor. . . . This new generation . . .” Rixon shook his head disapprovingly.

As we talked on, largely in generalities, but with an occasional allusion to Richard Rixon’s future in medicine, it became evident that there was something deeper than the mere professional relationship between Rixon and Quayne; a touch of intimacy, perhaps, due to long and tragic association.

At length the doctor rose and bade us good night. Vance and I left Carrington Rixon shortly after.

“A strange and dizzy household.” Vance sprawled in an easy chair in his room. “No wonder old Rixon’s jittery. Probably feels lost in the midst of the unknown. Obviously determined on Carlotta as a daughter-in-law, though; he’s just the type to crave a dynastic marriage for his son. And the girl’s not deficient in gifts. Nice; but too vivid for my aging tastes. And Richard. An admirable chap. Too serious for this outfit. Strange, too, his attitude toward Carlotta. Not all it should be. Seemed quite indifferent to the treasure hunter’s poaching. That rather irked the lady. I wonder. . . . Interesting creature, Sydes. Has a mental quirk. He put his finger on it, too. A collector! Just that. . . . But Bassett. Not a nice person. Worries old Rixon. Carlotta feels it, too. Something familiar about those cold eyes. Queer. And why should he pretend about Oberlachen? No ski runs or toboggan slides there. Only a lake and a castle and a few peasants. Probably never been there. He met Richard at Saint Moritz. He would. And when I mentioned Amsterdam, Jacques wasn’t having any. Well, well. . . . No, Van. As I said. A dizzy lot. Social life at its gaudiest. Too much mental makeup.”

He brought out his *Régie* cigarettes, lighted one, and stretched his legs.

“And all through the evening I kept thinking of little Ella Gunthar. Natural and fresh. Lovely. However. . . .”

CHAPTER IV THE FIRST MURDER

(Thursday, January 16; 8 a.m.)

The next morning at eight there was excited knocking at our door.

"Mr. Vance! Mr. Vance!" I recognized the old butler's voice. "Mr. Rexon says will you please come to the den at once, sir?"

Vance jumped up. "What's wrong, Higgins?"

"I—I don't know."

"Right!"

He dressed speedily, and we went into the hall. A woman, in the black livery of a housekeeper, was bent over the railing of the stairs. She heard us and backed against the wall, eyes staring, body rigid. Vance halted, looked at her sharply. She was tall, well built, about forty. She had green eyes, black hair, a cryptic face. A superior woman, but over-taut.

"Could you hear?" Vance's tone was cold.

"There's tragedy!" she said, in a tense, contralto voice.

"Common commodity of life. Relax."

We hurried downstairs.

"The Manor's strangest creature so far," Vance remarked to me. "Inhibited. Menacing. Knows too much. Volcanic. But only smouldering. *She's* tragedy. God help her. . . ."

Carrington Rexon was in a house gown. With him in the den was a huge middle-aged man in a lumber jacket, corduroy trousers, and laced leather boots. He was pale and nervous. There was sweat on his hands as he steadied himself against the mantel.

"Eric Gunthar here, my overseer," Rexon told us, "just found the body of Lief Wallen in Tor Gulch near here. He's evidently fallen from the ledge on top. Gunthar came in to report to me and get aid. Would you go with him, Vance? I've already phoned for the doctor. . . . Wallen was the guard of the Manor's west wing, where the Gem Room is."

"An indication perhaps. Quite. I understand. Gladly."

"Lief must have slipped," Gunthar put in thickly.

"Be sure you have someone replace him tonight," ordered Rexon. "Better take a couple of men to bring him up," he added.

"Darrup's down at the lower rink. I'll find another." Gunthar's hand brushed his forehead. "Wallen was a bad sight, Squire. . . . Can I have another drink——?"

"You've had too much already," snapped Vance. "Move!"

Gunthar led the way sullenly. As we crossed the main road just before the house, a strange shabby figure appeared. A straggly white beard accentuated his stooped shoulders. He shuffled as he walked, but there was wiry energy in his movements. He turned quickly toward a clump of trees, as if to avoid us. Gunthar hailed him peremptorily.

"Come here, Jed. We need you." The old man shuffled up obediently. "Lief's gone over the crags at Tor Gulch. We'll be bringing him up."

The old man grinned childishly. For some reason the tragedy seemed to amuse him. "Maybe you're drinking too much, Eric. Ella said you struck her last week. You shouldn't do that. The Gulch'll hold more'n one."

We picked up Guy Darrup, the estate carpenter. Gunthar explained. Darrup's eyes clouded. There was unfriendliness in them. As we headed westward down the path he said: "I guess that'll make your job safe for a while now, Mr. Gunthar."

Gunthar snarled. “Get on. Mind your own business. Maybe *you’d* like to be overseer?”

“I’d do everyone fair.” There was bitterness in the remark.

We took a circuitous route to the base of the rocky crags, passed through a cluster of trees over which the mist hung. We went north across a frozen stream, then turned in the general direction from which we came.

“You’re Miss Ella’s father, aren’t you, Gunthar?” Vance spoke for the first time.

Gunthar gave an affirmative grunt.

“Who’s *he*?” With a move of the head Vance indicated the old man shuffling briskly far ahead.

A sudden decision prompted ingratiating on Gunthar’s part. “Old Jed. He was overseer here before me. Pensioned off now. He’s cracked. Lives alone down in the Green Glen—named it himself. Doesn’t mingle. We call him the Green Hermit. . . . Nasty business about Lief, with the house full of guests——”

“That remark of Darrup’s. Is there talk of a new overseer?”

“Hell! They’re always talking. I make ’em work. They don’t like it.”

Old Jed turned abruptly to the right past an eruption of shrubs.

“Hey,” bawled Gunthar, “how do *you* know where to go?”

“I reckon I know where Lief is,” Jed cackled. He disappeared behind a projecting rock.

“He’s cracked,” Gunthar repeated.

“Thanks for the information.” As Vance spoke a shout came from Old Jed.

“Here’s Lief, Eric.”

We came up. A crumpled body, hideously twisted, lay at the foot of a stone cliff. The face was torn and clotted, and the bare head was violently misshapen. There was a dark pool of coagulated blood.

Vance leaned over the figure, examined it closely; then he stood up. “No doctor can help. We’ll leave him here. Darrup’ll watch. I’ll phone Winewood.” He looked up at the cliffside and then through the trees at the Manor towers beyond.

Gunthar waved Old Jed away.

“You really oughtn’t strike Ella, Eric,” the old man admonished with a faint grin as he moved off round the cliffs to the flat meadow.

“Can we get to the top of the cliff on our way back to the Manor?” asked Vance.

Gunthar hesitated. “There’s a steep short cut back a ways. But it’s a dangerous climb——”

“We’ll take it. Get going.”

When we had struggled up the slippery, treacherous incline, Gunthar indicated the approximate spot where Lief Wallen must have gone over. There were shrub oaks near the edge of the cliff and Vance moved among them, gazing down at the thin layer of crusted snow. Suddenly he knelt beside a sturdy tree bole. “Blood, Gunthar.” He pointed to an irregular dark patch a few inches from the tree trunk.

Gunthar sucked in his breath. “Holy God—up here!”

“Oh, quite.” Vance rose. “No. No accident. Too bad the wind last night obliterated the tale of footprints. However. . . . We’ll be going. Work to do.”

Gunthar halted abruptly. “Old Jed knew just where the body was!”

“Thanks awfully.” Vance hastened down the long slope toward the Manor.

CHAPTER V

THE CURSE OF THE EMERALDS

(Thursday, January 16; 9:30 a.m.)

Carrington Rixon was drinking his coffee in the den when we returned.

"Up to the police," Vance announced. Then he explained. . . . "I'll phone Winewood." He went to the telephone and conversed briefly.

Rixon rang. Higgins entered.

"Oh! Ah!" Vance sat down. "Many thanks. Just coffee, Higgins." He lighted a cigarette with unusual deliberation and stretched his legs before him.

Rixon was silent, coldly calm. He studied Vance over his coffee cup.

"Sorry you should be bothered," he murmured. "I was hoping my anxiety was unwarranted."

"One never knows, does one, old friend? We do our best."

Lieutenant O'Leary, of the Winewood police, a tall, shrewd and capable man, far superior to the ordinary country constable, arrived simultaneously with Doctor Quayne.

"Sorry, doctor. No need for you." Vance gave the details. "Fellow's been dead for hours, I'd say. It's the Lieutenant's problem."

"Doctor Quayne is our official physician," said O'Leary.

"Ah!" Vance threw his cigarette in the grate. "That facilitates matters. We'll go down at once. Darrup's watching the body. I ordered it left where Gunthar found it. Forgive my intrusion, Lieutenant. Sole interest Mr. Rixon."

"Quite correct, sir," O'Leary returned. "We'll see how the land lies."

"It lies exceeding black despite the snow."

Ten minutes later Doctor Quayne was examining Lief Wallen's body.

"A long fall," he commented. "Battered badly by the impact. Been dead all of eight hours. Poor Wallen. An honest, conscientious chap."

"That linear depression and laceration above the right ear," Vance suggested.

Quayne leaned over the body again for several moments. "I see what you mean." He looked up at Vance significantly. "I'll know more after the autopsy." He rose, frowning. "That's all now, Lieutenant. I'll be getting along—I've several calls to make."

"Thank you, doctor." O'Leary spoke courteously. "I'll attend to the routine."

Quayne bowed and departed.

O'Leary looked at Vance shrewdly. "What about that depression and laceration, sir?"

"Come with me a moment, Lieutenant." And Vance led the way to the cliff above. He pointed to the dark stain by the shrub-oak bole.

O'Leary inspected it and nodded slowly. Then he gave Vance a steady look. "What's your theory, sir?"

"Must I? But it's only a vague idea, Lieutenant. Highly illusory. That bash on Wallen's head might be from an instrument. Doesn't fit with a tumble. The poor johnnie could have been hit elsewhere and shoved over the cliff to cover up. There are faint indications in the snow hereabouts, despite last night's wind. Remote speculation at best. But there could have been three people here last night. Marks not clear. No. Proof lackin'. . . . My theory? Wallen was struck near the Manor. Struck over the ear with an instrument shaped—let us say—like the blunt end of a spanner. His skull was fractured. Then he was dragged here. Two faint lines up the slope. Heels, perhaps. The body was dropped to the ground here so the other could hold to

this tree while shoving Wallen over the cliff. Hemorrhage from the nose and ears intervened. Hence the blood here.”

“I don’t like it, sir.” O’Leary frowned glumly.

“Neither do I. You asked for it.”

O’Leary looked down at the telltale stain, then back at Vance. “You’ll help us, sir? I’d be flattered. No need pretending I don’t know of you.”

“Disregardin’ the compliment, I’d be happy to.” Vance took out a cigarette. “My sole interest Mr. Rexon. As I said.”

“I understand. My thanks. I’ll get the machinery going.” O’Leary strode off briskly.

When we returned to the Manor the sun was streaming into the spacious glass-enclosed veranda which stretched across the entire east side of the house. At the foot of a short terrace leading from the veranda was a large artificially controlled skating rink, lined on three sides with slender trees and landscaped gardens. Immediately below, to the south, was a pleasant pavilion.

Joan Rexon reclined on the veranda in a tufted wheel-chair built like a *chaise longue*; and beside her in a small wicker porch chair sat Ella Gunthar. Vance joined them with a smile of greeting. Joan Rexon was frail and wistful, but she gave little impression of invalidism. Only the blue veins in her slender hands indicated the long illness which had sapped her strength since childhood.

“Isn’t it terrible, Mr. Vance!” Ella Gunthar said in a quavering voice. He looked at her a moment questioningly. “My father has just told us about poor Lief Wallen. You know, don’t you?”

Vance nodded. “Yes. But we mustn’t let that cast a shadow over us here.” He smiled to Joan.

“It’s very difficult to avoid it,” Miss Rexon said. “Lief was so kind and thoughtful. . . .”

“The more reason not to think of such things,” Vance declared.

Ella Gunthar nodded seriously. “The sunshine and the snow—there *are* happy things in the world to think about.” She placed her hand tenderly over Joan’s. But the thought of the tragedy remained with her as well. “Poor Lief must have fallen on his way home this morning.”

Vance looked at her meditatively. “No. Not this morning,” he said. “It was last night—around midnight.”

Ella gripped her chair, and a frightened look came into her eyes. “Midnight,” she breathed. “How terrible!”

“Why do you say that, Miss Ella?” The girl’s manner puzzled Vance.

“I—I——At midnight. . . .” Her voice trailed off.

Vance quickly turned the conversation, but failed to alter the girl’s strange mood. At length he excused himself and went into the house. He had barely reached the foot of the main stairs when a hand was placed on his arm. Ella Gunthar had followed him.

“Are you sure it was—midnight?” Her whisper was tense and pleading.

“Somewhere thereabouts.” Vance spoke lightly. “But why are you so upset, my dear?”

Her lips trembled. “I saw Lieutenant O’Leary come in with you and go toward Mr. Rexon’s den. Tell me, Mr. Vance, why is he here? Is anything—wrong? Will we all have to go to Winewood—to answer questions maybe?”

Vance laughed reassuringly. “Please don’t trouble your lovely little head. There’ll be an inquest, of course—it’s the law, y’ know. Just formality. But they’ll certainly not ask you to go.”

Her eyes opened very wide. “An inquest?” she repeated softly. “But I want to go. I want to

hear—everything.”

Vance was nonplused. “Aren’t you being foolish, child? Run back and read to Joan and forget all about——”

“But you don’t understand.” She caught her breath sharply. “I’ve *got* to go to the inquest. Maybe——” She turned suddenly and hurried back to the veranda.

“My word!” murmured Vance. “What can possibly be in that child’s mind?”

On the upper landing, as we turned toward our rooms, the housekeeper stepped out unexpectedly from a small corridor. She drew herself up mysteriously.

“He’s dead, isn’t he?” Her tone was sepulchral. “And perhaps it wasn’t an accident.”

“How could one know?” Vance was evasive.

“Normal things don’t happen here,” she ran on tensely. “Those emeralds have put a curse on this house——”

“You’ve been reading the wrong novels.”

She ignored the implication. “Those green stones—they create an atmosphere. They attract. They send forth temptation. They radiate fire.”

Vance smiled. “What do you find abnormal here?”

“Everything. Darling Joan is an invalid. Old Jed’s a fanatical mystic. Miss Naesmith brings strange people here. There’s intrigue and deep jealousies everywhere. Mr. Raxon wants to choose his son’s wife.” She smiled inscrutably. “He doesn’t know he’s building on sand. It all started years ago.”

“You hear much, what?” Vance spoke satirically.

“And I see much. The Raxon dynasty is falling. Young Mr. Richard pretends much; but the first night he got back from Europe a girl was waiting for him in the rear hall back of the stairs. He took her in his arms without a word and he held her close and long.” She came nearer and lowered her voice. “It was Ella Gunthar!”

“Really, now.” Vance laughed indifferently. “Young love. Any objection?”

The woman turned angrily and went down the hall.

CHAPTER VI A WOMAN'S BARB

(Thursday, January 16; 4:30 p.m.)

Vance deserted the Manor an hour later, just as the noonday siren shrilled overhead, the surrounding hills catching the note and throwing the echo back and forth much longer than the original blast warranted. Carrington Raxon had long taken a boyish delight in retaining this outmoded signal for his workmen. He admitted it served no purpose, but it amused him to continue to use it.

The early winter dusk had begun to fall when Vance returned.

"Been snoopin' and talkin' round the estate," he told Carrington Raxon, settling himself comfortably before the fire. "Much needed activity. Hope you don't mind."

Raxon's laugh was mirthless. "I only hope your time wasn't wasted."

"No. Not wasted. I'll be frank. You want it, I know."

Raxon nodded stiffly.

"Things not happy," summarized Vance. "Meanness at work. And jealousies. Nothing overt. Just undercurrents. They could erupt, however. Gunthar's hard on the men. That doesn't help. . . . Hear you've been planning to replace him as overseer. Wallen mentioned. Any truth in that?"

"Frankly, yes. But I was in no hurry."

"Lief Wallen wanted to marry Ella. Both father and daughter protested. Friction—scenes. Not nice. Much bitterness. Source of general resentment of estate workers toward Miss Ella. Think she considers herself superior to the rest of them because she's Miss Joan's companion. Only Old Jed defends her. They answer he has delusions and a soft spot for the color green. Implication bein' the presence of the emeralds has affected him. Everyone adding fuel to a smoulderin' fire and waiting for a flareup."

Raxon chuckled. "And perhaps you think, Vance, that I, too, am affected with the rest."

Vance made a deprecating motion. "By the by, yours is the only key to the Gem Room, what?"

"Good Heavens, yes! Special key and special lock. And a steel door."

"Been in the room today?"

"Oh, yes. Everything's quite in order."

Vance changed the subject. "Tell me about your housekeeper."

"Marcia Bruce? Solid as rock."

"Yes. I believe you. Honest, but hysterical."

Raxon chuckled again. "You've noticed much. . . . But she adores Joan—cares for her like a mother when Ella Gunthar is off duty. Basically, Bruce is a fine woman. Quayne agrees. There's a fellow-feeling between those two. She was superintendent of nurses in a hospital once. Quayne's a worthy man, too. I'm glad to see that friendship developing."

"Ah!" Vance smiled. "I perceive Squire Raxon is sentimental."

"The human heart desires happiness for others as well as for oneself." Raxon was serious now. "What else did you learn, Vance? Anything pertaining to Lief Wallen's death?"

Vance shook his head. "Solution may come through irrelevancies. Later. I've only begun." Then he went out to the drawing room.

Bassett sat at the table near the veranda door where we first met him. He had just reached up and caught Ella Gunthar's arm as she passed. He was smirking up at her unpleasantly. She

drew away from him. Bassett let her go. "Haughty, aren't we?" His eyes followed her with a sardonic leer as she returned to Miss Joan.

Vance strolled up. "Not skiing today, Mr. Bassett? Thought the whole jolly crowd was up on the Winewood trails."

"I slept too late and missed the party. . . . Pretty blond thing, that Ella Gunthar." His eyes drifted back to the veranda. "Unusually attractive for a servant."

Vance's eyes narrowed, hard as steel, and drew Bassett's gaze. "We're all servants. Some to our fellow men. Some to our vices. Think that over." He went out to the veranda.

Lieutenant O'Leary was just coming up the steps at the side entrance.

"Doctor Quayne's doing the autopsy now," he announced. "Inquest tomorrow at noon. You'll have to attend, I'm afraid, sir. I'll pick you up."

"Any complications ahead?" asked Vance.

"No. I've soft-pedaled everything. John Brander, our coroner, is a good man. He likes Rixon. And I've explained the situation. He won't ask embarrassing questions."

"Accident verdict, maybe?"

"I hope so, sir. Brander understands. It'll give us time."

"A pleasure to work with you, Lieutenant."

O'Leary went inside to see Rixon, and Vance strode to where Joan and Ella Gunthar were sitting.

A noisy group of guests, returning from their skiing expedition, came clattering up the terrace, passed us with cheery greetings, and continued upstairs. Carlotta Naesmith and Stanley Sydes remained on the veranda and joined us.

Ella Gunthar was looking about anxiously.

"It's really no use, Ella," Miss Naesmith told her satirically. "Dick's gone daffy over Sally Alexander."

"I don't believe it!"

Miss Naesmith's mouth twisted in a cruel smile. "Does it hurt, Ella?"

"Carlotta! Cat!" There was no mirth in Sydes' reprimand.

"How do you feel today, Joan?" Miss Naesmith's mood changed as the girl smiled up sweetly. "And you, too, Mr. Vance. Why didn't you join the skiing party? It was glorious. At least ten inches of powder over a deep base."

"Isn't there enough snow already in these locks of mine?"

"And most becoming, Sir Galahad!" She turned and stroked Sydes' temple. "Wonder if Stan'll be handsome when he gets grey."

"I promise you, Goddess," declared Sydes, "I'll be unutterably fascinating." He leaned over her. "And now, for the last time:—"

"I always get seasick. I'll seek my treasure nearer home."

"Maybe I will too, if you spurn my invitation." Sydes' tone was fretful and aggressive.

"What do you think this wild man wants, Joan?" Miss Naesmith explained banteringly. "He insists I sail with him to Cocos Island and go diving for the treasure of the *Mary Dear* in Wafer Bay."

"Oh, that would be wonderful!" There was pathetic longing in Joan Rixon's voice.

"You dear, sweet child." The older girl's tone softened. Then she went upstairs, and Sydes followed.

A while later Marcia Bruce came out. "You may run along home, Ella. I'll take our darling in charge."

Vance rose.

“And I’ll see Miss Ella home.”

I knew he had great compassion for the girl who had no part in the gay sophisticated life about her. And I knew why he wished to walk with her to her father’s cottage. He would strive to cheer and amuse her, so that the sting of Miss Naesmith’s words might be forgot.

CHAPTER VII THE INQUEST

(Friday, January 17; noon.)

The coroner's inquest increased the tension of the situation. Ella Gunthar had spoken urgently to Vance as soon as she arrived at the Manor that morning. She was fully cognizant of the time and place of the inquest and determined to be there. Vance sought to dissuade her, but finally abandoned the effort. He realized there was some deeper reason than mere curiosity, and arranged to take her with us in O'Leary's car.

At the bend in the roadway where it joined the main highway O'Leary signaled sharply on his horn. The sound found a prolonged echo in the archaic midday siren reverberating over the estate and weirdly following us like a mechanical nemesis as we drove on. The Lieutenant offered assurances to Vance's unvoiced concern.

"It won't take us more than ten minutes to get there. Brander'll wait for us."

The small room in the Town Hall at Winewood was well filled with townspeople and workers from the Rexon estate; but there were no guests from the Manor itself.

At one end of the room on a low platform was a long table at which a heavy-set, red-faced man with blinking eyes presided.

"That's John Brander," whispered O'Leary. "A reasonable man. Local real-estate lawyer."

At the left of the table, partitioned off by a railing, sat the jury, simple and honest men of the conventional type one would expect to find in a country town. A constable, with an ineffectual air of importance, stood beside the witness stand.

Eric Gunthar was called first. He explained briefly how he had come upon Lief Wallen's body on his way to work, and had returned to the Gulch with Old Jed, Darrup and Vance. Under adroit questioning, his trip to the summit of the cliff with Vance was brought out; but when Gunthar became too voluble regarding the blood spot, he was somewhat abruptly dismissed, and Darrup was called. He appeared cowed and had little to add to Gunthar's testimony. Old Jed proved a somewhat pathetic figure on the witness stand, and Brander wasted no time on him.

Vance was called next. Brander's questions elicited largely repetitions of the testimony already given; and despite the coroner's obvious attempt at caution, the blood stain by the scrub oak on the cliff was necessarily gone into at considerable length. Brander seemed to attach no particular importance to it and contrived a subtle suggestion that the blood might have been other than human blood. I myself was conscious of a fleeting mental image of some boy or amateur huntsman shooting a rabbit scurrying over the snow.

"Were there footprints anywhere near the spot?" Brander asked.

"No. No footprints," Vance answered. "There were, however, vague impressions in the snow."

"Anything definite?"

"No." And Vance was permitted to step down.

Doctor Quayne was then sworn in. His dignity and soft manner were impressive. The jury listened with patent respect. The doctor's testimony was perfunctory and technical. He told of the condition of the body when he first saw it; estimated the time of death; and hastened over the findings of the autopsy. He emphasized, however, the peculiar skull wound over Wallen's right ear.

"Now, this skull wound, doctor," the coroner interposed. "Just what was peculiar about it?"

“It was somewhat sharply outlined and depressed, running from the right ear for about four inches toward the temple—not exactly what one would expect from even violent contact with a flat surface.”

“There was snow where Wallen struck?”

“About an inch, I should say.”

“Did you examine the ground under the snow for a possible projection?”

“No. It would have been visible had it been there.”

“But there are projecting rocks on the cliff between the upper ledge and the ground, aren’t there?”

“Slight ones. Yes.”

“Is it not possible, then, Wallen’s head glanced one of these rocks in falling?”

Doctor Quayne pursed his lips. He expressed considerable doubt.

“However,” persisted Brander, “you couldn’t say definitely—could you, doctor—that this particular injury was wholly incompatible with the fall?”

“No. I couldn’t say that definitely. I merely state that the injury seemed strange in the circumstances; one hardly to be expected.”

“But still,”—Brander leaned forward with marked courtesy—“you’ll pardon me, doctor, if I insist on the point. Such an injury would have been *possible* in an accidental fall from the cliff?”

“Yes,”—Doctor Quayne’s tone showed annoyance—“it would have been possible.”

“That will be all, doctor. Thank you for your clarity and help.”

O’Leary was then called. His testimony, brief and businesslike, served merely to corroborate that of preceding witnesses. As he stepped down there came an unexpected and dramatic interlude. Guy Darrup suddenly leaped to his feet.

“You ain’t doin’ fair to Lief Wallen, Mr. Brander,” he shouted righteously. “You ain’t askin’ for the things where truth lies. I could tell you——”

Brander struck the table with his gavel. “If you have evidence to give,” he said with acerbity, “you should have stated it when you were on the stand.”

“You didn’t ask me the right questions, you didn’t, Mr. Brander. I know plenty about poor Lief.”

“Swear him in again, Constable.”

“Not comfortin’ for us,” whispered Vance to O’Leary.

“Brander has no choice.” O’Leary, too, was apprehensive.

Darrup took the oath a second time.

“Now give us your withheld evidence, Darrup.” Brander’s biting tone was wasted.

“Maybe you don’t know, Mr. Brander, the queer wrong things that goes on over there at the Squire’s.” Darrup spoke like a zealot aroused. “Mr. Gunthar’s always a-bullyin’. An’ he drinks too much to suit the Squire. He’s been warned, he has. An’ it was Lief Wallen that was gonna step in his boots—just like *he* stepped in Old Jed’s boots. An’ Lief wanted to marry that pretty girl of his—the one down there who looks after Miss Joan.” Ella Gunthar drew back as he pointed. “Lief had a right. He’da made her a good honest husband. But Mr. Gunthar didn’t want it. I guess he’s got his own ideas.” Darrup contorted his lips into a shrewd smile. “An’ the girl didn’t want it neither. She thinks she’s better than us. An’ there’s been plenty o’ trouble about it all—Lief wasn’t a boy who’d give up easy. . . .”

Darrup breathed noisily, and hurried on.

“But that ain’t all, Mr. Brander—not by a long ways. Nothing’s right up there at the

Squire's. There's funny things goin' on. Deep, dark things—things you ain't taught about in the Bible. What's the girl doin' down in the Green Glen at night times, I'd like to know? I've seen her sneakin' to Old Jed's hut. There's plottin'. Everybody's lyin'. Everybody's hatin'. An' Old Jed's queer. He don't talk to nobody. But he's up to something, always lookin' up at the trees, an' lettin' the stream water run through his fingers, like a kid. An' then, just when young Lief's about to step into Mr. Gunthar's job, he goes an' falls off the cliff. Lief knew his way about the grounds better'n to do that. Anyway, what's he doin' up there that time o' night when he's supposed to be watchin' round the Manor?"

Brander's patience gave out. His gavel smashed down.

"Did you come here to vent your hates, man? That's not evidence. That's old women's talk."

"*Not evidence!*" shrieked Darrup. "Then ask Mr. Gunthar's girl why she was runnin' down the slope from the cliff at twelve o'clock that night when Lief *fell over!*"

"What's that?"

"You heard me, you did, Mr. Brander. I was workin' late in the pavilion, fixin' things for the Squire's party. An' here she comes runnin' down the slope an' turned right by the pavilion. An' she was cryin', too."

I looked at Ella Gunthar. Her face was white, her lips trembled. There was a subdued commotion in the room. Brander hesitated, looked uneasy. He rustled through some papers before him. Then he looked angrily at Darrup.

"Your statements are irrelevant." He paused. "Unless, perhaps,"—there was jocularly in his tone—"you're accusing a mere girl of hurling a big fellow like Wallen over the cliff. Is that what you mean?"

"No, Mr. Brander." Darrup lapsed again into sullenness. "It wasn't her as could've done it. I'm only tellin' you——"

Again the gavel descended. "That's enough! This inquest is not for the purpose of injuring a young woman's reputation. It is merely to establish by what means Wallen came to his death, and, if by criminal means, at whose hand. Your speculations are, therefore, not helpful to this investigation. Step down, Darrup." Darrup obeyed, and Brander turned quickly to O'Leary. "Any more witnesses, Lieutenant?"

O'Leary shook his head.

"That's all then." Brander spoke briefly to the jury. They filed out. In less than half an hour their verdict was announced:

"We find that Lief Wallen met his death by an accidental fall, under suspicious circumstances."

Brander was startled. He opened his mouth, was about to speak, but said nothing. The inquest was over.

"There's a verdict!" O'Leary scoffed to Vance as we drove back to the Manor. "No sense whatever. But Brander did his best."

"Yes—oh, yes. Not strictly legal, perhaps. Could have been worse. However. . . ."

Ella Gunthar sat in the corner of the back seat beside me, a handkerchief pressed to her mouth, staring, unseeing, over the quiet winter landscape.

Vance took her gently in hand when we arrived. "Was Darrup telling the truth, my dear?" he asked.

"I don't know what you mean. . . ."

"Were you running down the slope that night?"

“I——No. Of course not.” She raised her chin defiantly. “I was at home at midnight. I didn’t hear anything. . . .”

“Why are you fibbing?” he asked sternly. She compressed her lips and said nothing. Vance went on with tenderness. “Maybe I know. You’re a brave little soldier. But very foolish. Nothing’s going to hurt you. I want you to trust me.” He held out his hand.

Her eyes searched his face a moment. A faint smile showed on her lips. Then she placed her hand confidently in his.

“Now run along to Joan—and let that smile come all the way out.”

CHAPTER VIII SECRET PLANS

(Friday, January 17; evening.)

That evening, shortly after dinner, I stood with Vance on the veranda, looking out over the shadows on the skating rink. Echoes of music and gaiety drifted out to this secluded corner from the drawing room. Vance was in a serious, contemplative mood and smoked a *Régie* in silence, with a faraway expression.

Before long, however, there was the sound of approaching footsteps behind us, and Vance turned to greet Carlotta Naesmith.

"Brooding over your sins, Sir Knight?" the girl asked as she came up. "It really doesn't help. I've tried it. . . . I sought you out to ask a most important question—tu-whit, tu-who: Do you skate gracefully?"

"At my time of life!" Vance pretended dejection. "But your query's flatterin'. I'm duly grateful."

"I was hoping you did skate. We do so need a Master of Ceremonies." She prodded him playfully. "You are hereby elected."

"It sounds interestin'. Explanat'ry instructions in order."

"It's like this," Miss Naesmith readily complied. "All the inmates of the zoo, barring the decrepit, are throwing a party for Richard tomorrow night. A sort of farewell celebration. It's to be on the rink out there. . . . I'm hostess *pro tem*, you know. Originality expected from one so brilliant. Hence skates—that being the best idea the brain could conjure up."

"Sounds jolly," said Vance. "And my duties?"

"Oh, just to keep things going. Be officious—you can. Announce the animals. I'm sure you get it: every animal act has a ringmaster."

"Must I supply liniment?"

"You wrong us, sir!" she chirped indignantly. "We all skate amazingly well. I understand the bar will be temporarily padlocked."

"That could help, y' know." Vance smiled.

"We're planning it quite seriously," she ran on. "We're even going to practice on the lower rink tomorrow. And we're going to Winewood in the morning to scout for costumes. . . . Sounds a bit horrible, doesn't it?"

"Oh, no!" Vance protested. "Sounds jolly. As I said." He looked at the girl searchingly. "Tell me, Miss Naesmith, why did you try to hurt Ella Gunthar yesterday?"

Miss Naesmith's mood changed. Her eyes narrowed. She shrugged noncommittally.

"It doesn't take both my eyes to see that she and Dick are attracted to each other. They always were as kids."

"And Sally Alexander?"

She laughed without mirth. "Dick didn't speak to her all day. But let Ella worry."

"And it doesn't take both my eyes"—Vance did not shift his gaze—"to see that you will never pine away if Richard is diverted."

She pondered that a moment. "Dick's a nice boy. It's Papa Rixon's idea, you know. And who am I to upset his fondest dream?"

"Is it nice to be bitter?" Vance brought out his cigarettes. Miss Naesmith accepted one, and he lighted one himself.

"Oh, it's done in the best circles," the girl said facetiously. "And anyway, it's not the man's

place to walk out. That's *my* prerogative."

"I see. Mere technique of etiquette at fault. Well, well."

The girl blew Vance a kiss and went back to the noisy drawing room.

"As I thought," he murmured, as if to himself. "Neither wants it. Richard makes the fact evident. *Ergo*, pique. Evinced by a display of cruelty. Ancient feminine sequence. However, nice girl at heart. It'll all arrange itself. Poor papa. Yes, the Raxon dynasty is crumbling. Same like Bruce predicts." He looked out over the shadowy rink, drawing deeply on his *Régie*. "Come, I've a wishful idea." He spoke irrelevantly as he turned suddenly and went inside.

We found Joan Raxon in her own sitting room across the hall. She was on a divan by the window, and Marcia Bruce was reading to her.

"Why aren't you in the drawing room, young lady?" Vance asked pleasantly.

"I'm resting tonight," the girl replied. "Carlotta told me there's to be a big party for Dick tomorrow night, and I want to feel well, so I won't miss any of it."

Vance sat down. "Would it tire you too much if I talked to you a few minutes?"

"Why, no. I'd love it."

Vance turned to Miss Bruce. "Mind if I speak with Miss Joan alone?"

The housekeeper rose in resentful dignity and went to the door. "More mystery." Her tone was hollow. Her green eyes flashed.

"Oh, quite," laughed Vance. "A dark plot, in fact. But I can complete my dire machinations in ten minutes. Come back then, what? There's an angel."

The woman went without a word.

"I want to talk a moment about Ella." Vance drew up his chair beside the slight reclining figure of Joan Raxon.

"Dear Ella," the girl said sweetly.

"She is a dear, isn't she? . . . I've wondered since I've been here why I never see her on the rink. Doesn't she skate?"

Joan Raxon smiled sadly. "Oh, she used to love skating. But I guess she's lost her interest—since I fell."

"But I know you love to see others skating and being happy."

She nodded. "I do. I do. I've never forgot what fun I used to have myself. That's why Dad kept up the rinks and the pavilion. So I can sit on the veranda and watch the others. He often brings famous skaters up here just to perform for me."

"He'd do anything he thought would make you happy," said Vance.

She nodded again, emphatically. "And so would Ella. . . . You know, Mr. Vance, I'm really a very lucky girl. And I do have wonderful times just watching others do the things I'd love to do."

"That's why I thought Miss Ella might be doing your skating for you, so to speak."

The girl turned her head slowly toward the window. "Maybe I'm to blame, Mr. Vance. I've often thought that."

"Tell me about it," Vance urged softly.

"Well, you see, when I was a little girl, just after my accident, Ella went out on the rink and skated—she was a beautiful skater. I watched her and I was very selfish, I think. Just the sight of her skating seemed to hurt me. I don't exactly understand it. I was such a baby. It—it——"

"I understand, my dear."

"And when Ella came back to the veranda I was crying. . . . After that, for several years, I saw Ella only at intervals. She was at school, you know. And we never spoke again about her

skating.”

Vance took her hand gently. “She was probably too busy with other things to keep up her skating. Or perhaps she lost interest because you couldn’t join her. You needn’t feel guilty. . . . But it wouldn’t hurt you any more, would it?”

“Oh, no.” She forced a smile. “I wish she *would* skate again. I was just terribly foolish.”

“We’re all foolish when we’re young.” Vance laughed.

The girl nodded seriously. “I’m not foolish—that way—any more. Now when I see some wonderful skater I wish it were Ella. I know she could have done it.”

“I know just how you feel.” As he rose the door opened and Marcia Bruce entered.

“The plot’s concocted,” said Vance. “And I’m sure I haven’t tired the young lady. She’s quite ready to hear the ending of the story you were reading to her.”

As we came out again into the hall and approached the stairway two figures stood conversing earnestly in a secluded nook at the rear. They were Carlotta Naesmith and Stanley Sydes. Vance merely glanced toward them and proceeded to the drawing room.

CHAPTER IX AN ABRUPT SUMMONS

(Saturday, January 18; forenoon.)

The next morning Vance rose in good season and, after a hasty cup of coffee, left the house, alone, disappearing down the wide path which led past the pavilion to Gunthar's cottage. Shortly after his departure the other guests straggled down to the breakfast room and then assembled before the spacious gabled garage. One by one the cars were brought out and the cavalcade swung gaily up the hill to the main road and toward Winewood. Half an hour or so later the housekeeper piloted Joan Rexon tenderly to the now deserted veranda and with motherly attentions installed her on the specially built *chaise longue* near the windows overlooking the skating rink.

Barely was the girl settled when Vance and Ella Gunthar turned the corner of the path by the pavilion and came toward the house.

"You see, Miss Joan," Vance said as they entered, "not only do I see your charming companion home in the evening, but I escort her to you in the morning."

Ella Gunthar smiled. She seemed particularly happy. There was a new sparkle in her eyes. Marcia Bruce, apparently sensing something unusual, looked from Ella to Vance and back again. Then she rose, patted Joan Rexon fondly, and went indoors.

Vance remained on the veranda a while, chatting in his most trivial manner, and finally went inside to seek the comfort of the easy chair in his room. He seemed preoccupied and lay back, smoking listlessly for some time. His meditations, whatever they were, were interrupted by a knock on the door. Lieutenant O'Leary came in and sat down. There was an added sternness in his aquiline face.

"I wanted to see you alone, Mr. Vance. The butler said you were here, so I took the liberty. . . ."

"Delighted, Lieutenant." Vance rearranged himself in his chair and lighted another *Régie*. "I trust you haven't brought disconsolate tidin's."

O'Leary fumbled with his pipe a moment without replying. When he got it going he looked up.

"I wonder, sir, if, by any chance, you have the same idea I have?"

"It could be." Vance's eyebrows went up questioningly. "What is your thought?"

"I'm convinced I know who killed Wallen."

Vance lay back lethargically and studied the strong set face of the man opposite.

"Amazin'!" he murmured. Then he shook his head. "No. No such thoughts here. Mind a blank as to that. Anyway, thanks for your confidence. Could you stretch it further?"

O'Leary, hesitant at first, now seemed eager to talk.

"I figure it this way, sir: I don't think Guy Darrup was lying at the inquest yesterday."

"No. Not lying. Merely impulsive and ingenuous. A simple honest mind ruled by zealous emotions. Indignations churned up in him, and boiled over."

"Then you believe him?"

"Oh, yes. Quite. No alternative. Fact is, I'd done a spot of spyin' around myself and already knew most of what he poured forth. Not a pleasant situation here and abouts. But where's it criminal? I need more guidance. Do you have it?"

"Here's how I've put it all together: Gunthar drinks too much and is about to be discharged. Wallen's slated for the promotion. That in itself is a good enough motive with rugged straight-

forward natures. Gunthar has just such a nature. He's not subtle, and apt to be cruel in his cups: he'd take the straight line—strong and forthright—when perplexed with a problem. Now, add to this motive the friction between him and Wallen regarding his daughter's future. Wouldn't you say that would set the stage?"

"Granted." Vance nodded. "Opportunity even simpler. But continue, Lieutenant."

"Exactly, sir. A fine opportunity. Gunthar knows the lay of the land. He knows Wallen's habits and knows his weaknesses. What could be easier for him than to inveigle Wallen to the cliff on some pretext, bash him over the head, and throw him over into the Gulch? . . . Miss Gunthar probably suspected her father's intent, followed him secretly up the cliff, and, when the thing was done, came running down, crying."

"And what could Gunthar hope to gain?" asked Vance indifferently. "He would still be discharged."

"Oh, I know Wallen wasn't the only available man for the job. Rexon can get a dozen others, given a little time. But I gather Gunthar intended to give up his tipting—which is only of recent origin—and insinuate himself again into Rexon's good graces."

"But Gunthar was still drinking too much yesterday. I saw him both before and after the inquest."

"That substantiates my theory," O'Leary declared. "He needed it to buck him up—the experience is enough to undo a stronger man."

"True," conceded Vance. "The point fits snugly. What else, Lieutenant?"

"Gunthar threatened Wallen twice."

"Gossip?"

"Necessarily, of course. But I believe it's authentic enough. It'll be sworn to by reliable witnesses."

"A clever analysis, Lieutenant," drawled Vance. "But not a defense-proof case."

O'Leary showed resentment. "That's not all, sir." He pulled himself forward in his chair.

"Gunthar can't prove a satisfactory alibi for the supposed time of the killing. He came into Murphy's tavern at Winewood at ten o'clock that night. He was nervous and drank more than usual. He left at about half-past eleven. It takes nearly half an hour to walk here from Winewood. An hour later Sokol, the druggist in Winewood, was driving home from a late party and saw Gunthar crossing the meadow on the far side of Tor Gulch. The man thought nothing of it at the time; but after the inquest he figured the information might have some bearing, and told me about it. True enough, Gunthar was headed for his cottage. But that isn't the short cut from Winewood.—And it *is* the route he would have taken if he'd first been to the cliff. . . . Does that strengthen my case against Gunthar?" finished O'Leary doggedly.

"Oh, markedly," Vance readily agreed. "All rather circumstantial, however, isn't it, Lieutenant?"

"That may be." There was a touch of bravado in his voice: a satisfying sense of triumph over Vance. "But sufficient grounds for arresting the man."

"Oh, tut, tut. I wouldn't do that." Vance was all mildness. "So far you've done exceeding well, Lieutenant. You put things together deuced cleverly. Why spoil it all by moving too precipitately? Tie a few more ends."

"I don't intend to act speedily. I could do with a few more facts."

"Exactly. A common need of mankind. I'll bear your theory in mind. Maybe I'll be able to supply the missing facts. Credit all yours."

O'Leary knocked out his pipe and rose. "I've several lines I'm following quietly. But I

thought I'd tell you which way they're leading. I was hoping you might see things from my point of view."

"I do," Vance assured him. "You've done well. Thanks again for your confidence."

When O'Leary had shaken hands and gone, Vance crushed out his cigarette and walked to the window.

"Deuce take it, Van," he said, "the man's too specious. Speciousness. Curse of our modern age. He thinks straight, though. Competent chap. All for the best. Not a nice theory. I hope he's wrong."

An hour later Vance went below. The party that had driven off to Winewood earlier had returned. We saw some of them in the lower hall. From the drawing room came sounds indicating others there.

Doctor Quayne was sitting with Joan Raxon and Ella Gunthar on the veranda. He got up when he saw us and smiled.

"You come just in time, Mr. Vance," his pleasant voice greeted us. "Now you can entertain the young ladies. I'll have to run away in a few minutes to see some of my patients who need me much more than Joan does. I dropped by to make sure she was strong enough for the party tonight, and she doesn't need me at all. With the rest last night and this beautiful mild weather, she's all in readiness for the festivities."

"Anyway," Miss Raxon said, "I managed to keep you here an hour, doctor."

"That was purely social, my dear Joan." He turned back to Vance. "If all my patients were as charming as these two young ladies I'd never complete my rounds. The temptation to remain and visit would be greater than I could resist."

"Mr. Vance, is flattery supposed to be a cure?" Joan Raxon seemed very happy.

"There can be no flattery where you are concerned," Vance returned. "I know that Doctor Quayne means every word he says to you."

Several of the guests came out, joined us a moment to make a fuss over Joan Raxon, and then returned indoors. The midday siren sounded. Bassett, too, I noticed, strolled out; but he merely nodded and remained at the other end of the veranda. He sat down at a small table and began a game of solitaire.

The doctor glanced at his watch. "Good Heavens! That was the noon signal!" He gave the two girls a cordial bow. "You're both a corrupting influence." He went quickly through the drawing-room door. A few minutes later we saw him drive away.

We remained on the veranda for another half hour, relaxing in the warm sunshine, and Vance entertained the girls with tales of his travels in Japan. In the midst of his engaging narrative he glanced toward the French doors just behind us. Excusing himself suddenly, he hastened toward the door. As he stepped inside he turned and beckoned me to follow.

Higgins was standing just by the entrance, his face like chalk, his watery old eyes bulging. Fear and horror pervaded his entire being as he clasped and unclasped his hands against his breast.

"Thank God you were here, Mr. Vance!" His voice quavered and the words were barely audible. "I couldn't find Mr. Richard. Come quickly, sir. Something terrible——" He moved swiftly toward the rear of the main stairs and led us to Carrington Raxon's den.

There, on the floor before the grate, lay the owner of Raxon Manor.

CHAPTER X THE MISSING KEY

(Saturday, January 18; 12:30 p.m.)

Vance, down on one knee in a moment, cursorily examined the coagulating trickle of blood behind Carrington Rexon's right ear. He listened a moment to the labored breathing, then sought the pulse. He turned the man's face toward the light, found it ashen pale. He raised the upper eyelid of one eye; the eyeball was firm, the pupil contracted. He touched the cornea with his fingertip. The lids immediately compressed tightly.

"Not serious," Vance announced. "He's reacting now from unconsciousness. . . . I say, Higgins, summon the doctor immediately." He loosened Rexon's collar and stock.

Higgins coughed.

"I phoned Doctor Quayne before I came out to you, sir. Fortunately, he was at home, sir. He should be here directly."

"Stout fella, Higgins. Now, if you'll call Lieutenant O'Leary—tell him to come here at once. Urgent. Explain, if necess'ry."

"Yes, sir." Higgins picked up the telephone, put through the call, and returned the receiver. "The Lieutenant says he'll be here in ten minutes, sir."

Vance stepped to the window and opened it. Then he went to the fireplace and added a fresh log. The crackling flames seemed to dissipate the gloom that hung over the room. A knock on the door was followed by the entry of Doctor Quayne, bag in hand.

"Good God! What's this!" He rushed to Rexon.

"Not too serious, doctor. No. Bad rap on the head." Vance moved away a step. "He should be coming to. Every indication of return of muscular tone. I found his pulse weak but regular. There was a definite corneal reflex when I opened his eye. Unmistakable resistance when I moved his head."

Quayne nodded and fussed with the wound. A low moan came from Rexon. His eyes opened, glazed, unseeing. At an order from Quayne, Higgins brought brandy. The doctor forced a stiff dose gently between Rexon's lips. The prostrate man moaned again and closed his eyes.

"Lucky I went home for lunch before continuing on my rounds. . . ." The doctor chatted casually as he proceeded to examine Rexon. Finally he rose. "Everything quite in order," he finished cheerfully.

Rexon's eyes opened again, almost clear now. He recognized Vance and Quayne, attempted a smile, winced, and raised a hand to the back of his head.

"We'll take care of that in a moment." Quayne was kindly reassuring. Then, with Higgins' help, he placed Rexon on the sofa. With deft fingers he dressed the wound, continuing his assurances to the man.

While the doctor was thus busied, Lieutenant O'Leary came in. Vance, in a low tone, gave him the details.

"May we put a query or two now?" Vance asked as the doctor stepped away from the sofa.

"Certainly, certainly," Quayne told him. "Mr. Rexon'll be quite all right now."

Vance motioned Higgins from the room, and stepped to the sofa with O'Leary.

"Now, what can you tell us, old friend?" he asked.

"I doubt if I can tell you anything, Vance." Rexon's voice was low and husky, but it gained in volume as he continued. "I'd just risen from my desk to ring for Higgins. . . . I must have

been struck from behind.” His hand moved to his head again. “The next thing I knew, you and Quayne were with me.”

“Any idea how long ago that was?”

“Only a vague one, I’m afraid.” Rexon thought a moment. . . . “But wait! I think I heard the first notes of the siren before I lost consciousness. . . . Yes. I’m positive. I recall being annoyed because it was so near twelve and my breakfast tray hadn’t been removed. It’s usually taken out of my way by eleven. That’s why I was going to call Higgins.”

“Had you been here in the den since you came down this morning, sir?” O’Leary put in.

“More or less, yes, Lieutenant. But I was out of the room for a few minutes once or twice.”

“Had any one been here with you?” asked Vance.

“Yes. Bruce came in for instructions, as she usually does when there are guests. And my son spent about a half hour with me. Doctor Quayne here stepped in to say hello before he went out to Joan. Sydes and Carlotta came in for a minute. Some of the other guests did, too. I’ll try to think back, if you want to know who else.”

“No—oh, no. Really doesn’t matter.” Vance stepped back.

“Do you recall any feeling of giddiness when you first rose to call Higgins?” the doctor asked. “Judging from the wound, I’d say it was highly possible you hit one of the fire irons as you fell.”

“I don’t see how,” answered Rexon a bit nettled. “I wasn’t dizzy. The sensation was I was struck from behind.”

“Ah! I see,” said Quayne thoughtfully.

Rexon suddenly started forward, his eyes averted frantically. A bunch of keys on a long chain dangled from his trousers pocket over the edge of the divan. He caught the keys and sank back fumbling with them hysterically.

“The key!” he gasped after a moment. “The Gem-Room key! God in Heaven! It’s *gone!*”

“Easy now, Rexon,” admonished the doctor. “It can’t be gone. Look again—calmly.”

Rexon ran his hands hopelessly through his pockets. O’Leary searched vainly on the floor. Vance stepped from the room, returning instantly to report that the Gem-Room door was safely locked.

“Proves nothing!” exploded Rexon. “We must get in there at once. I’ll get the duplicate key.”

He rose feebly as he spoke, and moved unsteadily across the room. Snatching a priceless Rembrandt etching from the opposite wall, he threw it carelessly aside. Then he pressed a small wooden medallion, and a narrow panel shifted, revealing an oval steel plate with a dial and knob. His nervous fingers managed a sequence of turns—left and right and left again. Finally he pulled the plate open and reached inside the hidden wall safe. He brought out a key with a long slender shaft. Taking it from him, Vance led the way through the hall.

He had a little difficulty fitting the key into the lock, but finally succeeded and pushed the heavy steel door inward. Rexon brushed past him excitedly and came to a sudden stop in the middle of the famous Gem Room.

“They’re gone!” His voice was little more than a hoarse whisper. “The most precious part of my collection. *And Istar’s—*” His voice broke as he pointed spasmodically and began to sway.

Quayne stepped to him immediately, and took his arm. “My dear friend,” he cautioned. He turned to us. “I’ll take him back to the den, gentlemen.” He led Rexon from the room.

Vance closed the door after the two men, and locked it. Lighting a cigarette, he moved

leisurely through that interesting room, with O'Leary following him in silence. The room was completely void of furnishings except for the ebony carpet and the numerous metal-bound glass cases along the walls. Emeralds of various shapes and sizes, in exquisite and unique settings, were displayed against white velvet backgrounds. In the corner to which Rexon had pointed a case larger than the others had its front pane shattered. A smaller case beside the large one was similarly broken. Both were empty. But none of the other cases in the room seemed to have been disturbed.

"Very mystifyin'," Vance murmured. "Only two cases broken."

"Probably didn't have time; hurried job," suggested O'Leary.

"Quite, Lieutenant. All indications pointin' thus. . . . Wonder what Istar has to do with it."

He stepped to the side window and forced the catch open. O'Leary looked on as he examined the heavy criss-cross iron bars that enclosed the entire window frame. Then they made a similar inspection of the other window.

"My word! Here's something interestin', Lieutenant. Bit of tamperin', what?" He directed O'Leary's attention to some peculiar ragged scratches across three of the bars.

O'Leary's brows went up. "Whoever it was must've tried this means of entry first and found it too cumbersome an undertaking. No patience."

"Or," returned Vance, "an interruption occurred. Aborted attempt. Could be. Let's toddle."

They reclosed the windows. Vance took another look about the room before unlocking the unwieldy door.

In the den Doctor Quayne was attempting futilely to console Rexon. "It's not as if they'd all been taken." Platitudes like that. "Only a few pieces . . ."

"*Only a few pieces!*" repeated Rexon despairingly. "The very pieces that matter! If they'd taken all the others and left me those——" He did not complete the sentence.

Vance handed Rexon the key. "I've relocked the door, of course. Now tell us just what is missing. And how is Istar mixed up in it?"

Rexon jerked himself up in his chair; leaned wearily against the desk. "Every unset stone I owned. Spent a lifetime collecting 'em."

"Those would be the easiest to dispose of, I take it," observed O'Leary respectfully.

"Yes. Exactly. A fortune for any one into whose hands they came. All but the Istar . . ."

"Again, wherefore Istar?" persisted Vance.

"Queen Istar's necklace," groaned Rexon. "The rarest piece in my collection. From Egypt—eighteenth dynasty. It can never be replaced. Six high cabochon emeralds of flawless cut on a chain of smaller stones set in silver and pearls. . . . You must remember it, Vance."

"Ah, yes. Of course," said Vance sympathetically. "Naughty queen—Istar. Always poppin' in and out to annoy folks."

O'Leary was making notes in a small book.

"When were you last in the room?" asked Vance.

"This morning, early. I go in every morning. Had Bruce there with me to do a little dusting. For the display to my guests this evening."

"Ah, yes. Very sad. Now, of course, there'll be no display."

"No." Rexon shook his head in keen disappointment.

"But the youngsters must have their party tonight as though nothing had happened. You agree, Rexon?" Vance's tone was significantly imperative.

"Yes, by all means," complied Rexon. "No need to upset everybody."

The doctor rose presently, picked up his bag. "You don't need my services any more just

now, Rexon. Wish I could be more helpful. But I'll be back this evening to keep an eye on Joan for you."

"Thank you, Quayne. That's very good of you."

The doctor bowed himself out.

O'Leary closed his notebook. "Tell me, Mr. Rexon, was your overseer in to see you this morning?"

"Gunthar? No," replied Rexon. "He's probably been working on the rink and the pavilion all morning. But it's strange you should ask that. Higgins told me when I came down this morning that Gunthar had been here about half an hour earlier asking if he could see me. Higgins told him I wasn't down yet, and the man went away grumbling to himself. I don't understand it, for he never comes here unless I send for him."

O'Leary nodded with satisfaction. He stepped to the open window, lowered it and raised it again. Then he leaned out for a moment as if inspecting the flagging below. There was a speculative look in his eyes as he rejoined us.

In the hall Vance drew the Lieutenant aside. "What about Gunthar?" he asked in a low tone. "Any secrets to unbosom?"

"It's a clearer-cut case now than it was yesterday." The Lieutenant was solemn. "You admitted I had a good case then, sir. But add this to it: I tried to see Gunthar this morning. One of the workmen told me he had gone to the Manor to speak to the Squire. Seemed natural. So I waited around a while. But Gunthar didn't come back."

O'Leary cocked a triumphant eye at Vance.

"You see, sir, how easy it would have been for the man to have entered the den through the window, either then or later when Mr. Rexon was out of the room. He had only to wait back of the screen till the time was ripe. When he had struck the blow it would have been a moment's work for him to snatch the key and get to the Gem Room."

Vance nodded. "Deuced clever, Lieutenant. Logical from many points of view."

"Yes. And what's more," persisted O'Leary, "I'm not at all convinced his daughter Ella wasn't mixed up in it—you know, sir, like giving him the tip-off——"

"Oh, my dear fellow! You startle me no end. I say, aren't you carrying this prejudice against Gunthar a bit too far?"

O'Leary looked surprised that Vance apparently could not appreciate the circumstantial possibilities of the situation.

"No, I wouldn't say so," he retorted with the calmness of conviction. "I've got enough to arrest the girl along with her father."

"But on what grounds, Lieutenant?" Vance was concerned.

"As a material witness, if nothing else," was O'Leary's confident rejoinder.

Vance lighted a cigarette and blew a long ribbon of smoke. "Not attemptin' to try your case, Lieutenant. No. It's far too logical. Merely making an urgent request. Neither the girl nor papa is likely to run off tonight, what? Surely, tomorrow will serve your purpose quite as well. You'll wait, Lieutenant? I'm beggin'."

O'Leary studied Vance several moments. There was no denying the look of admiration beneath his perturbation and doubt. Finally he nodded. "I'll wait, sir. Though it goes against my best judgment." And he strode off across the veranda and disappeared down the side steps.

Vance, too, stepped out on the veranda a moment later. Joan Rexon still sat where we had left her, but Ella Gunthar was no longer there. In her place sat Carlotta Naesmith.

“My word!” murmured Vance. “No use hopin’ the doughty Lieutenant didn’t note Miss Ella’s absence. No. Observin’ fellow, O’Leary.”

Bassett was still hunched over the table where he had started his game of Canfield. Stanley Sydes had joined him and sat in a chair opposite, acting as banker. A decanter of Bourbon stood between them.

CHAPTER XI FAREWELL SOIRÉE

(Saturday, January 18; 9 p.m.)

The afternoon had passed uneventfully. After lunch Carlotta Naesmith and Stanley Sydes invited Vance to go with the others and watch their practice routine on the ice. He had politely declined. Richard Raxon, who likewise remained at the Manor, had talked briefly with Vance regarding the stolen emeralds and spent the rest of the afternoon brooding about the matter. Miss Joan retired to her sitting room for a rest. The house was unusually quiet.

At dinner there was excited talk about the party. Especially were there mysterious hints of a surprise performer whom Mr. Raxon had invited for the occasion. No one seemed to have any specific information, however.

Dinner over, the older guests assembled on the veranda, grouping themselves on either side of Miss Joan's *chaise longue* at the center window. The night was clear and not too cold.

Shortly before nine Marcia Bruce brought Miss Joan out to her place.

"Please pull up a chair for Ella beside me," the girl requested. "She should be here any minute now."

Miss Bruce complied.

Doctor Quayne came up. After a word of encouragement to Miss Joan and a greeting to Richard, he seated himself beside Carrington Raxon behind the young people. Jacques Bassett stood against the closed doors at the rear. Lieutenant O'Leary unobtrusively found a place for himself.

A high, old-fashioned phonograph was wheeled out to the rink by Higgins and another servant. A box of records was carried down.

Vance, on skates, in immaculate evening attire, with a white muffler at his throat, appeared on the rink. Additional lights were turned on as he came forward.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began in mock ceremonious style. His voice was clear and resonant. "I have been honored with the privilege of conducting this memorable event. I confidently promise you an evening of most unusual regalement."

General applause greeted his statement.

"We have with us tonight," he proceeded with exaggerated formality, "performers of wide renown. I might even say, of world-wide renown. Most of you, I am sure, will recognize each name as it is announced. . . ."

Another round of applause drowned out his next words.

"The first of our guest stars," he resumed, "is Miss Sally Alexander. She will entertain you in her own incomparable manner."

Miss Alexander came up from the pavilion, a smiling urchin in colorful tatters, skating gracefully into the spotlight thrown from an upper window of the Manor. She sang a gay Parisian chansonette of dubious significance, and was rewarded with much laughter and cheering. Her next number was a monologue depicting an intoxicated celebrity attempting to thread his way through a bevy of admiring debutantes. Skates made the task none too easy. The small audience was genuinely amused, their approval long and loud.

Vance assisted the young woman back to the pavilion and returned with Dahlia Dunham and Chuck Throme, both in trunks and jerseys. They skated into the spotlight and made a deep bow. Vance raised the young woman's hand.

"On my right, wearing red trunks," he announced, "is Miss Dahlia Dunham—a most

charmin' battler, with many a vict'ry to her credit. On my left, in white trunks, is Jocky Throme, with a list of wins quite as impressive. The two will now go through three rounds for the skate-weight championship."

The gloves were put on, the seconds waved away; the referee came forward, and the bout started. The two contenders sparred lightly for a few seconds. They went into a clinch and were separated by the referee. The slippery ice under their skates sent many of the punches far afield. Those that connected did little damage. When Vance blew his whistle at the end of the third round Miss Dunham was declared the winner by popular acclaim. Chuck Throme, taking his defeat gallantly, essayed another bow. As on an earlier occasion, he carried the obeisance too far. His skates slid out from under him. He lay prone on the ice. Vance and Miss Dunham assisted him to his feet and helped him from the rink.

Joan Raxon sat up and looked about. "I wish Ella would come," I heard her say. "She's missing all the fun. Have you seen her, Dick?"

Richard Raxon shook his head glumly. "Maybe she's outside somewhere." He went to investigate.

Next Miss Maddox and Pat McOrsay presented a skit with a homemade miniature plane on runners. This was followed by Vance's announcement of Miss Naesmith's number with Stanley Sydes. In Spanish costume they creditably performed a series of dances to the accompaniment of the records Vance placed on the phonograph. The other performers joined them for the final tango. Richard Raxon had returned to the disconsolate Joan.

"And now," came Vance's voice again, "we have a surprise for you. I can't give you the name of this performer because she is practically unknown. We call her the Masked Marvel. . . . But one moment! I must whisper in our maestro's ear what melody he is to play." He pantomimed comically to the phonograph as he put on a new record. The lovely strains of *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald* came floating over the still night. And then . . .

A petite figure came tripping out on the ice with unbelievable ease and rhythm. Her costume of velvet and sequins shimmered gaily in the lights. A silk mask covered most of her face. Her spaced routine was exquisitely performed. With incredible grace she combined the most difficult school figures with spirals, spins, and jumps of daring originality.

Everyone gasped with delight. There was a remark that it must be Linda Höffler, the newest skating sensation. Some of the guests questioned Miss Joan and young Raxon. They disclaimed all knowledge. Carrington Raxon, when asked what famous importation he had bagged for the event, would give no information.

Each time the girl left the rink the applause was so loud and continuous that Vance had to bring her back.

Finally one voice called out, "Remove the mask!" The cry was taken up in unison. Vance whispered to the girl at his side. She permitted him to take the mask from her face. Smiling happily, Ella Gunthar stood before us.

Joan Raxon arose in triumphant delight. "I knew it was Ella!" She was almost in tears. "I always knew Ella could do it. Isn't she marvelous, Richard?"

But young Raxon was already on the terrace steps, making his way to the rink. Carrington Raxon and the doctor stepped to Miss Joan's side.

"Oh, Dad!" the girl exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"It's as much a surprise to me as it is to you, my dear. Mr. Vance told me merely he had arranged something for you. I had no idea it was a surprise like this."

"All right, now. All right," Quayne put in admonishingly. "I think that's enough for this

evening, Joan.” The two men helped the girl indoors.

A noisy circle surrounded Ella Gunthar on the rink. The workmen, having been permitted to witness the performance, now moved off. The guests withdrew indoors.

Later they gathered in the drawing room. The performers came up from the pavilion, still in their costumes. Vance, showered with congratulations, disclaimed all credit.

“It’s all Miss Naesmith’s doing, I assure you,” he told everyone.

Ella Gunthar came in, escorted by Richard Rixon. She was enthusiastically greeted on all sides. She seemed upset and nervous and remained only long enough to embrace Miss Joan and say a few words to her. Young Rixon’s and Vance’s offers to see her home were refused with polite determination. She hurried away alone.

The phonograph was brought back from the rink. Someone wound it up and started a record. Soon dancing began. Quayne brought the housekeeper in and directed her to get Miss Joan off to bed. The woman had a new look of pride about her and was almost cheerful as she took charge of the girl and led her from the room.

The gaiety of the party increased. Only Jacques Bassett sat morosely by himself. Quayne was about to approach him, but was buttonholed by Miss Naesmith with a request for the best antidote to seasickness. Richard Rixon joined Bassett at his table.

Vance had had enough. He bade his host good night. O’Leary came up with a questioning look. But Vance put him off.

“Let’s sleep on it, Lieutenant,” he said. “Come round before noon. . . . Jolly party, what? . . . Cheeri-o.”

O’Leary watched sullenly as Vance mounted the stairs.

CHAPTER XII QUEEN ISTAR'S NECKLACE

(Sunday, January 19; 9:30 a.m.)

Vance rose early again Sunday. After strong coffee he invited me to stroll with him in the clear winter sunshine. Snow had fallen in the early hours of the morning; the world about us was covered with a fresh white blanket. We took a footpath that led down to the small pond in the Green Glen where we had first come upon Ella Gunthar. As we skirted a high bush at one end of the pond a small cabin came into view.

"The Green Hermit's cottage, I'll warrant," commented Vance. "Sabbath morn visit to the druid in order."

The door was slightly ajar. Vance rapped. There was no response. He pushed the door wide open. At a small table near a window sat Old Jed. He looked up without surprise.

"Good morning," Vance said pleasantly from the threshold. "May we come in?"

The old man nodded indifferently. His attention was focused on some object between his fingers. As we approached him he raised his hands. The sun fell full on a dazzling necklace of emeralds.

"Six cabochons on a chain of smaller stones," said Vance half to himself. Then admiringly to the old man: "Lovely, isn't it?"

Old Jed smiled with childish delight as he let the green stones slide between his fingers.

Vance sat down beside him. "What else have you?"

Old Jed shook his head.

"What did you do with the others?"

"No others. Only this." He spread the necklace on the table, inviting Vance to share his ecstasy. "Like the green meadows in springtime," he said mystically. "Like running streams of water—like God's trees in summer—green, all beauty in nature is green." His eyes shone fanatically.

"Yes," said Vance, falling in with his mood. "Spring . . . the green of nature all about:

'And all the meadows, wide unrolled,
Were green and silver, green and gold.'"

He looked up kindly.

"Find it, Jed?"

A shake of the head from the old man.

"Where did you get it?"

Another shake of the head. "You're a friend of Miss Ella?" the hermit asked as if eager to change the subject.

"Yes. Of course. And you are too."

The grey head bobbed enthusiastically up and down. "But that fellow Mr. Richard brought home with him. Are you a friend of his?"

"Mr. Bassett? No. No friend of his. Far from it. . . . What about him?"

"No good," declared Old Jed with strict economy of words.

Vance raised his brows slightly. "Did he give you that green necklace?"

"No!" The old man was petulant. "He came here to make trouble for Miss Ella."

"Really, now! When was that?"

"He came here last night. Before the swell doin's up at the big house. He thought Miss Ella

was alone. But I saw him.” Old Jed cackled. “Now he won’t come here no more.”

“No? Why not?”

“He won’t come no more,” repeated the other vaguely. . . . “But up at the big house, Mister: you’ll take care of Ella?”

“Certainly,” promised Vance. “She’ll be all right. . . . But tell me, Jed; how did you get that trinket?”

The old man looked back at him in blank silence.

Vance tried strategy. “It’s for Miss Ella’s sake I must know.”

“Miss Ella, she doesn’t do anything bad.”

“Then tell me where you got that necklace,” persisted Vance.

The old man looked about him in perplexity. His eyes came to rest on the small phonograph we had seen Ella Gunthar using. He looked up at Vance triumphantly. “There!” He pointed to the instrument.

Vance rose and brought it to the table. He opened it up and shook it, but without disclosing anything untoward. The old man picked up the necklace, placed it on the green felt base.

“So,” he said simply. “It was hidden there when I found it.”

Just then the door was pushed wide open again. Ella Gunthar stood there, a smile fading from her lips as she saw us. Old Jed stood up to greet her. Vance stepped across the room, took the girl gently by the hand, and led her to the table. Her glance fell on the open phonograph with the string of gems sparkling inside. Abruptly she turned away, her face white.

“How much do you know about this, Miss Gunthar?” Vance asked indulgently.

“I don’t know—anything about it.” Her answer was low and hesitant.

“But you’ve seen it before?”

“I—think so. In the Gem Room.”

“How did it happen to be hidden in your little music box? Jed says he found it there.”

“I—I don’t know. Maybe it’s not real.”

“Oh, it’s real enough, my dear.”

“I don’t know anything about it,” she repeated stubbornly.

“Now I think you’re fibbing again. Do you know that just such a necklace, and many other costly stones, are missing from the Gem Room?”

She nodded. “Richard told me last night.”

“Did Richard give you this?”

“No!” She glared at Vance indignantly. “And Jed doesn’t know anything about it either. And neither does my father! Oh, you’re all trying to pin lies on father—don’t you think I know why that police officer from Winewood is always hanging around the estate?” Her words came in a passionate rush.

Vance watched the unhappy girl appraisingly. “Who, then, my dear, do you think took the emeralds?” he asked calmly.

“Who?—who?” she echoed. She bit her lips. She thought for several moments. Then, as if on sudden impulse, she blurted defiantly: “*I* took them—I took them, of course!”

“*You* took them!” Vance repeated skeptically. “What else did you take besides the Istar necklace, Miss Ella?”

“I don’t know just what—some loose stones.”

“How did you get into the Gem Room?”

“I found the door unlocked.”

“Oh, come now, Miss Ella. Mr. Rexon’s not in the habit of leaving the Gem-Room door

unlocked.”

“I found it unlocked,” she insisted.

“And once inside the room, what did you do?”

“I opened two of the cases.”

Vance laughed softly. “You found those unlocked too?”

She drew up with a start. Tears formed in her eyes.

“Then I—I—broke them,” she stammered.

“I see, Miss Ella. Then you won’t mind coming with me to the Manor to tell Mr. Raxon all about it?”

“No.” She swallowed hard. “I won’t mind.”

Old Jed looked from Vance to the girl and back to Vance. He furrowed his brow in an attempt to concentrate.

“Mr. Vance,” the girl asked timidly, “will Miss Joan have to know about it? And—and—Richard?”

“I’m afraid so,” said Vance. “But perhaps not at once, my dear. Are you ready to go?”

Vance pocketed the necklace and accompanied the girl from the cabin. Again he took the footpath by which we had come. He made no further mention of the missing gems. Instead he asked: “Bassett been making himself objectionable again?”

She kept her eyes straight ahead. “It was nothing. . . . Did Jed tell you? . . . I never saw Jed so angry. I think Mr. Bassett was really frightened.”

The rest of the walk was in silence.

Carrington Raxon was alone in the den. Ella Gunthar entered the room as Vance held the door for her. She stepped to one side and stood shyly with her back against the wall. Vance indicated a chair. The girl looked from him to Raxon and came forward.

“Now, my dear,” prompted Vance as she sat down.

She lowered her eyes, gripped the sides of the chair.

“Mr. Raxon, I——” She raised her head and then spoke very quickly. “I took the emeralds.”

“You *what*?” Raxon asked in astonishment.

“I took the emeralds,” she repeated more slowly.

Raxon laughed bitterly in spite of himself.

“I can prove it!” she declared recklessly. She extended her hand to Vance for the necklace. He brought it out, gave it to her. She placed it diffidently on the desk beside her.

Raxon took it up eagerly, looked at it carefully. “The Istar necklace! Ah!” Then shrewdly: “Where are the rest?”

The girl shook her head. “I won’t tell you. I won’t!” Her compressed lips indicated unmistakably that she would say no more.

Raxon leaned back in his chair and studied the girl critically. Then crisply: “And you’re the girl my son wants to marry!”

Ella Gunthar’s face suddenly flushed. Raxon’s words had startled her.

“Oh, yes, my dear young lady,” Raxon continued coldly. “You didn’t think I knew of the affair that’s been going on between you and Richard. Miss Naesmith told me about it only last night—Miss Naesmith, the girl I hoped would be his wife. . . . Bah! After all I’ve done for you! You’re not content to steal the love of my only son. You must take my emeralds too.” He half rose in his anger. “I’m almost glad this thing has happened. It will be well worth the loss of the emeralds if I can save Richard. . . .”

Vance stepped swiftly round the desk and put his hand on the older man’s shoulder. “My

dear old friend, please! Don't turn a disappointment into a tragedy."

Rexon relaxed under the persuasive pressure of Vance's hand.

Tears flooded Ella Gunthar's eyes. Vance came to her side.

"Poor child," he said soothingly, "don't you think this tragic farce has gone far enough? It's time for the truth now—all the truth you know. We're in the dark. We want your help. Some terrible forces are at work in the Manor here. Some dangerous criminal perhaps. You can help those you love only by telling us the truth. Will you?"

She took a deep breath, dried her eyes. "Yes, I will," she said with unexpected determination.

Vance sat down beside her. "Then tell me first: Whom are you trying to shield with this foolish tale of theft?"

"I—I don't know exactly. But it seemed that everyone I love had suddenly been caught in an awful trap. Poor Jed, whom you caught with the necklace; my father, whom I knew that police officer suspected of all sorts of things; and, somehow, Richard. . . . And it was all mixed up in some horrible way with that night on the cliff when poor Lief was killed. I—I—it was all confusion. And it seemed that only I could help."

She buried her face in her hands, but when she looked up again her eyes were still dry.

"And I had to try to help them without knowing how to go about it; for I *really* didn't know. . . . Only little things, here and there, that didn't seem to fit together."

"You poor child," murmured Vance again. "But please tell us what you do know—all the little things—anything that may come to your mind. Maybe it will help us all—especially those you love most."

"Oh, I'll try! I'll try!" She spoke eagerly and braced herself. "Perhaps you think, Mr. Vance, that I insisted on going to the inquest Friday merely as an overcurious child."

"No," returned Vance. "Naturally, I've pondered the point. But no opinion."

"Well, anyway, you know all that I heard there. I think that jury was just anxious to get a bad job off their hands." (I could see that Vance was amazed at the sagacity indicated by her remark.) "And I've heard other things, too, Mr. Vance. I've heard the workmen saying it's strange that my father should have been the one to find Lief Wallen's body. . . . Guy Darrup is still saying I should have married Lief.—Can a girl help it if she doesn't love a man?—Then I've heard my father say it's strange that Jed should have known just which way to go that morning. Jed, who wouldn't harm a fly! . . . I've heard that my father wasn't home at midnight on the night Lief died, and that it made things look pretty dark for him. . . . Well, *I* wasn't at home at midnight either! Does that mean *I* killed Lief Wallen? . . ."

She broke off.

"I'm sorry if I sound all mixed up," she resumed. "But it's because I feel all mixed up. . . . A little before twelve that night I came here. Richard asked me to. We hadn't had a chance to speak alone together all day. We were to meet at a favorite tree we have up behind the pavilion. I waited and waited. But Richard didn't come. And then I heard him talking to somebody.—He was angry, I think. But he must have gone back inside. That's when I went running down past the pavilion crying. Just as Guy Darrup said I did. But he didn't know the reason."

She paused and looked at Vance, then at Rexon.

"Anything more?" Vance gave her a searching glance.

"Haven't I said enough?" Her voice sounded weary.

"You haven't told us where you got the necklace."

"Must I?"

“It might help to clear up a deucedly involved situation, don’t y’ know.”

“All right. But my father didn’t take it!” She looked defiantly at Raxon. “I found it lying on the floor near the window in the dressing room reserved for me at the pavilion last night. I was going to return it to Mr. Raxon. But then Richard told me what had happened. I was afraid I’d be asked questions. I knew father was in the pavilion yesterday. Jed brought my costume up there for me. Father locked the room—to keep the surprise—and gave me the key. I was afraid to do anything with the necklace until I had time to think what would be best. And that’s why I took it to Jed’s cabin and hid it in my little music box. . . . But my father didn’t take it! And Old Jed didn’t take it either! . . .”

Carrington Raxon looked profoundly disturbed and perplexed. Vance placed his hands on Ella Gunthar’s shoulders and was about to raise her from the chair.

A knock on the door was followed by Higgins ushering in Lieutenant O’Leary with a plain-clothes man in his wake.

CHAPTER XIII THE SECOND MURDER

(Sunday, January 19; 11 a.m.)

O'Leary looked from Vance to the girl in the chair and then at the necklace spread on the desk before Rexon.

"Where did that come from, sir?" he inquired bluntly.

Vance briefly repeated the girl's account of the finding of the necklace.

"A likely story." O'Leary's tone was sarcastic. . . .

The telephone rang. Rexon answered. Then: "It's from New York, Vance—for you. Private line, this. Perfectly safe. Go ahead." He pushed the instrument across the desk.

O'Leary drew his officer aside and spoke earnestly to him while Vance was at the telephone.

". . . What caused the delay, Sergeant?" Vance was saying. "Ah, records in Washington. . . . I see. . . . I'll take it word for word. . . ." He reached for paper and pencil. He wrote out a dictated message. I recognized the excitement under his calm demeanor as he worked quickly. "Thorough as always, Sergeant." He spoke with satisfaction as he threw down the pencil. "That gives me just what I need. . . . No. Not necessary for you to come. Many thanks. . . ."

He pushed the phone back and stood up. He sighed. He folded the message he had written out, and placed it in his pocket. He sat down again and lighted a *Régie*. "Well, Lieutenant?"

O'Leary came back to Ella Gunthar's chair. "I've kept my promise to you, sir." He was calm, unofficious. "I've waited, as you asked me to. Now I have no choice but to arrest this girl and her father. I think you will agree, sir. I brought this man for the purpose." He hesitated. "Unless you have additional information that will alter my decision."

"I think I have, Lieutenant." Vance turned to the girl in the chair. "Would you join Miss Joan on the veranda, Miss Ella?"

"I'm sorry, sir." O'Leary held up his hand peremptorily. "I don't believe I can allow that."

"Oh, I say! Then send your man with her. Perfectly safe, Lieutenant."

O'Leary scowled, but complied. The girl walked slowly from the room, followed by the husky Winewood constable.

"Thanks no end." Vance tossed his cigarette into the grate. "Lieutenant, I promised you additional information. Here it is." He brought forth the folded paper from his pocket, and passed it to O'Leary.

The Lieutenant unfolded it, glanced at it with quickly moving eyes, then read it aloud: "Whisky glass submitted shows clear prints of Jasper Biset. Description also corresponds. Biset reputed head of international organization of high-pressure jewel thieves. Generally keeps in background. No cause for criminal action against him available. Better known abroad, but would be recognized here. Last tabbed in Saint Moritz, Switzerland."

O'Leary looked up blankly.

"Let me explain further." Vance spoke. "On my first evening here I saw a face. Strangely familiar. Vague association. With Amsterdam. There were eyebrows meeting above the nose. Like a black shaft. But the face wasn't right. No. Something missin'. Should have been a mustache. Bristly. However. . . . Mustaches come and go. On impulse, I took the glass from which the gentleman had been imbibing too much Bourbon. Sent it, with note and general description, to New York police. Hopin'. . . . That's the verbatim report. Just received."

"Who is Jasper Biset?" O'Leary's voice was tinged with exasperation.

"Gent known to police as Jasper Biset is here under preferable name of Jacques Bassett."

Guest of the Manor. More specifically of Mr. Richard Raxon.”

Carrington Raxon gave a start but said nothing.

“Then you think he’s the one——” began O’Leary.

“Don’t know, Lieutenant. Those are all the facts I have. Bein’ honest. Keepin’ an open mind. Like yourself. But a chat with Biset-Bassett is clearly indicated—eh, what? Shall we do it here?”

O’Leary, somewhat dazed and uncertain, nodded.

Vance turned to Raxon. “Will you have the gentleman summoned, sir?”

Raxon, frowning deeply, rang. Higgins appeared and was given instructions. Vance paced up and down the room. He lighted a fresh *Régie*. The Lieutenant stood stoically at the window. He fumbled with his pipe.

Higgins returned. “Sorry, sir. Mr. Bassett is not in his room.”

“Well, can’t you find him, man?” Raxon showed impatience.

“It would seem, sir, the gentleman hasn’t been in his room all night.”

“Oh, my word!” Vance stood perfectly still, his cigarette halfway to his lips. “Are you sure, Higgins?”

“I knocked on the door, sir. No one answered. The door was unlocked, and I looked in, sir. The bed hasn’t been slept in all night. I checked with the chambermaid, sir.”

A groan escaped from Raxon.

O’Leary stood up, aggressively indignant. “I felt we should have acted sooner, Mr. Vance.”

Vance ignored the implied reprimand. “Higgins, call the garage.”

The butler dialed three numbers, handed the instrument to Vance.

“Any car been taken out this morning?” Vance waited a moment. “And last night?” . . . He put the telephone down. “Every car cozily in its place. Curious. Suppose we toddle up to the gentleman’s boudoir.”

The room showed no sign of disorder. One closet held a number of suits neatly arranged on their hangers. The other disclosed a grey topcoat, a tan one, two or three robes, and several pairs of shoes. Three hats rested on an upper shelf. From the closets Vance went to the bureau, inspected the drawers. These were neatly filled with the customary accessories of a man of taste. A trunk stood in one corner of the room with a matching bag beside it. Vance opened these, found them empty.

“Can’t see that we’ll learn anything here.” He took in every detail of the room. “Suggest we go down to Winewood. Confab with the station master might prove illuminatin’.”

The Lieutenant’s small car was parked outside the veranda. O’Leary turned toward it as we came down the steps.

“Oh, I say!” Vance checked him. “Please! Mind functions more efficiently at lesser speed. Let’s go on foot. If you don’t mind.”

O’Leary shrugged. We continued to the end of the pathway, swung into the vehicle road leading through the estate to the county highway. The fresh layer of snow was unmarred but for a single set of tire tracks marking the Lieutenant’s arrival an hour or two earlier.

Vance lighted a cigarette. We trudged along.

“Not every day one has the opportunity to lay his hands on a murderer.” O’Leary spoke glumly. “Too bad if he’s got away.”

“Oh, yes. Quite. Véry sad. But I’m not convinced the man *is* a murderer. My own observations contraindicative. No. Not the type that deals in murder. Too suave. Wouldn’t bloody his hands.”

“Then you don’t think he killed Wallen in an earlier attempt to get at the emeralds?”

O'Leary seemed surprised.

"No—oh, no. As I said. Not the type. However. . . ."

"But you admit he's gone off now with the gems?"

"My dear Lieutenant! I admit nothing. Just lookin' round at present. Strivin' to learn."

"That throws us back on Eric Gunthar. Has he been asked to account for himself during yesterday's incident?"

"No. Not yet. Good thought, however. I'll speak with him later. 'Where were you on the night of—?' And all that sort of thing. Might help. Might not. . . ." Vance flung the end of his cigarette aside.

We had just passed through the large gates and taken perhaps a hundred paces on the highway toward Winewood.

O'Leary brought out his pipe. "The car would have been quicker——"

"Quicker. Yes." Vance stopped abruptly. "But not as productive of results. . . . Look yonder, Lieutenant."

He directed our gaze into a clump of trees at one side of the roadway, just beneath the towering wall of the Rexon estate. An irregular mound of snow, with patches of black here and there, ended in a pair of patent leather shoes.

"Might have driven right past that, don't y' know." Vance stepped through the undergrowth. O'Leary followed in abashed silence.

As we came nearer, the mass resolved itself into the outlines of a hunched human form, one arm twisted crazily under the torso, the other extended straight from the shoulder.

"That, I opine, is our missing jewel expert." Vance spoke solemnly. He approached the figure, turned the face upward.

It was Jacques Bassett, in the evening attire in which I had last seen him the previous night. Now he wore a black Chesterfield as well. Vance bent down, examined the body more closely. A streak of sticky, darkened snow above the right ear caught his attention.

"Same like Wallen, Lieutenant. Not a nice business. Not at all a nice business. No."

"You're right, sir. Too much like Wallen. Same kind of wound. I don't like it either, sir. . . . Been dead long, would you say?" O'Leary asked as Vance rose.

"Eight or ten hours. But, my word, Lieutenant! I'm not the Medical Examiner. Should have Quayne here. Shall I stagger back to the Manor and phone your Æsculapius, or would you prefer to do the chore while I wait here?"

"No need for you to stay here, sir." O'Leary was respectful. "I'll remain. If you'll be good enough to phone Doctor Quayne."

"Gladly, Lieutenant. . . . By the by, . . ." Vance hesitated. "Could you tell me if the emeralds are in the gentleman's attire?"

"Really shouldn't do it, sir. Against regulations." O'Leary knelt down as he spoke and made a swift examination of Bassett's pockets. He rose. "No emeralds, sir. Just the usual." Then he added quickly, "You see what this means, sir?"

Vance looked at the other from the corner of his eye. "You're far too clever for this bailiwick, Lieutenant."

"I like it here. . . . It does throw the case back on Eric Gunthar harder than ever—doesn't it, sir?"

Vance nodded. "I'm afraid it does—theoretically. But surely, Lieutenant, you don't believe _____"

"I'm not paid to believe things, sir. I'm paid to follow facts." O'Leary drew on his pipe.

“And I’m afraid I’ll have to go through with the arrest of Gunthar and his daughter. I’m telling you now, sir. I want to be fair.”

“I understand, Lieutenant.” Turning away, Vance retraced his steps to the Manor.

On the veranda a few of the guests were talking animatedly. Joan Rexon had gone indoors. Ella Gunthar sat apart from the others, looking listlessly toward the rink. She was still guarded rather ludicrously by the Winewood constable. Vance approached her.

“Listen carefully, my dear. There’s real danger for you and your father. I need your help. You and I must work together. We’ll get rid of the nightmare. Here’s what I want you to do. Get your skates and skating costume. Tell your father Mr. Rexon would like to see him in his den. And Old Jed too, if you can find him. This gentleman will accompany you.”—Vance indicated the constable.—“Then you are to come back here to the rink and skate as if everything you ever wanted depended on it. Keep all the guests interested. Keep them away from the house at any cost. Skate until I give you the signal to stop. In the meantime, I’ll be working hard for you and your father. Understand?”

The girl’s lips quivered. Then she raised her chin and looked Vance straight in the eye. “I’ll do everything you ask.” There was determination, submission, heroism, in her voice. She turned toward the pavilion, the burly officer close behind her.

Vance started for the den. Carlotta Naesmith ran up inquisitively, as if to ask a question.

Vance held up his hand. “Not now, please. I have an urgent favor to ask of you. All the guests must be kept out here. Away from the house. Ella Gunthar is going to skate for them. You’ve hurt her much. She’s suffering now. Be kind.”

Before Miss Naesmith could answer, Vance continued to the den.

He found Carrington Rexon still alone there and briefly told him of the new developments.

The man sank dejectedly into a chair. “Another death!” he groaned miserably. “And the emeralds?”

“Not on him. May still be recovered.”

Vance reached for the telephone. He called Quayne, apprised him of the situation, and informed him just where he would find Lieutenant O’Leary waiting by Bassett’s body.

“What do you make of it all, Vance?” asked Rexon as the other sat down opposite.

“Nothing yet, old friend. Tryin’ to add things up. Must make a simple sum eventually. . . . Would you ask your housekeeper to come here, please? A few queries I’d like to put to her.”

Rexon telephoned the request.

Vance rose with suppressed nervousness and went to the window. He lighted a cigarette. At length he turned and faced his host.

“I’ve a feeling that somewhere this morning I’ve missed something. Of no importance. Bothers me no end, though. Something unconsciously waited for. Hasn’t happened. . . .”

CHAPTER XIV SKATING FOR TIME

(Sunday, January 19; 1:15 p.m.)

Marcia Bruce came in, dignified and composed. Vance drew up a chair for her.

"We have a few questions to put to you, Miss Bruce," he began tentatively.

"Nothing here surprises me any more," the housekeeper returned philosophically. "I'll do my best to answer."

"You know, of course, that several of the emeralds have been stolen from the Gem Room?"

"Mr. Rexon has informed me of it. That surprises me less than anything else. I'll be glad to be free of the atmosphere surrounding those stones."

"What do you mean, Bruce?" interposed Rexon.

"I might as well tell you, sir. You'll have to know sooner or later. I'm resigning immediately, sir. And leaving here for good in about a week—maybe sooner."

"Resigning! Leaving! But why, Bruce?"

The woman blushed. "Doctor Quayne has done me the honor of asking me to marry him."

Vance smiled pleasantly. "Well, well! That would have been last evening—eh, what, Miss Bruce? Just before you came for Miss Joan."

The woman seemed startled. "How could you know that?"

"Lovelight in a woman's eyes. I saw the signs. May I be the first to congratulate you."

"And I, too, am delighted to hear it, Bruce. . . ." Rexon's voice trailed off. Then, "But couldn't you stay on? Joan would miss you. . . ."

"And I'll be sorry to leave Miss Joan, sir. But Loomis—that is, the doctor—wants to leave Winewood. He finds it increasingly difficult to manage here—what with two younger men making such inroads on his practice."

"Where does he plan to go?"

"I'm not quite sure yet, sir. He mentioned the possibility of going abroad."

Rexon nodded resignedly. "I understand. I understand. I imagine it *is* getting a hard row for Quayne to hoe. But, Gad! I'll miss him. And you too, Bruce."

"To get back to less pleasant matters, Miss Bruce." Vance seated himself on the arm of a chair. "You must have been down on the lower floor here yesterday about noon."

"I was. I was down most of the morning, seeing about meals, and——"

"Did you see Eric Gunthar here?"

"I noticed him hovering outside the rear entrance. But I don't know whether he came into the house."

"Did you see Old Jed?"

"That hermit! He never comes near the house, sir."

"Well, can you remember any one you did specifically see? Out in the hall there, or near the Gem Room?"

"So many of the guests were up and down." She hesitated a moment, as if to collect her thoughts. "Mr. Richard dashed through the hall once or twice. I think I saw his foreign-looking friend, too. And that treasure-hunting gentleman was hovering around. I don't know whether he was waiting for Miss Naesmith, or what. And I saw Doctor Quayne, though I didn't have a chance to speak to him." She seemed avid for any excuse to mention the man's name.

"Was that when he arrived in the morning?" Vance asked.

"No. It was when he was leaving. He had stayed longer than usual and he was late. I

remember the noon siren had blown a few minutes earlier——”

Vance sprang to his feet and held up his hand for silence. A far-away look came into his eyes. He paced back and forth nervously several times. Then he came to a sudden stop before Rexon's desk.

“That insignificant something,” he remarked slowly, as he sank into a chair. “I think I have it. The siren. Haven't heard it today.”

“It's not sounded on Sundays,” Rexon told him.

“No. Of course not. But yesterday.”

“What can the siren have to do with if all, Vance?”

“Everything. Needs a little thought.” He brought out his case and selected a cigarette with marked deliberation. He walked to the window, stood gazing out for a moment. As he turned back, a soft knock on the door was followed by the timid entry of Eric Gunthar, twisting his hat nervously in his hands.

“You wanted to see me, Squire?” he asked, looking down at the floor.

It was Vance who answered his query. “You might as well know the worst, Gunthar. Lieutenant O'Leary is determined to arrest you and Miss Ella on what he calls suspicion. You must have noted he has a constable watching Miss Ella now. . . . She came back with you?”

“Yes, sir. She did. She's down at the pavilion, changing her clothes. She said she was going to skate on the rink.”

“Good,” said Vance. “We must all go out and watch her anon.”

“She asked me to tell you, sir, that she couldn't find Old Jed anywhere.”

“Thank you. It doesn't matter. . . . But to get back to what I was saying. I see no reason why you shouldn't be here too. No use trying to run away. The Lieutenant will arrive any minute. You're to sit there. Trust to me. Just as Ella is doing. I'll do my best. May fail. But can't be helped. Sit tight and wait. Understand?”

Nodding dejectedly, the man moved with awkward steps to the chair Vance had indicated. He continued the twirling motion of the hat in his hands for a moment. Then he placed the hat behind him and rested his head docilely on the palms of his hands. He was abashed, frightened.

Vance had scarcely resumed his own seat before Rexon's desk when another tap on the door announced the arrival of the Lieutenant and Doctor Quayne. A faint odor of gasoline accompanied them.

“I see your chariot has had another intramuscular injection, doctor,” Vance said pleasantly. Quayne merely nodded.

“Greetings and congratulations, doctor,” said Rexon. “Bruce has just told us of the betrothal. . . .”

Quayne smiled and looked admiringly at Marcia Bruce. He seated himself on the long leather divan, and Miss Bruce rose from her chair and joined him.

“I felt somehow you'd be pleased, Rexon,” Quayne said with some show of pride.

“Naturally. But I'll miss you both. So will Joan.”

O'Leary mumbled felicitations, his gaze on the downcast figure of Gunthar perched uneasily on the edge of his chair. Then he furrowed his brow in a puzzled frown and sought Vance's eyes.

“Yes. Quite, Lieutenant. Doing the big-hearted. Knew you'd be poppin' in anon. Thought I'd have Gunthar handy for you. Trying to do my share. Always appreciative of favors.”

“And the girl?”

“Waiting for you, too. After a manner of speaking. If she isn't already out on the rink she'll

be there in a minute or two. Skating for the guests. Under the eagle eye of your doughty constable, of course.”

O’Leary suddenly stepped back, narrowed his eyes and looked at Vance, shrewdly. “What’s the meaning of all this, sir? There’s something underneath.”

Vance smiled wearily and nodded. “Right you are, Lieutenant! Something underneath. But what? I think it’s the siren—the Rexon noonday siren, Lieutenant, which echoes through the hills and——”

O’Leary broke in impatiently. “Just where is this leading, sir?”

“To a mere bit of chatting. Puttin’ things together. Askin’ a few questions. Searchin’ our souls. Good for the soul now and then. When all that’s done, you may lead Gunthar and his daughter forth. If that should still be your desire, Lieutenant.”

“Sounds like hocus-pocus to me, sir.”

“More or less true of all life—eh, what?”

“How long is this to take, sir?” O’Leary’s restlessness was apparent. “I’ve gone pretty far with you already. For my part, I’m ready to take them now. . . .”

“You shall call the time yourself, Lieutenant.” O’Leary packed his pipe. “That’s fair.”

“Yes—oh, yes. Always fair. May be futile at times. But fair.”

CHAPTER XV QUERIES AND ANSWERS

(*Sunday, January 19; 1:45 p.m.*)

Doctor Quayne moved uneasily in his place on the divan. "It's a bad business," he remarked. "A bad business. Bassett's been dead at least ten hours. We had the body removed to the morgue. Another autopsy to do. From what I've seen offhand, I can only say that he met his death very much as Wallen did. But this time there is no cliff from which he might have fallen."

"You, too, noticed the similarity of the wounds, did you, doctor?" O'Leary put in.

"It could hardly be overlooked," returned Quayne. "I've never seen such a strange coincidence. If I weren't so confused by other factors I'd be willing to state under oath that both deaths were caused in the same manner."

O'Leary compressed his lips with great satisfaction and nodded energetically. "The same thought occurred to me," he said.

"I understand, Mr. Vance," the doctor went on, "that you had an official report on the man this morning that throws a rather sinister light on the matter. From what Lieutenant O'Leary has told me, I've formed a theory that I'd like to put before you."

"Pray do," said Vance eagerly.

"It is this: Obviously Bassett came here with the sole purpose of getting his hands on at least some of Mr. Raxon's emeralds. If we assume that his first attempt was made from outside and that he was surprised in his effort by the guard, Wallen, we can conclude that he had then but one course left to him. Namely, to do away with Wallen. Let us further assume that he took this course; that he was *seen* taking it, by a friend of Wallen who was, in the circumstances, helpless to prevent the murder. This second man, you may be sure, would carry the grudge, and take his revenge at the very first opportunity. These men are a very simple folk, Mr. Vance. They believe whole-heartedly in the Mosaic law 'An eye for an eye'. They wouldn't hesitate to take matters into their own hands and mete out what they consider retributive justice."

"Very plausible theory, doctor," said Vance. "Worthy of consideration." Quayne nodded in acknowledgment of the compliment. Then Vance looked abruptly at Miss Bruce, sitting beside her fiancé. "You say you saw Mr. Sydes flittin' round down here about noontime?"

She nodded.

Vance now spoke to Raxon. "Will you send for the gentleman? And your son as well. Immediately, please. Speed, old friend. The leaves are turning. The bird is on the wing. Time is running out."

Raxon rang for the butler, relayed the request to him.

In a very few minutes a knock on the door was followed by the swaggering entrance of Stanley Sydes, with Richard Raxon close behind him. The younger man walked to the window behind his father's desk and sat down on the broad sill. Sydes remained standing, resting his arms on the back of an empty chair.

"Quite a conclave here," he commented casually. "I do hope we're not all going to pass up Miss Gunthar's performance. I've never seen anyone who can claim to be her equal on ice."

"You're not alone in that opinion, Mr. Sydes," Vance remarked. "We'll try not to detain you too long. . . . Could you possibly recall just where you were yesterday when the noontime whistle sounded? Miss Bruce here thinks she saw you about that time, wanderin' in the lower hall."

Sydes laughed boisterously. "I can't say the lady is wrong. Probably was heading for the bar to soothe my jangled nerves."

"Hope the antidote was effective." Vance smiled. "Looking tip-top today. . . . Irrelevantly speakin', Mr. Sydes, does your interest run only to *buried* treasure?" Vance looked at the man keenly.

"I don't think I understand you, sir. As I said once before, it's the thrill of the search that lures me on. But I don't suppose any man would turn up his nose at a treasure right under his nose—if I may make a quip."

"Did you know of Mr. Rexon's collection of emeralds?"

"Strangely enough, not until I'd been here a day or two. It was other game that brought me here. However, I might add that I was genuinely disappointed when I learned we were not to see the stones, after all."

"Do you happen to know why Mr. Rexon hasn't opened the Gem Room to his guests?"

"I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea. And I haven't been presumptuous enough to inquire."

"Admirable restraint," murmured Vance. "Deservin' of appeasement. I'll answer the unasked question for you. The fact is, a number of the Rexon emeralds have disappeared from the Gem Room—undoubtedly stolen. And one of the guests—Mr. Bassett—has been murdered."

Richard Rexon rose with a bound from his place at the window.

Sydes straightened up and drew in his breath. "Incredible!" he mumbled. "Why, I saw the man only——" He broke off.

"Yes?" prompted Vance. "When *did* you see Bassett last?"

"Now that I think of it," Sydes returned lamely, "I haven't seen him today at all. . . . Is there anything I can do?"

"Thank you. Only to rejoin the others and help Miss Gunthar keep them entertained and out of our way."

Sydes bowed himself out with a look of concern mingled with relief.

Young Rexon was conversing in an undertone with his father. He looked bewildered as he stepped back to the window. Vance turned to him.

"How much did you know about your friend Bassett, Mr. Richard?"

The young man did not answer immediately. Vance lighted a cigarette while he waited. Finally young Rexon spoke.

"Not too much, I'm afraid. Only that he seemed a likable enough chap. And he was a pleasant traveling companion."

"Hardly sufficient recommendation," grumbled the elder Rexon bitterly. "The man was a scoundrel!"

"Did you know," Vance asked carelessly, "that during his brief stay here he was annoying Miss Ella?" Richard Rexon only shook his head. Vance continued. "Old Jed found it necessary to reprimand him severely. Perhaps Jed did more than that. . . ."

Eric Gunthar jumped from his chair. "You can't say that, sir! The hermit may be a queer one, but he didn't murder nobody!" The man seemed surprised at his own outburst. He sank back to his chair.

Quayne looked across at Vance with significance. "Bearing out my earlier contention, Mr. Vance."

Vance nodded abstractedly. He found an ash tray and broke the ashes from his cigarette.

"Tell me, Gunthar: was this hermit of yours friendly with Lief Wallen?"

"The hermit ain't friendly with nobody. Except, maybe, my Ella."

“Had Wallen *any* friend on the estate who would want to avenge him if he thought there had been foul play?”

“I don’t know about friends. But any man of us would do that if we had cause.”

“Very interestin’. And most commendable. . . . But I think Lieutenant O’Leary has a query or two to put to you.” Vance made a broad gesture with his hand, as if turning over a witness to the opposition.

“Mr. Gunthar,” the Lieutenant began, “you were at Murphy’s tavern the night Wallen died?”

Gunthar thought back. “Yes, I was.”

“And did you go directly to your cottage from there?”

“You might say I did, sir. I only stopped outside the house here, just to see what was doin’.”

“Did you see Wallen?”

“No—I don’t think so,” said Gunthar hesitantly. Then he amended his statement. “Or if I did, I wouldn’t have noticed specially.”

“Did you come up to the Manor yesterday, Gunthar?” The Lieutenant was becoming more belligerent.

“Well, I did—and I didn’t. I mean, I didn’t come into the house exactly.”

“What did you come for?”

“To talk with the Squire.” He looked uneasily at Rixon. “You see, Mr. Richard wanted I should come up here and promise the Squire I wouldn’t drink no more if he’d let me keep my job. So I come up here first thing in the morning. But the Squire wasn’t down yet. Later Mr. Richard come down to me where I was busy at the pavilion an’ told me to go up again. I didn’t want to, but Mr. Richard he wouldn’t let me off. So I come up. I had a bottle with me, an’ I took another drink on my way. Just to buck me up, you know. An’ when I come up to the house I stopped to make up what I would say. Then I thought the Squire wouldn’t like it if he could smell the liquor on me. I was outside for a bit, changing my mind this way an’ that. But I didn’t come in. I went back to the pavilion. After lunch Mr. Richard come down again to ask me——”

“That’s enough.” O’Leary interrupted the recital impatiently.

“I think, Lieutenant,” Vance interposed mildly, “the doctor’s theory is more plausible. However, I have known medical men who, when they did not like a diagnosis which could not be proven all the way, would substitute a more acceptable alternative based on the same principal factors.”

“A discerning observation,” commented Quayne dryly.

“We start then, with the admissible assumption that the guard, having frustrated an attempt to enter the Gem Room from outside, is deliberately murdered. That there is an eye witness to this murder seems not too preposterous. We know definitely that access to the room is later effected by means of Mr. Rixon’s key. We likewise know, beyond a doubt, that one Bassett, with sufficient and understandable reason to be interested in the emeralds, falls victim to a second murder.”

Vance paused to light a fresh *Régie*.

“We find ourselves confronted,” he resumed, “with more unknown quantities than I care to cope with in a single problem: Who witnessed that first hypothetical murder? Who managed to procure the key to the Gem Room and appropriate the emeralds? Finally, who finished Bassett, and why?”

He puffed thoughtfully on his cigarette and looked about.

“Offhand,” he continued, “Bassett seems the logical choice for the second factor of the puzzle.” The others nodded in agreement. “If only we had found the emeralds on him—or in his room . . .”

“Has a thorough search been made?” asked Carrington Rexion hopefully.

Before Vance could answer, the doctor spoke again. “My dear Rexion,” he said, almost as if to a child. “The man was not so simple as to have left them carelessly about. He might have wrapped them securely in a packet and mailed them off somewhere.”

“A reasonable suggestion,” agreed Vance. “On the other hand, I am compellingly driven to the conclusion that Bassett could not have taken the emeralds at all.”

There was a murmur of surprised dissent.

“Why not, Mr. Vance?” It was O’Leary who asked the question.

“For the simple reason, Lieutenant, that he wouldn’t have had the time. Mr. Rexion has told us that he heard the beginning of the noon siren just as he was struck and lost consciousness. Is that correct, old friend?”

“Absolutely, Vance. I am positive of it.”

“But,” interposed the doctor, “I wasn’t called till after half-past twelve. I presume that no one knew of Mr. Rexion’s predicament until then.”

“Quite right, doctor,” Vance told him. “And yet, I persist in the opinion that Bassett could not have managed it. . . . Habit dulls our awareness of the repetitious act or sound. How many of us are conscious of the striking of a clock unless we are waiting for it? We let time glide past us unnoticed. But let a man have a train to catch or a timed appointment to keep, and the tick of his watch acquires significance for him. . . . Is that psychologically correct, Doctor Quayne?”

“Undoubtedly,” agreed Quayne. He placed a hand on the shoulder of the woman beside him; but she seemed lost in her own thoughts.

“Very well, then. . . . Bassett joined us on the veranda almost before the echo of the siren died away. You may have noticed him.”

“Can’t say that I did.” The doctor coughed negligently.

“Possibly not. Aloof sort of johnnie. Remained at one end of the veranda—alone. Queer thing is that I wouldn’t have noticed the siren. Hadn’t noticed it on other days. Habit, as I say, dulls our senses, don’t y’ know. But though I was unconscious of the fact at the moment, the sound was forcibly called to my attention. By yourself, doctor. Do you recall?”

“It’s quite possible. I remember I was in a hurry. I’d stayed longer than I intended.”

“Exactly. But the important thing is—you couldn’t know, doctor, because you left us immediately—that *Bassett remained on the veranda for the next half hour at least*. . . . Does that establish my contention?”

Again there was a subdued murmuring among the others.

“Of necessity eliminating Bassett from that phase of our little problem play, whom can we enter in his stead? . . . Sydes was undoubtedly speaking the truth here.”

“That may be, Mr. Vance,” O’Leary conceded. “But what of Eric Gunthar? I’m about ready to call time, sir.”

Gunthar squirmed in his chair. Young Rexion came forward.

“If you will permit me, sir, I think I can bear out Gunthar’s statements. You can depend on it, he’s told you the truth.”

“Yes, Lieutenant,” supplemented Vance. “Let me say this for Gunthar: He’s been weak. He’s been foolish. He’s let his normal ego and competency run to aggressiveness. Hence his

enemies. Then he began drinking too much. To bolster his confidence. Not wise. No. Result: both he and his daughter are in devilish hot water. However, I'm not believin' he's guilty. And I think you will agree with me shortly, Lieutenant. A few more short minutes, please. . . ."

He looked at O'Leary, got a grudging nod from him. Then he faced young Raxon.

"What about yourself, Mr. Richard? Could you have taken your father's emeralds and wrapped them securely in a packet——?"

He was interrupted by a half-smothered shriek from Marcia Bruce. She suddenly rose from her place on the sofa.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned as she ran from the room.

Quayne looked after her in astonishment.

Vance's question had left us all equally stunned. Young Raxon stood white and speechless facing his accuser.

"From what I've observed and heard," Vance went on relentlessly, "and leaving the question of motive aside for the moment, you seem to have had every opportunity——"

Carrington Raxon leaped from his chair and pounded the desk with his fist.

"See here, Vance!" he thundered. "This has gone far enough! If you're going to make a farce of it, I prefer to say be damned to the emeralds, and drop the matter right now."

"Raxon's quite right," put in Quayne impressively. "Think of the scandal. . . ."

"I am thinking of it." Vance's manner remained cool. "But it is no longer a question of just the emeralds. We have certainly one murder on our hands. Possibly two. Surely, you wouldn't say 'be damned' to that."

The elder Raxon shook his head despondently. He sank back into his chair. The son, at a gesture of dismissal from Vance, resumed his former place on the window sill.

CHAPTER XVI FINAL CURTAIN

(Sunday, January 19; 2:45 p.m.)

Vance took a few paces across the room. His attention was caught by a pair of eyes peering in at the window behind Richard Rixon. It was the Green Hermit. He made no move as Vance approached the window and raised it.

"Might as well join us in here, Jed," Vance suggested casually. "You'll see much better, don't y' know. And hear. More satisfact'ry, what?" He closed the window as the old man moved away. Vance came back to a chair, crossed his knees as he sat down.

Higgins opened the door with a surprised look on his face. "It's Old Jed, sir," he mumbled awkwardly.

"Yes—oh, yes. Let him come in." It was Vance who spoke.

The white-haired old man came shuffling into the room, looking from side to side as if to find a place where he might hide. He finally chose a chair in the corner nearest Vance and sat down without a word.

"Where do we stand now?" Vance began anew. "Ah, yes. We still have to determine the identity of the persons involved in a dramatic piece of mayhem and thievery."

He rose from the chair and stood leaning against it.

"Mr. Rixon tells me, Doctor Quayne, that you are planning to leave Winewood." Vance looked at the man lazily.

The doctor seemed taken aback. "Frankly, yes," he returned. "Though I don't recall having mentioned it. At any rate, I don't see what my future plans can have to do with this matter."

"You will in a moment, doctor." Vance brought out a visiting card and a pencil. He wrote a few words hastily, toyed with the card for a moment. "Our problem is falling nicely into line," he announced, looking up. "I said Bassett could not have obtained the jewels. But he could—and probably *did*—assault Mr. Rixon and secure the key to the Gem Room. . . . Yes. He would have had just enough time for that. . . . This assumption assigns to him half of the second rôle. But our cast is still woefully incomplete. . . . Permit me one more question, Doctor Quayne. Just why were you determined to let me know it was after twelve yesterday?"

"I resent the imputation, sir. I was simply in a hurry."

"As you said. In a hurry to get to the Gem Room and out again, doctor?"

Quayne made no reply. Merely smiled, as at a precocious child.

The door opened suddenly. Marcia Bruce came rushing back into the room. Her face was flushed. Her hands were tearing frenziedly at the paper wrappings of a small parcel. She shot a look of disgust at the man on the divan.

In the momentary confusion Vance passed the card in his hand to Lieutenant O'Leary. The latter stepped from the room, returning almost immediately. He moved leisurely to the divan, sat down beside Quayne.

Marcia Bruce had removed the last bit of paper and now held in her trembling hands a small, crudely sewn chamois bag, tied with a bit of dental floss. She turned fiery green eyes on Quayne.

"You charlatan! You thief!" she flung at him. "Did you think I could be so easily deceived? Did you think that because of your honeyed words you could count on me to aid you and shield you in your hour of need? . . . Your hour of need!" she repeated disdainfully. "Hour of shame! Hour of perfidy!"

She turned from him and held the bag out to Vance. He took it from her, tossed it lightly to the desk.

Carrington Rixon, with shaking fingers, managed to get the bag opened. He emptied its contents. The brilliant gems formed a shimmering green pattern on the blotter before him. His son was again at his side. Together they examined the stones.

"I think they are all here, Vance." The elder Rixon brought out a pocket handkerchief and placed the stones, one by one, in its folds.

On the divan Quayne sat deathly pale. He seemed to have aged years in a few minutes. O'Leary moved a little closer to him.

Vance turned to the housekeeper. "May I ask how that little pouch came into your possession, madam?"

"*He* brought it to me." She pointed scornfully. "Last night. For safekeeping. It was all wrapped up. It was to be a surprise. A surprise I was to share with him when we were married and——" She broke off abruptly.

Vance bowed to the woman. "Thank you, madam. It was the tangible proof I needed. . . . Fortunate for Mr. Rixon the banks were already closed yesterday—eh, what, doctor?"

Quayne shrugged helplessly.

"Your theory wasn't far wrong, doctor. . . . Now, if we assign to Doctor Quayne the rôle of obtaining the gems, as circumstances so irresistibly suggest, the problem is no longer a problem."

"But how in the world, Vance——" Carrington Rixon was at a loss for words.

"If the good doctor will help me elucidate further. . . . Bassett's appearance on the veranda yesterday was your cue that he had carried out his half of the plan.—Am I right, doctor?"

Quayne gave no sign that he had heard.

"And, having established for yourself an ironclad alibi through that perilous hour of noon, you had only to enter the house, take the key from where you knew he had left it for you, and the rest was simplicity itself. Your presence anywhere on the lower floor here would excite no suspicion. . . . But won't you tell us, doctor, what form of blackmail Bassett employed to induce you to enter this scheme with him?"

Still Quayne sat in stony silence.

"Then I must resort again to our limited cast," continued Vance. "You were most helpful a little earlier, doctor. No doubt thought you were helping yourself. You suggested an eye witness to the murder of Wallen. Now, whom could we place in that rôle more appropriately than Mr. Bassett? . . . Of course, it would be only guesswork. But he would seem to meet every requirement. . . ."

There was an unexpected interruption from the Green Hermit. "You're not guessing, Mister. If you mean the night Lief Wallen died, I was there. I was there because I came to look after Miss Ella. Miss Ella oughtn't to come here so late. . . . I saw the doctor walk a ways with Lief. And I saw your Mr. Bassett walk after them. All very quiet and peaceful. I didn't know they meant harm. . . ."

Vance suddenly turned to O'Leary with a questioning look. The Lieutenant arose, making a jerky motion of his arm, much as a magician does when he is about to produce a surprise. Gradually dropping from his sleeve, came a heavy straight wrench, about twelve inches in length, with varied square openings at each end. He passed it to Vance.

"By Jove!" said Vance evenly. "A spanner! Usually part of the tool equipment of an automobile—eh, what, doctor?"

Quayne stiffened; his eyes bulged, fastened on the telltale wrench in Vance's hand.

"Too bad your first attempt to enter the Gem Room was not more successful, doctor." Vance looked coolly at the man on the divan. "So Bassett *was* the eye witness. He must have driven a hard bargain."

Quayne now spoke for the first time. His voice was strained and bitter. "Half of what I might get. And he ran only the minimum of risk."

"And did you take the additional precaution of leaving the necklace at the pavilion in the hope of further involving Gunthar who already seemed to be seriously under suspicion?"

The doctor spread his hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

"But in the end you felt you could not trust your partner? You deemed it safer—and more profitable—to put him out of your way permanently?"

Quayne leaned forward rigidly.

"I might as well tell you everything," he said wearily. "When I was abroad two years ago, Richard introduced me to Jacques Bassett. It was an unfortunate acquaintance for me. From the first I disliked the man, though I tried to give no indication of it. Brief as our association was, I felt his evil influence. In a weak moment I was persuaded to undertake smuggling a packet of gems into this country for him. I was fairly successful. Though I was under suspicion for some time, the federal investigation was finally dropped. When I sent the rascal his share of the transaction, I thought I had put him out of my life forever. . . . Then Richard came home and brought Bassett with him. I was distressed to see that their friendship had continued. But I could say nothing. . . . As I have already suggested, Bassett's trip here was motivated solely by his desire to acquire the Raxon emeralds. He lost no time in re-establishing contact with me. He made it plain to me that he was fortunate to find an unwilling ally who was necessarily under his thumb. He gave me the choice of doing as he said or being exposed in the smuggling matter. He painted rosy pictures for me if I would follow his bidding. . . . For years I've been hoping to marry Marcia Bruce. . . ."

He sent a look of appeal across the room to the woman. She had regained her poise and looked back at him coldly.

"But I never had sufficient income to take care of her," Quayne continued. "My practice had dwindled to a point where the Raxon fee was all I could count on. In the many years of my association here, stealing the emeralds never occurred to me. The scheme was Bassett's. But I was an easy prey to his designing chicanery. . . . Wallen interrupted our first attempt, and it became necessary to get rid of him. I had the spanner with me and used it to fracture Wallen's skull. Then we dragged him to the cliff and threw him over. It looked as if we were safe; and I wanted to quit then. But Bassett held this second crime over my head more ominously than the first. I had no choice but to go on. . . ."

He paused briefly, then resumed.

"You've shrewdly guessed, Mr. Vance, how Bassett obtained the key for me. . . . Late last night I met him just outside the grounds to divide the gems. Distrusting him as I did, I took the spanner along as a precaution. There was a violent dispute. He threatened me, and I used the spanner again. . . . The rest you know. . . ."

Quayne rose suddenly. O'Leary did likewise, a pair of manacles in one hand. Vance made a negative gesture. The doctor looked about him with clouded eyes. One hand moved slowly from his vest pocket to his mouth. . . .

He was immediately catapulted back to the divan, in horrible convulsions. In a few seconds he was still.

“Odor of bitter almonds,” Vance commented calmly. “Cyanide. . . . Wiser than I thought. Leaves us without any problem. Eliminates the second actor in the dual performance.”

A hush fell over the room. Two or three minutes passed.

O’Leary broke the silence. “But, Mr. Vance, how did you get a line on that wrench?”

“It wasn’t over difficult,” drawled Vance. “There were two factors missin’ in the pattern. The time element, and the lethal instrument. The first was cleared up when I realized their clever ruse built round the siren. The second dawned on me when Quayne returned with you this afternoon from viewing Bassett’s body. He brought a noticeable aroma of gasoline with him. And I was reminded of an evening earlier in the week when he spoke of priming the engine of his car instead of using the starter. There are two tools with which to remove the spark plugs for this process: a socket wrench, or a spanner. . . . You will recall the nature of the injuries on Wallen’s skull and on Bassett’s. A linear depressed fracture over the thin temporal bone. A crushing blow with a stout steel wrench would do the trick. I mentioned just such a weapon as a possibility on the morning Wallen was found.”

Vance paused to light a cigarette.

“Ordin’rily, of course, the murderous weapon is disposed of as quickly as possible. But in this case it must of necessity be kept on hand to loosen the spark plugs. I was convinced it would be found within easy reach—on the floor of his car, perhaps. . . . Is that correct, Lieutenant?”

O’Leary nodded admiringly. “But, Mr. Vance,” he said somewhat sheepishly, “suppose you hadn’t been on the veranda when that siren sounded? Quayne couldn’t count on your presence at the right moment.”

“Obviously not. That wouldn’t have mattered. He counted on Miss Joan and Miss Ella. Served his purpose admirably. Perhaps better, in fact. And yet . . . I don’t know. He would have insisted on bringing the point up. He considered it his irrefutable ‘out,’ don’t y’ know. . . .”

“And how,” asked Carrington Rexon, “did Bassett manage to come in here without my seeing him?”

“Didn’t you say you were out of the room, old friend?” Vance drew deeply on his *Régie*. “The man was patient. He was playing for big odds. . . .”

Carlotta Naesmith burst into the room. “The poor kid’s all tired out, Sir Galahad. But she says you told her to keep on skating.”

Vance quickly stepped before the limp figure of Quayne on the divan. “Thank you, Miss Naesmith. I’ll tell her in a moment that it’s all right now. We’ll all be joining you.”

“Please, Sir Galahad, let me tell her.” Miss Naesmith whisked from the room before Vance could reply.

The guests left Rexon Manor the next morning. Richard Rexon, too, was to drive to New York with Vance and me later in the day. Carlotta Naesmith and Stanley Sydes were the last to take their departure. We formed a somewhat subdued group on the veranda as Higgins carried their bags out.

Miss Naesmith stopped on the terrace. “You’ll mail me your new address, Dick?” she called back. “I’ll be sending you picture post-cards from Cocos Island. I hope you’ll like that, Dick.”

A smile of understanding passed between the two as Carrington Rexon knit his brows.

Sydes, still on the veranda, called out: “You mean that, Goddess?”

“Nothing else but,” she replied as she ran to the car. “When do we start?”

“As soon as we can get to the yacht, darling.” And Sydes went after her.

A little later Vance was in Carrington Rixon’s den bidding him adieu.

“The ingratitude of our young folks,” Rixon complained bitterly. “I don’t know what the world is coming to.”

“Really, now, it isn’t that bad,” Vance said sympathetically. “And wasn’t it you, Squire Rixon, who said something about the human heart desiring happiness for others?”

Rixon looked up at him, and a new light came slowly into his eyes.

Richard came in. “You’ll see that Higgins gets my trunks off, Dad?”

“Certainly, my boy. Take care of yourself. . . . And—before you go, son, will you bring Ella in here to me.”

Walking out with a smile on his lips, Vance left the two together.

TWENTY RULES FOR WRITING
DETECTIVE STORIES

TWENTY RULES FOR WRITING DETECTIVE STORIES

BYS. S. VAN DINE

The detective story is a kind of intellectual game. It is more—it is a sporting event. And the author must play fair with the reader. He can no more resort to trickeries and deceptions and still retain his honesty than if he cheated in a bridge game. He must outwit the reader, and hold the reader's interest, through sheer ingenuity. For the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws—unwritten, perhaps, but none the less binding: and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them.

Herewith, then, is a sort of Credo, based partly on the practice of all the great writers of detective stories, and partly on the promptings of the honest author's inner conscience. To wit:

1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.

2. No wilful tricks or deceptions may be played on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself.

3. There must be no love interest in the story. To introduce amour is to clutter up a purely intellectual experience with irrelevant sentiment. The business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar.

4. The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit. This is bald trickery, on a par with offering some one a bright penny for a five-dollar gold piece. It's false pretenses.

5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions—not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession. To solve a criminal problem in this latter fashion is like sending the reader on a deliberate wild-goose chase, and then telling him, after he has failed, that you had the object of his search up your sleeve all the time. Such an author is no better than a practical joker.

6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that will eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter; and if the detective does not reach his conclusions through an analysis of those clues, he has no more solved his problem than the schoolboy who gets his answer out of the back of the arithmetic.

7. There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice. Three hundred pages is far too much pother for a crime other than murder. After all, the reader's trouble and expenditure of energy must be rewarded. Americans are essentially humane, and therefore a tip-top murder arouses their sense of vengeance and horror. They wish to bring the perpetrator to justice; and when "murder most foul, as in the best it is," has been committed, the chase is on with all the righteous enthusiasm of which the thrice gentle reader is capable.

8. The problem of the crime must be solved by strictly naturalistic means. Such methods for learning the truth as slate-writing, ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic séances, crystal-gazing, and the like, are taboo. A reader has a chance when matching his wits with a rationalistic detective, but if he must compete with the world of spirits and go chasing about the fourth dimension of metaphysics, he is defeated *ab initio*.

9. There must be but one detective—that is, but one protagonist of deduction—one *deus ex machina*. To bring the minds of three or four, or sometimes a gang of detectives to bear on a problem is not only to disperse the interest and break the direct thread of logic, but to take an

unfair advantage of the reader, who, at the outset, pits his mind against that of the detective and proceeds to do mental battle. If there is more than one detective the reader doesn't know who his co-deductor is. It's like making the reader run a race with a relay team.

10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story—that is, a person with whom the reader is familiar and in whom he takes an interest. For a writer to fasten the crime, in the final chapter, on a stranger or person who has played a wholly unimportant part in the tale, is to confess to his inability to match wits with the reader.

11. Servants—such as butlers, footmen, valets, game-keepers, cooks, and the like—must not be chosen by the author as the culprit. This is begging a noble question. It is a too easy solution. It is unsatisfactory, and makes the reader feel that his time has been wasted. The culprit must be a decidedly worth-while person—one that wouldn't ordinarily come under suspicion; for if the crime was the sordid work of a menial, the author would have had no business to embalm it in book-form.

12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature.

13. Secret societies, camorras, mafias, *et al.*, have no place in a detective story. Here the author gets into adventure fiction and secret-service romance. A fascinating and truly beautiful murder is irremediably spoiled by any such wholesale culpability. To be sure, the murderer in a detective novel should be given a sporting chance, but it is going too far to grant him a secret society (with its ubiquitous havens, mass protection, etc.) to fall back on. No high-class, self-respecting murderer would want such odds in his jousting-bout with the police.

14. The method of murder, and the means of detecting it, must be rational and scientific. That is to say, pseudo-science and purely imaginative and speculative devices are not to be tolerated in the *roman policier*. For instance, the murder of a victim by a newly found element—a super-radium, let us say—is not a legitimate problem. Nor may a rare and unknown drug, which has its existence only in the author's imagination, be administered. A detective-story writer must limit himself, toxicologically speaking, to the pharmacopœia. Once an author soars into the realm of fantasy, in the Jules Verne manner, he is outside the bounds of detective fiction, cavorting in the uncharted reaches of adventure.

15. The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent—provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it. By this I mean that if the reader, after learning the explanation for the crime, should reread the book, he would see that the solution had, in a sense, been staring him in the face—that all the clues really pointed to the culprit—and that, if he had been as clever as the detective, he could have solved the mystery himself without going on to the final chapter. That the clever reader does often thus solve the problem goes without saying. And one of my basic theories of detective fiction is that, if a detective story is fairly and legitimately constructed, it is impossible to keep the solution from all readers. There will inevitably be a certain number of them just as shrewd as the author; and if the author has shown the proper sportsmanship and honesty in his statement and projection of the crime and its clues, these perspicacious readers will be able, by analysis, elimination and logic, to put their finger on the culprit as soon as the detective does. And herein lies the zest of the game. Herein we have an explanation for the fact that readers who would spurn the ordinary “popular” novel will read detective stories unblushingly.

16. A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with

side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no “atmospheric” preoccupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action, and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion. To be sure, there must be a sufficient descriptiveness and character delineation to give the novel verisimilitude; but when an author of a detective story has reached that literary point where he has created a gripping sense of reality and enlisted the reader’s interest and sympathy in the characters and the problem, he has gone as far in the purely “literary” technique as is legitimate and compatible with the needs of a criminal-problem document. A detective story is a grim business, and the reader goes to it, not for literary furbelows and style and beautiful descriptions and the projection of moods, but for mental stimulation and intellectual activity—just as he goes to a ball game or to a cross-word puzzle. Lectures between innings at the Polo Grounds on the beauties of nature would scarcely enhance the interest in the struggle between two contesting baseball nines; and dissertations on etymology and orthography interspersed in the definitions of a cross-word puzzle would tend only to irritate the solver bent on making the words interlock correctly.

17. A professional criminal must never be shouldered with the guilt of a crime in a detective story. Crimes by house-breakers and bandits are the province of the police department—not of authors and brilliant amateur detectives. Such crimes belong to the routine work of the Homicide Bureaus. A really fascinating crime is one committed by a pillar of a church, or a spinster noted for her charities.

18. A crime in a detective story must never turn out to be an accident or a suicide. To end an odyssey of sleuthing with such an anti-climax is to play an unpardonable trick on the reader. If a book-buyer should demand his two dollars back on the ground that the crime was a fake, any court with a sense of justice would decide in his favor and add a stinging reprimand to the author who thus hoodwinked a trusting and kind-hearted reader.

19. The motives for all crimes in detective stories should be personal. International plottings and war politics belong in a different category of fiction—in secret-service tales, for instance. But a murder story must be kept *gemütlich*, so to speak. It must reflect the reader’s everyday experiences, and give him a certain outlet for his own repressed desires and emotions.

20. And (to give my Credo an even score of items) I herewith list a few of the devices which no self-respecting detective-story writer will now avail himself of. They have been employed too often, and are familiar to all true lovers of literary crime. To use them is a confession of the author’s ineptitude and lack of originality.

(a) Determining the identity of the culprit by comparing the butt of a cigarette left at the scene of the crime with the brand smoked by a suspect.

(b) The bogus spiritualistic séance to frighten the culprit into giving himself away.

(c) Forged finger-prints.

(d) The dummy-figure alibi.

(e) The dog that does not bark and thereby reveals the fact that the intruder is familiar.

(f) The final pinning of the crime on a twin, or a relative who looks exactly like the suspected, but innocent, person.

(g) The hypodermic syringe and the knockout drops.

(h) The commission of the murder in a locked room after the police have actually broken in.

(i) The word-association test for guilt.

(j) The cipher, or code letter, which is eventually unravelled by the sleuth.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Winter Murder Case* by S. S. Van Dine]