

THE STRANGE
CASE OF
MR. HENRY
MARCHMONT



J. S. FLETCHER

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The Bedford Row Mystery

NOVELS BY
J. S. FLETCHER

THE BEDFORD ROW MYSTERY
THE LOST MR. LINTHWAITE
THE VALLEY OF HEADSTRONG MEN
EXTERIOR TO THE EVIDENCE
THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL
THE HEAVEN KISSED HILL
THE COPPER BOX
THE SECRET OF THE BARBICAN AND OTHER STORIES

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Row Mystery*

BY
J. S. FLETCHER

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I—Called to Remembrance

Bedford Row, on the western edge of Gray's Inn, is well known to all Londoners as being chiefly the business abode of limbs of the law; a severely respectable street of Georgian houses in age-coloured red brick; quiet, sombre, disdainful of change. Law is practised in nearly every one of its tall doorways; the rooms to which they admit smell of parchment and sealing-wax; the men who come out of them or hurry into them carry brief-bags, or bundles of papers tied about with red-tape; you may feel confident, if you chance to pace along the pavements, that nine out of ten of the individuals you encounter are connected in some way with legal processes—law, in short, is the life-business of Bedford Row, and there are few people entering it who are not there as either plaintiffs or defendants or as agents or witnesses for one or the other.

Nevertheless there are people who go into Bedford Row in pursuit of something other than law, and a young man who turned its corner at noon one October day certainly did not look as if he wanted to serve somebody with a writ, or had just been served with one himself. He was a well-built, athletic fellow of twenty-five or so, whose bronzed cheeks, clear eyes, and alert expression betokened a love of and close acquaintanceship with outdoor life; and had there been anybody about who knew him they could have told you that he was Richard Marchmont, well known on the leading English cricket grounds as one of the best all-round amateurs of the Middlesex County Eleven, and that he was scarcely less eminent as an exponent of Rugby football. He was of the sort that loathes gloves and overcoats, and though the October air was keen that morning he wore neither, and his suit of grey tweed and soft cap to match made a contrast to the black-coated law folk against whom he rubbed shoulders. It was not often that Richard Marchmont walked into Bedford Row; its character and atmosphere had no charm for him, used as he was to the level greens of the playing-fields. Yet he had a close connection with the place. At the farther end of the street, in one of the oldest and largest houses, lived his uncle, Mr. Henry Marchmont, sole surviving partner in the firm of Fosdyke, Cletherton, & Marchmont, Solicitors. Mr. Henry Marchmont was an old-fashioned solicitor, and an old-fashioned man. Being a confirmed bachelor, he lived above his offices, in a suite of rooms which he had arranged and furnished—long since—in accordance with his own taste. There he was occasionally visited by his nephew, who preferred to live in another quarter of the town, in a smart flat in Jermyn Street, close to his favourite club, the Olympic, every member of which was a figure of note in the athletic world. Richard, wealthy himself, used to wonder what made his uncle, equally

wealthy, tie his life down to the sombreness of Bedford Row when he might have had a proper establishment in the West End. Henry, teased on this point, always declared that he set his own neighbourhood high above either Mayfair or Belgravia, and the pavement before his front door to the flags of Pall Mall; he had taken root there, he said, and nothing should pull him up.

Henry Marchmont was at his front door, or, rather, on the broad, well-scoured step of it as Richard came along. He was a tall, fine-looking man, well and sturdily built, fresh-coloured, blue-eyed, silver-haired, very particular about his personal appearance. He looked very distinguished as he stood there now, in his smart black morning coat, his familiar monocle screwed into his right eye, bending down from the step to talk with two women who stood on the pavement, and whom Richard took for clients that Henry had seen to the door. Richard knew enough of his uncle and his habits to know that that was an honour the old lawyer accorded to few of his visitors, and he looked more closely at the women. He decided that they were the sort of women of whom one says at once that they have seen better days; their clothes looked as if they were usually laid up in lavender and only brought out on very special occasions. Richard knew—from a more or less diligent reading of back numbers of *Punch*—that the style and cut of their garments was after the fashion of twenty years before. But just then Henry Marchmont caught sight of his nephew and beckoned him to approach. He drew the attention of the two women to him with a smile.

“You don’t know this chap!” he said jocularly. “Chip of the old block, though! This is John’s boy—Richard.”

The elder of the two women held out a gloved hand. Richard noticed that the glove was carefully darned.

“You don’t say so, Mr. Henry!” she exclaimed. “Dear me!—yes, I see the likeness to his father. Mr. Richard Marchmont. Ah! My sister and I knew your father well, sir, in the old days.”

“This lady is Mrs. Mansiter, Dick; this, Miss Sanderthwaite,” said Henry Marchmont. “As Mrs. Mansiter says, they knew your father in the old days. Long before you were born, my lad!”

Richard made some remark—what, he scarcely knew. He remembered very little of his father, Henry’s elder brother, and he was wondering when and where John Marchmont had known these ladies, each so faded, so reminiscent of the past. He looked at them curiously; although they were sisters there was a difference between them. Mrs. Mansiter was a somewhat comfortable, placid sort of person—the sort of woman who gave the idea of a too-ready acceptance of things as they came along; her manner and tone indicated acquiescence. But her sister, thin, wiry, old-maid in every look and movement, struck Richard as one in whom hidden fires might be concealed; there was still a burning vitality

in her deep-sunken black eyes; a flash came from them as she turned to inspect him. Once, he was quick to see, this had been a handsome woman, perhaps a beauty. And he began to wonder what tragedy lay behind the old-fashioned clothes and under the queer old hats of these two, who looked like ships of a century ago, washed out of some backwater. . . .

“Oh, yes, long before he was born!” Mrs. Mansiter was saying. “Oh, yes, time will fly, Mr. Henry! And we must fly too, sister——”

When they had gone, with old-fashioned bows and smiles, Henry Marchmont looked after them and shook his head.

“Knew those two when your father and I were boys, Dick!” he said. “They were of some consequence in the world, in our part, in those days—their family, I mean. Now, those two poor old things keep a boarding-house in Bloomsbury! Egad!—I remember the time when the younger one, Cora Sanderthwaite, used to ride to hounds—she was a fine horsewoman and always well horsed too. Well, well!—and how are you, my boy?”

“All right, thanks; no need to ask how you are,” replied Richard. “You always look in the best of condition. I dropped in to see if you’d lunch with me?”

“I will, my boy—but I won’t go up West,” answered Henry. “Too far off—I’m busy this afternoon. I’ll go round to the Holborn with you, though. But come in a minute—I must just speak to Simpson.”

He led the way into the house, with the arrangements of which Richard was thoroughly familiar. It had been a family mansion a hundred and fifty years before; the residence, no doubt, of some rich City merchant, and Henry Marchmont, a lover of the antique, had always since his coming to it kept a careful eye on its upkeep and preservation. There was a fine, if dark, panelled hall on the lower floor, and fine rooms on either side; the staircase was of rare wood and the mouldings of the ceilings and fireplaces of singular artistic quality; the upper floors, in which Henry had his private residence, were similarly panelled and decorated. Richard knew that his uncle was prouder of the whole place than he ever admitted. It was, indeed, impossible for Henry Marchmont to cross the hall or climb the stairs without a lingering glance of admiration at the polish of one or the carving of the other; he and the old house, he always said, just fitted.

Henry led his nephew into his private office and rang a bell that stood on his desk. A man whom Richard knew as Hemingway Simpson, managing clerk, and whom, for some unexplainable reason, he cordially detested, put his head in at the door. He was a sharp-nosed, ferret-eyed man, whose naturally somewhat supercilious air was heightened by his pince-nez spectacles; to Richard he always conveyed the impression of being both prig and sneak. But he knew that his uncle had the greatest belief in Simpson’s abilities as a

solicitor and relied firmly on his advice.

“Oh, Simpson!” said Henry, as the clerk silently looked his attention. “I’ve been thinking over that matter we spoke of this morning. I think it’ll be best, wisest, if I see the fellow alone—he’ll probably talk more freely if there’s no other person present. What do you think?”

“It might be more advisable, certainly, Mr. Marchmont,” replied the clerk. “If he thinks you have me here on purpose——”

“That’s just it!” interrupted Henry. “He would! All right, Simpson—I’ll see him alone, then—I shall get more out of him, no doubt. So you needn’t stay, you know. Now, Dick,” he went on, as the clerk’s head was withdrawn, “that’s all. At your service, my lad—and I can give you just an hour and a half. Got an important appointment here at three o’clock, and it’s one now. Come along!”

He chattered about anything and nothing as they walked together to the Holborn Restaurant, and turned to no particular subject across the luncheon table. But later, in a quiet corner, over a cigar and coffee, he suddenly turned to his nephew with a look of confidence.

“Dick, my boy!” he said. “I’d one of the most curious experiences last night that I’ve ever had in the whole course of my professional life! You’re not a lawyer, but you’ve seen enough of the world to see the dramatic properties of this little story. I met a man last night who, twenty-five years ago, I and a lot more people wanted very much to meet, but who wasn’t to be met!—indeed, I, personally, never thought to meet him again. And last night—there he was!”

“Easily recognisable?” asked Richard.

“Oh, just so!—knew him at once. But I’ll tell you all about it,” continued Henry Marchmont, settling himself comfortably in his seat. “It’s a queer business. Now, I think you know that I began my professional career at our family’s native place, Clayminster, away in the Midlands. I was in practice there for some years before I came to London and bought a partnership in Fosdyke & Cletherton, which then became Fosdyke, Cletherton, & Marchmont. Well, during the last year or so of my time at Clayminster there were some queer happenings in the town—a small town, as you know. There was a man in Clayminster named Land. He had begun life as a schoolmaster—elementary school—but he had a special bent towards mathematics, or, anyhow, figures, and it led him to throw up schoolmastering and take to accountancy. Then he turned that up and turned to stock and share broking. He was a clever chap, a plausible chap, and he got hold of, or round, a lot of the moneyed people in the town and neighbourhood. There was no doubt that a great deal of gambling in stocks and shares went on in Clayminster and the district through Land—a very great deal! Of course, it was nobody’s concern but that of the folk actually engaged, though there was plenty said. However,

at the very height of it, this man Land suddenly disappeared! One evening he was seen in one of his usual haunts—the club, or the Angel, or somewhere—the next morning he'd vanished! Gone, Dick!—as clear as if he'd been snatched into the clouds!”

“Without a trace?” asked Richard.

“Without the ghost of a trace! He must have arranged the whole thing cleverly—had it all cut and dried. As soon as he'd gone, things came out. There were—well, irregularities. It was difficult to decide, in his absence, if he'd overstepped the bounds or not in respect of moneys entrusted to him. But there was the fact that several individuals were hard hit, very hard hit, and two or three families brought to something like destitution. In one or two cases, it certainly looked as if he'd appropriated considerable sums handed to him for speculation, or investment. The police came into it, and they made the most exhaustive inquiries. It was useless—he was never tracked. There are people in Clayminster to-day who believe that he committed suicide by throwing himself down one of the disused pit-shafts in the neighbourhood. But I never believed that—he was too cute and clever! If he'd come a cropper at that time and fled, it was only to start again and come up again in another place!”

“This is the man you met last night?” suggested Richard.

“The man! I met him in this way. I went to dine with some City men, financiers, at the Cannon Street Hotel—private dinner, of course, in a private room. Before dinner, while we were all standing about, a man I know very well indicated another who was one of a group—a man who was talking volubly, but had his back towards me. ‘That’s an interesting man who’s making some figure in the City,’ he said. ‘He’s from way back somewhere—Colonies, I think—and has come over here with valuable concessions and options—said to be of enormous wealth himself, I understand.’ Presently the man turned—and I instantly recognised him as Land!”

“After all those years?” exclaimed Richard.

“After twenty-five years!” said Henry. “And easily! He’s a big man—not unlike me, as a matter of fact—tall, well-built, fresh-coloured. But—he’s a drooping eyelid! The left—no mistaking that! Oh, yes, I knew him—immediately!”

“What happened?” asked Richard.

“He gave a big start—and suppressed it. He changed colour—went pale—and turned away. But in a second or two he looked round again. I nodded to him—significantly. He came over to where I stood, alone. ‘For God’s sake, Marchmont!’ he said in a whisper, ‘let me have a word with you, in private! Let me come and see you—I want to! I want to explain. Give me your card!’ Well, I gave him my card! I told him he could come to Bedford Row, to-night, and what time. He was damned grateful, Dick! ‘It’s good of you—kind of

you!’ he said. ‘But for God’s sake, Marchmont, wait—wait till I’ve seen you! Say nothing here! Don’t tell any of these men my real name!’ ”

“What does he call himself now, then?” inquired Richard.

“Now? Lansdale! John Lansdale. But his real name’s Land—James Land. Good Lord!—What a fellow! I suppose I ought to tell the police. However, I’ll hear what he has to say. Queer story, Dick, isn’t it? Now I’m off, my boy—time’s up!”

He hurried away, but Richard sat there, thinking. And his thoughts were chaotic—black. For he was very much in love with a girl whom he had only recently met—and her surname was Lansdale!

II—*The Dilemma*

Up to that hour of his life Richard had never known what it was to be faced by a really awkward situation. He had had a very easy time of it. The only child of wealthy parents, who had both died while he was still a boy, leaving him under the guardianship of his Uncle Henry, he had come at twenty-one into the uncontrolled possession of a very considerable fortune. Thanks to Henry's tutelage, and not a little to his own natural inclinations, he had never been likely to make ducks and drakes of it. His tastes were simple, and mainly for outdoor pursuits. Cricket in summer, football in winter, travelling at odd moments—these were the things he cared for, and until recently he had found nothing to affect his pursuit of them. But now there was a change. He was undoubtedly in love, and already knew that the girl he loved was also in love with him. And if her father turned out to be the man of whom Henry Marchmont had just told him—why then, indeed, he said to himself bitterly, there was going to be the very deuce of a mess!

Richard had been in the middle of a pleasing romance during the last few weeks. The more serious business of the cricket season being over for him early in September, he had amused himself during the last half of that month with a little country-house cricket, and in the course of this picnic-like diversion had met, at an old house in Surrey, the home of a big City magnate, a very pretty girl who was introduced to him as Miss Lansdale, and whose Christian name he quickly discovered to be Angelita. They met again—at another country house—and yet again—by their own appointment, in Kensington Gardens, and they had gone on meeting; they were meeting now, nearly every day. Bit by bit, Richard had learned a good deal about his lady-love. She appeared to be pretty much her own mistress. From what he had gathered from her own lips she, like himself, was an only child. Her mother was dead—had died years ago. She had been born in South America—in the Argentine; the mother had been of old Spanish ancestry; hence Angelita's name, and dark eyes, and dark hair, and rich colouring. In the Argentine Angelita had lived all her twenty years until recently, when she and her father had come to England, on business. Her father was English; that much Angelita knew, but it seemed to be about all that she knew of him, except that he was a very busy man, much concerned in financial matters, and always going into the City, or away for days together to places like Birmingham, or Manchester, or Sheffield, leaving her comparatively alone in the suite of rooms at a fashionable hotel which they had occupied since their arrival in England.

Angelita knew scarcely anybody save a few people who were really

financial acquaintances of her father—and since becoming interested in Richard she had not cared to enlarge her circle; Richard, with his thoroughly English matter-of-factness, his cool, good temper, and suggestion of protection, appealed to her. It had been what Richard called a dead-sure business with these two from the very first, and the time was now come when he wanted to settle things with Angelita's father. But that individual had been so far something of a will-o'-the-wisp; it was difficult to get hold of him, for his daughter scarcely ever knew where he was to be found, or when he could be seen; all she knew was that he lived in a whirl of business, supplied and surrounded her with every luxury and comfort, stuffed her purse with money, and left her to herself. Still—he had got to be run to earth, said Richard: Richard was getting impatient.

And, in truth, he had gone to Bedford Row that morning with the intention of telling Henry Marchmont all about it, and making Henry go with him to see Angelita's father. He had reserved his communication until after lunch; he had a full share of English reserve, and knowing his uncle to be a confirmed old bachelor and a bit of a cynic, felt somewhat shy and bashful about telling him that he had fallen in love. Then, before he could begin, Henry had started out on his own story—to wind it up with a dramatic conclusion that made Richard feel as if ice-cold water had been poured suddenly down his spine. For Lansdale is not a very common name, and taking all the other features of the story into consideration—the dinner of financial men, the fact that Lansdale was spoken of as a man from abroad, and that he was mixed up in big financial affairs—Richard found it impossible to avoid the conclusion that the man of whom his uncle told was any other than Angelita's mysterious father.

He sat for some time, his hands plunged in his pockets, his chin sunk in his collar, his cigar gone out, thinking. If Henry Marchmont's story were all true—and he knew it would be true enough in Henry's opinion—and Lansdale was Land, then Lansdale, twenty-five years before, must have been a shady sort of person, if not actually a bad lot. Nay, if what Henry had hinted at were true, Lansdale must be liable to prosecution—hadn't Henry used certain words, all the more significant as coming from a lawyer? 'I suppose I ought to tell the police' he had said. That was enough to show that Henry regarded Lansdale as a criminal escaped from justice.

Richard knew little of law, but in common with most Englishmen he was aware that lapse of time is no bar to criminal prosecution, and that a man can be as readily arrested for a crime committed years before as for one committed yesterday. It was a strange business, an unpleasant combination of circumstances, and there was only one crumb of comfort in it—at which Richard, thinking things over, was eager to snatch. That was—would any man in his common senses who knew that a criminal charge hung over him, in a

country from which he had long escaped, be such a damned fool as to return to that country under circumstances which must needs bring him into prominence? Richard thought not—and it seemed to him that if Lansdale, the financier, were really Land, the quondam stockbroker of Clayminster, Land's doings in that sleepy little town, even if doubtful, must have been regular and within the law—or he would never have dared to return to England.

Richard had all the average healthy-minded young Englishman's dislike of anything that was not in accordance with the rules, that was not playing the game, that—to use his own term—was not cricket. But he felt that the probability was that Lansdale, or Land, tackled with his sudden disappearance of five-and-twenty years before, would be able, not only to show plausible reasons for it, but to prove that he had done nothing to bring himself within the law. How else could he dare to show his face here again? Still, there was the sudden disappearance, under suspicious circumstances, and the loss of people's money—and there was Henry Marchmont. Richard knew well that whatever specious arguments or apparently good-faith reasons Land, or Lansdale, might offer for his conduct, Henry Marchmont would not change his opinion of the man and his doings. Henry was a man of essentially conservative mind; a hard man. To him another man who behaved as Land had done, would always be an object of contempt and scorn—and Richard quaked inwardly as he fancied himself telling his uncle that he wanted to marry the daughter of the man who had absconded from Clayminster and left various folk sitting amidst the wreckage of their fortunes. Henry would screw his monocle into his eye and look. . . .

“What a beastly situation!” muttered Richard at last. “And how the devil is one to make the best of it? Still, Angelita isn't her father!”

With this comfortable reflection he rose and looked at his watch. As was becoming almost a daily practice, he had an appointment with Angelita, and it was time he set out to keep it. Musing and brooding over the dilemma into which their love affairs seemed likely to be plunged, he went off to his own quarter of the town, and strolling into the National Gallery found Angelita awaiting him in a quiet corner.

Richard was one of those young men who find it impossible to avoid direct issues; in the cricket field he was famous as a batsman who lost no time in getting to work on the bowling, and in life, if he had a thing on his mind, he fidgeted until he had turned it into words. And before he had been at Angelita's side five minutes, he came to the question that was bothering him.

“Look here!” said Richard. “When am I going to see your father?”

Angelita shook her head and pursed her lips.

“The thing is—to catch him!” she answered. “During the last few days he's been busier than ever. He was away—I forget where—for two days. Then he's

been dining out—business dinners. And now he goes away to the City, wherever that may be, so early in the morning that I scarcely see him. However, that can't last long, because"—here she turned and regarded Richard significantly—"because he told me this morning that his principal business here would be completed in a fortnight, and then we're to leave."

"To leave?" exclaimed Richard. "For—where?"

"Home, I suppose," replied Angelita. "Yes, of course, it will be home."

"That settles it, then," said Richard doggedly. "Got to see him at once. You must fix it!"

Angelita studied the points of her shoes.

"I—I haven't told him anything yet," she murmured. "I mean, about you. About—you and me."

"Then you'd better!" retorted Richard with masculine severity. "Can't take long, that. Then—then I'll come in next. And I say—you're quite certain it'll be home when you leave?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure of it. There are things—business matters—he wants to get back to," she answered. "We have been here now longer than he intended."

"All right!" said Richard. "Then—I'll go back with you. That'll be the very thing to do! Yes—I'll go back with you."

He was not talking to her as much as to himself. If he went back with father and daughter to South America, he would be relieved of the difficulties which he had foreseen as regarded Henry Marchmont. It would all pan out nicely—what could be better than that he should winter across the Atlantic, and return for next year's cricket season, bringing a bride with him. Splendid notion!—he saw it all before him like a well-thought-out campaign, on paper. But a sudden idea chilled him.

"You don't think your father will kick me out?" he demanded suddenly.

Angelita gave him a look that made his head swim.

"Don't think so!" she replied demurely. "Why should he? Besides, he always lets me have everything I want."

"Sure he hasn't got some other chap in view?" asked Richard suspiciously. "Might have some notion of a big financial union, you know: these financiers are up to all those games!"

"That wouldn't matter," said Angelita. "It is I who am the one to decide. Besides, you see, I know my father. It will all be like this. I shall tell him—he will listen as I have often seen him listen to business propositions—oh, yes, often! He will seem as if he did not hear at all, abstracted, blinking his eyes, so. Then he will wake up. 'So that is it, is it?' he will say. 'Yes—I get you! You want to marry this young man? You are quite satisfied that it is a sound business? Very well—now go ahead!' That is how it will be—that will be all. Then—we do the rest."

“Sounds straightforward sort of work,” observed Richard. “Now, look here—you get hold of your father this very day—never mind if you have to sit up half the night to catch him! Tell him all about it, and all about me. And say that I’m coming to see him at your hotel at breakfast time to-morrow morning.”

He felt better when he had made this arrangement. But after he and Angelita had parted he became anxious again, remembering what Henry Marchmont had told him—that Lansdale was to visit him, Henry, at Bedford Row that very evening. What would happen there? What would Lansdale say to Henry? What would Henry say or do, in consequence? Would anything take place that would make his interview with Angelita’s father, next morning, impossible or fruitless? He had ideas of going back to Bedford Row, telling his uncle everything, and insisting that whatever Lansdale or Land’s past might be, he, Richard, was going to marry Angelita and that Henry must do nothing to rake up that past. But on reflection he thought it best to let matters take their course; he felt certain, from Angelita’s chance remarks about her father, that Lansdale, if he really was the Land of Clayminster of whom Henry Marchmont had spoken, would be well able to justify his behaviour of twenty-five years before.

So Richard turned to his club, and there he dined, and as luck would have it, after dinner he came across a noted cricketer of a previous day, who was well known to spend all his winters in the Argentine, and, with more craft than was usual with him, Richard drew him out to talk about that country, giving as his reason that he was thinking of going over there for a few months. The man of experience talked, and at last Richard put a direct question to him.

“Ever hear of a man named Lansdale out there?” he asked.

The other man’s face showed instant recognition.

“Lansdale? Oh, yes—well-known man out there. He’s a man who came there, either from here or New York, years ago, and went in for developing the country. Very wealthy man now, I believe—deals in options and concessions, and that sort of thing.”

“Know him personally?” inquired Richard.

“No, I don’t—never seen him. Heard lots about him, though. Very familiar name across there in connection with developments.”

This cheered Richard. Lansdale, if he were Land, had too much at stake, surely, to run his head into the lion’s mouth as Henry Marchmont seemed to suggest he was doing. He went home to his flat in Jermyn Street rehearsing what he would say to Angelita’s father in the morning and for the first time in his life he realised what it meant to be able to show that he was well equipped with this world’s goods.

But Richard never got to Lansdale’s hotel next morning. He was hastily breakfasting before setting out thither, when his valet called him to the

telephone. The first sound of the voice coming over filled him with a sudden strange fear.

“Mr. Richard? This is Simpson speaking, sir. Can you come here, Bedford Row, at once?”

“Yes!” answered Richard. “But what is it? Say!”

“Your uncle, Mr. Richard. An—an accident——”

“Say straight out!” demanded Richard. “Quick, now!”

“Mr. Marchmont is dead, sir!” replied Simpson.

III—Murder!

Richard was out in the street and running for the nearest cab-rank before he realised the full significance of the managing clerk's announcement. Dead?—Henry Marchmont dead?—it seemed impossible of belief! He had a vision of his uncle as he had seen him the day before—alert, vigorous, full of life and the enjoyment of it; anybody with half an eye would have said Henry looked good for quite another twenty years. And it was all very well to think of the usual platitudes about the uncertainty of human life, and never knowing what a day may bring forth, and all that!—ninety-nine people out of every hundred would have laid long odds on Henry Marchmont's prospects of living to a great age. But he was dead—there was no doubt about that. And now—the cause of his death.

Richard knew, well enough, what was at the back of his mind. He had a vivid recollection of all that Henry had said to him the day before about Lansdale's coming visit to him at Bedford Row. Had that visit come off? Had anything taken place because of it—arising out of it? Was it connected with Henry's sudden death? Had the two men quarrelled, come to blows? Was it possible that . . . he turned hot, cold, hot again, with a fear that he dare not put into words.

The taxicab into which he had leapt carried Richard past the front of the Hotel Cecil, where Lansdale had his suite of private rooms. Richard glanced up and along the rows of windows; somewhere behind one or other of them was Angelita. And it was of Angelita and her future, and his and her future, that he was really thinking. Supposing . . . merely supposing, of course . . . and yet supposing . . . supposing . . .

“My God! what an awful business if . . .” he groaned, as the cab extricated itself from the crowded traffic of the Strand and turned up Aldwych. “But it can't be!—it can't be! It must have been a sudden seizure—I always told him he didn't take enough exercise. Apoplexy, perhaps—he was rather full-blooded. Still, there was something in that fellow Simpson's voice——”

Simpson came out to the door as Richard's cab pulled up in front. He looked unusually grave; so, too, did a youngish man, a stranger who was with him. A knot of curious bystanders stood round; a uniformed policeman moved them aside as Richard sprang out and hurried across the pavement to the managing clerk.

“Well?” he asked quickly as he made up to Simpson. “Is—is that true?”

Simpson motioned him towards a door just within the hall and signed to the stranger to follow them.

"I'm sorry to say it's quite true, Mr. Richard," he answered, as he closed the door on the three of them. "I didn't mean to break it so abruptly, but you asked me. Your uncle is dead, sir—was found dead." He paused and looked at his companion. "This is Mr. Liversedge, Mr. Richard," he continued. "Detective-Sergeant Liversedge, of the Yard."

"Police!" exclaimed Richard. "Then——"

The other two men exchanged glances. Liversedge spoke.

"I don't think there's any doubt about it, sir," he said. "Mr. Marchmont was murdered!"

In spite of his sound nerves, Richard felt himself reel under this curt announcement. He dropped back into a chair and for a few seconds found it impossible to frame a word. When he did speak his voice sounded strangely level and quiet.

"Are you really sure of that?" he asked.

"Quite sure, sir," replied Liversedge. "There are two doctors upstairs now, and they will tell you that there is no doubt in the matter. Mr. Marchmont was shot dead, sir—through the heart, and from behind his back—a cowardly affair! According to the medical gentlemen, it would be about eight o'clock last night. That is, just about twelve hours before his dead body was found."

Richard turned to the managing clerk.

"Who found him?" he asked.

"Mrs. Pardoe found him, Mr. Richard," replied Simpson. "Mrs. Pardoe is the woman who acts as cleaner; she has been employed here a good many years. Perhaps," he went on, glancing at the detective, "I ought to tell you what the arrangements have been here?—I don't know if Mr. Richard is aware of them, either. Mr. Marchmont had a suite of private rooms over the offices—he's always lived there. But he has never kept servants there. His breakfast was sent in every morning at nine o'clock from a neighbouring restaurant; he always lunched and dined out. A man came every day about the same time to do his valeting. Mrs. Pardoe acted as charwoman and bedmaker. She came of a morning at eight o'clock and attended first to the business offices; later she went up to Mr. Marchmont's private rooms. She has a key, of course, by which she lets herself in at the front door."

"Latch-key, I suppose?" suggested Liversedge.

"A latch-key," assented Simpson. "According to her account, when she came this morning the door was not on the latch. That is, the latch had been fastened back, inside. It's kept like that, during the day—during business hours, anyway. When Mrs. Pardoe entered she saw Mr. Marchmont—that is, she saw a man's body, which turned out to be that of Mr. Marchmont—lying on the first landing, with an arm and hand drooping over the steps. Mrs. Pardoe is not, I should say, a strong-nerved woman, and she immediately ran out of

the door into the street. Fortunately, she caught sight of a policeman not far off and she attracted his attention and brought him in. He went up to the landing and found that the body was that of Mr. Marchmont, whom he knew quite well by sight, as indeed everybody about here did. He sent round to the neighbouring police-station, and the doctors came. That is about all that we know, Mr. Richard. I came in at my usual time—nine o'clock, and I at once telephoned to you. Perhaps," he concluded, eyeing Richard diffidently, "perhaps you would like to go upstairs? The doctors are in Mr. Marchmont's private office. We—we had him carried in there."

Richard went up to the room in which he had sat with Henry Marchmont not twenty-four hours before. Henry had been full of life then; he lay there dead, now—and handsomer in death than in life, his nephew thought. His face was strangely placid; there was something of a smile about the finely-chiselled lips. Richard had a curious idea as he stood looking at the dead man—Did Henry know who had killed him? But he quickly threw aside all fanciful speculation and turned to the two medical men.

"Can you say, with certainty, when this happened?" he asked.

"Between twelve and thirteen hours before we were called to him," answered the elder of the two. "That was about half-past eight this morning."

"Then that would fix the time at about the same hour yesterday evening?" suggested Richard.

"Yes—about eight to half-past," assented the doctor.

Richard looked again at the dead face. He had been fond of Henry; fond almost as if he had been his father. Henry, indeed, had been a second father to him as a boy, and a good friend in after years. And again he had a curious idea, a speculating wonder. Was it his duty to be the avenger of blood? It was his blood—the family blood! But . . . who was the spiller, the murderer? And at the back of his head the same ghastly, sickening thought was hammering. Supposing . . . Supposing. . . . He turned suddenly and left the room without saying more to the doctors. Outside, at the landing on which Henry Marchmont had fallen, Simpson and the detective were whispering together; they glanced at him as he came down the stairs. Richard caught a muttered remark from Liversedge.

"Better let us know all about it at once," he was saying. "It may be of the very greatest importance."

Simpson turned to Richard, at the same time opening the door of a room close by.

"Will you come in here, Mr. Richard?" he said. "Mr. Liversedge thinks I had better tell you something I know, and I should like you to hear it. The fact is," he went on when they were safely closeted in the room, "I do know something, but I should be very sorry, gentlemen, to think that it had anything

to do with what has happened. Still——”

“If you know anything at all, you ought to let it out,” interrupted Liversedge. “As I said just now, it may be of the utmost consequence. This is a case of murder!”

“What I know is this,” continued Simpson. He proceeded to address himself to Richard, only glancing at the detective occasionally. “Yesterday morning, Mr. Marchmont called me into his private office, and told me that he wanted to have a confidential talk about a strange matter that had cropped up the night before. He went on to tell me that on the previous evening, when dining out in the City, he had, very much to his astonishment, encountered, in a fellow-guest, a man who, to his knowledge, had been very much wanted by the police at Clayminster twenty-five years ago, when Mr. Marchmont was in practice in that town. He then went on to tell me all the circumstances, and I had better retell them now,” continued Simpson. “They were as follows. . . .”

Richard was compelled to hear the whole story retold which Henry Marchmont had told to him after lunch the day before. Henry had evidently told Simpson everything that he had told him—and now that he heard it a second time it seemed a deeply significant and incriminating story. And while Simpson watched its effect on him, Richard watched its effect on Liversedge, and he saw the detective’s face grow graver and graver; he, plainly, was suspicious.

“Just a question or two, Mr. Simpson,” said Liversedge, when the managing clerk had finished. “Did Mr. Marchmont tell you that he’d made a definite appointment with Lansdale?”

“Oh, yes! He was to come here at eight o’clock last night.”

“In accordance with his own request to Mr. Marchmont?—that he might give him an explanation of his disappearance from Clayminster twenty-five years ago?”

“That was what Mr. Marchmont understood—yes!”

“Did Mr. Marchmont tell you definitely that the Clayminster police wanted this man, when, as Land—his real name, I gather—he disappeared?”

“Mr. Marchmont certainly gave me to understand that. He used the expression ‘very much wanted by the police.’ Moreover, he said, in discussing the affairs with me, ‘Of course, Simpson, there’s no time-limit in these matters: I wonder the fellow dare show his face here!’ Oh, yes, I certainly understood that when Land left Clayminster the police were on his track and completely failed to trace him.”

“Of course, you don’t know if Lansdale did come here last night?”

“No, I don’t know that. He was to come—according to Mr. Marchmont’s account.”

“Mr. Marchmont would be alone?”

“He was always alone of an evening. At least, I mean that none of us, myself or the clerks, you know, were here, unless there was something that necessitated our staying late. As a rule—a rule very rarely broken—we all left at five-thirty. After that, Mr. Marchmont had the whole place, the entire house, to himself.”

Liversedge shook his head. What he was thinking Richard could not even guess at: his next question was addressed to both men.

“Do you gentlemen know what Mr. Marchmont’s habits were, of an evening?” he asked.

“I think Mr. Simpson can answer that better than I can,” said Richard.

“I know pretty well what they were,” asserted Simpson. “He always went out to dine about six o’clock. If he dined alone—I mean at a restaurant, or at his club, or at an hotel, and he had a habit of going first to one, then to another—he came back here by eight. Sometimes he had a friend in, but I believe that as a rule he spent his evenings alone. He was a great, a persistent reader. But he also dined out a good deal—two or three times a week, I should think. On these occasions he came home later.”

“Do you know where he was dining when he met Lansdale?”

“Yes. At the Cannon Street Hotel. A private dinner of financial men—Mr. Marchmont knew a lot of City men.”

“A private dinner? You don’t know the names of any gentlemen who were there?”

“Oh, yes—one, at any rate. Mr. Waterhouse—a client of ours.”

“That’s good! We can get Lansdale’s address from him.”

“I know that already,” said Simpson. “Mr. Marchmont knew it; probably he got it from Mr. Waterhouse. Lansdale has a private suite at the Hotel Cecil.”

“Rich man, I suppose?” remarked the detective.

“I gathered that he has that reputation,” replied Simpson.

Liversedge looked from one to the other of his companions.

“Very good,” he said quietly. “I’ll go along to the Hotel Cecil and inquire for Mr. Lansdale. But,” he added, with a significant smile, “if he was here last night, I shan’t find him there! However—I’ll go.”

Richard broke the silence which he had kept during the conversation between the clerk and the detective.

“If you have no objection,” he said, “I’ll go with you.”

“No objection whatever, sir,” replied Liversedge. “You’ve a very good right to see this man and to question him too. But you know, Mr. Marchmont,” he continued, when he and Richard had left the office and were driving off in the taxicab which Richard had kept waiting, “it’s just as I said up there—if Lansdale was at your uncle’s office last night he won’t be at the Hotel Cecil this morning! No!”

“Aren’t you rather jumping to a conclusion?” asked Richard.

“Jumping to nothing, Mr. Marchmont! And I’m not presupposing Lansdale’s guilt nor his innocence. But there’s a lot too much coincidence about all this business for me! It all comes too much of a lump. Taking all the facts into consideration, I think Lansdale did come to Bedford Row last night—and I say again, if he did, we shan’t find him at his hotel this morning. But—we may find out where he is!”

Richard remained silent till they turned into the Strand. Then he suddenly bent to his companion.

“Look here!” he said. “I want to say something! I don’t know Mr. Lansdale: I’ve never set eyes on him. But—I know his daughter! She’s here with him at the Cecil. She’ll be alarmed if he isn’t there, and we make a sudden entry. Let me go in first!”

Liversedge smiled and nodded an assent.

“All right, Mr. Marchmont!” he said. “Very good, sir. But I’ll be close at hand—and after all, I’m only beginning!”

Five minutes later, Richard found himself shown into Angelita’s presence.

“Your father?” he began. “Is he——”

But he knew, as soon as he had begun his question, that it was useless, and that Lansdale was not there.

IV—Gone!

Angelita was suddenly at his side; her hand on his arm.

“Something has happened!” she exclaimed. “You are pale!—ill!—What _____”

Richard made an effort to regain his composure. In spite of the fact that he now knew Liversedge to have been right in his surmise, he was looking about the room as if Lansdale might be lurking in a corner. And he caught sight of a photograph, evidently recently taken at a fashionable studio, set up on the mantelpiece, which he instinctively took to be the man he wanted to see. A big man, this, not unlike Henry Marchmont, too, in frame and general appearance—and there, plainly enough to be seen, was the dropped eyelid of which Henry had spoken. . . .

“What is it?—please!” repeated Angelita. “Tell me!”

Richard looked at her. He was wondering what they were going to say to each other, to be forced into saying to each other within the next few minutes.

“Yes!” he murmured. “Something has happened. My uncle is dead! Last night—very suddenly.”

She made a little murmur of sympathy and again laid her hand on his arm.

“Don’t be startled—too much,” Richard went on. “I’ve got to tell you, sooner or later. My uncle was murdered!”

The murmur of sympathy changed to a note of horror as she started away from him, staring incredulously. Richard nodded at her and once more his eyes began to search the room.

“Your father?” he said. “He’s not here? I wanted to see him—about this. You see—it’s difficult to explain, but I’ve found out that your father met my uncle at a dinner in the City, night before last, and there was some arrangement between them for your father to call at my uncle’s office last night. We—we want to know if he did call—if he heard or saw anything——”

A light tap on the door interrupted him and prefaced the entry of Liversedge, who answered Richard’s glance of annoyance with a reassuring nod.

“All right, Mr. Marchmont,” he said. “I’ve ascertained that Mr. Lansdale is not in, but that Miss Lansdale is. And Miss Lansdale can perhaps tell us——”

“I am just asking Miss Lansdale,” broke in Richard. “I think you might have waited a little.”

“Not a time for waiting, Mr. Marchmont, after what I’ve heard outside,” said Liversedge. “I’ve my duty to think about. Mr. Lansdale came in late last night, and was soon afterwards called on by a gentleman with whom, a few

minutes later, he went out again. He never returned. Can Miss Lansdale tell me where Mr. Lansdale's to be found?"

Angelita looked wonderingly from one man to the other.

"But I don't know!" she answered. "I have no idea. All I know is that my father did not dine here last night—but there was nothing unusual in that. He came home very late—that wasn't unusual either. I had gone to bed. I heard him come in—indeed, he came to my door and spoke to me. Then, a little later, I heard voices in this room,—my father's and a stranger's. After a while, my father came to my room and told me that he was obliged to go out again, on business, and probably shouldn't return that night. Then he went—and that's all I know. All!"

"You don't know who the man was who called, Miss Lansdale?" asked Liversedge. "Your father didn't mention his name?"

"Oh, no!—he didn't speak of him at all!" replied Angelita. "I have no idea who he was."

Richard made an impatient movement as if to get Liversedge out of the room. But the detective showed no sign of response.

"Perhaps you can tell me where Mr. Lansdale is usually to be found in the City?" he said, watching Angelita closely. "I understand——"

"Miss Lansdale doesn't even know where or what the City is!" exclaimed Richard. "It's no use bothering her. She doesn't know where Mr. Lansdale's to be found——"

"I should like to hear that from the lady herself, Mr. Marchmont," said Liversedge. "Mr. Lansdale spends his time in the City, mostly, and I suppose he occasionally talks to his daughter——"

"No!" said Angelita. "Never about his business affairs. I do not know where he goes, so I can't say where you would find him. As a rule, he is out all day, and——"

Another knock at the door heralded the entrance of a page boy who brought in a telegram which Angelita, after opening it immediately, offered to Liversedge. The detective took it from her hand before Richard could intervene.

"That is from my father," she said. "You see what he says?—that he will be away for a few days on important business. So—that is all I can tell you."

Liversedge glanced at the telegram and laid it on the table.

"Handed in at the General Post Office," he remarked. With a polite bow he moved towards the door. "Thank you, Miss Lansdale. Mr. Marchmont, you'll find me outside—I should like a word or two with you when you're at liberty."

Angelita turned to Richard when Liversedge had gone.

"Who is that man?" she asked. "Why does he come here and ask questions?"

“No use in keeping that back, either,” replied Richard. “He’s a detective. He wants to know if your father did go to my uncle’s office last night, and if he did, if he can tell anything. But never mind that, just now—does that telegram mean that you’re to be left alone here, for some days?”

“Not quite alone—I have my maid, you know,” said Angelita, “and I can get a friend to stay with me if I like—a girl whom I’ve had here before. But I’m not afraid of being alone. What’s troubling me now is—your trouble!”

“It’s an awful business!” answered Richard. “I can’t realise it. And—and I’ve got to help this fellow in finding out who—who did it! That man who’s just gone out—you can see for yourself that he’s the sort of man who won’t be put off. And—I’d better get down to him.”

After a few minutes he rejoined Liversedge in the corridor. The detective gave him a meaning look.

“Mr. Marchmont!” he said. “Let me have a friendly word with you—in your own interests. I can see how it is with you and the young lady in there. If you want to clear her father of the suspicion that seems to be coming round him, do all you can to bring him into daylight! He’ll do no good by keeping out of the way.”

“We don’t know that he ever went to Bedford Row last night,” said Richard.

“True—we don’t!” agreed Liversedge. “But the probability is that he did. I think he did, and I think that what happened here, later on, has considerable relation to his going there. Now when you first went upstairs here, I made a few inquiries downstairs about Mr. Lansdale. He came in here last night at half-past ten, and went up to his rooms. Not very long afterwards a gentleman drove up in a private car, a smart, closed car, and asked to be shown up to Mr. Lansdale at once. He was taken up. Within ten minutes he and Mr. Lansdale came down together, entered the car, and drove off. Since then, of course, Mr. Lansdale hasn’t been back to the hotel. So there’s a certain amount of information. But I got a bit more in the shape of a description of the man who called on him and carried him away. The hall-porter says he was a short, rather thick-set, swarthy-complexioned man, a foreigner, he thought, though he spoke good English.”

“I dare say Mr. Lansdale knows a good many foreigners,” remarked Richard. “And as I happen to know that he is extensively engaged in financial transactions, I don’t see how the fact of this man’s calling for him and taking him away need be connected with my uncle’s death.”

“Why, neither do I, Mr. Marchmont, at the moment,” said Liversedge good-humouredly. “But you know, Miss Lansdale says that her father came and spoke to her, at her door, when he first came in, and he was then evidently meaning to stay at home for the night—anyway, he gave her no reason to think

otherwise, yet within a few minutes he was back again to say he'd got to go out. Why? Some urgent reason, of course. And what I want to know is—had that anything to do with your uncle's murder?"

"And how are you going to find that out?" demanded Richard.

Liversedge smiled.

"Can't give you an answer to that, Mr. Marchmont!" he said. "But I must find Lansdale—and for the young lady's sake, I advise you to do your best to find him, too. Come with me down to the City, and help me to make an inquiry or two—he must be known there. Now, that managing clerk of your uncle's mentioned the name of some City man."

"Mr. Waterhouse, a client," said Richard.

"That's it—Waterhouse," continued Liversedge. "Let us call at the office, get Waterhouse's address, and go down to the City. I tell you, Mr. Marchmont, the sooner this Mr. Lansdale comes into the full light of day the better for him! Because you know, sir, I can't be indifferent to what Mr. Simpson told me this morning, and what I heard then I shall have to repeat elsewhere. Damaging, Mr. Marchmont, very damaging indeed—to Mr. Lansdale!"

"You mean—as regards the affair of some years ago?" suggested Richard.

"I mean, sir, precisely this," replied the detective. "A man absconds under queer circumstances—so queer indeed that the police want him badly. He is never tracked and never heard of again for twenty-five years, when he turns up in London, a rich man under another name. He is recognised by a man who knows all about it!—and he asks that man for a secret interview, in order to explain matters. Well, Mr. Marchmont, human nature is human nature!—and it wouldn't take your average jurymen long, granted the evidence, to make up his mind that the suddenly discovered man, instead of explaining, put a bullet through his detector in order to quiet him—especially if he thought nobody knew anything about this interview! Eh?"

"There's still no evidence that there ever was any interview," remarked Richard. "Lansdale may not have been near Bedford Row."

Whether he really believed that or not, Richard could not have made any absolutely positive assertion. He was in the position of a man who is having a fact forced upon him, but who fights tooth and nail to keep it from before his eyes. But when he and Liversedge reached Bedford Row again he found another link added to the chain which was being slowly and surely forged.

Simpson, just inside the hall, was talking to a respectable-looking woman, who, from the fact that she wore neither shawl nor bonnet, evidently lived close at hand. He drew the detective's attention to her.

"This is Mrs. Capstick," he said. "She's caretaker of next door, and she lives on the premises. Having heard of Mr. Marchmont's death, she's come in to tell me of something she saw last night. She's told me—she'd better tell

you. Tell it again, Mrs. Capstick.”

“Which it is just this, gentlemen,” responded Mrs. Capstick readily, “and same as I have just told to Mr. Simpson here, as has knowed me this many years and thoroughly respectable and not the sort to go spreading idle stories with nothing to the bottom of ’em. Which last night, gentlemen, as is my invariable custom, I went out to fetch the supper beer for me and Capstick, a pint and a half of old-and-mild which we favour and from the public around the corner as we have patronised ever since coming next door, which is a long time ago and never gone elsewhere. And as I was a-coming back the jug in one hand and a matter of small change in the other I see a gentleman come out of Mr. Marchmont’s front door, hasty-like, shut it behind him, and walk very sharp up the street, which I took it to be Mr. Marchmont himself and thought no different till he passed me under one o’ them gas-lamps when I see it was not but another gentleman though uncommonly like Mr. Marchmont—a tall, fine-made man, and as near as I would tell in the gas-light, a fresh-coloured one. And all I know is, gentlemen, that I see such a man and that he walked very quick in the direction of Theobald’s Road, top of this here Row, where of course there is buses and trams.”

“What time was this, ma’am?” inquired Liversedge.

“Which it would be all about half-past eight, sir,” replied Mrs. Capstick, “with a preference to being a little more inclined to nine, half-past being my hour for going for the supper beer and sometimes getting off a minute or so before the half-hour, me being of a methodical persuasion and liking to have my meals at fixed hours.”

“You didn’t stop talking in the public-house at all?” suggested the detective.

“Which it is not my habit ever so to do, sir,” said Mrs. Capstick. “As the young man in charge of the bottle-and-jug entrance at the Plume of Feathers will assure you if circumstances so require and knowing as I go straight in and straight out without wasting no words. At all about half-past eight you could put it down as certain, sir.”

“A tall, well-made gentleman, you say—something like Mr. Marchmont?”

“Uncommon like him in build, sir: a fine gentleman as walked very fast—a-talking to hisself, excited like.”

“Seemed excited, did he?” asked Liversedge. “Talked to himself, eh? All right, Mrs. Capstick—much obliged to you. Now then, just you and your husband keep all that to yourselves till I see you again. That’s Mr. Lansdale, Mr. Marchmont!” he murmured, turning to Richard as Mrs. Capstick withdrew. “Lansdale, for certain. We’ll get Mr. Waterhouse’s address and go along to the City.”

But Mr. Waterhouse, in the City, could give them no help; at least, what

help he could give was of little use. He had seen Lansdale at the dinner at which Henry Marchmont had met him; he knew two or three men who knew Lansdale, slightly, and he put Richard and the detective in touch with them. None of these men had seen Lansdale that morning nor on the previous day; none could give any definite information about him or his usual movements.

Towards evening, Richard, wearied of the search, left Liversedge still busied at it and went westward. There was much for him to do at Bedford Row, and he also wanted to see Angelita again. He drove to the hotel first, anxious to make sure that Angelita was all right before he settled down to the arrangement of matters with Simpson. But he had scarcely asked for Miss Lansdale when another shock came full upon him.

“Miss Lansdale is not in the hotel, sir,” said the inquiry clerk. “Soon after you were here this morning Miss Lansdale received a letter by express delivery. And soon after that she and her maid went out together, and up to now they have not returned.”

V—*Forestalled*

Before Richard could make any remark on this announcement, a man whom he had noticed on his visit to the hotel that morning, and who seemed to be a person of authority, came up to him with an inquiring look.

“Friend of Mr. Lansdale, sir?” he asked quietly.

“Of Miss Lansdale,” replied Richard. “I called to ask for her, and I hear she is out.”

The man nodded and looked as if he might say more, as if he wanted to say more, but was a little uncertain of his ground.

“You have no idea, I suppose, when Miss Lansdale will return?” asked Richard.

“None, sir,” replied the other emphatically. “Er—the fact is, there seems to be some mystery afoot. That is why I asked if you knew Mr. Lansdale. I may say that I know the man with whom you came here this morning—Detective-Sergeant Liversedge, of the Yard. I have had business with him before. He appeared to be very anxious to know something of Mr. Lansdale’s doings, sir.”

“Mr. Lansdale is missing from his usual haunts in the City,” said Richard.

“So I gathered, sir. And from here—he left here last night rather hurriedly. Now his daughter appears to be missing, too. Er—I don’t know if you were acquainted with—with the family, if I may put it so? Mr. Lansdale appears to be rather a mysterious person.”

He was speaking with obvious guardedness and watching Richard closely. But Richard wanted to know more.

“How?” he asked.

“Mr. Lansdale,” said the other, “has been here a few weeks—six, I think. He appears to be—appears, perhaps is not the right word—I suppose I ought to say he is a very wealthy man, and a very busy man. But during the whole time of his stay in this hotel he has never had a single letter or telegram delivered here! I conclude from this that Mr. Lansdale must have an office in the City—or another address.”

“In point of fact, you are somewhat suspicious about him?” suggested Richard.

“One likes to know with whom one is dealing,” said the man. “The detective who came with you this morning was certainly suspicious. And”—he paused suddenly, as he glanced in the direction of the entrance near which they were standing—“there he is again!” he added with a smile. “I thought we should see him this evening!”

Richard turned and saw Liversedge coming in. The detective caught sight

of him and his companion and made towards them. He showed no surprise at seeing Richard.

“I reckon from the fact that you’re standing there, Mr. Marchmont, that Miss Lansdale is not in,” he said in a matter-of-fact tone. “If she’d been in, you’d have been upstairs, of course. Any news of Mr. Lansdale?” he went on, glancing at the other man. “No? Just so! I want a word or two with you, Mr. Marchmont—come aside here a moment.”

He led the way to a quiet corner of the entrance hall and dropped into a chair as if he were tired.

“Bit wearying, this running up and down!” he remarked. “Well, Mr. Marchmont, I’ve had a scrap of news about Lansdale. After you left me I heard that he was sometimes seen at the Cannon Street Hotel, and occasionally dined there. So I made some inquiries, and got some information. Lansdale dined there last night at six-thirty, and was there until close upon eight o’clock. He had with him a man who met him there—a man who had been waiting some little time for him in the smoking-room of the hotel. And there’s no doubt that he was the man who afterwards called on Lansdale here and with whom he went away.”

“You got a description of the man?” asked Richard.

“Just so, Mr. Marchmont, and it tallies exactly with the description I had here this morning of Lansdale’s late caller,” replied Liversedge. “We must find out who that man is. But—any news here?”

“Miss Lansdale has—I don’t know what to say about it,” answered Richard, and went on to tell him what he had heard. “Of course, she may have gone somewhere for the day——”

“No, sir!” interrupted Liversedge, shaking his head. “That’s all part of the game, whatever it is! Miss Lansdale has gone to join her father. That telegram this morning was all a piece of bluff! Lansdale has made himself scarce and got his daughter after him. You can call here again last thing to-night, Mr. Marchmont, and again to-morrow morning, but you won’t find either father or daughter! They’re off!”

“You don’t imply that Miss Lansdale was deceiving me this morning?” exclaimed Richard, half angry and half suspicious, in view of Liversedge’s cynical tone. “Is that——”

“Come, come, Mr. Marchmont, don’t be too ready to take offence!” answered the detective, with an understanding smile. “If you were in my profession—but you aren’t, so what’s the good of saying what you’d do! I’m not implying that Miss Lansdale deceived us, though I shouldn’t blame her if she had done—a girl’s a perfect right to do her best for her own father if he’s in a hole. What I say is that the telegram was a bit of bluff, perhaps not on Lansdale’s part, but on somebody’s, and that you’ll not see either Lansdale or

his daughter at this hotel again!”

“Look here!” said Richard, with characteristic desire to get at plain issues. “Do you really think Lansdale shot my uncle?”

“I’m not such a fool, Mr. Marchmont, as to have formed any opinion, yet,” replied the detective. “But I’m perfectly certain that Lansdale’s sudden disappearance, and now his daughter’s, have both sprung out of, first, your uncle’s recognition of him at that little dinner night before last, and, second, your uncle’s murder. And you know, Lansdale’s name can’t be kept out of the affair, now. The inquest on your uncle is fixed to begin at two o’clock to-morrow afternoon, and though the first stages will necessarily be of a formal sort, there’ll be enough evidence given before the coroner and his jury to make Lansdale’s name and his disappearance known all over England before night falls! It’ll be in all the evening papers, anyway!—and there are plenty of ’em.”

“But—whose evidence?” demanded Richard. “What evidence?”

Liversedge looked at him half-pityingly.

“Simpson’s!” he replied dryly. “Just Simpson’s!”

“You mean to say that Simpson will have to tell the coroner and the jury all that he told you—about what my uncle told him about Lansdale?” exclaimed Richard—“everything?”

“Why, of course!” answered Liversedge, “every word! Most important evidence, Mr. Marchmont. And I shall have to tell that I’ve made preliminary inquiries for Lansdale—and that he’s not to be found! Perhaps, too, the old caretaker woman, Capstick, may be called, to have her say.”

“And then?” asked Richard.

“Oh, then the coroner will adjourn for a week or a fortnight, leaving us police to go on with the matter,” answered the detective carelessly. “Usual procedure—all cut and dried. And of course, our first job—my first job—is to get hold of Lansdale. Well, as I said, there’ll be plenty of publicity about him in to-morrow evening’s papers and more in the papers next morning, and if he doesn’t come forward voluntarily—well, we’ll just have to comb him out!”

“He must be somewhere,” said Richard abstractedly.

“I think you can take that for granted, Mr. Marchmont!” agreed Liversedge, with a sidelong glance at Richard’s perplexed face. “But I know what’s troubling you, sir! It’s the thought that the young lady’s father is suspected of having killed your uncle! Very unpleasant thought to have—very! I understand—oh, yes! And the very best thing you can do, Mr. Marchmont, is either to clear this man by finding out who actually did kill your uncle, or to get him to come forward and prove that he didn’t! At present, though, I don’t see how you or I, or anyone’s going to get hold of Lansdale, for a man with ample means at his command can do a great deal in the way of hiding himself, and I also foresee that if Lansdale does come forward he’ll have a stiff job to

clear himself—that is, if he actually did go to Bedford Row last night, as I certainly believe he did. However,” concluded the detective, as he rose, “the present situation is that Lansdale and his daughter have cleared out of this hotel—and you’ll see they’ll not come back!”

Richard felt that Liversedge was right, but he called again at the hotel just before midnight and again early next morning. There was no news of either Angelita or her father, and none had come in either to the hotel people or to the police when the inquest on Henry Marchmont was opened in the afternoon. At that grim business things went precisely as Liversedge had said they would, and before seven o’clock that evening the extra-specials of the newspapers were full of the murder of a well-known London solicitor and the extraordinary disappearance of the man against whom there was certainly a prima-facie case for suspicion. It was all there, in every damned paper—and Richard, who had the well-bred young Englishman’s loathing and hatred of intrusion upon private matters, turned hot and cold and fumed and raged when he saw Angelita’s name dragged into it in an account of her disappearance from the hotel in supplement of another telling how her father had vanished from the same place a few hours previously. He poured out the vials of his wrath freely before Simpson and Liversedge when he met them next morning in Bedford Row, for consultation. But the detective only smiled and shook his head.

“It’s all very well talking, Mr. Marchmont,” he remarked, “but what else can you expect, or indeed do, in a case like this? You want to know who murdered your uncle, don’t you? It’ll be very unfortunate, very sad, if it’s found out that Lansdale’s guilty—but the truth often is unpleasant. And publicity is highly useful—I believe in making use of the press. Anyway, all the world and his wife are acquainted with the business now, and let’s hope something will come out of this widespreading of the facts. I know what you’re feeling about it, Mr. Marchmont, but you know, when all’s said and done, you can’t get away from this—there’s a strong foundation on which to build up a case against Lansdale. I guess Mr. Simpson sees what I mean?”

“Motive!” said Simpson laconically.

“Just that!” continued Liversedge. “Motive! Whenever I strike a murder case—and this is the seventh I’ve been engaged in—the first thing I try to find out is—what motive had the murderer? Well, there’s a strong motive here. Silence! Put it to yourself. Lansdale meets Mr. Henry Marchmont. He knows Mr. Marchmont can give him away. He’s obviously very much upset—Mr. Marchmont told Simpson he was, anyway. What did he say?—according to what your uncle repeated to Simpson? ‘For God’s sake, Marchmont, let me have a word with you in private! Let me come and see you! I want to! I want to explain!’ Do you realise the significance of that, Mr. Marchmont? Those

words are the words of a frightened man—of a man who’s desperately upset at the unexpected meeting with another man who knew an old, bad secret—of a man who might be ruined by that secret coming out. What do you think?”

“I’d rather hear what you think,” replied Richard. He had a clear recollection of Henry Marchmont repeating the words which the detective had just repeated; evidently Henry told Simpson exactly what he had told Richard at the restaurant after lunch. “You know more of these matters than I do.”

“It’s not what I think—I’m merely explaining where motive comes in,” said Liversedge. “Mr. Marchmont gives Lansdale an interview—fixes it for next evening at his own private office. Lansdale has twenty-four hours to face it. Probably he believes that Mr. Marchmont won’t mention it to a soul—that the secret’s between them—and that—well in short, that if he puts Mr. Marchmont out of the way, the secret’s safe. I’ve known men hanged on much poorer theories than that!” concluded the detective. “And there’s another aspect of the matter—consider the circumstances! An elderly man, alone in his home—the dark time of the year—the meeting well after night had fallen—a street which isn’t a thoroughfare, and in which, after business hours, scarcely anybody but a caretaker or two lives—come!”

“What I want to know is—what’s going to be done?” asked Richard impatiently. “That is—what are you, what are the police going to do?”

“Well, if you want my personal opinion about the case, Mr. Marchmont,” answered Liversedge, “I feel that, quite apart from all we know, there’s a good deal of mystery around this murder! My idea is that we ought to go pretty deeply into the past. Hark back!—as they do in fox-hunting when they get off the scent. I’d like to know a good deal more about those doings at Clayminster five-and-twenty years ago. That’s my notion!—I don’t know what my superiors will say. Of course, the search for Lansdale will go on. What does Mr. Simpson think?” he added, turning to the managing clerk. “No doubt he’s some plan or project in his head.”

“Yes,” replied Simpson, “I have. I think it would be a very good thing to offer a reward. A substantial reward!”

“For Lansdale?” asked Liversedge.

“That’s more for you police,” said Simpson. “You ought to do that—a bill saying that he is wanted, or is lost, or has disappeared. No—I mean a reward for anyone who can give information which will lead——”

“To the arrest and conviction, etcetera, etcetera,” broke in Liversedge. “Yes—it comes off, sometimes. There are people, of course, who won’t give a scrap of information unless they know they’re going to be well paid for it! But that’s a matter for Mr. Marchmont.”

“I’d cheerfully offer a very large reward if you think it would lead to a satisfactory result,” declared Richard. “I would, indeed!”

“Especially if it cleared Lansdale, eh, sir?” observed Liversedge in an aside. “Well, you could try it. And I should have it extensively circulated in this neighbourhood—after all, there may be something close at hand that we’ve as yet never even heard of—you never can tell!”

“How would you word it—and what amount should be offered?” asked Richard, turning to Simpson. “If you’ll draft it——”

Before the managing clerk could reply, the door opened, and a junior clerk came in, carrying a copy of the noon edition of a leading evening newspaper. He handed it to Simpson, at the same time pointing to two staring headlines in bold black letters:

**THE BEDFORD ROW MURDER
TEN THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD!**

VI—*On Whose Behalf?*

The detective, who was sitting at Simpson's elbow and caught sight of the big letters as the managing clerk spread the newspaper on the desk, let out a sharp exclamation of astonishment.

"Hello!" he said. "What's the meaning of that? Here's a reward offered already! You're forestalled, Mr. Marchmont. And ten thousand pounds! pretty stiff figure that, I'm thinking!"

Richard, who had been walking about the room, his hands in his pockets, full of conflicting and miserable thoughts, came up to the desk; all three men bent over the newspaper. And Liversedge, who seemed more interested and excited than either of his companions, read the advertisement aloud.

"HENRY MARCHMONT, DECEASED.—Whereas Mr. Henry Marchmont, Solicitor, of 93A Bedford Row, was found dead on the staircase of his office on Wednesday morning last under circumstances which leave no doubt that he was murdered, by shooting, about eight to eight-thirty o'clock of the previous evening, Tuesday, October 16th, 1923, and whereas the murderer is still at large, NOW THIS IS TO GIVE NOTICE that the sum of £10,000 (TEN THOUSAND POUNDS) will be paid by the undersigned to the person giving information which will lead to the arrest and conviction of the said murderer.

"DANIEL CRENCH,
"Solicitor.

"985 Chancery Lane, W.C.2."

The first sound that escaped any of the three men after Liversedge had brought his muttering to an end was a laugh, cynical and contemptuous, from the managing clerk.

"Crench!" he exclaimed, "Crench! I don't suppose Daniel Crench has ten thousand pence to put his fingers on, let alone ten thousand pounds!"

"You know him?" asked Richard.

"Know him well enough!" replied Simpson. "He's what they would have called a pettifogging attorney in the old days. He used to be a clerk at Galdyke & Norgate's in the Lane—not an articled clerk, you know. They gave him his articles, though, in the end, and after a time he set up for himself. We've had to do with him now and then—a sharp, crafty man, not over-scrupulous. But—the idea of Dan Crench and ten thousand pounds is——" He wound up with a

sneer and a snap of his fingers, and tossed the paper aside. But Liversedge shook his head and picked the paper up.

“Aye, just so, Mr. Simpson!” he said. “But don’t you see, the man’s only an agent! That’s obvious. Why should any solicitor or firm of solicitors offer this reward out of their own pockets? Crench, of course, is acting for somebody. But who?” He turned inquiringly to Richard. “Are there any relations who’d do this, Mr. Marchmont?”

“There are no relations who’d do it,” replied Richard. “My uncle had no very near relations beyond myself.”

“Just so—I’d gathered that from what you told me the other day,” said Liversedge. “Well, there’s some mystery, then, about this business!”

“If it’s genuine!” sneered Simpson.

“Genuine enough, I think you’ll find,” replied Liversedge. “This man Crench, I take it, whatever his beginnings and however crafty he may be, is, you say, a properly qualified solicitor. Very well!—he wouldn’t issue that notice if it weren’t genuine. What it means is this.—There’s somebody desperately anxious, for some reason of his own, to find out who killed Mr. Henry Marchmont; so anxious that he’s willing to fork out ten thousand pounds for the information necessary to effect an arrest and a conviction, which means he’s a very well-to-do man to whom ten thousand pounds is probably nothing, and he’s employed this Crench to issue that notice. Simple!”

“But why should anybody—an outsider, I mean—have such desperate anxiety as you suggest, Liversedge?” asked Richard. “What has my uncle’s death to do with——”

“You don’t know who or what Mr. Henry Marchmont’s death—or, to put it plainly, murder—has to do with, sir,” answered Liversedge. “And I don’t, and Mr. Simpson there doesn’t; nobody knows. I’ve always felt, from the very beginning, that there was far more about this affair than’s to be seen on the surface!—that advertisement is a sure proof that I’m right. But something’s got to be done about this. Of course, our people at the Yard will take notice of it; they’ll want to know what it means. But Crench isn’t obliged to tell them; there’s no law that I know of to prevent Crench or anybody else putting out a notice of this sort.” He paused, and after seeming to reflect awhile looked knowingly at Richard. “Mr. Marchmont,” he continued, “I wish you’d do something! As next-of-kin to your uncle, go down to Chancery Lane, see Crench, and ask him what this thing means?”

“A good move!” murmured Simpson, “excellent!”

“He won’t tell you, you know,” Liversedge went on, with a dry smile. “You’ll probably not get a word out of him! But—go!”

“What’s the use if I don’t get anything out of him?” asked Richard.

“A lot! You’ll see him. He’ll not be so guarded with you as he would with

Simpson, or with me. Keep your eyes and ears open! But,” concluded the detective. “Go! You’re the principal, after all!”

Richard, too, was thinking, on not dissimilar lines. But he had an idea which, he thought, might not have occurred to Liversedge. Was this extraordinary offer related in any way to the Lansdale affair?—had it anything to do with the disappearance of Lansdale and his daughter?

“Very well!” he said suddenly. “I’ll go! Have you any advice to give me?—I’m not much accustomed to this sort of thing.”

“I don’t think you need any special advice, Mr. Marchmont,” replied Liversedge. “I should just announce myself, if I were you, as the late Mr. Henry Marchmont’s nephew, say I’d seen Crench’s advertisement, and had called to ask the meaning of it. And beyond that, I should do little more than keep my ears open—and my eyes, if need be!”

Richard went off to Chancery Lane without further delay. He had never visited any other solicitor’s office than his uncle’s, and he was surprised to find that Mr. Daniel Crench conducted his professional business in premises which presented a striking contrast to the roomy, rambling, handsomely appointed house in Bedford Row. Mr. Crench, as a matter of fact, practised law in two rooms at the very top of a large building in which there seemed to be a score or two of offices of all sizes and sorts. The door of entrance to his humble domain had a frosted sheet of glass in its upper panel whereon was painted Mr. Crench’s name in capitals and his profession in italics; within the door was a shabby, ill-furnished ante-room, containing bills and posters of property to sell, shelves of second-hand law books, bundles of papers and documents, and an ink-stained boy whose arms and legs had grown out of his sleeves and trousers, and who replied most amicably to the caller’s inquiry that Mr. Crench was engaged, but that a card might be presented to him if the business were urgent.

Whatever Mr. Crench’s engagement might be, it was evident that he considered Mr. Richard Marchmont’s affairs of paramount importance, for the boy had no sooner vanished within an inner room than he reappeared again and intimated that Mr. Crench would see Mr. Marchmont at once. He held the door open, and Richard walked into a room scarcely less shabby and badly-equipped than the one he had left. But he gave scant attention to the room; his eyes were all for its occupants. There were two men there. One, who sat at a desk in the centre of the room and made no show of rising as his visitor entered, Richard at once took to be Crench. He did not like his looks. He was a man of little under medium height, scarcely of middle age, shifty of eye, watchful of manner, not improved by a starveling beard and scrappy moustache; badly yet pretentiously dressed in an ill-fitting frock-coat, with which, from the fact that it hung on a peg above his desk, he evidently had the

bad taste to wear a bowler hat. Upstart was written all over Crench in big letters; the more Richard looked at him, the more he felt a loathing of him.

And little as he liked the looks of the solicitor, he was not sure that he did not prefer them to the looks of the man who was with him. This individual was a tallish, well-built fellow, dressed smartly in a tweed suit of fashionable cut, who stood leaning against the mantelpiece, his hands in the pockets of his trousers, and a cigarette dangling from the corner of his lips. He was a dark-complexioned, black-eyed man, who from his general appearance and air might have been an actor; from the fact that he wore a rather heavy, carefully cultivated moustache, Richard judged that he was not. There was an air of watchfulness about this man too, but whereas Crench's eyes were sly, the other's were undoubtedly sinister. Those eyes were kept steadily on Richard from the moment of his entrance, and he soon became aware of them, and grew uncomfortable under their persistent examination.

His reception was not at all ceremonious, nor on any lines that he had conceived. Crench grinned knowingly behind his thin moustache and nodded as familiarly as if he and his caller were at least old acquaintances, if not dear friends.

"Morning, Mr. Marchmont," he said, in an almost offensively off-hand manner. "Thought you'd drop in—or that somebody on your behalf would! Advertisement in the first edition fetched you, eh, Mr. Marchmont? Merely a preliminary that, my dear sir!—it'll be in all the big dailies to-morrow morning, and in the leading provincial papers too. Nothing like doing a thing thoroughly, Mr. Marchmont! And of course, you being in the relation you are to Mr. Henry Marchmont, deceased, you naturally want—eh?"

Richard glanced at the man lounging by the mantelpiece. Crench laughed.

"Oh, you can speak before Mr. Garner!" he said. "Mr. Garner and I are partners—not in law, but in other matters. We've no secrets! Besides, there is no secret in this affair—all open and above-board! Let any man or woman who can give the information asked for in my advertisement come forward and give it, and in due course, when the police have done their work, and a jury has done its work—why, then, there's ten thousand of the best for the informant, spot cash! We won't wait till the hangman's done his bit!" he concluded, with a leer. "A verdict of guilty from the twelve good men and true will do. But you called, Mr. Marchmont——"

"I called to ask on whose behalf this offer is made?" replied Richard.

"Ah, just so, Mr. Marchmont!" said Crench, with a sly smile, "and that's just what I'm not at liberty to tell you. Suffice it to say, sir, that my client—I admit it is a client—is deeply interested in the affair of your poor uncle's murder—and will cheerfully, most cheerfully, pay ten thousand pounds for the information I have advertised for——"

“If he can get it!” said Garner, with a guttural laugh. “If he can get it!”

“To be sure!” agreed Crench significantly. “If he can get it!”

“What is his interest?” asked Richard. “It can’t be from any family tie, Mr. Crench——”

“There are more weighty matters than mere family ties, sir,” interrupted Crench, with a wink. “Blood, no doubt, is thicker than water, but business, yes, business is of more importance than blood!”

“Far more,” muttered the man at the mantelpiece.

“Your uncle’s death, Mr. Marchmont,” continued Crench, “occurring just when it did, was a catastrophe! Catastrophes have to be repaired. This can be repaired, perhaps—not sure, you know, Mr. Marchmont, not sure!—through my advertisement. Perhaps! But—the amount offered only represents my client’s anxiety.”

Richard reflected a little on this and on Crench’s previous answer. Then he decided to throw aside Liversedge’s advice and to ask a few questions.

“I suppose you read all that transpired at the inquest, Mr. Crench?” he suggested.

Crench leaned back in his chair, smiled, and tapped the edge of his desk with his fingernails. His reply came with a snap.

“Every syllable!”

“You are aware that the name of a Mr. Lansdale was brought up?”

“Fully! And fully aware, also, Mr. Marchmont—the police and the press having contrived to give a great deal of publicity to the affair, very foolishly in certain respects—that Mr. Lansdale has disappeared from the Hotel Cecil—and his daughter too. Oh, yes, we’re fully posted up—here!”

“Does this offer come from Mr. Lansdale?” asked Richard bluntly.

Crench laughed.

“I know you’re a cricketer, Mr. Marchmont!” he said. “I’ve seen you play more than once, both at Lord’s and the Oval. You’re used to quick decisions, quick answers from umpires! But you won’t get a sharp answer from me, sir, either in the affirmative or the negative. All I can say to you I have said—which is that I have a client who is deeply interested in the matter of your poor uncle’s death, and who will cheerfully pay ten thousand pounds—but you know the rest, Mr. Marchmont!”

Richard gave him a glance and contrived to include the other man in it.

“Am I right in believing that your client is chiefly anxious to prove that Mr. Lansdale is innocent?” he asked. “Is that it, Mr. Crench?”

But Crench only laughed again and shook his head, and Garner’s face was irresponsive.

“You can believe what you like, Mr. Marchmont,” replied Crench. “Nothing to do with me, sir. I’ve said my say—and what I’ve said to you I

shall say to the police, whom I expect any minute; like you, they'll want to know what my advertisement means. But you know, Mr. Marchmont, and they know, that it's no affair of theirs or of yours—no offence, sir. If my client likes to spend his money in this way, who can object, Mr. Marchmont? It's his money!"

"And he's plenty of it!" muttered Garner. "His way of doing things!"

"His way of doing things—as my friend remarks, Mr. Marchmont," said Crench. He gave Richard a sly look. "You weren't thinking of doing as much yourself, in justice to your poor uncle, I suppose, sir?" he added. "Perhaps we anticipated you——"

Richard got himself out of the shabby office and went back to Bedford Row. Simpson sneered quietly at his account of the interview; it was Crench from top to bottom, he said; as for Garner, he knew nothing of him, had never heard of him. He went off to attend to some office business, and Liversedge turned to Richard.

"Mr. Marchmont," he said, "as things are, there's only one thing to be done! And you and I must do it!"

VII—*The Ex-Superintendent*

The detective was evidently greatly impressed by some idea that lay at the back of his head; he leaned over the desk at which he and Richard were sitting and tapped its surface vigorously as if to emphasise his points.

“It’s this way, Mr. Marchmont,” he said. “Ever since I came into this affair, and especially since Simpson told you and me what he did about your uncle’s story respecting Lansdale, I felt that the big thing to do was to hark back! I’m absolutely certain that if we want to get at the solution of things we shall have to go right back to the events of five-and-twenty years ago. Look here, Mr. Marchmont—am I right in believing that for the young lady’s sake, you want to clear her father?”

“You may take that as certain!” assented Richard. “Moreover, I don’t believe that Lansdale did kill my uncle.”

“Well, anyway, for his daughter’s sake, you’d like to clear Lansdale,” Liversedge went on. “And I’m positive that the first thing to be done is to find out, by unearthing first-hand evidence, what was the precise position of affairs at Clayminster when Lansdale cleared out of that town. I give you fair warning, though, Mr. Marchmont, that the thing may cut two ways. We may find that matters at Clayminster twenty-five years ago were really so bad that it would have meant ruin to Lansdale if your uncle had let out in the City, or to the police, that Lansdale was really Land, the absconding stockbroker! We may—and again we mayn’t. I believe, from what you told me, that although you know his daughter, you’ve never met Lansdale in person? Just so—well, evidently your uncle had a very bad opinion of him. Yet—your uncle may have been mistaken. Things may not have been so serious as he imagined. The difference of twenty-five years—eh? Perhaps the thing had got highly coloured in his mind. Anyway, I want to know, in pursuance of my duties, what the precise state of things was down there at Clayminster when Land, now Lansdale, cleared out of it!”

“You propose to go there?” asked Richard.

“I am going there!—I shall go there this very afternoon,” replied the detective. “It’s only a couple of hours’ journey. Now, you come with me, Mr. Marchmont! I’m a bit of an observant chap, and I could see quite well the other morning that you’re deeply interested—to use a general term—in the young lady. It’ll be a relief to you to know all about her father’s past—and if it is black, well, certainty is far better to bear than uncertainty. There’s a very good train from King’s Cross at 2.15—how will that suit you?”

The argument about Angelita swayed Richard to acquiescence: Liversedge

was right in believing that he was anxious not only to clear her father, but to know the truth about his past. He could do nothing more for the moment in London; the police were already making every possible effort to discover the whereabouts of Lansdale and his daughter and to trace the man with whom Lansdale had gone away from his hotel. So he made some hasty arrangements at his flat, and with Simpson, and met the detective at King's Cross. All the way down to Clayminster he was wondering if they would make any discovery there, and if it would give a new direction to further investigation; it seemed an odd thing to him to have to turn back so far into the past in order to get a strong light on the absolute present.

"We shan't have much difficulty here, Mr. Marchmont," remarked Liversedge, as he and Richard turned out of the station at Clayminster in search of the principal hotel. "You could walk all round this place in half an hour! That means a small population—and as it's amongst only a very small percentage of it that we can hope to scratch up any news we shan't have a long job of it."

"I suppose there are people in the place who'll remember the events of twenty-five years ago," said Richard. His own family had associations with the town; many of his forbears, he knew, were buried in its churchyard. But he had never visited Clayminster before, and he looked around him with interest and curiosity. The place was smaller than he had thought for; an ancient market-town of picturesque appearance, set amidst trees and dominated by the high towers of a great church; slow, sleepy; not at all the sort of town to be connected with any stirring events; an oasis in a desert of sparsely populated country. "People no doubt live to great ages here," he continued. "That's the atmosphere, anyway."

"Aye, and nobody's memory is as good as your old countryman's!" said Liversedge knowingly. "Nothing to do, you see, but treasure up memories of the past. Oh, we'll find what we want, never fear!" he added as they turned into the hall of an old-fashioned hotel in the centre square. "There's an hour before dinner-time—do you make yourself at home, Mr. Marchmont, or take a glance round, while I just go and do a bit of business. There'll be a police station here if there's nothing else!" he concluded, with a laugh. "You'll always find that!"

He went out presently, and Richard saw him no more until the bell was ringing for dinner, when he came back smiling and rubbing his hands with evident satisfaction.

"Struck oil at once, Mr. Marchmont!" he announced gleefully, as they went to the coffee-room. "Rare good luck! The man who was superintendent of police here twenty-five years ago—name of Daverill—and who only retired a short time since, is still living in the town—nice little place he has too, close

by the old church. I got in touch with him at once, from the local police, and he's coming along to have a talk with us after dinner. Fine old chap!—and what's very fortunate, he's posted in the case; that is, he's read all there's been in the newspapers so far; the inquest proceedings and so on. Of course, he knew your uncle when he was in practice here, and your family generally—Clayminster people, I understand. Oh, yes—we've hit the bull's-eye in one, sir! We'll give the old chap a drop of whatever he fancies, and a nice cigar—and let him talk. The more he talks, the better for our purpose!”

There were few people staying in the hotel, and when the ex-superintendent arrived he and his two hosts had the most comfortable fireside corner of the smoking-room to themselves. Richard was all agog to hear what their guest could tell, but the old man would at first talk of nothing else but his own recollections of the Marchmont family; of Charles Marchmont, Richard's grandfather, and of John, his father, and of Sophia and Charlotte, two maiden aunts, now departed; finally of Henry, his uncle. Richard grew impatient; family history and other men's recollections had no great interest for him. But Liversedge, who had dined well and was now taking his ease with the indifference of a man who has all the evening before him, let the ex-superintendent ramble on, knowing that he would eventually come to present-day matters. At last he came—with a sigh.

“But I never thought that such an event as this would happen in your family, sir,” said the old man, turning to Richard. “Poor Mr. Henry!—I remember him, young and active, as if it were yesterday! A bad business—bad!”

“Well, now, that's just where we want your help,” said Liversedge, seizing his opportunity. “You tell me you've read all the newspaper accounts about the inquest on Mr. Henry Marchmont—which, of course, has been adjourned for further inquiries. You'd see what was told to his managing clerk, Mr. Simpson, by Mr. Henry Marchmont, about his meeting with a man named Lansdale, who really was, he said, one Land, who used to live at Clayminster. You read all about that—all?”

“Every word,” agreed the ex-superintendent. “I've read all there's been in the papers—being, as it was, of special local interest.”

“Well, then, you know what Simpson said Mr. Marchmont told him about Land—gave him the impression that when Land cleared out of this town he was very badly wanted by the police?” continued Liversedge. “You were superintendent then, Mr. Daverill—is that so?”

Richard waited impatiently for the old man's reply. But Daverill took his time. He puffed meditatively at his cigar; he sipped his whisky. Eventually, he gave his two companions a glance which indicated that he was now going to talk business.

“Well, it is so, and it isn’t so,” he answered. “I read all that Mr. Henry is alleged to have told his clerk. If he said to his clerk what the clerk says he said, then Mr. Henry was not correct—though he may have thought that he was quite correct. You see, it all happened about the time that Mr. Henry left here to go to his new partnership in London. He probably confused things.”

“Wasn’t Land wanted by the police, then?” asked Liversedge.

“Oh, yes, he was, most assuredly!” replied Daverill. “We had a fine old hunt for him!—lasting for some time. But—it was not for the reason that Mr. Henry evidently thought it was!”

“What reason was it, then?” exclaimed Liversedge.

The old man smiled, as at some secret thought, and looked from one to the other of his listeners.

“I don’t think we ever let it out to anybody,” he said. “Probably that’s how Mr. Henry got hold of a wrong impression, thinking that we were raking the whole countryside for Land in order to arrest him. We weren’t! The fact is, gentlemen, the police firmly believed that Land had been murdered!”

The effect of this announcement on the detective was electrical; he leapt in his seat as if a strong current had run through him. And as he settled down again he let out a whistle of astonishment—or of illumination.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, beginning to rub his hands. “Ah! That was it, was it? You thought he’d been murdered? Instead of trying to catch him alive, you were really expecting to find him dead! Mighty different thing, that!”

“We firmly believed he’d been murdered,” replied Daverill. “What’s more, I never changed that belief! It was a perfect surprise to me when I saw that Mr. Henry had told his clerk that he’d met Land in London, under the name of Lansdale. For five-and-twenty years I’ve been under the firm impression that Land was murdered, and that his body might yet come to light in or somewhere near this town!”

Liversedge smote both hands on his knees and looked at Richard.

“God bless my soul!” he exclaimed. “D’you hear that, Mr. Marchmont? That’s something new for us, isn’t it? Murdered, eh? Well, of course, he would disappear if he were murdered. But——”

“What reason had you for believing Land to have been murdered?” asked Richard, breaking in on the detective’s soliloquies. “Weren’t they made public?”

Daverill smiled and shook his head.

“I dare say we—I—kept the thing close,” he answered. “There were reasons for doing so at the time. No, the public knew nothing except that we were conducting a very thorough and exhaustive inquiry for Land. Doubtless they thought, as Mr. Henry seems to have thought, that we wanted to arrest him. But that’s all wrong—we never had a charge brought against Land on

which we could have arrested him. He never committed any crime that was brought to my notice.”

Richard could not repress a sigh of relief; it was something, at any rate, to know that Angelita’s father was not a criminal. But Liversedge turned to practical questions.

“Well, I’m getting puzzled again!” he said. “You say you believed Land had been murdered. Whom did you suspect of murdering him, then?”

“Nobody!” answered the ex-superintendent.

“That puzzles me more than ever!” remarked Liversedge. “You believe a man’s murdered, and yet——”

“The fact is,” said Daverill, with a sly look, “the fact is, gentlemen, there were, at that time, in Clayminster and the neighbourhood, quite a score of people, women as well as men, who would have cheerfully murdered James Land! Cheerfully! And when he completely vanished, in such a fashion that he couldn’t have done it better if he’d melted into thin air, not a trace of him coming to hand—why, naturally, we believed that some one of those people had wreaked vengeance on him! I tell you, I believed it!”

“Vengeance, eh?” remarked Liversedge. “Were there reasons?”

“Reasons, yes—that in the generality of cases sprang out of utter unreasonableness!” replied the ex-superintendent. “The truth is, gentlemen, that about that time, twenty-five or twenty-six years ago, there was a perfect epidemic of what was no better than senseless gambling amongst a certain class of people in this town and neighbourhood—gambling, of course, in stocks and shares. I don’t know now—if I ever did know—how it began, but there it was. It always reminded me of what you read about the South Sea Bubble in history. There was a regular mania for it—chiefly amongst the better-class folk; country gentlemen, professional men, well-to-do tradesmen and the like. It was chiefly, I think, in foreign securities—I’m sure I can’t remember what, now. Well, of course, Land was in it. He was a youngish man then; he had been a schoolmaster; he had also been an accountant. I can’t remember if he’d started business as a stock and share broker before this gambling craze came on, and whether it was the craze that made him start. But anyway, he was stock and share broking here during the craze, and I believe an enormous amount of business passed through his hands. There was some particular stock that these misguided folk fancied—it was a temporary craze, like the rubber craze some years later—and Land dealt heavily in it. Then all of a sudden there was a terrible smash, or slump, or crash, or whatever they call it, and lots of people hereabouts were either ruined or reduced to comparative poverty. And many of them were unreasonable enough to blame Land, when they had only their own greed to blame. I tell you!—I, as police superintendent, became aware that his life was actually in danger; I knew it to

be so. And when he suddenly disappeared—but I've already told you what I believed, and why we made an exhaustive search for him. You can have no idea, gentlemen, no idea whatever," said the old man with emphasis, "you can't form any idea of the vindictive rage which these people showed towards a man who, after all, had only been their broker! For that's all Land was."

"Perhaps he'd given 'em bad advice," suggested Liversedge.

"On the only occasion on which I spoke to Land about it," replied Daverill, "he assured me that these folk had always insisted on his buying those particular stocks and shares through which they were ruined. I tell you, they were all mad to gamble—it was a fever! There were families that were well-to-do when it began; beggars when it ended. I can call several to mind. Aykins, of Woodcote; Marshes, of Pebberston; Sanderthwaites——"

Richard started. Sanderthwaite? Where had he heard that name before? Then he suddenly remembered the two shabby-genteel ladies whom he had found with Henry Marchmont in Bedford Row.

VIII—*The Detective Theorises*

Daverill was too much preoccupied with his recollections to notice Richard's start of surprise, and Liversedge was just then lighting a second cigar and consequently failed to see it. And Richard was thankful that it was unobserved; he had already made up his mind to keep that matter to himself for the time being; the idea had flashed across him that he might get some information from Mrs. Mansiter and her sister when he returned to town. He listened more eagerly than before as the ex-superintendent rambled on.

"The case of those Sanderthwaites was a particularly bad one," he said. "They were people who lived just outside the town, on a nice place—an old family of these parts, theirs was, and they were comfortably off. There was a father, a couple of daughters, and a son. The daughters were fine girls—Bessie and Cora, I remember them well enough, and the son, Lionel, or Liney, as they called him, was a smart young fellow. I don't know about Bessie—she was a quieter sort than her sister—but the father, and Cora, and Liney were all bitten with this gambling fever; they said in the town that they were never off Land's office doorstep! And when the smash came they were very badly hit. The children had money of their own; it all went, unless Bessie saved, or had taken care to keep safe, some of hers. But the old man was ruined, and it finished him off—anyway, he never got over it and died soon after. The place was sold up, and the brother and two sisters went clear away—I did hear, years after, that they started a lodging-house, or something of that sort, in London. I remember having a talk to Cora—she was the youngest—just before they left the town. She was one of those I mentioned to you—she'd cheerfully have murdered Land!—she blamed him for everything. But I don't know!—they were of the gambling sort, those Sanderthwaites—the sort of people that'll sit up round a card-table all night. The old man was a great race-goer and used to bet heavily. Cora—she was a fine, dashing girl who used to go hunting a good deal—she said that it was Land who persuaded them to go in for these deals that came to nothing, but it's my opinion and always has been that folk of this kind need precious little persuasion. Still, when I spoke to her about it, Cora Sanderthwaite was—well, murderous in her hatred of Land!"

"But you never knew of any real, actual misdoing on Land's part?" asked Liversedge. "Never knew that he brought himself within the law?"

"No," replied Daverill. "It was nothing but vague rumour, hints, suggestions—all coming from people who'd suffered, and who were naturally very sore about it. Of course, in a small country town like this, there are always people who talk off the top and say wild things. It was said that Land had

never invested the money some of these folk had placed in his hands; that he'd put it in his own pockets; that he'd made a nice warm nest somewhere and was off to it. That, of course, was after he'd gone."

"How did he go?" inquired Liversedge. "Any mystery about it?"

"Mystery!" exclaimed the old man. "It was all mystery! The night before the smash came—that is, the night before the news of the smash got generally known here in Clayminster—Land was in this hotel; as a matter of fact he was in this very room, and may have been sitting in this very chair, for all I know!—he used to spend his evenings here. Nobody noticed anything unusual about him or his manner, though seeing that he's now turned up again, he must have known what was going to happen, and what he himself was going to do. He walked out of this room—of course, we got every possible detail about it afterwards—and out of this hotel at ten o'clock, his invariable time for leaving, and he was never seen again!"

"Made a complete disappearance, eh?" said Liversedge. "Just—vanished!"

"Couldn't have vanished more successfully if he'd been a ghost!" answered Daverill. "From the moment he walked into the road outside—it was a dark night, about this time of the year, middle of autumn—nobody set eyes on him. Might ha' been spirited away!"

"Where did he live in the town?" inquired the detective.

"Why, he didn't live in the town. He was a single man, and he had rooms in a fine old farm-house at Elmcote, about three-quarters of a mile out," replied Daverill. "When he left this hotel, he'd cross the road, go down Church Pavement, and turn into Elmcote Lane. When he reached Elmcote—which is a tiny bit of a place, a couple of farmsteads and a sprinkling of cottages—he'd turn into another lane, really a cart-track, that led to the farm-house through a spinney. Our notion was that he'd been waylaid——"

Liversedge stopped the flood of recollection with a sharp exclamation.

"But I say!" he said. "This was before the smash came!—the day, or night, before! Why should anybody waylay him? The victims—if they were victims—didn't know of the smash then!"

The ex-superintendent smiled knowingly.

"I said—before the smash became generally known," he answered. "Generally. We found out, afterwards, that what you might call the inner circle—those most closely concerned—did know; they knew enough, at any rate, to know that their money had gone! Oh, yes—plenty of 'em knew; had known for a day or two. However, that's how it was—we believed he'd been waylaid and murdered, and that his body had been got rid of. That wouldn't have been difficult, thereabouts; there are a great many old pit-workings in that district, and the disused shafts are very deep, and covered over with growth; he could have been thrown down any one of them. And just to show you how

thoroughly we did believe that Land had been got rid of—we had a lot of these old shafts examined! Of course, we found nothing; anyway, we didn't find his body. But his disappearance was so complete, and the efforts to trace were such equally complete failures, that, as I tell you, I've always held to the opinion that he was murdered. And now—he turns up, after all these years, in London!"

"I suppose you could identify him, Mr. Daverill?" suggested Liversedge.

"Oh, yes, I could identify him," replied the old man. "He has—that is, Land had—a dropped eyelid. The left eyelid. It gave him rather an odd appearance—as if he was half-asleep, on that side of his face. Oh, yes, I should know him—if he's the man!"

"I don't suppose he'll have got rid of that little physical infirmity in twenty-five years, certainly," remarked the detective. "Can't have got himself a new eyelid, anyhow! But what like was he when you knew him here?—what make of man?"

Daverill smiled and turned to Richard.

"Why," he answered, "he wasn't at all unlike your uncle, sir—Mr. Henry. The similarity of appearance was often noticed. They were both good-looking men; tall, fresh-coloured, clean-shaved; very similar in features and in carriage. Of course, I'm speaking of a generation back: I don't know how they wore as time went on. But they were very much alike in the time we've been talking about."

When the ex-superintendent had gone away, Liversedge remained for some time walking about the room as if in deep thought. At last he came back to the hearth and dropped into his chair again.

"Mr. Marchmont," he said, "I'm wondering! Some people might say the motive was impossible, far-fetched, extravagant, but I don't know. Anyhow, I'm wondering if your uncle was shot by somebody who took him for Land!"

Richard made no reply for the moment. Some such idea as that now voiced by the detective had been floating, a vague and nebulous thing, through his own brain ever since the old ex-superintendent had mentioned the hatred felt for Land amongst a certain section of Clayminster people and by such particular sufferers as the Sanderthwaites. And now he was wondering, more than ever, if Henry Marchmont had told Mrs. Mansiter and her sister about Land's presence in London and that he was going to Bedford Row that evening, and if——But Liversedge broke in again on his speculating.

"The notion mayn't be as far-fetched as it seems at first sight," he remarked. "I've known of much more unlikely things."

"I could understand its possibility better if the murder had taken place anywhere else than where it did," said Richard, after another pause. "But supposing somebody did mistake my uncle for Land—somebody who still

bore an unconquerable grudge against Land—how should such a person get inside my uncle’s offices?”

“Aye, just so, but I don’t see the impossibility, or rather, improbability of that, either, Mr. Marchmont,” replied Liversedge. “I took in all that Simpson told us about your uncle’s general habits, and I remember that when he wasn’t dining out with anybody he used to get his dinner at a fairly early hour at some restaurant or hotel and return to Bedford Row by eight o’clock. Now supposing—you’ve got to suppose a lot in trying to get a clear notion in these affairs!—supposing that on the night of his death Mr. Henry Marchmont had dined somewhere, as of course he did, and there, at restaurant or hotel, or on the way home, had been taken for Land by somebody anxious to pay off an old score? What was to prevent such a person following him to Bedford Row, slipping into the hall of the offices after him, and shooting him on the stair? That similarity of appearance may be significant.”

Richard nodded—and refrained from expressing any opinion. He was beginning to realise the wisdom of keeping his own counsel in some matters, even from Liversedge. He turned the conversation to another matter.

“Can you make any suggestion as to why Lansdale—to give him the name he’s now known by—disappeared that night?” he asked. “Do you think it really had anything to do with my uncle’s death?”

“Oh, undoubtedly, Mr. Marchmont, undoubtedly!” exclaimed the detective. “I’ve thought all that out, and I’ve formed an opinion of my own, which may be wrong, but may be right. I think that Lansdale is here in England on some big, probably very big financial deal. He’s no doubt mixed up with great moneyed men in the City. He met Henry Marchmont unexpectedly. Under the fear that Henry Marchmont might rake up his past—and when all’s said and done, his Clayminster record is a bit shady, if nothing else!—he sought and got an interview with him. He found that your uncle was adamant—wouldn’t have anything to do with him—gave him the impression that he’d expose him. Lansdale went to his hotel. One of his business clients—the dark, swarthy chap we heard about—called to see him; Lansdale told him what had happened. Perhaps the dark man called for the express purpose of hearing what Henry Marchmont was going to do. This man advised Lansdale to clear out at once—to some place where his business deal couldn’t be interrupted. And he carried him off there and then—and they arranged for Miss Lansdale to be brought to join her father next morning. See?”

“I follow you,” assented Richard. “It’s possible.”

“Well, it’s just a theory,” said Liversedge. “But I’ve an alternate one. I don’t think there’s any doubt whatever that Lansdale did go to Bedford Row that night. He must have been the man seen by the caretaker next door, old Mother Capstick, as she came back with the supper beer from the Plume of

Feathers. Mother Capstick says that the gentleman she met and whom she at first took for your uncle seemed excited, and was talking and muttering to himself. Now, Mr. Marchmont, just you imagine a dramatic situation. Lansdale, in pursuance of the agreement made with your uncle, goes to Bedford Row to keep the appointment. He has no difficulty in gaining access; I ascertained from Simpson that although the actual business offices on the ground floor were locked up by him every afternoon at five-thirty when he and the clerks left, the front door was never locked or fastened in any way until Mr. Henry Marchmont himself locked it last thing at night. Lansdale, accordingly, enters, and—probably following your uncle’s instructions of the previous evening, when the appointment was made—proceeds upstairs. On the landing he comes across the body of the man he’s come to see—dead! Just dead!—and shot!” The detective paused, looking at Richard as if to emphasise his words.

“What do you suppose Lansdale would do, Mr. Marchmont?” he went on suddenly. “Remember, from all we know, Lansdale had gone there under exceptional circumstances. He knew that Henry Marchmont had a hold over him, or believed he had. I think that Lansdale, making such a startling discovery, would say to himself or think within himself, ‘If I’m found here, I shall be suspected of this—suspected of killing the man in order to ensure his silence—let me get out of it!’ Well, he gets out of it! But even then he’s afraid—mortally afraid! He thinks it more than likely that Henry Marchmont may have *told*—as we know Henry Marchmont did—and that as soon as the news of Henry’s murder gets abroad he’ll be suspected. So, when the dark man calls on him at his hotel, he pours out the whole story to him. From that point this theory runs on the same lines as the previous one—Lansdale gets away, of course, with the other man’s help, and they get his daughter away too. I think that whether one or other of these theories is right or wrong, Mr. Marchmont, neither will be very far from the truth. Lansdale’s disappearance sprang out of your uncle’s death.”

“What astonishes me,” remarked Richard, “is that a man can disappear so easily!”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said the detective. “That’s no difficult job. We hear and know a lot of that in our line of work. I’ve known a case where a man disappeared for twelve years and was eventually found to have been living all the time within half a mile of the house he cleared out of. London’s the finest place in the world for successful games at hide-and-seek; I mean on the part of those who hide. But I don’t believe Lansdale and his daughter are in London any longer—nor in England, either.”

“Where are they, then?” asked Richard.

“Oh, I should say, by this time, in Paris, or in Brussels, or perhaps travelling further afield!” replied Liversedge. “Off! I don’t suppose there will

be any news of them from any of our people when we get back to town tomorrow morning. However, we've got a bit—though I don't know how we're going to develop it. Frankly, Mr. Marchmont, I don't see much development at present!"

But there was some development of a phase of the situation when Richard and his companion walked into the Bedford Row office at noon next day. Simpson, in whose hands Richard had necessarily placed many matters for disposal and arrangement, took him and Liversedge into what had been Henry Marchmont's private room. He placed a long, unsealed envelope in Richard's hands.

"This, Mr. Marchmont," he said quietly, "is, as you will see by the endorsement, your uncle's will. I came across it yesterday after you had left."

IX—*Smouldering Fires*

Richard took the envelope without any show of surprise; he had expected that his uncle's will would be found amongst his private papers, and he already had a very good idea as to the character of its contents.

"Where did you find it?" he asked half-carelessly. "In the safe?"

"It was in the top drawer of his desk," replied Simpson. "Part of a small bundle of deeds and papers relating to property—his property. I have locked those up until you wish to go through them."

He was leaving the room, but Richard called him back.

"Stop a bit, Simpson!" he said. "I'll have a look at the will, now—you may as well know what there is in it. Don't go, Liversedge—no objection to your hearing the provisions, either."

"Well, if you don't mind, Mr. Marchmont, I should like to know what there is in your uncle's will," replied the detective. "In a case of this sort, every scrap of knowledge one can get hold of is useful. And I suppose there's nothing private about wills, is there? They all get into the papers, anyway!"

Richard seated himself at Henry Marchmont's desk, in the chair in which he had so often seen him sit, and drew the will from its envelope. He saw at once that it was couched in very brief terms and scarcely covered the single sheet of foolscap paper on which it was written in Henry's own handwriting. He glanced it over hastily, and suddenly turned to the managing clerk, who stood between the door and the desk.

"Simpson!" he said. "My uncle's left you ten thousand pounds!"

Save for a sudden very slight heightening of colour, the fortunate legatee showed no particular surprise or emotion. He bowed his head a little.

"Very good and kind of him, Mr. Marchmont," he said quietly. "I—I am not startled by the news. The fact is, Mr. Henry Marchmont often told me that he intended to leave me what he called a handsome sum—I have, of course, done practically all the supervising work of this office, relieving him of all responsibility, for several years past. Still, I had no idea that he would leave me so much. And—I always believed that I should have a great deal more to do for my employer before the time came when I should receive anything—I regarded Mr. Henry Marchmont as being good for quite another twenty years of life."

"Well, there it is!" said Richard. "Ten thousand, Simpson! There's not much else of any note. Legacies to all the clerks downstairs; two or three to charities; all the residue comes to me. What do we do with this will, Simpson?"

“I suppose you are named as executor, Mr. Marchmont?” inquired the managing clerk. “Just so,” he added as Richard handed the will over to him, “sole executor, I see, the ordinary procedure—probate, administration, and so on . . . if you’ll leave matters in my hands——”

He went away, taking the will with him, and Liversedge, when the door was closed, wagged his head.

“Lucky beggar!” he said. “Cool chap too, that! Heard he’d dropped into ten thousand—a real nice little fortune!—and never turned a hair! Um! Jolly good nerves that man’s got, I reckon!”

“He’d expected something,” replied Richard.

“But not so much, nor so soon,” remarked the detective. “Well, some folk are born lucky, and some aren’t! I never had any luck that way—never expect to have. I suppose Simpson has been here a good many years?”

“Ever since I remember anything about it,” replied Richard.

“Knows all the ins-and-outs, eh?” suggested Liversedge. He rose, observed that he must get round to headquarters to learn if there was any news, and went away. At the top of the street he looked round, and seeing a tavern on the other side of the road that crossed it, went over, entered the saloon bar, and treating himself to a drink, sat down in a corner to reflect in solitude.

“Knows all the ins-and-outs, eh?” he muttered, repeating his last words to Richard. “Yes, I guess he does! And knew that will was where it was, and what was in it, if I know anything! Too cool and collected by half, that chap. Not in human flesh and blood to be unmoved at hearing, suddenly, that ten thousand pounds has just fallen into your lap—not it! No—no!—he knew all about that before young Marchmont told him. And I wonder how long he’d known it? Will had been made a year, eh? Now!—now had Simpson known its contents a year? Or six months? Or a month? Lay in an unlocked drawer, did it?—mighty convenient! Expected Henry to be good for another twenty years, did he? Um!—painful thing to have to wait twenty years for ten thousand pounds—very! Dear me!—how things do crop up! Now, it wouldn’t surprise me in the slightest if it eventually came out that Master Simpson shot Henry Marchmont!—no, it wouldn’t. Motive!—strong motive! Ten thousand quid!”

He was thus ruminating and wondering if it might not be well to find out a little about the managing clerk, his private life, his antecedents, his present position, and all the rest of it, when two men came into the saloon, supplied themselves with drinks at its bar, and sat down in elbow-chairs close by his own. They were oldish men; they looked as if they had nothing to do but sit about, gossiping, in bar-parlours; and Liversedge quickly discovered that they were talking about the very subject uppermost in his own thoughts—the mystery of the Bedford Row murder. At that he took a covert but careful glance at them. One was a short, rotund person, obviously a retired tradesman;

the other a man who, in the detective's opinion, was or had been of superior social standing to his companion, but who from the fact that his tweed suit, though scrupulously neat, was old and worn, and his carefully cleaned and polished boots were patched and mended, had evidently come down in the world. He was a tall, good-looking man, this; there was something of the sportsman about him, or, rather, a suggestion that at one time of his life he had been a sportsman—it was all had-been with him, thought the observant Liversedge.

It was a remark from this man that drew the detective's attention to him and his companion.

"What, of course, never came out at the preliminary stages of the inquest on Henry Marchmont," he said in quite audible tones, "is that Lansdale, or Land, to give the fellow his proper name, knew that he couldn't clear himself to Henry—or, at any rate, believed he couldn't. He knew that Henry would still cherish the Clayminster notion about misappropriation of moneys handed to Land for investment. There were such cases—we know of, at any rate, our own case. Land had money of ours which he stuck in his own pocket, as sure as fate! He couldn't have shown stock for it!"

"Indeed, sir, indeed!" remarked the other man, in the admiring tones of one who listens to wisdom greater than his own. "Dear me! Then you think this here Land, or Lansdale, is a guilty man, Mr. Sanderthwaite?—guilty, I mean, of this Bedford Row murder?"

Liversedge knew now who it must be that sat near him. This must be the Lionel Sanderthwaite of whom old Daverill had spoken, the night before, at Clayminster. Well—Daverill had said something about the family being reduced to keeping a lodging-house in London; probably it was near the tavern in which they were now sitting. He kept his ears open.

"What do you think?" exclaimed the man addressed as Sanderthwaite. "I should have no hesitation in saying he was guilty, if I was on a jury. Would you?"

"I should want to know a bit more, Mr. Sanderthwaite, I should want to know a bit more!" replied the other cautiously. "I've been on a good many juries in my time. But it certainly looks very black against this Lansdale, or Land—judging, of course, by what came out at the inquest and what's been in the papers. Now I wonder, Mr. Sanderthwaite, wherever that man has disappeared to?"

"He's a clever hand at that sort of thing!" replied Sanderthwaite. "He disappeared cleverly enough twenty-five years ago, and for anything I know he may have repeated the operation more than once since. Practised hand!—he may be wanted in more countries than this."

"It's a very unsatisfactory thing when the police can't put their hands on a

man straight off!” remarked the other. “Leads to such a deal of uneasiness amongst what you may call the law-abiding section of the public. Now I remember——”

Liversedge affected to read a newspaper which he had picked up from a table close by; the two cronies talked on. A clock struck twelve; the short fat man drank off the contents of his glass and jumped to his feet.

“Bless me!” he exclaimed. “Noon!—and I’ve an appointment in Gray’s Inn about a bit of property. See you very likely to-night, Mr. Sanderthwaite.”

He hurried away, and when he had fairly gone the detective turned to the man left behind.

“Mr. Lionel Sanderthwaite, I believe, sir?” he said politely. “Formerly of Clayminster?”

The man addressed turned sharply and stared at his questioner as if he scarcely comprehended him.

“I don’t know you, sir!” he said. “A stranger to me, sir. How——”

“I heard your friend who has just gone out mention your name,” replied Liversedge, “and from certain things he and you said, which I couldn’t help overhearing, I gathered that you’re the Mr. Lionel Sanderthwaite of whom I heard ex-Superintendent Daverill speak last night, at Clayminster.”

Sanderthwaite’s face lighted up; it was obvious that the reference to Clayminster made him inclined to talk.

“God bless me, sir!” he exclaimed. “Is old Daverill still alive? Retired, of course. At Clayminster last night, were you? Now, who is it I’ve the pleasure ——”

“That’s who I am, Mr. Sanderthwaite,” said the detective, thrusting his professional card into his companion’s hand. “And—I’m in charge of this Bedford Row case!”

Sanderthwaite fumbled for a pair of old-fashioned glasses, put them on the rather high bridge of his nose and read the card.

“Bless me! Dear, dear!—a detective, of course,” he observed. “You haven’t found Lansdale, I suppose? You heard me mention him just now, no doubt. No privacy about it, you know: everybody in this neighbourhood’s talking.”

“Will you have a drink, Mr. Sanderthwaite?” said Liversedge, who had been quick to size up his man and saw that he was the sort whose tongue would loosen over a glass. “No!—we haven’t got Lansdale, or Land, yet,” he went on, when his companion’s liquor had been set down at his elbow. “I suppose you can’t give me any help in that way? You used to know him in the old days, so Daverill told me.”

“All my family knew him far too well, sir, in the old days,” answered Sanderthwaite. “To our cost! Daverill would no doubt tell you that we lost our

all, or nearly so, through James Land. No, I'm afraid I can't give you any help, sir—I wish I could! I've no doubt that Land went to see poor Mr. Henry Marchmont for the purpose of stopping him from letting out all he knew about the past, and stopped him for good and all by slaying him! Of course, we knew that Land was going to Mr. Marchmont's office that evening, so——”

“Who knew?” interrupted Liversedge sharply. “You say—we knew! Who?”

“I reside, sir, with my two sisters, Mrs. Mansiter and Miss Sanderthwaite, in Bernard Street, not far off—I refer to them. We knew means that my sisters and I knew that Land was going there, and why. So,” he added, with a sly smile, “we weren't surprised when we heard what had happened—though we were horrified.”

“How did you know?” demanded Liversedge.

“The morning before his—his sad death, Mr. Henry Marchmont sent for my two sisters, sir, and they went down to see him at his office,” replied Sanderthwaite. “He told them that Land, under the name of Lansdale, was in England, and apparently now very well-to-do, and that he was coming to see him that night at eight o'clock. Of course, as you are probably aware, Mr. Henry Marchmont himself came from Clayminster, as we did, and was accordingly aware that our family had suffered through Land.”

“Yes—but why did Mr. Marchmont send for your sisters to tell them that Land was coming to see him?” asked Liversedge. He had been considerably surprised by Sanderthwaite's news, and was already beginning to wonder if Henry Marchmont had spread the news of Land's reappearance rather more widely than he had reckoned for. “What reason had he?”

“Well, sir,” replied Sanderthwaite, “if you really want to know—and I suppose one can speak freely to a gentleman of your profession—he told my sisters that, being under the impression, gained in the City the previous evening, that Land was now a wealthy man, he was going to see if he couldn't make him disgorge some, at any rate, of the money we had lost through him! That was it, sir!—and very kind indeed on poor Mr. Marchmont's part. But,” he concluded, with a deep sigh, as he picked up his replenished glass and sought consolation from it, “we know what happened, sir, we know what happened! At least—we think we do. The veil of mystery, sir, the veil of mystery! Hard to penetrate it, sir—uncommonly hard in this case! But you'll know more about that than I do!”

“Not much, I think,” said Liversedge. He remained silent a while, ruminating over what his companion had told him. Sanderthwaite's bit of news had set him off on a new tack—it seemed to him much more likely that Lansdale, if he did see Henry Marchmont alive that evening, would be far readier to purchase his silence about the past by giving him money for the

Sanderthwaites than to ensure it by murdering him. "I should like to have a little conversation with your sisters, if convenient," he went on, turning to Sanderthwaite. "Do you think there's any objection?"

"I see none, sir," replied his companion. "None at all—to you! I am just going home, sir—if you like to walk along with me——"

Liversedge went with him to Bernard Street. Sanderthwaite paused before the door of a house which, like most of them in the street, was obviously a lodging or boarding establishment, and producing a latch-key led the detective into a narrow hall. There was an open door on their left, and from the room within came the sound of a woman's voice, high pitched, vibrant with long-suppressed hatred.

"I hope James Land will hang by the neck till he's dead—dead—dead!" said the voice. "I wish he could be drawn and quartered as well as hanged! I don't care that, if he's as innocent of this last affair as you are! He wasn't innocent when he robbed me twenty-five years ago! I hope to God they'll catch him, and convict him, and hang him! If I knew he was innocent and could prove it, I wouldn't speak one syllable to save him! Damn James Land—and his daughter too! I hope she'll starve, as we've had to, more than once, through his fault!"

Sanderthwaite turned to the detective with a deprecating, apologetic smile.

“My sister Cora!” he whispered. “She cherishes a hatred of Land that seems to get worse as time goes on. But who’s with her——”

He turned into the room, and Liversedge followed close on his heels—to find Richard Marchmont standing, hat in hand, just within the doorway, looking highly uncomfortable. Facing him, on the other side of a centre table, stood a woman who, Liversedge was quick to see, had once been remarkably handsome, and whose eyes were still full of life and fire. Something had evidently happened just then to rouse her anger; her face was distorted with passion, and she took no notice of the entrance of her brother and the stranger.

“Only let me see Land in the dock!” she went on, facing Richard as if he were the object of her rage. “Only let me hear him sent off to be hanged!—I wish I could see that! Land?—I curse the very day I first saw him—he’s the cause of all this trouble from that day to this. I’d cheerfully give——”

“Come, come, Cora, my girl!” interposed Sanderthwaite, stepping forward. “You’re getting into one of your tantrums! And what’s it all about? This young gentleman——”

“Mr. Richard Marchmont!” whispered Liversedge. “Henry’s nephew! Didn’t expect to find you here, Mr. Marchmont,” he continued, turning to Richard. “I didn’t know you were thinking of coming this way.”

Richard moved towards the door.

“I came here to ask Mrs. Mansiter and Miss Sanderthwaite a question—about Mr. Lansdale, or Land,” he said. “Mrs. Mansiter is out, and I seem to have occasioned Miss Sanderthwaite some distress, so——”

He made as if to leave, but Liversedge stopped him.

“Half a minute, Mr. Marchmont!” he said. “I, too, came to ask a question of these ladies. This is their brother, the Mr. Lionel Sanderthwaite we heard old Daverill speak of last night—I just met him, accidentally. And I understand from him that his sister visited Mr. Henry Marchmont on the morning before his death. Perhaps Miss Sanderthwaite will just tell me——”

But Miss Sanderthwaite suddenly moved from behind the table and strode out of the room, still white with anger.

“I shall tell nothing—unless it’s in a witness-box, and there I’ll tell plenty!” she exclaimed. “I know who you are, you’re a detective! I saw you at the inquest. You catch James Land and put him in the dock—I’ll speak then. I want to see James Land hanged—do you hear? Hanged—and buried like a dog!”

She hurried out of the room, and Richard and Liversedge looked at each other. Lionel Sanderthwaite shut the door.

"There's no dealing with her when she's in one of these fits of rage, gentlemen!" he said. "The mere mention of Land's name is enough to set her off. She's never forgiven him! The fact is—it's a delicate subject, a very delicate subject, but my sister—you'll understand, I'm sure—my sister was—er—in love with Land!"

"What!—in the old days?" exclaimed Liversedge.

"When he ran away from Clayminster," replied Sanderthwaite. "You see, she was always going to his office about those stock and share affairs, and he was a very good-looking fellow, and she—well, she was madly in love with him! And—well, he made off without as much as a word to her! She—she was always a very strong-natured woman, Cora! And—she's got worse!"

"I'm sorry I mentioned Land's name," said Richard. "I only came to ask your sisters a question. I happened to see them talking to my uncle outside his house in Bedford Row the day of his death, and I wanted to hear from them now if he mentioned Land to them. I had no intention of hurting Miss Sanderthwaite's feelings."

"Oh, I am sure you hadn't, sir, I am sure you hadn't!" answered Sanderthwaite. "But Cora is—it's the result of years of repression and brooding, sir. However, I can answer that question—indeed, I've just answered a similar question, put to me by Mr. Liversedge. Your uncle did speak of Land to my sisters—that's why he sent for them that morning."

"Yes," remarked Liversedge. He nudged Richard's elbow. "Let's get out!" he whispered. "Nasty scene, Mr. Marchmont," he went on, when they had left the house and walked away along the street. "Lot of suppressed fury in that woman!—what?"

"Very unpleasant," said Richard. "She seemed to lose all control of herself at the mere mention of Land's name. I'd scarcely been there a moment when you arrived."

"Of course, I didn't know you knew anything about her and her sister's visit to your uncle," continued Liversedge. "You saw them with Mr. Henry Marchmont?"

"Only for a minute," said Richard. "I'd forgotten all about it until last night. It appears to be of no importance, anyway."

"I don't know!" remarked the detective. "Do you know why your uncle sent for Mrs. Mansiter and her sister? No? Well, I do—the brother told me. Your uncle told them that Land was back, a rich man, and that he, your uncle, was going to try to get money out of him—for them!"

"Well?" said Richard. "I didn't know that. But—what of it?"

"Just this!" answered Liversedge, with a meaning look. "I wonder if he

did!”

Richard paused and stared at his companion.

“Do you mean—did my uncle get money out of Land?” he exclaimed. “Why——”

“That’s it!—that’s what I do mean,” replied Liversedge. “Isn’t it much more likely that Land would ensure your uncle’s silence by giving him money—a good lot of money!—for these people, than make that silence certain, yet dangerous for himself, by murdering him? Of course! Look here! I’m beginning to think that Land, or Lansdale—same thing and one name’s as good as t’other—came to Bedford Row a bit earlier than he’d arranged, and that he did give your uncle money for the Sanderthwaites, and possibly for some other victims of twenty-five years ago—and then went away. Perhaps when Mother Capstick saw him muttering to himself—for you may safely bet it was Land that she saw—he was grumbling being bled pretty freely! Eh?”

“Then—who shot my uncle?” demanded Richard. “Who——”

“Not Land, anyway!—if that theory’s right,” said Liversedge. “Who, indeed?—we’re about as wise on that point as we were at the beginning!”

Richard looked up and down the street as if he were lost. But he was not seeing the street nor thinking of it.

“What a muddle!” he exclaimed.

“To be sure, Mr. Marchmont—a muddle!” assented Liversedge. “But these things always are muddles! What do you expect? The thing is—to muddle through them!”

“If we could only find Lansdale!” said Richard.

“Just so!—and if and when we do, there’ll probably be more muddle than ever!” remarked the detective. “However, I’ve heard nothing from headquarters for twenty-four hours, and now I’ll go along there and find out if they’ve any news. If I hear anything, Mr. Marchmont, I’ll communicate with you; if you hear anything, send for me.”

He jumped on a west-bound bus and went off, and Richard returned to Bedford Row. He had many things to attend to. Throughout all of them ran the undercurrent of anxious speculation as to the whereabouts of Angelita and her father and doubt as to Lansdale’s guilt or innocence. At the end of a week from Henry Marchmont’s death, matters had not become any clearer. The police had not discovered Lansdale’s whereabouts nor traced the man with whom he left the hotel, nor the woman in whose company Angelita had gone away. No news of any sort came to the office in Bedford Row; the police had discovered nothing; apparently no information of any description had been given to Crench. It came to this, thought Richard—Henry Marchmont was dead and buried, and there he was, successor to his wealth, as wise as ever as to the real truth about the tragedy that had forced him to step into his uncle’s shoes.

And then, suddenly, and when he was least expecting it, came news. Returning to his rooms in Jermyn Street very late one evening, he found a solitary letter in his box. He knew at the first glance that it was from Angelita; at the second he felt sure that it had been written and posted under unusual circumstances. His address had been written in pencil; the handwriting was hurried; the envelope, a cheap, common thing, was creased and thumb-marked. These outward signs made him open the letter very carefully; he observed as he did so that the postmark was that of a place he had never heard of before—Malbourne. Still keenly observant, he saw that the single sheet of paper which he drew out of the dirty envelope had been torn from some book, a cheaply printed book—was in fact a fly-leaf. And these discoveries prepared him for the opening sentences of Angelita's letter; it, too, had been hastily scrawled in pencil:

“I do not know how or when you will get this—please first thing you do, look at the postmark so that you may find out where the letter was posted. I don't know where we are. I was brought here by a woman who said that my father had been taken ill; I and my maid left with her in a car she had waiting for us and were brought a long, long way into the country. My father is not ill; he and I and my maid are prisoners. We are in a big house and have every comfort and are politely treated, but we cannot go out without being watched and the whole place seems to be guarded. I do not know why we are here. I am going to try to get this posted, somehow, but we cannot leave the grounds and they are walled in. If you can find out where we are from the postmark, try to rescue us—there are men here who frighten me. I must stop.”

There was no date on this letter; but on turning to the postmark Richard found that it had been posted at Malbourne at seven-thirty that morning. But where was Malbourne? Fortunately he had an old gazetteer throwing about on his desk, and on consulting it he found that Malbourne was a small place, a market-town, in one of the wildest, least-populated corners of the South Downs. He determined to go there at once, and late as it was set about looking out a train. There was no train that night to anywhere in the neighbourhood of Malbourne, but there was one from Victoria at six o'clock in the morning and he immediately decided to travel by it, and began making his arrangements accordingly.

The arrangements were hurried; his valet was left in ignorance of his destination; he neglected the ordinary precaution of writing to Liversedge or to Simpson; consequently when he went out of his rooms in Jermyn Street at

half-past five next morning not a soul but himself knew on what expedition he was adventuring.

He began to review matters as his train moved out into the still half-lighted country south of London. The interview with Cora Sanderthwaite had puzzled him. He had gone to Bernard Street to ask her and her sister one or two simple questions about their visit to Henry Marchmont's office, and had found Mrs. Mansiter out. As soon as he had mentioned Lansdale's name Cora had burst into a rage of white-heat fury. He had scarcely comprehended half of what she said in her rage, but it was easily to be seen that she cherished a hatred of Lansdale which nothing could appease and was all the more vindictive for having been saved up and brooded over for twenty-five years. Her brother's explanation to Liversedge and himself gave some solution of it, perhaps, but Richard was too inexperienced in the ways of the world, and too innocent of feminine characteristics to understand how love, or what passes for it, could turn to such hatred as this woman displayed. And he was still puzzling over one sentence of hers, spoken after her brother and the detective had walked in on them.

"Land?—I curse the very day I first saw him!—he's the cause of all this trouble from that day to this—to this!"

What did Cora Sanderthwaite mean by "this trouble"? Why did she reiterate the word "this"? Why did she repeat "this" yet again, with a strange emphasis? Was she referring to Henry Marchmont's murder? Why should that affect her—particularly? What trouble, of any special nature, was hanging over her, or over her and her sister and brother, through Lansdale? There had been a curiously sinister significance in all she had poured out about Lansdale which was, to say the least of it, puzzling in the extreme. And Richard began to believe that Cora Sanderthwaite knew something—something which she would conceal, in spite of her unquenchable rage against Lansdale.

However, there was little use in speculating on an angry woman's fury and what it really meant; his present job was to find Angelita. He had previously never been in that part of England in which he now found himself at an early hour of the morning—at an hour, in fact, in which Malbourne was just waking up to the new day's business. It was a very small town, an old-fashioned, picturesque place surrounded on three sides by high hills, on the other by shelving moorlands; a place that presented vast possibilities to the landscape painter and the poet, and, thought Richard somewhat ruefully, might not be an unfitting background for mystery of anything but the idyllic and pleasing sort. He could see, as he walked from the railway station into the town, that the overhanging hills were wild and solitary, with deep recesses between them; he knew from a map which he had torn from his gazetteer that the surrounding country was thinly populated, and that miles upon miles of it had scarcely any

human habitation. Angelita in her letter had said that she and her father were prisoners in a big house; Richard could see the towers, gables, chimneys of several big houses on the hillsides in the distance. Round about Malbourne, no doubt, there were many great country houses, old and new, but it was impossible to make a house-to-house visitation of them, and he had no clue whatever that would help him, beyond the postmark on the letter. He felt it out of the question to approach the local police; any application to them could only result in his having to give Lansdale's name, and he knew well enough that every police station in the country was acquainted with that, through the notices issued by Scotland Yard and the advertisements inserted wholesale by Crench. It was like looking for a needle amongst a bottle of hay; all the same, he was going through with it.

He came across a quaint, old-world hotel as he turned towards the main street of the little town, and entering, ordered breakfast. And as he ate and drank he tried to puzzle out some plan of campaign—and had hit upon nothing satisfactory by the time he had risen. Nor did the smoking of an after-breakfast pipe give him any help; it seemed to him that he could do no more than wander round, keep his eyes and ears open, and trust to luck. And suddenly luck came his way. As he stood lounging in the window of the old-fashioned parlour in which he had breakfasted he caught sight of a smart car, on the front of which was a liveried driver and a liveried footman, passing rapidly along the street beneath. The car was closed, but its windows were large and clear, and there, lolling against luxurious cushions, and reading a newspaper, Richard saw the Chancery Lane lawyer, Crench!

XI—*Mantrap Manor*

The car slowed down a few yards farther along the street, obstructed by the passage of a heavy wagon which emerged from a side lane, and Richard turned to a waiter who was clearing away his breakfast things.

“Whose car is that?” he asked. “That!—with the men in dark-green liveries?”

The waiter glanced out of the window and his eyes lighted up as at some humorous thought.

“That, sir?” he answered readily. “Oh, that’s one of the cars from what we call Mantrap Manor, sir. Several of ’em there, sir.”

“Mantrap Manor?” said Richard. “Odd name, that, isn’t it?”

“Why, it is, sir,” replied the waiter. “Sort of nickname given to it by the townfolk, you understand, sir. Real name, of course, is Malbourne Manor—just a little way outside the town, sir.”

“And why is it called Mantrap Manor, pray?” asked Richard. “Do they trap men there, or something? Anything to do with game-preserving?”

“No, sir—it’s just a nickname,” said the waiter. “Arose, I believe, from the fact that everything about it is—well, kept unusually close and private. Nobody allowed in, you understand, sir. Fine old place—very ancient, sir—ruins, and that sort of thing. Used to belong to Lord Nortongrave until a few years ago. His lordship sold it to the gentleman who lives there now, Mr. Vandelius. And after that everything was changed.”

“How?” inquired Richard.

The waiter smiled and shook his head; the gesture indicated that the subject was capable of wordy treatment.

“Changes were considerable, sir,” he answered. “There’s a very nice park, beautiful park, around the Manor. In Lord Nortongrave’s time—and it had been in that family some hundreds of years, so I’m told, sir—the townfolk were allowed to go where they liked in that park, subject of course to reasonable limits, sir. But it was—well, what you might call free and open to the Malbourne people; used to be a deal of picnicking there in those days, sir. Mr. Vandelius, he stopped all that. He built a ten-foot wall all round the park! Two and a half miles long that wall is, sir. And there’s only one gateway in it, and that has a door that’s always locked—regular stronghold, sir, like one o’ those old castles you read about. And—I’ve never seen it—I’ve never known anybody that’s been inside the park since the wall was built—but they say there’s a forty-foot moat round the house, with a drawbridge over it! That’s an ancient thing, to be sure, that moat, but it wasn’t used in his lordship’s days—

dried up, you understand, sir. This Mr. Vandelius, he had the water turned in again, and the drawbridge built, and now you can't get to the house except over the bridge, and they say that's one of those affairs that you raise and lower by machinery. Regular bastille that place, nowadays, sir, by all accounts!"

"What's the reason of such a desire for privacy?" inquired Richard.

"That I can't say, sir," replied the waiter. "Eccentricity, some people think. But private it is, sir—to the last degree! The Manor, sir, has no sort of relations with the town. His lordship, he patronised all the leading tradesmen in the place—bought everything here in the town, sir, from his beef to his beer. But this Mr. Vandelius—he's never spent one penny in Malbourne since he came here, except on the building of that wall and the gatehouses in it and over the moat; that job, to be sure, was done by a local firm. Everything's got from London, sir; meat, groceries, everything; these big London stores, sir—do a deal of harm to local tradesmen, these stores, sir. Yes, sir, not a penny ever finds its way from the Manor into this place, sir!"

"Then I imagine its owner isn't very popular?" suggested Richard.

"Quite right, sir—he isn't!" said the waiter. "Highly unpopular! But then, it don't matter to him. He's never seen, and he never sees anybody. Something of what they call a recluse, sir—like them old hermits."

"Who is he—what is he?" asked Richard.

"Well, sir, they do say he's a big man in the City—what they term a high-finance gentleman," replied the waiter. "Company-promoting, I believe, sir—but, of course, one only hears rumours. Something to do with money, anyway."

"And his name is—what did you say?" inquired Richard.

"Vandelius, sir—Mr. Louis Vandelius; that's the name painted on his carts," answered the waiter. "Louis Vandelius, Esquire; Malbourne Manor—that's it, sir."

"Foreigner, eh?" suggested Richard.

"May have been that to begin with, sir, but I understand he's a proper Englishman now—what they call naturalised, sir," said the waiter. "To be sure, he looks like a foreigner—I've only seen him once, but I did notice that much. Quite the foreigner, he looks, sir—not at all English."

"What's he like, then?" asked Richard.

"Little dark-coloured man, sir—podgy in figure and swarthy-skinned," replied the waiter. "Not unlike some of those Indian gentlemen that we see sometimes. Just once I saw him, in one of his cars. It's very seldom anybody ever does see Mr. Vandelius, though," he continued reflectively. "He never comes into the town, never uses the railway. And they say that when he goes up to London, which is only now and then, it's always in a motor-brougham

with the blinds drawn. Very retiring gentleman, sir!”

“How came you to see him?” asked Richard. He felt sure, by that time, that Mr. Louis Vandelius was not only the man who had called on Lansdale at his hotel on the evening of Henry Marchmont’s murder, but was also responsible for the ten thousand pounds reward offered through Crench, and feeling sure, he was greedy of any information he could get about his personality and habits.

“Accident, sir,” said the waiter. “I happened to be at the cross-roads just outside the town one day when his car broke down. The chauffeur couldn’t restart it anyhow, and finally they had to telephone to the Manor for another. And of course Mr. Vandelius had to get out of the broken-down car to get into the one they sent, and very angry he looked about it. I should say,” concluded the waiter, with a sage shake of his head, “I should certainly say, sir, that that was about the only occasion on which Mr. Vandelius ever has been seen by Malbourne people. He scowled frightful, sir, at those that did see him—as if he hated being looked at!”

“I should imagine he did, from all you tell me!” assented Richard, with a smile. He picked up his hat and stick and moved towards the door. “Pretty country round here, isn’t it?” he remarked.

“Oh, beautiful country, sir—beautiful!” said the waiter. “Some of the finest country in the South of England in our parts. Going to stay with us a bit, sir?”

“Very likely a day or two,” replied Richard. “To-night, at any rate.”

He went out into the hall of the hotel with the intention of booking a room at the office. But once outside the coffee-room he began to reflect on what he had just heard, and on the line of procedure he ought to take. He had no doubt that it was Vandelius in whose company Lansdale had left the Hotel Cecil; no doubt that some woman agent of his had trapped Angelita; no doubt that Angelita and Lansdale were prisoners in the mysterious house which the waiter had described. And he had no doubt either that he was going to make an attempt to get into that house, and as soon as possible, in the endeavour to find Angelita and secure her release. But—was it wise to attempt that unaided? He didn’t like what he had already heard of Vandelius; he was suspicious about the presence of Crench; there might be danger, serious danger, in a solitary undertaking. And now he was wondering to whom it would be best to turn for assistance. It was out of the question to go to the local police; he had not sufficient grounds for any application to them. If he wired to Liversedge, he would only bring down the collective weight of Scotland Yard on his venture, and officialism would thrust him aside. Yet he ought to have somebody—and suddenly he thought of the very man. Scarfe!—of course, Scarfe was the very man!—why hadn’t he thought of Scarfe at once?

Scarfe was Richard’s valet; an ex-service man, smart, reliable, quick-

witted; he had been with his master for three years, and Richard had an implicit belief in him. To be sure, Scarfe was exactly what he wanted. He walked over to the office.

“Will you book a room for myself, and another for my valet, if you please?” he asked the clerk. “He will come down this afternoon with my things. I may want the rooms for a few days, but I’ll tell you about that more definitely to-morrow.”

Then, having signed the visitors’ book, he inquired the whereabouts of the post office, and going there, dispatched a telegram of instructions to the valet as to when and where to come that afternoon and what to bring. And that done, he set out to view the outer fortifications of what the waiter had called Mantrap Manor.

His recent dealings with Liversedge had taught Richard something of the methods of detective work. His first job now, it seemed to him, was to buy a map of the district and ascertain the exact whereabouts of the place he wanted. That was easy work; there was a stationer’s shop close by the hotel and he was fortunate enough to get an ordnance map there. One glance at it showed him that Malbourne Manor was reached by a road leading south-east out of the town in the direction of the hills; from the contours of the map it evidently lay in a deep valley amongst the hills. That was fortunate; he would be able to look down upon it and its surroundings from the hillside.

Half an hour later Richard found himself confronting the boundary wall of which the talkative waiter had told him. Practical young man though he was, he marvelled at the bad taste shown in building such a fence round a beautiful old park studded with fine plantations of elm and oak. For the wall was of the sort that one associates with convict prisons—a high, solid erection of cold grey stone, hideous and formal, without a relieving feature in its aggressive rawness. Presently he saw the gateway of which he had heard; that was even more formidable than the wall—a frowning structure built in imitation of the main entrance of a Norman castle, with arrow-slits in its flanking turrets and an oaken, iron-studded door in its midst that looked as if it would never open. There was not a sign of life about that entrance, but smoke came from the chimney in its roof, and Richard knew that in all probability sharp eyes kept watch from one of its back windows along the road by which he had approached it from the town. For that reason he carefully abstained from showing any particular interest in the place; he had already ascertained from his map that close by the gateway a footpath led from the road up to the top of an adjacent hill, and now catching sight of the stile by which access was had to it he turned off and went upward. And at the end of a quarter of an hour’s stiff climb he paused, and from beneath a sheltering grove of trees looked down on the scene of his lady-love’s supposed captivity.

This superior situation enabled Richard to see everything of Malbourne Manor. He could trace the continuous line of the boundary wall all round the undulating park. He could see the moat of which the waiter had spoken—a ribbon of placid water shining coldly in the autumn sunlight. And there was the house—a dark, evidently ancient mass of masonry, one wing of which appeared to be in ruins. He saw, too, a winding, freshly gravelled road that led from the entrance he had just seen to a sort of barbican and drawbridge over the moat; it was evidently the only way by which the house could be gained. That moat, he said to himself, was the very devil of a difficulty!—how, even supposing one could get into the park, was one to cross a ditch of water that was obviously fairly wide and probably pretty deep? But as he debated that question, moving about the hill-top and viewing the manor from various angles, he caught sight of what was evidently a rustic bridge, spanning the moat at a corner of the pleasure-grounds—that, at any rate, he thought, could be successfully crossed.

After making a complete circuit of the park by way of the surrounding hills, Richard went back to Malbourne. Just before reaching the hotel, and as he was considering the various points of his plan of campaign, a sudden notion in connection with his proposed venture sent him into a boot store, where he asked for a pair of rubber-soled tennis shoes. There was a man in there who was engaged in trying on a pair of new boots; Richard gave him a passing glance; had he noticed him more particularly, he could have seen that this man bestowed on him a sharp, inquiring look when he asked for rubber-soled goods at that time of the year, and subsequently viewed him over with what any observant person would have considered to be unusual interest. And when Richard went away, carrying his purchase under his arm, this man, making an excuse to the shopkeeper, followed him out on to the pavement, and thence watched him into his hotel. But Richard saw nothing of this; he was too much occupied with his own concerns to pay any attention to the doings of strangers.

Scarfe arrived before the end of the afternoon; Richard bade him get his evening meal early and be ready to go out with him at seven o'clock. By that time he himself had dined, put on his rubber-soled shoes, and was ready and impatient for action. He led Scarfe out of the town, and once on the way to Malbourne Manor told him what he was after. With Scarfe's aid he could climb the boundary wall, and that done he must trust to luck. But—if he was not back at the hotel by eleven o'clock, then Scarfe was to seek out the local superintendent of police and tell him all about it.

Scarfe was upset. By what his master had told him, he said, he judged that the place harboured a gang of queer people who might be ugly to deal with. Wouldn't it have been better to go armed?

"No!" said Richard. "I shall probably knock at the front door, and send in a

polite request to see the master. No show of force, Scarfe! Don't you get nervy—but do what I've said, if I'm not back by eleven.”

Scarfe observed that all the mischief might have been done by that time. But he was a man of obedience, and presently, in the darkness, he helped his master to scale the wall at a point which Richard had selected in the morning, and that done went away, shaking his head: Scarfe's notion, as an old soldier, would have been to go with an automatic pistol in one hand and a bomb in the other.

Richard had no thought of bombs or pistols. He made his way across the park to the narrow rustic bridge. In a dead silence he got across it. He crept on towards a part of the house wherein were many lighted windows. And suddenly as he stepped into a winding path that ran through a thick shrubbery a flashlight was turned full on him and his surroundings, and he found himself confronted by a couple of stalwart men who covered him with unpleasantly steady revolvers.

XII—Mr. Louis Vandelius

Richard immediately recognised one of these men as the man he had seen trying on boots that afternoon at the store whereat he had purchased his rubber-soled shoes. But this man remained silent; so did his similarly armed companion. It was a third man, big and formidable as the others, who advanced out of the darkness and spoke.

“Who are you, and what are you doing here?” he demanded sternly. “Answer!”

“I came to call upon Mr. Vandelius,” said Richard promptly. “Why are you threatening me with firearms?”

“There is only one authorised way into this park, and you didn’t come in by that!” retorted the man. “How did you come in? Don’t trifle now, if you don’t want a bullet through you! We stand no nonsense here!”

There was a curiously grim menacing note in his inquisitor’s voice which convinced Richard that these were not idle threats, and he determined to tell the truth.

“I climbed over the park wall,” he began. “I——”

“And that you couldn’t do without assistance!” interrupted the man. “Who helped you?”

“My man-servant,” replied Richard.

“Where is he?”

“Gone back to the town. If you will let me explain——”

“I’m asking you to explain all along! Answer my first question!—Who are you, and what are you doing here?”

“May I give you my card?” asked Richard. “You will see——”

“Keep your hands where they are!” commanded the man. “You may be armed, for all I know. Now—where is your card?”

“Left-hand top-pocket of my waistcoat,” growled Richard. “I’m not armed!”

“That’s well for you,” said the other. He drew out his captive’s card-case, found a card, and held it to the light. “Mr. Richard Marchmont, eh?” he read aloud. “Jermyn Street. Any relation of Henry Marchmont of Bedford Row.”

“His nephew,” said Richard.

The man put the card in his own pocket and returned the card-case to its former receptacle. But the discovery of Richard’s name and his asserted relationship with Henry brought no modification in the sternness of his tone and manner.

“Well—and what do you want here?” he asked again. “Quick, now!”

"I've told you—I came to see Mr. Vandelius," replied Richard.

"People who come to see Mr. Vandelius don't climb over walls, and they don't wear tennis shoes on damp autumn nights! If you wanted to see Mr. Vandelius, why didn't you seek admission in the ordinary way, at the entrance gate?"

"Because I didn't think I should get it, if you must know," said Richard. "So I came in after my own fashion!"

"And at your own peril! Why do you want to see Mr. Vandelius?"

"I want to ask him if he can tell me anything of the whereabouts and the safety of Mr. Lansdale and his daughter——"

"What business is that of yours?" interrupted the man sharply. "Say!"

"Not to you!" retorted Richard. "To your master, if you like—if Mr. Vandelius is your master!"

"You will not see Mr. Vandelius, nor will he know you are here unless you answer my question," said the man. "Answer plainly—is there anyone who knows you're here, except your man-servant?"

"No!—no one!" asserted Richard.

"You have not been seeing the local police?—talking to them——"

"I've never been near the local police. No one knows I'm here, I tell you, except my valet. He won't say a word to anyone—if I am safely back at the hotel by eleven o'clock. If I am not——"

"Well—what then?"

"Then he'll go to the local police superintendent, and tell him that I'm here, and why!" answered Richard. "So that's that! You'd better let me see your master."

The man hesitated a moment; then he seemed to make up his mind.

"Very well!" he said. "Follow me! These men will walk alongside you; you'll remember that you're in their custody. This way!"

He turned swiftly; the bright light was extinguished; Richard, only just able to see the leader's figure in the semi-darkness, found himself threading an intricate path which led through thick shrubberies towards the house. Presently the four men emerged from these upon a lawn; there the light grew better, and Richard saw that they were approaching the lighted part of the long range of buildings. But as they drew closer, the leader turned along another path; this led to the ruins which Richard had seen that morning from the hillside. Through a doorway in them they passed into what appeared to be a long vaulted passage; at the farther end an obviously modern entrance confronted them. And here the man who had done all the talking turned on his prisoner.

"I can't say if Mr. Vandelius will see you personally or not," he said in his usual stern accents. "But he'll say what is to be done with you. You'll wait here!—and remember that you're in charge of these men. If you attempt to

make off, or anything of that sort, all the worse for you! I've warned you before, though, that we stand no nonsense!"

Richard's blood began to stir in his veins.

"Look you here!" he said suddenly. "I've told you of my orders to my man. If I'm not back at my hotel, safe and sound, by eleven o'clock, you'll have the local police in this place before midnight! Now you go and tell that to your master—and be damned to you!"

The man made no answer. He passed through a door and closed it behind him, and Richard, seeing an antique chair close by, sat down, drew out his cigarette case and began to smoke, paying no more attention to his guards than if they were stone images. Five minutes, ten minutes passed; then the door was suddenly opened again and his interrogator looked out and motioned to him.

"Come this way!" he said peremptorily. "Alone!"

Richard rose promptly enough and passing through the door found himself in another long passage, which, from its furnishings, obviously belonged to the modern part of the house. His guide, without further word to him, walked swiftly along this until he came to a door at the extreme end; this he opened without any preliminary knock, and standing aside, motioned Richard to enter. And Richard obeyed his gesture, not without a sudden quickening of his pulses—he was, at any rate, within the secret centres of this strange place at last, and perhaps sooner than he had thought to be.

The room was a small one; evidently a luxuriously fitted smoking-room; the atmosphere was heavy with the aromatic odour of choice cigars. There were three men in it, grouped around a fire of oak logs; cigar boxes, decanters, glasses, were ranged on a table near them. Two of these men Richard recognised at once as Crench, the Chancery Lane solicitor, and Garner, his friend: each gave him a nod of recognition to which he made a formal, silent response. He knew them for nothing but subordinates; his whole attention was given at once to the third man, whom he felt to be the controlling spirit in what had already seemed the aspect of an extraordinary and perhaps sinister mystery—Mr. Louis Vandelius.

Mr. Vandelius sat on the left-hand side of his bright fire, in a deep easy chair; a short, stoutish man, dark of hair and complexion, with a pair of peculiarly bright black eyes, a high white forehead, and an expression, at that moment, of interest and curiosity. He rose slightly from his seat as Richard entered, bowed politely, and waved a slender hand to a chair exactly opposite his own.

"Mr. Richard Marchmont?" he said in a low, musical voice, and with great suavity of manner. "Please to be seated. I think you are already acquainted with these gentlemen, Mr. Marchmont?—Mr. Crench; Mr. Garner."

"I have met both gentlemen: they know well who I am," replied Richard.

He took the chair which Vandelius indicated, and looked frankly at the man whose house he had invaded. "So," he continued, "I dare say they have given you some explanation of my presence here."

Vandelius smiled, showing a set of very fine white teeth.

"I should prefer to hear your own, Mr. Marchmont," he said. "I understand from my servants that you came in rather an irregular fashion, eh?—climbed the wall, I think? That——"

"There was no other course open to me," interrupted Richard. "I believed—I may have been wrong—that if I sent in my card you wouldn't see me. And _____"

"Quite wrong!" said Vandelius. "I would have seen you. Well, I see you now. What is the matter, Mr. Marchmont? But I am forgetting my duties—a glass of wine, now?"

"Thank you, no, if you don't mind," replied Richard. "Mr. Vandelius," he went on steadily, "I want to ask you a plain question. Are Mr. Lansdale and his daughter under your roof?"

Vandelius smiled again.

"They are, Mr. Marchmont," he replied. "They are in my house."

"As prisoners?"

"Say guests, Mr. Marchmont, guests! Prisoners, no!"

"I shall be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Vandelius! I received a letter from Miss Lansdale late last night in which she told me that she and her father were prisoners in a house the whereabouts of which she was ignorant of. She suggested I might ascertain her whereabouts from the postmark. I saw that the postmark was Malbourne. I came here; I chanced to see Mr. Crench in one of your cars. I made some guarded inquiries—which, Mr. Vandelius, have so far respected your privacy—and I came to the conclusion that Miss Lansdale and her father were here. I want to know if Miss Lansdale is—safe?"

Vandelius had nodded his head at various points of this speech; he now nodded it with an expression of indulgence.

"Miss Lansdale is quite safe," he said. "As safe as if she were under her own roof, or, rather, far safer! But, Mr. Marchmont, since you are so frank, I too will be candid. What is your particular interest in this young lady?"

"I have no objection to telling you that," answered Richard. "Miss Lansdale and I are engaged to be married."

Vandelius bowed his head sympathetically.

"Is her father aware of it?" he asked.

"He may be now—since he and his daughter have been thrown together here," replied Richard. "He was not—that is, he wasn't at the time of his disappearance."

Vandelius remained silent a moment, watching his visitor.

"If what one reads in the newspapers is correct, Mr. Marchmont," he replied suddenly, "Mr. Lansdale is suspected, by police and public, of having murdered your uncle!"

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Richard.

"It would be a very nasty thing for you to believe if you are in love with his daughter—who is a very nice, beautiful girl!" observed Vandelius, again showing his teeth. "But I should be greatly delighted and infinitely relieved if you could give me some grounds for not believing it! As the thing has been worked up by the press and the police, there is something very like a *prima facie* case against this very unfortunate Lansdale!"

"But you don't believe it yourself?" said Richard bluntly. "Do you?"

Vandelius waved his cigar.

"I am not often asked what I believe, Mr. Marchmont!" he replied, smiling. "If I am, I remain silent. Evidence is evidence—facts are facts. I believe you have a proverb, you practical English people, to the effect that facts are ugly things. Sometimes, yes, they are—very ugly!"

"Why is Mr. Lansdale hidden?" demanded Richard. "That's no good! It's only made the police consider him guilty. Innocent men don't hide!"

"Yet you consider him innocent?" said Vandelius. "Well, my friend, what you mean is that innocent men ought not to have any necessity to hide. But sometimes a wholly innocent man—as in this case—is wrongly suspect. Then it is a question of expediency as to whether he should hide himself, or let his friends hide him—or remain in the full light, eh?"

"I say—the full light!" said Richard.

"Um—yes!—but perhaps you have never been locked up in a police cell, or confined in a detention prison!" remarked Vandelius good-humouredly. "You have not much chance of doing anything for yourself in those places, and if you are in them, your friends can't do much for you, either, Mr. Marchmont. In Mr. Lansdale's case—somebody had to do something!"

"I conclude that it is you who offer that mysterious reward of ten thousand pounds, through Mr. Crench?" suggested Richard.

Vandelius waved his cigar again—unconcernedly.

"Well, between us, as gentlemen, yes, Mr. Marchmont," he replied. "You see, if the real murderer of your uncle—please accept my sincere condolences on the sad fate of so estimable a man as I am sure Mr. Henry Marchmont was!—if, I say, we can detect and convict the really guilty man, why, then, Lansdale is cleared! He steps out into the daylight—free!"

"That is your object in having him here, and in offering that reward, then?" demanded Richard, going to his point.

Vandelius affected a momentary interest in his cigar. After carefully removing the ash from it, he looked across at his visitor with a sudden

confidential smile.

“Mr. Marchmont,” he said, “I know you—as a cricketer! I have seen you play cricket—several times—at Lord’s and at the Oval. All cricketers are men of honour! The cricket field is the nursery of honourable conduct; it breeds gentlemen. So—I will take you into my confidence—the confidence of Louis Vandelius!—I will tell you why Lansdale is here, why his daughter is here _____”

A slight warning cough from Crench interrupted him. The lawyer was shaking his head.

“I’m not sure that that’s advisable, Mr. Vandelius,” he said hurriedly. “I don’t think I’d_____”

But Vandelius frowned and waved his hand with a peremptory gesture.

“Mr. Marchmont is engaged to Miss Lansdale!” he said. “I decide to give Mr. Marchmont my confidence!”

XIII—Mr. Vandelius Explains

It was very evident to Richard, who from the first had endeavoured to keep a sharp eye on all three men, that Vandelius' proposal was by no means welcome to his two companions. Although Crench made no further effort to voice his objection, he showed his disapproval by facial expressions and shakings of his head; a scowl on Garner's face and an abrupt movement of his body showed that he was in agreement with Crench. But at Vandelius's next words, both men changed in demeanour, and turned on Richard with obvious suspense in their eyes—for the words constituted an all-important question.

"That is," continued Vandelius, with one of his suave smiles, and watching his visitor more closely than ever, "that is, if Mr. Marchmont gives me his word of honour that my confidence is not abused. In plain language, what I now say to you, Mr. Marchmont—contingent upon your promise—is not to be repeated to anyone. It is to be regarded as being something between you and me?"

"Your friends here sharing in it," suggested Richard.

"They are already acquainted with it," replied Vandelius. "Naturally!—or they would not be here. I propose to take you into my confidence, Mr. Marchmont, because you tell me you are engaged to Lansdale's daughter, and this is really for Lansdale's sake. Being in love with Miss Lansdale, you naturally desire her father's safety—you wish to see him cleared of a charge which the police have brought against him——"

"Not quite that, sir!" interrupted Crench. "The police, up to now, have not brought any charge against Mr. Lansdale. If they had, I am afraid you would be in something of a delicate position—possibly liable for what is called comforting and assisting a suspected person. All that the police are anxious to find Lansdale for is that they may ask him to give some account of his doings with Henry Marchmont after their meeting at the dinner in the City—whether he actually did go to Bedford Row or not, and if he did, what happened there? There has been no warrant issued against Lansdale—at least no warrant had been issued when I left town this morning."

Vandelius waved his hand as if to brush aside the solicitor's interruption and remarks.

"Legal quips and quiddities don't interest me," he said. "That is all in your domain, friend Crench. We have done nothing against the law that I know of. Mr. Lansdale and his daughter are my guests—I don't know Mr. Lansdale as a criminal fleeing from justice! I am about, for his sake—and his daughter's sake—to tell Mr. Marchmont why they are here. That is, if Mr. Marchmont

gives me his word of honour that he will respect my confidence?"

"I can't do anything else," said Richard. "So—I shall!"

Vandelius smiled, nodded at the other men, threw away his cigar, and leaning forward in his chair began to address Richard as if he was an audience, or a judge, or a jury, to whom it was necessary to elaborate and to explain—with a liberal use of gesture.

"I will begin then, Mr. Marchmont," he said, "by informing you that Mr. Lansdale has for many years lived in South America, where he has done much good work in aiding in the development of various industries and natural resources; he is well known over there, and there he has amassed a very considerable fortune. He has very large business interests. He has and has had a great deal to do with options and concessions. Lately he came to England in connection with a most important deal of that nature—the sale of and taking up of an option. He desired to find a financial man, a capitalist of undoubted substance. He found me!"

Vandelius paused as if to let this information sink deep into his listener's mind. Getting nothing from Richard in response beyond a steady stare of attention, he went on.

"He found me!—Louis Vandelius. With me he opened negotiations. The negotiations involve, represent, an enormous sum of money. If they come to a successful conclusion, Lansdale adds greatly to his already considerable fortune; I vastly increase mine! Therefore, as is natural, we are supremely anxious that the negotiations should be successful. And they are going on most successfully, here in London, and away across the sea, in a certain city in South America, by constant interchange of cablegrams, when a most unpleasant diversion occurs—Lansdale meets your uncle!"

Richard was beginning to wonder if the man before him had ever been an actor, or if he amused himself by writing dramatic stuff, or if he was merely one of those people who cannot help showing dramatic effect in speech and action, for the more he talked the more dramatic he was getting—voice, eyes, shoulders, fingers were all being brought into active play.

"He meets your uncle!" Vandelius continued, throwing out his hands. "Lansdale meets Henry Marchmont! A calamity! For Lansdale has a past! A past!—and Henry Marchmont, the upright, matter-of-fact, call-a-spade-a-spade solicitor, not likely to forget or to overlook anything that he objects to in his severe, English mode of regarding things, is connected with it. Year before, previous to his successful career in another country, Lansdale was Land, a dealer in shares in an obscure country town in which Henry Marchmont was a young solicitor. Something goes wrong—there is a great smash—Land's clients lose money—much money—some of them all their money! Land goes—what you call makes himself scarce—he is there to-day, and to-morrow he

isn't! And then, of course, many of these unfortunate people say he robbed and defrauded them!"

He spread out his hands again and shrugged his shoulders, looking at Richard as if to appeal to him. But Richard remained silent, stolid as ever.

"Of course, it is what they would say!" continued Vandelius, with a grimace. "They always do! Yet they are generally wrong, these people—suffering, eh? from bitter disappointment. In this case, I am assured—Lansdale gives me his word!—they were wrong. He robbed nobody; defrauded nobody! The people were the victims of their own gambling mania—they wanted to get rich quick—they had a fever for certain things—they would buy—he was but an agent. Perhaps he made a mistake in not what you call facing the music—but he didn't. He fled, overseas. Then, twenty-five years later, he comes back, a rich man, engaged in a stupendous financial deal, and, unexpectedly, he runs his head right against the past in the shape of Henry Marchmont, the respectable, uncompromising, stern English man-of-law!"

Again the spread-out hands, the dramatic appeal—and again Richard's watchful silence.

"Well!" continued Vandelius. "A calamity! A catastrophe! Why? Because the stupendous deal is on the very eve of completion; a few days, perhaps a few hours, and it will be carried through, and Lansdale will be richer than ever, and—incidentally!—so, even more so, will Vandelius! But—Henry Marchmont? Henry Marchmont is—a man of probity, and a severe man. Suppose Henry Marchmont voices it abroad in the City that Lansdale is an absconder, that he has a bad record, that his past is shady? Such news flies round the City like wild-fire. Suppose Henry Marchmont does this?—quicker than it takes to tell, the news reaches the little group of financiers with whom Vandelius and Lansdale are dealing, and the grand *coup* is—well, if not off, delayed, possibly endangered! What is to be done? Fortunately Lansdale thinks quickly. He implores Henry Marchmont to give him an interview at his office whereat he may explain. Henry Marchmont consents!—the interview is arranged. On the following evening, Lansdale is to wait upon Henry Marchmont!"

"Did he go?" asked Richard.

It was the first time he had opened his lips since Vandelius began his story, and the tone in which he asked this apparently simple question was quiet enough. But in reality he was conscious that he was now about to hear the truth, and under his stolid demeanour his nerves were tense with anxiety.

"He went!" replied Vandelius. "He saw Henry Marchmont. Henry Marchmont was iron! Obdurate, adamant, immovable! He refused to have anything to do with Lansdale. He delivered to Lansdale an ultimatum. If Lansdale wished to clear himself of the matter of twenty-five years ago let him

repair to the town whence he fled, and do it there—publicly! Otherwise, he, Henry Marchmont, would take it upon himself to let the financial world know that Lansdale, the now successful, was identical with Land, the defaulter! A hard man!—implacable!”

“Well?” asked Richard.

“Lansdale leaves Henry Marchmont. Lansdale goes away, much upset. He feels that Henry Marchmont is unjust, harsh, for he, Lansdale, did not cheat or rob anybody—he was the victim of circumstance as much as the people who employed his services. He returns to his hotel. He is very unhappy! He feels broken; he could shed tears. And at that stage in walks Vandelius! Vandelius is a man of vast human sympathies—Lansdale, earlier in the day, has told Vandelius of the unfortunate *rencontre* with Henry Marchmont, and of the proposed interview, and Vandelius has now come to hear how the interview went off. Lansdale tells him—tells him, moreover, that he fears—yes, fears!—that Henry Marchmont will denounce him!—yes, perhaps to the police! What is to be done? For both Vandelius and Lansdale must consider this great deal, this stupendous affair, papers relating to which are on the way, may arrive in a few days, next day, perhaps are already in the postman’s wallet, awaiting delivery! It is frightful; it is nerve-destroying; something must be done. They talk—quickly! Finally, it seems to Vandelius that the thing to do is to remove Lansdale to a place of safety where nothing can occur to prevent him from attaching his necessary signature to those arriving papers. It is done!—Vandelius carries Lansdale away!”

“To Malbourne Manor,” remarked Richard in his driest tones. “Just so, Mr. Vandelius! And next day you got Miss Lansdale here!”

“By a little, quite kindly ruse,” smiled Vandelius. “In her own interests—and her father’s.”

“Don’t think it was very kind to tell her that her father was ill,” said Richard. “That——”

“My good young gentleman, her father was ill!” retorted Vandelius. “He was very poorly indeed for several days—so upset had he been by your uncle’s manner towards him. He is not well now, but he has every comfort and attention—so has his daughter. And I am doing all I can to clear him of any suspicion. Vandelius acts! Figure to yourself, Mr. Marchmont, my predicament! The very day after I carry Lansdale away to this quiet country retreat, I hear that your uncle, the Henry Marchmont we have talked of, has been found murdered!—must have been murdered very soon after Lansdale left him—and that suspicion has already fallen upon Lansdale, of whom Henry Marchmont has told his managing clerk! What a state of things; what a mess! I spring into action!—I move!—I instruct friend Crench here to offer a reward, a big reward—by finding the real murderer we will clear Lansdale. Get the right

man, and all suspicion against the wrong one falls flat!”

“Has Mr. Crench had any luck?—any response?” asked Richard.

The solicitor shook his head.

“Not a letter, not a word!” he replied. “Nothing has turned up yet.”

“But it is early,” remarked Vandelius hastily. “There must be somebody; there must be something. And I am going to send down to this town of the long ago—Clayminster, eh?—to have that matter cleared up—Lansdale must be set right!”

Richard rose to his feet.

“I’m much obliged to you, Mr. Vandelius,” he said. “I shall respect your confidence, of course. Now I want to know if I may see Mr. Lansdale and his daughter?”

He was conscious of a murmur of disapproval from Crench, and a restless movement on the part of Garner as he made this request, but Vandelius showed no sign of any intention to refuse it. On the contrary he nodded his assent.

“Yes,” he said. “I don’t see any reason why you should not, Mr. Marchmont. It seems to me that we are what you call all in the same boat—you don’t believe that Lansdale murdered your uncle, and you are anxious to establish his innocence, and so am I, so there is a common purpose between us _____”

“Mr. Marchmont has promised not to tell anything of what has passed between you and him, sir,” interrupted Crench, “but there’s no bond of secrecy entered into as regards what might pass between him and Lansdale. Mr. Marchmont, to my knowledge, is in close touch with a Scotland Yard man, Liversedge. Now——”

Before Crench could say more, and as Richard was on the point of interrupting him, a sudden knock at the door prefaced the entrance of the man who had arrested and catechised him in the park, and who now inquired in a low voice if he might speak to Mr. Garner. Garner left the room with him; he was scarcely over the threshold when he looked in again, and hurriedly asked Vandelius and the solicitor to step outside. That some event of a probably important nature had happened, Richard felt sure from the expression on Garner’s face; what it might be he could only guess at. Perhaps the papers of which Vandelius spoke had arrived; perhaps some information had come for Crench; perhaps . . .

It suddenly struck him that the three men were a long time in coming back; several minutes had gone by, several more went, and still he had the room to himself. At last the door opened, and the man who had called Garner out came in again, alone.

“Mr. Vandelius sends you his compliments, sir,” he said in tones which

were now as polite as formerly they had been menacing, “and regrets that he cannot see you again this evening, nor introduce you to Mr. Lansdale, owing to important business. He will be much obliged if you will tell me where you can be found in Malbourne, so that he can communicate with you to-morrow morning.”

“I am staying at the Malbourne Arms,” said Richard. He saw that there was nothing else to be done, and no other answer to be given. “How do I get out?” he went on. “Not, of course, as I came in!”

He said this with a smile, but the man to whom he spoke looked as if he never smiled. He answered that a servant would show the way; and led Richard to a footman who presently let him out of the house, and told him how to pass through the lodge at the end of the great drive. And without further adventure Richard went away, and returned to the hotel, greatly to the delight of Scarfe, who was hanging restlessly about the portals, and in due time he retired to bed, more satisfied in mind than he had been for many days. He half-expected to dream of moats and ruins and all the rest of it, but he dreamt of nothing, and was sound asleep when a loud knocking on his door preluded his sudden waking in a grey dawn to see Liversedge standing at his bedside.

XIV—*Through the Lady's Maid*

Richard, like most men who spend the greater part of life in open-air pursuits, was a sound sleeper, and not apt to awake very readily. But he awoke speedily enough at sight of the detective and his wits came to him with surprising readiness.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed as he struggled out of his blankets. "What are you doing here?"

"I might have asked that question of you, Mr. Marchmont, a few hours ago," replied Liversedge, with a laugh. "But I've the advantage of you!—I know why you're here."

"How did you find out I was here?" asked Richard.

"Heard of it from the curious gentleman up at the Manor," answered the detective. He crossed over to the window, drew up the blinds, and returning, perched himself at a corner of the bed. "Strange man, that, Mr. Marchmont, very strange!"

"You mean Vandelius?"

"Nobody else!—oddest chap I've come across of late, if ever!"

"So you've been at the Manor?"

"Been there all night!—that is, since just before midnight, until an hour ago. Three of us. The other two are up there now—I came down to see you."

Richard got out of bed and consulted his watch. Nearly seven o'clock. He rang the bell.

"I suppose you've got a tale to tell, Liversedge," he remarked as he got into a dressing-gown. "We'll have some tea. Or would you prefer coffee?"

"Tea for me," said the detective. "Weakness for tea of a morning—and I've had a stiff night. Yes," he went on when Richard had ordered tea from the chambermaid who answered his summons, "I've some rather interesting news to give you. But—how came you to strike this place, Mr. Marchmont? You'd no idea of it, I think, when I saw you last."

Richard told him of Angelita's letter and of his subsequent discoveries and eventual interview with Vandelius, but nothing of what Vandelius had said.

"Aye, well!" remarked Liversedge. "I suppose you were in a hurry to do what you could for the young lady, but you ought to have let us know at the Yard—you might have run yourself into serious danger. However, this man Vandelius, queer though he is, doesn't seem to be of the sort that would resort to criminal practices in any shape—his foible appears to be in a mistaken notion that his money will enable him to do anything! Sad error, that!—as he'll find out!"

“How came you here?” asked Richard. “That’s more to the point—my point!”

“More interesting, eh?” laughed Liversedge. “Well, I’m going to tell you. I happened to be at headquarters last night, rather late, and I was just thinking of going home when word was brought in that a young man had called who said that he wanted to see somebody in connection with the disappearance of Mr. Lansdale and his daughter. He was brought in to see me and one or two more of our men who chanced to be there. He turned out to be a superior sort of young fellow, a clerk in some West End establishment—name of Charles Summers. Summers had a romantic tale to tell. He said that he was the fiancé (funny what grand phrases these people use so glibly, Mr. Marchmont!) of Miss Amy Meecher. Miss Amy Meecher, he went on to explain, was, and is, maid, lady’s maid, to Miss Lansdale. Miss Lansdale engaged Miss Meecher’s services, through an agency, soon after she, Miss Lansdale, came with her father to the Hotel Cecil; it was one condition of service that Mr. Summers, as Miss Meecher’s sweetheart, should be allowed to visit Miss Meecher at the hotel. Mr. Summers availed himself of this privilege pretty regularly, I fancy. And he appears, from a comparison of dates, to have been there on the evening on which Lansdale disappeared—a few hours before that disappearance took place. On that occasion Miss Meecher said nothing to him that indicated any movement on the part of her mistress or her mistress’s father; on the contrary, she fixed up an appointment with Summers to call next evening, when Miss Lansdale was going to dine out somewhere, to call and take her to the theatre. Summers called—only to hear that Miss Lansdale and her maid had gone off with an unknown lady that morning, hurriedly, and had never returned!”

At this point of the story, the chambermaid entered with the tea; when Liversedge had got his cup in his hand he went on:

“Summers, disappointed, went home to his lodgings, expecting to find a letter of explanation from Miss Meecher. He didn’t find anything then; he didn’t receive anything later. He called at the hotel two or three times—no news of Miss Meecher or her young mistress had come to hand. Then he began to read things in the paper—about the disappearance of Lansdale, and Lansdale’s connection with Henry Marchmont, and about the murder in Bedford Row, and he got decidedly anxious and uneasy about his sweetheart. But he seems to be a diffident and nervous sort of chap, and didn’t like, he says, to apply to the police—besides, he was hoping, every day, to hear from Miss Meecher. And at last, yesterday evening, he did hear from her!”

Richard nodded. It had been yesterday evening when he, too, heard from his sweetheart. He began to put two and two together. Evidently these two young women, immured at Malbourne Manor, had joined wits in the endeavour to get into touch with their young men—and had succeeded.

“Yes?” he said. “Deeply interesting, Liversedge. And what said Meecher?”

“A lot more than your young lady said to you, Mr. Marchmont!” replied Liversedge, with a laugh. “She must have taken a bit of time over her letter—I read it, but, of course, we gave it back to Summers. She told how she and Miss Lansdale were got away from the Hotel Cecil and brought a good way into the country to a big country house where Lansdale was, how they were exceedingly well treated in the matter of lodging, food, and all creature comforts, but were virtually prisoners, not allowed to go out except under surveillance, nor to see newspapers, nor to send letters, nor to communicate with servants except those detailed to look after them. However, this is evidently a smart girl, gifted with resource and unusual power of observation. As maid to Miss Lansdale, she enjoyed a certain amount of liberty inside the house, and in the way of fetching and carrying, I suppose, and she noted a feature of its arrangements—namely, that at seven o’clock every evening a footman cleared a letter box in the hall, placed the letters, without inspection, in a bag, and handed the bag to a page who immediately went off to the post with it. So she announced in her letter that she should watch her opportunity and slip her letter into that box—presumably, from what you tell me, she subsequently did the same thing for her young mistress.”

“The letters appear to have been delivered about the same time,” agreed Richard. “Well—what more?”

“This: Meecher said in her letter to Summers that she didn’t know the name of the house or place in which they were confined: she suggested that Summers should look at the postmark—as in the case of your letter. Fortunately, the postmark was quite clear—very often, as you know, they’re illegible—and he saw it was Malbourne. And so, Mr. Marchmont, he did just what you ought to have done, you know, and didn’t do!—he came straight to us.”

“I’d reasons,” said Richard. “I didn’t want you to interfere!”

“Very kind of you, I’m sure!” laughed the detective. “Though I don’t see your reasons!”

“I thought that you’d probably arrest Lansdale, if you found him there,” said Richard. “I don’t want him to be arrested!”

“Well, of course, we have found Lansdale,” said Liversedge. “But I don’t know what we’ll do with him, yet! What we really want with Lansdale, at first, you know—I won’t say what may happen later—is to get information out of him; we want him to explain himself, and tell us things. However, I was telling you what took place last night. After we’d heard all this from Summers and seen Meecher’s letter, and had a consultation at headquarters, and got instructions, I and two of my associates chartered a fast car and came down here. We struck this place just after eleven o’clock, and of course made first

for the local police. We roused out the superintendent, and in five minutes were sure that the house we wanted to find was Malbourne Manor, the residence of a more or less mysterious person named Vandelius. So, reinforced by the superintendent and one of his sergeants, we set off there, and reached it before midnight.”

“How did you get in?” asked Richard. “The place is semi-fortified!”

“We got in easily enough,” replied the detective. “There was a bit of delay at the gateway while the gatekeeper, who had, of course, to be roused, telephoned up to the house, but Vandelius evidently made no bones about our being admitted. He himself met us at his front door—a queer, strange character, I should say! Of course, we’d a talk with him; he was very anxious to know how we’d got there. We didn’t tell him, you may be sure. He inquired if we knew anything about you—we knew nothing, as you know. Then he told us you were here, at this hotel, and that you’d had an interview with him last night, and that he’d told you frankly why Lansdale was here, and he went on to say that he’d be equally frank with us.”

“And was he?” asked Richard.

“As far as one can tell, I should say he was,” answered Liversedge. “It came to this—that he brought Lansdale here until this mess could be cleared out of the way and their business carried to a satisfactory conclusion—which, I understand, was done last night . . .”

“Eh?” exclaimed Richard, interrupting him sharply. “Last night? How? It hadn’t been done when I was there!”

“Well, I didn’t pay much attention to it,” said the detective. “It was something about some papers of vast importance which had to be signed by Lansdale and Vandelius—relating to some huge deal in South America. I gathered that they arrived last night, by a special messenger from Southampton, and Lansdale and Vandelius signed them—that, I imagine, was why Crench, the solicitor, was there.”

“Um!” remarked Richard. “So that’s carried through!—but, after all, Liversedge, that had nothing to do with your job, eh?”

“Well, not so far as we know, you know,” agreed Liversedge. “And as I said to Vandelius. Of course, our job is to ascertain what Lansdale had to do, if anything, with the murder of your uncle. I pointed that out to Vandelius. Then he told us that it’s he who’s at the back of that offer of ten thousand pounds reward. But you know that?”

“Yes,” assented Richard. “I do, now!”

“Well, his notion—Vandelius’s—is that by getting at the real culprit you’ll free the supposed one—if Lansdale is that. But, as I immediately pointed out to him and Crench, we, the police, haven’t had a single approach in respect of that offer, and I said that I didn’t believe Crench had. Crench admitted he

hadn't! So, as I went on to urge them, it comes to this—we must regard Lansdale as the only person known to us at present whose doings on that evening . . . eh?"

"I see your point," said Richard. "Well?"

"I told him that I must see Lansdale, and at once," continued Liversedge. "And before they could warn him that I was there and who and what I was!"

"Rather drastic, though!" observed Richard, with a gesture of disapproval. "He's a sick man!"

"Oh, I was considerate enough about it, Mr. Marchmont," retorted the detective. "I always make allowance for other people's feelings. I saw the daughter first—very nice, sensible young lady, that, sir!—and prepared her. She saw my point at once, and she took me in to see her father. Not at all the sort of man I expected to see, Mr. Marchmont! I should say Lansdale's nervous system is—well, I should say it's been pretty well tried in his time. However, I saw him!—and I just, as considerately as I could, explained what I wanted, adding that I was obliged to intrude on him there and then, in pursuance of my duty, and that if he'd just answer the one question I wanted to put to him I'd withdraw—for that time, at any rate."

"What question did you put to him?" asked Richard.

"I asked him if he could tell me if he knew anything about the murder of your uncle and if he would tell me whether or not he visited him at Bedford Row on the evening on which the murder took place," replied Liversedge. "That, d'you see, Mr. Marchmont, was putting the whole thing into a nutshell, as far as he was concerned—it required no more than a direct answer!"

"And—he answered?"

"He answered, right enough, and direct enough!" said Liversedge. "I'll give you his exact words. 'I know nothing whatever about the murder of Henry Marchmont!' he replied. 'I called on him in Bedford Row at half-past seven; I was with him until close upon eight; I left him in full life and vigour! I shall say no more unless I am called on to do so in a court of law, and then I shall say what I am certainly not going to say to you!' Straight enough, that, Mr. Marchmont! Of course, as I'd promised, I left him then."

"What are you going to do?" asked Richard.

"Oh, well, of course, that's not satisfactory, from our point of view," replied Liversedge, with a shake of his head. "That won't suit our people! I shall have to telephone to headquarters and ask for further instructions."

"Look here!" exclaimed Richard suddenly. "Do you know whether Miss Lansdale knows that I'm in the neighbourhood?"

"She does!" answered Liversedge. "I had a bit of a talk with her—keeps her head well, for a young lady of what I call half-foreign extraction. I told her what Vandelius had told me—that you were here and were anxious to see her."

In fact, I promised her that you should see her this morning.”

“What did she say?” demanded Richard.

“Say? Why, what should she say?” laughed the detective. “Seemed highly pleased, of course—and relieved!”

Richard opened the door and shouted for Scarfe, whose room was close by. He turned to Liversedge.

“Look here, Liversedge!” he said. “You breakfast here with me in an hour—then I’ll go up to the Manor with you. Something’s got to be done!”

“Aye, Mr. Marchmont, but that doesn’t rest with me!” remarked the detective. “I’ll breakfast with you with pleasure, and while you’re dressing I’ll get on the ’phone and have a talk with somebody at headquarters—then we’ll know more.”

He went off, and Richard, over his toilet, wondered anxiously what the next development would be. He was feverishly anxious to spare Angelita any further trouble, and to be able to give her good and reassuring news on their meeting. He went down to breakfast full of hope—but his face fell as Liversedge, waiting in the coffee-room, advanced to meet him with a shake of the head and an expression of gloom.

“No good, Mr. Marchmont!” he whispered. “My instructions are peremptory—we’re to take Lansdale up to headquarters at once!”

XV—Flown!

Richard moved off to a table in a quiet corner of the coffee-room, motioning Liversedge to follow him. They were comparatively alone, but he lowered his voice as he leaned across from his chair.

“Does that mean—arrest?” he asked.

“Why, scarcely that, as yet, Mr. Marchmont. Though, to be sure, we shall keep our eyes on Lansdale now that we’ve found him. No!—What it does mean is that our people at headquarters want to hear, from his own lips, some explanation of his doings on the night of your uncle’s death, and of his movements since. There’s a certain suspicion attached to him, of course. It all depends on what account he gives of himself as to whether he’s detained or not. He may be able to give a perfectly satisfactory account of his goings-on. Again—he mayn’t!”

“Then—he’ll have to go with you?” suggested Richard.

“If he’s an innocent man, he’ll make no bones about that!” said Liversedge. “Best thing for him!—in his own interests.”

“An innocent man may be forced into a very queer position,” remarked Richard. “He may find it very difficult to show that he is an innocent man!”

“Well, he’s done himself no good by hiding down here,” replied Liversedge. “He’d have done far better to come out into the open at once. When a man runs off and hides himself as he’s done——”

“Didn’t Vandelius explain that to you?” asked Richard.

Liversedge picked up his knife and fork and began to eat his bacon and eggs. He chewed steadily for a minute or two before he replied. “Vandelius, Mr. Marchmont,” he said at last, “is a queer chap! I had a fair amount of talk with him during the time I was up there, and I can’t make him out. He’s a good hand at telling a straight and plausible tale, though. What he said amounts to this: He knew something, though probably not everything, about Lansdale’s movements on what the newspaper fellows and story-writers would call the fateful night. I don’t think he was more than, shall we say, politely concerned about your uncle—and not a great deal about Lansdale and his safety. What he really was concerned about was getting through, satisfactorily, some big business deal, to complete which the signatures of Lansdale and himself, to certain papers, not then arrived, but daily expected, were absolutely necessary. He didn’t want anything to interfere with that. So—he carried Lansdale off to this place. Now, I understand, the papers have come, and have been signed—last night. And, the deal being effected, it’s my conviction that Vandelius has pretty well exhausted his interest in the affair. He lives in an atmosphere of

mystery, anyhow!”

“He takes jolly good care to guard himself!” remarked Richard. “Did I tell you how I got into his house last night? No?—Well, you listen!” He went on to tell Liversedge of his adventures from leaving the hotel to being held up by the armed men in the shrubbery. “What do you make of that?” he concluded. “Out of the common, eh?”

“Sounds like a bit out of a tale, or a scene from a play,” said Liversedge. “Vandelius is a mystery man, and I’d like to know more about him. But I’m not concerned with him just now—professionally. My concern is with Lansdale.”

“But aren’t they all mixed up?” suggested Richard. “How are you going to disassociate one from the other? Vandelius, to begin with. Then that man Crench—for whom I’ve a particular dislike, though I don’t know why. Then the other man, Garner. I don’t like the looks of him, either! They are all mixed up together—evidently!”

“I know something of the last two,” remarked Liversedge. “Crench is pretty much what Simpson described him to be—a pettifogging solicitor, with very little practice. Garner, I have found out, is a man who’s been known for some time, in certain circles, as a company promoter. He’s not in very good odour, so I’m told. Never come under our notice, you understand, but still a doubtful character—been connected with some affairs of the sort that can only be catalogued under one head—shady. And the strange thing to me about this business, Mr. Marchmont, is just this: If Vandelius and Lansdale are such wealthy men, such great figures in high finance, what are they doing in company and in dealings with a twopenny-halfpenny solicitor and a man of questionable reputation?”

“I gathered, from what I saw and heard, that Crench and Garner are merely subordinates, paid employees, underlings,” replied Richard. “Vandelius is the head and front.”

“Maybe!” agreed the detective. “But I should have thought he could or would have got himself better-class tools. However, as I said, I’ve nothing to do with those three—at present. My job is with Lansdale. Now, Mr. Marchmont, you can come in at this! So let me ask a question—did you see the daughter last night?”

“No,” replied Richard.

“You’ll see her this morning—I’ll take care of that,” continued Liversedge. “Now, Mr. Marchmont, you talk confidentially to her—and straight out. Tell her to advise her father to come at once with me to headquarters, and to give us a candid, frank, truthful account of his doings with Mr. Henry Marchmont. Tell her to point out to him that he’s nothing to fear if he’ll be straightforward with our people, and will tell all he knows about Henry Marchmont and the

Bedford Row office on the night of the murder. Convince her—and get her to convince him—that openness is his best policy. I mean to say—let her persuade him that he'll be acting in his own very best interests if he comes quietly along with me and tells his tale in a candid fashion. It's all we want!"

"Supposing you don't believe him?" suggested Richard bluntly.

Liversedge shook his head.

"It's got to be an obviously hatched-up story that we're suspicious of, Mr. Marchmont," he answered. "We can tell when a man's speaking the truth, in nine cases out of ten! Anyhow, that's the thing to be done. Get Miss Lansdale to talk to her father a bit—then you can come with both of them, in our car, to headquarters, where he can say his say. A thousand times better than hiding in holes and corners and letting suspicion gather more and more thickly about him!"

"You've got to remember that Lansdale made no effort to run away," remarked Richard. "It was Vandelius who persuaded him to leave the hotel."

"Oh, I know that, Mr. Marchmont!" asserted Liversedge. "That's all right!—but it doesn't alter my present contention. They've got this deal through—now let Lansdale come out and unbosom himself."

"Didn't he say to you this morning that he'd speak at the right time and place?" asked Richard. "Well?—what did he mean by that?"

"I don't know," answered Liversedge. He pushed away his plate, and drank off his coffee. "The right time is as soon as may be, and the right place is Scotland Yard, Mr. Marchmont! Let's be getting up to the Manor."

Richard gave some instructions to his valet, and joining Liversedge outside the hotel, set off with him along the road which by that time had become as familiar to him as Jermyn Street.

"You left a couple of your men at the house, didn't you?" he asked as they came in view of the battlemented gateway in the wall. "On guard, I suppose?"

"Why, sufferance would be a better term, Mr. Marchmont," replied Liversedge, with a smile. "On sufferance!—Vandelius's sufferance. We've no warrant, you know—we're merely here on a voyage of exploration. I asked him if I could leave my assistants there while I came back to the town to see you—he was quite agreeable. A very amiable gentleman, Mr. Vandelius!—that is, if he likes to be! If he likes to be, Mr. Marchmont, eh?—if he likes to be!"

"You think he could show another side of himself?" suggested Richard.

"I should imagine he could show a good many sides!" assented Liversedge dryly. He pointed his stick at the confines of the Manor. "Now why does he surround himself and his demesne with a wall that makes you think of a jail, and why is the only way through it built like the gateway of one of our old castles?—you'd think he feared a siege. Look at that door!—solid oak, studded with iron nails, and twenty feet high—formidable affair that, Mr. Marchmont!"

I reckon it would take one of those ancient battering rams they used to use to make an impression on it. Looks like it would never open——”

But just then the two halves of the great door swung back, moved by some invisible machinery, and a powerful automobile swept through, at full speed, the janitor having thrown the gates open in readiness for its approach; it was travelling so rapidly that it flashed past Richard and his companion before they had more than realised its presence. Yet great as its speed was, they were able to see that the blinds of its windows, front back, and sides, were closely drawn; whoever was inside was securely guarded from outside inspection. The two men turned sharply and followed the car’s course, instead of taking the road to the town, it slowed down a little, rounded a bend, and took what both knew to be the highway to London.

“I wonder who was in that?” exclaimed the detective. “Queer! Blinds drawn in every window, Mr. Marchmont! Not a glimpse of the contents possible!”

“Vandelius, I should say,” replied Richard. He went on to tell Liversedge of what the garrulous waiter had told him the previous morning. “One of his eccentricities, I suppose,” he concluded.

Liversedge made no comment on that. But when they had passed through the wicket-gate at the main entrance he hastened his steps and walked fast towards the house. Once across the moat, he walked faster still—and still faster when he caught sight of his two assistants advancing in his direction over the trim lawns. Richard, inspecting their faces as they drew near, saw that these men were either perturbed or perplexed—perhaps both.

“Anything wrong?” demanded Liversedge as they came within speaking distance. “Anything happened?”

“We don’t know—we aren’t sure!” replied the elder of the two. “But did you see a closed car on the road or in this park? Well, we think Lansdale and his daughter are off in that!”

Liversedge smothered what was obviously going to be an expletive.

“What makes you think that?” he demanded. “Did you see anything?”

The man who had first spoken turned, pointing to the house.

“We were taking a turn there, in the garden before the front,” he answered. “A man-servant came and told us that breakfast was laid for us. We went in with him—he took us to a room at the back, where breakfast was ready—a jolly good breakfast too——”

“Confound it! Why didn’t you go separately?” exclaimed Liversedge. “One at a time—leaving the other to watch?”

“We didn’t know what to do—we never expected anything to happen until you came back. They were very polite, and——”

“Get on with it!” said Liversedge “Quick!”

“Well, when we came back to the front from breakfast, an elderly man and a young lady were just stepping into that car! We’d no right, you know, to stop or question them, and of course we didn’t know who they were; besides, the car was off on the instant—full speed down the park. We——”

Liversedge stopped him with another impatient exclamation. He looked round—and suddenly caught sight of Mr. Vandelius, who, attired in country-squire fashion, was evidently giving some instructions to his head gardener, at the end of the terrace. The detective made for him, closely followed by Richard.

“Mr. Vandelius!” said Liversedge in injured tones. “You’ve let Lansdale go!”

Vandelius turned and stared hard at his questioner; of Richard he now took no notice whatever.

“My good fellow!” he said, looking Liversedge slowly over from head to foot. “You are impertinent! You speak to me as if I had been Mr. Lansdale’s jailer instead of his host! It is only because I don’t wish to be rude to you that I tell you that just after breakfast Mr. Lansdale informed me that he wished to go up to town at once. I immediately placed one of my cars at his disposal, and he has gone—and his daughter with him. They have returned, of course, to the Hotel Cecil. You had better follow them—with your companion.”

He turned away, without further word or sign, and Liversedge, after a moment’s hesitation, glanced at Richard with a wry expression.

“That’s what they call being done in, Mr. Marchmont!” he muttered. “Pipped! Now, you know, I’d a suspicion that Lansdale was in that car! Well!—now it’s all got to begin over again!”

“Scarcely that, if Mr. Lansdale’s returned to his hotel,” remarked Richard.

“Aye—but has he?” said Liversedge. “Perhaps!—and perhaps not! However, I can only go there and see. I’ll get off at once. About yourself, now?”

Richard told him that he would get back to London by the next train, and would go straight to the Hotel Cecil. He returned to the town and collected his valet and shortly after noon turned out of the Strand into the courtyard of the big hotel, in the ardent hope of seeing Angelita within a few minutes. Instead, he saw—Liversedge. Liversedge shook his head.

“They haven’t come back here,” he said. “They haven’t heard anything of their coming, either. I never supposed they would come. As I remarked down there at Vandelius’s this morning, we’ve got to begin all over again. But I say, Mr. Marchmont, haven’t you forgotten something? The adjourned inquest on your uncle is fixed for this afternoon. Two o’clock—same court. I suppose you’re going to be there?—though we’ve got very little new evidence, if any.”

Richard got a hasty lunch and went to the Coroner’s court. He had

forgotten all about the adjourned inquest until Liversedge reminded him of it, and he had little hope of hearing anything that would clear up the mystery of Henry Marchmont's murder. He expected nothing, in short, when he entered the gloomy court, and certainly not to see what he saw as he stepped in—Angelita sitting at the solicitor's table, and next to her a man whom he knew at once to be her father.

XVI—*Lansdale Speaks*

Lansdale and his daughter were not alone. Seated close by, and in earnest conversation with them, were two men who, Richard felt sure, belonged to the legal profession. One was a tall, handsome, white-haired man with whose features he was vaguely familiar; he must have seen this man's portrait in the illustrated papers, he thought, or have had him pointed out at some time as some notability. The other, a middle-aged man of striking countenance, bore the unmistakable stamp of the barrister; his was a face only seen at the bar or on the bench. And he was doing most of the talking, emphasising whatever he was saying with a liberal use of gesture, and appealing at times to the white-haired man as if to seek agreement in his arguments. Angelita was listening intently to him; so intently that it was some time before Richard, wedged in at the back of the court, could catch her eye. At last she saw him and smiled; there was something reassuring in that smile, and still more reassuring in the way in which after giving it she motioned him towards the two legal-looking men as if to imply that here was powerful help. Richard made pantomimic signs to her, indicating his wish to join her, but she shook her head and then pointed to a door; he took that to mean that he was to meet her when the proceedings were over. And as he nodded his assent, he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turning sharply, saw Liversedge at his elbow.

"You've seen 'em, I see, Mr. Marchmont!" said the detective. "Surprise, no doubt! But we heard of it half an hour ago. Do you know what's going to happen? Lansdale's going to tell his tale—in that witness-box!"

"How did you hear?" asked Richard.

"In this way," replied Liversedge, squeezing himself into a seat by Richard's side. "You see the white-haired old gentleman sitting next to Lansdale? That's Sir John Crowe, the cleverest and smartest and deepest solicitor in London!—and that's saying a good deal! And the other man next to Miss Lansdale is Mr. Charles Barwick, the famous criminal barrister, just as eminent in his line as Sir John Crowe is in his. Now, about half an hour ago, I learnt that just after noon Sir John telephoned our people that he was going to produce Lansdale at the adjourned inquest this afternoon, and that his client would go into the witness-box and give evidence as regards all he knew about the Henry Marchmont affair, adding that he, Sir John, had already notified the Coroner to the same effect. So—there you are! And—there they are! And I'm pretty keen, as I guess you are, Mr. Marchmont, to know what Lansdale's got to say!"

"Probably anything but what you expect," suggested Richard.

“I never expect anything, definitely,” replied the detective. “I don’t anticipate—I wait. But I reckon there’ll be some stuff for the newspaper people. They’re in full force, the reporters. And so are other interested folk. Look across there, Mr. Marchmont! See any familiar faces?”

Richard looked in the direction indicated, and in a gloomy corner of the court saw Crench and Garner. A little way from them sat Simpson, gazing intently at Lansdale and his daughter.

“Three of ’em there of whom I’d like to know a good deal more,” muttered Liversedge. “Now if only Vandelius would turn up, eh? But here’s the Coroner.”

The Coroner came to his presidential desk; the jurymen, endeavouring to look as if they had kept their minds clear and open since the opening stages of the inquiry, filed into their places; the crowded court settled into silence. The Coroner put on his spectacles, fidgeted with his papers, and turning to the twelve good men and true told them that since the previous sitting, and in fact during the last hour or two, he had received notice that a very important witness had come forward whose evidence would be all the more notable, and incidentally useful to them in the discharge of their duties, from the fact that his name had been very freely, perhaps much too freely, mentioned in the papers. This witness, he went on to say, was Mr. John Lansdale, who, it had been rumoured, had visited the deceased Henry Marchmont on the evening on which he was believed to have been murdered. Mr. Lansdale was now in court, and, he believed—here came a glance in the direction of Sir John Crowe and Mr. Barwick—was, as he had a right to be, legally represented. It would perhaps be well to take Mr. Lansdale’s evidence at once. . . .

The Coroner here favoured the representatives of the police authorities with a look which seemed to inquire if they had any objection; nobody offering any, he glanced invitingly at Mr. Barwick, who rose to his feet amidst an expectant silence.

“I represent Mr. Lansdale, sir,” he began, “and I may say at once that my client desires to go into that box and to give whatever evidence he can give on the subject of this inquiry, and to submit himself to any examination that you, sir, or the representatives of the deceased, or the representatives of the police, choose to put him to. He has no desire but to tell the plain truth about whatever he knows, especially in view of the fact that, since the death of the late Mr. Henry Marchmont, a great many baseless and unauthorised statements have appeared in the public press relating to his knowledge of Mr. Marchmont and to certain events in the earlier history of both. If I may propose a course of procedure, sir, I should suggest that Mr. Lansdale should go at once into the box to be examined by myself in accordance with my instructions from his solicitor, Sir John Crowe, after which, of course, he can be further examined.

Mr. Lansdale's wish is to place you, sir, and the gentlemen of the jury, as soon as possible, in possession of all, of everything—I repeat those words with emphasis!—of all, of everything that he can tell!”

“Let Mr. Lansdale be called,” said the Coroner.

Richard fixed all his attention on Angelita's father as he rose from his seat and went through the preliminaries in the witness-box. He was strangely struck by the fact that when Lansdale stood at his full height he was curiously like Henry Marchmont—a tall, well-set up, broad-shouldered man, of florid complexion and silvering hair; the general similarity of face and figure was striking. But in particulars the resemblance was not great; Henry Marchmont had been of a gay, lively disposition and a debonair appearance; the sort of man who had taken life easily and showed his enjoyment of it in his lips and eyes; Lansdale's appearance was that of a man who had lived a hard life, and whose nerves and health had suffered; the face which he turned upon the court after taking the oath was that of a tired man.

It was amidst a dead silence that the exchange of question and answer between Barwick and his witness began; the silence grew deeper as it was carried on.

“I believe you first knew the late Henry Marchmont some years ago, Mr. Lansdale?”

“Thirty years ago!—first.”

“Where was that?”

“At Clayminster.”

“Was he then practising as a solicitor?”

“He was—a young solicitor.”

“What were you doing at that time?”

“I had just begun business as a stock and share broker.”

“Under your own name?”

“No—under the name of James Land.”

“Your real name, then, is John Lansdale?”

“Exactly! I took the name of James Land for business purposes at Clayminster.”

“Have you seen much of the newspapers since the death of Henry Marchmont?”

“I have seen all the principal London papers every day.”

“You are aware that there has been a good deal about you in them, then, and you have seen that it has been said that your real name is Land?”

“Yes. It is a mistake. I assumed the name of Land at Clayminster. When I left Clayminster I reverted to my real name—John Lansdale.”

“You can give full proof that that is your real name, and of your parentage, and where you were born, and so on, if necessary, I suppose?”

“Full proof! There is no mystery about it.”

“Have you read in the recent papers certain rumours or suggestions that you left Clayminster twenty-five years ago under discreditable circumstances?”

“I have. There is no truth in them! The truth is that a number of my clients in Clayminster developed a craze for what was nothing more nor less than a gamble in certain foreign securities; it was at the time of a prevalent mania for speculation in such things. There was a sudden crash; many of them lost heavily. There were many unreasonable people amongst them; some of them took a violent dislike to me, personally, though I was a mere instrument. The real reason why I left Clayminster suddenly was that my life was in danger.”

“Had you been threatened?”

“I received several threatening letters—anonymous, of course. Rather than claim police protection, I cleared out. I saw that my business was gone, and I decided to go elsewhere.”

“You insist that your record at Clayminster was a clean one, that your transactions were honest and above-board, that you defrauded no one?”

“I do claim all that!”

“Still, you are aware that your sudden disappearance, and the secret manner of it, gave rise to unpleasant rumour?”

“Quite aware of it! I know that great suspicion was aroused. Henry Marchmont was a chief promoter of that suspicion. He never liked me. He blackballed me at the Clayminster Club—some time before the smash.”

“Had he any reason for disliking you?”

“None that I know of. But he had an aversion to what he called gambling in stocks and shares. I was the only broker in Clayminster, which is a very small place. He disliked my setting up in the town, and he wanted to get me out of it.”

“Did you bear him any ill will?”

“Never! I was absolutely indifferent—one way or the other. All I wanted was to be left alone.”

“Well, you left Clayminster—in your own opinion, and according to your conscience, with clean hands—and I believe you went to South America?”

“Yes—to the Argentine. And as my career seems about to be closely inquired into, I should like to say that the last phase of it, covering twenty-five years, is well known out there. I married a lady who came of a Spanish-American family, I settled down to business in connection with the development of the country, and I built up a reputation which I confidently assert is second to none as regards probity!”

“And as a result, Mr. Lansdale, I believe you have done very well—to use a current phrase which is well understood?”

“I am a wealthy man!”

“I am glad to hear it!—and now we will come to your present visit to England. Why did you come here?”

“In connection with a big financial deal, to be carried out in co-operation with Mr. Louis Vandeliuſ.”

“Who is Mr. Louis Vandeliuſ?”

“A man interested in big financial matters, not much known to the public, but well known to financiers all over the world.”

“Did you know him before you came to London?”

“I had met him in New York, five years ago, and in Buenos Ayres, last year.”

“How long had you been in London before the death of Henry Marchmont?”

“A few weeks.”

“During those weeks did you ever go down to Clayminster?”

“No—never!”

“Nor heard any Clayminster news?”

“No!”

“Did you know that Henry Marchmont had left Clayminster soon after you did, or at about the same time, and was practising in London?”

“No!—I knew nothing about Henry Marchmont’s doings or whereabouts until I met him accidentally, at a dinner, a financial dinner, in the City.”

“Tell me what happened, Mr. Lansdale.”

“I recognised him at once. I saw that he recognised me. His air, his look, was threatening, unpleasant. I knew him in the old days as a man who was somewhat free of his tongue, and it looked to me as if he might say something about me to some of our fellow-guests which would do me no good, in view of the very important business on which I had come to London. I drew him aside and asked him to give me an interview—he was churlish, almost insolent in manner, but said that if I wanted to see him, I could see him, and named his office, and from seven-thirty to eight the following evening, as place and time. I told him I would be there.”

“Was this before or after the dinner you speak of?”

“Before.”

“Did you have any more conversation with him that evening?”

“No! We were seated well apart. But I saw him looking at me now and then, and his glances were distinctly unfriendly. I realised that I had an enemy in him. It naturally made me uneasy.”

“What did you do?”

“Next day I had a consultation with Mr. Vandeliuſ and with two associates of his——”

“Better give their names, Mr. Lansdale.”

“Mr. Crench, a solicitor, and Mr. Garner, who is a sort of agent for Mr. Vandelius. I told these three all the circumstances of the Clayminster affair, and about Henry Marchmont’s dislike and suspicion of me, and of my conviction that he meant to do me a mischief. They, of course, accepted my story, but Mr. Vandelius was much concerned, seriously concerned, lest any action of Henry Marchmont’s should interfere with our present big deal. It was decided that I should keep the appointment with Henry Marchmont and attempt to prove to him that he had formed and was cherishing a totally wrong impression of my doings at Clayminster. This, I say, was decided upon between Mr. Vandelius, Crench, Garner, and myself. But . . . after leaving them, and thinking matters over again, I decided, entirely on my own notion, to do something in addition, which something, in my opinion, now, has had a great deal to do with Henry Marchmont’s murder!”

XVII—Twenty Thousand Pounds

There was a distinct ripple of excited comment in the crowded court when Lansdale spoke these last words, and Liversedge, who had been watching the witness with concentrated attention, nudged his companion's elbow.

"It's coming, Mr. Marchmont!" he whispered. "If this man has a secret, it's coming out now. And—what's it going to be?"

Richard made no answer and no guess. He, too, was watching Lansdale. It seemed to him that the longer Lansdale remained in the witness-box the more confident he grew; at first he had seemed nervous and uncertain and his voice had been husky, but as his examination progressed he had held himself more erect and his demeanour more spirited; once or twice, when reference had been made to the Clayminster episode, a note of mingled defiance and indignation had come into his answers. And in his last remarks he had looked round the ring of expectant faces with the air of a man who has it in his power to say words of the highest importance.

Barwick's voice, cool, quiet, broke the silence which had fallen over the court after the murmur of excitement.

"You determined on a course of procedure which you kept to yourself, Mr. Lansdale?—is that what we are to understand?"

"Yes!—I mentioned it to no one—have mentioned it to no one until now. Perhaps I made a mistake in keeping it to myself—but I am prepared to say why I have kept it back until this moment—I had good reasons."

"Very well!—but what was it you decided to do—and, I suppose, did?"

Lansdale leaned over the ledge of the box, and looking alternately from the Coroner to the legal men and officials grouped about the table, assumed a confidential, conversational tone.

"Well, it was this. Although twenty-five years had elapsed since the Clayminster affair, I could see quite clearly from Henry Marchmont's demeanour at the City dinner I referred to just now, and from the tone he adopted in speaking to me, that he still regarded me as a black sheep, a bad lot. I remembered him in the old days as a very hard man, and I had no doubt that he was as hard as ever, perhaps harder. In that case, I knew he could do me a mischief. He could have noised it abroad in the City that I had left Clayminster under doubtful circumstances; he could—in short, he could have done me a lot of harm. Eventually, he could have done me none, for I took good care before leaving Clayminster to place all my books and papers in safe keeping in an adjacent town, and they are there now, to prove the absolute honesty of my business transactions. But he could have made trouble at the moment, and that

would have interfered most seriously with the business deal in which Mr. Vandellius and myself were engaged; it might have wrecked it, and in any case it would have caused delay, and delay was the last thing we desired: it was necessary to our purposes to carry this deal through quickly and all that remained was to sign certain papers which we expected to arrive from South America at any moment. So, after thinking matters over by myself, I decided that it would be well to placate Henry Marchmont. I preferred to do that in this way: while steadily denying any personal responsibility for the losses of the Clayminster people twenty-five years before, and wholly disclaiming any bad faith in my dealings with them, I would tell Henry Marchmont that I, being now a wealthy man, was willing to do something for those who had lost money at that time, or, if they were dead, for their descendants, and to place in his hands a sum of money to be distributed amongst them. I considered that such an action on my part would show him that I was acting in good faith, and would stop him from circulating rumours or positive statements about me. Of course, I meant to insist strongly that anything I gave to these people would be in the nature of a voluntary gift; that there was not the slightest obligation on my part to give a penny! There wasn't!—I am not indebted in any way, even what is called morally, to any man or woman in Clayminster!”

Lansdale smote the edge of the witness-box as he spoke the last words, and his eyes, dull at first, but now bright with excitement, flashed defiance. He looked round as if to invite comment; all that came was in the cool tones of the barrister.

“Continue, if you please, Mr. Lansdale.”

“Well, having decided on this course, I went to my bank, drew a certain amount of money in ready cash—that is, in notes—so as to have it in readiness to offer to Henry Marchmont when I went to see him that evening. And in due course I went to his office in Bedford Row. That——”

“A moment, Mr. Lansdale!” interrupted Barwick, with a meaning glance at the Coroner and the jury. “You took the certain amount of money you have just mentioned in your pocket when you repaired to Bedford Row?”

“Certainly!—that’s why I got it from my bank—to take with me.”

“What was that certain amount of money? The exact figure, please?”

Lansdale hesitated a moment. Then his answer came sharply:

“Twenty thousand pounds!”

Once more a ripple of excited murmur ran round the court; once more Barwick’s quiet voice was heard as it died away.

“Twenty thousand pounds! In what form? You spoke of cash—notes?”

“There were forty Bank of England notes of five hundred pounds each—in a wad, with an india-rubber band round them.”

“Very well—go on, Mr. Lansdale.”

“I went to the office in Bedford Row just about half-past-seven. Henry Marchmont himself admitted me, and took me upstairs to what I took to be his private office. I saw no one else, nor did I hear anything that led me to suspect the presence of anybody else in the house—I judged that we had the place to ourselves. I found out before I had been there a moment that Henry Marchmont was not inclined to treat me with even ordinary courtesy. He sat down himself, at his desk, but he never offered me a seat. His demeanour was harsh, arrogant, impatient, contemptuous. He began by saying that he wondered how I dared to show my face in England, and especially in the City amongst financiers of repute. He was plainly in a temper: I kept mine, and I endeavoured to show him good reasons to prove that he was doing me a wrong, and that the financial smash at Clayminster was not due to anything dishonest on my part. He utterly refused to credit that, and said that if I wished to convince him or anybody of it, I must go down to Clayminster and whitewash myself there. I said my arrangements would not permit of that, but to show my good intentions in the matter I wished to make a proposition to him. He was fidgeting about at his desk all this time, displaying, as he did all through, considerable impatience and testiness; he neither said he would hear my proposition or that he wouldn’t, and I went on to make it, on the lines I have already told you of, and when I had said what I had to say I drew the roll of bank-notes from my pocket and laid it before him, on his blotting-pad. He pushed it aside, saying he would have nothing to do with it—and then he added a remark that at last roused my temper. He said that as far as he knew that was not as much as I had done Clayminster people out of, and he didn’t believe a word of what I’d been saying. On that, I picked up my hat and walked out of the room!”

“Leaving the money on his desk?” asked Barwick.

“I left the twenty thousand pounds’ worth of notes on his desk,” replied Lansdale. “As I walked through the door he called after me. I repeat his exact words: ‘If you don’t remove this confounded money, I shall put it and you into the hands of the police first thing to-morrow morning!’”

“Did you go back and remove it?”

“Not I! I took no notice whatever of his threat. I walked downstairs and out of the house.”

“I gather that by that time you were somewhat upset—agitated?”

“I was very much upset—I was indignant. I was so much agitated that when I went out of the house into Bedford Row I took the wrong turning. I had come into Bedford Row from the Holborn side, through the passage that leads from Holborn into Gray’s Inn, and I meant to return to Holborn by the same way. But being upset I turned up Bedford Row and crossed Theobald’s Road, and found myself in some narrow streets on the other side of it before I knew

where I was—I was in Little James Street when I came to my senses. I then went back by the way I had come, and down Bedford Row again towards Holborn. I passed Henry Marchmont's office. And, just as I had passed the door, which I observed—for I gave an indignant glance at it—was closed, I heard what sounded like a shot! I hesitated for a moment; then, coming to the conclusion that the sound came from the banging of a door, I walked on."

"About what time would it be, Mr. Lansdale when you passed Henry Marchmont's door and heard the sound you speak of?"

"I should say about eight o'clock."

"Your first impression of the sound was that it was that of a shot?"

"Decidedly! But I have very little knowledge of fire-arms, and I thought myself mistaken—that it was merely a door banging."

"Did you see anyone about there?"

"No! It was dark, of course, except for the street lamps."

"What did you do after leaving Bedford Row?"

"I walked along Holborn, down Kingsway, and turned into the Waldorf Hotel, where I sat for some time, smoking and thinking—I was still very much agitated. Eventually, I went to my own hotel, the Cecil. Mr. Vandelius came there—he wanted to know how I had got on with Henry Marchmont. I told him everything—except about the money."

"Why did you not tell him that?"

"Well, it had been my own notion—anyway, I didn't tell him. We talked about Henry Marchmont's general attitude. Mr. Vandelius suggested that I should go with him to his country house for a few days—until we got the papers and signed them. I went. Next day, my daughter joined me there. I remained at Vandelius's house until the papers came—they arrived last night. We signed them. Then, this morning, early, having had a visit from detectives, I decided to come back to town, see a solicitor, and tell all I know. I saw Sir John Crowe on arrival—and on his advice I have come here and told everything."

Barwick hesitated a moment, glancing at the Coroner. Then he turned once more to his witness.

"There is just another question—or two—I should like to put to you, Mr. Lansdale," he said. "You are aware, no doubt, that a reward of ten thousand pounds has been offered to anyone giving information which will lead to the arrest and conviction of the murderer of Henry Marchmont? Had you anything to do with that?"

"No!—nothing!"

"Do you know who is responsible for it?"

"I do now—I didn't until two days ago. Mr. Vandelius is responsible. His idea was—when the news of the murder came to hand—that if suspicion

attached to me, it would be best removed by finding the real culprit.”

“Mr. Vandelius, then, made this offer on his own initiative, and without consulting you?”

“Just so! I knew nothing about it until he told me.”

Barwick looked at the Coroner and suddenly sat down with the gesture of a man who has done his work. The Coroner turned to Lansdale.

“You say you took twenty thousand pounds in bank-notes, Bank of England notes, of course, to Henry Marchmont, and left the entire sum with him,” he said. “Have you the numbers of those notes?”

“No,” replied Lansdale promptly. “But my bankers will have.”

“Who are your bankers?”

“The British-Argentine Banking Company, Lombard Street.”

“The numbers of the notes were taken when issued to you?”

“Of course—I saw them taken and entered. They are easily obtainable.”

The Coroner turned to the police officials.

“This must be inquired into at once,” he remarked. “The numbers of the notes must be got, and inquiries must be made at the Bank of England to ascertain if they have been presented there for payment. But now, following on what we have heard from the witness, I want some information about the arrangements at Bedford Row. I gathered at our first sitting that Henry Marchmont lived in a private suite of rooms above his offices, and that no one else lived in the house. I gathered also that his dead body was found early in the morning by the charwoman, Mrs. Pardoe. Mrs. Pardoe”—here the Coroner turned to his notes and consulted them for several minutes.—“Yes. Mrs. Pardoe found Henry Marchmont lying dead on the first landing of the staircase, and immediately hurried out to get a policeman. It would, of course, be some time before anyone made any thorough examination of the premises. Now I want to know, and you, gentlemen of the jury, want to know, too—who first entered Henry Marchmont’s private room, where, on his desk, Mr. Lansdale says he left the twenty thousand pounds’ worth of bank-notes?”

The Coroner was still addressing the police officials, and one of them rose, pointing to Simpson, who sat near.

“The late Mr. Marchmont’s managing clerk is here, sir,” he said. “Mr. Simpson. He can probably tell that.”

“Let Mr. Simpson come forward,” said the Coroner. “Mr. Simpson, you have heard the evidence that has just been given—that a packet of forty bank-notes, each of a nominal value of five hundred pounds, was left on Mr. Henry Marchmont’s desk in his private room on the evening on which he was murdered. As far as we are aware, none of his staff entered that room until next morning after the discovery of the murder. Now, can you tell us who was the very first person to go into the room that morning—the very first?”

Simpson replied promptly.

“Yes, sir,” he said. “Detective-Sergeant Liversedge.”

XVIII—*Trace the Notes*

Liversedge was on his feet and moving towards the centre of the court before the Coroner could ask if he, too, was present. And as he moved away, Richard, following his movements, was suddenly aware that close by his own seat sat Cora Sanderthwaite. Rapt in the proceedings following Lansdale's appearance in the witness-box, he had not noticed her before, but now that he saw her for the moment forgot all else. For Cora Sanderthwaite was watching Lansdale as if she would never and could never take her gaze off him, and in her eyes was an expression of vindictive hatred that made Richard feel a sense of cold horror such as he had never known before. She sat, slightly leaning forward in her seat, her elbow supported on her knee, her chin resting in her hand, immovable, staring, staring . . . the stare suggested murder. And Richard stared at her, fascinated, until he became aware that seated next to her, and evidently in her company, from the fact that he turned and whispered something in her ear, was a curious-looking little man, grey-haired, elderly in spite of his smooth, clean-shaven face, who was dressed in very old-fashioned clothes that had evidently been of smart cut in their day, and in spite of their threadbare state were still neatly kept and carefully brushed. Was this another of the victims of the Clayminster smash, he wondered?—for the little man, too, was watching Lansdale, though not with the vindictive hate manifested by his companion.

But the Coroner was talking, addressing himself to the police authorities and to Simpson and Liversedge, who by this time had gone up to the table.

“Oh, Detective-Sergeant Liversedge is here, is he?” he said. “Just so!—well, in view of the evidence which we have just heard, what I want to get at is this—who was the first person to make any examination of Mr. Henry Marchmont's private office after the discovery of his dead body that morning? The supposition is that he was shot, murdered, by some person about eight o'clock the previous evening, and that no one entered the place until next morning when Mrs. Pardoe went in. Now I want to know what happened immediately after that? Perhaps Mr. Simpson——”

He glanced inquiringly at the managing clerk, and Simpson responded readily.

“I can give that information, sir,” he said. “When Mrs. Pardoe made her discovery she ran straight out of the house to a policeman at the head of the street. He sent for help to the police station, which is close by, in Gray's Inn Road. Within a few minutes two or three officers came; a doctor came with them, so did Detective-Sergeant Liversedge. I arrived at the same time. After

some conversation in the hall, Detective-Sergeant Liversedge said he would like to look round the room which Mr. Henry Marchmont was likely to have been in last. I showed him the door of the private office—which, in fact, was open—and he went in there.”

The Coroner turned to Liversedge.

“Did you make any examination of Mr. Marchmont’s desk?” he asked.

“Only a superficial one, sir,” replied Liversedge. “I looked round the room generally. I wanted to see if there were any signs of Mr. Marchmont’s having had a visitor late the previous evening, or if there was anything on his desk that would give any clue of any sort. I touched nothing. There was nothing much on his desk. I certainly saw no bank-notes. To the best of my recollection, sir, there was nothing on the desk but a blotting-pad. I remember thinking at the time that Mr. Marchmont had evidently been a man of very neat and precise habits—everything was very tidy.”

“Who subsequently examined Mr. Marchmont’s room and effects?” demanded the Coroner.

“I did, sir,” answered Simpson. “In company, at various times, with Mr. Richard Marchmont. We went through everything—drawers, bureaux, the private safe. As Mr. Liversedge has just inferred, the late Mr. Marchmont was a man of unusually tidy and precise habits; he was the sort of man who kept everything in its exact place, and grew very angry indeed if his clerks didn’t follow his example. Mr. Richard Marchmont and myself found everything in strict order, but we found no bank-notes.”

“You don’t know if Mr. Marchmont had any secret hiding-places where he would be likely to place twenty thousand pounds’ worth of bank-notes for the night?” suggested the Coroner. Simpson shook his head.

“I don’t think that is at all likely, sir,” he replied. “I have been in the late Mr. Marchmont’s employ for a great many years, and I never knew of his having any such place.”

The Coroner leaned back in his chair, and looked at Barwick.

“Well, here we have Mr. Lansdale saying that he left a parcel of forty Bank of England notes of five hundred pounds each on Mr. Marchmont’s desk!” he began. “Yet——”

Barwick got to his feet with a deprecating shrug of his shoulders.

“With all respect, sir,” he said smoothly, “it seems to me that this informal conversation is against the interests of my client! It appears to be moving in a direction of suspicion—and that is not at all in accordance with the theory I represent!”

“What is your theory, then?” asked the Coroner, a little impatiently.

“My theory, sir, is that Henry Marchmont was not only murdered, but robbed!—robbed of the twenty thousand pounds lying on his desk—of the

bank-notes laid there by my client!" said Barwick. "It is that he was murdered for the sake of robbery!"

The Coroner moved uneasily in his chair.

"We have heard Mr. Lansdale's evidence," he said, with still a note of impatience in his voice. "But I am bound to point out that up to now there is nothing to corroborate it. No doubt he drew twenty thousand pounds in notes from his bank. But we have no proof beyond his own allegation——"

"On oath, sir!" interrupted Barwick.

"On oath, to be sure—that he left those notes on Mr. Marchmont's desk," continued the Coroner. "However, he tells us that his bankers will have the numbers of the notes, and I suggest that Mr. Lansdale should at once assist the police to get them, and then to trace the notes to the Bank of England. Of course, as far as I am aware, the Bank of England is bound to cash its own notes on presentation, and even though these particular notes are for large amounts, five hundred each, I suppose no questions would be asked on their presentation—so there may be some difficulty in tracing them through the different hands in which they may have been since the date on which they were drawn from Mr. Lansdale's bank. Still, the police will no doubt see to this immediately, and in the meantime I suggest that I should adjourn again for—shall we say a week or a fortnight?"

When the Coroner and the police authorities had settled this point between themselves, and the court began to clear, Richard made his way towards Lansdale and his daughter. He suddenly felt a fierce grip on his elbow, and turning found himself in the clutch of Cora Sanderthwaite. She pointed a quivering finger at Lansdale, who was busily talking to his legal advisers and Liversedge.

"Are they going to arrest him?" she hissed in Richard's ear. "To lock him up? Tell me!"

Richard looked at her, half in surprise, half in pity, for he had already formed the opinion that the woman was crazy. Then he saw that the man at her side, the little, oddly dressed man, was also staring at him with the same eagerness that was manifest in Cora Sanderthwaite's burning eyes. The two of them together made an unpleasant exhibition of vindictive hatred.

"I can't tell you," he answered, endeavouring to disengage his sleeve from the woman's clutching fingers. "You must excuse me, please!"

But Cora Sanderthwaite hung on to him.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, young Marchmont!" she exclaimed. "Your murdered uncle's nephew!—faugh! If I'd been you—his blood relation!—I'd have had that man in irons before now—till they can hang him! Yet you've just sat there and heard him tell his lies—lies, lies, all lies!"

"Will you let me go, if you please?" asked Richard.

The oddly dressed man spoke.

“Let him go, Cora!” he said. “No good, my girl—all of a bunch, together!”

Cora Sanderthwaite suddenly released her grip on Richard’s arm and turned to the nearest door; her companion followed her, muttering. Richard made his way to the group on the floor of the court; Barwick was speaking to Lansdale.

“You’ve ample time before the banks close at four o’clock,” he said. “It’s only a little past three now. Get down there with Liversedge, get the numbers of those notes, and let Liversedge get to work tracing them.”

“Whatever you suggest,” responded Lansdale. He turned to his daughter as she laid her hand on his arm and drew his attention to Richard. “Mr. Marchmont?—Mr. Richard Marchmont,” he said. “I have heard all about you, sir, from my girl—I hope to have a talk with you when we have an opportunity. You have heard all I have to say?—now I must go with these people on this bank-note business—perhaps you will take my daughter to our hotel?”

He turned away with Liversedge and the two lawyers, and Richard found himself alone with Angelita in the thinning court. She gave him a questioning look.

“You heard all my father had to say?” she asked.

“Every word!” replied Richard.

“You believe him?”

“I see no reason why I shouldn’t. It seems to me that that is just what would take place.”

She turned, pointing to the Coroner’s empty chair.

“That old gentleman didn’t seem to,” she said doubtfully. “Why? He appeared to be against him!”

“Scarcely that,” answered Richard. “He merely pointed out that there was no evidence to corroborate your father’s statement about the notes. But never mind that!—they’ll get the evidence they want. Yourself?”

“I’m all right,” she said, with a shy look at him. “But I haven’t understood things, and I didn’t like being at Malbourne. You got my letter?”

“Yes, and I hurried down there at once—instantly!” replied Richard. “You spoke of being prisoners—were you really prisoners?”

“I don’t know what else you’d call it—to be kept to certain rooms, and to a certain part of the gardens, and to feel that there were men watching you all the time!” she answered. “My father said we weren’t; that it was all business—but I felt that we were. And I don’t like Vandeliu—”

She paused suddenly, and Richard, turning in the direction in which she looked, saw Simpson coming up to him.

“Can you make it convenient to come to the office, Mr. Marchmont?” he

asked. "There are some matters there which require your attention. I telephoned to your rooms yesterday and again this morning, but you weren't at home."

"I'll come in an hour from now," replied Richard. He turned to Angelita when the clerk had withdrawn. "You heard what your father said?" he went on. "I'm to take you back to your hotel. Come along—we can have half an hour together, at any rate. . . ." But at the end of the half-hour he tore himself away, and hurried to Bedford Row, where he found Simpson in the room that had been Henry Marchmont's. Simpson, as being in charge of the business, had installed himself in his old master's room and chair, but he rose from the chair when Richard walked in and offered it to him as by right. From a drawer he produced a sheaf of documents.

"These are the matters arising out of the will, Mr. Marchmont," he said. "You told me that you'd like to pay out the legacies as soon as possible, and of course you can do that at any time without waiting to take out probate. So I've prepared the cheques for your signature—these other papers relate to some business matters."

He laid several already filled-in cheques on the blotting-pad; Richard, who knew next to nothing of legal matters, proceeded, without demur or question, to sign them.

"What are you going to do with your ten thousand pounds, Simpson?" he asked, half jokingly, as he handed the cheque back. "Very useful legacy, isn't it?"

"It will be exceedingly useful to me, Mr. Marchmont," replied Simpson solemnly. "I propose, as you are selling this business as a going concern, to buy myself a partnership in another firm."

"Why don't you join the people who are taking this over?" asked Richard.

"I don't think they want another partner," said Simpson. "There are four of them already. No!—I know of a very good firm in the West End, sir, where I can get a partnership—a firm with a first-rate conveyancing practice. The matter can be arranged now that I have received my legacy—for which, Mr. Marchmont, I assure you I am truly grateful to my late employer!"

"Oh, well, I'm sure he was glad to leave it to you, Simpson," said Richard. "But I say—as regards that evidence we heard this afternoon—is there nowhere, no place in which my uncle could have put those bank-notes for safety?"

"I cannot think of any place, Mr. Marchmont," replied Simpson. "I—sometimes with you, sometimes alone—have been through the whole office. I am quite sure no bank-notes were in this house that morning!"

"What do you think about their disappearance, then?" asked Richard. "What's your theory?"

Simpson assumed the demeanour of a man who thinks, or has thought, a good deal about the subject proposed to him, but who is not sure that it would be wise to say what his thoughts are or have been.

“Well, Mr. Marchmont,” he replied at last, “the matter is, of course, *sub judice*. But a great deal might be said. We must remember that your uncle did sometimes have callers here at night. I know for a fact that men sometimes came here of an evening who sold him old books, curios, things of that sort. The sight of those notes lying on his desk would tempt some men—even to murder! And . . . the doctors may have been mistaken as to the exact time of his death. It may have been an hour or two later—he may have had visitors of the sort I have just referred to. The present thing to do is to trace those notes—if it can be done. It will take time.”

But before noon next day Richard heard that Liversedge had successfully achieved success in the first stage of the note inquiry. All but five of the forty £500 notes had already been cashed at the Bank of England.

XIX—Side Whiskers

Liversedge told the result of his preliminary inquiries into the history of the bank-notes at the Hotel Cecil, where he found Richard in company with Lansdale and his daughter. He had encountered no difficulty in tracing the ultimate destination of thirty-five of the forty. They had been duly presented and cashed at the Bank of England, in the ordinary way, at various dates since that on which Lansdale had got them from his own bank, and through different channels, and there had been nothing whatever in their manner of presentation to arouse suspicion or lead to comment. Whoever, said Liversedge, had stolen them from Henry Marchmont's desk had disposed of them in extremely knowing and clever fashion. Still, some at any rate could be traced back—one bunch, in particular, had been brought to the Bank before eleven o'clock on the very morning after Henry Marchmont's murder by a commissionaire, who was being sought for—but the process would take time. As to the remaining five, the Bank had, of course, been warned as to the facts relating to the theft and notified of the numbers, and careful watch would be kept for their coming in. That again meant probable delay—and in the meantime Liversedge wanted some more information out of Lansdale.

It was very plain to Richard that the detective, for reasons best known to himself, had accepted Lansdale's story without hesitation or demur. Henry Marchmont, in Liversedge's opinion, had been murdered for the twenty thousand pounds left with him by Lansdale. That was a splendid motive from a police point of view, and Liversedge was quick to realise it. And having finished his story about the notes, he turned to Lansdale for other news.

"Mr. Lansdale—a question or two! You said in the witness-box yesterday that you were so much upset by the treatment you got from Henry Marchmont at that City dinner that you took your financial partners in this deal you referred to into your confidence? You meant, primarily, Vandelius?"

"Vandelius, of course. I told him all about it."

"Where was that?"

"At Crench's office, in Chancery Lane."

"Was Crench there?"

"Certainly—I said so in the witness-box. Crench was there, and Garner too."

"In fact, your conference was with all three of them?"

"Yes, all three."

"And they all three—Vandelius, Crench, Garner—agreed that the best thing for you to do was to see Henry Marchmont that evening, and endeavour

to convince him of your innocence of the suspicions he was evidently still harbouring against you?"

"Just so!—all agreed upon it."

"They were all concerned lest any action on Henry Marchmont's part should spoil this big deal of yours?"

"They were—it would have been a very serious matter if anything had interfered with it."

"Well now, look here, Mr. Lansdale, what I want to get at is this: How much was Crench, who's in only a small way of practice, concerned in your deal?—how much was Garner concerned?"

"They stood to make a good deal, if the thing went through. Nothing, of course, like Vandelius and myself! But still, a very nice thing—each of them—a handsome amount."

"So that it was very much in their interests that the deal should be carried through?"

"Of course it was!"

"And it's a positive fact, is it, Mr. Lansdale, that if Henry Marchmont had interfered, by raising rumours about you, the deal might have been off?"

"If he'd done it quickly—yes. Because both Vandelius and myself were, after all, only agents. If Henry Marchmont had gone into certain financial centres in the City at once, as he might have done, he could have accomplished a lot of harm."

"Well, Mr. Lansdale, the deal did come off, didn't it—at Vandelius's place, where I saw you?"

"Yes—the papers arrived the evening before you came there. We signed them at once—the deal is through."

"Quite satisfactorily—and finally?"

"Both!"

"All right!" said Liversedge. "Now then, Mr. Lansdale, just tell me something—How much did Crench and Garner get out of it?"

But Lansdale shook his head.

"I'm not at liberty to tell you that!" he answered. "But I can tell you this—as soon as the deal was through, settled by Vandelius and myself signing the papers, Crench and Garner received the amounts which they were to get if it ended satisfactorily."

"Received them?—there and then?"

"There and then! Vandelius wrote out the cheques for them as soon as we had signed the papers."

"And you can at any rate say this—the amounts were considerable?"

"Very considerable! Handsome figures!"

Liversedge asked no more questions. But he got Richard out of Lansdale's

rooms and into a quiet corner elsewhere.

“Mr. Marchmont,” he said confidentially, “you must have seen what I was getting at, in there, just now?”

“You seem to have some sort of suspicion of both Crench and Garner,” replied Richard.

“Frankly, I have!” asserted Liversedge. “I don’t know myself what it amounts to, but I have!—it’s there! I’ve never liked the look of either man since setting eyes on ’em, and I like the men less the more I see and hear of ’em! Now look you here, Mr. Marchmont—let’s suppose that these fellows, between them, stood to make, say, ten thousand, aye, or even half that, out of that deal Lansdale’s been talking about. I reckon ten thousand or five thousand or a couple of thousand would have been pie to those chaps!—neither of ’em looks as if they rolled in money. Well, what was the state of events when your uncle crops up? These two were within an ace of getting their money. Then they learn from Lansdale that there’s a rock ahead! Henry Marchmont is the rock! Mr. Marchmont, you mayn’t know it, but there are men—plenty of men, sharks, crooks, bad men!—in London, that would murder their own mothers for a thousand pounds!”

Richard remained silent for a moment.

“You think that one or other of these men may have shot my uncle, so that _____”

“I wouldn’t put it past either of ’em to do it, Mr. Marchmont!” exclaimed Liversedge, with conviction. “Lansdale’s just told me they were upset by his communication to them that afternoon—they saw their money in jeopardy! Supposing they said to each other, ‘Let’s make sure—let’s silence Henry Marchmont once and for all!’ Eh?”

“Vandelius had more interest in silencing him, surely, than they had?” suggested Richard.

“Oh, yes, no doubt; but then, Vandelius, according to all we know of him, is a very rich man!” said Liversedge. “A really big loss—I mean big in the relative sense—wouldn’t have meant as much to Vandelius as the loss of even a couple of thousands to Crench and Garner. There wasn’t the same temptation in his case. No!—I’ve made some small inquiries about both Garner and Crench, and I should say, from all I’ve learnt, that each is the sort who’d sell his soul for a thousand of the ready!—or was, not so long since!”

“You’re evidently pretty strongly prejudiced against them!” remarked Richard.

“Not prejudiced!—that doesn’t enter in,” replied Liversedge. “I’m suspicious—very suspicious indeed, especially since yesterday afternoon, when Lansdale let out about his twenty thousand pounds. Of course, I’ve had all sorts of suspicions in this case, all along. I’m candid with you, Mr.

Marchmont—and I want, badly, to track down the man who shot your uncle!—so I tell you that I’ve been uncommonly suspicious about Simpson. I’m not sure that I’m not as suspicious about Simpson as I am about Crench and Garner!”

“What have you particularly against Simpson?” asked Richard.

“You can follow my reasoning, if you like,” said Liversedge. “Your uncle has left Simpson ten thousand pounds, hasn’t he? Very good!—or very bad! But I was there when the will was brought to you—by Simpson. Am I not right in believing that the will was found where, I suppose, anybody—Simpson, at any rate—had easy access to it? It was!—lying in an open drawer, in an unsealed envelope! Mr. Marchmont—do you suppose for one second that Simpson hadn’t acquainted himself with the contents of that will? I don’t!”

“Do you mean that Simpson knew about the legacy to him before my uncle’s death?” exclaimed Richard.

“Of course!” retorted Liversedge, with a cynical laugh. “Lay anything he did! What was to prevent him? There was the will, as I say, in an unlocked drawer, in an unsealed envelope—Simpson, as confidential managing clerk, had the run of the place; often, no doubt, had the place all to himself. Of course he knew! And we don’t know what sort of man Simpson is, really. He may be a rogue. He may gamble, on the quiet. He may live a double life. He may be avaricious. Anyway, Henry Marchmont’s death meant—ten thousand pounds to Simpson!”

He laughed, still more cynically, and then, as with a sudden impulse, turned to Richard with a sharp glance.

“Yes!” he said. “And by the by, Mr. Marchmont, as you’re sole executor of your uncle’s will—and you won’t mind my asking the question, seeing the importance of all these little details—when do you think you’ll pay that money over to Simpson?”

“I have paid it,” replied Richard.

Liversedge’s lips opened in a gasp of astonishment.

“Paid it!” he exclaimed. “What—already?”

“Yesterday afternoon,” said Richard. “Why not? It had to be paid.”

Liversedge became gravely thoughtful.

“I thought legacies weren’t paid until a year after the testator’s death,” he remarked.

“I don’t know much, if anything, about these things,” replied Richard. “I left all this to Simpson—he had the full confidence of my uncle, and, though I don’t like him personally, I’ve seen no reason to distrust him. I said to him, soon after he produced the will, that I’d like to pay out the legacies as soon as I could, and he explained to me that I could do that whenever I liked—an executor, he said, could collect debts or pay legacies without waiting for

probate. So—I paid the legacies. But why?”

Liversedge said nothing for a moment. He was staring at the wall behind Richard. “Oh!” he remarked at last. “Um! So Simpson’s got his ten thousand pounds?”

“Why, of course!” said Richard. “He had to have it some time or other—why not now? You know, though I don’t care about him, I’ve no suspicion of Simpson—he was a faithful servant to my uncle. So, at any rate, my uncle said.”

Liversedge got up, and began to button his overcoat.

“Aye, I’ve no doubt, Mr. Marchmont!” he replied abstractedly. “Well, you see, I live in an atmosphere of suspicion! Still, you want to know who shot Mr. Henry Marchmont, don’t you? To be sure!—so do I! And now I’ll be off and see if I can do a bit more towards finding out!”

He went off into the crowded Strand, and, it being then well past noon, turned into a favourite resort of his to get his midday dinner. But once he got his plate in front of him, Liversedge scarcely knew what he was eating. His brain was busy with Crench, Garner, Simpson—especially Simpson. And when he had made an end of his dinner, he got into the darkest corner of a smoking room, and lighting his pipe, began to think. . . .

The result of Liversedge’s period of reflection, prolonged over the smoking of several pipes of tobacco, was that instead of repairing to headquarters that afternoon, or going into the City in search of further information about the bank-notes, he repaired to his own small bachelor flat in Bloomsbury, and then, after making himself a cup of tea, proceeded to consider his wardrobe. After thoughtful inspection of its contents, he selected a neat and inconspicuous suit of dark tweed and a still darker overcoat, a black bowler hat, and a plain dark necktie—all these things being essentially different from the clothing he had worn of late. Having duly laid them out, with other matters necessary, he divested himself of the smart grey suit he was wearing, and began a process of disguising himself by doing his hair in a quite different style, and assuming a pair of false side-whiskers, so admirably made and fitted that no one could have told they were false except by very close inspection. Eventually, Liversedge stood up before his mirror looking exactly what he wanted to look—a highly respectable, rather smug City clerk, finished off with black gloves and a spruce umbrella. As he had lately been wearing a rather loud-checked overcoat and a pearl-grey Homburg hat, the change in his appearance, helped greatly by the whiskers, was remarkable—still, he fancied that there was yet something needed, and he supplied it after due consideration by finding and assuming a pair of slightly tinted spectacles.

Secure in his disguise, and feeling certain that his own mother would not know him, Liversedge, soon after five o’clock had struck, and the October

dusk had begun to fall over the London streets, sauntered round to Bedford Row, and, entering it from the Theobald's Road end, took the opposite side to that on which Henry Marchmont's office was situate. He was already fairly familiar with the procedure of that office and the habits of its clerks; as he strolled past, he saw Simpson's shadow cross and recross the blind in the murdered man's private room. And biding his time and moving about this almost deserted street in such a manner as to avoid notice, Liversedge waited until, soon after five-thirty, the various offices began to discharge principals and clerks. At twenty minutes to six, Simpson emerged, carrying his small bag and umbrella. He turned away north; Liversedge followed him across Theobald's Road, up Doughty Street and through Mecklenburgh Square into Gray's Inn Road as far as King's Cross, where he turned into a restaurant opposite the station—no doubt, thought Liversedge, to get his dinner. And feeling secure in his side-whiskers and spectacles, Liversedge followed him, carefully selecting a table well removed from that at which Simpson seated himself. So far so good!—yet nothing might happen. But something did happen—for as his waiter handed him a menu card, Liversedge was aware of the entrance, through a side door, of another man in whom he was deeply interested—Crench!

XX—The Riverside Hotel

The detective hailed Crench's advent with all the delight of a hound that after nosing about in copse or thicket for a patience-wearing period suddenly hits on the scent of a fox; at last he was on a trail, a definite, obvious trail! It was no mere coincidence that Crench should walk in there at that particular moment; he had come there, of course, by appointment, to meet Simpson. What would have surprised Liversedge would have been to see Simpson and Crench ignore each other—but he knew, as soon as even Crench crossed the entrance, that they wouldn't. And he saw just what he was expecting to see when Crench walked straight up the room, nodded familiarly to Simpson at his table in an alcove, and after laying aside his bag and divesting himself of his overcoat and hat, slipped into a vacant chair at his side. They were going to dine together, these two, said Liversedge to himself—and not for the first time.

While the detective was seeing all this out of one eye, he was affecting to study the menu with the other, and presently he ordered a dinner which would take some little time to prepare. Then he called back the waiter as he was hurrying off.

"Have you a telephone here?" he asked.

The waiter pointed to the inner door of the entrance, through which Crench's insignificant figure had just emerged.

"You find him in ze vestibule, sir—right hand," he replied. "Ze portaire show you if you don't see him."

Liversedge was glad to hear that the telephone was outside; he wanted to use it; he didn't want anybody to see him using it. He had been thinking at lightning speed, and his main thought was that this was not going to be a one-man job; he must have help. And he knew where to get it. One of his cleverest and smartest associates lived not far away—Pryke, in a flat in Hunter Street. Pryke was a superior sort of chap; he had some private means of his own, and his wife had more; they lived in some style and had electric light and a telephone in their flat; just at that hour, Liversedge knew from familiar acquaintanceship, Pryke would be at home, for he and his wife liked to live like gentfolk, and dined at seven o'clock. Well, Pryke would have to go without his dinner, or swallow some of it in a hurry . . .

Pryke's voice responded when Liversedge got into the telephone box and rang him up; Liversedge blessed him for that quick response. But he was urgent enough in his demands on Pryke's services.

"Pryke!—this is Liversedge speaking! Urgent business—highest importance. Listen!—you know Muratori's Restaurant, right opposite King's

Cross Station? Good!—I want you to come there at once, to join me. Just going to sit down to dinner?—can't help it, you must come! Get something in a hurry and come on—get a taxi! Don't come in!—be outside. Wait till I come out. Want you to help me in watching two men, now here—to track them when they leave—big business! Coming at once?—good man! Remember—outside, till I join you.”

Then he rang off, contented, and went back to his table. Pryke would come, and Pryke was the very man he wanted for this job. Pryke's work usually lay in quite another quarter of the town; he would be unknown to either Crench or Simpson, if events so developed that he came in close contact with them. And he was a clever, ingenious fellow, and absolutely fearless, the very man to take on a job in which there might be an element of personal danger. So now there was nothing to do but to eat his dinner, affect to read the evening paper which a polite waiter handed to him—and keep an eye on Crench and Simpson at the other end of the room.

Crench and Simpson were in no hurry; it occurred to Liversedge presently that he might have asked Pryke, torn away from his own dinner, to come and share his. But Pryke's presence inside the restaurant might not have suited Liversedge's plans—no, Pryke must kick his heels outside. Still, he might have given Pryke a bit more time; the two suspects were taking theirs. From what the detective could gather by surreptitious glances, they were doing themselves very well, going steadily through course after course; they were drinking champagne too—a big bottle. And they talked ceaselessly, and apparently in terms of great amity and confidence. Liversedge laughed cynically at this display of friendship; he remembered what Simpson had said about Crench to Richard Marchmont and himself when the reward of ten thousand pounds had appeared in the papers with Crench's name at the foot. He had sneered at Crench then—and now here he was hob-nobbing with him! But all that was immaterial—what was material was the question—what were Simpson and Crench doing together? Being a practical man, Liversedge made no attempt to answer it, but he felt assured, having already formed estimates of each, that these two were up to no good.

Things went on quietly and uneventfully until Crench and Simpson reached the concluding stage of their dinner. When they had got their coffee and liqueurs and had lighted cigars which Crench produced from a case and evidently recommended highly, Liversedge thought it time to move. He paid his bill, tipped his waiter, and marched out into the night. And there, overcoated and muffled, stood Pryke; his attitude suggested patient endurance under affliction.

“You might have let me finish my own dinner in peace,” said Pryke sadly, when he had seen through and commented, ironically, on his friend's disguise.

"I've been hanging round here half an hour by that damned clock opposite!"

"Couldn't help it, dear boy!" replied Liversedge. "Duty, you know!—couldn't help myself. I've had to eat a dinner that I didn't want. Look here!—you know I'm in charge of that Bedford Row affair—murder! Well, there are two men in there of whom I'm suspicious—always have been, though I've never quite joined them together. One of them is Simpson, Henry Marchmont's managing clerk; the other is Crench, a solicitor in Chancery Lane."

"I know Crench," remarked Pryke. "Daniel Crench—miserable little beast!"

"What's far more important is—does Crench know you?" suggested Liversedge.

"No!—not that I know of. I only know him by sight."

"Does Simpson know you? No?—well, do you know him?"

"Not even to know he is Simpson! No—no knowledge of him."

"Well, you know Crench, anyway, and Simpson will come out with Crench, presently. Now I want you to help me to track both men. If they separate, you'll have to follow one, and I the other. If they go off together, then we hunt as a couple. They don't know you, and I flatter myself they won't know me. But—I want to know all about their movements, whether they go together or separately."

"What's the notion?" asked Pryke.

"Can't tell you, exactly. But I can say this much—I'm so surprised at finding them together that I'm sure they're up to something! Now, we'd better not stand here; they'll be out soon. You keep a look-out for Crench and the man with him—I'll hang round a few yards away."

Pryke nodded, and Liversedge moved off beyond the glare of the lamps in front of the restaurant. Five minutes went by; then Crench and Simpson came out, talking earnestly. They took no notice of anything else at hand; together they moved across the road towards the station. And behind them on the right hand followed Pryke, and behind them on the left, Liversedge.

The two men thus followed made for the entrance to the Underground Railway, and arriving at it turned to the booking-office for trains going east. Liversedge, near enough to them to note this, was sorry to see it; at that hour of the evening passengers for the eastward route were few; the trend was all the other way. But he motioned to Pryke to go on, and Pryke getting within touch of the pursued heard Crench ask for tickets to Mark Lane. After that the first stages of pursuit were easy; Simpson and Crench got into one carriage of a circle train going east; Pryke and Liversedge got into the next, still keeping apart from each other. They kept apart, too, when they got out, moving cautiously after their quarry. But Simpson and Crench seemed to have no

suspicion of being watched and followed; still in close conversation they climbed the stairway and emerged on Byward Street. It was by that time nearly nine o'clock, and the City was quiet as any country town; the pursuers instinctively waited until the two men in front had got some little distance ahead.

"Going east, eh?" remarked Pryke as Liversedge came up to him. "Got any notion where they may be going?"

"Not a notion!" answered Liversedge. "But wherever it is, we're going too! You take the other side—I'll stick to this. And keep your eyes skinned!—they may slip off into some side street."

Simpson and Crench went ahead, walking more rapidly; Liversedge and Pryke followed, each twenty yards in the rear on opposite sides of the various streets. Across the north side of Tower Hill, down Tower Bridge Approach; into St. Katherine's Way—the smell of the river and of the merchandise stored in the big warehouses of the neighbouring docks grew strong in the night air. Liversedge began to wonder what the two men wanted down here, amongst the shipping; then an idea came to him. From some of the wharves or quays in that quarter there were frequent sailings to the Continent; it might be that the two men he was following were leaving the country, for Antwerp or Rotterdam, or the Hook of Holland, or some other equally convenient and easily reached port. And this notion began to assume something like conviction when, after walking along Wapping High Street for some little distance, Crench and his companion turned into a dimly lighted building over the door of which the detective presently made out the faded letters of a sign: *Albion & Minerva Hotel*.

Sauntering slowly past the door of this shabby hostelry, a place that had evidently seen better days, and had at one time been of some pretensions as a riverside inn, Liversedge saw his two men standing in the hall. He crossed the street to where Pryke was now coming to a halt; Pryke nodded at the open door.

"I see 'em!" he said. "What do you make of this, now?"

"They may be putting up here for the night, to get a very early morning boat," replied Liversedge. "Worn-out-looking house, but still doing business. Well!—they're in there, that's flat! Now——"

"Moving!" said Pryke, motioning towards the hotel.

A man in a shabby uniform was speaking to Crench and Simpson—presently he pointed to a door at the end of the hall; they moved off in its direction. One of them opened the door; they disappeared.

"What're you going to do?" asked Pryke.

Liversedge hesitated—thinking.

"I wonder if either of these chaps does know you?" he said. "We're often

known to people who don't know us—and of course solicitors are often in the police courts and see us. They both know me well enough!"

"Not in that rig-out!" remarked Pryke. "I'd have passed you in the street."

"Still, they could hardly fail to notice me at the restaurant just now," said Liversedge. "I don't know that they actually did, but I guess I'd rouse some recollection in their minds if I walked into this hotel. I think you'd better go in, Pryke."

"What must I do?" asked Pryke.

"It seems to be a licensed house," said Liversedge. "There's a bar there, at that corner, anyway. And as it's an hotel where people stop, there'll be a smoke-room. Go into that—get a drink, and hang round a bit, keeping your eyes open. I'll wait round."

"I've had scarcely any dinner, and I don't like drinking on a nearly empty stomach!" replied Pryke grumblingly. "However—in the name of duty——"

"You needn't drink," said Liversedge. "Order a drink—and leave it. Anything for an excuse to get in. If you do see those fellows, and anything suspicious, don't excite their suspicions by hurrying out. Take your time! There's a devil of a cold wind off the river, but as you say, duty——"

Pryke crossed the road and entered the hotel; Liversedge watching him across the lighted hall saw him presently directed to the door through which Simpson and Crench had passed; within it, he, too, disappeared.

"I reckon that's the smoking-room," he muttered to himself. "Now, have those two come here to meet somebody, or are they going to stay here for the night, and slip off by an early morning steamer?"

Speculating on the respective chances of these propositions, Liversedge pulled out his pipe and tobacco and, strolling up and down under the gloomy shadow of the big warehouses, began to smoke. He had nearly smoked a big pipe out before Pryke emerged from the hotel and came towards him.

"Well?" demanded Liversedge.

"They're in there, right enough," said Pryke. "In the smoking-room. Biggish place that, when you're once inside, and pretty full—I mean the smoking-room. Seafaring men, most of 'em—rum and tobacco going strong. Our two are in a corner, with a man they evidently came to meet—doing a close talk."

"What sort of man?" asked Liversedge.

Pryke furnished a detailed description; before he had finished Liversedge stopped him.

"Garner!" he exclaimed. "Garner!—sure as fate! Oh, yes, that's Garner!"

"Who's Garner?" inquired Pryke.

"Another chap I suspect—mixed up with Crench. Lord!—I believe we're striking oil! Crench and Simpson!—that's significant—but Crench, Simpson,

and Garner in combination—um!”

“What’re you going to do?” demanded Pryke.

Liversedge considered the situation hastily. It seemed to him that this was no time for half-measures. He suddenly took off and put away his tinted spectacles; with a deft movement of his fingers he divested himself of his side-whiskers; then he turned down the collar of his coat and shifted the angle of his hat.

“Going in!” he answered. “Have you got your card on you?”

“Of course!” replied Pryke. “And,” he added, with a laugh, “a pair of bracelets in one pocket and a revolver in another! That do?”

“Come on!” said Liversedge. “Show the way—straight to ’em!”

Pryke led him into the hotel, across the hall, and into a big room thickly clouded with tobacco-smoke. He let out a sharp, subdued exclamation as he opened the door, and Liversedge following his glance saw Garner sitting in a corner—alone.

XXI—*The Bridge*

Garner caught sight of the two detectives as soon as they entered the room, and Liversedge, watching him closely, saw in his face the expression of a man who realises that he is unexpectedly confronted with a critical situation. But it died away as quickly as it had arisen; by the time Liversedge and Pryke had reached the corner in which he sat, Garner had recovered himself, and was gazing at Liversedge with a half-cynical, half-defiant smile. And Liversedge, quick to notice this, went straight to his point.

“Now, Garner!” he began in a low voice, as he leaned across the table behind which Garner sat. “You had Crench and Simpson here a few minutes ago! Where are they?” Garner looked at his questioner for an instant as if some insolent retort were on the tip of his tongue. But instead of making it, his manner changed, and he smiled.

“Ask me another, Liversedge!” he answered banteringly. “I don’t know!”

“Where did they go, then?” demanded Liversedge. “Answer that!”

Garner pointed to the farther end of the room.

“If you must know, they went through that door,” he replied. “Back entrance to the hotel there. I should say they’re on their way home. Business with them?”

“And with you!” retorted Liversedge. “Come, now, Garner—it’s no good bluffing! What were those two doing down here?”

Garner stretched himself lazily on his seat and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, shook his head.

“I don’t know any reason why I should act as an information bureau to you, Liversedge,” he answered. “If a couple of gentlemen come to see me at my hotel——”

“That won’t do, Garner!” interrupted Liversedge. “If you won’t talk here, you’d better come along at once—I’m not going to stand any nonsense! Which _____”

Garner’s face grew dark, and he slowly withdrew his hands from his pockets.

“What do you mean by that?” he growled. “What warrant have you to _____”

“Never mind about warrants!” said Liversedge. “You’ll hear about warrants sharp enough, if need be! Now, are you going to tell me what those two were doing with you here, or will you come along and tell it elsewhere?”

Garner looked steadily from one to the other of his unwelcome visitors. He made a particularly careful inspection of Pryke, who had assumed a ready and

watchful attitude at Liversedge's elbow, in such a position that at the fraction of a second's notice he could spring into action. And he didn't like Pryke's looks, nor his athletic build, nor his hands and fingers, which seemed as if . . .

"I don't know what the devil you're after, Liversedge," he muttered grumblingly. "I'm just going across to Holland on business, and those two came along to see me—I put up here so as to be ready for the first thing in the morning. Not a very palatial hotel, but convenient——"

"I've guessed all that," interrupted Liversedge. "It doesn't tell me what Simpson and Crench were doing here. What was their business with you?"

"Why should I tell you?" asked Garner. "What have you to do with my business? It's an interference that——"

"Look here, Garner!" said Liversedge, bending closer across the table, and lowering his voice. "You listen to me! I don't want to make any scene here, but you'll either tell me what I want to know, or you'll have to go with us! I've grounds for suspecting both Crench and Simpson in relation to the Bedford Row affair, and I've been watching them closely to-night and followed them here in consequence. Now I find them with you——"

"You haven't found 'em with me!" said Garner, with a sneer. "You——"

"They were with you in this corner ten minutes ago," said Liversedge. "They're gone—but you're here. Now, once more, what was their business with you? You heard what I said just now—I've given you your choice!"

Garner frowned. He was still unpleasantly conscious of the proximity of Pryke. If only Pryke hadn't been so very formidable!

"I'm not at liberty to say what their business was," he muttered. "But I can tell you where they've gone, if that's any good to you."

"Where, then?" demanded Liversedge.

"Cannon Street Hotel," answered Garner readily.

"Do you know why they've gone there?"

"Well—I do!"

"Why?"

"If you must know, to meet Vandeliu!"

"Is he staying there?"

"I conclude he is, since they've gone there to meet him."

Liversedge reflected for a while.

"Very well!" he said suddenly. "We'll go there! But you'll come with us, Garner!"

Garner rose, shrugging his shoulders.

"No objection, if you insist!" he muttered. "Though why I should, I'm hanged if I know! Just remember I've got to be up by five o'clock to catch my boat."

"It's no great distance from here to the Cannon Street Hotel," remarked

Liversedge. "If I get satisfactory explanation there, you can return here as soon as you like. Now come on!"

Garner's hat and overcoat were lying on the seat beside him; he put on his hat, threw the overcoat over his arm, and rose with the air of a man who gives a churlish assent to what he cannot avoid. Together the three men left the smoking-room and went out into the street.

"Going to walk?" asked Garner laconically.

"There's no other way, I should imagine," answered Liversedge. "No taxicabs about here, are there?"

"Get one at the end of Tower Bridge," said Garner. "And," he added sneeringly, "I suppose your time's valuable!"

Liversedge made no reply. He took one side of Garner; Pryke took the other; the three walked abreast to the end of the street, across the bridge, and into St. Katherine's Way, amongst the wharves and warehouses, in silence. At that hour, there were few people about; between the gas-lamps the street lay in darkness or in deep shadow. And in one of its darkest patches, and where an opening ran down to the river, seen gleaming in the light of lamps on the opposite shore, Garner suddenly dashed his overcoat across Pryke's face and shoulders, twisted sharply before Liversedge realised what he was after, and disappeared into the gloom of an arch which led into a tall, apparently unused building. Before Pryke could throw off the heavy coat or Liversedge follow, he had vanished.

Pryke's first proceeding, after he had thrown off the coat, was characteristic. He pulled out a police whistle and blew sharply, on it, once, twice, thrice. Then he turned to Liversedge, who was swearing softly to himself.

"The thing is," he said, stepping back into the roadway and looking up at the front of the tall, gloomy building into which Garner had disappeared, "the thing is—is there a way out of this place at the back? Does he know of it? I reckon he steered us this way on purpose. If——" He checked himself to listen; heavy feet were coming, hurriedly, from both directions. A policeman came running round the nearest corner; two more from over the bridge they had just crossed.

"What's this?" demanded the first pantingly, as he came up. "Who are you?"

"Detectives," answered Liversedge. "Both of us. There's a man slipped us and got away into this building! What sort of place is it?" he went on as the other policemen joined the first. "Are there any other doors?"

"It's an old sail-loft," replied the first policeman. "Disused for some time now; they're just going to pull it down—I expect that's why this door's open. There's no way out but this that I know of. How long's he been in?"

“Slipped in just before I whistled,” answered Pryke. “Turn your light on!”

The three policemen turned on their lamps, and the five men cautiously advanced through the doorway into a cavernous chamber, where, when they came to a halt, everything was silent. They stood, listening; suddenly a faint, scurrying sound came to their ears from some inner recess.

“Rats!” said one of the policemen laconically. Then he added in the tone of one who volunteers highly interesting information: “Thousands of ’em hereabouts!—and thousands more on top of that—and still thousands!”

“Give us hold of that a minute,” said Liversedge, taking a lamp out of the nearest policeman’s hand. He turned it in every direction, revealing dark corners, heaps of rubbish, festoons of cobwebs, masses of disused timber and fallen plaster, and, on one side of the place, a steep stairway, towards which he promptly advanced.

“Must have gone up here!” he said. “Come on!”

“Better have a care!” said the policeman who had first appeared, “Rotten timber, most likely!”

But Liversedge went on and Pryke followed—to turn when he had climbed a few steps.

“One of you watch that doorway!” he said. “If it’s the only way out and in _____”

Another policeman came hurrying in, and took in the situation at a glance.

“There’s a bridge between this place and another at the side!” he called out. “A foot-bridge, high up—right at the top. It communicates with a warehouse—another empty building. If he’s got in there—good Lord, what’s that?”

He paused as a sudden crash as of falling wood, above which rose a sharp cry of agonised fear, came from outside. And at that the two detectives ran down the stair, and followed by the policemen hurried round the corner into a narrow alley, on the cobble stones of which Liversedge turned the lamp he was still carrying. Within a few paces from the street, its yellow glare fell full on Garner, crumpled up in a heap; high above him, outlined against the grey of the sky, still swayed and dangled the worn-out timbers of the bridge that had given away beneath his weight.

Liversedge knew that Garner was dead before even he laid hands on him—he lay as only a dead man would lie. But he put a hand on him, while the other men gathered round in silence.

“Dead enough!” said Liversedge in a low voice. “Neck broken, I should think!—he must have fallen forty feet! Rotten woodwork, I suppose, up there.”

“They’d started taking that bridge down,” muttered the policeman who had last appeared on the scene. “All this property was coming down—there’s a new warehouse to be built here.”

The policeman who had first accosted Liversedge and Pryke turned the

light of his lamp on the dead man's face.

"I suppose you know him?" he asked, turning to the detectives. "Wanted him, eh?"

"We know him," assented Liversedge. He glanced round at the mouth of the narrow alley in which they were standing. A crowd was beginning to collect. "Look here!" he continued. "You'd better get something, a stretcher, or an ambulance, and get him away to the mortuary. Send off at once—I want to find out what he's got on him, and I can't do that here. There'll be something in his pockets," he added in a whisper to Pryke, as one of the policemen hurried off. "He'd never have tried to slip us if he hadn't had something incriminating! We must take care nothing's touched until we've satisfied ourselves."

"The other two?" suggested Pryke. "At Cannon Street Hotel?"

"That must wait," said Liversedge. "Besides, I'm wondering now if that wasn't all bluff? I think he may have meant to get us out of the hotel with that tale, so that he could give us the slip. Anyway, the first thing to do is to find out if there's anything about him that will give us a clue. Now!—now that this has happened, I think there will be."

Half-an-hour later, in a grimly sombre room, and in the presence of police officials and a police-surgeon, Liversedge laid out the contents of Garner's pocket-book, and knew that he was on a definite track at last. Pryke and the others standing by marvelled at the things which Liversedge produced and carefully tabulated. There was a considerable sum in Treasury Notes, all brand new: there was another in French paper money, larger still. There was a draft on a bank in Buenos Ayres for several thousands of pounds, in favour of E. Gordon. There was a passport made out in the same name with a recent photograph of Garner attached to it. There was a newspaper clipping giving particulars of sailings from a French port to Monte Video and Buenos Ayres. And last, but certainly not least in Liversedge's view of things, there were three Bank of England notes of five hundred pounds each. He laid these down and drew a slip of paper from his own pocket.

"These are three of the forty notes stolen from Mr. Henry Marchmont's office in Bedford Row on the night of his murder," he remarked to the police officials at his elbow. "See, here are the numbers!"

The principal official nodded at the dead man.

"Think he was concerned in that affair?" he asked.

"Well—here are the notes!" said Liversedge. "But there are other men! Two others that I've strong suspicions about. We were after them to-night when we chanced on this man. They got away—and we must be after them before this gets out."

Presently he went off with Pryke, both grave and thoughtful. They walked

some little distance in silence.

“Where now?” asked Pryke, at last.

Liversedge woke up out of a reverie.

“Oh, we’ll try the Cannon Street Hotel!” he said. “But as I said before, I believe that was all a made-up tale. We shan’t find them there—nor Vandelius, either.”

In that Liversedge was right—the hotel people knew nothing of Vandelius, nor of Crench, nor of Simpson. No men answering to their descriptions had been there.

“Headquarters now, Pryke!” said Liversedge, as they left the hotel. . . . “And as it’s on the way, we’ll just take a glance at Crench’s office in Chancery Lane. If we see a light there . . .”

XXII—*Trapped*

The building in which Crench had his office stood at the corner of Chancery Lane and Cursitor Street, having an entrance in both thoroughfares. Liversedge remembered that important fact, and was bearing it well in mind when he and Pryke turned out of Fleet Street: he had no desire to let Crench—if he did happen to be there—slip out of his hands through back doors for the second time in one evening. Having more than once been in that particular block of offices on business, he knew exactly where Crench's two rooms lay, high up on the fourth floor; he knew, too, from what angle of the street corner he could get a view of their windows. To that angle he repaired, and craning his neck looked up—to turn on Pryke with an exclamation of delight.

"Hit it!" he said. "He's in!—anyway, somebody's in! See those two lighted windows, away up? Those are Crench's. And now, what's the best thing to be done?"

Pryke pointed to the Cursitor Street entrance.

"Light there," he said. "The door's evidently open."

"Oh, I've no doubt we can get in, easy enough," replied Liversedge. "The only thing is—ought we to have some additional help?"

"I'm all right!" declared Pryke. "And, as I told you—if it comes to it, armed."

"Just so!" agreed Liversedge. "But there are two doors to this place, and, I believe, two lots of stairs. While we're going up one, Crench may be coming down the other—the wrong staircase." He paused, listening. "I hear somebody coming," he continued. "If it's a constable——"

A policeman came along Cursitor Street, leisurely, trying the doors and basement windows in his progress; simultaneously, another came down Chancery Lane. Liversedge waited until they came up: then he introduced himself and Pryke and explained matters. And eventually, having posted one man at one door and the other round the corner, he and his fellow-detective walked into the Chancery Lane entrance and made for the staircase, only to be stopped by a big man who suddenly appeared out of a sort of hall-porter's box, and who regarded them with suspicion.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed gruffly. "What may your business be?"

Liversedge motioned this man into the light at the foot of the stair, and without preface thrust his professional card under his nose.

"See?" he said laconically. "Business upstairs! with Mr. Crench. He's in—eh?"

"Came in some ten minutes since," replied the janitor, obviously surprised.

He looked round at the open doorway and caught sight of the policeman standing in front. "Something up?" he inquired.

"Bit of business that concerns Mr. Crench," answered Liversedge. "Do you know if he's alone?"

"A gentleman came in with him," said the man. "Unknown to me. You know your way up?"

"All right!" answered Liversedge. He began to climb the stairs, closely followed by Pryke. "If, as I suspect, it's Simpson that's with Crench," he remarked as they drew near the fourth landing, "don't be surprised if he shows fight! Crench won't—if I've read him right, he's the sort to collapse. But Simpson's a determined fellow—quiet and dangerous. Watch him! However, we'll let 'em know at once that we've plenty of assistance close by."

Crench's offices lay at the extreme end of a long corridor and down a side passage which opened from it. Half-way along the corridor, the two detectives suddenly heard a door bang; following on that came the sound of advancing feet. "They're coming away!" whispered Liversedge. "Look out!"

Crench and Simpson came sharply round the corner; Simpson carried a small suit-case; Crench, an old-fashioned hand-bag. The electric light was full on just there, and each man was quick to recognise Liversedge. Their eyes turned questioningly from him to Pryke, and they came to an abrupt halt.

"If Simpson downs that suit-case, go for him!" muttered Liversedge. "Watch him close!" He strode on and up to the two surprised men. "Now, Crench, now, Simpson!" he said. "Show us back to the office you've come from! No use refusing or resisting!—we've plenty of help at hand—the police are downstairs. And listen here—Garner's dead, and we've found on him certain matters about which I want an explanation from you. Come on, now—back to that office you've just left!"

Crench was beginning to tremble; in the light of the electric lamp above him, his face turned a sickly green. He drew back, easily responsive to Liversedge's orders. But Simpson faced the detective boldly.

"What do you mean by addressing us in that way and interfering with us?" he demanded. "Garner dead?—that's nonsense! We saw Garner an hour or two _____"

"Garner broke his neck, Simpson, trying to get away from us in Wapping," retorted Liversedge. "We tracked you and Crench down there to his hotel, and saw you in conversation with him in the smoking-room. We lost you there—but we've got you here! Now are you both going quietly back to that office?—or shall I call up the policemen? It's no use you showing fight!—we're both armed."

As if to corroborate his colleague's declaration, Pryke made a quiet but insignificant movement of his right hand in the direction of a convenient

pocket, and Simpson, after a sharp glance at him, showed signs of acquiescence in Liversedge's orders. But it was a slow and grudging acquiescence, and Liversedge saw that he was endeavouring to gain time.

"I know of no right that you have to stop me," he began, as he turned after Crench, "Where's your warrant for——"

"It's no use arguing, Simpson!" interrupted Liversedge. "I'm responsible for what I'm doing! Now look here," he went on, as Crench unlocked a door and turned on a light in his office. "You may as well face it—I want to know what you have in those things—your suit-case, Simpson, and your bag, Crench. And I shall want to know, too, what you were doing with Garner down there in Wapping. I may as well tell you that we followed you from King's Cross to Mark Lane, and from Mark Lane to Wapping High Street: I'll tell you, too, that on searching Garner's dead body we found, amongst other valuables, three of the five hundred pound notes which were stolen from Mr. Henry Marchmont's office on the night of his murder. Now—are you going to give me any information, or——"

Simpson suddenly sat down in the nearest chair and put his hands in his pockets.

"I shall not say anything!" he answered. Then he glanced at Crench. "Don't you say a word, either!" he added. "Let them do what they like—we've plenty of time. Do nothing!"

Crench had put his bag on the table by the side of Simpson's suit-case. He was trembling more than ever: Liversedge saw that he was going to show himself the craven thing that he had always believed him to be.

"I—I—if you'd only let me explain!" he began. "You see, Liversedge _____"

"Psha!" said Simpson contemptuously. "What is there to explain? I tell you—say nothing. Let Liversedge run his head against another brick wall. He's already thinking we murdered Marchmont! Let him think so!"

Liversedge made no reply to these taunts. With a whispered word to Pryke to keep his eye on both men, he went out to the head of the stair and called to the surprised caretaker to tell the two policemen to come up. Reinforced by their presence he went back, and while the uniformed men watched their quarry, he and Pryke opened the suit-case and began to examine its contents. There were articles of clothing and toilet necessities there, to be sure; just enough for a man who is going away for a week-end or desires to have a few things close at hand on a sea voyage, but there were also bundles of notes, bearer bonds, securities easily convertible into cash in any foreign capital or commercial centre: the whole represented a very considerable amount, and Liversedge secretly concluded that Simpson at the moment of arrest was actually beginning the first stage of a flight to some distant country and

carrying his money with him. He came to the same conclusion as regards Crench, after examining his bag. But in that second examination he made an important discovery, for there in a pocket-book filled with other valuable paper he came across two more of the five Bank of England notes previously unaccounted for. Crench witnessed his unearthing of these, and grew more nervous than ever, but Simpson, who had begun to smoke a cigarette, showed nothing but what was meant to be cynical indifference.

Liversedge wasted little time over this examination, especially after his discovery of the missing bank-notes. He replaced the various things in bag and suit-case, locked each, and turned to their owners.

“You’ll have to come with us, both of you!” he announced in matter-of-fact tones. “It’s no use protesting or saying anything, after what I’ve seen; you can give what explanation you like elsewhere.”

“Wh—what are you going to charge us with?” asked Crench huskily. “Upon my soul, Liversedge, I know nothing about——”

“Hold your tongue, man!” broke in Simpson. “Don’t be a fool! He’s going to charge us with being in possession of our own property!”

“The charge can wait,” remarked Liversedge. Although he showed nothing of it, he was full of surprise at the events of the evening, for though he had suspected Simpson, and Crench, and in a lesser degree, Garner, his suspicions had never assumed any very clear or definite shape. But now he was wondering whether the charge that would inevitably be made wouldn’t resolve itself into one of murder—and he glanced at his two prisoners with a half-dreamy speculativeness, already seeing ropes about their necks. Then he suddenly picked up the suit-case and the bag, and nodded at Pryke and the policemen. “Bring them along!” he said quietly.

Setting down his burdens in the corridor, Liversedge asked for and got the key of the office door from Crench and locked it himself. Downstairs, the caretaker stared widely at the significant procession; Crench looked away from him. Liversedge drew the man aside.

“Mr. Crench’s office is locked up, and the key’s in my pocket,” he said. “Have you a master key for it?”

“Why, there is such a thing,” answered the surprised caretaker, “but it’s never used. Mr. Crench, you see, he’s liked his cleaning done when he was in the office.”

“No one’s to enter that office—you understand!” ordered Liversedge. “I shall be back here in the morning.”

The caretaker nodded at the retreating figures of the two captives, now disappearing down the steps into Chancery Lane, carefully shepherded by Pryke and the two constables.

“What ha’ they been up to?” he asked. “I see you’ve took ’em! But Mr.

Crench—he's a peaceable, law-abidin' sort—pays his rent reg'lar, and all that. That other feller, now—can't abide him at no price! I reckon he's been gettin' poor Mr. Crench into trouble—what?"

Liversedge had been for hurrying on after issuing his monition about the key, but the caretaker's last words gave him an idea.

"You'll hear all about it, in due course," he said. "These things will happen, you know. But the other man?—you've seen him here before?"

"Only now and then, and only of late," replied the caretaker. "And it's always been of a night—late, like this. He's come in with Mr. Crench now and then, and once or twice by himself. I never saw him in my life before about a fortnight ago, but since then he's been here at intervals, as you might say."

"Alone?" asked Liversedge.

"Well, yes—but last night he came in with Mr. Garner. Him and Garner they come in at ten o'clock—uncommon late."

"Was Crench here, then?"

"He was here—yes. He came in about ten minutes before they did—the three of 'em was upstairs till, well, getting on to eleven, it would be."

"Bit unusual, isn't it, for people to come here as late as that?" suggested Liversedge.

"Well, as a rule. But there are tenants that stops late—very late, sometimes. And there are others that lives here—two or three gentlemen has residential chambers, as they call 'em. Anyway, I'm always on duty down here till eleven—otherwise I shouldn't ha' seen that chap as I don't like the look on. Reckon he's been up to no good with poor Mr. Crench!"

Wondering what it was in Crench that had appealed to the caretaker, Liversedge hurried after his prisoners and their convoy. He was wondering, too, as to what charge to bring against the two men when he handed them over; eventually he decided to charge them with being in possession of the notes stolen from Henry Marchmont's office, and to leave any grave charge until later. But when, after consultation with the officials, he did so charge them, Simpson objected sharply.

"You found no such notes on me, Liversedge, nor in my suit-case!" he said. "That's pure nonsense! What you found is my property!"

"Not everything!" replied Liversedge. "You may have overlooked them, but there are two or three securities in there which were obviously the late Mr. Marchmont's property and I believe them to have been stolen. Look at that—and that——"

He held up two documents, at sight of which Simpson started; their presence evidently took him by surprise. "Sandwiched in between a lot of bearer bonds," remarked Liversedge in an undertone to the inspector. "I dare say he didn't know they were there."

Simpson said no more; he became doggedly silent and allowed himself to be locked up without further protest. But Crench, about to be removed, suddenly became eloquent and gave signs of supplementing his eloquence with tears.

“If you’re thinking that we—or I—or either or both of us were responsible for—for that affair of Henry Marchmont’s, you’re mistaken!” he burst out. “Absolutely, entirely mistaken! Before Heaven, Liversedge, I’d nothing to do with it—and he hadn’t—I know he hadn’t. About the money, I could explain. But I don’t mind the money—it’s the other thing—the murder! For God’s sake, don’t charge me with the murder!—I couldn’t bear to think that I was charged with that. And—and—will you send, now, just now, for Mr. Richard Marchmont? Send for him—for Mr. Richard!”

XXIII—Look for that Woman!

It was evident to Liversedge and the police officials standing near him that Crench was rapidly developing a highly nervous condition. Great beads of sweat were gathering on his brow; his fingers were beginning to twitch; his whole attitude was that of a man whom sudden shock has knocked off his balance. And all through this and above it was the unmistakable sign of fear—the sort of fear that turns men into limp rags. All the bluster and cock-sureness that had formerly characterised Crench had gone out of him; he stood there in the yellow glare of the gas-light a very mean object.

“Why do you want to see Mr. Richard Marchmont?” asked the inspector.

Crench glanced, fearfully, at the door through which Simpson had just disappeared in custody.

“I—I want to—to tell him something—to ask him something!” he answered tremblingly. “That is if—if I can speak to him alone—or to him and Liversedge—or to the three of you alone. Not before Simpson!”

“You’re afraid of Simpson?” asked Liversedge, abruptly.

“If we were left together—now—yes!” said Crench. “Don’t put me with him, gentlemen! If he knew that I’d said anything—was going to say anything—to you, he’d murder me! Keep us apart!”

“You want to make a statement?” suggested the inspector.

“Now that this has happened, yes!” assented Crench. “I’ll say what I know—if Simpson isn’t there!”

“Don’t bother yourself about Simpson,” said the inspector. “We’ll see you’re safe. But you wish Mr. Richard Marchmont to be present?”

“I want to ask him something,” repeated Crench.

The inspector turned to Liversedge.

“Do you know where Mr. Richard Marchmont lives?” he asked. “Can we get at him?” Liversedge glanced at his watch.

“I know his address,” he said. “He’s on the telephone, too, and likely to be at home now. I’ll ring him up.”

Half an hour later, Richard, ignorant of what had happened, rode up to the door of the police station and was met by Liversedge, who hurriedly told him of the various events of the evening and of Crench’s desire to speak before him.

“He’s got something to tell, Mr. Marchmont,” continued Liversedge, “and it’s my opinion that it probably incriminates Simpson; in fact, I’ve already got an idea that Simpson murdered your uncle and that somehow or other Crench and Garner became or were accessories. However, we’ll hear what Crench

says—you must remember, though, that he's in a dangerous position and he'll try to save his own neck. Listen and say nothing—let him have full rope.”

Richard followed the detective into the room in which Crench was detained under the eyes of the inspector and Pryke. He gave Crench a steady inspection and wondered why the look he got in return was one of almost craven entreaty; there was evidently an idea in Crench's mind that Richard could do more for him than any other person he could think of. He stood up, as a criminal might stand before a judge, as full now of humility as he had formerly been distinguished for aggression; Richard, thinking of him in cricketing terms, felt that all the devil and spin had gone out of him.

“Sit down, Crench,” said Liversedge. “Now here's Mr. Marchmont! Do you still want to make that statement you spoke of?”

During the interval of waiting Crench had recovered something of his self-possession. He responded readily to the detective's question.

“I'm willing to tell all I know about the Bedford Row affair,” he answered. “That is, so long as you'll not let Simpson know I've said anything, and will keep him away from me. If he knew——”

“I've told you already you needn't trouble yourself about Simpson,” said the inspector. “We'll take care of you! We'd better take down his statement,” he added, turning to Liversedge. “You understand, Crench, that anything you say——”

“I understand all that,” answered Crench impatiently. “I'm going to make a clean breast of everything—as far as I'm concerned.” He waited while the inspector completed arrangements for taking down what he had to say. “To begin with, I wish to assert, as strongly as possible, that I had nothing to do with the murder of Mr. Henry Marchmont, and have no knowledge whatever as to the exact identity of his murderer! That is the solemn truth!”

He paused at this, looking round as if to enlist some sympathy or understanding from his hearers. He got nothing; the others remained stolid, listening, watching, and Crench moistened his dry lips again and went on.

“All that I know is this. About six o'clock on the evening on which Mr. Henry Marchmont was murdered, I went to the Café Bologna in Holborn to get my dinner. It is a place I am in the habit of going to three or four times a week. I saw Simpson there. I had seen him, that is to say met him, there before; he went there occasionally. Sometimes we had some conversation. On this occasion he came in just after me, and took a seat at my table. After some desultory talk, he asked me, between ourselves, as solicitors, if I knew anything of a man named Lansdale, who had recently come to London from South America, and was interested in financial matters? I asked him why he put the question; he replied that he had good reasons, which he wouldn't mind divulging if it turned out that I knew the man. I then, under the stipulation of

secrecy—professional secrecy—said that I did know Lansdale. He was connected with another financier, Mr. Louis Vandelius, for whom I had done some business, and had once or twice been at my office with another man, Garner, who was employed occasionally by Vandelius as a sort of agent. I further told Simpson that Vandelius and Lansdale were deeply interested in a big financial deal having to do with certain developments of properties in South America, and that both Garner and myself stood to make a nice bit for our services in connection with the successful carrying through of that deal. And having said that, I was considerably taken aback when Simpson told me that in his opinion that deal was in danger because of Lansdale's connection with it.

“Simpson then told me how he came to form this opinion. He said that during that afternoon Mr. Henry Marchmont had told him that on the previous evening he had accidentally met Lansdale at a City dinner, and had immediately recognised him as one Land, a defaulting stock and share broker, who, twenty-five years previously, had vanished from Clayminster, after doing a lot of people out of their money, and had been badly wanted and searched for by the police, at the time, without success. Mr. Marchmont had consulted Simpson as to what he should do; according to Simpson he wanted to inform the Clayminster police about Lansdale's presence in London. However, he had also told Simpson that Lansdale was coming to see him that very evening, at Bedford Row, and that after that interview he should decide what to do.

“Now, of course, nothing, or nearly nothing, of this was news to me, for as a matter of fact, though I hadn't let it out to Simpson in the first stages of our conversation, I already knew about the meeting between Lansdale and Marchmont at the City dinner—Lansdale had told Vandelius, Garner, and myself about it that afternoon, putting the whole thing from his point of view. But I was upset to find out that Marchmont seemed to be in such deadly earnest as Simpson represented him to be in, for I saw that my interests were endangered, and I said so. Then Simpson made a proposal to me—and I wish I'd never listened to him! He said that for reasons of his own he was curious to know all about this Clayminster episode and to hear Marchmont and Lansdale thrash it out. Then he told me that he knew every inch and corner of Marchmont's offices in Bedford Row, could admit himself by a back entrance whenever he liked, and knew how to not only hear but watch anything that went on in Marchmont's private office. And he suggested to me that we should go there, together, after our dinner, and listen to whatever passed between Marchmont and Lansdale.

“I was fool enough to consent! We left the Café Bologna about a quarter past seven. Simpson took me to the back of the house in Bedford Row, let us both in at a door there, and after we had taken off our boots led me up by a

back stair to a room which he said was next to the private office. There was a deep cupboard in that room, in which books and papers were stored: a door communicated it with the private room and in the upper panels of the door there were holes bored. We could hear and see everything in the private room—easily.

“There was no one in the room when we got into the cupboard, but the light was full on. Very soon, I should say about half-past seven, we heard steps and voices, and Henry Marchmont came in followed by Lansdale. What followed was described by Lansdale accurately, truthfully, fully, in the evidence he gave at the adjourned inquest. Mr. Marchmont was harsh, overbearing, contemptuous: he had obviously got an impression fixed firmly in his mind, and nothing that Lansdale could say or urge could shake it. We heard all that passed—just as Lansdale described it to the Coroner. We saw Lansdale lay down the bundle of bank-notes. We saw him leave the room. Every detail that he gave at the inquest was correct.”

Crench paused—his manner signified that he had come to the critical point of his statement. And now he seemed to care little whether he got any sympathy or not; his evident desire was to make things clear.

“I say—we saw Lansdale go away, leaving the bank-notes behind him, where he’d put them down on Henry Marchmont’s desk. He made no response to Marchmont’s demand that he should come back—he just went off, evidently deeply offended at Marchmont’s treatment of him. When Marchmont found that he’d really gone, he stamped about the room a while, fuming and muttering. Then he unlocked his safe, threw the bank-notes into it, locked it, and put the keys in his pocket. Then, after thinking a bit, he sat down at his desk, wrote a short letter, stamped it, put on his overcoat and hat, and, with the letter in his hand, went out. As soon as he’d left the room, I wanted to go—I was afraid of being discovered. But Simpson wouldn’t go—he said Marchmont had only gone to the corner with the letter and would be back presently; when he came back he’d probably go out to dinner or to his living-rooms upstairs; we’d wait, and get away after his return. So we waited, whispering—and all of a sudden, a few minutes later, we heard a shot!

“Immediately on hearing this, Simpson tore open the door that communicated with Henry Marchmont’s private office. I believe it was locked, and that the key was in the door, on our side. As soon as we were in the room, Simpson rushed to the door that opened on the stairs—the door by which Marchmont had gone out with his letter. He ran through it down the stairs. But I didn’t—I ran to the window. There were two windows, tall, narrow windows—I ran to the left-hand side one, and tore aside the blind. And I was just in time to see a figure running across the street, in a slanting direction from Marchmont’s door, towards the opposite side—the figure of a woman!”

In spite of himself and his determination to preserve an undisturbed demeanour, Richard let out a sharp cry of surprise.

“A woman?”

“The figure of a woman, Mr. Marchmont!” asserted Crench. “As far as I could see in the gloom, a tall, slenderly built woman, very active in movement. She ran quickly; she disappeared round the corner in the direction of Red Lion Street. Then I left the window and went after Simpson. He was bending over Marchmont, who lay on the first landing, quite dead. As I hurried down, Simpson looked up at me. ‘This is Lansdale’s work!’ he said. At that, I decided to say nothing of what I’d just seen from the window.”

“Why?” demanded Liversedge sharply.

“I can’t tell you—precisely,” replied Crench. “We had to think quickly. It was all quick. And I needn’t go into details—what I want to make plain is bald fact. We stood by the dead man for awhile, whispering—about nothing much. Then Simpson took the keys out of his pocket. We went back upstairs. Simpson unlocked the safe and took out the bundle of notes. I think the same thought was in the minds of both—that when Lansdale heard of the murder—supposing he hadn’t done it himself—he’d be so afraid of its being known that he’d been at Marchmont’s office that he’d say nothing about the notes being left there. Anyway, Simpson put them in his own pocket, took the keys back to where he’d got them from, and after we’d turned out the lights we left the house by the way we’d got into it. We separated as soon as we’d got clear of Bedford Row, but met again later on that evening.”

“Where?” asked Liversedge.

“Near Simpson’s rooms in Camden Town—I live that way, too. After discussing things thoroughly, we agreed to share the notes. We didn’t think it at all likely that Lansdale would ever say anything about them. If he did, it would probably be concluded that whoever shot Henry Marchmont had robbed him of them. We felt certain, reviewing everything, that no suspicion could possibly attach to either of us. There was only the question of getting rid of the notes, and we knew how to effect that without creating suspicion. Taking everything into consideration, we did not see how we could be detected—that is, easily.”

Liversedge was regarding Crench with steady attention during the whole of his statement, and more particularly towards the end.

“Why did you wish for Mr. Richard Marchmont’s presence while you told all this?” he asked suddenly.

“Because of what I saw from the window,” replied Crench.

“The woman—crossing the street?”

“Just so—the woman! Find that woman! Look for that woman! I tell you, I’m innocent as you are of Henry Marchmont’s murder. Look for that

woman!”

“But—why send for Mr. Richard Marchmont to hear that?” demanded Liversedge.

“Because,” said Crench. “I think Mr. Richard Marchmont may know who that woman was!”

XXIV—*The House in Bernard Street*

The three men closely watching and listening to Crench had been aware, all through his statement, that he was addressing himself mainly to Richard Marchmont, as if in him lay his chief hope of escaping from what was still a probable eventuality. And Crench suddenly became entreating in manner, and, as if ignoring the police officials, turned himself to Richard.

“Mr. Marchmont! Those women that came to see your uncle the morning of that day—the day he met his death, of which, God knows, I’m as innocent as you are, sir!—you saw them—you know them, Mr. Marchmont! Simpson saw your uncle introduce them to you, outside the office! Mr. Marchmont!—it must have been one of those women that I saw running away—saw from the window! Liversedge, there!—I know he means to charge me and Simpson with the murder, I know he does!—I can see it!—Mr. Marchmont, you know those women!—for God’s sake, Mr. Marchmont, find the one that ran away from the door as I looked out!—don’t let me be charged with murder! Mr. Marchmont——”

Liversedge came to Richard’s rescue.

“Keep quiet, Crench!” he said. “You don’t know anything at all of what’s in my mind. We’ll investigate your statement about the woman, right enough! Leave that alone—you tell me something else. What had you and Simpson to do with Garner? What were you doing with him at the hotel in Wapping?”

Crench made a gesture that seemed to signify some past helplessness.

“Garner!” he answered thickly. “Garner—he got the whip hand of me—of me and Simpson. It was after hearing Lansdale’s evidence at the adjourned inquest the other day; about the twenty thousand pounds’ worth of bank-notes. He taxed Simpson and me with having got possession of the money. He was there, at the adjourned inquest; he heard all that Lansdale had to say, and he put two and two together. He chanced to come across me and Simpson talking privately after the inquest, and he accused us of having taken the twenty thousand pounds and threatened us. We—we had to come to terms with him. He’d got his money out of the Lansdale-Vandeliuss deal, and he wanted to go abroad at once, to start on some financial game of his own, with as much capital as he could rake up, and of course he wanted to get more out of us. Blackmail!—that’s what it was!—blackmail! We had to give in to him—he was a dangerous man, Garner! Of course, we’d negotiated nearly all the five hundred pound notes by that time, successfully. Garner forced everything out of us: there was no other way than to square him. We took him the money last night—to that hotel in Wapping. He was going to catch an early morning boat

for some Dutch port; from there he was going across France to—I forget which French port it was—to get a ship for South America.”

“How much did Garner get?” asked Liversedge.

“One-third!” replied Crench. “Six thousand seven hundred, roughly speaking. It would be on him—but he’d other money of his own. As—as we had.”

“How much did you and Garner get out of that deal in which Vandelius and Lansdale were concerned?” inquired the detective.

“We had five thousand pounds each—cash,” answered Crench. “Vandelius gave up his cheque for our shares as soon as he and Lansdale had signed the papers. That’s my money, of course—you can’t touch that!”

“Do you know what Vandelius got out of it?” asked Liversedge. “If you do—tell!”

“I don’t! A very big amount, I’m sure,” said Crench. “What we got would be a mere nothing to it!”

“And—just think carefully, before you answer this—if anything had occurred to put that deal off, Vandelius would have lost all that very big amount?”

“It was possible—yes, you might say probable. Certainly!”

“Then it was in his interest to keep Mr. Henry Marchmont quiet?—to prevent him from telling anything of his own beliefs or impressions about Lansdale?”

“It was certainly in his interest!” replied Crench eagerly. “When Lansdale told the three of us—Vandelius, Garner, and myself—at my office about the unfortunate meeting with Mr. Henry Marchmont at the City dinner, Vandelius said that Henry Marchmont must be kept quiet at any cost—any! Until the deal was through. We were all anxious nothing should be said; we all urged Lansdale to do all he could that night to convince Henry Marchmont that he was not the dishonest and fraudulent man Henry Marchmont believed him to be.”

“Then it comes to this,” said Liversedge. “It was quite probable that on Henry Marchmont’s silence depended a vast gain to Vandelius, and a smaller one of five thousand pounds to Garner?”

“That is so!” asserted Crench.

“Very well!” continued Liversedge. “Now you tell me this—did you never suspect either Vandelius or Garner?”

“No!—because of what I saw. The woman, you know, who ran away!”

“Why should she have shot Mr. Henry Marchmont?” asked the detective.

Crench shook his head.

“I don’t know; I can’t suggest anything!” he answered. “All I know is that’s what I saw. The woman—a woman—running away across the street as if

from Marchmont's front door."

"Well, just another question, Crench," continued Liversedge, after a pause, during which the solicitor looked anxiously from one to the other of the three men. "You say you and Simpson were together when you heard that shot?"

"Together, yes—just within the cupboard I told you about."

"He ran straight downstairs, and you ran to the window of the private room?"

"Yes!"

"Did Simpson do anything about searching the place? Did he look into any rooms, opening from the stairs, or the landings?"

"No!—he did nothing, except to take the key of the safe from Henry Marchmont's pocket. It was he, Simpson, who suggested taking and sharing the notes—upon my honour, I hadn't thought of it! I wish I'd never listened to him—but I did! Still, I tell you again, I know nothing of the murder—I'm as innocent of that——"

"You're not charged with murder," interrupted Liversedge. "You're not charged with anything at present. You've been found in possession of money that was undoubtedly stolen from the late Mr. Marchmont's office in Bedford Row on the night of his death, and you'll be detained till we know more."

"I know nothing of the murder!" repeated Crench.

When he had been taken away, the three men left together looked at each other.

"What do you make of that, Liversedge?" asked the inspector. "Do you think he's been telling the truth?"

"Yes, I think so!" answered Liversedge. "He's not the sort of chap whose word I should take in a general way, but I believe we got the real truth out of him this time! Crench is frightened!—he sees the dock at the Central Criminal Court and the gallows, too, for that matter, in certain eventualities! For, if you come to think of it, it wouldn't be a difficult thing to convict him and Simpson of murder. On Crench's own admission they were there!—who's to prove their innocence?"

"If you're asking me," remarked the inspector dryly, "there's no innocence about it! I don't believe a word of what Crench has said!—except that he and Simpson took the money, and, of course, that they were there eavesdropping. My notion is that the story we've heard is only true up to a certain point. I think they overheard the talk between Mr. Marchmont and Lansdale and saw Lansdale put the money down and go away and afterwards saw Mr. Marchmont go out to post the letter they say he wrote. But there—at that point!—I think Crench moved off from the truth. I think one or other of the two probably waylaid Mr. Marchmont on his return and shot him—for the twenty thousand pounds!"

“You’ll not be alone in thinking that, either,” said Liversedge. “But—I don’t think it!”

He turned to Richard. “Mr. Marchmont,” he continued, “the inspector here doesn’t know all we know! Crench has spoken of seeing a woman run away across the street. Well”—here he turned back to the inspector—“there is a woman known to Mr. Marchmont and myself who’s half-crazy, or wholly crazy, with murderous designs on Lansdale! Her name’s Cora Sanderthwaite. She believes herself and her family and others to have been deeply wronged, financially, and perhaps otherwise, by Lansdale. Mr. Richard Marchmont and I have both heard her—well, rave about these wrongs, which, if Lansdale’s to be credited, are purely imaginary. Now what I know about her fits in with Crench’s story. In fact, as he talked, I came to an opinion. I think it very likely that Cora Sanderthwaite, having been told by Mr. Henry Marchmont that Lansdale was going to the office at Bedford Row that evening, went there with the fixed idea of meeting him and revenging herself, and that she shot Mr. Henry Marchmont in mistake for Lansdale—the two men were very much alike in build and figure, and one could easily be mistaken for the other in a half-light. Considering what we know now, Mr. Marchmont, I think that’s a reasonable theory—what do you think?”

“I think there may be a great deal in it, Liversedge,” replied Richard. “It’s in accordance with my own conclusions after hearing what Crench had to say and with what I know. But I have here,” he went on, drawing an envelope from his pocket, “something that may perhaps strengthen it—that is, if it really relates to what we’re talking about. This is a letter, an anonymous letter, which I found in my letter-box this evening, just before you rang me up on the telephone. I brought it along in case it might be of use to you, Liversedge. As I say, it’s anonymous, and there’s no address, but it seems to have been posted this afternoon in the south-west district, I’ll read it—the handwriting’s that of an elderly man, I should say, and I don’t think there’s been any attempt at disguising it.”

He drew a sheet of letter-paper from the envelope, smoothed it out, and read:

“Richard Marchmont, Esq.

“DEAR SIR,—I venture to write to you believing you to know Mr. Lansdale or Land and to be interested in his daughter. If you wish to avoid sorrow and trouble for her and her father, advise him strongly to get out of this country as quickly as he can. His life is in danger. It is not safe for him to go about, nor for his daughter to be with him when he is about. Tell him to take a hint and go away as soon as possible; the sooner the better for everybody concerned.

Richard tossed the letter across to Liversedge; the detective re-read it.

“Mr. Marchmont,” he said, “as sure as fate that refers to Cora Sanderthwaite! It probably comes from some member of her family—maybe from her brother, maybe from her sister. They may have concocted it between them. Anyway, they, or whoever’s written it, knows that Cora Sanderthwaite’s crazy brain is still prompting her to go for Lansdale! That’s my reading of this letter. And late as it is, I’m going round to Bernard Street!—Mr. Marchmont, you might come with me.”

The clocks were striking midnight as Richard and the detective gained the open air. Liversedge, as he stepped out, stretched his arms and then rubbed his hands—the involuntary gesture of a man who is physically tired and yet has work to do.

“A fair lot’s happened since this evening began, Mr. Marchmont!” he remarked. “But I really do believe we’re getting at a solution of things, or, at any rate, making some progress towards a solution. Of course, there’s a lot to be cleared up, and there are still several puzzling details. Now, I was wondering as Crench told us his story who it was that your uncle sat down and wrote to after Lansdale left him that night? That letter, which, if Crench’s tale be true, Mr. Henry Marchmont went out to post with his own hands, may be of some importance. I’d like to know if it had any relation to the interview he’d just had with Lansdale?”

“You’d think it had—as, according to Crench, he wrote it immediately the interview was over,” replied Richard.

“You would! My first notion about it was a letter to the police. But it can’t have been, or I should have heard of it. Yet whoever it was to, it must have been about the business that had just occupied his thoughts—you could hardly conceive his sitting down immediately Lansdale had gone to write about any other matter.”

“Part of the mystery!” said Richard. “But, Liversedge—what are you going to do about this Cora Sanderthwaite? Things are pointing that way. And in my opinion the poor thing’s mad!”

“Half-mad, Mr. Marchmont, half-mad!—and therefore doubly dangerous,” answered the detective. “I don’t know—yet. What I want to find out is what her relations, her sister and brother, have to say. Then—I can decide. But I’m getting more and more convinced that my notion about her is not far off the truth! I know of a bit of evidence that helps me to think so.”

“What’s that?” asked Richard.

“Well,” replied Liversedge, “it’s not a nice thing to mention to you, but the fact is, I’ve seen the bullet which caused your uncle’s death! The surgeons

showed it to me after their examination. Mr. Marchmont!—that bullet had never been fired out of a modern fire-arm—that is, a fire-arm of the present day. What it had been fired out of was a revolver of the sort they made about thirty years ago. Now, a family like these Sanderthwaites coming from the country, as I understand they did, might be very likely to have a weapon of that sort, eh? But here we are at their house—all in darkness, as I rather expected at this time o' night, though it is a boarding establishment. No matter!—I'm going to have somebody up."

Lionel Sanderthwaite appeared at last, in a shabby dressing-gown, a lamp in his hand. He showed no surprise at seeing Richard and the detective, and when they had followed him into the hall Liversedge went straight to the point.

"Mr. Sanderthwaite!" he said. "Don't be alarmed—but where is your sister, Miss Cora?"

Lionel shook his head with a half-perplexed gesture.

"I can't tell you!" he answered. "My sister Cora has left us!"

XXV—*The Dead Man's Letter*

Sanderthwaite moved aside as he volunteered this information, and Liversedge, taking the movement as an invitation to enter, stepped into the hall, followed by Richard. There, coming down the stairs they saw Mrs. Mansiter, who, like her brother, appeared to have risen hastily from bed.

“Is anything wrong?” she asked anxiously, peering at the detective. “Is it _____?”

“There’s nothing to be afraid about, ma’am,” said Liversedge, going forward. “You know me—and Mr. Richard Marchmont. If we could just have a word or two with you and your brother?”

Sanderthwaite turned into the room in which Richard had witnessed Cora’s strange outburst of fury against Lansdale, and lighted the gas. The visitors walked in, followed by Mrs. Mansiter; in the gloom they saw that her face, despite the detective’s assurance, was full of doubt.

“There must be something, when you come at this hour of the night,” she said. “Past twelve o’clock! If it’s my sister——”

“Your brother says she’s not with you,” interrupted Liversedge. “I wanted to ask her a question or two, Mrs. Mansiter. Perhaps you can tell me——”

Mrs. Mansiter made an uneasy movement. It was plain to Liversedge that she was put out and anxious; she was watching her visitors closely; so, too, was Sanderthwaite.

“We’ve had a great deal of trouble with Cora,” she remarked presently. “Ever since all this began she’s been strange in manner. And some days ago—a week—she went away. We don’t know where she is.”

Liversedge turned to Richard.

“Mr. Marchmont saw her, though, a day or two ago,” he said. “She was at the adjourned inquest. She spoke to Mr. Marchmont.”

“There was a man with her,” said Richard. He went on to describe Cora’s companion. “They sat together and went away together.”

Mrs. Mansiter looked at her brother.

“That would be Mr. Appleby, Liney!” she said. “She must have gone there—to Mr. and Mrs. Appleby.”

“Who are they, ma’am?” inquired Liversedge.

“Old friends of ours, who live in Clapham now,” replied Mrs. Mansiter. “They used to live at Clayminster, when we did. They lost money in that Land affair. If Cora’s with them, she’ll be safe. But I should have thought Mr. Appleby would have let us know.”

“I suppose you know where Mr. Appleby lives?” suggested Liversedge.

“You can give me his address?”

“Oh, yes, I can give you his address,” said Mrs. Mansiter. “But you’ll not go there to-night, will you? Cora is in a strange state—we’ve been frightened about her. Ever since Mr. Henry Marchmont sent for her and me and told us that Land, or Lansdale, was back in this country she’s been queer—it upset her.”

“I told you the reason—when you were here before,” said Sanderthwaite.

“I remember,” agreed Liversedge. “Well!” he went on after a pause. “I don’t want to give you any further trouble, but there are matters I’m bound to go into. We’ve had information that just about the time Mr. Henry Marchmont was shot on the stairs of his office, a woman answering the description of your sister was seen to run across the street outside, as if from the door of the office. Now do you know if your sister was out that evening, at that time?”

The brother and sister looked at each other, wonderingly.

“I couldn’t say,” replied Mrs. Mansiter, after a pause. “I couldn’t say anything as to that, now. She might have been—she’s not to be controlled, Cora, and she has a habit of going out and wandering about. But as to that particular evening—oh, I can’t say anything about that, at all!”

“Nor me!” said Sanderthwaite. “I don’t remember anything about her movements that night. What makes you think the woman you heard about might be my sister Cora?”

“General description, Mr. Sanderthwaite,” replied Liversedge. “It occurred to me that she might have gone there, expecting to meet Lansdale. She—to put it plainly—she’d got Lansdale on the brain after hearing that he was back, hadn’t she?”

Mrs. Mansiter sighed deeply.

“It was a great pity Mr. Henry Marchmont ever sent for us that morning!” she said. “It—it revived old matters that I’d preferred to let be. It upset Cora—and then of course was the news of the murder close upon it. She—she’s firmly convinced that Lansdale killed Mr. Henry Marchmont. And yet——”

She paused, looking from one to the other of her visitors as if uncertain of what to say next.

“You don’t think so, ma’am?” suggested Liversedge.

“I had a letter from Mr. Henry Marchmont the morning after we’d seen him,” said Mrs. Mansiter. “I couldn’t believe it was Lansdale after getting that.”

“A letter, eh?” exclaimed Liversedge. He contrived to bring his elbow into contact with Richard. “The morning after you’d been to Bedford Row? And what was there in it, Mrs. Mansiter, that made you think Lansdale innocent?”

Mrs. Mansiter got up and went over to an old bureau, where she unlocked a drawer and produced a letter which she handed to the detective.

“That’s it,” she said. “I put it by when I’d read it, for you see, just after getting it we heard about what had happened at Bedford Row, and of course as Mr. Henry Marchmont was dead, there was no use in our going to see him again. I thought, perhaps, that when things were cleared up, I might hear more of what he refers to. But I’ve heard nothing.”

Liversedge and Richard bent over the letter when the detective had laid it on the table at which they were sitting. It bore marks of hasty writing, but Richard had no difficulty in recognising his uncle’s bold hand.

“187, BEDFORD ROW, W.C.

“Tuesday Evening.

“DEAR MRS. MANSITER,

“With regard to our conversation this morning—Lansdale has been here this evening. I’m not sure upon reflection that I may not have been wrong, or misinformed, in my judgment about him in relation to the Clayminster affairs. However, right or wrong, Lansdale is willing to do something for the various sufferers in that matter, and he has placed a large sum of money in my hands which he wants me to distribute. I should like to have a talk with you about this, so please call here again to-morrow, during the morning. If you can think of anybody else, still living, who lost money at Clayminster at that time, make a memorandum of their names,

“Yours truly,

“HENRY MARCHMONT.”

“That’s the letter that Crench told us of, Mr. Marchmont!” whispered Liversedge. “The letter that he went out to post with his own hands! And a really important discovery it is, too! Mrs. Mansiter!” he went on, raising his voice. “You must let me take this! It will be of the greatest service to us—I wish we’d had it before!”

“I didn’t know what to do about it,” said Mrs. Mansiter. “Yes, you can take it. But—do you think there will be money for anybody, as Mr. Henry Marchmont said?”

“I think you’ll find the money to be all right,” answered Liversedge. He put the letter carefully away in his pocket-book, and rose. “Now if you’ll give me Mr. Appleby’s address,” he concluded, “I’ll not keep you longer.”

“You can have the address,” said Mrs. Mansiter, “but we shall go there ourselves to-morrow morning. It’s 591 Clapham Common—north side.”

Once again in the now deserted streets, Liversedge turned eagerly to Richard.

“I’m not certain that this letter isn’t the most important bit of real evidence

I've got in this case, Mr. Marchmont!" he said. "Rum stroke of luck to get it! You see, it proves Lansdale's story about the money to be true. You'll remember what the Coroner said when he heard Lansdale's story about the notes?—that it was easy to prove that he'd got them from his bank, but nothing to prove that he handed them over to your uncle! Well, here is the proof! Certainly, the amount is not specified in this letter, but it does speak of a large sum. We've got a plain, straightforward sequence of facts about the notes now! Drawn from the bank by Lansdale; handed over by him to Mr. Henry Marchmont; found, as regards some of them, at any rate, in possession of Garner, Crench, and Simpson. A splendid find—this letter!"

"Will it help you to settle the big problem?" asked Richard. "Who shot my uncle? That's what I want to know!"

"Every little thing helps in a case of this sort," replied Liversedge. "And sometimes on first getting hold of it, you don't realise how much a comparatively insignificant thing—a seemingly insignificant, I should say—may help. The problem to me is—what was the motive in this case? Was Mr. Henry Marchmont murdered for the twenty thousand pounds? Was he murdered to keep him silent for ever about Lansdale's past? Or . . . was he murdered in mistake for Lansdale?"

"The last argues that Cora Sanderthwaite is guilty," said Richard.

"Maybe!" agreed the detective. "I shouldn't wonder! But I shall go down to Clapham in the morning, after I've had another interview with Crench, and, if I can get him to talk, with Simpson. Are you doing anything to-morrow morning, Mr. Marchmont?"

"Nothing!" replied Richard.

"Stay in your rooms till I call—unless I ring you up to join me somewhere," said Liversedge. "I shall be sure to have some news for you, of some sort. Now I'm going home—dog-tired!"

Richard was tired, too, and in spite of the exciting events of the evening he slept like a top and so far into the morning that he had only just sat down to breakfast, at nearly eleven o'clock, when Scarfe showed Liversedge into the room. He saw at once that the detective was full of whatever it was he had to tell.

"No breakfast, thank you, Mr. Marchmont!" said Liversedge. "I'd mine long since—and a good lot's happened since then! I told you I should have some news for you, and so I have, but I never expected as much, nor of such quality!"

"Well?" asked Richard. He motioned Liversedge to an easy chair and pushed a box of cigarettes over to him. "Something important?"

"Aye—and just as unexpected!" exclaimed the detective. "Take your time over your breakfast and I'll tell you. I went round to see our captives of last

night as soon as I'd had mine," he went on, "and as soon as I got there I was told that Simpson wanted to see me if I called. Of course I went to see him. Simpson, mind you, had had the night for reflection. He's a hard nut—in my opinion, a cool, practised hand at dissimulation and all that sort of thing, and, when fairly cornered the sort who faces facts—he's not a coward, like Crench. As soon as I went in, he asked me straight out if he and Crench were going to be charged with the murder of your uncle? I gave him the same reply that I gave to Crench last night. Then he pointed out that of the moneys and securities found on him and in his suit-case at the time of his arrest, a certain specified amount was his own lawful property. I agreed. Then he wanted to know if Crench had made a statement, and if so, what it was? After considering matters, I told him that Crench had made a clean breast—according to himself—of all that he knew and all that he and Simpson had done, and had signed it. Then, of course, Simpson wanted to see it. I humoured him in that: I went and got a copy, and I let him read it. He's as cool as a cucumber, that chap, Mr. Marchmont!—he read Crench's statement over three times, without moving a muscle or winking an eyelash. At last he handed it back. 'Yes, Liversedge,' he said quietly, 'that's quite correct as far as Crench and myself are concerned—conjointly. But I can tell more than that, and I've decided that I will! I tell you,' he went on, 'I'm going to do that in the hope that it will tell in my favour. It's useless, now, worse luck, to deny that Crench and I were in possession of moneys taken from Henry Marchmont's safe after his death. We've lost that game!—but I don't want to be let in as regards a charge of murder, any more than Crench does. So I'll make a statement—not supplementary to Crench's, for it'll be on a different matter—and when I've made it, I think you'll have enough stuff in your hands to enable you to put them on the right man!—you'll be singularly wanting in the very qualities you ought to possess if you haven't,' he said. Now that made me prick my ears. 'Look here, Simpson!' said I. 'Regard this as a bit of informal talk! You know where you are, and what hole you've got into—worse luck, as you say. But you're convinced in your own mind of your innocence of Henry Marchmont's murder!—now, before you make any statement, which, of course, will be a formal matter, have you formed any opinion as to who did kill Henry Marchmont?' He laughed, in that cold, half-sneering way of his. 'Why, of course I have, Liversedge!' he replied. 'Always have had—never had a doubt about it!' 'Who then?' I asked, wondering, and eager, I can tell you, about what he would answer. 'Why!' he said, laughing again, 'Vandelius, of course—Vandelius!'

Liversedge paused and looked at Richard. Richard had dropped his knife and fork on his plate and sat listening, open-mouthed. The detective smiled.

"Yes!" he said. "That's just like I felt!—I sat staring at him! For though, as

you know, Mr. Marchmont, I've had suspicions about Vandelius, it never seemed to come right home—dead heavy!—until Simpson spoke in that cynical way of his. 'You really think that?' I said, when I could find my tongue. 'I've already said so, haven't I?' retorted he. 'But—proof!' said I. He laughed again at that. 'You get my statement down,' he said. 'Then—you'll see!' So I made arrangements for his statement to be properly taken down, there and then, and when it was done and he'd signed it, I got a copy made which I've brought with me—here it is, Mr. Marchmont, and I'll read it to you."

With this, the detective drew from his pocket a foolscap envelope.

XXVI—*The Visiting Card*

Liversedge pulled up a chair to the table at which Richard was breakfasting, pushed aside a plate or two, and spreading out a closely written document, tapped it with his finger.

“This,” he said significantly, “this, Mr. Marchmont, is, in my opinion, the most important thing I’ve struck in this business! I said last night that I believed Crench’s statement—well, I believe this too! I think that both Simpson and Crench, finding themselves unexpectedly trapped—and it was certainly mere luck that led to their being caught—have decided that it was best to throw up the sponge, confess themselves beaten, and make the best of a bad job by telling the truth. This statement of Simpson’s explains a lot that was mysterious and puzzling. But do you get on with your breakfast while I read to you what Simpson says. Now we start:

“This is a voluntary statement made by me, Hemingway Simpson, solicitor, managing clerk to the late Henry Marchmont, solicitor, of Bedford Row, and is taken down in writing at my request.

“I have had read to me a statement made by Daniel Crench, solicitor, of Chancery Lane, giving his account of certain things that happened at the late Henry Marchmont’s office on the evening on which Henry Marchmont met his death. That statement is substantially truthful and correct. Daniel Crench, however, is not in possession of certain facts known to me only. I now propose to tell what those facts are.

“When Crench and myself heard the sound of the shot to which he refers in his statement, we rushed out of the cupboard in which we had concealed ourselves to listen to the conversation between Henry Marchmont and Lansdale, into Henry Marchmont’s room. Crench immediately made for one of the windows, looking out on Bedford Row. I ran downstairs. I found Henry Marchmont lying on the first landing. He was either dying or just dead. I gave little attention to him at the first glance, for I had already seen something that filled me with utter amazement. Close by Henry Marchmont’s right hand, placed so near it that you would have thought it had fallen from his fingers as he fell, lay a revolver. I at once recognised that revolver as my own.

“It will help to make things clear if I now tell the history of that

revolver. Some twenty years ago, in discharge of my duties, I had to collect weekly rents in a low and dangerous quarter of the town. The streets and courts which I had to visit, as a rule of an evening, Friday evening, were anything but safe, being infested with roughs. I bought the revolver for my own safety, and for two or three years carried it in my pocket when I went rent collecting. It was never used, but I always kept it in order. When I gave up collecting those rents, I put the revolver away in a drawer in my desk at Henry Marchmont's offices. It lay there for many years, untouched, under books and papers. Not long ago—I believe but a day or two before Henry Marchmont's death—I had occasion to tidy out my desk, and I came across the revolver. Instead of putting it back in the drawer where it had remained so long, I placed it on my desk, intending to take it home and give it away. I placed it in a conspicuous position on my desk for that very purpose—so that I shouldn't forget it. But it was there—on the desk, where I had placed it, on the day on which Henry Marchmont was shot.

“I now wish, before going further, to emphasise two facts about this revolver. The first is that when I found it in my drawer, I did not examine it, to ascertain whether it was still loaded or not. I think I must have taken it for granted that I had unloaded it when I put it away years ago. At any rate, I didn't examine it; I just laid it by, as I have said, conspicuously, on my desk. The second fact is that on the butt of the revolver my initials, H.S., were deeply scratched, and a date, 1901. This, of course, proved to me that the revolver I picked up from close by Henry Marchmont's dead body was my revolver—the revolver which at five o'clock that evening had certainly been lying on my desk in my room, just at the foot of the first flight of stairs, on the right-hand side of the hall.

“My first notion was that Henry Marchmont had committed suicide, though he was the last man in the world to suspect of such a tendency. But without moving or touching him, I at once saw that he had not—it was impossible, for he had been shot through the back. I immediately concluded how the murder had taken place. The murderer had entered the offices—the street door of which was always open until Henry Marchmont himself closed it—had gone into my room, seen my revolver, concealed himself behind my half-closed door and had fired at Henry Marchmont as he went upstairs. The door of my room opens from left to right; the murderer had nothing to do but to keep behind it until Henry Marchmont had passed him and was climbing the staircase, and then, through the

half-open door, to fire at him. Obviously, he had then advanced into the hall, and thrown down the revolver by the dead or dying man.

“All this I saw and realised in far less time than it now takes to tell of it. As I realised what had happened, I heard Crench coming downstairs from Henry Marchmont’s room. I snatched up the revolver and put it in my pocket. I said nothing to Crench of what I had found.

“The details and particulars given by Crench in his statement as regards what took place after the discovery of Henry Marchmont’s body are correct. I took the keys of the safe from Henry Marchmont’s pocket; we possessed ourselves of the bundle of Bank of England notes left by Lansdale, and, after I had put the keys back, went away.

“Now I come to two highly important details of which Crench knows nothing. I went to the offices at the usual time next morning. The discovery of Henry Marchmont’s dead body had been made then, and the police, and the police-surgeon, and Detective-Sergeant Liversedge were already there. As I said at the adjourned inquest, Liversedge was the first person to enter and examine Henry Marchmont’s private office; while he went in there, I went into mine.

“Immediately on entering my office, and going up to my desk, I made a remarkable discovery. Late the previous afternoon, an old man from Judd Street, a tradesman for whom we had recently transacted some business, called to pay an account of fifty-three pounds. He paid it to me, in my office. Greatly to my surprise, he paid it in gold—fifty-three sovereigns. It is, of course, a most exceptional thing nowadays to see gold coinage at all, and instead of putting this gold in the office safe, which is in my room, I put it in a canvas bag which I laid on my desk, intending to show it to Henry Marchmont as a curiosity. We were very busy at the end of that afternoon, and I forgot all about the gold. I had brought it to mind, however, before morning, and as soon as I went into my office I looked to the place on my desk where I had put the canvas bag down. I saw at once that it had disappeared.

“That was my first discovery that morning. The second was this, and, in my opinion, it was by far the most important. Detective-Sergeant Liversedge stated, at the adjourned inquest, that when he went into Henry Marchmont’s private office first thing that morning, he only made a general, a sort of cursory inspection. But a little later I went in alone, and made a more particular one. I looked well over the things lying on Henry Marchmont’s desk and on the various side-

tables in the room. And on one of the smaller tables, in the right-hand window, where he was accustomed to toss such things, I found, uppermost on a silver tray, a visiting-card which bore the name *Mr. Louis Vandelius*. From the fact that this card lay on top of others which I knew to have been presented during the previous day, some in the morning, some in the afternoon, I concluded that *Mr. Louis Vandelius* had certainly called on Mr. Marchmont between five-thirty and seven-thirty on the evening of the murder.

“I have nothing more to say at present except that the revolver and the visiting-card referred to in this statement are in a safe which I rent privately at the Chancery Lane Safe Deposit; the key of which safe I now hand over to the police authorities.

“(Signed) ‘HEMINGWAY SIMPSON.’”

Liversedge folded up the document from which he had read and, smoothing it carefully in its original lines, restored it to its envelope and his pocket. He looked at Richard with an enigmatical smile.

“There!—what d’you think of that, Mr. Marchmont?” he asked. “Piece of enlightenment, eh?”

Richard by that time had finished his breakfast and was smoking his pipe; he looked to be deep in thought.

“Do you think it was Vandelius?” he asked suddenly.

“Vandelius, by all accounts, had a lot at stake, Mr. Marchmont!” replied the detective. “We’ve heard a lot, first and last, of his fear lest the business he and Lansdale were concerned in should be interrupted. He may have wanted to make sure!”

“Would Vandelius steal fifty pounds?” asked Richard.

“I should say he wouldn’t—certainly!” said Liversedge. “But—he might take it to make us think Mr. Henry Marchmont had been murdered by thieves or burglars. That’s a detail!—the visiting-card shows he’d been there.”

“Well?” asked Richard.

“You want to know—what next?” suggested Liversedge. “Why, of course, we shall have to get hold of Vandelius and question him. Do you know anything of his movements, now?”

“I!” exclaimed Richard. “Nothing!”

“I suppose you have been seeing Lansdale and Miss Lansdale,” said Liversedge. “I thought they might have spoken of Vandelius?”

“Not of his present whereabouts,” answered Richard. “I should think——”

Just then the door opened and Scarfe appeared, glancing at the detective.

“Wanted at the telephone, sir,” he said. “Inspector March calling!”

“I left word with March where I was going, in case anything turned up,”

said Liversedge. He rose and followed Scarfe to the telephone outside. "Here's another development!" he remarked, coming back presently. "An old gentleman's arrived at the police station asking for me and saying he wants to see me, and nobody but me, about the Bedford Row affair—won't give his name until I come. I must hurry back, Mr. Marchmont—will you come with me?"

Walking into the waiting-room at the police station with Liversedge, Richard immediately recognised the elderly man who rose at their entrance as the companion of Cora Sanderthwaite at the adjourned inquest, and he whispered his recognition to the detective. Before either could say anything the visitor broke into speech.

"My name's Appleby!" he announced abruptly. "John Appleby, retired from business. I came to see Mr. Liversedge—that's you! But I know t'other gentleman, by sight—saw him at that inquest; he's Mr. Richard Marchmont, nephew of Henry, as I used to know well enough in the old days at Clayminster. And now that's it come to—well, to where it has come, I don't mind saying that it was me that wrote that letter to you, Mr. Richard Marchmont, t'other day—about this poor girl, Cora Sanderthwaite."

Liversedge, seeing Richard somewhat taken back, took the matter out of his hands and waved the old man to a chair.

"Sit down, Mr. Appleby," he said. "So you've come to see me——"

Mr. Appleby took the chair, pulled out a large gaily-coloured handkerchief, and mopped his face.

"This very morning," he broke in, "Mrs. Mansiter and Liney Sanderthwaite they come to see me and my wife at our house—early. Said you'd been to see them at theirs—midnight. Had gathered from Mr. Richard Marchmont's description of a person as he saw with Cora at that inquest that I was that person—d'you see? Mr. Appleby, says they! Quite right—I am! So they came to see if Cora was at our house. Quite right again! Cora is!"

"Not in a very good state of health—mentally—eh, Mr. Appleby?" suggested Liversedge. "A little—eh?"

Mr. Appleby placed a podgy forefinger to his left temple and tapped it several times.

"Now and then!" he answered. "Now and then! Not always, mind you! Only occasionally—if roused, excited, upset. But at them times—clean off it! Came to see me and my wife—old friends—stopped with us—poured out her woes—got me to go with her to that inquest—deal of trouble with her, I can tell you—had to exercise patience—patience! And, now seriously afraid of what she might do if let loose in one of her tantrums. Bee in her bonnet, you know!—always had, ever since I knew her. That man Lansdale! At first—madly in love with him. Now—wants his blood! Worse than ever since she got

it into her head that you police fellers are all doing your best to get him off! Works like poison in her, does that! Oh, yes!”

“She wants to fix the guilt of the Marchmont murder on Lansdale, does she?” said Liversedge. “That it, Mr. Appleby?”

“Want’s to hear that he’s been hanged,” replied Mr. Appleby brusquely. “About it! Spite? My!—never see such a spiteful female in my born days—never!”

“What does she know about Lansdale and Henry Marchmont?” asked Liversedge. “Anything?”

Mr. Appleby mopped his face again.

“Ah!” he said oracularly. “Fact of the matter is, Cora Sanderthwaite was there!”

XXVII—*Straight to the Point*

The two listeners turned from their visitor to stare at each other, a common thought and understanding in their minds. But Liversedge was quick to turn back to Mr. Appleby.

“There!” he exclaimed. “What d’you mean by that? There!”

“There!—at Bedford Row,” answered the old man. “When it happened. Cora Sanderthwaite, d’ye see, she saw Marchmont shot!”

Once more Richard and the detective glanced at each other.

“We seem to be joining up the plots pretty well this morning!” muttered Liversedge. “If it’s true! How do you know Cora Sanderthwaite saw Mr. Henry Marchmont shot?” he went on, raising his voice. “Does she say so?”

“Cora,” replied Mr. Appleby thoughtfully, “Cora, she varies. At times, d’ye see, she’s herself—quite herself. At other times—these here tantrums—outbursts! Nice job with her I had when I accompanied her to that inquest! She wanted to hear the jury find Lansdale guilty of murder. Of course, nothing happened—of that sort. But she quietened down at home—my place—that night, and she told me and my wife that she knew. Saw Henry Marchmont shot!”

“Who shot him?” demanded Liversedge abruptly.

“She thought—Lansdale! Made sure Lansdale shot Henry Marchmont. That is, she thought so after seeing the newspapers next day; evening papers, you know—there was, of course, nothing in the morning ones. But at first, when she saw it, she thought it was Lansdale that was shot! See?”

“No, I don’t see at all!” exclaimed Liversedge. “It’s a muddle! Make it clear!”

Mr. Appleby sought illuminating powers from his handkerchief. After mopping awhile he squared himself for another effort.

“You aren’t far wrong in calling it a muddle!” he said woefully. “First-rate specimen of a muddle I called it—at first. Couldn’t make head or tail of it, nohow! But I’ve got it all smoothed out, now—I understand it! Like this, d’ye see?—you listen, careful. I’ll put it in order,” he continued, preparing to check his points on his stubby fingers. “To start with, on the morning of that day on which Mr. Henry Marchmont—this young man’s uncle, as I’m given to understand—met his death, he’d sent for Mrs. Mansiter and Cora Sanderthwaite to see him at his offices in Bedford Row. They went. He told ’em Lansdale, or Land, was in London, and more about him—never mind that! What’s important is, Henry Marchmont told ’em that Lansdale was coming to see him, there, that night, and what time. Cora wanted to see Lansdale—

couldn't help it, I reckon, knowing all I do. She went to Bedford Row. She stood in a porch, t'other side of the street, watching. She saw a man come up from the corner—a man that she took to be Lansdale, from his build. He went into Henry Marchmont's offices, and left the door a bit open. She ran across the street, pushed the door more open, and looked in. The man had his back to her; was going up the staircase. As she looked she saw a hand and arm, holding a pistol, come out of a door on the left-hand side. The pistol was fired; the man on the stair let out a groan and fell. Then she ran—anywhere! Came to herself somewhere t'other side of Red Lion Street. Of course, she then thought it was Lansdale that had been shot. But when she saw next afternoon's papers, she knew it was Marchmont. Then she came to the conclusion that Lansdale shot Marchmont. And at that she sticks!"

"Why didn't she tell all this at the inquest? or to the police?" asked Liversedge.

"Didn't want to say anything that might ha' got Lansdale off," answered Mr. Appleby. "Thought that the lawyers might ha' twisted what she had to say into something different. Queer woman to deal with, I assure you!"

"Where is she now?" inquired the detective. "Still at your house?"

"No—gone home with her brother and sister," replied Mr. Appleby. "She's in one of her peaceful moods at present. Can't say how long it'll last, though. And about that unsigned letter I wrote to this young man—if I was you, sir, I should get Lansdale to go away! There's no telling what Cora might do. Her poor brain's disordered—very!"

"She hasn't given you any more details, more particulars, has she?" asked Liversedge. "She didn't, for instance, see the man to whom the hand and arm protruding from the door belonged?"

"No—I asked her about that," replied Mr. Appleby. "A hand and arm!—that was all she saw."

"Didn't remark if it was a big man, or a little man, eh?" suggested the detective. "She could have told that, you know, by the height at which the hand was held."

"Didn't say that, neither—I expect it never struck her," said Mr. Appleby. "I asked her questions similar to that. She did remember one thing, however—that the man, whoever he was, wore a dark suit. Dark sleeve, you understand."

"Can't make much out of that!" muttered Liversedge. Presently, after a little more conversation, he showed his visitor out, and came back to Richard. "I dare say all that's true enough, Mr. Marchmont," he said. "Now if only Cora Sanderthwaite had seen a bit more, or waited a bit longer! However, that's another link in the chain—and I'm beginning to think that everything's pointing to Vandelius. You haven't heard Lansdale mention him, Mr. Marchmont?"

“Not at all!” replied Richard. “Never mentioned him—to me!”

“Still, he may know where Vandelius is likely to be found in the City,” said the detective. “He’s sure to come up here—and anyway, we know where that country place of his lies. I’m going to get possession of his card this morning, and then——”

At that point Pryke came in.

“There’s a thing that ought to be seen to,” said Pryke, glancing at Liversedge. “Garner no doubt had some baggage at that hotel where we found him. It ought to be examined before the inquest on him.”

“I’d forgotten that,” admitted Liversedge. “It ought!—if there is anything. You go down there, Pryke, and make inquiries. If he has left anything there, search it—or, better still, bring it away. I’ve other matters to attend to. Now, Mr. Marchmont,” he continued, when Pryke had left the room, “come along with me to that Safe Deposit in Chancery Lane, and we’ll see about that card that Vandelius is supposed to have left at your uncle’s office. I’ve got the key, and the authorisation from Simpson—and I shall get the revolver too.”

Richard looked on with keen interest while the detective and an official of the Safe Deposit Company unlocked Simpson’s safe. There was little in it to divert attention from the things they had come to find, and those lay plainly before them.

“Here’s the revolver—just as Simpson described it!” remarked Liversedge. “And there’s the card! Mr. Louis Vandelius, Malbourne Manor, Sussex—no town address. Well—that’s that! Now,” he added, as they went out into the street again, “we’ll just step along to the Hotel Cecil, Mr. Marchmont, and see if Lansdale can give us any idea of Vandelius’s present whereabouts. I’m anxious to plump Vandelius with a plain question—how came his visiting-card on Mr. Henry Marchmont’s table? Take a bit of explaining—satisfactorily!—don’t you think?”

“It certainly looks as if he had called there,” admitted Richard.

“Looks? It’s proof—proof positive—that he’d called there!” exclaimed the detective. “How else could your uncle have got hold of it?”

“I was wondering if, for some reason or other, Lansdale might not have handed it to my uncle,” suggested Richard. “As a reference, or something of that sort.”

“Lansdale said nothing of that in his evidence,” replied Liversedge. “No!—I feel sure, certain, that Vandelius presented it himself. He went there, Mr. Marchmont!—lay all I’ve got to a penny piece he went there!”

“Vandelius,” said Richard, after a pause, “struck me, down at his place, as being a remarkably astute man—unusually so! Do you think a man who was going to shoot another would be ass enough to leave his card about?”

“I don’t suppose Vandelius thought of shooting anybody when he went to

Bedford Row,” answered Liversedge. “I’ve figured it out this way—I always figure out what I imagine to have happened. Vandelius, after hearing what Lansdale had to tell in the afternoon, was very much concerned lest his deal shouldn’t come off. He went to see Mr. Henry Marchmont, on his own hook, presenting his card. He found Mr. Henry Marchmont obdurate—probably, knowing what we do, Mr. Henry Marchmont refused to discuss matters with him. Vandelius left. He hung around, and saw Lansdale arrive. He followed him in—perhaps stole up the stair and overheard the conversation between the two men. Finding that Lansdale made no impression on Mr. Henry Marchmont, he came down again, and slipped into Simpson’s room, thinking that when Lansdale had gone, he’d try his own hand once more. There, in Simpson’s room, he saw the pistol. Well, in my opinion, Vandelius is the sort of man who’ll stop at nothing where his own interests are concerned. He decided to silence Mr. Henry Marchmont, and did it! That’s how I figure things out, sir!”

“Very ingenious!” murmured Richard.

“No—but it’s probable!” said Liversedge. “Highly probable—on the facts! And I believe in probability as a guide to things.”

“Do you think it probable that a wealthy man like Vandelius would risk his own life by taking another man’s?” asked Richard. “There was always the chance of his having been seen about!”

“Not much chance,” replied Liversedge. “Bedford Row’s deserted that time of an evening. It’s not a thoroughfare. And we’re in autumn, and it’s dark enough at seven o’clock. And as to Vandelius being a wealthy man—well, Mr. Marchmont, I’ve no proof that he’s as wealthy as appearance would seem to indicate! He may be an adventurer—most likely is. All his apparent wealth may be a mere show—I’ve known two or three instances in my time of that sort of thing. There was Palfreyman!—the chairman and managing director of the Great International Combine; the fellow that swindled tens of thousands of foolish people, tempted by his lavish promises. He’d a grand town house in Park Lane, a regular palace in Kent, a shooting-box in the Highlands, a yacht at Cowes, a villa on the Riviera, and a flat in Paris! You’d have thought he was a millionaire—and when the smash came, he hadn’t one half-crown to rub against another! I reckon nothing of show, Mr. Marchmont—some of these financial big bugs are, in reality, men of straw, when it comes to it!”

“I’ve no doubt you’re quite right, Liversedge,” agreed Richard. “But do you think that Vandelius would steal that gold which Simpson says he left on his desk?”

“Well, I can imagine that he would, and why he would,” replied the detective. “He might take it to make anyone—the police, you know—think that Mr. Henry Marchmont had been shot by burglars. Anyhow, I’ve strong

suspicious about Vandelius, and as soon as I come across him, I shall let him see that I have!”

“Vandelius has certainly got to explain the presence of his card,” said Richard. “But you know, Liversedge, I’m by no means satisfied about Crench and Simpson! Crench is a bad lot, and none the better for being a miserable coward, and Simpson’s shown himself to be an unscrupulous scoundrel. How do you know that all this story of theirs, fitting like a glove as they tell it, isn’t a clever concoction to save their own necks? I’ve no doubt it’s true enough, up to the point where my uncle left his room to post his letter, but what proof have you that it’s true after that point? None!”

“You think they may have conspired to kill Mr. Henry Marchmont?” suggested Liversedge.

“I see no proof that they didn’t!” answered Richard. “What was to prevent them? They were there, alone in the place with him. They could shoot him—one of them, Simpson, for choice!—and make up all this story later on. There’s a damned lot too much apparent consistency in their stories to suit me. But of course, I’m not skilled at this sort of thing. Anyhow—I wouldn’t believe a word that’s said by either Simpson or Crench!”

“Mr. Marchmont, you’d be surprised how some men can tell the truth—when it suits ’em!” said Liversedge. “Now, from experience, I believe that Simpson and Crench have both told the exact truth in their statements! All the more so, because they both know that they’re in a hole—a very nasty, deep hole! As you say, they were both in the house at Bedford Row; they’ve admitted they were. They’d every opportunity to murder your uncle for the sake of the money left with him by Lansdale. They haven’t a single witness to bring forward for their defence! And they know that, if we charge them with the murder, they haven’t a cat’s chance! But—it may be intuition, it may be prejudice—I believe they’re both innocent of your uncle’s murder. Vandelius, now——”

Richard suddenly clutched his companion’s arm. They had come to near the entrance to the Hotel Cecil; there, amongst a procession of cars slowly filing into the courtyard, was one to which he pointed, excitedly.

“There *is* Vandelius!” he exclaimed. “There!—in that dark-green coupé car!”

“I see him!” muttered Liversedge. “Luck! He’ll be going to see Lansdale. We’ve got him! Keep back, Mr. Marchmont—let him get in!”

He drew Richard aside till the dark-green car had pulled up at one of the doors of the hotel and they had seen Vandelius, alone, get out and disappear inside, while the car moved off and went away.

“Now come on!” said Liversedge. “We both know Lansdale’s rooms, and we’ll go straight up there. And once there, Mr. Marchmont, leave matters to

me!”

Richard followed the detective along the corridors with a growing sense of excitement. What was going to happen?—what was to be revealed? He saw that Liversedge meant business. And Liversedge went straight to it, as soon as the door opened and they walked in on Lansdale, Angelita, and Vandelius.

“Mr. Vandelius,” said the detective, with no preface or delay, “I have followed you in here to ask you a question. Did you call on Mr. Henry Marchmont at Bedford Row on the evening on which he was murdered? A plain answer, if you please, sir!”

XXVIII—*Final*

Richard, following closely on the detective's heels, and secretly somewhat taken aback by his abrupt manner of entrance, was quick to observe the effect he produced on the three persons thus broken in upon. Angelita, who was arranging flowers at a side-table, turned on Liversedge with a look of sudden apprehension; Lansdale, just rising from his desk, a pen in his hand, stared first at the detective, then at Vandelius; Vandelius—at ease in a big chair, a cigar, just lighted, in his mouth, was the only apparently unconcerned person present. He glanced at Richard with a slight recognition of his presence, and then eyed Liversedge over, calmly, and with an amused smile.

"My good man!" he answered in suave, bantering tones. "Aren't you forgetting yourself—and your manners? What warrant have you for breaking in upon a gentleman, his daughter, and his visitor—in this fashion?"

"I wouldn't say overmuch about warrants, if I were you, Mr. Vandelius!" retorted Liversedge, standing his ground. "Warrants are not very nice things in certain circumstances—these circumstances, if you wish me to be plain. I'm investigating the murder of Mr. Henry Marchmont, and I've good reason for asking you the question I put to you just now!"

"And supposing I tell you to take yourself away?" asked Vandelius. "What then, my man?"

"I should go!—and you would go with me, Mr. Vandelius—to Scotland Yard!" replied the detective. "If you won't answer here, you'll have to answer a lot of questions there! That's flat!—so you'd better think!"

"I am thinking!" said Vandelius. "I am thinking a great deal. The gist of my reflections is that your police methods are elementary and offensive. May I inquire why you force yourself in here—in company with a young gentleman, who, if you don't, ought to know better!—and discharge a question at me point-blank? There are better ways of doing things, my good fellow!"

"If you're going to bring me into it," said Richard suddenly, "I may as well tell you that I think Liversedge is quite right! What were you doing at my uncle's offices on the evening he was murdered?"

Angelita gave a little gasp, and Lansdale made a sharp exclamation. Richard gave them a nod before he turned again on Vandelius.

"You were there!" he exclaimed hotly. "Why lie about it?"

Vandelius's dark face flushed, and the whiteness of his teeth suddenly showed.

"I am not accustomed to be addressed by young men in this way!" he said, eyeing Richard offensively. "How do you know I was there?"

“Look here, Mr. Vandelius!” said Liversedge, before Richard could speak. “I may as well tell you that a good deal has taken place since last night. Garner was arrested early in the evening—you’ll hear soon enough what happened to him!—and Crench and Simpson a few hours later. Crench and Simpson have both made statements—Simpson’s statement incriminates you——”

“That is impossible!” exclaimed Vandelius. “I do not know Simpson!”

“That’s immaterial,” continued Liversedge. “Simpson’s knowledge of you is better than yours of him. Mr. Vandelius!—you were at Henry Marchmont’s office that evening! You left your card there! Here it is!”

He drew the card from his pocket and held it out. Vandelius glanced at it with a look of annoyance. Before he could speak, Lansdale turned on him.

“You never told me you’d been to Marchmont’s office!” he said. “If you had——”

Vandelius uttered an exclamation of anger—his tone was that of a man contemptuous of trifles.

“Tcha!” he said, waving his hand at Lansdale. “Why should I tell you all my business? Why should I tell——?”

“You’ll tell me, anyway!” broke in Liversedge. “Or, as I said before, you’ll go with me to headquarters! Whichever you like! If you’ve any explanation——”

“Well, well, I did go to Marchmont’s office!” said Vandelius suddenly. “Why not? I had my business to consider—great interest at stake. I wished to persuade Marchmont that Lansdale was an innocent man. I found Marchmont obdurate, pig-headed, stupid—not to be persuaded out of his obsession about Lansdale. So, well, of course seeing there was nothing to be done with him, I left him.”

“Where did you leave him?” asked Liversedge.

“Eh? In his room, of course!” replied Vandelius.

“He didn’t show you out?”

“No—he left me to find my own way out—no manners!”

“You went down the staircase alone?”

“Of course!—how else?”

“Just so!” agreed Liversedge. “But instead of walking out at the front door when you reached the hall, you turned into the room on the right hand—the right hand, that is, as you came downstairs? Didn’t you, now?”

Vandelius twisted in his chair with a sudden searching look at his questioner.

“How do you know?” he began. “How——?”

A knock on the door interrupted whatever he was going to say. Richard, being close by, opened it. There stood Pryke, ushered by a hotel servant.

“Come in, Pryke!” said Liversedge. “Lucky you’ve come!” he whispered

as Pryke strode up to him. "I may want you. Well—found anything?"

Pryke produced a small canvas bag, and a sealed letter.

"There!" he said. "In a small suit-case, locked, in his bedroom. There's gold in that bag—sovereigns! About——"

Liversedge interrupted him with a sharp exclamation and a glance at Richard.

"Gold!" he said. "Good heavens!—that'll be the gold that was on Simpson's desk! In that case—but this letter——"

"I didn't break the seal," said Pryke. "I thought I'd bring it to you. You see?—it's addressed to Crench, at Chancery Lane, and stamped, as if Garner had meant to post it before sailing this morning."

"I see," muttered Liversedge. He turned the letter over, broke the seal, and drawing out the folded sheet glanced hurriedly at its contents. Suddenly his face changed, and he gave Pryke a warning look which indicated Vandelius. "Watch that man, Pryke!" he whispered. "This concerns him! Mr. Marchmont!—look here!"

Richard drew close to the detective's elbow. Liversedge held the letter under his eyes, pointing to something in it.

"This is evidently a letter from Garner to Crench!" he murmured. "Read it!—by George, Mr. Marchmont—I believe we've solved the mystery at last. Read!"

"DEAR CRENCHE,—Now that the thing's over, and we're not likely to meet again, I'll tell you exactly what happened at Bedford Row on the night Henry Marchmont met his death—and if you want to know who actually shot him, I'll tell you—that is, in my opinion, for I didn't see the shooting. Personally, I have no doubt on the point. The guilty man is Vandelius!

"After Lansdale had told Vandelius, you, and me, at your office, about the possible bother with Henry Marchmont, Vandelius, walking with me up Chancery Lane, asked me for information about Henry Marchmont; where Bedford Row was; the situation of the office, and so on. He didn't say as much, but I formed the opinion that he meant to go there himself. Being curious on the point, I went myself to Bedford Row after it was dark. There was nobody about, and I concealed myself in the porch of Cripsdale and Peldridge's, opposite, and watched. I saw Vandelius arrive, not long after I'd taken up my position. He went in. After a while, Lansdale came—*he* went in. I thought Vandelius and Lansdale would leave together. They didn't. Lansdale came out alone, and walked very swiftly up the street, towards Theobald's Road. A woman came on the scene

and hung about—I couldn't make out what she was up to. Then Henry Marchmont emerged, and went down the street to a post-box. He came back and went into his office door again. Almost simultaneously, the woman ran across the street, and looked in at the door, after him, and Lansdale reappeared, walking quicker than ever, and coming down the street. He'd passed Henry Marchmont's door a few yards, when there was a sound which I knew to be a shot. Lansdale half-paused; then hurried forward towards Holborn; a second later, the woman ran from the door, crossed the street, and ran round the corner into Gray's Inn Passage. I waited, wondering what had happened. Quite ten minutes passed. Then Vandelius came out. He made straight across the Row, and, as far as I could judge, turned the corner of Princeton Street, a little way up. After a little more waiting, I went across, and finding the outer door slightly ajar, I pushed it open and went in. There was a light in the hall, and I saw Henry Marchmont, just as they described at the first inquest. I took a quiet look—incidentally, I found a small bag of sovereigns on a desk in the front room and put it in my pocket for safety!—and went away, after turning out the lights. It seemed to me that considering all I'd seen, it would be a wise thing to do. Also, I carefully closed the front door: I thought it foolish to leave it open—a passing policeman might have noticed it.

“Yours, E. G.”

Liversedge folded up the letter and put it carefully in his pocket.

“That's enough, Mr. Marchmont!” he whispered. “There's only one thing to do—and we'll do it at once! Now, Mr. Vandelius!” he continued, turning and raising his voice. “If you're ready, we'll take you round to Scotland Yard! I wouldn't make any resistance, if I were you, Mr. Vandelius—it's quite useless!”

When Vandelius had gone, protesting, the three people left together looked at each other. There was a question in the eyes of father and daughter, but for the first time for many days Richard felt that his question was answered.

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Bedford Row Mystery* by J. S. (Joseph Smith) Fletcher]