

THE STOAT

LYNN BROCK



CRIME



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Colonel Gore, generally considered one of the great detectives of fiction, makes a spectacular return, after too long an absence, in *The Stoat*. Old admirers of the Colonel will find that his brain is still as nimble, his brilliant deductions still as devastatingly sound. *The Stoat* is an exceptionally fine detective story, with really “live” characters and vigorous dialogue, written with an infectious exuberance of style. There is no break in the succession of thrills, and altogether Mr. Lynn Brock is to be congratulated on a most satisfying detective story.

By the Same Author

THE DEDUCTIONS OF COLONEL GORE
COLONEL GORE'S SECOND CASE
THE KINK
THE MENDIP MYSTERY
Q.E.D.
THE SLIP-CARRIAGE MYSTERY
NIGHTMARE
THE DAGWORT COOMBE MURDER
FOURFINGERS
THE SILVER SICKLE CASE
THE TWO OF DIAMONDS
THE RIDDLE OF THE ROOST

THE STOAT

COLONEL GORE'S QUEEREST CASE

By
LYNN BROCK



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To
JOHN
1940

*All Characters and
Events in this Story are Fictitious*

CHAPTER ONE

As little Dr. Brownrigg drove yawning homeward through the twisting, deserted streets of Cullerton, the surly old clock of St. Mary's squat tower chimed two. The end-of-September night had turned damply chill; he had had, as usual, a long, busy day of it; and only once in the three years for which they had lived in the neighbourhood had the Margessons employed him professionally. None the less, when he found awaiting him on his hall table the message, "Please ring up Colonel Margesson tonight," he complied at once with this request. For beneath her message his wife had written and underlined twice the word "Urgent."

"Colonel Margesson? Brownrigg this end. Sorry I'm so late ringing up. Been detained by a troublesome hæmorrhage. Anything I can do for you?"

"I hope so," replied a pleasant, sonorous voice. "Can you possibly come out here to Cullerside tonight. I hate bothering you at such an hour. But _____"

"Not at all," replied the doctor briskly. "I'll go along right now."

The authentic route from the town to the Margessons' very secluded residence involved two uphill miles along the main road crossing the moor to eastward and then a further mile and a half down a very gloomy, rough, narrow private road running through the dense belt of woodland between the moor and the River Culler. But, as he started up his long-suffering car once more, Dr. Brownrigg decided to cut a long mile off his journey to Cullerside by taking the road running northward to Ockenford, up the narrow valley at the southern foot of which Cullerton lay astride the river. He could park his car in the grounds of the Grammar School, he reflected, cross the river by the Margessons' private footbridge almost directly opposite the school's gates, and so reach the house at the cost of a short walk through the grounds.

A dark and devious footpath, he knew, zigzagged up from the footbridge steeply—for the slope on which Cullerside stood rose sharply from the riverside—and disappeared into the trees. Dr. Brownrigg, like many other people in Cullerton, couldn't for the life of him understand why when the Margessons had built their big house a couple of years ago, they hadn't made a decent and rational approach to it from the Ockenford road—the route by which, obviously, it could most easily and speedily be reached from the town—instead of the roundabout way they had chosen. Bad as it was, that private road of theirs up there—formerly a mere cart-track—must have cost them a pretty penny.

For that matter, he couldn't for the life of him understand why anyone should want to spend a lot of money on building a house in such an out-of-the-way, depressing spot as they had selected—hidden away among all those confounded trees—hanging right over the river with its flies and mosquitoes in summer and its damp mists all the rest of the year. However, like most people in the neighbourhood, he had by this time accepted Mrs. Margesson's marked desire for seclusion (it was Mrs. Margesson who had the money, he understood, and who had built the house) as a normal feature of the Cullerton scene. If people liked to cut themselves off from other people and sun and air, that was their own affair. So he contented himself with assuring himself preliminarily of the reliability of the battery in his pocket-torch.

Colonel Margesson himself admitted the visitor. A largely built, handsome man of fifty or so, growing a bit heavy now, his sunburnt face—obviously one accustomed to placid cheerfulness and good nature—wore tonight, without attempt at concealment, an expression of frowning perturbation. He led the way to his own particular sanctum, ensconced the doctor in a big armchair, persuaded him to a modest drink, and then, himself similarly equipped, came, as was his habit, to the point without delay and with a frankness that was engagingly boyish in its simplicity.

"I'm frightfully worried about my wife, Dr. Brownrigg," he began. "Been worried about her for a long time back. You haven't seen her for a very considerable time——"

"Not since she had that poisoned hand. That was—that was almost exactly two years ago. As a matter of fact I don't believe I have even set eyes on your wife since then. . . ."

"Probably not," agreed Margesson gravely. "Yes. That was in the October of '36. Well . . . it was about that time that I first noticed—seriously—an extraordinary change coming over her. . . . A change in—well, in her habits, her interests, her outlook on things generally—in her whole disposition and character, in fact."

"What age is your wife?" asked the doctor bluntly.

"Forty-two."

"Um. Often a difficult sort of age for women, you know. Two children, isn't it? How old are they now?"

"The boy—Leonard—is nineteen. The girl, a year younger."

"Joan—I believe is her name. Just left school, hasn't she? A very pretty girl, I've heard. Well—this change you say you've noticed in your wife—over a period of two years or so; it has been—progressive?"

"By fits and starts. In the beginning—for the first year or so—there were intervals when she seemed to return to her old self more or less for a while.

But then there would be a speeding-up. And each time, when it happened, the speeding-up became more marked——”

“And naturally, more alarming for you. Why didn’t you send for me twelve months ago, then?”

“I wanted to. I suggested time after time that she should see you and have a talk with you about things. But she always refused point-blank to do that. And—well, to be quite candid with you, Doctor, one of the most marked changes in her has been the change in her attitude towards myself. As matters stand now, the mere fact that I make any suggestion to her, is sufficient to cause her to turn it down at once. So—I’ve given up making suggestions to her. For instance, she hasn’t the slightest idea that I’m consulting you this way, preparatorily. . . .”

“I see. Suppose you give me, briefly and explicitly, the other symptoms that make you uneasy about her.”

“To answer that question, it’s necessary to tell you first that, until—well, I had better say three years ago—until then my wife was a very gay, live, sociable, energetic sort of woman. We were living in Surrey at that time, and both of us had a lot of friends living in and around London. She took a tremendous interest in life then—in other people—in clothes, theatres, music, painting—she’s rather clever at water-colour work—in books, in golf and tennis, in world affairs generally, in her house and her garden, her food—even in myself. In the children, of course. But steadily and gradually, one by one, all these interests have died out until, now, not one of them is left—except, in a very modified form, her interest in the children.”

“How does she get on with them?”

“With the boy—Leonard—quite well. She’s almost fanatically devoted to him. And I think he’s very attached to her in his way. He’s rather a queer fish. She’s fond of Joan still, too, I think—in a fussing, fidgeting way. She gets on fairly well with her, however. . . . I really see so little of either my wife or my children nowadays——”

“Her interest in *you*, you say, has declined noticeably during these last few years?”

“I regret to say, most noticeably. We’ve been married now for—let me see—nineteen years. And I think I can honestly say that for sixteen of them, at any rate, she and I were the best of pals. Little differences of opinion, of course now and then. My wife is by temperament rather impulsive and quick-tempered naturally. But——”

“I understand, yes. But now——?”

“Now—well, I’m afraid the mere sight of me seems to set her all on edge. Indeed, she carefully avoids being with me—especially being alone with me—when she can possibly manage to do so. And so—naturally—I

keep out of her way as far as possible. And yet the curious thing is that she hates me to leave the house—even for a couple of hours, to get a round of golf or a game of bridge. She spends nearly all her time in her own rooms now, you see.”

“How does she occupy herself?”

“She doesn’t. Just sits doing nothing—or lies down. But every half-hour or so she sends her maid downstairs to discover where *I* am and what *I*’m doing—or where *I*’ve gone to and when *I*’m coming back. *That’s* a new development, comparatively—since things reached what you might call an acute stage with her, a few months back.”

“An acute stage? Can you be a little more precise?”

“An acute speeding-up—which, this time, hasn’t slackened off. It began about the beginning of July—just after my daughter had come home from school. Not that that had anything to do with it. But it fixes the date for me. Suddenly everything that had made me anxious about her before became much worse. For instance—well, there was that determination of hers not to be left alone with me. Then—well, last year she gave up going out anywhere. I mean, outside the grounds of this house. But now she gave up going out even about the grounds. Her appetite had been poor for a long time. But now it became almost impossible to induce her to eat anything whatever. She stopped sleeping practically altogether—except to doze during the day—didn’t even bother to open the boxes from the Times Book Club—spent the whole day in a dressing-gown or a fur coat huddled on over her sleeping things.”

“All these symptoms of the new phase developed simultaneously?”

“Yes. And quite suddenly. She had been irritable for a long time before that. But now she began to have fits of furious anger. I mean—breaking things—or tearing them—or throwing them about. For no cause whatever that one could discover. We’ve had endless trouble about servants during the past few months. Servants nowadays won’t stand being abused and hectored constantly. I don’t know how her own maid—Georgina—sticks it. My wife bullies her and storms at her from morning to night. Although, as I’ve told you, I think she’s still fond of Joan—whenever Joan goes into her room, she attacks her furiously about some quite trifling thing or other. . . .”

Margesson paused to regard his listener questioningly, his tanned forehead wrinkled in anxiety.

“But—as a matter of fact, I’ve no doubt that you’ve heard most of all this already, from other people. You doctors hear all the gossip—Well—I won’t embarrass you—I’ve given you, so far, the new developments of earlier symptoms. But there’s one absolutely new symptom which worries me even more. My wife was always a most courageous—even reckless—

sort of person. But now—well, she appears to me to live now in a state of chronic terror——”

“Terror? Of what?”

“No idea. So far as I know, she has not the slightest grounds for even uneasiness about anything on earth—except her own health, if she goes on as she is going. But there it is. It’s my conviction that she lives in a state of appalling terror—unceasing. By night as well as by day. Even in her sleep. I should tell you that lately she has apparently been taking some stuff to make her sleep—I’ll come back to that. But even in her sleep, apparently, this fear of hers, whatever it is, continues. She wakes up screaming quite often—half-crazy with—with terror. I’ve tried, I needn’t tell you, to get her to tell me what it is in her mind that causes this fear of hers. For I’m perfectly convinced that whatever she fears exists only in her own mind. But it’s perfectly useless. I can’t get anything out of her——”

“She has a maid of her own, you tell me. Does the maid sleep near her?”

“In the next room, for several months past. My wife insists on her bedroom lights being left on all through the night, and by her directions the maid looks in at intervals during the night to see how she is getting on. But of course—the way things always happen—these fits of screaming and so on never come on while the maid is in the room with her.”

“How often do they come on—roughly?”

“It varies. Twice a week—three times a week. Sometimes twice in the same night. Afterwards, she’s almost in a state of collapse—faints right off, sometimes. And—well, my God, Doctor—I simply can’t bear to see the expression in her eyes. . . !”

“You say she’s been taking something. Not under medical advice, I presume?”

“No. My daughter Joan mentioned casually one day some time ago that her mother was using some stuff—sleeping cachets, she said. I let it go at that—foolishly. Like most healthy people, I suppose, I have a horror of drugs. Still, it didn’t occur to me for a moment that my wife could possibly have got hold of anything actually dangerous—until tonight. I changed my mind about that tonight, however—and that’s why I sent out that S.O.S. to you. What do you think these things are? I know nothing about drugs. But—by the merest accident I discovered tonight that my wife is using a hypodermic syringe. I found the syringe in her room—and quite a big supply of these things. I saw one of them partially dissolved in a glass——What are they?”

Dr. Brownrigg examined the two white tabloids handed to him, but, after a sniff or two, laid them aside.

“I can’t tell you—from the outside. Home-made, by the look of them. I’ll take them back with me, if I may, and let you know about them—tomorrow probably. I suppose you have asked your wife what they are—and where she got them? Or have you?”

But Colonel Margesson had judged it prudent merely to purloin a couple of the tabloids and beat a cautious retreat from his wife’s bedroom before her return to it. He explained that—apparently while she had been preparing an injection there—she had been summoned to the telephone, which was downstairs. Nowadays, it seemed, such a summons for her was almost a phenomenon. Quite in ignorance that she had gone downstairs, he had entered her bedroom to give her some illustrated papers which he had brought out from Cullerton for her, and to his startled dismay had caught sight of the hypodermic syringe and the open box of tabloids. The box, which he estimated had originally held about fifty tabloids, had been about half empty.

“I knew quite well that it would be perfectly useless my asking her any questions about them,” he continued ruefully. “I thought the best thing to do was to sneak a couple of samples—and show them to you. You see—thinking back now—I mean, tonight—since this discovery—I’ve begun to—well, it may seem a damn’ queer thing to say—but, honestly, I’ve begun to hope, actually, that these troubles of my wife’s may be due purely and simply to—well—to dope of some sort. I realize I needn’t say, how dangerous any sort of dope is—and how hard it is to break people off it, once they get started. But—compared with the thought that my wife’s mind was going—And *that’s* the fear that has made my own life a perfect hell for months and months past. What do you think, Doctor? Well, you can’t say, of course, yet. . . . But if those things turn out to be dope of some sort—why then—willy-nilly, she’s got to be broken off it. You’ll decide how——”

“Very well, Colonel,” Dr. Brownrigg agreed. “That seems as far as we can get for tonight, at any rate. I’ll let you know my results as soon as possible, you may feel quite sure.”

As he rose to his feet, he turned towards the windows of the room in mild surprise. The night stillness had suddenly been disturbed by the sound of a very gusty and very discordant chorus approaching the house spasmodically, feminine voices shrilling with abandon above a bass of masculine howling, equally disdainful of key and tune.

As Colonel Margesson had suggested, his visitor heard most of the gossip of the neighbourhood in the course of his wide-flung ministrations. He listened to the tempestuous revellers with attention for some moments and then turned to his companion again.

“Forgive my curiosity, Colonel—but do those very joyous sounds proceed from your next-door neighbours up the road? I’ve heard that they kick up rather a row at night up there at that bungalow—which is your property, I believe, by the way?”

“Yes. My wife put it up—experimentally. We lived in it, you know, for a year or so, before we definitely decided to settle in this part of the world and build a house. Yes—they’re rather a rowdy lot up there, I’m sorry to say.”

“Shouldn’t have thought you’d have been bothered here though, by their noise—at this distance. What a dreadful din——It sounds as if they were all extremely drunk——They must be *in* your grounds, surely?”

Colonel Margesson smiled uncomfortably.

“I suppose it strikes you as rather odd, hearing a racket like that at this hour in such a quiet place. . . . But I’ve grown accustomed to it. It’s merely my son and daughter being seen home through the wood by their friends from the bungalow. No—they’re not drunk. Probably had a cocktail, or two. Very little makes these young people, nowadays, quite silly. But they like to pretend that they’re so very, very gay, and glad that nothing whatever matters in the least. Perhaps you’d prefer to get off before they come along. By the way—let me see you down that confounded path of ours to the bridge, won’t you?”

But before they reached Cullerside’s elaborately-artistic porch, a laughing, breathless group of six young people had arrived in the outskirts of the bay of the drive and greeted their appearance with cheers of lavish wildness and then a chorused,

“Good morning—good morning——A very good morning to you.”

“Do stop that noise, will you,” called out Margesson mildly. “This isn’t Whipsnade, you know.”

A wavering feminine voice supported this protest ironically.

“Shurrup, all of you. You’re making mos’ disgrasheful noise. You know it’s disgrasheful noise. This’s a r’shpectable house. An’ that’s my resphectable father all poshed up in his reshpectable glad rags like a good old English gennelman——So shurrup.”

There was another outburst of laughter and applause, but then the party broke up with boisterous good nights and arrangements for re-meeting on the morrow. While their escort disappeared into the blurred darkness of the trees which completely surrounded the house, Joan Margesson came jauntily across the drive, followed unsteadily by her brother. The brilliant light from the porch (Cullerside and the Grammar School had combined for a supply of electricity from the town), illuminated her blonde, insolent prettiness, her slim, still childish figure clad in the thinnest of jumpers and the most

revealing of beach trousers, and the heavy, knobbed ash-plant which she twirled airily as she came.

“Hallo, Pater,” she remarked casually. “Not gone to roost yet? Naughty old man.” Her hardy gaze rested on the doctor’s dowdy elderliness for an instant of devastating indifference and then, whistling, she passed on into the house, walking with swaggering carefulness. Essaying a like insouciance, her brother—a slight, pallid youth of supercilious smile—stumbled over the two low steps and fell. When he had risen to his feet again with solemnity, he addressed the doctor affably.

“I don’t think we have met before, have we? But it doesn’t really matter in the least, of course, does it? Not in the least. You look an intelligent person, whoever you are. I *like* your face. Pathetic. But it appeals to me, somehow. Tell me—do tell me—I should so much like to know. What, do you suppose, is the really fundamental shig—shignificance of hum’n ’xishtence?”

“That,” replied Dr. Brownrigg dryly, “is rather a big question, young man. We’ll go into it some other time, perhaps. . . .”

“But why sm’other time,” protested young Margesson. “Ashmatter fact, it’s my experiensh that three o’clock in the morning is the hour at which I _____”

His father took him by an arm, and urged him onwards towards the hall door. “Don’t make an ass of yourself, Leonard,” he said quietly. “Get in and get off to bed.”

But, to the visitor’s amazement and discomfiture, the weedy Leonard’s affability vanished in a flash, and, wresting himself free from his father’s hand, he slapped him across the face viciously.

“There——” he panted, breathless with anger. “Keep your bloody hands off me, or it will be the worse for you. Do you hear?”

For a moment Colonel Margesson regarded his son in menacing and contemptuous silence. But then he said quietly:

“On second thoughts—don’t go to your room yet. I want to have a talk with you, Leonard. And with Joan. Tell her—will you. And wait for me in my den, both of you.”

“Oh, go to hell!” replied his son. “Boom-boom-boom——! That bloody voice of yours——Boom-boom——! From morning to night. Boom-boom-boom!”

Apparently, as his father had surmised, his ostentatious insobriety had been mere behaviourism. For he strode on truculently into the hall without any trace of unsteadiness, took off the dishevelled raincoat which he had been wearing, and disappeared with a scowling backward glance towards the hall door.

Margesson shrugged his heavy shoulders as he turned to Dr. Brownrigg again.

“Sorry you’ve been bored this way, Doctor,” he apologized, with an attempt at lightness. “I’m afraid I’m not a great success as a father. Do let me see you down to the bridge, won’t you. . .?”

But Dr. Brownrigg declined escort and went off with a brisk, cheerful “Good night,” which yet contrived to express friendly sympathy with the difficulties of latter-day parents. Margesson stood in the porch for some moments, watching the alternate appearances and disappearances of the flicker of his visitor’s torch as they receded down the steeply sloping path. Dr. Brownrigg was a methodical little man, and he switched his torch on and off with rhythmic regularity. But one eclipse of the little light was noticeably briefer than its predecessors and Margesson had the impression that it had been caused, not by the switch of the torch but by the quick intervention of some moving bulk between him and his departing guest. A tree trunk, probably—his long sight at intermediate ranges was, regrettably, not at all what it had been. And that thought reminded him that he was playing golf with Dicky Broughton over at Budleigh Salterton that day and had to make an early start. He turned and went into the house slowly, his handsome, good-humored face settling into unwilling grimness as once more he faced the troubles that rankled within its artistic and expensive walls.

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CHAPTER TWO

Considerably to his surprise, he found that, for once, his injunctions had been obeyed, and that Joan and her brother awaited him in his sanctum, each defiantly sprawl in an easy chair. His confession to Dr. Brownrigg, despite its humorousness, had admitted the truth. He had never been able to do anything with his two children—never been able to understand them—never been able to understand how he could have had two such children. He was old-fashioned if you liked—an anachronism—a regular old stick-in-the-mud. Still, he assured himself, he had some faiths—some ideals—some traditions—some sense of duty—some will and self-control. And, as he had been bred, and as he had gone on for nearly fifty years, so he wished and so intended to go on to the end. *Had* to go on to the end; for he knew that he couldn’t change anything in himself. Strive as he might—and he had striven honestly always—to be fair and reasonable and just and all the rest of it, he had always come back to the same impasse. He disapproved profoundly of

these two human beings whom he called his son and daughter but who had always been and always would be complete strangers to him. Disapproved of them not merely passively, but, despite himself, actively. He even disliked them at times—disliked Leonard, in particular, at times acutely. Incapable of the least subtlety, he was aware that to the much quicker wits of the pair his own feelings towards them had always been as clear as daylight, despite his conscientiously maintained pose of paternal good nature and toleration. And, since both possessed a marked talent for what he called “backchat” of a peculiarly searching and wounding kind, together with a carefully cultivated aplomb of imperturbable amusement, as a rule he carefully avoided open conflict with their always allied adroitness.

But Leonard’s performance in the porch—before a witness who was almost a complete stranger—was an entirely new and startling development, which seemed to him to demand direct and firm protest. As he entered his den, his blue, straightforward gaze rested with severe distaste upon his son’s pale, sensitive face, meagre physique, and careless, untidy garb. Himself a man of great strength and activity, devoted with tranquil passion to all outdoor pursuits and extremely skilful at them, robust of health, and untiring of energy, it exasperated him that this son of his should be a puny, white-faced, narrow-chested little Cissy of a chap, who hated games, found his principal pleasure in life in strumming idiotic modern music on a piano or blithering pretentious tripe about art and literature and psychology and all that sort of stuff—always looked as if he had slept in his clothes and forgotten to wash—always slouched or sprawled—had never done a day’s work in his life—never would do it—never wanted to do it—Joan—Well, her father wasn’t sure whether Joan was really a babbling, squawking, squealing, aimless little nitwit, or merely succeeded always in pretending that she was one. But, in either case, the result was the same. Five minutes of Joan, he considered, was just about as much as any sane human being could stick in one dollop. And now—look at her. Lolling askew in an armchair, with one leg cocked over its arm—a cigarette hanging out of her mouth—a smirk of cheeky amusement on her face—a lipstick in her hand. And those beastly trousers—Like some little shopgirl—

He addressed her first.

“Now, look here, Joan—this has got to stop. I’ve spoken to you several times. I won’t speak to you again. I dislike that chap Radville and his friends extremely. I dislike your spending your whole day, and the greater part of your night, in their company—I dislike your having anything to do with them, in fact. However, you seem unable to make any decent friends for yourself—so I’ll merely say this. In future, if you spend the evening up at the bungalow, you will come home by twelve o’clock at latest. You’ll come

home looking and behaving as if you were sober—whether you are or not. And under no circumstances will you bring Mr. Radville or any of his friends into the grounds of this house. You understand? That’s all I wanted to say to you. Except that the alternative will be very unpleasant for both of us. And for God’s sake, get some decent clothes and dress like a gentlewoman. You’re supposed to be one. Good night.”

“By whom,” yawned Joan. And Leonard raised his shadowed, cigarettebleared eyes to the ceiling in elaborate weariness.

“Boom-boom-boom!” he blew. “Good God—I hear it in my sleep now! It makes me think of loathsome African forests—and horrible oily smelly rivers with furtive crocodiles in them—and fever—and quinine—and wardrums. Ghastly——” He shuddered.

“Oh, don’t exaggerate, Len,” remonstrated his sister, inspecting her scarlet mouth abstractedly. “Pater’s voice is one of his chief pleasures in life, you know. He thinks it’s so rich and mellow and hearty and strong-mannish. He *likes* to hear it booming, poor dear. Why *shouldn’t* he boom if he likes? You needn’t listen to it. It doesn’t mean anything—and it makes him feel good, poor darling. After all, he doesn’t scratch himself—or chew gum _____”

She writhed to her feet.

“Well, nighty-night, Pater. Oh—who was the funny little old thing with the hairy face? I know, I’ve seen all that hair somewhere before. Don’t glare at me, Pater. Your eyes become so prominent when you glare. Like a Peke’s. Oh . . . I know now who hairy-face is. That little doctor—what’s his name? I say—what was *he* doing here at this hour? Did he come to see Mater?”

“No,” replied Margesson curtly. “He came to see me.”

“See *you*?” repeated Leonard, with a sudden suspicious sharpness. “What about?” He raised his voice when he received no reply. “I say—what did he come here to see you about?”

“Oh, don’t try to look mysterious, Pater,” adjured Joan. “Leave us some shred of self-respect. After all—biologically—you are our father.”

Unwisely, Margesson essayed scathing repartee.

“I find some little difficulty in believing that either of you are capable of _____”

“Is,” groaned Leonard, eyes closed in agony. “Is—is—is. Either never are, dear Pater. Never, never are.”

Above the shrill titter which this languid rebuke evoked from his sister, a distant scream from the upper part of the house, followed by two others yet more frantic and prolonged, brought Leonard to his feet and across the room to the door. As he opened it, the three cries were followed by three heavy

reports in rapid succession. There was the tinkle of falling glass—hurrying footsteps overhead—another cry——

“Colonel Margesson. Colonel Margesson. Come up! Come up!”

Thrusting his son aside, Margesson rushed up the staircase and along the short corridor at the end of which lay the rooms in which his wife now spent the greater part of her unhappy existence. At one side were her own and her maid’s bedrooms and a dressing-room; at the other, a large room which had been converted into a sitting-room for her. The dressing-room stood in the angle of the house’s north and east walls, with a window in each. And it was in this room that Mrs. Margesson lay, unconscious, crumpled up in her pyjamas on the carpet, one slippered foot resting on a service revolver which her husband at once recognized as his own property. Apparently she had fallen backwards and her white face, frozen in terror, looked up into the unshaded electric lamp (for she had had the shades removed from the lights in all the rooms specially used by her), hanging above the dressing-table. On her knees beside her mistress, the maid, Georgina, knelt endeavouring to restore her with the aid of sal volatile.

Relieved by the discovery that his first apprehensions had been unfounded and that his wife had merely fainted, Margesson picked up the revolver after some moments and examined it—satisfied himself that all three shots had been fired from it—and removed two undischarged cartridges from the cylinder. It was clear to him that the shots had been fired from the spot where his wife had fallen, and that all had been aimed at the window in the north wall, directly behind the dressing-table. For one bullet had broken an upper pane of the window, one had shivered the dressing-table’s mirror and presumably ricocheted backwards and upwards, and the third had splintered one of the window’s shutters, which stood partially ajar, and then lodged in the sashing. The slivers of glass from the mirror with which the carpet about the dressing-table was plentifully besprinkled crunched beneath his feet as he hurried to the window, and, making a shade of his hands, peered out into the darkness. Another caprice of his wife’s had been to have the lower portions of all the windows in her own part of the house permanently fastened down, and trial assured him that the fastenings of this one were intact. The upper portions of the window was open. But another hurried trial proved that it could not be opened sufficiently to permit him to look out through the aperture, and impatiently he renewed his attempt to overcome the reflected light on the panes.

By this time Leonard and his sister had arrived on the scene and the latter had replaced Georgina beside her mother, whose cheeks she was slapping with nonchalant calmness, cigarette still in mouth. Leonard stood by, hands in pockets, watching his father’s movements through harrowed

eyes. Both had by now become accustomed to their mother's fainting fits and the screaming which invariably preceded them. But this loosing off of a revolver was a much more interesting and serious business. And Leonard wanted to see just what his father was going to do about it.

"Who opened those shutters?" Margesson demanded of Georgina.

The maid, a plain, prim-mannered girl, compressed her thin lips and shook her head.

"I don't know, sir. I pulled down the blinds and fastened the shutters in all these rooms myself this evening—early—about seven o'clock."

"What about the window itself. Did you leave that open?"

"Yes, sir. A little at the top——"

Margesson went back to examine the catch of the shutters again. "No sign that the shutters were forced from the outside, anyhow," he commented. "Mrs. Margesson must have opened them herself. Did you hear her scream?"

"Yes, sir—of course."

"Never mind 'of course.' How often did you hear her scream?"

"Twice, I think, sir."

"Think be hanged. Pull yourself together. Where were you when the shots were fired? Still lying in bed?"

"Oh, for God's sake, don't bully the girl that way!" broke in Leonard, his voice shrill with indignation. "Talk about Inspector Hornleigh——"

His father repeated his question, however, and Georgina stated that the three shots had been fired while she had been putting on her dressing-gown and slippers. As she had passed through her mistress's bedroom she had heard her fall. She believed that she had noticed at once that the shutters of one window had been unfastened and the blind let up—but certainly she had neither seen nor heard anything or anyone outside the window. Several times before she had known the shutters of that window to be unfastened and the blind drawn up in the course of the night.

"By Mrs. Margesson?"

"I supposed so, sir. There was no one else to do it."

"Ever make any remark to her about the matter?"

"No, sir. I never make any remark to Mrs. Margesson about anything she does. I just supposed that some nights she wanted to let more air in—without having too great a draught in her bedroom."

"Of course," agreed Joan, and sat back on her heels placidly. "She's coming round now, all right. Suppose you hike her back into bed, Pater, instead of asking utterly futile questions. . . ."

But her golden head turned sharply towards the broken window again at the sound of a voice calling out from below. Margesson climbed onto a chair

to conduct a brief conversation with a figure whose position was indicated by the intermittent flashing of a torch.

“Nothing wrong, I hope, Colonel?” Dr. Brownrigg inquired. “I heard three shots. So I thought I had better come back.”

“No. Nothing wrong, Doctor. At least—Just a minute. Will you go round to the front door?” Margesson turned on his perch. “Go down and let Dr. Brownrigg in will you, Leonard. Bring him up here.”

Leonard and his sister exchanged a glance of ironic amusement at the curtness of their father’s tone.

“How wonderful you are, Pater,” cooed Joan, rising to her feet and inspecting her stockings. “So masterful—so decisive in moments of crisis. Georgina—run down and let Dr. What’s-his-name in, will you, like a dear. You needn’t look so coy. I expect the old thing’s seen a female in pyjamas before.”

But Colonel Margesson had decided to put his foot down.

“Stay where you are, Georgina,” he commanded sharply. “Did you hear what I said, Leonard?”

“Quite distinctly,” replied his son coolly.

“Then do as I tell you. At once.”

The youth sighed unhappily, then seated himself with deliberation in the only chair which the room contained.

“Boom-boom-boom!” he murmured dejectedly. “Mango trees and alligators and pygmies——” But he uncrossed his legs again hastily as his father made a threatening move towards him. “Now—no more of that. I’ve warned you. Pater. I won’t stand any more of it—do you hear?”

And Joan supported her brother with a scornful. “Do leave him alone, Pater. You *are* a tiresome old thing——For Heaven’s sake let’s get Mater off the floor, anyhow——”

Dr. Brownrigg, who had been admitted by an alarmed housemaid, entered the room at that moment and, after a brief, silent examination of the prostrate figure, took charge of the situation. When her mother had been restored to the bed which she had obviously left in precipitate haste, and had evinced an obstinate determination to keep her beautifully fashioned lips tightly closed, Joan went off yawning to her room. Leonard, however, lighting cigarette after cigarette from its predecessor, refused to follow his sister’s example and accompanied the two elder men into the dressing-room, leaving Georgina on guard over his mother.

“No,” he objected with darkling vehemence. “I want to know what Dr. Brownrigg thinks about all this. I don’t want any hugger-mugger about Mater——”

The little doctor looked at him over his glasses, and then went and shut the connecting door.

“Hugger-mugger, Mr. Margesson,” he repeated stiffly. “I don’t understand.”

“Don’t understand,” echoed the young man excitably. “Well, I’ll put it into plainer words then. I’m not going to let Pater put it into your head that, because she’s nervy and bored by things—and because she hardly ever gets any decent sleep—and *that*, I expect, is mostly because she’s just too bored to take any fresh air or exercise—I’m not going to let Pater stuff it down your throat that there’s anything else the matter with Mater.”

“Anything else, Mr. Margesson?”

“Yes. Anything the matter with her mind—if you *will* have me put it into plain words. I’m convinced that Pater has persuaded himself that there is something the matter with her mind. I don’t know how—but I guess *why* he has persuaded himself of that. Anyhow—it’s my belief that he has. And I tell you now before him that it’s all damn nonsense—humbug. Mater’s mind is as sound and as clear as yours or mine. And a damn sight clearer than Pater’s about many things—I can assure you of that. And I think I may say that I know her better than anyone else in the world. . . .”

Margesson’s blue eyes had remained fixed on his son’s face during this breathless oration with a growing curiosity in their intentness. For, both to him and to the other listener, it was clear that, plain as the boy had undertaken to make his words, he had chosen to express their real implication by look and gesture and intonation only. It was his first inkling of the real reason of his son’s long-standing hostility towards him. And the accusation which it insinuated was, he had to admit to himself, founded on so much of uncomfortable fact in his relations with his wife, that something like dismay embarrassed his placating comment:

“My dear Leonard, no one is going to dispute either your affection for your mother—or hers for you—or the confidence that exists between you. But—if you’ll allow me to say so, my boy—it is you who are talking nonsense. In any case, what you or I think about the state of your mother’s health——”

“Oh, don’t funk it,” interrupted Leonard contemptuously. “You’re up against it now. We’re talking about the state of Mater’s *mind*. And you know we are.”

“Quite. And what you or I think about that doesn’t matter in the least, for practical purposes. It’s a matter for——”

“Boom-boom-boom! A matter for mental specialists——That’s what you were going to say, wasn’t it? That’s the way you want to try to work it. Oh—I know all about that little game. I know how people are wangled into

these mental homes—and then kept there. It’s as simple as kiss-my-hand. ‘My dear, I just want you to have a nice little quiet talk with this nice kind doctor.’ And then the nice quiet little talk is over, and the nice kind doctor says what he’s been hired to say, pockets his easy money, rings up a pal of his—another of the right sort, and says——”

“Now, really, Mr. Margesson,” intervened Dr. Brownrigg with severity. “You are talking in a very absurd, imprudent way. My advice to you is to go to your bed——”

“And leave you and Pater to fix it all up in peace and comfort. Not damn’ likely. Not damn’ likely. I’m not going to see my mother wangled into a lunatic asylum—put away—got rid of—certified, God’s truth—and left to eat her heart out for the rest of her life—in the company of idiots and epileptics and God knows what——I won’t have it, I tell you. I’ve had a talk with my mother’s solicitors already about it, I warn you. Oh, yes—You may glare and tush till you’re blue in the face, Pater. I’ve spoken plainly, haven’t I? Well, I’ll speak more plainly still—now that I’m at it. I’ll tell you that Joan and I—and Mater herself, too—we all know what your little game is perfectly well. You think you’re going to get Mater nice and safely into a mental home—that’s what they’re called, when they can make you pay for their dirty work—and that you’ll get control of her money—and that everything in the garden’s going to be lovely for you. Well—you’re making one hell of a big mistake, let me tell you. . . . There’s going to be nothing doing in the mental home line. Nothing doing at all. So now you know——”

His companions watched him fling himself down into his chair again convulsively and light a cigarette with trembling fingers. A little gesture from Dr. Brownrigg induced Margesson to turn away with a shrug and leave the situation to him.

“If I thought you expected for a moment, young man,” the little doctor said acidly, “that I would take these accusations of yours against your father seriously—well, I should have no hesitation whatever in recommending *you* as a candidate for one of those institutions of which you seem to have made such a profound study. However—the matter under discussion is your mother’s condition—both bodily and mental—for neither you nor I nor anyone else can separate the one from the other. Of that condition, I tell you quite frankly—I take at this moment a very serious view——”

“Rot,” came contemptuously from the chair. “Bunk! Absolute boloney!”

“Perhaps. I don’t propose to discuss my opinions with you, however—on that point or any other. I’ll merely do two things. I’ll recommend you to consult those legal advisers of yours as to the law of libel. And then I’ll ask you one perfectly simple question. You say that you know your mother better than anyone else in the world. From that knowledge of yours, can you

give—or suggest—any reason why your mother should have got out of her bed at three o'clock in the morning—come into this dressing-room—unfastened those shutters—drawn up the blind—and then gone back towards the middle of the room and fired three shots at the window with a revolver of your father's which, I understand from him, she could only have got into her possession by the exercise of the most deliberate cunning and patience? A long question, I admit. But you can make up for that by giving me the shortest possible answer. Will you?"

"With pleasure," replied Leonard disdainfully. "She must have been awakened by some noise in here—got up—come in here—found that the noise came from the window—opened the shutters and let up the blind—and seen someone outside the window. Someone whom she may have seen before—perhaps several times before—which was why she went to the pains of pinching Pater's revolver. Anyone could have pinched it easily—any old time. When she saw whoever it was—and I have my own ideas about that—she screamed and moved backwards away from the window—watching him. And finally she fired at him—and then—naturally, considering her fright and her state of health generally—and I don't suppose she had ever fired any sort of gun in her life before—she just did a flop. And there you are."

Dr. Brownrigg took off his glasses, looked at them against the light, and put them on again.

"Not a very short answer. But certainly a perfectly plausible one. There's a fairly wide sill outside the window. And there's a lopped tree-branch which comes to—I estimate—within six or seven feet from the sill. Your theory, I gather, is that someone reached the sill via the tree and the bough."

"Yes. It's perfectly possible."

The doctor went to peer out into the darkness again and then came back, fingering his untidy little beard.

"Well—I shouldn't like to make the experiment myself," he announced. "But I suppose a young and very active and courageous person *could* do it successfully—twice—or even several times. Let's suppose the feat possible, at any rate, for the moment. You say you have your own idea as to someone likely to take so much trouble and run so much risk for so very little apparent purpose?"

"Yes," replied Leonard defiantly. "I have. I expect those silly asses up at the bungalow have been trying to be funny—and that one of them's been climbing up and knocking at the window. Pater has elected to make himself unpleasant to them. And anyhow, they're always playing the giddy goat. It's a mania with Radville. They were all about the place here tonight. They came back with Joan and myself from the bungalow. You saw them——"

“Well,” commented the doctor, turning towards Margesson, “I’m bound to say. Colonel, that, from what I’ve heard of your tenants up there at that bungalow of yours—and what I heard of them myself tonight——What do *you* think about this idea of your son’s?”

“I’ll tell you that when I’ve had a talk with Mr. Radville in the morning,” replied Margesson non-committally. “For the moment——”

Leonard sprang to his feet.

“For the moment you don’t want to open your eyes to any fact that’s going to disturb your rosy day-dreams, do you?” he flared out. “Well, let me tell you that I’m going to open them to one fact, anyhow, before you start snoring tonight. I’m going up to the bungalow right now, if you want to know. I’ll be seeing you——”

Despite the remonstrances of his elders, he slouched out of the room, feeling for his cigarette case as he went, his creased, soiled flannel trousers flapping about his spidery legs. Margesson and the doctor made another estimate of the possibilities of the lopped branch which projected towards the broken window, without arriving at any very definite conclusion regarding it. Then they shut the window and fastened the shutters and, having learned from Georgina that the sedative given her mistress had done its work satisfactorily and that she was sound asleep, went down the stairs and out into the porch, discussing the Premier’s impending interview with Herr Hitler. Within the past hour the night had shrouded itself in clammy fog and, as the doctor took his torch from his overcoat pocket he uttered a little snort.

“One of the prices you pay for your amenities, Colonel. And in four or five years you’ll be coming to me and asking me why you’ve got rheumatism all over you. Well, good night. I’ll run out this evening, sometime, and have a look at your wife—if she’ll let me. Probably be able to let you know about those——”

He paused to listen to a brief anguished sound, muffled, and abruptly stifled, that told of some nocturnal tragedy enacting itself in the invisible mystery of the woods.

“Stoat at work,” he commented. “Good-bye, Brer Rabbit.”

And, blowing a little, protestingly, the little man went briskly off into the fog.

‡ ‡ ‡

CHAPTER THREE

The world might be all of a dither with its hopes and fears, its threats and its prayers. But down in its sheltered valley Cullerton's market-day had pursued its usual tranquil, cheerful course. It had been none too bad a market, considering. Weather, sales, and prices had given nothing to grumble about, as times went. And as for that there Hitler chap, Cullerton wasn't worrying about him. All wind and bluff. Chamberlain would tell him where he got off.

By half-past six business was over for the day. But the numerous hostleries grouped about the Market Square were chock-a-block with customers relaxing for a little space in sociable and sustaining refreshment after the day's good-humoured conflicts and philosophic anxieties. And the most distinguished and select of these establishments, the ancient Stag's Head, was having a rush hour of such hustle and bustle that Henry, the veteran head waiter, had been obliged to enlist the aid of one of the chambermaids in the lounge, and in the bar both Mr. Babbicombe, the licensee of the house, and his wife, were giving Miss Mowlem a strenuous and expert hand.

In the dining-room and the lounge every available sitting-space was occupied. Farmers of superior substance and their wives and children—dealers and agents—locals of various grades of dignity and importance, avocation or mere gregariousness, sat absorbing every conceivable variety of fluid from milk to Scotch, from ginger-beer to rum-punch—every thinkable species of eatable solid from chocolate biscuits to bacon and eggs, from tinned salmon to venison pasty. Apart from a sprinkling of visitors, resident or passing, these customers of the Head were all market-day habitués of old standing and as well known to one another as the Head itself. . . . Above the sonorous, humming bass of soft, slow Devon voices, laughing interchanges, amicably ironic or shrewdly topical, passed to and fro across the lounge. The chatter of childish trebles made of the long, narrow room—it had been the dining-room in coaching days—a family meeting-place. As he came and went with quiet efficiency and never-wearying vigilance, Henry's well known face, with its humorous mouth and little tufts of side-whisker, wore the smile of an approving and approved grandfather.

There were moments, however, when the smile eclipsed itself momentarily. For the Stag's Head had had an honourable reputation for the best part of four hundred years now. And in that blameless repute no one took a more jealous pride than Henry, who had served it, boy and man, for over fifty years and been its head waiter for twenty-six of them. So whenever the noisy little party in the corner, where the two big palms were, made its remarks too loudly or laughed too boisterously, Henry turned down his humorous lips and turned up his humorous eyebrows—knowing that this

tacit expression of his disapproval of the party in the corner would be observed by the “regulars” and accepted by them as the Head’s view of rowdy young swankers who didn’t know how to behave themselves in its lounge. But then his grandfatherly smile would return and deftly he would adjust the napkin which was serving some Tommy or Susie as bib, or produce from nowhere, as he passed, a light for someone’s cigarette, while his eye assured someone else at the other end of the lounge of the immediate supply of more hot water or more buttered toast or “the same again.”

The lounge had taken its cue and beyond an occasional glance towards the offenders at some unusually loudly-spoken witticism or over-strident outburst of laughter, decided to ignore them at least overtly—with all the more determination because it divined itself deliberately and disdainfully ignored by their esoteric gaiety. But, surreptitiously, the farmers’ wives strained their ears to translate the unfamiliar vowels and clipped consonants of the corner party’s unceasing chatter of night-clubs and bottle-parties, shows and dance bands, screen stars and crooners, Wimbledon and Wembley, Brooklands and Henley and Ranelagh and Cannes. And their men folk exchanged winks and nudges as Henry distributed yet another trayful of cocktails to the quintette and then, with elaborate impassiveness, stood waiting until, with some delay, payment was made for them.

“That’s the fifth round they’ve had—since we come in, any’ow,” commented Mr. Bodley of Shramley Pound Farm to his vis-à-vis, moving his mouth as little as possible and screening the rest of his face with his glass of cider, “Five-an’ten a time. That’s thirty bobs’ worth they’ve put into them already, anyways.”

“Makes me laff way old ’Enry sticks to’n till they square up on the nail,” grinned his friend, Mr. Varney, who had come in all the way from Widdecombe.

“Ar,” nodded Mr. Bodley. “Them two chaps owes money all over the town, I hear. Radville, the black chap’s name is. T’other chap’s name’s Beeton or summat o’ that. One of the gals is Radville’s sister—her that’s wearin’ the big fur coat.” He winked. “‘Least, so they say. The two chaps has been livin’ in a bungalow up beyond school since beginnin’ of summer. I suppose they must have felt lonely up there. Anyhow, the sister and a girl friend of hers have been staying up there with them this while back. Likely the girl friend’s t’other chap’s sister——”

He winked again and Mr. Varney averted his face from his wife’s view so that he might grin appreciatively. “An’ very nice, too,” he remarked. “I never see ’em about before.”

“You wouldn’t,” explained Mr. Bodley. “I never see them in here before, myself, in the daytime.”

“Mus’ be a birthday party or somethin’, eh?”

But the other shook his head. “No. They’re often in here in the evenings lately, making whoopee. None too welcome, either, I reckon—for all they shy money about. Mostly there’s six of them—least when I see ’em. One young chap’s not with them this afternoon. I wonder at that. ’Cause mostly it’s ’im as pays for the lot—t’other two chaps just sits tight and lets him. Son o’ Colonel Margesson’s, he is—regular silly softy of a young chap. That’s his sister—the youngest of the three gals—the one with her legs cocked up on the dark chap’s knees. An’ I was jus’ noticin’ to meself that it was her paid these last two times for the drinks. . . . You watch, next tune——”

Although Mr. Bodley and his friend sat, surrounded by a loudly-buzzing hubbub, at least forty feet from the party in the corner, which was entirely unaware of their very existence, these interchanges of theirs had been made in murmuring undertones and with intense wariness of eyes and lips, no other portion of their faces or persons being permitted the slightest movement. But now Mr. Varney screwed his head round by very slow instalments until he enjoyed a clear view of Miss Margesson and her companions, gazed exhaustively but as if he was gazing at nothing, and then in slow motion screwed his head back to its original position.

“Ar,” was his comment. “Fancies ’erself, don’t she? Fancies her legs, any’ow, by the way she’s showing them.”

But, this criticism was overheard by Mrs. Varney in one of the intervals of a confidential conversation with Mrs. Bodley.

“Never you mind about ’er legs, William,” she enjoined. “You finish off that drink of yours and let’s get on back home in the daylight. . . .”

“Ar—an’ you do the same, Peter,” commanded Mrs. Bodley. “Legs, indeed——! If you ask me, I think it’s a shocking shame that a young thing like that—only a child, you might say—should be allowed to drink and make a show of herself that way in a public place——”

“And on a market-day, too,” supported Mrs. Varney, “with a lot o’ silly fools o’ men gykin’ at her out of the corners of their eyes. . . .”

“I don’t know what sort of a woman her mother can be,” continued Mrs. Bodley, “to allow her to do it. They say her mother’s queer in her head—never puts her foot outside her own room. My niece’s husband’s sister was in service up there at Cullerside for a while last year——”

“She looks a bit queer in the head, herself, to me, anyway,” commented Mr. Varney, finishing his drink with lingering zest. “Pretty well screwed at this moment, she is—child an’ all as she may be. And t’other two pieces as well. Hark to them cacklin’.”

“Oh, that’s nothing,” smiled Mr. Bodley. “You wait till they get another few into them. Then you’ll see some fun——”

“Oh, will we, indeed?” retorted Mrs. Varney. “Ah well, if you don’t mind, Mr. Bodley, the fun I want to see is my own hall door. And that’s best part of twenty miles away.”

But she and her friends lingered. For Miss Mowlem, the barmaid, after a preliminary colloquy with Henry through the hatch, by which drinkables passed from the bar to the lounge, had left her own special domain and appeared at a side-door close to them. Her still pretty and usually smiling face wore an expression of concerned gravity; and, though she came on into the lounge after some moments and made a show of merely routine interest in the comfort of the guests, it quickly became clear that the real purpose of her appearance among them was to reconnoitre the party in the corner by the palms.

Miss Mowlem had presided over the bar for over ten years, and, her popularity with the patrons of the Head being only less than that of Henry himself; humorous little friendly greetings punctuated the gradual passage down the room. Presently she came to a pause behind the chair of a customer who sat alone, in apparently abstracted contemplation of the smoke of his cigarette, occasionally sipping his drink, occasionally adding unobtrusively a quick, considered touch or two to a pencil sketch made on the fly-leaf of a novel which he shut quickly before she could see the drawing.

“Now, now, Mr. Purefoy,” she scolded playfully. “I’ve caught you. I know you’re making another of those dreadful caricatures of yours. I won’t allow it, mind—unless, of course, it’s someone I don’t like.”

Mr. Purefoy raised his very fine, long-lashed grey eyes to hers with a charming smile. “And now, what are *you* doing in here, Miss Mowlem, may I ask—stealing up behind people, and threatening them? I know you’re just dying to see whom I’ve been sketching. And it *is* someone you don’t like. But, just to punish you——”

“Oh, don’t be such a tease, Mr. Purefoy,” retorted the barmaid, colouring agreeably beneath the artist’s intent gaze. For, even if his own claim to be middle-aged was to be allowed, Miss Mowlem privately considered him one of the handsomest and most distinguished-looking gentlemen she had ever seen in real life. He might say he was middle-aged; but he didn’t look it, because he had such a nice, slim, young figure. She admired even his spruce little beard and the lavishness of his tie, which was a bow with wide-flung ends; they just went with the rest of him, like his manners, which were always gay and charming. If Mr. Purefoy had been just a few inches taller, Miss Mowlem was of opinion, he would have been a perfect dream. As he was, she considered him a perfect pet.

So she shook his shoulder kittenishly. “Go on. Do show it to me.”

“—please.”

“Well—please, then.”

Thus entreated, Mr. Purefoy exhibited discreetly his drawing, which Miss Mowlem rewarded with a gratifying little exclamation of admiration, bending over him to inspect it more closely. But her smile faded into vague uneasiness as she looked.

“I think it’s just wonderful,” she commented in an undertone. “But it isn’t a caricature. . . . It’s worse than a caricature. . . . It’s just her—as she looks when—as she looks now. . . . You’re a horrid, wicked, clever thing _____”

“Thank you, my dear,” smiled Mr. Purefoy, shutting his novel again. “For that sweet sincerity all other trespasses are forgiven you.”

“Well—look here—will you give me that sketch then?”

“Why not let me make one of you, my sweet?”

“Rather not, thank you,” declined Miss Mowlem. “Heaven knows what you’d turn *me* into. No—I want that sketch—for a special reason. . . . You’ll only use it to clean your pipe with—or forget all about it, most likely. Go on—tear it out and give it to me—quietly. Wait a moment—she’s looking at us. Now—quick——”

So Mr. Purefoy, with a sigh of charming resignation, complied, and then returned to his abstracted contemplation of his cigarette smoke, while Miss Mowlem, deftly concealing her prize in a newspaper left behind by a departing family party, moved onwards slowly towards the two big potted palms between which Henry passed just then with a trayload of empty cocktail glasses.

“Five brandy liqueurs this time,” he murmured as he met the barmaid.

“Bring two,” she said in the same undertone, as she turned to retrace her steps. “No more drinks this afternoon for the ladies.”

“Very good, miss.”

Proceeding to the hatch, Henry obtained from Mr. Babbicombe two brandy liqueurs, and, returning to Mr. Radville, who had given him the last order, presented his tray to that gentleman with his customary courteous “Thank you, sir.”

Radville, a sleekly-groomed, dark young man of about thirty, whose fixed smile revealed permanently his very white and regular teeth beneath a tiny wisp of moustache, cast a glance at the tray.

“I said five.”

“I am aware you did, sir. But my orders are that no more drinks are to be served to these three ladies this afternoon.”

“What?” screamed two of the three ladies in outraged indignation. And Joan Margesson opened her eyes to inquire: “What’s up? What’s he say?”

“Well, I’m damned,” remarked Mr. Radville’s friend, Mr. Bethune. “Infernal cheek! You go and bring three more of these tout-de-suite—See?”

“Sorry, sir. My orders are that no more drinks are to be served to these ladies this afternoon.”

“What?” screamed Joan Margesson in her turn. “No more drinks? Hell’s bells——! Why not?”

Henry surveyed her colourless face and glazed eyes in grave but eloquent silence and then, as Mr. Radville and Mr. Bethune made no motion to help themselves from his tray, deposited the two glasses on a little occasional table close at hand and then coughed traditionally.

“No use your waiting, my dear man,” said Mr. Bethune. “Bring the drinks we’ve ordered and you’ll get paid all right.”

“Sorry, sir. My orders are——”

“Orders be blowed,” retorted Mr. Radville. “Who gave you these orders?”

“The management, sir.”

“Are we to understand that the management—otherwise Mr. Babbicombe—suggests that these ladies are not in a fit condition to be supplied with any more drinks?”

“Well, sir, I think you’ll agree yourself that the ladies have had quite enough—for this afternoon. At any rate, I’ve told you what my orders are. And I intend to carry them out.”

By this time the rest of the lounge had suspended all other operations of its own to follow the discussion with ironic interest. And there was a general murmur of support for Henry’s firmness as he moved away with dignity, having at length received from Miss Margesson, via Mr. Radville, as Mr. Bodley noted sardonically—payment for the two drinks he had served. But silence fell again as almost immediately he was recalled by a loud chorus of “Oi!” “Here!” “Come back here, will you!”

Mr. Radville and Mr. Bethune had each taken possession of a glass and, under the facetious pretence that they desired man-size drinks, now demanded to be supplied each with two further liqueur brandies. The purpose of this little manœuvre being perfectly clear, Henry merely smiled at its childishness and turned away again. Whereupon Joan Margesson snatched Radville’s glass from his hand and, swallowing its contents in a gulp amid the boisterous laughter of her friends, swung her legs off his knees and, rising to her feet, attempted to fling the glass at Henry’s retreating back. Restrained from this revenge by Bethune, she consented to compromise by swallowing his drink also in a breath, and then with a

foolish cackle attempted to flop back into her chair but, instead, subsided abruptly on to the floor.

Miss Mowlem had come to a halt again beside Mr. Purefoy to watch developments, and uttered a little exclamation of indignation at the laughter which this contretemps elicited from him as from the majority of the lounge's other occupants.

"It's nothing to laugh at," she exclaimed. "A young girl like that—a lady—making such a show of herself. Really, I'm surprised at *you*, Mr. Purefoy _____"

"Youth will be served," smiled Mr. Purefoy. "Youth will be served."

But the little *jeu-d'esprit*—Mr. Purefoy was addicted to them—was wasted on Miss Mowlem who, with a sharp "Not in this house—unless it behaves itself," moved quickly to the side-door and disappeared purposefully, exchanging with Mrs. Varney and Mrs. Bodley, as she passed them, the censure of clucked tongue and shaken head.

"If that little baggage was *my* daughter," announced Mrs. Bodley for all the world to hear, "I know what she'd get, and where she'd get it, too."

"It's a winner Mr. Babbicombe doesn't put the whole lot of them out," said Mrs. Varney, also broadcasting. "I see'n watching the whole thing through the hatch."

"Half a tick," counselled Mr. Bodley. "They're going out thesselves now. I bet it'll be worth seeing when the Margesson piece tries to walk."

But the preparations of the party in the corner to depart prolonged themselves, and at this point the lounge discovered a new and stronger interest. The three large bay windows by which it was lighted commanded a view of most of Bridge Street, Cullerton's principal thoroughfare, and the attention of the guests had been directed out through them to the post office, directly opposite, by a surprised remark uttered by Mr. Jago, the popular manager of the Regal Cinema, as he struggled into his well-known fur-lined overcoat.

"Hallo——Bryant's driving his car himself again, then. Why, I thought they'd suspended his license for twelve months to come, didn't they?"

"So they did," confirmed someone else. "His 'sistant's been driving the car ever since."

"Well, he's driving it himself this afternoon, anyhow," insisted Mr. Jago, making his way to a window to obtain a fuller view of this interesting fact. "Look! See! 's'no one else in the car, only himself. Got a puncture or something, seemingly. He's getting out now."

All three windows were quickly besieged by curious spectators of the unlucky Mr. Bryant's activities. Just outside the post office, which stood back somewhat from the footpath in a little recessed bay of its own, a large,

heavily-built middle-aged man had alighted from a rakish-looking saloon with sorely-dinged wings, and was now bending to inspect one of its rear wheels. Having gazed at it for a long time, he proceeded to unearth from the rear cupboard of the car the component parts of a jack, which he then essayed to fit together. Finding, however, the task of inserting the threaded end of the bar into the head too difficult for him, he threw down the former angrily, and, having placed the head beneath the car's back axle to his satisfaction, lifted the rear of the vehicle bodily with his hands and eventually succeeded in resting the axle on the jack. That done, he spat copiously, and lighting a fresh cigarette, considered his next move with solemnity.

It is not to be supposed that it was either Mr. Eustace Bryant's popularity in Cullerton and the surrounding neighbourhood or this exhibition of his immense physical strength (he had been known to hold a bull prisoner by its horns while his assistant had ringed it, and could throw a horse or a heifer as easily, single-handed, as lesser men could up-end a push-bike), which just then fixed upon him the attention, not only of the Head's lounge, but also of every other inhabitant of Cullerton who happened to be within eyeshot of him at that moment. Though for many years it had been conceded that he was head and shoulders the best vet. in the countryside, he was anything but a popular individual and indeed, for certain good reasons, had recently earned the marked disapproval of most of his fellow-townsmen. And as for his physical strength—that was as familiar and accepted a thing as his chronic state of insobriety, his violent temper, and his talent for lurid and inexhaustible blasphemy.

But the disgrace which had fallen on him, both professionally and morally, some few weeks before had made him an object of curiosity, by reason of its notorious effects both upon his formerly very large practice and his formerly quite tolerable private conduct. One of its immediate results had been a bout of more than usually concentrated drinking, in the course of which he had driven his car onto one of Bridge Street's footpaths and knocked over and injured, in addition to a lamp-standard, a young woman and the child which she had been wheeling in a perambulator. Both human casualties, by fortunate chance, had escaped death, and Bryant had stumped up handsomely and voluntarily for the damages sustained by them. But the magistrates, unappeased, had imposed the maximum fine in their discretion and had deprived the offender of his driving license for a year.

That he should have the nerve to defy the law so flagrantly as to drive his car in the town's principal street in broad daylight—and on a market-day—was beyond all Cullerton's expectations. The Market Square was only just round the corner. And in the Market Square, for a certainty, at that moment

—as on all market-days until 7 p.m.—Sergeant Rendall and at least two of his subordinates were on the impatient move, watching and speeding-up the final stages of its evacuation and tidying-up. Any time now, the sergeant would come bustling round the corner, on his way back to the station and his supper. And then, as Mr. Jago opined hopefully, there wouldn't half be some fur flying.

Unaware of the interest he was arousing, or indifferent to it, Bryant detached his car's spare wheel slowly and, laying it on the footpath, regarded it meditatively for a space before beginning another impatient search in the rear cupboard for his tool-box. His head and shoulders were still buried in the cupboard when another big car drew up just behind his. Mr. Jago whistled at sight of the sprucely plus-foured figure which emerged from it and moved quickly towards the door of the post office. And Mr. Bodley, who had succeeded in elbowing his way to one of the other windows, turned to look back over the intervening heads to Mr. Varney, who hadn't.

“See who it is?” he inquired. “Colonel Margesson——”

“Well? What about it?” asked Mr. Varney deprecatingly. For Mr. Varney visited Cullerton only on market-days and lived otherwise remote from its doings and sayings.

“What about it?” repeated his friend.

And he and everyone else who had heard Mr. Varney's question looked at Mr. Varney and then laughed. For the most talked-of event that had occurred in Cullerton for many a long day had been the prosecution and conviction of Bryant, only a few weeks back, on a charge of savage cruelty in the slaughter of an unfortunate cat entrusted to him for “putting down”. Of course, he had been drunk; probably he had been very drunk. At any rate, initial efforts with chloroform having proved inadequate, he had battered the animal to death with a mallet, but had, unluckily for him, been disturbed in the final stages of this operation. The horrified and indignant intruder—he had later described Bryant's performance as that of a raging and blood-thirsty maniac—who had without delay reported what he had seen and heard to both the police and the R.S.P.C.A., and been subsequently the sole but sufficient witness—apart from the carcass of the cat—for the prosecution, and thus the primary and principal cause of Bryant's conviction and practically unanimous boycotting, had been Colonel Margesson, whom the indisposition of one of his gun-dogs had by chance led to the vet.'s “clinic” on the afternoon in question. All the town knew of, if it had not personally heard, the blood-curdling threats against the Colonel which ever since had been the principal theme of Bryant's conversation. And now, there were the two enemies—within a few inches of one another—and Mr. Varney asked

“What about it?” Mr. Bodley turned his back on his friend rather disdainfully and resumed his loudly-breathing survey of the post office door quickly, lest he should miss anything of the situation’s drama.

For, just before Colonel Margesson had disappeared through it, Bryant’s head had emerged from concealment and without any doubt whatever he had seen and recognized his accuser and undoer. He had made a lurching movement to follow him, but had come to a stop, and stood now, looking towards the door ominously and swinging the bar of the jack, which he had picked up, slowly and meditatively to and fro, pendulum-wise.

By now, practically the entire lounge had surrendered to curiosity and had either divided itself among the three windows or had gone out to watch developments from the ivied porch of the hotel. Mr. Purefoy, however, although he had long ago finished his drink, still sat on in solitary contemplation of his cigarette smoke. But his long-lashed eyes were twinkling. For in the corner by the two big palms a discussion was going on between Mr. Radville and his friends on the one side and Mr. Babbicombe on the other. And, as the eyes of the disputants frequently turned to him, as to an impartial neutral—for he was on quite good terms with both sides in a casual way—Mr. Purefoy was quite enjoying himself. And, also, despite his alleged middle-age, he liked looking at pretty, smartly-dressed young women.

Mr. Babbieombe was a stout, burly, red-faced, genial man of sporting proclivities and, in general, broadminded outlook. But in regard to the good name of the Stag’s Head his views were of inflexible rigidity; and, at need, he had no least hesitation in using either his tongue or his hands to maintain them. And now, taking advantage of the distraction caused by Mr. Bryant, he had decided to come into the lounge and do something which he had been contemplating doing for quite a little while back—tell those two smooth shavers with the haw-haw accents that he’d be obliged if they’d transfer their patronage elsewhere for the future, and start doing it straightaway.

This bluntly-delivered ultimatum had at first been received by the two gentlemen with supercilious amusement, by two of their lady-friends with derisive laughter. But when’ Mr. Babbicombe stolidly repeated it in still more concise form, Mr. Radville’s smile, though persisting, lost its easy indifference and hardened into wary-eyed insolence. He supposed that even the landlord of a third-rate little pub in a one-horse country town was aware of the legal responsibilities and liabilities of his job. Mr. Babbicombe might get away with that sort of stuff with his local clodhoppers and chawbacons and their most depressing squaws. But any further attempt to put it across on him, Mr. Radville, and his friends would lead, he conveyed, to results for Mr. Babbicombe both surprising and extremely unpleasant.

Mr. Bethune lent a running accompaniment of smiles and cigarette-flickings and "I should think nots," and "I should jolly well think so's" to his friend's remarks. And the two young women to whom Mr. Radville referred as his sister, Mrs. Canning and Miss Cardew, absorbed themselves in a discussion concerning Mr. Noel Coward's latest masterpiece, designed to display both their entire sobriety and their entire imperviousness to Mr. Babbicombe's ridiculous impertinence. Unfortunately for this design, however, Joan Margesson, who had fallen asleep, suddenly awakened and, catching sight of Mr. Babbicombe, dug him in the ribs with the toe of one of her shoes, addressed him as "Wallace Beery," and requested him to "bring some more drinksh."

Already sharply stung by Mr. Radville's disrespect to the Head and angered by his suave threats, Mr. Babbicombe found this flank assault altogether too much of a good thing.

"For two pins, my girl," he said, "I'd take you out to the yard by the scruff of your silly little neck and souse you in one of the water-butts. Hear me?"

To which Miss Margesson replied, "Oh, shurrup, you bloody ole fool!" and, having exchanged a glance, the two young men had risen from their seats threateningly.

"None of that," said Radville sharply, "or you'll go into a water-butt yourself—pronto."

But, undaunted, Mr. Babbicombe fastened the lowest button of his jacket and then pointed one large hand towards the swinging doors.

"For the last time—get off my premises, the lot of you—rightaway."

There was such fierce determination in his air that, when Mrs. Canning intervened with a face-saving, "Oh, for Heaven's sake, let's get away from the poor brute before it throws a fit or something," the men judged it prudent to fall back upon amused superciliousness, and, with the exception of Miss Margesson, the party once more began to make leisurely preparations for departure.

Miss Margesson was not merely unwilling to depart, but, experiment proved also incapable of doing so without a great deal of assistance. Ultimately, however, supported between the other young women, she began a slow progress towards the doors, the men following behind, and the relentless Mr. Babbicombe bringing up the rear.

Radville stopped as the cortege passed Mr. Purefoy, upon whom Mrs. Canning and Miss Cardew had both bestowed dazzling smiles, and whom Miss Margesson had hailed with an amicable "Hallo, beautiful!"

"Highly amused by our ignominious exit, I perceive," said Radville. "Look here—the girls are beating it back to London in the morning. . . ."

Come along tonight and say good-bye to them.”

“Hate to have to, but love to,” smiled Mr. Purefoy. “The pleasures of the country have begun to pall, then?”

“London’s always calling,” laughed the other as he moved on. “I shall be heading for the lights myself pretty soon, I hope. When are you breaking camp?”

“Pretty soon, I expect. Depends on the weather.”

“Well, see you later, then. . . .”

Mr. Babbicombe, too, came to a stop by Mr. Purefoy who, on the occasion of his first visit to Cullerton, two years back, had put up at the Head, and not only earned its warm approval as a guest, but had won Mr. Babbicombe’s admiration by painting a portrait in oils universally conceded to be the living image of him and now hanging proudly from the best lighted wall of the bar.

Besides, not only was Mr. Purefoy an artist, with letters after his name, who could paint you a group of moor ponies or Lydford Gorge or Yes Tor in a thunderstorm as well as he could take off your own likeness, and as quickly, and who sent his pictures to the ’Cademy up in London regular; but he was also a man of substance, with a big place up in Surrey—free with his money, too, in a quiet way, like a gentleman—and well liked by a lot of people in Cullerton, where everyone knew him well now by sight and all about him. In the vestibule of the Head at that moment, too, was displayed a bill announcing the forthcoming annual sale to be held at the Arts and Crafts Club’s hut in the vicarage grounds in aid of Cullerton’s cottage hospital. And prominent among the items to be disposed of were no less than six of Mr. Purefoy’s oil sketches of assorted local subjects, presented by him to the vicar, same as he’d done last year, free gratis and for nothing, to help the charity.

That was the sort of customer Mr. Babbicombe liked to, and was proud to, deal with. None of your shoddy, smarmy-tongued swanker about *him*, putting on London side. London——! Bless your heart, Mr. Purefoy had been all over the world—lived in Paris and New York and Canada and China. Done his bit in the War, too, though you mightn’t think by his looks that he had been old enough to do it—been in the retreat from Mons. That alone would have commended Mr. Purefoy to Mr. Babbicombe, who had gone through the same experience and emerged from it with three stripes and a D.C.M.

He was a little put out that Mr. Purefoy—of course, just for politeness sake—had bothered to talk to that chap Radville or whatever his name was—while he and his friends were in process of being chucked out, too, as you might say.

“Don’t often have to make myself nasty, Mr. Purefoy,” he remarked, “I’m thankful to say. But it’s got to be done sometimes, you see. I didn’t know them two gents was friends of yours.”

“Oh, I like to think that all the world’s my friend, Mr. Babbicombe,” smiled the artist. “An illusion, of course. But it makes things easier sometimes. I just come across these young people occasionally, you know—pass the time of day with them—and so forth——”

“’Course you’re not very far from them up there where you are this year, are you, sir,” reflected the landlord. “I’m told they kick up a proper old shindy at night in that bungalow—specially since the two women came——”

“Doesn’t worry me,” declared Mr. Purefoy. “I never hear them. I sleep like a log while I’m down here, always.”

“Ar—the moor air’s good air for sleeping,” agreed Mr. Babbicombe and looked about the now empty lounge as they moved towards the doors. “Wonder what’s taken everybody outside so sudden——” But he abandoned his speculations and Mr. Purefoy, abruptly, as his wife appeared at the side-door and signalled to him urgently. “Excuse me, sir. Expect things are getting a bit too hot for her and Miss Mowlem in the bar. Good evening, sir.”

“Good evening, Mr. Babbicombe,” responded Purefoy pleasantly and passed on out into the porch, a little curious himself, as to the sudden exodus from the lounge—an exodus in which, he found, both the bar and the dining-room had also joined.

For, outside the post office Bryant still stood waiting, swinging the bar of his ear jack to and fro slowly, and watching the door closely. And the rumour had spread that Colonel Margesson was hiding inside, waiting for the arrival of the police, whose aid he had summoned by telephone. A large crowd had collected now and, between the Stag’s Head and the post office, not only both footpaths but the street itself were blocked, only the narrowest of avenues being left for the passing traffic. The owners of the varied vehicles in the Head’s ear-park—Mr. Radville among them—had converted them into grandstands for the occasion. But though he and his other friends were awaiting the course of events with obviously keen interest, Miss Margesson, Purefoy noticed at once, had disappeared—having, he was told by Mr. Jago, become extremely indisposed on reaching the open air and been taken indoors again, at the invitation of Miss Mowlem, for attention in private.

As afterwards transpired, Colonel Margesson had found much difficulty in making contact with Dr. Brownrigg over the telephone, having been compelled to track him from patient to patient along his evening round. But at length he emerged from the post office and, moving quickly towards his

car with preoccupied mien, beheld, obviously to his complete surprise, Bryant barring his way. When the latter greeted him with a gush of foul-tongued abuse, he made no rejoinder but attempted to pass on. Whereupon the vet. unleashed a veritable torrent of blasphemous revilement and, raising the jack-bar, aimed a reckless, slashing blow with it at his head.

In the bright, carefree days when he had been a subaltern, Margesson had for a considerable period been one of the best heavyweights in the service. And, if he was not as quick on his feet now as had been thirty years ago or so, he was a good stone heavier and in excellent condition. Unable to evade his assailant's long weapon altogether, he took the blow on a shoulder, jolted his left hand a bare twelve inches to Bryant's cleft chin, sent his head back, and then slammed over a devastating right to his jaw. While the spectators were still coo-ing and cor-ing, and otherwise expressing their appreciation of the skill and violence of this retaliation, Mr. Bryant dropped his weapon, wilted at the knees, went down with a clatter, and lay still. Having inspected his fallen foe for a moment or two warily, Margesson brushed his hands together expressively and then turned towards his car.

So quickly had the encounter passed that, though Sergeant Rendall and a colleague had seen its beginning from the opposite side of the street as they came round the corner from the Market Square, the victor had already started up his engine by the time that they had reached the actual scene of the affray. Margesson made light of the affair and was for driving off forthwith. But Sergeant Rendall held other views about the matter and, though the aggrieved party refused to make a charge, insisted upon full and leisurely note taking. Meanwhile, his subordinate dispersed the crowd with good-humoured energy, and, as Bryant showed no signs of coming round of his own accord, a cheerful postman fetched a bucketful of water from the post office's backyard and sluiced it over his head. This heroic treatment proving effectual, Sergeant Rendall saluted Colonel Margesson punctiliously and then turned his curt attention to the other combatant.

But again Margesson's strong desire to escape from the scene of his unpleasant experience found itself thwarted. For Mr. Babbicombe had come across from the Head and was waiting for him beside his car.

"Excuse me, Colonel," he said in a discreet undertone, "but I'd be glad if you could come over to the Head to your daughter. She's none too well—my missus and Miss Mowlem have been looking after her. Better bring your car across, I think, sir. You won't want any fuss getting her into it, I'm sure."

Colonel Margesson had had a trying day of it. He had started out oppressed by the happenings of the night. He had played, for him, filthy golf. Dicky Broughton had been gloomily depressing about the country's utter unreadiness for the war which, he had prophesied, was bound to come

within the next twelve months. He had lost his lighter. He had run out of petrol two miles from the nearest garage, and discovered only then that his petrol gauge had elected, for some reason, to register four gallons permanently. He had had a most unpleasant report from Dr. Brownrigg about those confounded tabloids. He had been dragged into an affray with a drunken blackguard, right in the middle of Cullerton. And now, this chap Babbicombe——

“What’s the matter with my daughter?” he demanded tartly. “Has she met with an accident?”

“No, sir. Just——Well, she’s none too grand, sir, if you know what I mean. As you happened to be on the spot, I thought you’d like to take her home yourself.”

“Very well,” replied Margesson shortly. “I’ll take the car over.”

But in the room behind the bar in which his wife and Miss Mowlem had been ministering to Miss Margesson, Mr. Babbicombe was much less euphemistic, and Margesson received a very explicit account of the behaviour of his daughter and her friends in the Head both on that afternoon and on several previous occasions. He listened in silence, controlling his visibly rising anger—apologized formally for his daughter’s conduct, and then ordered her peremptorily to accompany him to his car. On her flat refusal to obey, he and Mr. Babbicombe between them carried her, kicking and punching hysterically, out into the yard of the hotel and, leaving the landlord in charge of her, he returned to his car with the intention of driving it into the privacy of the yard and embarking his passenger there. But, perceiving Mr. Radville and his party engaged in noisy discussion in the parking place, indignation got the better of his judgment and he strode towards them intimidatingly.

“Look here—you, sir!” he precluded loudly. “May I ask what the devil you mean by bringing my daughter to a place of this description and allowing her to disgrace herself in public? Encouraging her, and inciting her to do it, from what I hear? I ask you, what do you mean by it?”

Radville shrugged smilingly.

“My dear Colonel, I’m not your daughter’s keeper. If she has a weakness for cocktails—and, unfortunately, weaknesses of other kinds—you surely don’t suggest that I am to blame for it?”

Margesson swept the party with a contemptuous glance, and the forced laughter of Mr. Bethune and the two young women silenced itself under the threat of his prominent blue eyes.

“I suggest to you, sir,” he replied still more loudly, “that if you don’t want to get a hiding that you’ll remember for the rest of your life, you’ll never let me hear that you’ve even attempted to speak to my daughter again

—or have anything else whatever to do with her. I don't know who you are, and I don't care. But I don't like you, and I don't like your friends. You're going out of that bungalow of mine just as soon as I can get you out of it. And in the meantime, if I find you—or any of your friends—trespassing on any other part of my property, I'll prosecute you or them. Now—we've got that quite clear, haven't we? Or do you want the hiding now?"

"Oh, go to hell!" groaned Mr. Bethune wearily.

As Margesson turned on him angrily, a voice addressed him from amongst the numerous groups which still lingered in front of the hotel.

"Yes——Have a go at *him*, Colonel. It's all right. *He's* drunk, too. And anyhow he's only a little 'un."

The guffaws evoked by this sarcastic exhortation induced Margesson to turn away and stalk stiffly to his car—his shoulder was becoming disagreeably painful now—enter it, and drive it into the yard. The interest of the loiterers by the bar entrance transferred itself to the difficult removal of Mr. Bryant to the police station, which was now proceeding by slow instalments at the opposite side of the street. Mr. Purefoy, having decided to leave the porch and join in a general movement towards the car-park, found himself side by side with the humourist whose irony had so abruptly restored Colonel Margesson's better judgment.

"Quite a live little burg, this," his neighbour remarked conversationally, chewing a mutilated stump of cigar busily. "Hot stuff, the old boy, isn't he?"

Mr. Purefoy smiled pleasantly. "Quite," he agreed. "A bit of a bruiser in his salad days, I believe."

"That so." The conversationalist threw away his stump regretfully. "Expect you're a bit surprised to see me down here in this part of the world, eh?"

"A little. But delightfully. Taking a little holiday?"

"Oh, just having a look round, you know," replied the other. "Been a bit of a hold-up, you see, lately, about some stuff I was expecting. So I just thought I'd wander along and find out why. Pretty country round here, isn't it?"

"Quite," agreed Mr. Purefoy again. "But—as you see—a bit hot. I shouldn't wander too much, if I were you."

His companion, a tall, well set up man in his later forties, laughed as he took pipe and pouch from a pocket of his seedy sports jacket. His jutting chin jerked round towards Mr. Purefoy truculently, and for a moment the heavy black bar formed by his bushy eyebrows contracted in a frown, as his reckless eyes encountered the artist's.

"Don't worry, Mr. Purefoy," he said. "I'm doing nothing silly. And I can take care of myself all right. Where you staying? In this joint?"

Mr. Purefoy jerked his head backwards rather vaguely. "No. Up there—back along the Ockenford road. About two miles out. Anyone will tell you where to find me. Come up and see me—won't you—if you're staying for any time."

"Don't know—yet. Staying the night, anyhow. Well, how's things with you? Painting much?"

"Quite a lot."

"Camping out, I suppose?"

"No. I've got quite a delightful little cottage. . . ."

"A cottage, eh? I see. This your car, isn't it? I thought I recognized her. Nice little bus. Best sixteen on the market at present. I might roll along tonight, sometime, out your way, perhaps—for a chat."

"Do," said Mr. Purefoy cordially and drove away, waving a farewell as he passed, to Mrs. Canning and Miss Cardew. By this time Mr. Bryant and his captors were out of sight. But there was only one police station in Cullerton, and thither Mr. Purefoy proceeded forthwith. For he anticipated that Mr. Bryant—who had done him a highly-valued service some little time back—was going to experience considerable difficulty in finding any sureties for his bail whom Sergeant Rendall would accept. An anticipation which Sergeant Rendall himself, now the possessor of a black eye, a bloody nose, and several equally seriously injured private and official susceptibilities, shared to the full as, grimly, he helped to urge his prisoner through the portals of the station.

The man with the remarkable eyebrows had got his pipe going satisfactorily now. Apparently he was something of a car fan. For, as he sauntered about the park, he eyed bonnets and bodywork critically, and from time to time gave vent sociably to knowledgeable little comments for the benefit of owners preparing to get their vehicles under way. But, with the exception of Mr. Radville's long-nosed Bentley and the Rolls of Lord Winchbook's agent, the untidily-parked, unwashed cars were obviously all mere hard-worked farm drudges, dishonourably battered and scratched and tarnished, past their prime. And the critic's scrutiny wasted but little time on any of these scarred veterans.

Despite his well-worn sports jacket and soiled flannel bags, there was something in his stalwart, upstanding figure and light, springy gait, the tilt of his pork-pie hat, the thrust of his jaw and chin, and the laughing recklessness of his eyes, that the farmers' wives found attractive. Staid Mrs. Bodley, mother of grown-up daughters, coloured up warmly when, with a somewhat intimate pleasantry, he picked up one of her countless parcels, which had fallen, and repacked it carefully in her encircling arms. And, watching him covertly for some little time afterwards, while her husband arranged various

sacks and bags in the back of his Ford, she was hardly surprised when she saw him bestow a jaunty grin and a wink upon the two glamorous and noisy young women who were ensconcing themselves in a big swanky car with those two nasty young bounders with the eyeglasses. One of the young women waved a laughing hand in response, and the two bounders, observing this, turned their heads sharply to look out at the winker with, Mrs. Bodley thought, marked displeasure. Jealous, she reflected and, again, was not surprised.

But the big swanky car was already on the move and Mr. Bodley was saying "Get you in now, Maggie!" And so this brief romance of Mrs. Bodley's terminated, as she supposed, with faint regret, for ever.

##

CHAPTER FOUR

As he sat alone in his den after a lonely dinner—for no other member of the family had obeyed the summons of the gong—Colonel Margesson made various unsuccessful attempts to decide upon an at least definite course of action.

Perturbed as he was by Dr. Brownrigg's report that the suspicious tabloids had each proved to contain a dangerously large quantity of heroin, that discovery had at least allayed for the moment the carking fear that had haunted him for a much longer time past than he had admitted to the doctor. But the only less anxious fact remained that his wife was in the habit of administering a highly dangerous drug to herself in large doses. That fact must be dealt with, at once, and decisively, of course. But how?

How induce Enid even to see a doctor? How persuade her to admit that she had been doping herself—to disclose the means by which she had been obtaining supplies of the dope? How persuade her to submit to a treatment which, necessarily, must be rigorous in its nature—attended with constant surveillance by strangers?

He had paid a brief visit to his wife's room before dinner. But monosyllables had answered his gentle inquiries and silence greeted his guarded references to his day's golfing. She had not even troubled to look up from the magazine whose pages she had turned and re-turned without, he knew, even seeing them. And now her face, exquisite in its delicate beauty still, despite its haggard pallor and strained, hostile expression, kept rising between him and any feasible solution to these difficulties of his. Her angry, imperious voice silenced every suggestion of his thoughts. Her fear-haunted,

suspicious eyes rejected scornfully the kindest, frankest overtures his fancy could devise. He sat motionless, chewing the stem of his long-extinct pipe. Loyalty was with Lionel Margesson an instinct as unflinching as physical courage and love of sport, and he was still profoundly attached to the woman whom he had once loved with as much of passion as his nature had been capable of and for whose sake he had sacrificed his professional career.

Well—something or other would have to be done about Enid. Something or other *would* be done. He would see Brownrigg tomorrow, and they would talk the thing out in definite detail. His mind turned again to consider lesser difficulties.

That blighter up at the bungalow had, most unfortunately, been given a twelve-months' agreement by those solicitor chaps in Cullerton to whom Enid had entrusted the business. He still had eight months or so to run, then. Possibly there might be some way of kicking him out, on the grounds of nuisance and annoyance. But—even if there were—it would take some time to get rid of him. And Joan must be cut off from him and his friends at once.

Impossible to do that so long as they were up there—just beside her. They were on the telephone, too. Impossible to keep Joan under watch and ward all day long—and all night long, too. With Joan, sheer folly—Merely make her all the more determined to stick to them—Leonard—well, Leonard would be going back to London soon now, no doubt, to loaf about with his Chelsea friends—blathering about the kind of music he was going to compose and the kind of plays and novels he was going to write, when he had lived for a bit. Lived, God's truth—! Soon, yes. But meanwhile his backing up would make Joan still more difficult to deal with

And besides, *would* Leonard go back to London now—after that damned nonsense he had talked last night—after letting the cat out of the bag—breaking the ice?

Unpleasant little beast, Leonard. Just clever enough to be really viciously, upsettingly nasty—Most annoying that he had elected to let the cat out of the bag in Brownrigg's presence. And for certain every word he had said had been heard by that sulky, sly-looking slut, Georgina. . .

Well—something would certainly have to be done about Joan at once—after this business this afternoon. All over the place, probably, by this time, that she'd been fired out of the Stag's Head, dead drunk—kicking and screaming. Pleasant facing the golf club—All those cats of women—Nothing to be done about her or with her tonight, however. Tomorrow—

But—what about Leonard? Something would have to be done about Leonard, too. To start with, he must be warned off the bungalow—It

would be interesting to hear what the result of his visit there last night had been——

Presently Margesson rang and asked the maid who answered the summons whether Mr. Leonard was in.

“No, sir,” the parlourmaid replied. “He hasn’t come in yet.”

“Oh! Well, if he should come in before you go to bed, tell him I want to see him, will you?”

“Very well, sir.” The girl turned her head towards the sound of the hall door bell. “Perhaps this is him, sir.”

It proved, however, to be Mr. Spannett, the cheerful young games master from the Grammar School, who had come over to ask if Margesson would care to play in a mixed foursome next day. Learning that the latter’s right shoulder was temporarily out of action, the caller, with a demure twinkle in his eye, expressed his regret and took his leave. But before he was let out into the night he asked casually:

“By the way, Colonel—did you have poachers or burglars or anything exciting of that sort up here last night—or rather, early this morning. Some of my colleagues say they heard quite a lot of shooting going on—and shouting or screaming. Some of the boys were awakened by it, too. The school’s quite worked up about it.”

“Really?” smiled Margesson politely. “I believe I did hear some shots somewhere, now that you mention it. A long way off, though. You’ll go back by the bridge, I suppose? Got a torch?”

“Yes, thanks, sir. Reason we’re so interested about the shots and so forth is that one of our laundrymaids had a rather nasty adventure up in these woods of yours the other night. Last Sunday night, it was. I suppose she had no business to be in your woods, really. But she was in them—with, of course, the inevitable boy friend. Suddenly some guy appeared from nowhere—knocked the boy friend out with a wallop—fractured his jaw for him, as a matter of fact—and then caught hold of her and, so she says, proceeded to strangle her. However, fortunately for her, his pal or pals whistled to him just then, and he changed his mind and cleared off. The girl had the pluck to wait until the boy friend felt able to go somewhere else—when, naturally, they both did so. Nothing else happened. But she collapsed when she reached the lodge gates of the school—and so—eventually the matron heard the whole story. And naturally everyone’s been taking an intense interest in your woods ever since.”

But Colonel Margesson had no light to throw upon the laundrymaid’s misadventure. “Fractured jaw,” he commented. “By jove. Well, I feel assured that if anyone tries to do anything of that sort to your jaw, you’ll be able to deal with him suitably.”

Spannett, a hefty six-footer with a granitic countenance, grinned.

“I hear you did a bit in that line yourself this afternoon, Colonel. The Head told us about it. He happened to be passing in his car just at the right moment, apparently. Never saw a lovelier bit of timing in his life, he says. Well, good night, sir. Another time, I hope. . . .”

“I hope so, indeed,” responded Margesson cordially. “So sorry you’ve had the fag up here for nothing. Awful good of you. Good night.”

But before the visitor had reached the head of the path leading down to the footbridge, a low, prolonged whistle, ending with a plaintive, staccato turn, caused him to pause.

“Funny!” he remarked after some moments. “The girl says the whistle she heard was like the call of a plover—I’ll swear that whistle we heard just now wasn’t made by anything with wings, though. . . .”

Both men stood listening for a little space. But there was no repetition of the sound, and with a final “Good night, sir,” Spannett went on his homeward way down the path. While Colonel Margesson lingered in the light of the porch, Nugent, his chauffeur-gardener, came round the side of the house, wheeling his bicycle—delayed, as he explained to his employer, by an unsuccessful attempt to restore the car’s petrol gauge to working order. He was on his way home to the lodgings in the town at which he lived with his wife and child, and Margesson, always considerate where servants were concerned, was unwilling to detain him beyond a few moments. But in those few moments he furnished some information which presented Mr. Spannett’s little story about the laundrymaid in a much more serious light.

For it emerged that she and her boy friend had only been one of several couples who had been molested in the woods surrounding Cullerside within the last few months—some of them even more disagreeably. And, although apparently the victims had all preferred to suppress general publication of their adventures, always humiliating and usually compromising, Margesson learned to his dismay not only that their adventures were common knowledge in Cullerton but also that the general belief was that he himself had been responsible for them.

“I won’t mention his name, sir,” said Nugent. “But one chap that got a bit of a mauling a few weeks back, told me to my very face in the tap of the Angel that it was you who laid him out—that he recognized you by your voice and by the size of you—and that the piece who was with him had recognized you, too. Wanted to start on me myself, he did—because he said he’d recognized my whistle and known that way that I must be somewhere about. He’s a low sort of blackguard—so of course I just took no notice. But I know there’s a lot of people as thinks and says the same as he does, all the same. And now—after the hiding you gave Mr. Bryant in the town this

afternoon, sir—well—I'm afraid there'll be a lot of others'll think the same thing, and most like say it too. . . . How it is, sir, these woods up here—well, couples has always come out here at night as long as I remember, looking for quiet spots. But now, since you fenced it and put up them notices—well, everyone knows you don't want people straying about on your property. And you being such a big, strong gentleman—well, people got it into their heads that you're taking this way to scare couples off from trespassing. Of course—for myself, sir—it's very unpleasant for me—because, of course, they think I'm helping you. That's natural enough. I been intending to speak to you about it this good while back, sir—only I didn't like—seeing as it's such foolishness their thinking a gentleman like you'd demean himself to—”

“As a matter of fact, Nugent,” interrupted Margesson abruptly, “*is* there anything peculiar about your way of whistling?”

“Well, yes, sir—there is, maybe,” Nugent admitted. “I have a habit of whistling like this. . . . I've always had it since I was a kid, for some reason or other. . . .”

Thereupon he performed several samples of his whistle, but, sharply questioned by his employer, denied that he had been responsible for or had even heard a whistle of exactly the same kind, like a plover's call, at any time whatever within at any rate the preceding three or four hours. But on other occasions, lately, he stated, he had heard someone give a whistle just like his own, somewhere in the grounds or in the woods—pretty close to the house. Three or four times, anyway, he supposed. Oh yes, always after dark. Usually about nine o'clock, if he happened to be a bit late going home. No—just the whistle. Usually he had stopped when he had heard it, to listen. But he had heard no other sound—never seen anyone who might have done the whistling.

Colonel Margesson meditated silently for some moments.

“Well, I don't want to keep you now, Nugent,” he said then. “We'll have a talk about this tomorrow. It's all news to me, I may say—what you've just told me. . . . Er—I don't know whether you've noticed—but from time to time, I've seen some extremely tough-looking customers hanging about up there at the bungalow. They—they seem to come with lorries to the bungalow. Usually very late at night, I think. . . . I hear the lorries usually long after I've gone to bed. But two or three times when I chanced to be in the neighbourhood of the bungalow in the daytime—”

“That's right, sir,” agreed Nugent quickly. “There was two lorries arrived there this afternoon, 's'far as that goes. And you've said a true word, sir—as to the chaps that were in charge of them. Tough? I'll say they were. . . . I'd seen two of them before up there, so, after a bit, I strolled along over to where they had stopped the lorries. ‘Afternoon, mates,’ I said, like that,

civil. ‘Got a big lot of stuff there, haven’t you?’ Coo!—one of them—a big husky of a chap, come walking over to me with his jaw stuck out. ‘What the hell do you want here?’ he asks. I thought he was going to sock me one straight off. ‘You scram—see?’ ‘I’m Colonel Margesson’s gardener,’ I said, ‘‘case you don’t know. I’ve got a perfect right to go anywhere on ‘is property.’ One of the gentlemen came out of that big shed they’ve put up there, then, sir, and of course he recognized me and came over to find out what the trouble was—and what I wanted. Well—I wanted nothing, really, sir—except just to see what was going on and what was in the two lorries—so I made a sort of excuse about looking round the fence-posts and come away—thinkin’ to myself I’d been lucky. Real ugly customer the chap as spoke to me was, sir—sort of chap you wouldn’t want to play cards with in the train, comin’ from the races. That was what he looked like, more than a lorry-driver. And his mates were as tough looking as himself—I’ve often wondered, sir, what all the stuff can be that goes up there to the bungalow in all them lorries——Can’t all be grub——”

“No,” assented Colonel Margesson. “However—we’ll have a talk about it all tomorrow, Nugent. Good night. Don’t worry. We’ll clear up these mysterious doings in our woods all right. . . .”

His confidence was not all assumed. For into the gloom of his puzzlement and annoyance had shot, quite suddenly, a ray of hope and an inspiration for definite action.

Finding the parlourmaid waiting in the hall, he looked at his watch.

“Five past ten. I expect you want to get off to bed, Hetty, don’t you. I shan’t want anything more. But I shall have to make a very early start in the morning. I’m going up to London—by the early train. So I shall want breakfast at—well, I can breakfast on the train. But I’m to be called at six. Six sharp, mind. I’ll have a few biscuits with my tea.”

“Very good, sir. Six sharp. I’ll tell the housemaid, sir. What about Mr. Leonard, sir?”

“Oh, don’t bother about that. By the way—how does Mr. Leonard get in—and Miss Joan, too—when they come back late. . . . I mean, after you’ve all gone off to bed?”

Hetty hesitated. “Georgina lets them in, sir, I think.”

“Georgina? But Georgina doesn’t wait up until two or two or three in the morning to let them in, does she?”

“They go under her window, sir, and throw gravel up at it till she wakens.”

“Oh. I see. You’re sure that Mr. Leonard is not in the house, are you?”

Again Hetty hesitated noticeably.

“Oh, yes, sir. Quite sure,” she said at length. “Mr. Leonard hasn’t been home all day. He didn’t sleep here last night, sir. His bed wasn’t touched, the housemaid says. Mrs. Margesson’s been in a state all the day—sending Georgina down every five minutes to find out if Mr. Leonard had come back.”

Margesson stared. “Must have slept up at the bungalow,” he decided. “He went up there late last night.”

“No, sir. He didn’t sleep there. Mrs. Margesson went into Miss Joan’s room just after you brought her home, to ask her if she knew where Mr. Leonard was and if he was up at the bungalow. But Miss Joan said that he wasn’t up there, sir—that she’d been up there herself this afternoon and that they’d all been wondering where Mr. Leonard had got to, as he hadn’t turned up there.”

“Oh!” said Margesson again. But after some further staring at the parlourmaid’s dubious little face, he decided to leave the unsatisfactory Leonard to his own devices. “Oh, well—I suppose he’s amusing himself somewhere. All right, Hetty. Get off to bed. I’m going off myself in a moment or two.”

He went to the telephone, and after some little delay heard a sleepy voice growl:

“Hallo. Yes. What is it?”

“That you, Dicky. Margesson speaking. . . . Look here—you were talking about Wick Gore today. You remember?”

“Yes. Well?”

“Well—I rather think I’ll take your advice and run up and see him tomorrow.”

“Better fix up with him beforehand. He’s a busy bird——”

“I’ll have to chance it. I shouldn’t get him on the phone tonight. Look here—where does he hang out?”

“Norfolk Street. Something or other House—I forget the name. But you’ll find him in the London telephone directory. Look for Gore and Tolley. . . . Private Investigation Agents, they call themselves, I believe. If you send a wire by phone tonight to Gore & Tolley, Norfolk Street—it’ll fetch up all right, I expect in the morning, and give him some warning, anyhow.”

“That’s an idea. I’ll do that. Good night, old chap. Many thanks——”

“’Night. Give my love to Gore——Oh—by the way—*don’t* ask him heartily if he’s married. He isn’t . . . and it’s rather a sensitive spot. Good luck.”

CHAPTER FIVE

“Colonel Margesson, sir.”

The senior partner rose to receive Messrs. Gore & Tolley’s new client with urbanity.

“Hallo, Margesson. This is an unexpected pleasure. No need to ask how you are. Do make yourself comfortable, won’t you, and tell me what we can do for you? I’m entirely at your disposal until five o’clock.”

Margesson watched the speaker’s slim, debonair figure a little enviously as it returned to a scrupulously tidy roll-top desk. Wick Gore, he recalled, had always been one of those chaps who could lie about in an easy chair the whole evening and emerge from it without a crease or a wrinkle or a speck of ash. And you couldn’t be sure whether that sandy-coloured sort of hair had turned gray or not. Hadn’t dropped off, anyhow. Eyeglass, of course—always been that sort of chap, too. But apparently hadn’t to use glasses for reading with yet. Lucky devil——

The two men had never known one another at all intimately in the old days. For, although both their careers in the service had followed the same well-worn tracks and made many of the same friends along the way, Margesson had been an infantryman, with very little more than his pay. And in those old days—ended forever on the banks of the Marne—the horse soldier had separated himself with some strictness from his professional brethren of less decorative and opulent caste. Since his retirement immediately after the war, Margesson had dropped out of Gore’s sight practically altogether, as out of that of most of his old service friends and acquaintances. And beyond some very occasional meetings at the Rag., the two had seen nothing of one another for nearly twenty years.

“Suppose you just blaze away,” suggested Gore, as he seated himself. “And then, if any questions seem necessary, I can ask them. But—before you start—perhaps I had better say that we don’t handle divorce business. Oh——! Not that sort of trouble? Good! Then, let’s hear what sort of trouble it *is*.”

But Margesson obviously found some little difficulty in the operation of blazing away. The truth was that the inaction of his long railway journey—he hated sitting still for any length of time—had seriously dimmed that ray of hopefulness which had cheered him on the preceding night. He had had time to get his new discoveries and worries into some sort of perspective in relation to the old ones and to begin to doubt gravely that, after all, the new ones did fit into and explain the old ones. By the time that he had reached Waterloo he had lost all clear idea as to just what he had come all that way to ask this chap Gore—whom, after all, he had never known at all well—to

do. And now, with the beggar sitting there, watching him with those cool, shrewd eyes of his, he suddenly realized that he was damned if he knew even what reason he could give for asking him to do anything of any sort.

All very well to talk to a doctor about Enid—tell him about intimate awkward things—about the changes in her—about her screaming and fainting and all that—about her using dope. A doctor, yes. But what could this chap Gore do about things like that? What did he know about things like that?

Still—now he was here—He selected the most tangible and least embarrassing fact of his troubles, and at length answered:

“What I really want you to do, if you will, is to try to find out something about a tenant of mine—or rather, I should say, of my wife’s. A chap called Radville—Victor Radville. Her solicitors let a bungalow of ours—it’s situated quite close to our house—er—let it to him in the early part of the summer. Er—he’s an objectionable sort of person—with some most objectionable friends. They’ve been staying with him for some time past—three of them. Two young women——”

Gore made a note and then waited.

“I propose to get rid of him as soon as I can,” Margesson went on. “But, under the agreement the solicitors foolishly gave him, he has still some eight months to run. And so we may have him as next-door neighbour for quite some time to come unless we can turn him out. For certain reasons, I want you to try to get some information about him—who and what he is—and so on. All we really know about him is that he is a Londoner—of what one might call the Mayfair playboy type. Young—about thirty. And that he was introduced—by letter merely, I should say—to the solicitors by the Hon. Maurice Roker and by Lady Diana Galton. The Hon. Maurice Roker is, I believe, a younger son of Lord Nesseldown’s. I don’t know who Lady Diana Galton is—I’m not an authority about these things. . . .”

“She’s one of the Earl of Baltrasna’s daughters,” supplied Gore. “So you had quite an imposing pair of vouchers for your tenant’s desirability, then.”

Something in the tone of this comment caused Margesson to survey the speaker’s face questioningly. But, as it afforded no reply, he continued.

“Well—the solicitors thought so, anyhow—and the agreement was put through—and then Radville himself arrived on the scene and took possession of the bungalow. I disliked the chap very much at sight—he’s the sort of young blighter you see knocking about the West End by the dozen at night. You know—the night-club tomcat type. Always with showy womenfolk in tow. So, when I found that he proposed to use my house as a home from home, I choked him off at once—pretty stiffly. Unfortunately, my young people—I’ve got a boy and a girl, you know—just grown up—

they took a violent fancy to the chap. And that has complicated matters badly. These friends of his arrived after a few weeks and when I put my foot down definitely and refused to have him and them coming to the house, my son and daughter took to—well—practically living up at the bungalow with them. You know the idiotic rot that amuses these young people nowadays—kicking up an insane row at night—always swilling cocktails—and keeping an infernal gramophone or the radio going perpetually to dance to. And when they're not at that, they're charging about the country in a big, fast car the beggar has—bullying everyone else off the road—passing out at ninety—cutting in—driving cyclists and pedestrians into the ditch. . . . Regularly every night my two hopefuls come home in the small hours of the morning—well—at any rate, none the better for drink—and kicking up the most frightful shindy. And so on. . . . I needn't stress things unduly. But—you can easily understand that I object to my son and daughter being incessantly in contact with that sort of thing. And I want to stop it. The girl's a mere child—only left school last summer. The boy's only nineteen—just at the silly age. It's frightfully bad for them. And—well, anyhow, I mean to stop it. And stop it at once if I can.”

Time was passing and Colonel Gore was due at Croydon aerodrome at 5.30. He laid down the fountain pen with which, from time to time, he had made a brief note, and sat back in his chair.

“Really, then, what you would like us to do would be to find out something about Mr. Radville which could be used by you to lever him out of your bungalow—shall we say—non-legally?”

The blunt, smiling question disconcerted Margesson a little.

“I have a feeling,” he said evasively, “that there's something fishy about this chap and his pals. And I've got, at any rate, some evidence to support that belief of mine. If it's a correct belief—I shall certainly let him know—through my solicitors. And I shall be very much surprised indeed if, after that, he insists on his legal rights. . . . He's a nasty bit of work, I *think*. But I'm *sure* he's no fool.”

“Precisely,” smiled Gore. “As I say, you want us to find out that Mr. Radville is a nasty bit of work—nasty enough, anyhow, to be kicked out of bungalows with impunity. Very well, I have never heard of your Mr. Radville before—but I do know something about both Mr. Maurice Roker and about Lady Diana Galton. Nothing actually . . . well, nasty, actually. But most of it certainly not nice. Young Roker is just sane enough not to be locked up—his father managed to commit suicide in a lunatic asylum the other day, and his grandfather was the celebrated Lord Nesseldown who invented nudism—so far as England is concerned, anyhow. I believe he can just write his own name, with assistance. He throws fits all over the place,

and he hasn't a red cent. But there are, apparently a number of people who find him—and his Honourable—useful. He's got just enough intelligence to make a success as tout and a decoy pigeon. And that's how he lives. I've met him personally—on behalf of a client of mine—and I can say with conviction that his recommendation of anyone or anything would in itself be a warning. I've never come across the Lady Diana personally. But she's been divorced twice and seems to spend most of her time—by daylight, at least—in bilking tradespeople of all sorts. So, so much for Mr. Radville's testimonials. But now—let's get down to the brass tacks of this belief of your own about him. Pay his rent all right?"

"Yes—unfortunately. He paid twelve months in advance."

"Dear me—How enticing for your solicitors. But now—apart from your own private feelings—paternal, landlordly, middle-aged, and otherwise generally respectable—what have you against him that's actually nasty—exactly?"

Abruptly Margesson decided to stick to the theory which had hurried him to the telephone on the preceding night.

"To start with—I have reason to believe that he is supplying my wife with a dangerous drug—heroin. Illegally, of course."

To his relief, Gore did not look up from his memorandum-block but merely repeated the word "heroin" placidly, as he jotted it down.

"Yes—I'm sorry to say I've discovered that she uses heroin to give herself injections with. My wife lives—well—an altogether secluded life—rarely leaves the house now. She never receives any letters—so far as I know—never sees anyone—so far as I know—except her own maid—rarely, the other servants—my daughter—my son—and myself. That she receives supplies of the drug somehow is certain. That she must receive them through either my son or my daughter seems to *me* practically certain. Well—both my son and my daughter, as I've told you, spend practically their entire lives at present in Radville's company. The inference seems to me obvious——"

"What about the servants? Many of them?"

"Four women—and a chauffeur-gardener. All perfectly decent people—locals. None of them could possibly get hold of a drug like that—even a small quantity—except with a doctor's prescription. Not to speak of a box containing a couple of hundred tabloids—each a heavy dose of the stuff."

"However—may I have their names—ages—and so on."

And so, question by question, Gore led his new client at increasing speed along the very indistinct path of fact, checking firmly his strong tendency to plunge at each step into the vague obscurity of conjecture through which it wandered. Gradually Margesson resigned himself to succinct candour. And only a very few minutes after five o'clock he departed, restored once more

to faith in his theory of the preceding night, and visibly cheered by Gore's undertaking to look into Mr. Radville as thoroughly and as speedily as could be contrived.

So cheered, indeed, that he had announced his intention of spending the night in town instead of at the house of a sister of his who lived down in Surrey and to whose charge he proposed to transfer his daughter Joan temporarily, while Mr. Radville and his friends were being got rid of. He had thought he would look up old Billy Bainbridge—Gore remembered Billy Bainbridge, of course—and get him to do a show with him. He'd run down and see his sister, Mrs. Nicolette, next day, and then go back down to Devonshire by the afternoon mail. He always stayed at the Curzon. His sister's Surrey address was "Yew Lodge, Puttiford."

While Colonel Gore prepared for his own immediate departure hurriedly, he issued some concise instructions to one of his aides whom he had summoned during the closing passages of his interview with Margesson.

"Oh . . . Kestheven. Get out and find out about a chap called Victor Radville, will you? Friend of Mr. Maurice Roker—and also of Lady Diana Galton. Gave Wyllard's Club as his address in June last. Living down in Devonshire at present, near Cullerton. Tallish, pale, not bad-looking, hooked nose—probably one of the boys. May be a dope-carrier. Has some pals—chap called Bethune—spelt the right way. Same type—but fairish and smaller. Two girls—a good-looker, Miss Cardew, and a sister, also a good-looker—Mrs. Canning. Both youngish and very smart, toothy and noisy. These three have all been with Radville down in Devonshire for a good bit back . . . Go to it, my son."

Mr. Kesthevan came out of the weary reverie in which his existence appeared to pass.

"Never heard of Victor Radville," he remarked. "But everyone knows the other three. They used to be at the Gazebo and at the Warminster every night—though, now you mention it, I haven't noticed them about for some time back, any of them. Bethune's a perfectly ghastly creature—Molly Canning used to run the Abracadabra till it got too hot and closed down. Then she and the Cardew girl were both dance hostesses for a bit at the Gazebo when it first started. But they gave that up when it changed hands last year."

"Missed any of their particular pals lately?" inquired Gore as he adjusted his headgear jauntily on his crinkled head.

Mr. Kestheven reflected. "I don't think so. Wait a moment, though—yes—there was a flying-bird called Cluffe, who usually ran round with them. He was mixed up somehow with those chaps who got quodded for pinching a diamond pendant from someone in the lounge of the Warminster. . . . You

remember. . . . He got out of it all right—gave the other blokes away. . . . No—I haven't seen him running round for a good bit, either, I believe.”

“Hooked nose?”

“Broken nose.”

“Good! Well, do your best. I shall get back some time tonight. Roll along here if you've anything interesting. . . . Oh—by the way—if you hear the name Margesson mentioned in connection with these people, you might try to remember what the connection was—accurately.”

“Righto,” drawled Mr. Kestheven, and, resuming his disillusioned reverie, moved like Agag to the door and disappeared.

Before midnight that night Gore was back in Norfolk Street, confiding to a dictaphone a report of the results of his trip to Paris, to be typed by his secretary next morning. That task completed, he glanced over the varied memoranda made during the earlier part of the day, the last of which recorded his impressions of Colonel Margesson's visit. Margesson's story had been an interesting one in some respects—a mildly depressing one in others. And when the perusal of his notes had ended, Gore sat back in his chair and smoked a pensive cigarette over it.

So that was how the beautiful, laughing, imperious, spoiled Enid Clayton was ending up. . . . A nerve-shattered wreck—hiding from life—afraid to leave her room—hating and suspecting the few people she couldn't avoid coming into contact with—a dope addict—Good Lord—!

Enid Clayton—! The mere sounding of the name aloud brought back to Gore with a little sharp pang of nostalgia all that India had been for a carefree, popular, and not too impecunious squadron-leader in a crack cavalry regiment in the days just before the War. Faces and voices, sounds and smells, places, and a thousand details of a sunbaked scene that seemed, in retrospect, to have been perpetually bathed in the sparkling gaiety of a musical comedy—a thousand associations and memories forgotten for many a long year resurrected themselves with a curious effect of having been not so much forgotten as left behind out there to continue forever—in never-fading sunshine.

Enid Clayton—Probably every subaltern in India round about that time—1912-1913-1914—had nursed a hopeless passion for her. There must still be some hundreds of old buffers scattered all over England, growling in their clubs or hacking up golf courses, whose faded eyes would light up into bleary sentimentality at the mention of that once-worshipped idol—Well, well—everything passed, Gore reflected sagely, and looked at his watch. He'd wait until one, he decided, in case young Kestheven rolled along.

He glanced again at his memoranda. O'Malley-Martyn—Another name from that happy past—Gore remembered O'Malley-Martyn well—a tall, gaunt, long-legged gunner—he'd been a major then—rather grim and very serious—the most un-Irish Irishman you could imagine—like most Irishmen—but a first-rate chap at his job. No one had ever known how he had induced Enid Clayton to marry him—

Margesson, of course, had been coy about it—simply said that his wife had been married before to a chap called O'Malley-Martyn, and hurried on to describe his own happy life with her until this trouble had come along. But, then, either she had divorced O'Malley-Martyn, or he had divorced her, Gore reflected. It had been at the beginning of 1914 that Enid Clayton's marriage to O'Malley-Martyn had staggered everyone in India. Margesson had been in India at that time, he had said—so possibly he had come across her out there in the first instance. He had been married to her in 1919. . . . He had been over in Ireland for a bit in 1918—in the west of Ireland, he had said. O'Malley-Martyn came from the west of Ireland for a dead certainty, with that name. . . . It looked rather as if Margesson might have come across Mrs. O'Malley-Martyn over there, somehow—and that that had been how she had been transformed into Mrs. Margesson in 1919. H'm—! Well, O'Malley-Martyn must have been a difficult husband for a gay, high-spirited, spoiled, beauteous young woman to live with. And Margesson had been a dashed smart, good-looking chap twenty years ago. . . . A bit of a lady-killer, too. . . .

However, Gore & Tolley were not concerned for the moment with twenty years ago. The job they'd been asked to do was simply to supply any obtainable information concerning Mr. Victor Radville. Nevertheless, Gore was sufficiently interested in these surmises of his to take the pains to make some casual inquiries among the old sweats at his club next day. And he succeeded in obtaining without difficulty a tolerably full history of the beautiful Enid's change of husband in 1919.

Margesson, it seemed, had gone to Ireland in the summer of 1918—he had been severely wounded in the March of that year—as G.S.O. at the headquarters of the Midland and Western Irish command, then installed in the workhouse of Ballinabar. And, by a curious coincidence, a bare mile from the workhouse of Ballinabar, he had found the former Miss Clayton living with her husband—apparently already none too happily—in the great gaunt, rambling barracks of a house in which O'Malley-Martyns had lived their reckless lives since their original castle had been blown to bits by Cromwell's guns. O'Malley-Martyn had lost an eye in 1917, and retired from arms to his ancestral estate—mortgaged up to the hall door. But he had extended a truly Irish hospitality to the members of the headquarters staff

and the officers of a company of South Kents stationed in the town—which owed this military occupation to the fact that, though the dreariest and most God-forsaken of holes, it was a railway junction of considerable strategic importance.

And so Margesson had met the beautiful and very bored Enid again—she had hated Ireland, the Irish, and all their ways; habits, and political aspirations heartily, although her husband had been an almost fanatical nationalist—and, no doubt, had done his best to console her for the monotonous dullness of her life at Gortrisha. This chance reunion had lasted until Margesson, now a sound man again and a Lt. Colonel, had gone back to France just in time for the Armistice—gone to Cologne for a little space—and then returned to England. By that time—the early part of 1919—Mrs. O'Malley-Martyn had left her husband and the gloomy wilderness of Gortrisha, and been living in London. And there Margesson and she had met again. No defence had been offered to the divorce suit. Margesson had sent in his papers, and he and his Enid had departed to Italy where, in due course, they had been married and had lived for several years.

Nobody was in the least interested in O'Malley-Martyn's subsequent career, Gore found. Probably dead, it was surmised. O'Malley-Martyn had never been popular. He had been at least fifteen years older than his wife. . . . Keen and efficient, certainly—but a crank—and, in anything concerning Ireland, a rabid rebel. Mad as hatters, you know, these chaps from the west of Ireland—the whole lot of them. . . .

As for Slogger Margesson—old Slogger had had to chuck in, of course. But there had been consolations. His wife had come in for all her mother's money. . . . Trust old Slogger to do nothing foolish. . . . Living down in Devonshire now, somewhere. Slogger must be—er—let me see. . . .

‡ ‡ ‡

CHAPTER SIX

But, as has been said, this information concerning Margesson's bygone romance was acquired by Gore on the following day, and solely for his own edification. Most of it was new to him—for immediately after the War he also had retired from the service, accepted an invitation to take part in an exploratory expedition to Central Africa, and so from the beginning of 1919 until the end of 1922 had been out of England. And he took a considerable interest in it, for the simple reason that he had known the three protagonists personally and was at the moment in direct contact with one of them. But

even if, on the night of September 29, 1938, it had been in his possession, it would never for a moment have occurred to him that it could be in the least useful in clearing up Margesson's present spot of trouble.

So, while he awaited Kesteven's coming, he contented himself with turning over in his mind again such details as Margesson had furnished concerning his tenant's allegedly objectionable behaviour.

By themselves, they merely went to show that Mr. Radville was a noisy young bounder of a very common type, with friends of the same kidney. There was not a scrap of real evidence to show that he was supplying Mrs. Margesson with dangerous drugs, or climbing up trees to knock at her windows, or beating up amorous yokels at night in the woods on her property. (From the way Margesson had spoken, the property was hers and not his.) Heavy lorries paid visits to the bungalow late at night. But heavy lorries were bound to do some night travelling if they made trips of any length. These lorries arrived at the bungalow during the day also, sometimes. And there were a dozen possible explanations of their arrival, whether by night or by day. The men in charge of them were tough-looking chaps. The majority of lorry-drivers one saw on the road were. But one didn't suppose that they amused themselves in between trips by knocking courting couples about in woods where they themselves had no right to be.

No. The curious thing about the tenant of the bungalow—so far as Margesson's description of him went—was the fact that he *was* the tenant of the bungalow. He was a very common type of bounder, perhaps—but not common in the wilds of Devonshire. Why should a chap of that sort elect to live in a bungalow hidden away in the woods in a remote spot like that—a couple of miles from the nearest town—a sleepy, dull little country town at that? He owed money all over the place in Cullerton, it seemed. But he had been willing to plank down a whole year's rent in advance to get into the bungalow—and he had stayed in it four months. Apparently he knew no one in the neighbourhood—except the young Margessons—didn't fish—didn't walk—didn't sketch—didn't do anything but help his pals from London to kick up a row and make themselves general nuisances. Well—why did he want to bury himself in the wilderness to do only that?

He had been introduced to those solicitors by two very dubious sponsors. His guests from London were equally dubious. It looked extremely likely that he was using an assumed name. If that was the fact, and if his real name was Cluffe, he had been involved in a very ugly affair which had sent three of his pals to gaol and nearly ended in his doing a stretch himself. Margesson's suspicions, vague guesses as they seemed to be, inspired entirely by prejudice, might quite possibly all prove well founded.

However, all that Margesson wanted to do, it seemed, was to get the chap out of the bungalow; all that he wanted Gore & Tolley to do for him was to put him in a position to bluff him out of it. One o'clock. Gore yawned and was reaching to slam down his roll-top desk when Kestheven arrived, arrayed as the lilies of the field, and gave him what he had been waiting for.

There had been no difficulty whatever, Mr. Kestheven stated, in identifying "Old Margesson's bird" with the individual, commonly known as Cluffe, who had been one of the four accused in the notorious Lounge Lizard case of the earlier part of that year. Cluffe's abrupt disappearance from his customary haunts had, it seemed, been inspired by the vengeful threats of some of his betrayed accomplices' pals—his adoption of the pseudonym "Radville" by the embarrassing celebrity bestowed upon his real name by the Press. After a little while, however, boredom and loneliness had overcome his first apprehensions, and he had ventured to communicate his whereabouts to some of his friends, who had, of course, promptly spread the glad tidings all over the place. Everyone knew now that he was living in a bungalow down in Devonshire, somewhere near Cullerton, and calling himself Radville. There was no mystery about that whatever.

"Most satisfactory," commented Gore. "Anything interesting about him—I mean, besides a fondness for diamond pendants—and for his own skin?"

"Interesting?" drawled Mr. Kestheven with pursed lips. "No. Just the usual N.B.G. He was in the Air Force for a few months, but they turned him out. Dud cheques. Hasn't a bean—goes everywhere, does everything—pays for nothing—that sort of wizard. Persuade you black was white with the help of a cigarette. But, no—There's nothing in the least interesting about him. Just a louse."

"Nothing in the dope line, then?"

"No. But I ran into old Margesson tonight. He was having the time of his life at the Gazebo with—guess, Colonel——"

Gore paused, half-way into his overcoat.

"Margesson at the Gazebo, you say?"

"Yes." Kestheven blew a quite perfect ring and gazed at it thoughtfully. "With that horrible little worm Bethune and those two women you spoke of. Fact! They were all at the Gazebo tonight, and old Margesson spent his time paying for drinks for them when he wasn't dancing with Mrs. Canning."

"Well, I'm jiggered," laughed Gore and reseated himself to hear further details.

In search of information concerning Mr. Radville, Kestheven had provided himself—naturally, at the expense of Messrs. Gore & Tolley—with suitable feminine camouflage and proceeded in the first instance to the

Warminster, where sundry informants had been only too delighted to gratify his curiosity. Then, the night being still young, he and his fair disguise had moved on to the Gazebo, at the moment the smartest and most fashionable of the more sophisticated night-clubs, and a favourite hunting ground of Cluffe and his intimates.

“First thing I spotted,” proceeded Kestheven, “was old Margesson. He was with another old buffer. Both of them looked very bright and doggish—this was in the cloakroom—and they were busy chaffing one of the attendants about her kit—Anyhow, Margesson paid no attention to me—so I picked up the wench and we went on into the foyer—you know the Gazebo, don’t you? And there I saw Bethune, rather to my surprise, as you’d said he was down in Devonshire—and Mrs. Canning and the Cardew girl with him. They were sitting at a table talking to Hensard—”

“Hensard? That’s the chap that runs the Gazebo, isn’t it?”

“One of them. It’s a syndicate. But Hensard’s the man-on-the-spot. There were very few people in the foyer, so we were able to get a table just beside theirs. They were having an argument about something, but they lowered their voices when we came along, and Hensard went away, leaving the others looking rather glum. But then I saw them brightening up suddenly and winking at one another, and Molly Canning waved to someone behind me and called out ‘Cooo—eee!’—and when I looked round, I saw Margesson and the other old boy standing at the far end of the foyer. At first Margesson looked a bit ferocious, but in the end he waved back, and he and his pal came on. The two girls got up and grabbed hold of them and started spellbinding. And the end of it was that the old boys sat down at their table—and, of course, started paying for drinks at once—champagne cocktails, equally, of course.

“Well—they talked a lot of tripe for awhile, and I was beginning to get rather bored, when suddenly Margesson began to talk about Radville. It began by his asking the girls if they were going back down to Devonshire, and when they said not, he asked if Radville was staying on down there—and how long he was going to stay on down there—and what he was going to stay on down there for. The girls kept trying to change the subject—Bethune hardly spoke at all, I should say. But old Margesson kept coming back to Radville—obstinate old cock, he seems to be—and saying he couldn’t understand what Radville could want to stay on down there for by himself, with the winter coming on—or what had ever taken him down there to start with. Then he began to talk about lorries. . . . This boring you?”

“Not at all, not at all,” smiled Gore. “What about the lorries?”

“That was what *he* wanted to know. He said they woke him up at night, and he couldn’t think what the devil they were doing up at the bungalow in

the middle of the night. Finally he asked Bethune point-blank what all the stuff was that Radville seemed to be having dumped at the bungalow—he said something about a big shed that Radville had had put up there—without his permission. Bethune tried to pass the whole thing off as a joke—said he’s noticed no lorries about at night—asked the girls if they’d noticed any lorries about at night—of course they said they hadn’t and tried to turn it into a joke, too. But I saw them all looking at one another when the old boy kept sticking on about lorries, and in the end the girls jumped up and insisted on the two old boys dancing. So Margesson stopped asking questions, and went off with Mrs. Canning. His pal, I should tell you, had been very much out of it during all this—and looked rather bored. I think he felt that he’d had just about as much as he could carry comfortably and was getting a bit nervous. Anyhow, he wouldn’t dance—and after a very short time he got up and cleared off. I think he must have gone away. At any rate, I didn’t see any more of him.

“After he’d left them. Bethune and the Cardew girl called over Hensard—he’d been hanging around in the foyer most of the time—and he came over and joined them and they had a long conversation. It was so long, in fact, that I became afraid they might grow suspicious of our staying on at our table so close to them. In fact, I’m afraid, they did become a bit suspicious of us in the end. So we went and danced for a bit. However, I heard the beginning of the conversation with Hensard—or most of it. And it was all about Margesson. Bethune led off by telling Hensard about the questions Margesson had been asking about Cluffe, and about lorries going to his bungalow with stuff. Hensard looked pretty grim at that, and began asking questions about Margesson—what terms he was on with Cluffe, and whether there’d been any trouble between them. Bethune said he was a bloody old fool, but that he’d got his bristles up about his daughter running round with Cluffe and had been making himself nasty about it. ‘Why?’ asked Hensard. ‘Cluffe hasn’t been messing about with his daughter, has he?’ The Cardew girl laughed down her nose and said, ‘Oh, well—you know Victor——She’s quite a pretty little thing in her way. And—of course—she’s quite convinced that Victor’s going to marry her. . . .’ Hensard got quite wicked at that. ‘The bloody fool!’ he said, ‘I’ll kick the b——’s guts out if he lets us down again. Look here, Molly,’ he said to Mrs. Canning, ‘you’ve got to find out if this old beggar’s getting nosy. If he is——’ He stopped then and asked Bethune some questions about ‘how much stuff,’ but he didn’t finish the question, whatever it was, and I knew he was taking a good look at us to discover if we were listening. So at that point, as I say, we faded away gracefully.”

“Margesson’s pal deserted him, you think. Or did Margesson clear off with him?”

“No. Margesson stayed on for a bit. He danced with Mrs. Canning several times again, and in between they had more drinks. We didn’t venture close again—just drifted into the foyer and out of it again a couple of times. But I’ve no doubt whatever that Canning and her pals were trying to get him to talk.”

“Was he screwed at all?”

“Um—pretty well towards the end, I think. All the same, I think in the end he must have twigged that they were leading him up the garden. He left them very abruptly, anyhow, and I saw them looking after him a bit uncomfortably, and Mrs. Canning got up in a hurry and followed him. I wondered if she’d go away with him. But he shook her off, and made straight for the cloakroom—collected his stuff, and went off by himself in a taxi. To the Curzon. So then—well, the wench and I decided to call it a day.”

Mr. Kestheven intimating then that the wench was waiting down in Norfolk Street in a taxi—again at Messrs. Gore & Tolley’s expense—the senior partner waved a benediction over his departure and, returning to the dictaphone, composed a brief report embodying the information obtained by the firm in reference to “Your tenant, Victor Radville.”

He decided to supplement this by a little personal note:

“MY DEAR MARGESSON,—I trust enclosed will be sufficient for your purpose. It was very pleasant to meet you again, though I wish the reasons for our meeting had not been so distressing for you. I don’t anticipate that you will have any further need of our services, but hope you’ll look me up some time when you’re in London on less anxious occasions.

“Yours sincerely,
“WICKHAM GORE.”

And then, having left instructions on his secretary’s desk for the dispatch of these two communications to the Curzon Hotel at the earliest possible hour next morning, Colonel Gore also decided to call it a day. In all probability he’d never set eyes on Slogger Margesson again, he reflected as he went down in the lift, and fell to wondering, like most people awake in the world at that moment, what Neville and Adolf had been saying to one another. . . .

CHAPTER SEVEN

But on the following afternoon, when he returned to Norfolk Street from his club, around six o'clock, he was informed that Colonel Margesson had run up from his sister's house in Surrey, apparently in a state of agitation, and had seemed greatly disappointed on being informed that Colonel Gore was out. He had declined to leave any message, had said that he couldn't ring up later, as he had to catch a train, and had rung off abruptly.

Having ascertained from a time-table that, since he had rung up at midday, Margesson could not reach home until, at earliest, seven o'clock or thereabouts, Gore postponed for the moment any attempt to get into touch with him. When at ten o'clock his call was at length put through, Margesson himself answered it and at once plunged into a highly perturbed account of fresh troubles which had descended upon him in the course of the day. The line was a-crackle and his sonorous voice was prone to blur into a confused roaring over the phone. But Gore was able to gather at any rate the substance of the one-sided conversation.

Margesson, it seemed, had duly gone down to Surrey to arrange the transference of his daughter to his sister's care. But when he arrived at Mrs. Nicolette's house he had learned that his wife's maid had rung up at his wife's direction about half an hour before, on the chance of finding him there. The message for him, delivered by the maid to Mrs. Nicolette, had been to the effect that his son, Leonard, had neither yet returned home nor sent any word of his whereabouts, that something most alarming had happened concerning his daughter, Joan, and that he must return to Cullerside at once.

Naturally much disturbed, he had rushed back to London and returned to Devonshire by the first available train. On his arrival at Cullerside, to his amazement, he had found O'Malley-Martyn there, and a three-cornered scene which he described as "perfectly horrible," had ensued, in the course of which O'Malley-Martyn had struck him and behaved otherwise in a manner so unbearable he had, literally, shoved him out of the house.

His wife had refused absolutely to give any explanation of this astounding intrusion, beyond stating that O'Malley-Martyn had come to the house at her invitation and to discuss a business matter of great importance. When he had expressed his disapproval, she had become hysterical and had "blurted out at him" the news that his son was not the only one whom his bullying and browbeating had driven from the house. His daughter, Joan, too, had taken flight, having previously announced to her mother, earlier in the day, that she couldn't "stick it" any longer—that she was engaged to Mr. Radville—and that she was to be married to him in a few days in London.

Mrs. Margesson's reaction to this announcement had been to remain in the bed in which she had received it, in a state of prostration. Not until six o'clock in the afternoon had she learned of her daughter's departure from the house, which no one had witnessed and which had been divined by the housemaid from the disappearance of the "things" from Miss Joan's dressing-table and the subsequent discovery that two suitcases had also vanished from her room.

Apparently Margesson, despite his stupefaction, had acted with energy. He had summoned a doctor to attend to his wife—who had had another of her fainting attacks—questioned the servants—rung up the Cullerton station master and questioned him—and then rushed off up to the bungalow to tackle Mr. Radville. But neither servants nor station master had been able to supply any helpful information. And he had found the bungalow in darkness and completely deserted. The curtains of all its windows had been drawn. But he had been able to ascertain through a window of the padlocked garage that Radville's car was not inside it, and, concluding that it had carried his daughter and its owner off to London, had returned to Cullerside in still greater perturbation to renew his cross-examination of the servants.

While he had been questioning them, his chauffeur had arrived with the car, which, despite his wire, had failed to meet him at the station on his arrival. The car had been left by his daughter Joan at a garage in Cullerton in the course of the afternoon, with the request that a message should be sent to the chauffeur at his lodgings in the town at 9 p.m., but not before, informing him that the car was at the garage. This message had been duly delivered, the chauffeur had duly collected the car and, thinking his employer might require it early next day, had brought it out to Cullerside at once. On the cushion of its driving seat had been left a note for Margesson from his daughter, telling him that she was going up to London with Mr. Radville and would be married to him on the following Monday. In the meantime she would stay with Mr. Radville's sister. It would be perfectly useless to try to find her.

Gore had already had three extensions of his call and at this point he was cut off peremptorily while Margesson was saying something about lorries which his chauffeur had seen taking away stuff that afternoon. And when he succeeded in getting through again, a very indistinct and nervous maid's voice informed him that her master was upstairs with the doctor and that she was afraid Mrs. Margesson had been took very bad. The maid was replaced then by the chauffeur, whose name, Gore learned, was Nugent and who was able to give him the number of the 3½-litre Bentley belonging to the gentleman up at the bungalow.

“Colonel Margesson tells me,” Gore said then, “that you saw some lorries taking stuff away from there today.”

“Yes, sir. Two six-tonners. Mardens, they was, both of ’em. An’ I reckon they had a full load on board, each of ’em. I tried to see the registration numbers when they were going away, but they was covered over with sackin’, the lot of ’em.”

“See what sort of stuff they were taking away?”

“No, sir. I couldn’t see that from where I was. . . . Well—I was lyin’ in a sort of ditch as a matter of fact—jus’ watchin’ them on the quiet, you see, sir. The big shed they were takin’ the stuff from is back of the bungalow, you see—and it’s mostly hid by the trees. From where I was I could only see part of the end of the shed and the back of it. There was some lorries there very early this morning, too, sir. Though I didn’t see them myself or hear them—because I don’t sleep here at the house, you see. I have lodgings in the town with my wife and child an’ I go back there after I’ve finished up here. But Mr. Spannett—that’s one of the masters over at the school, sir—he told me this mornin’ when I met him along the road that he’d heard lorries up there round six o’clock or so this mornin’—goin’ up and then comin’ away again. Two of ’em, he said he thought, sir. Might I ask who I’m speakin’ to, sir?”

“I’m Colonel Gore—Colonel Margesson will tell you who I am. Will you tell him, when the doctor goes, that I’ll wait on for an hour from now, in case he should care to ring me up again. Gerrard 9191—Colonel Gore—Gerrard 9191.”

“I’ll remember, sir.”

While he waited, Gore decided to ring up Inspector Granley at New Scotland Yard. During the past fifteen years Messrs. Gore & Tolley had very frequently come in contact with the Yard in the course of business and, in return for various little services rendered tactfully, had invariably found the official hand willing to make itself helpful in moments of need.

“You remember that chap Cluffe,” Gore began, “who was——?”

“The Lounge Lizard? Yes. What about him?”

“Interested in him at all now?”

“Oh, well,” replied the tranquil voice at the other end, “we bear him in mind.”

“Then I expect you know he’s been living down in Devon lately?”

“Yes. Since June. Near Cullerton. Oh, yes—we know he’s down there.”

“He isn’t. He cleared out some time today. Reason I’m interested is that—perhaps—he took the daughter of a client of ours with him—with the intention of marrying her—perhaps—on Monday. Maybe he’ll try to.

There's money, you see. The girl left a message saying she'd stay with Cluffe's sister until Monday."

"Hasn't got a sister," said Inspector Granley.

"Doesn't matter. He's been passing off a woman who's been staying down there with him—a Mrs. Canning—as his sister."

"I see. Well?"

"Well, naturally, the girl's people are all hot and bothered about her. It would be a help to know if she fetches up wherever Mrs. Canning hangs out when she's in town. Any idea?"

"Not straight off. But we'll find out for you. Afraid we can't do anything much more than let you know. But we'll do that with pleasure."

"Many thanks. Cluffe has a gray Bentley——"

"He hasn't. The Bentley belongs to a chap called Hensard——"

"Chap who runs the Gazebo?"

"Yes. He lets his pals use it."

"Nice kind sort of bloke he must be. Well, Cluffe has had it down there, and it's not down there now. So it might help to find Miss Margesson—that's her name—before she does anything more foolish than she's done already. Margesson—Joan Margesson—about eighteen—very pretty—fair—bit of a lisp—smallish."

"Right. That all?"

Gore decided then to produce the quo for the requested quid.

"Nearly. Cluffe took away some other things when he cleared out. Four lorry-loads of them, anyhow—six-tonner Mardens—two loads at six o'clock this morning—two more this afternoon."

"Stuff?" repeated an entirely changed voice. "What sort of stuff?"

"Can't tell you. But I thought you might like to know about the lorries."

"Like to know? Here—come clean, Colonel. Where was this stuff taken from? From this shanty where——?"

"Yes. However, I'm sure you'll be able to find him if you really try. He'll be able to tell you all about it. Don't forget to let me know, will you?"

Inspector Granley chuckled appreciatively. "Same old game, is it? But you've played fairer than you think, this time. I'll let you know. Bye-bye, Colonel. And—provisionally—thanks."

An essential feature of the highly specialized services rendered by Mr. Kesteven to the firm was the habitual frequentation of night resorts of opulent facade. Without difficulty, he was tracked over the phone to the Warminster and instructed to devote himself forthwith to the discovery of Mrs. Canning's dwelling-place and to take all necessary steps to keep it under continuous observation until otherwise directed, reporting immediately if a very pretty, fair, lisping, and probably slightly-screwed

young woman made her appearance, possibly in Cluffe's company. Very shortly after Gore had provided himself with this second string to his bow, a trunk-call from Cullerton came through.

It was almost impossible now to distinguish a word of what Margesson was saying, but at length Gore divined that he was being requested to travel down to Devonshire by the earliest possible train next morning. His attempts to explain the steps he himself had taken already were either equally unintelligible to his listener or unsatisfactory. And the very trying conversation ended with his giving a most reluctant assent to Margesson's obstinately-repeated request. Next day was Saturday—the first. He had hoped to spend the week-end potting pheasants with a pleasant little bachelor-party down in Hampshire. Still—poor old Slogger did seem in rather a filthy mess. Cullerton—somewhere between a hundred and eighty and a hundred and ninety—say four and a half to five hours—barring accidents——

He covered the first half of his journey at a comparatively leisurely pace, not wishing to reach his destination at too ungodly an hour. But between Wimborne and Dorchester he ran into heavy rain which had become torrential by the time that he passed through Exeter. As his boredom deepened, his speed increased, and eventually he arrived in Cullerton very shortly after six o'clock. A postman—the only human being in sight—supplied directions for the rest of his journey and at a quarter-past six precisely he drew up outside Cullerside's porch. The rain had stopped by now, and patches of cheerful blue had begun to show behind the ragged sullenness of the sky. Going to take up—Those beggars up in Hampshire would have a good day, after all.

There was no sign of life about the big house, but the sound of a prolonged matutinal throat-clearing induced him to leave his car and reconnoitre towards the rear of the premises. There, standing half-dressed at the head of some steps leading up to the loft over the garage, he found Nugent, the chauffeur-gardener, polishing his leggings sleepily.

Nugent, a decent-looking, middle-aged Devon man, with horse written all over him ineffaceably, despite the peaked cap with which he hastily completed his attire, undertook to induce the housemaid to inform the Colonel of the early visitor's arrival. And, after a somewhat lengthy disappearance, he returned to escort Gore to the front door, which had been opened in the interval.

“Lucky for you, sir,” he commented, “that I happened to sleep on the premises last night, 'case the Colonel wanted me for anythin'. If I hadn't,

you'd have found no one stirring till eight. You may have to wait a bit for the Colonel as it is. He's a hard one to get out of bed, the Colonel is—and it takes him an hour and a half good to dress himself. Late up last night he was, too."

As he ushered Gore into a sitting-room off the hall, the housemaid appeared on the staircase, but, clearly feeling her attire unbecomingly sketchy for nearer inspection by the visitor, stopped and beckoned to the chauffeur. After some moments' conference Nugent came down the stairs again dubiously.

"She says the Colonel's not in his bedroom, sir, or anywhere about the house. His bed hasn't been slept in, she says, either. That's a funny thing. He mustn't have——" He called up to the maid. "Was the lights on or off down here, Hetty?"

"They were all on," replied the girl. "I turned them off before I went up to call the Colonel."

"Funny!" commented Nugent again. "The Colonel can't have come back, then, wherever he went last night. He went out latish last night, you see, sir—about eleven it might be. So I suppose he can't have come back—or he'd have turned off the lights. He's very particular about the lights being all turned off at night."

"Did he go out in his car?" Gore asked.

"No, sir. Car's in the garage now. So he can't have been going far, you'd say. When I heard him going out, my own belief was perhaps he was going up to the bungalow, because he'd heard the noise of more lorries up there, like I'd heard them myself. Anyhow, it came into my head that he was going up there, through the wood. But I wouldn't be sure about that. Because you see the Colonel always wears them rubber soles. And after hearing the hall door shut and the gravel on the drive grinding a bit, I couldn't make out which way he'd gone. I was up there in the loft—where you saw me—reading for a bit in bed——Well—I must say it seems funny to me. Makes it awkward for you, sir, coming all that way and not finding him here. Expected you, I suppose, the Colonel did, sir?"

"Not so early as this," Gore replied. "But——I wonder if you'd mind making a good search about the house—to make quite sure."

"Certainly, sir. You can come with me yourself, if you like——"

"The Colonel's not in any of the rooms upstairs, I'm sure as anything of that," put in the housemaid from the landing.

"Might be in one of Missus's rooms," suggested Nugent. But the maid shook her head.

"No. I've asked Georgina."

“Cor!” ejaculated Nugent. “It’s a queer business, I’ll say. First Mr. Leonard goes off with himself—then Miss Joan—and now the Colonel. I’ll be missing, myself, next—Well, you’d like us to try the rooms down here again, sir. . . .”

But, despite the man’s effort to treat the matter semi-jocularly, he was plainly extremely uneasy. And when he perceived a pair of glasses lying on a table in his employer’s own particular sanctum at the north side of the ground floor, he uttered an openly suspicious “Umph!”

“That proved he didn’t come back last night, sir. Them’s his reading glasses—I know them by the red case. He always keeps his reading glasses in a red case, so’s he’ll see them and not leave them behind him. Because he can’t read a blessed word without them. He’d never go up to his bedroom without them, because he’d want them to read his letters in the morning when they went up with his early tea. So that settles it.”

Gore sat down in one of the two big easy chairs.

“Tell me about those lorries you heard last night, just before you heard Colonel Margesson going out. You were up there in that loft over the garage, reading in bed—and you heard lorries up at the bungalow. Going or coming—?”

“Both, sir. They went away after about a quarter of an hour. There was two of them.”

“That was at eleven o’clock?”

“Yes, sir. Round about that. I got out of bed and went to the door of the loft to listen to them—because—well, we’ve been wondering about all the lorries going up there, you see, sir.”

“So you got up and wondered some more. And then—?”

“Well, then, sir, a little bit after I’d heard them going away, I heard the front door being slammed—the Colonel always slams a door when he shuts it—so I knew it was him—and I heard the gravel on the drive going like someone was walking very quick on it—and I said to myself, ‘He’s heard them, too, and he’s going up to see what’s on up there.’ He’s been wondering. . . .”

“Yes, I know,” nodded Gore. “Well, you went back to bed then?”

“After a bit I did, sir. I kept my ears cocked while I was readin’ for another bit. But I put out the light then, and I think I must have went asleep pretty quick.”

“You heard no sound of Colonel Margesson or anyone else about the place before you went asleep?”

“No, sir. No sound about the place at all. You can guess with both Mr. Leonard and Miss Joan gone it was pretty still up here last night. You’d ’a heard a glow-worm burning, it was that quiet.”

“You’ve no dogs here, Colonel Margesson told me.”

“No, sir. The Colonel keeps his shooting dogs over at Mr. Armytage’s. Mrs. Margesson couldn’t stand the noise about the place, you see.”

“How far is it to this bungalow?”

“Shortest way is through them woods you see out there, sir. It’d be about a quarter of a mile or so.”

“Those, I take it, are the woods—or the part of the woods where people have been having a spot of trouble lately?”

Nugent eyed this pleasant gentleman with the steady, friendly gray eyes, who seemed so desirous of accurate information about things. “Oh, you’ve heard about that, too, sir. . . . Funny thing—that very idea came into my own mind just now, soon’s I set eyes on them glasses——”

“I rather thought so,” commented Gore. “Well—you busy just now? Or would you care to show me the way to the bungalow?”

“I was thinkin’ of goin’ up there myself, sir, in any case,” announced the chauffeur. “I’ll just tell them not to get my breakfast till I come back.”

It was a typical English October morning now—the kind of morning for whose mild, tanged mistiness the sportsman’s soul cherishes a special affection. The drenched woods surrounding Cullerside were a soft silver-gray blur, their undergrowth festooned with the myriad jewelled miracles of the spiders’ working. That autumnal odour of sweet rottenness which has inspired so much literary sentimentalism blended itself pleasurably with the smell of their cigarettes as the two men made their way under the still dripping trees along one of the narrow, leaf-strewn paths radiating from the north side of the drive. But—not merely because they went in single file—they exchanged no further word until, some two hundred yards or so along their way to the bungalow, yet another twist in the track brought into view a masculine figure halted a little way ahead of them.

“Looks as if he’d found something,” remarked Nugent, jerking his head down the slope to westward. “He’s the boilerman over at the Grammar School down there. Been up lookin’ to see if there was anythin’ in his snares, I expect.”

The man greeted them with a friendly “Mornin’!” as they neared him and, in response to Nugent’s inquiry laughed and held out a grimy paw.

“No. No luck this morning, Alfred. ’Cep’ ’ooever dropped this ’ere gadget’s goin’ to offer a reward for findin’ it.”

Nugent examined the object exhibited on the other’s palm. “Eyeshade,” he commented. “More likely he chucked it away from the looks of it, Harry, I’d say.”

“You’re right,” agreed Harry, and tossed his very bedraggled and battered prize into the nearest thornbush carelessly, before Gore’s hurried

remonstrance had time to check him. Nugent and he looked on with some surprise while Gore retrieved it, examined it carefully, and then equally carefully shut it up in his cigarette-case, having previously removed the very few cigarettes which had survived his long night journey, and presented them to the boilerman, whose name, he ascertained, was Mylor. No explanation of his interest in the eyeshade accompanied this gift, and when Mylor had pointed out the precise spot, a couple of feet off the path, where he had first seen it, he went on his way divided between amusement and curiosity.

"I never see anyone about up here with one of them things, sir," remarked Nugent, after some musing, as he led the way onwards towards the bungalow, and turned in further surprise when, in response to this statement, he was asked at what time he had gone home to his lodgings from Cullerside on the preceding day.

"Middle of day, sir," he replied. "Half-past twelve. Fridays I get a half-day off. Why do you ask that question, sir?"

"Well—for one thing, I wondered how Miss Margesson had contrived to take the car out without your knowledge, if you had been on the premises during the afternoon. But you weren't. And it was after nine o'clock, wasn't it, when you brought the car along from the garage in Cullerton. . . ." Gore waved his cigarette towards a patch of red tiled roof which had appeared through the trees another hundred yards or so ahead. "That's the bungalow, I expect. Any other houses or bungalows up this way?"

"No, sir. Not this side of the river. These woods goes on for another mile or so, and then you're out on the moor." He pointed eastward up the steeply-rising slope. "And the same up that way. You'd come out on the moor, and then for twenty miles or more there'd be nothing but the moor and the tors and the mires—that's what we call the bogs, sir—till you might come to Moreton Hampstead—if you ever did get there and that's a doubtful thing."

The chauffeur swung round to point down the slope to westward. "'Course the Ockenford road's down there, sir, across the river—and there's the Grammar School—and Mr. Armytage's place—and a few small cottages about a mile on, where the quarrymen live, some of them. . . . And the other way, back towards the town—there's a few small houses—but not many till you come to the beginnings of the town. . . . There you are, sir. . . . You can see the whole of the bungalow now. That's the garage at the side. You can just see the end of the big shed I told you about, peeping out at the back."

The Margessons' migration from Surrey to Devonshire, Gore had learned, had been the final result of a pleasure jaunt taken in 1935. A fondness for water-colour painting had then still been one of Mrs. Margesson's many keen interests, and she had fallen so much in love with

Devonshire—and more particularly the moor—that in her impulsive fashion she had bought a plot of land out of hand and set a Cullerton builder to erect a bungalow upon it without delay. Initially the Cullerton bungalow had been designed merely as a summer appendage to Surrey. But having lived six months in it experimentally, she had decided to abandon Surrey altogether, buy a very much larger plot adjoining the original one, and build a modern house on it. That done, the bungalow could be let or sold.

In point of fact, Mr. Radville had been its first and only tenant since its evacuation by its owners. And already the Cullerton job-builder's hasty and indifferent handiwork was beginning to show signs of the wear and tear of weather and two years of neglect. It had been planned on a generous scale, however, and was a building of considerable size, flanked by a very large garage, and approached from the Ockenford main road by a private road of its own, for which way had been blazed through the woods and which crossed the Culler at its lower end by an ugly, but sturdy little humpbacked bridge of reinforced concrete—also its own private property.

Beyond the absolutely necessary clearing, no attempt had been made to alter the bungalow's sylvan surroundings, and on that damp misty morning, deserted and silent, the curtains of all its windows drawn, it wore a forlorn and abandoned aspect which the much trampled, muddy paths and deeply-rutted roadway accentuated. The empty garage and the big, newly-erected shed at the back were both, like the bungalow itself, locked up. The latter possessed no window of any sort, and after a survey of its padlocked sliding doors, Gore turned away towards the bungalow again and performed a vigorous rat-a-tat-tat with its front door knocker.

"Telephone here, I see," he commented, his eyes following the file of posts lining the roadway toward the main road. "And a wireless aerial. Electric light?"

"No, sir," replied Nugent. "Lamps and candles up here. And water from a well."

"Quite Arcadian," smiled Gore, turning to wield the knocker with increased energy for a space. But there was no response, and he shook his head.

"Well, obviously Colonel Margesson is not up here now. I think you were right in your surmise, and that he did come up this way last night. . . . But—By the way, when did the rain begin down here last night?"

"Oh, late, sir. Must have been a good bit after I went asleep."

"Probably a good bit after you heard Colonel Margesson go out, then. . . . However—let's see if we can find any marks of rubber soles about, up here."

But, though the path leading up to the front door from the roadway had clearly been disturbed after the night's rain had begun to fall on it, no actual footprint of any sort was discernible on its very uneven and weed-grown surface.

"Oddly enough," said Gore, "I rather think someone has taken the trouble to scrape this path over with the side of his foot. Quite a lot of pains, too. Made quite a job of it. Pity. Colonel Margesson, I feel pretty sure, came at any rate as far as the place where that chap found the eyeshade. As we came along I noticed in two places the marks—very recent marks—of rubber soles on fresh rabbit-scrapes at one side of the path. Both were heading this way. The last one was just a little short of where the chap found the eyeshade. Well—if he came as far as that—through a wood—at eleven o'clock at night or thereabouts—you'd say he must have been coming on here to the bungalow. . . . Though, if he was merely reconnoitring—Let's look back along the path a bit. . . ."

As they crossed the roadway again a crumpled wisp of paper lying in one of the cavernous ruts caught his eye and he stooped to pick it up. Rain and mud had rendered the words written in block capitals—with a very soft pencil, evidently—on a quarto sheet of thin card, once, obviously, the back of a writing pad, almost illegible. But after some study they resolved themselves into the instruction:

"LOCK UP PUT KEYS THROUGH KITCHEN WINDOW SHUT WINDOW."

A loop of string passed through a perforation in the card indicated that it had in all probability been attached to the keys referred to in the message, and curiosity induced Gore to return and make trial of the windows nearest to the big shed—those at the back of the bungalow. Finding one of these unlatched, he raised it the few inches for which it would open at the bottom and, pushing aside the curtain inside, saw that it belonged to a kitchen of considerable size and elaboration of equipment but cluttered with an amazing disorder of soiled crockery and cooking utensils. Over the back of one chair hung a woman's coat, on which rested a perky little hat. And screwing his head in, he could just contrive to see, lying on the floor beneath the window, two keys tied together with a shoelace.

He closed the window and went back to Nugent.

"Looks either as if whoever was in the bungalow when the lorries arrived last night, didn't want his sleep disturbed," he said, as they went back along the path through the wood slowly, "—or as if there was no one in the bungalow when they arrived. More probable that there was no one in it, one would say. And, if that was the case—then the only thing to interest

Colonel Margesson up here would have been the lorries—and what they were up to.”

Nugent came to a stop, when they had gone a little way further in silence.

“I don’t know what’s in your mind, sir—or what the Colonel has told you. But I don’t mind telling you straight out, sir, that what *I’m* hoping is that no harm’s come to him. What I’d be afraid of is that he might have come up here and had some sort of row with the chaps that came with the lorries—and they might have set about him and hurt him so bad he hasn’t been able to get back to the house.”

“But the lorries, you said, had gone away before he even left the house.”

“The lorries, yes, sir. But I can’t tell you who they may have left behind them, when they went away.”

The chauffeur glanced about him doubtfully at the wilderness of undergrowth beneath the endless trees.

“He might be lying about anywhere in all that stuff. . . . He’s a quiet gentleman enough, sir, till he’s roused. But if those chaps was to go for him—he’d fight like a tiger, I’ll bet—and it’d be him or them. If they hurt him serious between them, they might have dumped him somewhere, so that he wouldn’t be found till morning, anyhow—when they were well away. . . . I don’t want you to think I’ve got the wind up about the Colonel, sir. . . . But it’s very queer his not having come back last night. . . .”

“We’ll go and look at those marks on the rabbit-scrapes,” suggested Gore, without further comment, and silently they went on to the spot where they had encountered the boilerman. The partial imprint of a right-foot rubber sole, pointing northwards towards the bungalow, was unmistakable on the close-by scrape. It had sunk deep into the loosened red clay and had been protected completely from the rain of the night by the thicket under whose lee it lay. By tacit agreement the two men began a search among the adjacent bushes, most of which were more than head high, and almost immediately Nugent came upon another find—a wide-brimmed gray felt hat, saturated and mud-caked, and long and carelessly worn, but obviously originally of good quality. Its lining bore the gilt stamp, “WINCHCROFT & SONS, 113 Arundel Street, PORTSMOUTH.” And stuck inside its stained sweatband were three little paper packets, each secured with a dab of sealing-wax.

“Doesn’t belong to the Colonel, anyhow,” stated Nugent, when this discovery had been examined. “Wouldn’t be seen dead in a hat like that, the Colonel wouldn’t.”

Some misgiving as to his own phrase effaced the chauffeur’s smile as he watched Gore carefully replace the hat on the spot where it had been found.

“All the same, I wonder how it come here,” he added after some moments of head scratching. “You’d think whoever owned it would have took them things out of the inside before he chucked it away.”

“Whoever he was,” replied Gore, pointing to sundry down-trodden bracken fronds and bramble tendrils as he moved forward among the bushes, “he went on a bit farther this way.”

But when he had followed this spoor for another bare ten yards, he came to an abrupt stop. For protruding from the narrow gully between two huge thorn-thickets, he saw looking up at him a face which only his reason assured him was Slogger Margesson’s.

‡ ‡ ‡

CHAPTER EIGHT

It has been battered out of all identity—out of all resemblance, indeed, to the face of a human being. In its swollen discolourment all individual features had disappeared. Alone, a rose-coloured fragment of a dental plate, imbedded in the monstrous mask, lent to it a grotesque decoration. Already the Colonel’s once powerful limbs had stiffened beyond movement save by violence, and, though his clothes were sodden with rain, the ground beneath his body was bone dry. Clearly he had died before the rain of the night had begun, and had lain there for five or six hours.

The shocked but steady-nerved Nugent was sent off at the run to the house with instructions to telephone the Cullerton police station but otherwise to keep his mouth shut. Gore lighted a pipe, and, having made such visual examination of the dead man’s clothes as its narrow hidingplace permitted without actual disturbance—a bulge in one pocket of the light overcoat was caused, he felt pretty certain, by a revolver or an automatic—began to quarter the surrounding undergrowth systematically. Margesson, he remembered, had been in his time one of the army’s star heavyweights. Somewhere near, he anticipated, he would find the evidences of a desperate affray—at least, a patch of ground trampled by infuriated feet. From that it ought to be possible to trace the routes by which both attacked and attackers—for he felt sure that there must have been at any rate more than one of these—had reached it and left it. Margesson—a dead weight of fourteen stone or thereabouts—must, he judged, have been carried to the place where he had been hidden away. Here and there a down-beaten patch of bracken or a snapped-off gorse-tip seemed to mark a vague, spasmodic trail. And such a burden would have been carried the shortest possible distance.

But the trail, if it was one, petered out, and he found no other tell-tale signs. Returning towards the path, after nearly half an hour of fruitless questing, he heard Nugent coming back, as he had gone, at a trot, and quickened his pace.

“I couldn’t get the police on the phone, sir,” the chauffeur panted, when they met. “The line’s broke down.”

“Broken down?” repeated Gore in surprise. “But it was all right last night. And there’s been no wind here, has there, during the night?”

“Not as I knows of, anyhow, sir. But the wire’s down all right. I see it myself.” He pointed downwards towards the river. “ ’Bout half-ways along to the footbridge over the river——That’s the way the wire comes up to the house from the road.”

He explained then that, hearing no sound of any sort in response to his repeated attempts to ring the Cullerton exchange, he had concluded that there was something wrong with the instrument and had decided to go across to the school and telephone from there. While descending the path to the footbridge he had come on the broken telephone wire, trailing across the path. Thinking that Gore would wonder at his long delay, he had then decided to come back and explain it to him, before going on to the school.

“A thing like that *would* happen just when you wanted to use the phone special,” he commented aggrievedly. “Well, I’ll get off over to the school now, sir.”

“Why shouldn’t we use the telephone up at the bungalow?” suggested Gore. “Lots quicker. Come along.”

“But it’s all locked up up there, sir.”

“I expect we can force that window at the back right open,” replied Gore. “Let’s go.”

Without any great difficulty, and with the aid of a coal hammer discovered in the fuel shed, the bottom of the bungalow’s kitchen window was driven up over the nails which had acted as stops, and he climbed inside. A central passage divided the building lengthwise and led him to a little entrance hall where, as he had anticipated, he found a wall telephone instrument. But only dead silence rewarded his attempts to attract the Cullerton exchange’s attention. And a suspicion which had dawned in his mind on hearing of Nugent’s failure was transformed by his own to something very like certainty.

He returned to the kitchen window and instructed the chauffeur to follow the bungalow wire down the private road to the main road line, and discover if it was intact as far as the junction. Whether it was or not, Nugent was directed to go on to the Grammar School and ring up the police from there.

If the school wire was dead also, he was to return to Cullerside direct and drive into the town in Gore's car.

As Nugent hurried off, Gore picked up the keys lying beneath the window and prepared to climb out through it again, intending to pay a visit to the big shed and discover whether it still contained any of that "stuff" the mention of which had seemed to arouse Inspector Granley's interest so noticeably. But as he turned sideways to swing a leg over the low sill, his eyes fell again on the coat and hat resting on one of the kitchen chairs, and he paused to consider them.

Both were youthful and smart and new—not at all possessions to be left behind by even the most haphazard of young women through mere oversight. He swung his foot to the floor again and walked over to examine them more closely, then decided to investigate the pockets of the coat, in one of which he found a ten-shilling treasury note, in the other a tiny handkerchief embroidered with the initials J.M.

The hat and coat were Joan Margesson's property, then, for a practical certainty—most improbably left behind. Left behind—when? Though their smartness seemed utterly inappropriate to their surroundings, one could never reason as to a woman's choice of clothes to be worn under any particular set of circumstances. Very probably Miss Margesson had done her best to live up to the smartness of those two showy young women from London.

But the discovery that the bungalow's telephone was, so curiously, also out of action had quickened sharply suspicions which his ghastly discovery in the wood had set a-dance in his mind. These were a coat and hat for town wear—just such a coat and hat as Joan Margesson would have worn for a journey which would end in London. He continued to stare at them with growing doubtfulness. Had she worn them—expecting to make such a journey—yesterday afternoon? Then—if she *had* made such a journey—why were they there—on that chair—in the kitchen of the bungalow—now?

He thrust the keys into a pocket and, leaving the kitchen, began a search of whose hastiness he himself was quite unconscious. It ended very quickly. For the second door which he opened—that of one of the bedrooms opening off the central passage—revealed to him the answer to that question of his. Joan Margesson had not made that journey to London, after all. She was lying in a crumpled heap on the floor of the bedroom, beside and partly under the bed, barefooted and clad in once coquettish pyjamas of blue silk, which hung in shreds about her motionless body. And on the bed lay another figure, as still as hers, his white upturned face and his clothes and shoes bedaubed with what Gore at first took to be blood, but subsequently discovered to be a mixture of lichen, and fungus.

Horror-stricken, he looked about the common-place little room. But its very primitive camp furniture betrayed no disorder sufficient to indicate anything in the nature of a struggle. Various feminine garments were draped over a chair-back or hung from hooks on the back of the door. Two small suitcases rested on the uncarpeted floor near the wardrobe, one of them partially unpacked. The young fellow lying on the bed was fully clothed, even to the wearing of a raincoat over his sports jacket and flannel trousers and shoes over his gaily-hued socks, but the bed had clearly been occupied—presumably by the Margesson girl—before he had assumed or been placed in his present posture on it. And the occupant had dropped a lighted cigarette which had been permitted to burn itself out and in doing so burn a large hole in one of the rumpled pillows.

That the two were brother and sister Gore guessed instantly. The boy on the bed was certainly not yet twenty, short of stature, fair rather than dark and, though in features vaguely resembling his unhappy companion, devoid of the least pretence to good looks—certainly not Cluffe, as Margesson had described him. And from this staggering relationship between these newly-discovered victims—for a glance at their bruised, distorted faces had sufficed to tell him that both had died in terrified agony—his mind had flashed back to that other victim down there among the undergrowth in the wood—Father—son—and daughter—A massacre—an extermination effected with the savagery of insanity—Margesson's handsome, troubled face rose before him. Was this the realization of those nightmare fears of his wife's which his rich, sonorous voice had striven so hard on Thursday afternoon to attribute to a heroin habit?

But even while his eyes and a process of mind grown now automatic with him were so busied, he had reached the bed and begun to ask of the motionless form beside it the question of which he knew already the answer. Assured that both brother and sister had both long been past any human aid, he left the room and continued his search through the other rooms of the bungalow, which comprised four bedrooms, a sitting-room and a dining-room, bathroom, lavatory, kitchen and larder. Some of the rooms were, save for a camp bed, completely unfurnished—the others equipped with the barest of mere necessities. Of the untidiness of the bungalow's recent occupants there was plentiful evidence, but none either of violent disorder or of hurried departure. In one bedroom, which he surmised to have been Cluffe's, he found a considerable quantity of male apparel and the usual masculine toilet apparatus. But some suitcases stacked in a corner were empty, and the two hats and the overcoat hanging from a bracket in the hall seemed to indicate that, if Cluffe had gone away, he had probably gone bareheaded and overcoatless and had left most of his wardrobe behind.

Numerous souvenirs of recently departed femininity were visible in odd places—laddered stockings, a lipstick, empty powder tins and cream pots, some illustrated fashion journals. And the shut-up interior was haunted by a musty odour compounded of stale cigarette smoke and stale perfume. Soiled plates and cups and saucers and glasses, empty bottles, unemptied ash trays and cigarette ends were everywhere. In a biscuit tin used as waste-paper basket were a large number of unopened envelopes, obviously containing tradesmen's bills. In one otherwise empty bedroom the bed was littered with soiled bed-linen and towels, a tablecloth over which a bottle of ink had been spilled, shoe cleaning tackle, old newspapers, and cracked gramophone records.

But, though he made a careful tour of inspection, Gore found nothing of a more sinister nature than a tin box containing a large number of little sealed paper packages resembling those which had been secreted in the old hat which he had discovered in such close proximity to Margesson's body. Curiosity induced him to pocket one of the little packets, and, as he was returning then to the chamber of death, he heard a vigorous knocking at the front door. Opening it, he saw Nugent, very much puffed, and holding in his hand a nickel-plated torch of unusually large dimensions.

"I got through to the police station all right, sir," the chauffeur announced between gasps. "They're coming along at once. This is the Colonel's torch, sir—I'd swear to it anywhere. I found it lying on the road—I mean this road coming up here. Right down at the bottom of it, it was—just this side of the bridge over the river I told you about—Must have been where they did for him, down there, sir. The ground's all trampled; you'd think a pack of elephants'd been over it." Nugent rubbed his ear in puzzlement. "However he was got to where we found him . . . a big heavy gentleman like him. . . . And if they took so much trouble to hide him out of sight—why did they leave this torch lying about down there for anyone to find and start wondering about? You don't hardly ever see a torch this size, do you, sir? Anyone that found it would——"

"What about the telephone wire?" Gore interrupted.

"That's all right, sir, as far as I could see."

Examination of the instrument in the hall, inspired by this report, revealed that the cable had been severed indoors in the course of its passage along a projecting beading to its exit at the front door, the staples which secured it having retained it in position. If its specific purpose remained obscure, the interruption of both the bungalow's and Cullerside's telephone communications had been due to deliberate sabotage, then, and not to accident. However, for reasons of his own, Gore was anxious to get back to the house before the police arrived there. And, when a hurried inspection of

the big shed at the back had revealed in its interior nothing more illuminating than a quantity of empty bottles and a large costumier's box, empty save for an ornamental button, he posted Nugent on the roadway with strict instructions to allow no one except the police to pass him, and then, without confiding to the sentry the secret over which he was to stand guard, left him and went back through the wood.

From the housemaid, busy in the hall with her morning "doing," despite her obvious suspicion that there was "something up," he learned that Mrs. Margesson was still probably asleep, as her maid, Georgina, had not yet come downstairs to ask for her mistress's tea, which was usually taken up to her about half-past eight.

He glanced at his watch.

"Just half-past now. Tell me—Hetty's your name, isn't it? Well, tell me, Hetty—there was a visitor here yesterday, wasn't there—to see Mrs. Margesson? Round about seven o'clock. A gentleman—well—about my age—with a black shade over one eye?"

"Yes, sir," replied Hetty without hesitation. "But I can't tell you who he was, if that's what you want to know. He wouldn't give any name—just said that Mrs. Margesson expected him. . . ."

"I see. Rather a curt sort of gentleman. He came about seven?"

"A little before seven, sir. Curt? He frightened the life out of me when I opened the door and saw him—with his black patch and his other eye looking at me so wild and fierce."

"The Colonel hadn't got back from London yet?"

"No, sir. He didn't come till a good bit after."

"But the fierce gentleman with the eyeshade was still here when the Colonel came?"

"Still here? I should think he was, sir. Whoever he was, the Colonel had to put him out of the house in the end. I never heard a gentleman carry on the way he did—cursing and swearing and shaking his fists. . . . Him and the Colonel had a regular stand-up fight in the hall, before the Colonel could get him out through the door. Shockin', it was, the way he carried on."

"Dear-dear!" clucked Gore sympathetically. "It would have been about half-past seven, I suppose, when he left?"

"Yes. About that, sir."

"Did you see the scrap in the hall yourself?"

"Oh, yes, sir. We were on the stairs—me and the parlourmaid. We'd wondered what all the row was about."

"Of course, yes. And the black eyeshade—was the fierce gentleman still wearing that when he was put out through the hall door?"

“Yes, he was, sir—but it had got round to the back of his head and the string had got into his mouth between his teeth, and he couldn’t get it out, because the Colonel had hold of his arms. . . . Me and the parlourmaid had to laugh at the faces he was making trying to get it out of his mouth. . . . Terrible he looked.”

“Did he have a car?”

“Yes, sir. An awful shabby old car—like himself. Me and the parlourmaid thought he must be Irish by the way he spoke.” The housemaid’s curiosity found encouragement in the twinkling smile which this conjecture of hers had elicited. “Has the Colonel been took ill, sir?” she asked, lowering her voice to a mysteriousness that could be quickly transformed, if necessary, to sympathetic regret.

“I’m afraid so, Hetty,” Gore replied gravely.

“Is he over at the school, sir?”

“Why do you ask that?”

“Oh, well—we just thought he might be over there, sir.”

But this surmise, it transpired, was not at all so vague as Hetty’s reply had suggested. In point of fact, Gore learned, she and the parlourmaid had heard from their beds both the Colonel’s slamming of the hall door and a ringing of the telephone-bell which had preceded it by but a very few minutes. And, while they had been surprised by this late outgoing of his, they had jointly concluded that he had been rung up by one of the masters at the school and asked to go over there to play bridge, as he very frequently did in the evenings—though never before at such a late hour. The discovery that he had not slept at home had led them to believe further that he had been taken ill over at the school and had been obliged to spend the night there.

While the housemaid was still engaged in this explanation, a very plain and unprepossessing young woman descended the stairs with light fleetness, her dark sullen eyes fixed on the unfamiliar figure in the hall. Mrs. Margesson’s maid, it seemed, did not wear the customary black and white of her vocation; her tall, graceful figure was attired in well-cut tweeds. She passed on towards the rear of the house with a curt “Good morning, Hetty!” to which the housemaid replied with an equally reserved “Good morning, Georgina!” but stopped to look back quickly as a car drew up with screeching brakes outside the open hall door. Turning towards the sound, Gore saw two uniformed figures alight and salute the occupant of a second car which drew up behind the first.

With a friendly, “Thanks, Hetty—sorry to have interrupted you,” Gore went out to meet the two police constables in the porch. They eyed him

speculatively and then the older man of the two, a bronzed, tranquil, voiced Hercules, took a step forward.

“You’ll be the gentleman who found the body, I suppose?” he conjectured.

“Three, I regret to say,” Gore replied gravely.

P.C. Yallow gave proof at once that he was worthy of the charge entrusted to him in the unavoidable absence of Sergeant Rendall, off duty and in the cottage hospital with a gravely-injured eye. He stared, felt for his notebook while he stared, opened it carefully while he continued to stare, said with superb calmness, “Been busy up here this morning, sir, haven’t you?” and then gave his pencil a preliminary waggle.

“Name, please?”

‡ ‡ ‡

CHAPTER NINE

Two more cars arrived, one of them containing a local surgeon called to collaborate with little Dr. Brownrigg, the other uniformed reinforcements which included a photographer. The two doctors expressing anxiety to get to their work without delay, Gore made his account of himself and his discoveries as brief as possible. Colonel Margesson, for whom his firm had been making some investigations with regard to the tenant of his bungalow, had asked him overnight—somewhat urgently but without any expressed explicit reason—to come down to see him. In consequence of statements made to him by Colonel Margesson’s servants on his arrival at 6.15 a.m., he and the chauffeur had gone up to the bungalow in search of him but had failed to find him there. He detailed the successive steps that had led to the finding of Margesson’s body—the footprints, the eyeshade, the hat, and the marks in the undergrowth, and then passed on to the reasons which had induced him to make entrance into the bungalow and so discover the bodies of—as he believed—Margesson’s son and daughter. With so much, P.C. Yallow declared himself content for the time being, and the party of seven moved off rapidly through the wood in silence and single file.

P.C. Yallow was a very intelligent and conscientious officer whom the experience gained in two previous murder cases had rendered meticulously cautious in regard to collateral detail. His investigations in the wood and at the bungalow, with their attendant technical operations, were conducted with admirable thoroughness and efficiency, and complete indifference to the passage of time.

But, from the start, Gore, who though unobtrusively but firmly excluded from participation in these activities, remained by request attendant upon them, divined that he was also being excluded in another way. The police, it became clear, were in possession of some information which had already provided them with a definite theory, if not a definite conviction, with regard to the three murders.

P.C. Yallow's impassive taciturnity had not altogether concealed his satisfaction when he had learned that a hat not belonging to Margesson had been found near his body, and he had looked at his colleagues with a significant "Good enough!" The doctors' agreed surmise that Margesson had first been beaten into insensibility, possibly with some blunt weapon, possibly by blows delivered by the fists of an extremely powerful assailant, and subsequently throttled to death, had elicited from him an equally significant "Just so." Dr. Brownrigg's ejaculation of confounded horror at sight of the two victims up at the bungalow: "Good God . . . the whole family . . . !" caused another official interchange of looks. Any direct personal knowledge that Nugent was able to impart concerning the bungalow, its tenants and his friends, and the lorries which visited it, was attentively listened to and duly noted, but Yallow's interest at once returned to the hat and the little paper packages stuck in its grease-band. For the similar packages which Gore had discovered in the bungalow had been rediscovered and immediately associated by Yallow with those in the hat. Moreover, the two doctors had agreed that the contents of two packets selected were cocaine. And Dr. Brownrigg had further been induced to state, with obvious reluctance, his belief that cocaine was in common use as a local anæsthetic for animals as well as for human beings. And P.C. Yallow's "That was what I thought, Doctor," had been almost exultant.

But the investigation of the bungalow and its surroundings went on methodically and interminably. Everything was looked at, measured, tried for fingerprints, photographed, noted in exhaustive detail. But there were no illuminating comments from the workers or their director, and Gore himself volunteered none. Learning that an ambulance was expected shortly, he strayed down the roadway towards the main road unobtrusively, to view the trampled area discovered by Nugent before any wheels passed over it. In point of fact, he found two freshly-trampled areas, one about half-way down to the concrete bridge, the other, more extensive, only a short distance from it. The trampling in both cases had taken place considerably after the rain had begun to fall, and also after any vehicle had passed up or down the roadway. For the marks of heels and toes had dug deep into muddy clay and softened turf and the fragments of these which had dropped into the deep ruts showed no trace of flattening by the weight of a heavy vehicle's wheels.

But, though two pairs of feet had left many clear prints there, neither pair had worn rubber soles of the kind that had left its prints on those two rabbit-scrapes up in the wood. Margesson's torch had found its way to the bottom of the bungalow's roadway. But there was no sign to show that Margesson himself had accompanied it.

While Gore still stood musing, a young man clad in shorts and sweater appeared on the little humpbacked bridge and, after some hesitating, came on towards him. He introduced himself pleasantly as one of the masters of the nearby Grammar School, said that his name was Spannett and that he had been out for a breather and was getting back to lunch and the dear old grind, and then asked politely if Gore had lost anything.

Recalling Margesson's reference to a Mr. Spannett from the school, who had told him about the misadventure of a laundrymaid and her boy friend in the Cullerside woods, Gore smiled amicably.

"Colonel Margesson lost a torch somewhere round here," he explained. "By the way—I've heard him speak of you, Mr. Spannett. . . . He goes over to the school sometimes to play bridge, doesn't he? Did you ring him up last night by any chance—late—around eleven?"

Spannett shook his tousled flaxen head.

"No. As a matter of fact the Head had suggested ringing him up just after dinner to ask him to come over. But I knew that he had gone up to London. . . . So we didn't. Has he come back then?"

"Yes, Mr. Spannett—unfortunately."

The master's forehead wrinkled for a moment. But then his smile reappeared.

"Oh—I understand now. . . . Yes—I expect he's rather worked up about that super torch—of his. He's very proud of it. . . . Well—I'm afraid I can't stay to help you find it. . . . There's that infernal bell. . . . Good-bye. . . ."

Returning to the bungalow, Gore found P.C. Yallow in grave conference with little Dr. Brownrigg, and, to his surprise, was invited to join them by a purposeful "Colonel——Just a minute——" The matter under discussion, he discovered, was the manner in which Mrs. Margesson was to be informed of the tragedy which had deprived her at one fell stroke of her husband and her two children. Dr. Brownrigg was of opinion that the gravest of results might follow if she was informed of it save in the most cautious and gradual way and that, for the present at any rate, she should be kept in entire ignorance of it. . . . Yallow, though as a man entirely sympathetic, as a policeman felt that the efficient discharge of his duty must, for him, outweigh all other considerations. . . . All possible pertinent information must be obtained as quickly as possible. And Mrs. Margesson, it was only reasonable to believe, must have a great deal of pertinent information to

give. He had understood that Colonel Gore had been a personal friend of Colonel Margesson's. It had occurred to him that perhaps, in the first instance, Colonel Gore might be willing to—well, to break the ice——

But Colonel Gore refused most emphatically to do anything of the sort. He had never known Colonel Margesson at all intimately—had only spoken to Mrs. Margesson once in his life, and that twenty-five years ago. He entirely agreed with Dr. Brownrigg that the evil tidings should be kept from her until her own relatives could communicate them to her. They should clearly be summoned at once.

“Quite right, quite right,” approved the little doctor warmly. “The only possible course. I warn you, Yallow—if you blunder in on this unfortunate lady and blurt out that her husband and her children have been murdered, you'll do it at your own very serious risk——”

P.C. Yallow received this admonition respectfully but with complete serenity.

“Very well, Doctor,” he said. “I have your professional opinion now on that point. As a matter of fact, I think we can carry on quite well with what we've got. Here's the ambulance coming up now. When will you and Mr. Hepburn do the P.M.?”

“When we've had some lunch,” replied Dr. Brownrigg, turning away. “Not before.”

P.C. Yallow smiled genially as he turned to Gore.

“I expect *your* breakfast seems a long time ago, too, sir, by now——”

“The last one happened yesterday,” smiled Gore.

Real concern shadowed Yallow's handsome, sunburnt face. He was sure he needn't keep Colonel Gore hanging about up there any longer. He recommended the Stag's Head strongly—was gratified to learn that Colonel Gore would probably stay the night there and would be available if further needed—stated that the inquests would probably not take place until the following Tuesday at earliest—which he hoped would suit Colonel Gore—and finally saluted Colonel Gore in farewell with punctilious correctness.

But then his expression changed abruptly. His arm shot up and, emitting a stentorian “Back there!” he moved down threateningly on a line of skirmishers advancing up the slope among the trees in open order, pushing through the undergrowth the bicycles which had carried them out from the town. Somehow or other, Cullerton had got wind of the doings up at Cullerside, and it was Saturday afternoon.

Well, Gore reflected, as he drove away from the stricken house, that was that, and he was out of a job and had missed a cheery, pleasant week-end for

nothing. Yallow seemed to have a pretty clear idea of what he was going to do next; and, anyhow, it was no concern of Gore & Tolley's what Yallow did or didn't do. However, when he reached the town he paid a visit to the post office and, Inspector Granley not being at the Yard just then, delivered a message for him to a subordinate. And having done so much towards ensuring that Cluffe and his late guests at the bungalow would receive any official attention which seemed due to them, he adjourned to the Stag's Head across the street.

At the Head, lunch had been off for over an hour. But when it had assigned him a sixteenth century bedroom, its dignified head waiter produced "The best we can do for you, sir." The whole town was talking about a shocking affair which had taken place during the night just outside it, Henry informed him while he set a table by the fire in order. And, though he had no suspicion of the new guests' connection with its discovery, he entertained him, as he came and went, with what he considered its more interesting and dramatic details.

Not that he, Henry himself, took much interest in murders and that sort of thing. His references to the excitement in the town and the rumours that were causing it preserved a slightly distasteful detachment. But of course, like everyone else, he had known Colonel Margesson well by sight—known the Colonel's daughter and son by more than sight and, he conveyed, only too well, since they had been frequent and none too welcome visitors to the Head. In fact, only on Wednesday afternoon last, Miss Margesson had been in the house with some friends and—well, Henry was sorry to have to say, she and her party had behaved themselves in such a way in the lounge that the Guv'nor had had to ask them to leave. A nice poor little thing enough, in her way, if she'd been properly looked after, as any young girl should be, by her mother. But the mother was an invalid, and she'd been allowed to get in with—well, some very queer friends. A terrible pity. And now, look at the end of her. Found dead and murdered—without a stitch hardly on her, they said—in that bungalow out there where she and her friends had carried on. . . . Well—it had been the talk of the whole neighbourhood, the carryings on out there. And her brother beside her—murdered, too, poor, silly, white-faced little chap. . . . Only a boy—led away by two—well, Henry had always said that those two chaps were real bad 'uns. Two London smoothies—'cute as foxes. Radville and Bethune, their names had been. Everybody was asking what had become of them and the two swanky bits-of-goods they'd had staying with them out there. Some said that they'd all been arrested in Plymouth. But you were told that all sorts of people had been arrested. . . .

When Gore adjourned presently to the lounge for his coffee, Henry wondered if he'd mind signing the register in the hall *en route*. The guest's eye fell on a sprawling signature just above the line that cut off September 30th from October 1st.

"O'Malley-Martyn," he commented. "Is Colonel O'Malley-Martyn staying here at present, then?"

"He stayed last night, sir. But he left early this morning. A friend of yours, sir?"

"Yes. Though we haven't met, actually, for a long time. I'm sorry to have missed him. He lives at Bournemouth now, I see. I wonder if I could. . . . Do you happen to know his address there?"

But Colonel O'Malley-Martyn had never visited the Stag's Head before and Gore went on his way to the lounge.

"Colonel O'Malley-Martyn lost an eye in France, I seem to remember," he said musingly when his coffee arrived. "I expect he has a glass eye now."

"No, sir. At least, if he has, he wasn't wearing it while he was here."

"Oh! Wears a shade then, I suppose?"

"No, sir. You'd think he *would* wear a shade, with a disfigurement like that. But I suppose, sir, he's got used to it himself and doesn't trouble his head about what other people think. A bit what you'd call hot stuff, sir, isn't he? Other people and what they think don't matter much to *him*."

"No?" smiled Gore invitingly.

And Henry described how Colonel O'Malley-Martyn had arrived in his car about eight o'clock on the preceding evening, very short and curt—engaged a room for the night—ordered some sandwiches and a large whisky—he had insisted that the whisky should be Irish—to be brought up to it—and remained hidden from view, presumably in his bed, until about midnight. He had suddenly reappeared then, demanded and settled his bill, and gone off in his car with his suitcase. But close on two o'clock he had returned and, without explanation, re-engaged his room and directed that he should be called at 5 a.m. And a very little after that very inconvenient hour he had gone off in his car again. Henry thought that Colonel O'Malley-Martyn must have had some sort of accident between his first departure and his second arrival. For the night-porter, who had opened the garage for him and seen him off the premises, had noticed that the wings of his car had been crumpled badly and that he himself had apparently suffered some injury, since he had walked with a hobble and had seemed very nervous about reversing the car out of the yard into the street.

Henry disappeared once more and Gore fell to rather sleepy musing while he sipped his excellent coffee. A curious business, this resurrection of Mrs. Margesson's first husband, in itself. A very curious business, when one

reflected that it had preceded the murder of her second husband by but a few hours. That thought had occurred to Gore immediately at sight of the eyeshade in the boilerman's hand. For, having immediately guessed that it was the property of the preceding evening's visitor to Cullerside, the obvious question had immediately presented itself—what had taken O'Malley-Martyn up into that part of Cullerside's woods—and when had it taken him there? The thought had recurred to him on hearing the demure-eyed Hetty's replies to his questions about the visitor. O'Malley-Martyn had gone away from the house—in his car, wearing his eyeshade—by the only way one *could* go away from Cullerside in a car—along Cullerside's private road. How, then, had he come to lose his eyeshade along a path which no car could travel and running in exactly the opposite direction to the private road?

And *now*—what about O'Malley-Martyn and his shade? He had arrived at the Stag's Head about eight o'clock, having left Cullerside—only a couple of miles away—about half-past seven. And he had arrived without an eyeshade. . . . It had been quite dark at half-past seven. Nothing to see at any time, anyhow, from that path through the woods. . . . The path led nowhere, apparently, except to the bungalow.

Always been a queer sort of fish, O'Malley-Martyn—always doing unexpected things. But never without what seemed to him, anyhow, a good enough reason. What the deuce had he wanted to go through all that performance last night for? Must have had a smash—somewhere along the Ockenford road—for that was his road for Bournemouth. Apparently his decision to go to London had only been arrived at in the morning. . . .

An odd coincidence—For O'Malley-Martyn, then, might quite possibly have been passing along the Ockenford road at the very time when his successor in the beautiful Enid's affections was being bashed and throttled to death up there in the woods running alongside it, across the river—and when his successor's daughter—if not her brother as well—had been

A damned odd coincidence—if you remembered that scrap in the hall at Cullerside only a few hours before—and where the eyeshade had been found—and the hobbling and the nervousness. . . .

Damned odd. But damned odd coincidences were always happening. . . .

Gore felt unsuccessfully in his pockets, rose, and, proceeding to the hall, removed from those of the Burberry which he had hung up there on his arrival, various small possessions—cigarette-case, pipe and pouch, matches, a little sealed packet, and, to his surprise—for he didn't remember having put it into his pocket—a limp and very soiled piece of card, crumpled into a wisp. He looked round for some receptacle in which to deposit the

disreputable object but, seeing none, took it back to his seat in the lounge with his other belongings, and opened his cigarette-case—only to find it empty. Only then did he recall his largesse to the boilerman and the resolve, made when he had surrendered the eyeshade to P.C. Yallow, to refill the case from the reserve supply in his suitcase. However, his pouch was full, and he lighted his pipe philosophically and resumed his desultory musings.

But almost immediately Henry again appeared, walking now with not quite dignified haste.

“If you’re interested about this murder business, sir, I think the police have arrested someone for it. At least, everybody’s saying, I’m told, that he’s the one that committed the murders—for what that’s worth. But anyhow, there’s a policeman walking him up the street. . . Come and have a look, sir. There’s quite a crowd following them. . . .”

Curious to discover who the suspect might be, Gore rose and followed to the porch. But the big breeched and legginged man whom a mob, composed almost entirely of hobbledoys and young girls, was following at an obviously cautious distance, booing and cat-calling and shouting presumably opprobrious remarks, was under protective escort merely, it proved, and not arrest. For the policeman had fallen several yards to the rear, pausing at intervals to check the demonstrators with a gaze of menacing sternness. And presently the big man, who was obviously at least partially intoxicated, got into a big car and was driven away amidst a storm of hisses.

“Who is the gentleman in the leggings?” Gore asked.

“A bloke called Bryant,” replied an affable voice behind him, and, looking round, he saw that Henry had disappeared and had been replaced by one of the Stag’s Head’s other guests, who he had previously encountered on the stairs.

“He’s a vet.,” continued the sociable stranger. “Reason they’ve got their knife into him is they think it was him pulled off this business last night. Maybe they’re right, too. He’s a pretty tough guy, the same bloke. You a stranger in these parts, then, sir?”

The speaker’s eyes—an unusual pair of eyes, apart from the very black and bushy eyebrows which over-shadowed their vigilant intentness—made swift appraisal of Gore, and plainly arrived at an estimate satisfactory to their owner. With easy friendliness he embarked upon a vivid and spirited account of the encounter between Bryant and this very chap Margesson which he and the whole blinkin’ town had witnessed on the preceding Wednesday, and then related the story of the cat’s doing to death with a wealth of detail collected, he assured his listener, from the most trustworthy sources. Since Wednesday, he knew for a fact, Bryant had been going round telling the world what he was going to do to Margesson next time he met

him. Mr. Birmingham—for that, he had stated, was his name—parted reluctantly with the butt of the very inferior cigar which he had been smoking, and then expectorated at it with great force and accuracy.

“Well—maybe he’s done what he said he’d do. Or some of it. Maybe not. *I* don’t know. I’m just a stranger here like yourself, staying for a few days on a bit of business I got to look after down here. I’m only telling you what I’ve heard said about the town and in the bar here.”

“What strikes me about it,” commented Gore, “is that, if Colonel Margesson was able to handle him so easily once. . . .”

“Bryant was too drunk to make a fight of it then, you see. If he’d been sober. . . . Well, I’ll tell you——! That sock on the jaw Margesson gave him sobered him a bit—and it took three big rozzers to get him to the station. I saw that with my own eyes. One of them—the sergeant—he got such a doing that he’s in hospital still. Going to lose one of his peepers over the job, I hear. ’Course, I needn’t tell you—if the rozzers can get him, they will—if it’s only for a few nice quiet minutes somewhere private. Just the same, you can take it from me—he *could* have done this job out there all right. An’ I know for a blinkin’ fact that he was seen out that way late last night, seen around twelve o’clock going out there and seen again at two o’clock, coming back—left his bike out there in a ditch, too. He’s been goin’ about on a push-bike a lot, you see, since his driving licence was took away. Still—you’re innocent till they prove you guilty, aren’t you? Stayin’ long down here?”

“Just the night,” replied Gore.

“Long enough in this cock-eyed burg,” said Birmingham with conviction. “’Less you have business to keep you.” He turned to greet an acquaintance who had just parked his car and was now approaching the porch, removing a pair of gauntlets from his long-fingered hands as he came.

“Afternoon. Mr. Purefoy. Taken up nicely now, hasn’t it? Come in for the sale at the Vicarage, I suppose? Opens this afternoon, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” nodded the new arrival pleasantly, pausing to look up the street with his handsome, long-lashed eyes. “What’s all the excitement about?”

Birmingham repeated his bombardment of the discarded cigar butt carefully. “Haven’t heard the news, then?”

“News?” repeated Mr. Purefoy. “What . . . don’t tell me Hitler has marched into Czechoslovakia?”

Gore smiled and returned to the lounge, asked Henry for some more coffee and some cigarettes, and opened the *Daily Telegraph* discovered on a nearby table. But when he had skimmed the headlines, he dropped it to his knees and, Henry returning with his coffee and cigarettes, began to consider

the information which his chatty fellow guest had just imparted to him. Whatever else one might surmise about Slogger Margesson's ghastly ending, one seemed compelled to believe that he had been killed by an assailant of very unusual strength and of almost insane ferocity—most probably, the two doctors had seemed inclined to agree, without the employment of any other weapon than the murderer's own hands. There could be no doubt that the young Margessons had both died, if not both at the same time and in the same place—by the same hands. Everything, then, seemed to point to the conjecture that the three killings were the revenging of some vital injury inflicted on the killer by Margesson. This chap, Bryant, it seemed, fitted into the picture with very convincing accuracy—a big, violent-tempered, hard-drinking brute, apparently—whose means of livelihood had been almost completely cut off at one blow—a blow delivered by Margesson—It seemed pretty certain that he had been in the close neighbourhood of Cullerside between midnight and 2 a.m.

Yes—it looked ugly enough for Mr. Bryant—at first glance, anyhow. But what *had* become of Cluffe? When had Cluffe cleared out in his car—leaving all his belongings behind him? Leaving, it seemed, the young Margessons behind him at the bungalow? Why should they have remained at the bungalow after he had gone away? How could this fellow Bryant have known that Cluffe had gone away and left them behind there? How could he have known that Margesson would go up to the bungalow—on just the right night—and at just the right hour?

As Gore reached out a hand abstractedly and began to collect his belongings and stow them away in his pockets, his eyes rested again on the crumpled piece of card and, unfolding it, he studied its prosaic message once more. He was about to consign it to the fire when a sudden second thought occurred to him. Crumpled and twisted as it was, most certainly no lorry wheel had passed over it, though it had lain in one of the two deep ruts in which, equally certainly, the wheels of any vehicle using the bungalow's roadway must have travelled—unavoidably, owing to the narrowness of the roadway and the width and depth of the ruts themselves. It had found its way into that rut, then, after those lorries had gone away. For, going to and coming from the big shed at the back, they must have passed over the spot on the roadway where he himself had found it, just opposite the path leading to the bungalow's front door. If it had been thrown away by someone in the cab of one of the lorries as they had gone away, it couldn't possibly have fallen into a rut, wherever else it might have fallen.

So then, it had got into that rut after the lorries and their crews had gone, apparently. But who had dropped, or thrown it into the rut? It had been attached obviously, to those two keys—both opening the door of the shed.

The keys, obviously, had been left somewhere where the people with the lorries would be sure to find them when they arrived—almost certainly in the lock of the shed’s door. When the people with the lorries had used them and locked up the shed, they had dropped them in through the kitchen window, as the message on the card had directed them to do. Obviously it had not been they who had dropped the piece of card into the rut—for that matter, Gore supposed, they had probably not bothered to detach it from the keys—and even if they had done so, or it had become detached from the keys by accident, it would have been thrown away or have fallen to the ground between the door of the shed and the kitchen window—twenty or thirty yards away from the place where he had found it. So, it seemed, after the lorries had gone away, someone had taken the trouble to remove the piece of card from wherever it had been left, and—eventually—deliberately or unconsciously dropped it into that rut. . . .

Who had done that—and why had it been done? It was beginning to grow clear that accurate answers to those questions might be of considerable importance. . . .

Someone, it seemed, had wished to ensure that it should appear to the people with the lorries, when they arrived, that there was no one about or in the bungalow—or that, if there was anyone, he, she or they didn’t want to be disturbed. Again—who—and why?

The lorries had gone away shortly after 11 p.m. But apparently it had been around 12 p.m. when Bryant had been seen going out along the Ockenford road—presumably on or with the bicycle—something close on an hour and a half after that message had been printed on the piece of card so neatly and carefully.

Cluffe? But Cluffe had gone away almost certainly in his Bentley. And what applied to the wheels of the lorries applied to the wheels of the Bentley. So it would appear that it had not been he who had dropped the piece of card into the rut.

Then who had—if neither Bryant nor Cluffe nor the people with the lorries had? Gore felt convinced that the writer of the message and the person who had dropped it into the rut had been one and the same—Whoever he had been, he had been at the bungalow before the lorries had arrived at 11 p.m.—and at it after they had gone away. Probably he had been inside it when the lorries had arrived—trusting that the message on the card would prevent his being disturbed. . . . Why?

Well, there was one obvious answer to that question, of course. The Margesson girl and her brother were lying dead in the bungalow when the lorries had arrived. The writer of the message had known that they would arrive, and had taken his precautions accordingly. After they had gone away,

he had gone out, found that the piece of card had been dropped somewhere near the shed, picked it up, crumpled it in his hand, gone on to the roadway to look down it to make sure that the lorries had turned it into the main road and were finished with, and then just chucked the bit of card away. A foolish, risky thing to—But even if he had realized that, he would remember that he had carefully printed his message in block capitals. . . .

Difficult to imagine how Bryant could have known that the lorries were to arrive. . . . But Cluffe, of course, would have known. . . . Cluffe would have had to get his car out of sight, too, before they came—if it was he who had written that message. . . . So he might have taken it down to the main road before they came, and parked it in some safe place down there. He'd go back to the bungalow—in case curiosity made the people with the lorries too inquisitive he would have to be on the spot to bluff them somehow. . . . When they had gone, he would have been able to get on with the rest of the job—entice Margesson up to the bungalow—ring him up, perhaps, and tell him that his rebellious daughter was up there. . . .

But—for the love of Mike—for what conceivable reason could Cluffe—alone or with assistance—have wanted to murder Margesson? Or Margesson's son? The girl . . . ? Well—one could conceive a waster of his type killing a girl whom he had got into trouble, say—and who was making trouble for him. A common sort of crime enough. But the other two—her father and her brother. . . .

Absolutely out of the question that, single-handed, a fellow of duff's type, as Kestheven had described him physically, could have killed Slogger Margesson as he had been killed. . . .

Colonel Gore had had a night without sleep, a long and rather trying morning, and—despite Henry's apologies—an excellent lunch. No use trying to build up theories on quite inadequate data. He surveyed the bedraggled piece of card again for a yawning moment, restored it carefully to its former creases, put it into a breast pocket, and then stretched vigorously, wondering what Cullerton offered towards the filling in of the remainder of the afternoon. He knew several people settled in that part of Devonshire—old sweats, most of them. But none of them lived within just easy reach from Cullerton; and in any case he didn't feel like visit-paying. He glanced towards the exterior sunshine visible at the end of the perspective formed by the hall and the porch. Pity to stay indoors—Quite a good afternoon now.

CHAPTER TEN

The chatty individual with the eyebrows and his acquaintance had remained in conversation in the porch—no doubt discussing the Cullerside affair. But now they had entered the hall and were bending over the register, which lay open on a table, expectant of guests to come. The man with the eyebrows pointed to its pages and, when his companion had studied them for some moments, both turned to look inwards towards Gore, no doubt identifying him with the last signature. They came on, then, into the lounge slowly, engaged in a little discussion. The dapper, very handsome man with the trim little beard and the flowing tie wanted some coffee, it appeared, before going on to the Arts and Crafts Club's sale. His companion was endeavouring to persuade him to ascend to his room, where the coffee could be reinforced, legally and pleasurably, with a little drop of something. But Mr. Purefoy declined this invitation—a little peremptorily, in the end—and they parted, one seating himself near the fire in the lounge, the other disappearing, presumably to enjoy a drop of something alone in his bedroom.

Despite his excellent English, Mr. Purefoy spoke with a slightly foreign accent. And a certain decorativeness in his attire, together with his beard and his eloquent long-fingered hands, seemed to confirm Gore's first impression that his unusual surname, as pronounced by his friend with the eyebrows and by Henry, was a British version of an exotic original. The charming courtesy with which he bestowed some little commonplaces upon the only other occupant of the lounge, after a smiling "Good afternoon!" was unmistakably Gallic. And Gore responded to it at first with that slightly amused amity which the Anglo-Saxon employs as his conversational medium with the foreigner.

But this surmise proved mistaken. After a shocked allusion to the news which he had just heard, Mr. Purefoy passed on, inevitably, to the international situation, concerning which he confessed himself pessimistic. Hitler would do what he had been getting ready to do for three years.

"As for our thinking that we can sloother him out of doing it—that seems to me just pathetic."

Gore cocked an eyebrow.

"Sloother—It's a long time since I heard that word," he commented.

Mr. Purefoy's hand made another little gesture. "Oh, well—it's an expressive word. Ah—here is my coffee. Come along, Henry. I promised the vicar faithfully that I'd help him to receive Lady Rowbourne."

While he swallowed his steaming coffee with valiant haste, he explained to Gore that the sale for which he was bound was an annual affair held in aid

of the local Cottage Hospital. Not quite a jumble sale—but very nearly as shamelessly extortionate. All sorts of perfectly useless things for sale—some of his own daubs included. In the cause of such a deserving charity, he suggested that Gore might like to expend at least a shilling on an admission ticket. The vicarage grounds were not five minutes walk away.

At the word “daubs,” Henry had demonstrated protest respectfully.

“I ought to tell you, sir,” he informed Gore, “that this gentleman paints for the ’cademy up in London. You go and see his pictures down there at the sale, sir—and then you’ll know what he calls ‘daubs.’”

Gore was no sort of authority on Art or artists. But now, vaguely, he recalled the name Purefoy as one of those which one came across inevitably in almost any press notice of any Art exhibition. Mr. Purefoy’s attractive accent and eloquent gestures were mere mannerisms, then, picked up and employed, like the word “sloother,” for the sake of their expressive effect.

The artist finished his coffee and gathered up his gauntlets and his broad-brimmed hat.

“You will come along, sir, won’t you? Yes—I know you will. Sure you couldn’t spend a bob on a better cause.”

“Now, now!” laughed Gore. “You’re trying to sloother me, Mr. Purefoy, I’m afraid.”

Mr. Purefoy seemed for a moment a little put out by this response to his appeal. “I shouldn’t select you for any experiments of that sort, I think, sir,” he retorted rather stiffly. But then his smile returned. “But do come along. You’ll see all the local celebrities—including a countess. And you may be able to pick up a flannel nighty for a song. . . .”

And he hastened off with a wave of the hand and an enticing “*A bientôt.*” His friend with the eyebrows reappeared in the hall. But Mr. Purefoy was in too great a hurry to stop, and said so with a flourish of his gloves.

“It’d be really worth your while, sir, to go and have a look at his paintings,” Henry suggested, as he gathered up the coffee cups. “All sorts of paintings and drawings he does. It’s wonderful the way he can take off anyone in a moment on the back of an envelope or the back of his bill. Just a moment, sir, and I’ll show you one of his sketches he did here in this very lounge only the other day. It’s a likeness of that poor young creature that’s been murdered, funny enough. He gave it to Miss Mowlem—that’s our barmaid here—because she wanted to have it. I’ll ask her for it. . . . Excuse me for a moment, sir.”

When he returned after some minutes, Miss Mowlem accompanied him.

“I’m so sorry,” she apologized, “but I’m afraid it’s in rather a bad condition. I showed it to poor Miss Margesson herself, you see—it was silly of me—but I thought it might do her good to see what she looked like when

—well—when she'd had too much to drink. . . . And she snatched it out of my hand and crumpled it up and threw it into the basin I was using to bathe her face. However, anyone that knew her would know that it was her, still. . . .”

Gore knew, at any rate, enough about Art to realize that he was looking at something like a masterpiece—one of those terse, vivid, effortless translations of diffuse reality into simple significance which are the despair of the amateur. In a few pencil strokes, swiftly and unerringly, Mr. Purefoy had written a tragedy. Or—it seemed—the first act of one, at least. For he had written beneath his sketch of Joan Margesson the words, “*Et après?*” above his initials and the date.

“I’ve only kept it,” said Miss Mowlem, “just because I didn’t like to destroy it. But I can’t bear to look at it. Now, especially. . . . It’s almost in her face, isn’t it, that something terrible was going to happen her? I remember I said to Mr. Purefoy when he showed it to me that day—last Wednesday, it was—I said to him that it was wicked of him to have drawn her when she looked like that. I was just thinking that I’d throw it into the fire when Henry came in and said a gentleman would like to see it. I wish now I hadn’t shown it to her. But I only did it for her own good—really. I can assure you of that.”

Gore looked down sympathetically into her pretty, troubled face.

“I’m quite sure of that, indeed, Miss Mowlem. But you won’t throw it into the fire, will you?”

“I don’t want to keep it, now,” replied the barmaid. “Would you like to have it? You can, if you like.”

With becoming gratitude Gore accepted this offer, and, when Miss Mowlem had retired, ascended to his room and, after some further inspection of her gift, locked it up in his suitcase. When he reached the hall again, he found Henry awaiting him.

“I’ve been able to get Colonel O’Malley-Martyn’s address for you, sir. Before he left this morning, he wrote out a telegram in the night-porter’s book to—well, I suppose she must be his daughter—anyhow, she’s a Miss O’Malley-Martyn. The telegram was to say that he was going up to London and that she wasn’t to expect him until tomorrow evening. The post office wasn’t open, of course, at that hour—so he wrote it in the night-porter’s book for him to send off as soon as it opened.”

Gore made a memorandum of the Bournemouth address, returned the book to Henry with his thanks, obtained directions as to the Vicarage’s whereabouts, and set off there forthwith. But outside the long wooden hut which an artistic poster proclaimed the headquarters of the Cullerton Arts and Crafts Club, he found the vicar explaining to a little crowd of early

arrivals that, to his regret, it had been necessary to postpone the opening of the sale until the following Saturday. Lady Rowbourne herself had just rung up to suggest this gesture of sorrow and respect, which the vicar felt sure everyone would approve, despite the fact that so many intending patrons of the sale would have come a long distance, only to meet with disappointment. Everyone knew that Colonel Margesson had always taken the deepest interest in the admirable work performed by the Cottage Hospital—the deepest and the most generous interest. Everyone would feel that the terrible tragedy which had horrified the town and snatched him from their midst in the flower of his life rendered it unthinkable that a social function with which he had always been so closely associated since his arrival in their midst should, however laudable its aim. . . .

Cars continued to arrive—the crowd in the grounds continued to grow. The vicar moved from group to group repeating his regrets and apologies with desperate patience. A shirt-sleeved workman appeared bearing a home-made notice announcing: “SALE UNAVOIDABLY POSTPONED TO SATURDAY OCTOBER 8TH,” and attached it to a tree beside the gates. Gradually the grounds emptied, the gates were closed, and the vicar, mopping his benevolent and worried forehead, caught sight of Gore and moved patiently towards him.

“Oh—er—ah—we’ve had to postpone our sale, you know——”

But Mr. Purefoy appeared at the door of the hut and intervened with a grateful, “Oh—how nice of you to have come. I’m so sorry to have enticed you under false pretences. I’m sure you’ll understand. . . . Are you staying for any length of time?”

“No. I’m leaving tomorrow morning,” replied Gore. “But of course I quite understand. Though I had looked forward very much to seeing some of your work. . . .”

“Oh, well,” smiled the vicar consolingly, still mopping as he moved off towards the vicarage, “some other time, we hope. . . .”

Purefoy watched his retreat for a few moments and then winked naughtily. “Come along. He’s off to work poor old Margesson up into a sermon for tomorrow. Besides you can pay your bob to me. It’ll be quite safe. And you need only look at my masterpieces. I always like to keep my promises.”

It was impossible to resist his charming smile—as impossible as to decide whether he was twenty-five or forty-five. Gore followed him into the hut and inspected with the sincerest of admiration the six oil sketches and the dozen-odd drawings which formed his contribution to the miscellaneous display within. The drawings—all of them, Mr. Purefoy explained, sketches of well-known local celebrities, and many of them, by his admission,

caricatures—elicited from him special tributes of respectful praise. The artist was without concealment much gratified by this discrimination.

“I see you like the drawings best. Quite right. You see—beauty, colour, form, texture—all that means, comparatively, very little to me—in itself. And so I am a mediocre painter. But the eternal, universal struggle with ugliness—which is what life is, really—that interests me profoundly. It is always hidden—but it is always there—in everything—in everyone. And when I am watching for another glimpse of it—catching it before it disappears again—I am happy—I am doing what I was meant to do—and I do it—well—not so badly. And so my drawings are—not so bad. . . . But I’m boring you. . . .”

“Indeed, no,” Gore assured him, bending forward to scrutinize one of the drawings more closely. “What are they done with? It’s not pencil, is it?”

“A sort of pencil, yes. Carbon pencil. It is my favourite medium. You can get them in all grades.” Purefoy exhibited an assortment which he had fished from a pocket. “I always carry a supply about with me. I prefer them to lead pencil. I dislike the shine of lead pencil. You get no shine with these.”

“Rather like crayons, aren’t they?”

“’M’yes. But a much pleasanter black—not so brown in the lighter tones.”

“Do they smudge?”

“Well—a little—if the drawing is handled very carelessly. But you can spray the drawing with a fixative. . . . Hallo . . . ! Here’s one of my victims. . . .”

The big man whose bulk had suddenly blocked out the light of the door stood for some moments swaying on his breeched legs and then came ponderously and unsteadily towards them. His truculent visage, heavy-jowled and pig-eyed, was rendered still less engaging by several large abraded bruises distributed over its flabby, unshaven expanse.

“Here!” he demanded thickly, “what’s up, eh? There’s a sale on here today, isn’t there?”

“It has been postponed, Mr. Bryant,” Purefoy explained.

“Postponed? Why?”

“Well—on account of Colonel Margesson’s death.”

Bryant threw back his head in a scornful guffaw, and then thrust it forward towards the artist aggressively.

“What the hell’s that got to do with the sale? The sale’s for the hospital, isn’t it? What’s that bastard Margesson got to do with the hospital? All he ever did for it was to get his wife to write a cheque, and stick it in an envelope and send it along as if it was his own five quid he was parting

with. Listen——! Every year for over twenty years—on New Year’s Day, I’ve sent the treasurer of the hospital a cheque for twenty pounds—and it was my own twenty pounds—earned by my own work—and damned hard work, too—not scrounged off a woman who was keeping me. But do you think that if I got a kick in the guts from a horse tomorrow and pegged out, that bleating old hum-bug of a vicar would as much as take the trouble to leave a card on my wife? Not bloody likely. . . . Well—if you say the show’s off—it’s off, I suppose. . . .”

As he lurched back towards the door, Bryant paused.

“That dog of yours all right now?”

“Fit as a fiddle, thanks,” replied Purefoy.

“Ever hear anything more of that blighter he went for?”

“No. I don’t think he’s likely to give me any more trouble.”

“Umph! Wonder he didn’t try to get damages out of you.”

When the unprepossessing intruder had disappeared from view, Mr. Purefoy shrugged smilingly and expressively.

“Poor devil. Quite disappointed. Came here probably just to show that he doesn’t care a damn what people are saying or thinking about him. Rather embarrassing his turning up here like that . . . one doesn’t know what to think about these rumours. Personally, I’m rather prejudiced. . . . Because he did me a very considerable service a couple of months ago. A dog of mine was badly hurt by a tramp who came prowling about my premises while I was away. The dog managed to keep the chap pinned down until I got back . . . but one of his hind legs was broken and his back damaged. Bryant thought at first that he was going to be paralyzed permanently, and that he would have to be destroyed. However, he got him all right. I must say he was kindness itself to the dog. And you know how one values that sort of thing. So, as I say, I’m rather prejudiced——”

The vicar returned then in anxious quest of his fountain pen, and Gore left Mr. Purefoy to aid in the search for it and, having made his way through the Saturday-afternoon bustle of Bridge Street, paid a visit to the police station, where he found P.C. Yallow in charge.

“I forgot, stupidly, to give you this this morning,” he explained. “I thought I’d come along and hand it over. One never knows. . . .”

Yallow was a little glum—for an inspector had arrived from Exeter with several C.I.D. men and had taken control with unnecessary brusqueness. But his face relaxed into a friendly smile as he took charge of the crumpled piece of card and learned where it had been found.

“Very good of you to come along, sir. I hope they’re making you comfortable at the Stag’s Head. Very decent people there.” He raised his eyes from a perusal of the message on the card. “I’ll give this to Inspector

Hawley. As you're here, sir, I hope you didn't think this morning that I didn't appreciate the help you'd given us. As you realize yourself, it might easily have been several days before anyone would have come along to us and started us searching about up there."

"But I gathered that from the start you had a pretty clear idea. . . ."

"Yes—once we got the start, sir. All we knew when the chauffeur rang up was—well, there's no secret about it now—every kid in the town knows—that Bryant was out there last night. As far as that goes, he admits himself he was. He tells a cock-and-bull story, but—well, I'll show you his statement, and you can judge for yourself. . . ."

He took a jacket containing some sheets of foolscap from a drawer and handed it across the counter. "The other two are the statements of people who saw him last night."

The first statement, made by P. C. Lomax, was to the effect that at 12.15 a.m., on Oct. 1, 1938, while proceeding along the Ockenford road on his bicycle on patrol in the direction of the town, he had met Eustace Bryant riding a bicycle in the opposite direction, about three-quarters of a mile outside the town. He had recognized Bryant by the light of a passing car and had at first intended to follow him and point out that he was riding without a light, but, because Bryant had been so much in trouble with the police lately, had ultimately decided not to do so. At the time, Bryant had been wearing a Trilby hat and a raincoat. It had been raining heavily then. He had been riding rather unsteadily but pretty fast. P. C. Lomax had not seen him again before he had gone off duty at 1 a.m."

Herbert Davis, bank clerk, had seen Eustace Bryant, whom he knew well by sight, walking along Maggs Lane in the direction of his house at the end of the lane at, as nearly as he could estimate, 2.15 a.m., on Oct. 1, 1938. It had still been raining heavily then, but Bryant had not been wearing a hat or pushing a bicycle. He had passed close to Bryant, who had looked at him but had not returned his "Good night!"

George Sinclair, fitter, employed by the Cullerton Electrical Lighting Company, while cycling into the town to his work about 5 a.m., on Oct. 1, 1938, along the Ockenford road, had noticed a bicycle lying in the ditch at one side of the road, about a mile the town side of the Grammar School. Finding from a card attached to the toolbag that it belonged to Mr. Bryant the vet., he had brought it along and handed it over to the police. As far as he had seen, the bicycle, though old, had not been damaged in any way to prevent its being ridden. He had seen no hat near the bicycle nor anywhere else along the road.

"When we rang up Bryant's house to say that the bicycle was at the station," Yallow explained, "Mrs. Bryant asked if his hat had been found as

well, as he'd come home without one. So—well, of course, I guessed at once, when you showed me the hat you'd found, that it was his. He admits that it's his."

Bryant's own statement was much more voluminous. According to his own account, he had been rung up at his house at or about midnight on the night of September 30, 1938, by Mr. Radville, who had asked him to go out to his bungalow straight away, as he, Radville, was going up to London early next day and wanted particularly to see him before he went. Bryant had accordingly got on his bicycle and started out along the Ockenford road. It had been raining very heavily and the battery of the lamp on his machine had given out. Wearying of riding in the rain and darkness, he had left his bicycle in the ditch beside the road and begun to walk on, but, a car overtaking him after a little time, he had stopped it and obtained a lift on his way. At his request, the driver of the car had pulled in towards his offside, after passing the gates of the school, so that he could alight at the bridge over which ran the private roadway leading up to the bungalow. As the car had been veering across the road towards the bridge, a lorry had come along behind at great speed and in passing struck the car a glancing blow, very nearly overturned it, damaged its wings and, its driver had seemed to think, its steering gear.

Its owner had been greatly annoyed and, after watching him examining the damage for a little time Bryant had left him, crossed the bridge, and begun to ascend the roadway towards the bungalow. When he had gone some little way, he had fancied that someone was following him, keeping just behind him among the trees, and he had stopped to listen. However, he had gone on until, about half-way up to the bungalow, someone had sprung on him from behind, thrown him to the ground, and then, it was his belief, kicked him in the head. The next thing he could remember, he stated, was that he was on his hands and knees, trying to get to his feet. Succeeding in this, he had searched about in the darkness for his hat, but, having failed to find it, had set off back down the roadway, it being his belief that it had been the driver of the car who had followed him and attacked him. This surmise had proved correct. For, as he had neared the bridge, the driver of the car, who had been crouching in a gap in the bank bordering the roadway just there, had rushed at him again and knocked him senseless before he could defend himself.

He had no idea, he stated, how long he had remained insensible. When he had once more recovered his senses, he had crossed the bridge, seen no sign of the car or its driver, and set off to walk home. He had felt too sick and dizzy to retrieve his bicycle along the way and had made his whole homeward journey on foot.

He denied that he had been at or in the bungalow at any time during the night, or nearer to it than half-way up the roadway from the bridge. He had not seen either Colonel Margesson or either of his children or Mr. Radville or any other person whatever at any time between midnight and 2.30 a.m., except the driver of the car. He did not remember passing a constable on a bicycle, nor meeting anyone in Maggs Lane. He had had a good few drinks during the preceding day and evening, but had been perfectly sober when he had started out on his bicycle.

He could not explain how his hat had reached the place where it had been found. He had never been in the grounds of Colonel Margesson's house at any time in his life. He could not explain the finding of three packages of cocaine in his hat. As a qualified veterinary surgeon, he had no difficulty in obtaining any drug required for his professional work. He had never obtained any supply of cocaine from or through Mr. Radville nor ever heard him make any reference to that or any other drug. He rarely used cocaine—nearly always novocaine. He frequently carried small articles about inside his hat. He knew nothing whatever about the deaths of Colonel Margesson and his son and daughter.

He had not taken any particular notice of the driver of the car and could only say that he had been tall, middle-aged, and very curt in his manner. He had only travelled about a mile or so in the car, and the driver had hardly spoken a word. The driver had been raging mad when the car had been damaged and had tried to put the blame for the accident on him. The car had been a small saloon, but Bryant had not noticed either its make or registration number. The off-wings had been pretty badly knocked about by the lorry.

He knew nothing about Mr. Radville except that he had come across him casually some months before in the Stag's Head and since that time had occasionally gone out to his bungalow in the evenings for a game of poker and so on. The two girls had always been there and sometimes young Margesson and his sister. He had never had any unpleasantness or quarrel with them or with Mr. Radville or the two girls. He had never seen any improper conduct going on at the bungalow. The last time he had been out there had been on the night of the preceding Sunday.

Gore handed the jacket back across the counter. "A curious story, certainly," he agreed, "—in parts."

"The only sort of story he *could* tell," commented Yallow. "We'd told him what we knew—he had to make his story fit it. I don't believe, myself, he knew what he was doing last night. But I've no doubt whatever in my own mind that he killed those three people—speaking from my knowledge of him and his history."

“Think he could have climbed a telegraph post?” Gore asked dubiously. “Someone did, you know.”

“Easy, sir. It’s only fourteen feet. I climbed it myself this morning, just for experiment. And besides, it was just the sort of idea that would come into the head of a man fuddled with drink—as, of course, he was. For what would a man in his senses think he’d gain by cutting the bungalow and the house off the phone? Nothing, that I can see.”

“Found out yet who rang up Colonel Margesson before he went out?”

“Not who, sir. But the exchange put through a call from the bungalow to Cullerside last night all right. Just before eleven.”

“Fingerprints?”

“Well—we have no prints of Bryant’s yet, you see.”

Gore began to move towards the door. “You didn’t worry Mrs. Margesson, then?”

“I didn’t, sir—as Dr. Brownrigg put his foot down that way. But I got it in the neck from the inspector when he came along. He’s gone out there now to see her. As you suggested, I got into touch with some of her relatives—a sister of Colonel Margesson’s. She lives up in Surrey. I was able to get her on the phone, and she said she and her husband would come down at once. I told the inspector that. But he wouldn’t wait till they came.”

“By the way—what about the gun?”

“What we make of that, at present, is that it was used pretty recently. We know Mrs. Margesson fired three shots with it on Tuesday night. Another shot was fired from it more recently. And there’s one cartridge not discharged. No trace of a bullet at the bungalow, anyhow. . . . The gun will be examined by the experts, of course.”

A beaming young woman arrived to deliver an envelope with the explanation, “From Dr. Brownrigg.” When she had gone out Yallow looked up from his perusal of its contents.

“The colonel and his daughter were both killed about the same time, the doctors think—roughly, round about midnight. But the son, they say, had been dead for a much longer time—between two and three days. . . .”

He continued with his reading for some further moments and then attached the report to the other documents in the jacket. “The girl was pregnant,” he added. “Three months.”

Gore opened the swinging door.

“Well—I shall be going to London tomorrow—and come back down here on Monday afternoon. If the inquest should be postponed you’ll let me know. Gerrard 9191. ’Afternoon! Good hunting.”

The afternoon was beginning to draw in now, but in view of his late lunch Gore decided to cut out tea and run out along the Ockenford road. For

a mile or so after he had passed Cullerside, the road rose steadily, hedged in by the trees on either hand. But then the river and the woods left the road and curved off eastward across the moor, whose now darkening expanse opened out on either hand and ahead. A little clapper bridge crossed the river at this place, close to a small thatched cottage picturesquely embowered in the trees at the ragged edge of the woods. A cart-track led down from the road and, passing the cottage, wound away towards a substantial-looking farm a mile or so out across the moor. And, as he slowed down to survey this suddenly revealed prospect, considerably to his surprise, Gore caught sight of no less than three people with whom he had already come into close contact during that day.

Near at hand, the surly-faced young woman with the streamlined figure, whom he had seen at Cullerside, was sitting on an autocyte outside the cottage gate, talking to a decent-looking elderly woman whose arms were filled with the washing obviously just collected from a clothesline. And about fifty yards or so farther down the cart-track, a farm-hand in charge of a straggling herd of cows was talking to Mr. Purefoy and his friend with the bushy eyebrows.

Beside Purefoy, whose hand rested on his head, a formidable-looking mastiff stood eyeing the farm-hand's collie disapprovingly. The conversation ended in laughter and the custodian of the cows went off with his charges along the track, while the other two strolled towards a large caravan which stood parked close to the riverside. After a glance in their direction, the cyclist dismounted and, resting her mount against the hedge, passed through the gate and entered the cottage with the elderly woman.

But by this time Gore had proceeded nearly a quarter of a mile along the road, and farther view through his rear window threatening a ricked neck, he opened his throttle and turned his attention to the landscape ahead. Presently he drew up, got out and, lighting a pipe, sat smoking in thoughtful contemplation of a quite uninteresting sunset.

The upshot was that, after dinner that evening, he rang up Miss O'Malley-Martyn at the Island View Hotel in Boscombe to ask if she could give him her father's address in London. But Miss O'Malley-Martyn, he discovered, was not a daughter, but a sister of Colonel O'Malley-Martyn's, and a very distressed sister. For she had just been informed by the local police that her brother had been found sitting in his car somewhere in Chelsea, unconscious, and was now in Battersea General Hospital suffering from concussion. Apart from the question of expense, which seemed to be a serious one for Miss O'Malley-Martyn, she appeared much worried by the difficulties connected with Sunday trains, and when Gore gallantly offered to pick her up on his own way to London, she accepted with grateful relief.

A little after its lunch-hour next day, accordingly, he collected his passenger at the Island View—a rather dingy little residential hotel—and three hours later duly deposited her at her destination. She was a gaunt, very reserved and difficult woman, whose whole life, he gathered, had been passed under the shadow of tuberculosis. Her brother and she had lived together, she informed him, plainly in very straitened circumstances, since he had left Ireland in 1921—at first at Torquay, latterly at Bournemouth. His house—Gortrish—had been burnt down by the Black-and-Tans—it had been impossible to extract any rents from his tenants—a great part of the estate was now divided up into small holdings—the rest of it lying derelict. Her brother would never go back there—would never speak of Ireland now. He just pottered about, she explained, played a little golf—read a great deal. There were a great many Irish people living in Bournemouth—but her brother avoided anything that could remind him of the old days. She had been very much surprised by his telegram from Cullerton, and had no idea what could have taken him up to London—and so abruptly. For he detested London and had not been there half a dozen times in the past seventeen years. . . . She was so amazed to learn that he had paid a visit to his former wife down at Cullerton that for the remainder of the journey her thin, aristocratic lips remained taut in silent misgiving.

Her brother had recovered consciousness and she was permitted to pay a short visit to his bedside. While he waited, Gore made an appointment with Inspector Granley from a nearby telephone box, and, having left Miss O'Malley-Martyn and her modest luggage at a quiet little hotel close to the hospital, went along to the Yard.

He discovered at once that Inspector Granley had been in communication with Inspector Hawley and was in full possession of the facts of the case known to that energetic officer to date. But Granley, Gore quickly discovered, viewed the case from an entirely novel angle, and his interest in the Cullerton murders themselves was merely incidental.

For some eight or nine months past, he explained, the Yard had been endeavouring to round up an organization of formidable dimensions and adroitness which was specializing in road piracy of a very profitable kind. Changing its terrain with lightning swiftness, it had operated all over the country—so far, almost invariably with complete success and always with complete impunity. Gore was shown a map upon which were marked the scenes of a hundred and forty-one holdups—including lorries (three petrol lorries among them), traders' vans, and cars—the majority of these latter driven by commercial travellers. The raiders showed a preference for wines and spirits, tobacco in all its forms, feminine wearing apparel, furs, jewellery, and boots and shoes; but numerous loads of building materials,

agricultural machinery, motor parts, groceries, confectionery—particularly chocolate—and pharmaceutical supplies had also disappeared. That the gang had a large and expert membership, an extensive transport of its own, constantly renewed with stolen vehicles, safe dumps and safe means of disposal for its booty, as well as a highly efficient intelligence system, was certain. But, despite all the obvious possibilities of leakage in such large-scale depredations, the Yard had failed so far to get beyond suspicion as to the identity of its leaders and their highly disciplined personnel.

Its technique—obviously founded on trans-Atlantic methods—varied slightly in individual cases but was, in general outline, always the same. A firm of the right sort was selected, its lorries or vans or travellers' cars patiently and minutely watched—the chosen vehicle was held up by some ingenious device at a carefully chosen spot—the driver, and his mate if he had one, forced into a car, driven to a considerable distance, and left tied up and gagged in some hiding place. In a few rare cases where resistance had been offered, violence had been used; but with the odds against always at six to one, these cases had been very rare. The captured van or lorry was driven to an arranged place and, when its load had been transferred to the marauders' own transport, taken to some distant by-road and abandoned. All kinds of traps had been laid—but without avail. Inspector Granley estimated that close on £40,000 worth of stuff had been stolen in this way since the spring.

Gore was duly impressed, but not greatly interested until he learned the direction in which, by a process of gradual elimination, the Yard's suspicions had decided to concentrate to themselves. It had recently been paying great attention to certain sections of the American colony in London, and in particular to a discreet little coterie which, behind the camouflage of an international financial exchange agency had been devoting itself energetically for some two years past to the brightening of London's night-life. One of its most successful ventures had been the Gazebo—and one of its most active and acute members, a man named at the moment Hensard, who, under various aliases, had earned considerable celebrity in his native country as a small-time swindler, and was at present, among other things, the Gazebo's managing director.

That the Gazebo was one of the regular haunts of many minor undesirables was well known. But, though Cluffe and his special intimates, like many others of their kind, were, to use Inspector Granley's phrase, always worth bearing in mind, he had not previously been suspected of any direct association with Hensard.

Now, however, Inspector Granley was most anxious to have a talk with Cluffe and his friend Bethune concerning their sojourn in the wilds of

Devonshire. All the more anxious because neither of them, nor either of the two glamorous young women who had shared their country retreat, could be found. He listened with flattering interest to Gore's account of Kestheven's visit to the Gazebo on the preceding Thursday night and of his own inquiries and observations down at Cullerton. Things looked rather awkward for Bryant, he agreed—and even more curious than the first husband's visit to Mrs. Margesson would be his encounter with Bryant at the critical hour—supposing, that was, that Gore's surmise was correct and that O'Malley-Martyn had been the driver who had picked Bryant up along the Ockenford road. However—all that was Inspector Hawley's pigeon and could probably be safely left to him to play about with.

But the big shed erected behind the bungalow during Cluffe's tenancy, and the lorries which had visited it, and especially the costumier's box which Gore had discovered in it—all these were very interesting. Oh, yes—Cluffe and his friends were all known dope-pedlars in a small way. It was, of course, possible that somehow or other Margesson and his son and daughter had butted in awkwardly at an awkward moment. Not that Cluffe had the guts for a killer. But of course those lorries hadn't driven themselves. And, obviously, if there had been a dump down there, it had been cleaned up in a hurry.

Inspector Granley surveyed his visitor with a sardonic smile. "Now—cough it up, Colonel. . . ."

Gore began to move towards the door. "Well—as a matter of simple curiosity—think you could let me know something more definite about this spot of trouble of O'Malley-Martyn's last evening. . . . I shall be at Norfolk Street until about seven. 'Bye-'bye!"

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

EXTRACTS from Colonel Gore's Journal, subsequently transferred to File 1938-M 73, MARGESSON, LIONEL.

Oct. 3. Saw O'Malley-Martyn, Battersea G.H. Seemed pleased. Curious to discover how I knew of his visit to Mrs. Margesson, etc. His account of meeting with Bryant agrees with Bryant's until Bryant left him after collision. Says while straightening wing which was fouling wheel, heard shout, then after a while Bryant coming back. Went across bridge and

met Bryant who attacked him, knocked him down, and then bolted. As steering of car seemed damaged, O'M-M. decided to go back to hotel and stay night. Could suggest no reason for Bryant's attacking him, except that he seemed half-drunk.

Would not talk about his visit to Cullerside, nor why he had suddenly come up to London, nor what happened him on Saturday evening.

Tea with Miss O'M-M. at her hotel, but he had told her nothing.

5.30 started for Cullerton.

Oct. 4. Inquests Cullerton. Formal evidence only. Postponed to Oct. 18th. Birmingham gone away. Met Purefoy in town. Said staying on for sale, returning then Surrey. Lives Shackleford (*near Seale*). Last year stayed at Stag's Head, June-Oct. This year rented cottage. Cottage sub-let to him for six months by tenant, Mrs. Haines, widow of police sergeant. *Georgina* her daughter. While cottage let, Mrs. Haines lives with sister, lodge-keeper at Grammar School, goes up during day to look after Purefoy at cottage. Purefoy has done a lot of caravanning, England and abroad, painting.

Yallow told me Granley down at Cullerside yesterday. Bryant says now reason why he went out to bungalow on Friday (Sept. 30th) night, was to get a supply of whisky to tide over while Radville (Cluffe) was away. Says Radville had been supplying him with whisky very cheap for past three months. (Yallow says tradesman's carrier fitted to Bryant's bicycle last week.)

Mrs. Margesson's sister-in-law and her husband (Nicolette—stockbroker) at Cullerside. Mrs. M. going to stay with them in Surrey (Yew Lodge, Puttiford). (Mem.: *Puttiford close to Seale*.)

Nothing found grounds Cullerside or round bungalow. Saw Inspector Hawley—could get nothing from him. Completely puzzled, I think. Will not want me for resumed inquest, he thinks, as has my deposition.

Had talk with Dr. Brownrigg. His theory that Leonard M. was killed on Tuesday-Wednesday night. Gave me an account of his visit to Cullerside that night—the shooting—window—quarrel between Margesson and son, etc. Convinced Leonard M. killed some time Wednesday anyhow. Sound little man.

6.15 p.m. started for London.

Oct. 5. Granley says no information about O'M-M. except that he was found in his car unconscious in Raikes Station, 8.25 p.m.

Oct. 11. Granley told me Cluffe's body found by boys from Grammar School in hollow tree in Cullerside grounds. Boys noticed smell while poking about. Granley thinks body was hoisted up by rope nearly 20 feet. Cluffe shot through temple. Bullet fired from Margesson's Webley.

Also told me Mrs. Canning found in Edinburgh. Says she and Bethune and Cardew girl left bungalow very early on the Thursday (Sept. 29th) for London, leaving Cluffe behind. They went in the Bentley. Saw lorries arriving at bungalow, but didn't bother about them and has no idea where they came from or what was in them.

Granley believes Cardew and Bethune are in Paris.

Oct. 18. Resumed inquests Cullerton. "Person or persons unknown."

Nov. 22. Saw Purefoy Oxford Street.

Nov. 27. Granley told me Bethune and Cardew in Buenos Aires—12 mos.—attempted blackmail.

Dec. 12. Met Bunny Edwards at A. & N. Told me he'd seen Margesson left £633. Said he'd been D.A.A.G. at H.Q. at Ballinabar in 1918, when Margesson had been G.S.O. there for a while. Often been up at O'M-M.'s place (Gortrisha). O'M-M. and his wife had been badly at loggerheads then, and everybody had known that Margesson had been going very strong with her.

1939.

Jan. 8. Mrs. Nicolette (Puttiford 47) rang up to ask me to go down tomorrow (10.30) morning. . . .

##

CHAPTER TWELVE

Yew Lodge was a large modern house standing in extensive grounds about half-way between Puttiford and Seale along a quiet by-road running parallel to the Hog's Back, whose telegraph poles were visible against the sky a mile or so to northward. Mrs. Nicolette, a large, handsome woman of decisive

manner, had stated her troubles with concise lucidity when she intimated her knowledge of the fact that her brother had consulted Gore in the preceding September.

“And my reason for going to you, Colonel Gore,” she proceeded, “is the same as his. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Margesson, is still being terrorized—I believe by the same person as before—and in the same way.”

Satisfied that Gore had received from her brother a detailed account of his wife’s mysterious transformation into a fear-ridden neurotic, Mrs. Nicolette passed onto the period since the Cullerside tragedy. Her husband and she had, of course, in the end been compelled to tell Mrs. Margesson what had happened, though they had succeeded in postponing this revelation until she had been enticed up to Surrey. Their worst fears had been realized, and for some weeks it had been doubtful whether she would ever be a sane woman again. This first crisis—which had been one of terror rather than of grief—had, however, been mercifully succeeded by a reaction of stupefied apathy, and, as the weeks had passed and Mrs. Margesson’s physical health had improved, the Nicolettes had begun to hope that the corner had been turned. The most vigilant care had been taken to guard against any intrusion of the past. Nurses had watched over the convalescent night and day—two eminent specialists had visited her constantly. Before Christmas she had been up and about—able to take short walks about the grounds, or go for drives—read the newspapers—had once even begun to paint a bowl of chrysanthemums.

“But then,” confessed Mrs. Nicolette ruefully, “I did a most foolish thing. She had kept on asking ever since she came to us that I would get her old maid back for her—the maid who had looked after her down at Cullerside—a girl called Georgina. I see you know about her—Well, Enid stuck at it and at it, and, as I say, most foolishly I gave way in the end and the girl came up here three days before Christmas. Frankly, I took a dislike to her at once—and so did everyone else in the house. But I must admit that my sister-in-law seemed delighted at her arrival—and that the girl did really seem most devoted to her. You may remember, she’s a disagreeable-looking young woman—my husband can’t bear the sight of her. And the other servants resent her not wearing a cap and apron and having privileges—you know the sort of thing. Well, I shouldn’t have minded trouble of that sort if things had gone on all right otherwise. But they haven’t. . . .

“By the merest chance, on Friday afternoon I happened to look out from one of the upstairs windows. I had heard Enid going downstairs, you see, and I just looked out casually to see if she had gone out for a little turn about the grounds. I saw her standing by one of the seats along the path around the lawn, staring at something on it—Then she screamed and turned and ran

back towards the house. I hurried down the stairs, ran out, and just managed to catch her before she fell. And as I did that, I saw this girl, Georgina, putting something into her pocket . . . she was close to the seat where I'd seen Enid, wherever she had appeared from. . . . There'd been no sign of her when I'd looked out of the window. Well, I'm afraid I dumped my poor sister-in-law rather hurriedly on the ground and made straight for Georgina. . . . I saw she had an envelope in her hand and I snatched it from her and saw that it was addressed to my sister-in-law. She swore black and blue that she hadn't tried to put it into her pocket, and that she knew nothing whatever about it. But she was scared to death, and I knew she was lying. And this is what I found in the envelope. As you can see, I took the pains to steam it open so as to damage it as little as possible. I had a sort of idea as to what I was going to find inside it."

Mrs. Nicolette unfolded a sheet of notepaper, when she had handed the containing envelope to Gore, picked up a lorgnette and read with expressive deliberation:

"You know who murdered your husband and your son and daughter, and so do I. And be sure if he can he will get you same as he got them and the same way which you know is a nasty sort of death. He is close to you waiting for his chance, your only hope is to take this warning which is *most serious and urgent* and let me help you as I am still willing to do if you will do your share for your own sake. Send reply to this with £50 in notes for expenses to old address which I know you still have. Send it so I'll get it not later than Wednesday morning and say if willing to arrange meeting which is absolutely essential. don't delay as no matter how carefully you are watched it will be useless I fear. your sincere well wisher."

"Obviously," Mrs. Nicolette continued, when she had passed this communication to Gore for his inspection, "my sister-in-law had recognized the hand-writing on the envelope at once. And so—immediately—it flashed into my mind that this girl, Georgina, had written that letter and left it there on the seat for Enid to find—and that it had been she all along who had been terrifying Enid. I mean, it was simply too curious a coincidence that, as soon as Georgina arrived, this kind of thing should start again. Well, I talked it over with my husband when he came back from London on Friday evening. He wanted to put the matter into the hands of the police straightaway, at first. But in the end . . . well, heaven knows we've had enough of the police during the past few months . . . so, in the end, we decided just to carry on and see what happened next—if anything did happen. So I said nothing

whatever to Enid about the letter—nor to Georgina either—except that in future she was not to leave my sister-in-law alone, either in the house or out of doors, without special permission from me.

“The next thing was that on Saturday I discovered that, on Thursday, without my knowledge, Enid had opened a bank account in Farnham and had transferred £2000 from her deposit account at Lloyds branch down at Cullerton and drawn £100 in notes. I remembered then that on Thursday she and Georgina had gone for a drive. . . . I happened to be playing golf that morning. I got the numbers of the notes, on spec . . . and I did think of tackling Enid straight out about it and making her give up the cheque-book and the notes to me. But—of course—well, that would have been a very difficult sort of thing to do, and Enid would probably have gone off the deep end. . . . Anyhow, I didn’t do it. That was on Saturday.

“On Sunday—yesterday—Enid went to church with my husband and myself at Seale, and then, after lunch, when I’d seen her as I thought safely settled down—she goes to bed for a few hours every afternoon—he and I went over to Godalming to some people. When we got back, Enid had vanished—taken advantage of the servants all rushing out to see a plane that had crashed in a field behind the house and gone on fire. . . . Georgina had gone with the rest—dressed herself—taken her cheque-book and her £100 with her, and cleared off. Well, I needn’t tell you, we were in a pretty state for a while. But about nine o’clock we were rung up by the Superior of a convent in Marylebone Road and told that Enid had arrived there and announced that she had come to stay permanently. You see, a great friend of hers in the old days, a Mrs. Wolseley, who has had rather an unhappy life, lives at the convent—they take a few boarders there. Mrs. Wolseley has written to Enid once or twice since she has been here, and so, I have no doubt at all, Enid thought of the convent as a safe sort of place to hide herself in, and scooted off there when she got the chance. The Superior said that she arrived in a very excited and hysterical condition, but had been put to bed, and quietened down. So I just said that my husband would go to see her today and that meanwhile no one not belonging to the convent was to see her under any circumstances, except, of course, a doctor, if necessary. And that, my dear Colonel Gore, is how matters stand at present. Not a very comfortable state of affairs, is it? Do tell me what you think about it all? How does my idea about Georgina strike you?”

Gore replaced the intercepted letter in its envelope. “I should like to keep this for the present. . . . Thank you. Georgina? Georgina possibly knows who wrote the letter—and possibly left it on that seat. But she didn’t write it, I think—unless she’s grown a moustache since I saw her last and either smokes strong cigars or chews tobacco. Whoever closed this envelope, as

you see, made a nasty mess of it. . . . I understand that you have asked her no questions about it?"

"No. I thought she might give herself away by doing something that would show that she knew what was in the letter. However, she hasn't. In fact, I've hardly spoken to the girl—except, of course, yesterday afternoon, when I went for her for leaving my sister-in-law alone against my strict orders."

"Does she know where Mrs. Margesson is now?"

"No. At least, neither my husband nor I have told anyone where she is."

"Good! Now—has Mrs. Margesson had any visitors at all, since she has been here?"

"No. The only people who knew that she was here—outside ourselves and the servants, I mean—are Mrs. Wolseley and another old-time friend, a Mrs. Singleton, who lives in Inverness-shire. Enid asked me to let them know that she was staying with us—so I wrote and told them. But no one else knows—so far as—Wait, though. Someone did come here and ask to see her . . . some time in November, I think it was. A man who'd been a sergeant or something in Colonel Margesson's battalion during the war, he said. He didn't say what he wanted. I just told him that Mrs. Margesson was too ill to see anyone, and he went away."

"You saw him then, personally. What was he like?"

"Quite a respectable sort of man—forty-fivish, I should say. I can't remember anything much about him, really, except that he had tremendously black, bushy eyebrows—and an extremely off-hand manner."

"Give his name?" Gore asked.

"Yes. But I'm afraid I've quite forgotten it."

"Did he come again?"

"No. Not to the house. But he must live somewhere in this neighbourhood, I think. I've seen him occasionally along the roads round here since. Why?"

"Because, I rather think that it was he who wrote this letter, Mrs. Nicolette. Before we go any further—may I say definitely that I don't want to run into Georgina while I'm here—which, I'm afraid, may be for some little time longer. Mrs. Margesson will want some things sent her, I expect. . . . Think you can arrange that? And may I use that telephone of yours?"

By the time that Gore had finished with the telephone Mrs. Nicolette had returned to report that, in accordance with his suggestion, Georgina would be fully occupied for the next two hours, under the superintendence of one of the housemaids, in packing two suitcases to be despatched to her mistress. While he waited for the arrival of the two men who were to keep her under

surveillance subsequently and whom he was to meet at 12.30 outside the church at Seale, it was arranged that, about half an hour after his departure from the house, Georgina should be given Mrs. Margesson's present address and told to prepare labels for the suitcases. If, as he suspected to be the case, his Cullerton acquaintance with the bushy eyebrows was hanging about the neighbourhood, and if Georgina was acting in collusion with him, she would probably try to pass on this information to him as soon as possible. If an actual meeting of the two took place, Mrs. Nicolette would be informed at once, and Georgina would receive a week's wages in lieu of notice, be instructed not to leave the house for the rest of the day, and be packed off back to Devonshire on the morrow under Mrs. Nicolette's supervision.

"If she makes a fuss, threaten to turn her over to the police. Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Nicolette. We don't mean to do that—just yet. But make her think we do. If she continues to make a fuss, let me know. Of course, if Mrs. Margesson had any kind of lock-up where she——"

"I took possession of every key I could lay hands on at once," interrupted Mrs. Nicolette. "As a matter of fact I went through all her things last night. But I found nothing in the least suspicious. However, my sister-in-law's room has been locked up since yesterday afternoon. And my housemaid will watch Georgina like a cat. I know. She loathes her."

"Splendid. Well, I'm going to ask you to leave the rest to us," concluded Gore. "By the way, the Margessons lived here, didn't they, before they moved down to Devonshire? I mean, in this house, actually?"

"Oh, yes. For quite a long time. My husband bought the place from my sister-in-law. That was in 1936. We had been living down at Cliveden before that. But we had come to the conclusion that the river didn't agree with either of us, so——"

"The Margessons, I suppose, knew most of the people living round here?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. Enid was a most sociable person in those days. That was what made the change in her seem so incredible. Yes, do smoke, please. . . ."

"I know a chap who lives just near here somewhere," Gore went on, while he lighted a cigarette. "He's been living down here for some little time now. An artist bloke—a chap called Purefoy. I expect the Margessons must have come across him. . . .?"

"Casimir Purefoy? Oh, yes. He lives over at Shackleford, a couple of miles away."

"Shackleford, yes. That's the man. You know him, then?"

"Oh, yes. Not very well. But we meet him occasionally at other people's houses. But I don't think he can have known the Margessons. At any rate,

he's never made any reference to them when I've come across him. Quite a charming person, isn't he? Frightfully amusing. The Pocket Adonis I always call him. He's got a lovely place over there. Pots of money, I believe. As I say, we don't know him at all intimately. Mutual friends sort of thing. He spends very little of his time at home. I can't think why he keeps on that big place. He's always just back from somewhere, or just off somewhere. How interesting that he should be a friend of yours."

"Yes. Isn't it?" agreed Gore. "I ran into him while I was down at Cullerton in October. He spent the summer down there this year. And last year, too, I gather."

Mrs. Nicolette stared.

"Really? Was that—why you asked if the Margessons had known him up here?"

"Yes. I just wondered. Because, apparently, they didn't know him down there."

Mrs. Nicolette continued to stare. "And so—what?" she asked at length.

"Well . . . I thought him an extraordinarily interesting chap. By the way, he's an Irishman, isn't he?"

"An Irishman? No, I don't think so. He's a bit Frenchified. . . . He lived in France for a long time, I believe. But I'm sure he's not Irish. I can easily find out, if it interests you. . . . Old Miss Chenevix—she lives in that lovely old Tudor cottage you must have noticed as you came along from Puttiford—she's an artist, too . . . she has known Mr. Purefoy all his life. Funnily enough—now that you raise the point—*she's* Irish. . . . The darlindest old thing. . . . I have to go into Puttiford this morning, sometime. I'll pop in and ask her, if you like. . . ."

"Do," nodded Gore approvingly, rising after a glance at his watch. "Frankly, I'm extremely curious about Mr. Purefoy for various reasons. For one thing, I haven't been able to find that the birth of any Casimir Purefoy was registered anywhere in the British Isles between the years 1885 and 1905. He certainly isn't fifty yet—and he was a dispatch rider with the B.E.F. in 1914—so that he must certainly have been born before 1910, at any rate. Also, I'm pretty sure he's an Irishman. Well, I ought to make a move, I think. . . ."

And, while Mrs. Nicolette still continued to stare, he took leave of her and went off to keep his appointment by Seale's picturesquely-set little church.

Mrs. Nicolette discharged her little commission with promptitude and when Gore arrived at Norfolk Street about six o'clock that evening, he

found awaiting him a memorandum of a telephone conversation which she had had with his partner, Tolley, in the course of the afternoon.

Re GEORGINA HAINES—Mrs. Nicolette has acted as arranged. Girl very frightened, accepted dismissal without protest. Will be seen off at Waterloo tomorrow morning.

Mrs. N. has given her no explanation except that Mrs. Margesson will not be returning to Yew Lodge for some considerable time.

Re CASIMIR PUREFOY—Mrs. N. saw Miss Chenevix this morning. Purefoy's name originally SINNOTT—changed by deed poll (Canada) 1923.

Miss Chenevix knew mother very well in Dublin early nineties. (Then Miss Purefoy.) After marriage to Sinnott, journalist, etc., became well-known as poetess Gaelic movement, novelist, etc. Sinnotts lived at Ballinabar, Co. Mayo (house called Mountgarrett). Miss Chenevix stayed there several times. Husband and a daughter died; Casimir only surviving child.

Miss Chenevix went to live in Paris with aunt, 1902, kept up correspondence with Mrs. Sinnott. When Casimir Sinnott went to Paris to study art 1911 (then 19), Miss C. saw a great deal of him until Aug., 1914, when he became dispatch rider B.E.F. and she lost sight of him. Continued to correspond with Mrs. Sinnott—heard that Casimir had been seriously wounded in Mons retreat and invalided out, and had returned to Ballinabar.

Mrs. Sinnott died 1923. In 1922 a brother of hers in Canada, in failing health, had asked that she and Casimir should go out there. Mrs. Sinnott herself then in very bad health, had not gone. Casimir went out, summer, 1922. In 1923 his uncle died, left him a great deal of money made in timber trade—conditionally on his changing name to Purefoy and remaining in Canada for at least ten years as junior partner in the business. This condition merely nominally fulfilled; Purefoy devoted himself almost entirely to painting.

From 1923 until 1936, Miss Chenevix heard nothing of him. In 1936, just after her return to England, met him at Academy. Learning she was looking for place to settle in not too far from London, he told her he had just settled in Surrey, and suggested the cottage she now occupies, then vacant.

Purefoy did not know Margessons at all. Came home from Canada, 1935; went to live at Shackleford, 1936.

Miss Chenevix says age 46 or 47. Always “very French” in his ways. Some of mother’s relatives French. As young man “great lady’s man.”

Gore uttered a little grunt as he felt for his cigarette case—the kind of grunt he usually reserved for the successful overcoming of a stymie. So, in 1918, then, Purefoy had been living at Ballinabar. . . .

Ballinabar, 1918—Surrey, 1936—Cullerton, 1937 and 1938—Certainly a curious thing that, though chance had brought them so close to one another in such widely scattered places, the Margessons and Mr. Purefoy had never met—And now again, in 1938—chance had again brought Mr. Purefoy close to one of them. . . . To one of them. . . .

In 1918, Purefoy had been, say, 26 or 27. A “great lady’s man. . . .”

Gore had known Ireland pretty well in the old days. He had no difficulty in picturing Ballinabar. One wide, sleepy little street, redolent of pigs and turf-smoke, between two rows of little decayed, thatched cottages with here and there an ugly little new monstrosity in brick and slate. Chickens and dogs the only living things in sight except perhaps a few ragged, barefooted children scabbling in the gutter. A police barracks—a fusty little hotel—a chapel—a few odorous little shops—a few still more odorous little pubs—somewhere in the distance a railway station. Occasionally a passing ass and cart or a dilapidated Ford. Out of the town, along the rutted, deserted road a few larger houses, dingy and unkempt. . . . And all around, for miles and miles—in Mayo, at least . . . bog. In some such desolate, limited landscape, the debonair young “lady’s man,” with his memories of Paris and the war, his artistic ambitions, his good looks, his intense interest in himself, had had to pass the interminable, eventless days of those years from 1915 to 1922. Impossible to believe that if a lovely, radiant young woman had suddenly flitted into it, those long-lashed eyes of his had not followed her—discovered that she was the new mistress up at the “big house”—watched for her goings and comings—perhaps used a box of colours and a sketching-block to attract her attention when he had discovered that she dabbled in art. No lack of self-confidence or of enterprise would have embarrassed Mr. Purefoy, that was certain. . . .

And then the troops had arrived and there had been a General and his staff up at the workhouse, and khaki-clad visitors to Gortrisha—and a little Irish painter chap in civvies had been very small beer and very much out of it. . . . Probably scores of times Margesson and Purefoy had met and passed in the one street—the one with contemptuous indifference, the other with the resentment of inferiority and wounded vanity—perhaps with some feeling more acute even than that, if he had known, as had apparently been

generally known, that the lovely little lady up at Gortrisha was finding consolation for her boredom in the big, handsome major from H.Q. . . .

Gore's contemplation of his imaginary picture of Ballinabar in the summer of 1918 was disturbed at this stage by the entrance of a respectable-looking elderly man, attired in rather rusty black and carrying a small, well-worn black bag.

"Hallo, Scott!" said the senior partner in welcome. "Well, how's the piano-tuning business doing today?"

"Can't grumble, Colonel, thanks."

"Good! Sit down and let's hear all about it."

"Well, we had no trouble at all. The girl left Yew Lodge at a quarter-past one on a bicycle—called at the post office in Puttiford—telephoned to someone—Eyebrows, probably—because we think she fixed up then to meet him later. After that she went on through Puttiford and down towards Shackelford and into Innismara—that's the name of Purefoy's place. Fine place it is, too. She stayed in there about three-quarters of an hour, and then she came out and went back on her bicycle towards Puttiford, but turned off up a track that runs across the golf links. She went a bit along the track, and met Eyebrows all right. They had a bit of a talk—he wrote something down in a notebook—and then she left him and Potter followed her back to Yew Lodge in the car and then phoned Mrs. Nicolette from the post office. I stayed behind to watch Eyebrows. He went across the golf course to the inn—it looks right out onto the links—and went in. Potter came back with the car to look for me, and we went in and got a spot of grub. There was no one in the place except Eyebrows and ourselves. He came into the coffee-room and had some grub while we were having ours. The girl called him Birmingham. He stayed there last night and he's stayed there before. We heard him asking for his bill and saying he was popping off straight away, so we knew it was going to be easy. And it was.

"He's got an old Morris Eight—YZ4483. All we had to do was roll along behind. We ended up at a fish-and-chip joint in Kings' Road. The name over the shop is Warden. It's a rough, cheap-looking joint—the ground floor of a small house—two stories over the shop. There's a lane—Welham Lane—running back at one side of it. He got out of the car and went inside for a bit, and then he came out and took the car down the lane, and that had us guessing for a bit. But he came back walking all right, and went into the shop. We hung about for a while, taking a look whenever anyone went in or out. He belongs there all right—we saw him behind the counter in his shirt sleeves. He's got a couple of tough-looking huskies working there with him. A tobacconist a few doors off told me he and his pals had only been there about a year—the other blokes are his partners—and that you could get a bit

on there if you wanted to. However, that was accidental-like. The number of the house is 373. The lane bends round and runs between Kings' Road and Abercorn Street Stables and garages along it."

"Let's have a look at a map," suggested Gore, and tapped his teeth with his pipe stem in satisfaction when Scott had indicated the position of No. 373. "Not so far from Raikes Street, I see. Good work, Scott! What about Potter?"

"I left him down there. He's going to do a bit of pub-crawling and so on."

"Good! You and Potter get round and find out what you can tonight. But I want him trailed tomorrow. He may stray up towards Marylebone Road—there's a convent there he's interested in, I think."

"O.K., Colonel!" Scott picked up his bag. "I suppose you know . . . the Yard's onto this bloke. There was a chap trailing him down at Puttford. And we spotted a Yard man on the mooch round about the Kings' Road joint—Hillyard—I know him well by sight. He spotted our car after a bit, and came along to have a good look at us when I was coming away."

Gore reached for his telephone and after some little delay got through to Inspector Granley.

"Gore & Tolley this end. Er—there's a fish-and-chip shop in Kings' Road—number 373. Warden's the name. I hear a friend of yours was having a look at it this evening. That right? Well, in that case, I think I'd better go along and explain things—lest there should be any misunderstanding. Eight will suit me nicely. Thanks. 'Bye-'bye."

Later that evening Gore made the following entry in his Journal.

Jan. 9.

Saw Granley re Birmingham (Warden, etc.). Real name William Tinsley (known as Bushy). Son of travelling circus propr. well-known in Midlands. Served infantry war, Capt., D.S.O., M.C. 1920 *enlisted Auxiliary Police (Black and Tans)*. Returned England 1921 worked with circus. Sold business on father's death, 1930 (still carried on as Tinsley's Circus). 1930-1 share small racing stable, Westbury. 1932 bought Ring and Mitre public house, Catford. Convicted various offences, Licencing Laws. June 1937, refused renewal of licence (disorderly premises). House transferred South London Breweries. July, convicted garage-breaking. 1937 Dec. released from Wandsworth. 1938 Jan., opened business Kings' Road. Known associate of dangerous

criminals. Expert motor mechanic and car faker. Since release not in trouble.

Both present partners several convictions. One, *Purdon, also formerly in Black and Tans*. Intimate with another *Black and Tan, Anderson* (known as “Gallus”). Anderson several convictions, opened garage at Catford, April, 1938. Suspected of being concerned in road robberies during year. Garage raided Xmas Day, 1938. Large quantity stolen goods recovered. Anderson disappeared. Granley suspects Tinsley and Purdon in touch with him.

Granley doesn't want Tinsley interfered with. Very keen to pick up Anderson, who may give away other dumps. Agreed that connection between Tinsley—Purefoy—Georgina—Margessons—O'Malley-Martyn curious, but as regards Purefoy probably of no significance. Knows nothing about Purefoy and thinks my idea of some connection between Purefoy and the Margessons going back to Ballinabar (1918) fanciful. I agreed.

Granley told me Tinsley had been down to Puttiford on Thursday (Jan. 5—day Mrs. M. opened account and drew money), and had twice met a woman on golf links (Georgina?). Had not visited any house or made any other contact down there.

Discussed affair generally. I pointed out that:

1. Whoever wrote message on card for lorry-drivers

- (a) Was at bungalow before lorries came.
- (b) Knew they were coming.
- (c) Didn't want to show up while they were there.
- (d) Was there after they had gone.

2. It had been very shortly after they had gone that Margesson and Joan M., at any rate, had been killed. Joan in bungalow for certain—Margesson just outside door (path had been scraped over to efface traces).

3. Message on card had been written with a very unusual sort of pencil.

4. Purefoy habitually used pencils of that kind.

Granley admitted he personally had never seen a carbon pencil or known anyone use one, but pointed out impossible man of such light physique as I described Purefoy could have done such a job of work on Margesson without help. I agreed. He asked if I suggested that either Bryant or O'Malley-Martyn had helped him,

seeing they had apparently been busy beating one another up that night.

I pointed out that:

1. O'M-M. had certainly had an old grudge against Margesson.
2. His reappearance after twenty years had resulted in violent quarrel with Margesson.
3. Very shortly after the quarrel Margesson had been killed.
4. O'M-M.'s eyeshade had been found near body.
5. Admittedly, at time of Margesson's death, he had been close to the bungalow.
6. Instead of returning to Bournemouth, had suddenly decided to come up to London.
7. He had been found unconscious in car not a quarter of a mile from Tinsley's premises.
8. His place in Ireland had been burnt down by Black and Tans.
9. Tinsley, his partner, Purdon, and his friend Anderson had all been in Black and Tans.
10. O'M-M. had refused explanations of his visit to Margesson's house and his being found in Raikes Street.
11. Tinsley had been at Cullerton on day of O'M-M.'s visit to Mrs. Margesson, and on night Margesson and Joan M. killed.
12. There was certainly some link between Tinsley and Purefoy, and some between Tinsley and Margessons.
13. Even if he had not come across Margesson at Ballinabar in 1918, it was incredible that between 1915 and 1921 Purefoy should not have come across O'Malley-Martyn in some way there.

Granley agreed again it was curious, but all too shadowy and fanciful to build on. He pointed out, of course, that Margesson's son had been killed on night of 28-29 Sept.—and I agreed that apparently neither Tinsley nor O'Malley-Martyn had been at or near Cullerton until Sept. 30, and also that the son had apparently been killed in at any rate the same way as the father and daughter.

We discussed Cluffe then, but agreed that it was impossible to fit Cluffe's shooting with Margesson's gun into any theory except that it was incidental—unless Margesson himself shot him, which Granley doesn't think, but seems to me possible.

We arrived at no definite conclusion, except that Tinsley was to be left alone for present, and that Mrs. Margesson would be safe for the present, where she was, from further annoyance.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

On the following morning Gore received a visit from Mrs. Nicolette and her husband. They brought with them an address-book which Mrs. Nicolette had discovered among the few possessions which had accompanied Mrs. Margesson in her flight, and a report of a conversation which they had held, jointly, with Mrs. Margesson herself half an hour before.

The last entry in the address-book, made obviously some considerable time back, was "Warden, 373 Kings' Road, Chelsea, S.W.3." And the substantial result of the conversation was that, if her own statement was to be believed, Mrs. Margesson had obtained her supplies of heroin; not through Georgina, as Mrs. Nicolette had surmised, but through her daughter Joan.

It had been Joan, her mother persisted, who had first suggested that she should use something to make her sleep and had said that she could get something for her which was quite safe and harmless. Apparently Mrs. Margesson had had not the slightest idea as to the identity of the drug contained in the tabloids which her daughter had procured for her and had presumed that they were obtained in the ordinary way from a chemist. Georgina, she stated, had been aware that she was giving herself injections, but had never asked any questions about the matter.

"We asked her then if Georgina had been receiving letters for her, or sending them off for her, down at Cullerton," proceeded Mrs. Nicolette. "But that set her off at once—so, as of course we—well, we didn't want a scene at the convent . . . I brought away her cheque-book and the money—and the address-book, too, because it seemed funny that she should have bothered to take it along . . . though, of course, the address of the convent is in it. . . ."

But when they had learned who "W. Warden" was, and what Gore had to say about him, the Nicolettes declined altogether to accept Inspector Granley's placid view that Mrs. Margesson was quite safe at the convent and that they need feel no further anxiety about her. Over three months, Mrs. Nicolette pointed out, had passed since her brother and his two children had been murdered, and the police had failed to do anything about it. Now her sister-in-law was being threatened with the same fate—and the police suggested that nothing should be done about it. This man Tinsley or whatever his name was must be arrested at once. Mrs. Nicolette announced

her intention of interviewing at least an Assistant Commissioner before she went back to Surrey.

It took Gore over an hour to placate the indignant lady by an explanation of the difficulties with which the police had to contend. And to do so, he was obliged to go over practically all the very debatable ground covered in his conversation with Inspector Granley on the preceding evening. Gradually, however, the interest of his two listeners in his own perplexities and those of Inspector Granley overcame their impatience of inaction. And the result of the interview was that when they went away, they left him, to his satisfaction, with an entirely free hand.

Officially, the Cullerton case remained still the property of the Devonshire Constabulary; but in one aspect of it, at least, the Yard was directly interested. Inspector Granley entertained little doubt now that the Cullerton bungalow had been one of the many dumps scattered about the country and used as temporary repositories by the gang of road-raiders of which he was in search. The costumier's box found in the shed there had been traced, through the ornamental button discovered by Gore amongst its tissue-paper, and ascertained to have formed portion of the contents of a van held up on the Bristol-Bridgwater road in the preceding July. The fact that "Mr. Radville" had paid, in cash, both a year's rent in advance and the builder's account for the erection of the shed, seemed to him in itself significant, since Mr. Radville had paid for nothing else whatever, either on cash or otherwise, during his stay at Cullerton.

Cluffe, he thought, had probably been used merely as a catspaw—all the more willing because he had had reason to desire a temporary retreat from the attentions of his betrayed confederates' pals. If it had been suspected that he had been responsible for attracting inconvenient attention to the activities which his tenancy of the bungalow had been intended to cover, it was quite possible that there had been an accident with that gun of Margesson's—supposing that Margesson had butted in awkwardly that night, made a fuss, been beaten up, and found to have a gun in his pocket. . . .

As to just how that accident might have happened, Inspector Granley had no sufficient data yet for definite surmise, and was not directly concerned. From his conversation with Gore, however, the definite fact had emerged that Tinsley, disguised under the name "Birmingham," had arrived at the Stag's Head in Cullerton on Sept. 28, and stayed there until the morning of Oct. 2; and that on the nights of Sept. 28, 29 and 30, he had not returned to the hotel until considerably after midnight. And, however, dubious with regard to Gore's speculations as a whole, Granley's interest was strongly aroused by Tinsley's share in them.

Accordingly, when, at Gore's request, he obtained an official record of Tinsley's service with the Auxiliary Police in Ireland, and learned that Tinsley, Purdon and "Gallus" Anderson had all been in the same company, which had been stationed at various places in the South and West of Ireland, he passed on this information to Gore without delay. Finding that the company in question had operated successively from Castlebar, Tuam, Galway and Sligo, in 1921, Gore asked for and obtained by the same means a complete list of the company at the time of its disbandment at the end of that year. Remembering that the Auxiliaries had been recruited from among ex-officers, some of whom at least, he calculated, must still be in receipt of pensions for wounds received during the war, Gore then secured from the Ministry of Pensions a list of some twenty names and addresses, upon which he set four of his staff vigorously to work. And within twenty-four hours he was sitting in the best room of a little house in Camden Town, listening with edification to the reminiscences of one of Tinsley's some-time brothers-in-black-and-tan.

Henry Nairn—at present night watchman, unemployed and grievously afflicted with arthritis, at any rate entertained no misgivings as to the justice and righteousness of the methods adopted by the British Government in dealing with the "Shinns," in so far, at least, as he had borne a share in them. And when ultimately he was led to the burning of Gortrishia, his account of it was given with the reasonable complacency due to a meritorious achievement conscientiously performed. A detachment of his company had been stationed at Tuam at the time, and the Shinns had succeeded in ambushing a portion of it between that place and Ballinabar, blown two lorries sky-high with land-mines, and killed seven men. It had been learned that a big house near Ballinabar, named Gortrishia, was being used during the absence of its owner, a Colonel O'Malley-Martyn, as a meeting-place for the local Shinns and a hiding place for some imported comrades who were on the run. Accordingly, one night a strong detachment of the company had rolled along to Gortrishia to square things up—found that the Shinns had got the tip and scooted—and had had to content themselves with setting fire to the house. An old woman, believed to have been the caretaker, had refused to jump from the window of a room in which she had been hiding and had, Nairn supposed, been burnt to death. A younger woman had succeeded in escaping into the darkness. A child, who had been hiding with the old woman, had risked the jump from the window, been caught below, and come off without injury.

Having seen the place well alight, the party had then proceeded to another house nearby, the owner of which, a woman, had been supposed to be a Shinn. However, it had been discovered, while preparations were being

made to burn down her house also, that her son had been in the army during the war. The son had turned out a decent sort of little skin and had produced enough whisky to furnish everyone with a good time. And so, having sprayed the main street of the town with machine-guns, just as a warning, the party had returned to its headquarters in complete satisfaction with its vindication of justice.

Obviously, next to his experiences with the Black Watch, during the war, Nairn's career as an Auxiliary had been the principal event of Nairn's life. His face lighted up with almost affectionate pleasure at mention of the names Tinsley, Purdon and Anderson. He related with smiling gusto the sinister story which had won for Anderson the nickname "Gallus"—the hanging of two Shinns from his shoulders—how Jack Purdon had found a Shinn hidden in a nun's bed in a convent at Macroom. Oh, yes, they had all been along that night at Ballinabar. It had been Bushy Tinsley who had caught the kid when it had jumped. They hadn't known who the kid belonged to, but had supposed it had belonged to the woman who had got away. But it had been a comical-looking kid, and Tinsley had taken it away with him to be a mascot for the company. Bonzo, they had called it. The comicallest kid you ever saw—more like a monkey than a human being. Bushy had taken a fancy to it, because he used to say it would make his Old Man's fortune, when it got a bit bigger and had been trained a bit.

"Trained?" repeated Gore.

"Yes. Trained to do tricks and the like. His Old Man had a circus, you see. Bushy was always teaching Bonzo tricks when there was nothing else to do. He took the kid back to England, when we were disbanded, with him. Yes—many a good laugh Bonzo gave us. Comicallest kid I ever saw, he was. And strong—lummy. Something wrong with his palate or something. Couldn't talk rightly. All he could do was make comical noises. I remember that night, when we were at that other place I told you about—the old dame's name was Sinnott—a proper old madwoman, she was, too. . . . When the son brought out the whisky, very first thing Bushy Tinsley did was to give the kid a good stiff swig and try to get him to say, 'To hell with the Shinns.' Well, of course, all the kid could say was 'woof, woof, woof!' But he said that right enough, and so Bushy gave him another swig and then poured the rest of the tumbler over him and christened him Bonzo. Cor . . . I can see it now! And Bonzo licking his chops and grinning all over his face. I often wondered what became of him. I heard Bushy Tinsley'd been in trouble a while back. Pinching cars or somethin' of that. But—funny thing—I never come across any of the boys afterwards. Not once. I got married, you see, in 1922, and settled down. . . ."

"The owner of the house was away at the time, you say?"

“Yes. He was living in Dublin. Never went near the place himself. That was why the Shinns took to using it.”

“How old would you say this child was, then?”

“Oh, well—lemme see. Hard to say. He was a big kid. Strong as a bull. I’d say he might have been six or seven, perhaps.”

“You’re sure Tinsley took him to England?”

“Oh, yes. We all came across on the same boat—they had to smuggle us out of the country, you see, on the quiet. And Bonzo was on the boat all right. I remember shaking hands with him and Bushy before I went down the gangplank at Liverpool. Yes—I’ll say we had some times over there . . . !”

Presently, having regaled Mr. Nairn at a nearby pub and rewarded him suitably for his information, Gore returned to Norfolk Street and rang up Yew Lodge forthwith. Yes, Mrs. Nicolette stated, there had been a child by the O’Malley-Martyn marriage, still-born. It had very nearly cost its mother her own life, Mrs. Nicolette believed. She was unable to be very definite about the matter, but had a general impression that it had been born at the end of the year before her brother’s marriage. That would be the end of 1918, yes. Oh, yes—it had been born in Ireland, Mrs. Nicolette was quite sure of that.

Gore went down to Bournemouth that afternoon and paid a visit to Miss O’Malley-Martyn at the Island View Hotel. He found her considerably more communicative about her brother, whose state of health since his excursions to Cullerton and to London had been causing her the gravest anxiety and, by reason of his intense irritability, had resulted in a request from the proprietress of the Island View that he and she would find accommodation elsewhere. Evidently glad to escape for a little while from an unfriendly atmosphere, she allowed Gore to drive her into Bournemouth and give her tea at the Pavilion. And before he left her back at the hotel she had been induced to add some illuminating details to his information concerning her brother.

To begin with, he ascertained that both he and she herself had known the Sinnotts at Ballinabar very well, as young people, Mrs. Sinnott having been a great favourite of their mother’s, and Mountgarrett, the house which the Sinnotts had occupied as tenants, having been part of the Gortrish estate. She herself had left Ireland in 1913, but she remembered Casimir Sinnott well as a boy and as a young man. He had always been a most amusing, charming fellow, and had always been made welcome at Gortrish, not merely for his mother’s sake but also for his own. Her brother, though considerably his senior and, of course, rarely at home after he had gone into the army, had always been very fond of him. She felt quite sure that when

her brother had left the service and returned to live at Gortrishia with his wife, Casimir and his mother had been made as welcome there as in the old days.

Miss O'Malley-Martyn had had no idea that the Casimir Sinnott of her younger days had become a well-known and opulent artist, and had changed his name to Purefoy. She had never heard her brother speak of Casimir since he had come to live in England. But then her brother never did speak of anything or anyone connected with Ireland.

She confirmed Mrs. Nicolette's statement that a child had been born, dead, in November, 1918. Her brother's wife had nearly died—spent two months in a nursing home in Galway, gone to Torquay to convalesce, and never returned to her husband. The marriage had been a hopeless failure from the start, Miss O'Malley-Martyn thought. Her brother had been utterly unfitted to marry anyone—not to speak of a little . . . well, it was no use going back over the wretched business now. . . .

Her brother, she stated, had continued to live on at Gortrishia for some time after the divorce. He had become very odd—lived practically alone—with just a housekeeper and a man of all work—never gone anywhere—refused to see anyone who went to the house. Then, some time in 1920, he had gone to live in Dublin, practically permanently, and had come over to England once or twice to see her. When Gortrishia had been burnt down in 1921, he had decided to break with Ireland altogether and joined her at Torquay. Since then he had never left England.

Her account of the burning of Gortrishia was, of course, at third hand; but it confirmed substantially that given by Nairn. She had heard that the old housekeeper had been burnt to death, and that her daughter had escaped just in the nick of time. Her brother had never mentioned anything about a child. Possibly the child had belonged to the housekeeper's daughter. . . .

The names Birmingham and Tinsley had no associations for her. But she at once remembered that someone named Warden had come to the Island View in the August of the preceding year to see her brother, and that there had been a most unpleasant scene in her brother's bedroom before the visitor had consented to depart. She had not ventured to ask any questions about him; but the proprietress of the Island View had been put out, of course. And in October, when the police had kept coming to the place, the proprietress had made a fuss about it and had been just waiting ever since for an excuse to make herself definitely nasty. Miss O'Malley-Martyn and her brother would have to go into rooms somewhere, until they could find a small flat. Before she turned regretfully to enter the portals of the Island View she undertook to let Gore know when she had a new address. Beyond her thin, tall figure, he caught a glimpse of her brother in the light of the hall,

glancing over an evening paper with irritable impatience. But he decided to remain content with the results of his rather depressing afternoon.

Whatever the reason of O'Malley-Martyn's visit to Mrs. Margesson on September 30th—at her invitation—Gore felt tolerably satisfied that something which had occurred in the course of the visit had induced O'Malley-Martyn to go up to London instead of returning to Bournemouth, as, clearly, he had originally intended to do. It seemed to him also tolerably certain now that O'Malley-Martyn had gone to London for no other purpose than to pay a visit to Tinsley at his fish-and-chip shop in Kings' Road. Tinsley had been down to Bournemouth in the preceding August to see him—had had a discussion with him in his bedroom—a discussion which had ended unpleasantly. If O'Malley-Martyn had not learned Tinsley's London address then—he could have learned it on September 30th from Mrs. Margesson. It was true that, in fact, on the evening of October 1st, Tinsley had been down at Cullerton. But O'Malley-Martyn had not been aware of that.

Accepting the supposition that he had gone to Kings' Road in search of Tinsley—or Warden, as he would probably believe his name to be—why had he been found, unconscious, in his car in a nearby street that evening? And why had he refused to give any explanation, either to the police or to his sister, of his being found like that?

Obviously, the answer to that question must lie in the nature of the business which he had intended to discuss or transact with Tinsley. And, presumably, that business had had some direct and urgent reference to Mrs. Margesson. On the information in his possession, Gore felt little doubt now that Tinsley's visit to Cullerton had been made for the same sinister purpose as that which had inspired his visits to Puttiford—the terrorization and blackmailing of Mrs. Margesson. And he felt equally certain that it had been this pressure from Tinsley which had caused Mrs. Margesson to invite her first husband to visit her—and, as a result of the visit, had caused O'Malley-Martyn to go to London in search of her persecutor.

If that had been so, the pressure exerted by Tinsley must have had reference to something in which Mrs. Margesson and O'Malley-Martyn had a common interest—something, therefore, belonging to the period when they had had common interests, twenty years back. For clearly, since the beginning of 1919, there had been no contact or communication of any sort between the two.

It was true that Tinsley's sole visible connection with that common past of theirs—the fact that he had helped to burn down the house in which they had lived as man and wife—had taken place in 1921, two years after they had parted. But that very fact seemed to Gore to limit the field of his

speculations definitely to the house itself. And, on hearing Nairn's story of the raid on Gortrisha and Tinsley's share in it, one detail had seemed to him at once of possibly great significance.

Of the three people who had been in the house on that night when the Black and Tans had arrived whooping in their netted lorries, one had been an old housekeeper—another her daughter. For both of these there was O'Malley-Martyn's own statement to his sister to vouch. But apparently he had never spoken to her of the third person who had been in the house that night—the child who had been taken away by the Black and Tans to become a company mascot. The child had, it seemed, subsequently accompanied Tinsley to England. If the housekeeper's daughter had been its mother she had apparently made no attempt to recover it; if any such attempt had been made, it could hardly have failed to succeed—at any rate, O'Malley-Martyn would certainly have learned of the child's abduction. Even at that troubled time in Ireland, the abduction of a child would have set the whole country in an uproar. But apparently there had been no uproar—and O'Malley-Martyn had not heard of any child being abducted. Well, was it credible that if the child had been the property of the housekeeper's daughter, she would not have raised an outcry? Was it even credible that she would have run off into the darkness and left it to its fate?

Whose child then had the comical Bonzo been? And what had become of it after Nairn had shaken hands with it in farewell in the docks at Liverpool? By Nairn's account it had been a child of six or seven in 1921; the child would be a man of twenty-three or twenty-four now, if it had lived. It had apparently been an unusually strong, healthy child; presumably it had continued to live. And if it had, was it possible that *it* was the link between Tinsley and the two people into whose lives he had made such ill-omened intrusion after the lapse of all those years?

Without informing him of the meditations which had occupied his journey back to London, Gore rang up Inspector Granley on reaching Norfolk Street and asked him to ascertain officially from the Eire Registrar-General's office whether there was any registry of the birth of a child, between 1914 and 1921, probably at Ballinabar, of which the father had been Dermot O'Malley-Martyn, of Gortrisha, Ballinabar, Co. Mayo. This Granley undertook to do by telegram next morning.

"Now, what dirty work are you up to, Colonel?" he asked sardonically. "This isn't an archæological research association, you know."

"I'll be seeing you," laughed Gore, as he replaced the receiver and turned towards the respectable little figure which had just entered the room unobtrusively. "Evening, Scott! Well, anything doing?"

“Not a lot, Colonel. Tinsley—that’s his real name—Bushy Tinsley, they call him. He went up to Marylebone Road this morning all right, and had a good look at that convent. But after that he went straight back to Kings’ Road, and Potter says he hasn’t shown up since. I left Potter there, you see, and went down to Catford—because Tinsley used to have a pub down there for a good while, I heard last night, and was well-known down there. He was well-known down there, all right. The pub was the hottest spot in South London for a bit, I’m told—while it lasted.”

Gore listened in silence to an account of Tinsley’s career as licensee of the Ring and Mitre, until Scott reached the episode which had brought it to an abrupt conclusion. One of the amenities with which the house had provided its large and sporting clientele had been weekly exhibitions of boxing and wrestling, conducted in a large marquee at the rear of the premises. These entertainments—especially the wrestling, which had been of the all-in variety—had been very popular, and the proprietor of the establishment had made a tidy bit of money out of them one way or another until, unfortunately, one of the combatants in a wrestling bout had received such serious injury that he had died next day. There had been a hundred witnesses to swear that the fight had been fair and square, and that the man’s death had been entirely by misadventure and his own fault. But, though the police had not had enough evidence to prosecute, they had put a stop to the Ring and Mitre’s backyard sideshows, and had in due course opposed with success the renewal of Tinsley’s licence.

“Tinsley was glad enough to clear out by then, it seems,” Scott went on. “His custom fell off at once, when the police got hot on the place. And it meant a big loss for him when they stopped the fights. He used to charge ten bob for admission to the marquee, and of course he always had his own man well backed, and his own man always won. He kept a chap on the premises permanently for the game, you see. A holy terror, he must have been, by all accounts. Bonzo, they called him. And this Bonzo used to take on anyone that liked to come along and lay him out without fail. Some good lads he laid out, too, it seems. The chap he killed was a Jew-boy from Lambeth, named——”

Scott paused in some surprise. For the senior partner had risen, and, approaching him purposefully dealt him a resounding smack on his shoulder.

“Scott,” he said, “I’ve told you before, several times, what I think about you. But this time, consider it told with knobs on. You were talking about Bonzo. . . . Please continue. What became of Bonzo when Tinsley packed in at the Ring and Mitre? Happen to hear?”

“Oh, yes. He’s with Tinsley still.”

“At that place in Kings’ Road?”

“Yes. So I was told down at Catford, anyhow. I don’t know what happened when Tinsley was pinched. . . . He did five months in Wandsworth for garage-breaking. . . .”

“Yes, I know. But Bonzo was with Tinsley after that, then?”

“Well, that was what I was told, anyhow, Colonel. Seems he was a well-known character down at Catford, when he was down there. He does tricks to amuse the customers, I was told. Seems to be a bit of a masterpiece, by all accounts. I can easily find out whether it’s right or not, I expect.”

“Go and have a look-see, anyhow, Scott. I shall be here until eleven or so, I expect, if you find out anything tonight.”

Shortly before ten o’clock Scott rang up.

“There’s a bit of a mystery about this chap, Bonzo, Colonel.”

“Yes?”

“He used to be at the Kings’ Road joint all right. Used to help there—serve the customers and all that. That was up to the beginning of summer, last year. He went away then. He was ill or something, and he went away to the country somewhere for a change. Some time round May, that was. The mystery about him is that Tinsley and the other blokes who run the joint say he hasn’t come back there. He never shows up. And they don’t like any questions asked about him. But . . . I told you I’d palled up with a tobacconist chap that’s only a few doors along from the joint. He’s a decent sort of young fellow, and he’s got a bit of an edge on Tinsley and his pals because, for one thing, they sell cigarettes and tobacco on the quiet at cut prices, and for another they did him down over a horse that won at 33 to 1—said they hadn’t been able to get his bet on . . . you know the game. . . . Well, anyhow, I dropped into his place for some fags tonight, and what *he* says is that it’s well known that for some reason Tinsley and his mates are bluffing—that Bonzo did come back quite a good bit ago—autumn sometime—and that he’s kept locked up in the stable at the back, where Tinsley keeps his bus. There’s a little yard to the stable, with high walls, and he’s just let out into that after it gets dark. Sometimes, the chap told me, Tinsley takes him out in the car at night, too. But he advised me not to get asking any questions about it. Seems one or two blokes have got thick ears for being too curious. I’ve been down the lane—you remember the lane I told you about. I’ve located the stable belonging to number 373 all right. But there was no sound of anyone in it that I could hear. However, that was about half-past nine. It’s about eleven or so they usually let Bonzo into the yard it seems. I’ll wander along again round then, anyhow.”

“Very well, Scott. But be careful. We don’t want these birds flushed just yet. By the way, your friend from the Yard still about down there?”

“Three of them now, Colonel. There’s a car on the job, now. However, they don’t take any interest in us any more. You staying on up there, Colonel?”

“No. I’m through now. You can let me know about that stable in the morning. Good night, Scott! And don’t forget how valuable those ears of yours are to us. . . .”

“O.K. Colonel, thanks.”

Extracts from Colonel Gore’s Journal, subsequently transferred to File 1938-M 73 MARGESSON, LIONEL.

Jan. 12. To Cullerton.

Saw Bryant at house. Told me man attacked by Purefoy’s dog in July was badly bitten in legs. Purefoy took him out in his own car late at night to attend to him and to dog. Said he was tramp—had tried to break into caravan. Man in bed in caravan—kept clothes over head—appeared big chap—legs very hairy and muscular. Bites severe but clean. Bryant saw him only once. Out to see dog several times—it was badly damaged. Purefoy said tramp gone away.

Asked him if sure it had been driver of car who had attacked him night Sept. 30-Oct. 1. Obvious he was half-screwed and dazed and merely guessed. Says now thinks someone else about. *Heard whistle going back along roadway just before second attack. Couldn’t describe whistle.*

Saw Nugent at lodgings. Told me of conversation with Margesson night Sept. 28th about *whistles* in woods. Whistle like plover’s call.

Saw Yallow at police station. *Told me O’Malley-Martyn also stated heard whistle just before attacked.*

Inspr. Hawley could get no information from Mrs. Margesson before she left Cullerside.

Saw Mrs. Haines at cottage. Purefoy had meals in cottage but always slept in caravan. She never went near caravan on account of dog—very fierce. Never saw anyone but Purefoy go into it or come out. Deafish and very short-sighted. Her daughter Georgina nursemaid now to Mr. Armytage’s children. Purefoy *had very large*

appetite. Remembers Tinsley coming to see Purefoy September, but on no other occasion. Did not see him go into caravan.

Thinks afraid also of dog.

Saw Bodley, Shramley Pound Farm (along track beyond cottage). Knew Purefoy well as passed cottage every day. Never saw anyone but Purefoy about caravan. Purefoy warned him about dog. Remembered one night in July hearing dog yelping—came along track a bit—but went back. Next day Purefoy told him tramp had injured dog. Door of caravan had been damaged, he had noticed, but thinks Purefoy repaired it himself. Remembers Tinsley about cottage September. Tinsley met his wife along track and sold her wrist watch for 10/-; Bodley discovered it was valuable watch afterwards and made wife give it up to police.

Started London 4.30. Norfolk Street 10.15. Fog.

Scott badly knocked about Welham Lane last night—three men—thinks Purdon one. Thinks stable 373 occupied.

Mrs. Nicolette saw Tolley this afternoon. Left drawing (*carbon pencil*) dropped in letter-box convent last night addressed Mrs. Margesson (block capitals—ink). Drawing rabbit *peering out of bolt hole*—very clever.

Granley sent copy reply telegram Eire. Only child still-born, Nov. 17, 1918, at Gortrishia. Certificate signed W. P. Mulligan, F.R.C.S.I., Ballinabar.

There is no entry in the Journal of an incident which took place in Colonel Gore's bedroom around midnight that night. As he removed his loose change from his pockets, he selected a penny, gazed at it for some moments sleepily, tossed it solemnly, and called "head."

‡ ‡ ‡

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Almost exactly twenty-four hours later he was driving through the streets of Dublin to the Shelbourne—still a little dismayed by the realization that in Eire's capital the outside-car was now but a memory—and early on the afternoon of the following day, he sat down to a belated lunch at Considine's Hotel in Ballinabar. The proprietress, a bustling, cheerful young woman, with a tongue as quick as her twinkling eyes, entered the coffee-room to inquire whether "they were looking after him," and, when he consulted her

as to the respective whereabouts of Gortrisha and Mountgarrett, bent upon him a gaze of dubious intentness.

“*You’re—you’re* not the gentleman was here before, are you?” she asked. “The gentleman that used to live at Mountgarrett. . . . Mind that plate—it’s mad hot out of the oven. Mr. Sinnott. . . . You’re not Mr. Sinnott surely. . . .”

“No,” smiled Gore. “But Mr. Sinnott is a friend of mine. He never told me he’d been back here.”

However, it emerged that Mr. Sinnott had been back in his native place—in the February of 1937—and had stayed two nights at Considine’s Hotel, which he had impressed very favourably by his nice easy ways. Miss Malone, the proprietress, had only come to Ballinabar from Galway four years before and, herself, didn’t remember Sinnotts living at Mountgarrett. But Mr. Sinnott had found a lot of people in the town who had remembered him and his family, and had seemed to enjoy himself very much going to see them and talking about old times. Miss Malone didn’t know if he had done any sketching or not; he had spent most of his time just walking around.

But it became clear that Mr. Sinnott had not travelled to Ballinabar merely to walk around. After his meal, Gore went in search of the local registrar, whom he found in his office and his shirt-sleeves, cleaning a 12-bore. Mr. Macauley had held his present post for but a few years. But, after some pleasant little discussion of the peculiar joys of snipe-shooting, he was able to produce the rather musty tome which contained the local births registered in 1918, and testified to the still-birth, on November 17 of that year, of a male child to Dermod O’Malley-Martyn, Gortrisha, Ballinabar, Co. Mayo, and his wife, Enid, the birth being attested by W. P. Mulligan, F.R.C.S.I.

“You’re the second person I’ve had wanting to look up that birth,” remarked Mr. Macauley, as he put away the volume again, and was without difficulty induced to narrate how a Mr. Sinnott, who had been a friend of the child’s father and mother, had come to his office at the beginning of 1937 and inspected that particular registration. Mr. Macauley had been very interested to learn that this Mr. Sinnott himself had been born at Ballinabar, and had helped him to find some people still living in the town and its neighbourhood whom he had known formerly. Mr. Macauley had privately formed the opinion that Mr. Sinnott must be acting for the Colonel O’Malley-Martyn who had lived up at Gortrisha before it had been burnt down. Because he had been specially anxious to meet both a man named Hennessy who had been employed at Gortrisha as lodge-keeper and a Mrs. Daly who had been the only persons to escape from the fire.

“A pretty shrewd guess of yours,” smiled Gore, without hesitation. “As a matter of fact, that’s the reason why *I’ve* been giving you all this trouble.

And I'm particularly anxious to have a talk with these very two people you mention. I've been wondering exactly how to set about finding them."

"Then you needn't worry your head about *that*," said Mr. Macauley and supplied forthwith the information that old Ned Hennessy was now living with his old mother, rent free, in the lodge up at Gortrish, and that Mrs. Daly—whose name was now Mrs. Kenny—lived in the second cottage on the right past the Protestant church on the Castlebar road. When he had volunteered further the information that Mr. Sinnott had asked about old Dr. Mulligan and had seemed much disappointed on learning that he had died several years before, the visitor took cordial leave of the affable little registrar, and left him squinting anxiously up the barrels of his beloved gun.

As he walked along the little town's one street, Gore was amused to discover how closely the Ballinabar of his anticipations had resembled the reality. But for a blue-and-gold motor bus from Galway, which stood before Considine's Hotel as he passed it, it still belonged to the Ireland of those blithe bygone days when he had been stationed at Island Bridge and played polo in the Phoenix. It was a pleasant, crisp afternoon. The fragrance of turf-smoke—the "Good-day to yeh, yer 'onner!" from the proprietor of an unruly pig, as he passed—the rattling rumble of a governess-cart's iron-tired wheels . . . Gore forgot for a little space the errand which had renewed those old memories.

The O'Malley-Martyns had perched their old-time fortress on the wide crest of a height which rose, he found, sharply from the level expanse of the surrounding bogland. After an uphill half-mile the southward road passed Mountgarrett—an ugly four-square white house, now occupied by a poultry-farmer. Another stiff mile brought him in view of the immense ironwork gates of Gortrish, black with rust, supported by huge partially demolished stone pillars, and flanked on either side by a curve of formidable railing set in moss-grown masonry. Behind them, at one side, stood a stone lodge as large as the average suburban villa. And through them, at the end of a dead-straight avenue, which he learned subsequently was exactly an Irish mile in length, and which was bordered on either hand by a double row of gigantic lime trees, he saw what remained of Gortrish itself—a black shell, through whose chinks and gaps was visible the sky beyond.

The effect of utter abandonment and desolation impressed him so much that he stood for some little time looking down the long, deserted perspective of the avenue before he became aware of an old woman who had appeared at the door of the lodge. When, with some difficulty, he opened the gates, the little old creature—she was so bent that the ends of the shawl which enveloped her from head to foot trailed on the ground—brandishing her arm in feeble menace, began to hobble towards him, gabbling shrilly in

Irish. To his relief, a decent-looking elderly man came hurrying round the side of the lodge and, picking up the furious little figure in his arms, carried it indoors. He came out again after some moments and, after a guarded “Aftbernoon, yer ’onner!” awaited an explanation of Gore’s intrusion with visible curiosity.

But Ned Hennessy’s honest, kindly face cleared when he discovered that he was speaking to a friend of Mr. Sinnott’s and, learning that the visitor wished to inspect what remained of the house at close range, volunteered to accompany him on his two-mile promenade. Yes, he had been lodge-keeper in the old days, when Colonel O’Malley-Martyn had lived at Gortrish, as his father and his father’s father had been before him. No; he wasn’t employed by anyone now. He just lived in the lodge with his mother—had lived there for sixteen years now, and no one had asked any questions about it. Some said the place belonged to the Colonel still, and some said it belonged to the government. But Ned Hennessy was of opinion that Gortrish belonged to no one at all now, and anyhow no one had ever come bothering him, so he never bothered his head who owned it.

The reason of his obviously complete indifference to the present whereabouts and fortunes of his former employer, and of his equally obviously deep devotion to the memory of Mrs. Sinnott and to her son, was quickly revealed. For it seemed that in 1918 Hennessy had been dismissed from his post as lodge-keeper—in his opinion most unjustly. And it had been Mrs. Sinnott who had proved a friend in need, taken him into her employment, and given his mother also a home at Mountgarrett. After Mrs. Sinnott had died in 1923—because Mr. Casimir had gone away to Canada the year before, he had had to look round for some place to live. So, as the Colonel had gone off to England, and never a soul had gone near the place, and the lodge had been lying there empty, he had said to himself that he and his mother might as well have the use of it as the mice, and no one had said any differ ever since.

It had been Mrs. O’Malley-Martyn, he alleged, who had made the Colonel throw him and his mother into the road, all of a sudden, without notice or warning. A terrible proud, spiteful bit of goods, she had been. And a bad bit of goods. Everyone in Ballinabar had known what the end of it would be—with all those officers up about the place every day, running round after her like dogs with their tongues hanging out—Shure, everyone had known what was going on under the Colonel’s nose except the Colonel himself. . . .

With a little judicious encouragement, Gore succeeded in eliciting the details of the curious little comedy which had resulted in his companion’s ejection from the lodge. Little divining the grim tragedy to which it had been

the curtain-raiser, about half-way along the avenue Hennessy struck off under the trees and came to a halt by the rotted remains of a little wooden chalet, whose paneless windows looked out over the vast brown plain stretching away to westward.

“There,” he said, pointing, “that’s the very place where it happened. She used to come down here from the house if it was a fine day, to do her paintin’. An’ Mr. Casimir . . . well, he was a bit sweet on her himself, I won’t deny that—an’ sorry I was for to see it, because shure she was jus’ leadin’ him on an’ laughin’ up her sleeve at him all the time. But annyway he was in there with her this day I’m tellin’ you of—he used to be givin’ her lessons in her paintin’, be the way, so’s to try an’ get roun’ her, I suppose, because she thought she was a great dab at the paintin’. But shure I don’t think meself she was any great shakes at it at all at all. Well, how it was, she’d took a great dislike to me poor ould mother somehow or other from the first start off of her comin’ here an’ she made the Colonel gimme orders me mother wasn’t to be allowed to go up anywhere near the house where she’d see her. Me mother . . . well, you see, sir, she was always a bit queer in her head, poor creature, and when she’d see anyone that was a stranger like she’d start shakin’ her fist at them an’ jabberin’ at them like mad—like she done when she seen you at the gates below. She never done a mortal livin’ soul a hurt in her life, the poor ould thing. But of coorse me fine lady up there must have her way. An’ so I got me ordhers me mother was to be kep’ out of her sight. Well, this mornin’, be bad luck, I had to go up to the house for to get me wages, an’ when I was comin’ back along, who should I see, standin’ there—right at the back of that shally, but me mother—an’ me fine lady inside it, as I knew well, with Mr. Casimir, because I’d seen them there an’ I goin’ up to the house. Well, I didn’t know what to do. I made signs to her to come away, but she took no notice, an’ I was afraid to come any closer for fear that’d start her jabberin’ an’ spoil everythin’. An’ so I stood like a fool watchin’ her an’ tryin’ to coax her away be makin’ signs. An’ then, be the worst o’ luck, didn’t me fine lady pop out of the shally at the other side with Misther Casimir afther her, like two Jacks-in-the-boxes. He was grabbi’ at her an’ tryin’ to get his arms round her . . . an’ in the end he cot ahout of her an’ tried for to kiss her, but she gave him such a wallop in the puss that he let go of her an’ she ran roun’ the side of the shally an’ came right on top of me mother standin’ there behind it. I suppose she thought me mother had been listenin’ to what had been goin’ on inside with Mr. Casimir. But annyway, she was in such a mad temper with Mr. Casimir that she gave me mother a push an’ knocked her flat on her back an’ then started to call her all sorts—‘You horrible mad old monkey!’ sez she. ‘You ought to be shut up in a cage. That’s the place for you. A cage! Get out of me sight

and don't ever let me see that monkey's face of yours again or I'll have the dogs set on you.' She turned on me then—I'd run over as hard as I could pelt, you see—so she turned on me and ballyragged me. Well, I was hard set to do it—but I held me whisht an' jus' let her blaze away, while I tried to coax me mother to come with me. But she wouldn't come—she was a strong little thing in them days—and there we were . . . me lady givin' me down the banks, an' me tryin' to keep ahout of me mother so's she couldn't use her arms, an' me mother cursin' an' spittin' like a cat, tryin' to get at her, an' Mr. Casimir not knowin' what to do an' tryin' to pass it off as a great joke, be the way. But it was no joke for him, annyway, in the end. For didn't two of the officers from the town come along the avenue in a car, goin' up to the house, an' when they saw Mrs. O'Malley-Martyn, of coorse, they pulled up an' one of them got out an' came over to find out what was the matther. I don't know what story me lady tould him. But annyways he come back to me with his chess stuck out. 'Look here, you bloody fool!' he sez to me. 'Get out of this, and take your infernal mother with you! Go on! Get to hell out of this, both of you, at once.' 'I will, sir, as soon as I can,' sez I. But Mr. Casimir was annoyed at him speakin' like that to me, as if he ownded the place, and told him to keep his orders for his own servants. The officer—he was a great big man—a Major somethin' or other, he was—I forget his name—but annyway he roun' an' gave Mr. Casimir one look an' then cot him and twisted him roun' an' give him such a kick in the behind as you never saw in yer life. All poor Mr. Casimir could do—shure he was only a weeshy little chap beside the officer—all he could do annyways, was roll about on the grass, houldin' on to himself an' groanin'. Well, that sent me mother nearly out of her senses an' she started jabberin' an' cursin' an' shakin' her fist worse than ever, until me lady got into the car with the two officers and went off, and they all laughin' their hearts out at poor Mr. Casimir on the grass. The time he came up to see me—two years ago, it'll be next month, he tould me he still feels it where he got the kick. 'Well, Misther Casimir,' sez I to him, 'the kick done you one good turn, anyway. For it kep' you away from them gates from that day to this.' An' that was the truth. For he never set foot inside them afterwards, even when the Colonel was livin' here by himself, afther me lady leavin' him.

“So, annyway, the nex' mornin' the colonel come down to the lodge and tould me me mother would have to be sent away. He said I could stay on if she went, but she must go right or wrong. Well, I knew I could get no one to take me poor ould mother in, on account of her ways, an' that it'd mean her havin' to go to the 'sylum, an' I wouldn't have that happen to anyone belongin' to me. An' so I told the colonel if she had to go, I must go, too. All he said to that was 'Very well,' and that it'd be all for the betther if we

both went. An' so that was the end of it—out we went with our bits o' things the next day, an' shure I didn't know which way to turn when I got outside the gates. Howsomever, as I tell yeh, Mrs. Sinnott, God rest her soul, took us in for the night, and it ended that I stayed on four year with her down below at Mountgarrett till she died, an' me mother with me, in a hut she had put up special for us behind the house."

Gore looked meditatively out over the sombre expanse of bog beneath him stretching away to a wall of jagged mountains whose crests were tipped with snow.

"This was in the summertime, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. The end of June it was, when we left the lodge."

"Mrs. O'Malley-Martyn had a child later on that year, hadn't she?"

"Yes, sir. In the November, that was. But shure it was dead when it was born. An' a good thing for it, I'm thinkin'."

For a little space Gore continued to look away towards the mountains.

"Does your mother speak Irish always?" he asked, as they went on then.

"Yes, sir. She'll understand you if you speak to her in English, but she can't speak it herself, except maybe a word or two."

"She must be a great age now."

"Ninety-seven, sir," replied Hennessy. "I'm goin' on for seventy meself."

"How did she get on with Mrs. Sinnott and her son? All right?"

"Oh, fine, sir. She had a great grah for Mr. Casimir because he'd sit there and listen to her old stories an' nonsense while he'd be making sketches of her."

"Was he able to understand her?"

"Oh, bless yeh, yes, sir. Mr. Casimir can speak Irish as well as I can meself, an' betther. Shure Mrs. Sinnott used to write her poetry in Irish."

While they made a tour round the melancholy ruins of the house, Hennessy paused to point upwards.

"You see that window at the top, sir. That was the room Mrs. Joyce, the old housekeeper, was burnt alive in. They tried to get her for to lep down from the window, the Tans did, so it was said afterwards. But she was afeard."

"There was a child in the house with her, wasn't there?"

Hennessy scratched his head. "Well, now, sir . . . it's funny thing you should ask that question. For it's the very same question Mr. Sinnott asked me when he was up here that time. But there was no child in the house when it was burnt. The only two was in it was Mrs. Joyce and her daughter—Mrs. Daly she was then, but she married again afterwards and she's Mrs. Kenny now. She's alivin' down below in the town yet. She ran off when she heard

the Tans whoopin' an' they comin' up the avenue, an' left her mother. An' be the same token, that's never been forgot to her, neither, to this day."

"Had she a child?"

"Divil a child, sir. Mr. Sinnott asked me that, too. But she never had a child in her life, for all she had two husbands to help her."

"So, then, you're quite sure about it. There was no child in the house that night it was burnt down?"

"As shure as I'm lookin' at you, sir. Shure, whose child would it be?"

"You never heard any talk about a child having been taken away by the Black and Tans?"

"Niver a word of it, sir—excep' from yerself an' Mr. Sinnott. Shure, didn't me an' Mr. Casimir have the father-an'-mother of an argyment about it, here on the very spot you're standin' on now. An' didn't he go an' ask Maggie Kenny about it, an' try for to convince her? But shure she jus' tould him the same thing as I'd tould him. . . . I often wondhered to meself since however he got it into his head there's been a child took away be the Tans."

But Ned Hennessy received no response to this indirect question, and they went back along the avenue in the dusk, talking of his son, who had been a sergeant in the Connaughts during the war and was now commissioner at a cinema in Glasgow. As they parted at the gates, Gore looked back towards the ominous silhouette whose jagged edges cut themselves sharply against the last light of the westward sky, and his companion put his thoughts into words.

"Ai. It'd turn the heart in yeh to look at it, sometimes. Good-bye, sir—and thank yeh. There's not many of yer breed lef' these days . . . God bless yeh. . . ."

After a visit to the shrewd, paternal old parish priest, who insisted on giving him tea and buttered toast, for the sake of his old friend, Dermot O'Malley-Martyn, and who affirmed that he himself had officiated at the burial of his unchristened child in a special precinct of St. Kevin's churchyard, Gore made his way to Mrs. Kenny's cottage. Mrs. Kenny herself admitted him, with reluctance, and a glance at the hostile, suspicious face which the indifferent light of the little interior revealed informed him at once that with its owner any attempt at finesse would be entirely useless.

"Mrs. Kenny," he said bluntly, when an ungracious hand had indicated a chair. "You remember my friend, Mr. Sinnott, coming to see you a couple of years ago——"

"I do," Mrs. Kenny snapped, hands on hips defiantly.

"You told him, I think, that the child who was at Gortrishia on the night of the fire——"

“There was no child at Gortrisha on the night of the fire. Nor any other time, either. And if that’s what you’ve come here about, you may save yourself the trouble of askin’ any more questions. There was no child at Gortrisha. I told Mr. Sinnott that. And I tell you the same now, and have done with it.”

“I’m afraid I can’t accept that statement, Mrs. Kenny. There *was* a child at Gortrisha that night—a child who was taken away by the Black and Tans. Come now—this is a very serious matter. I want you to realize that. You mustn’t allow any sort of undertaking or promise you may have been induced to give to any person whatever—either to Colonel O’Malley-Martyn or to anyone else at his request—to induce you to make a false statement.”

“Listen to me here now,” said Mrs. Kenny. “Who are you, I’d like to know? What brings you here to my house, threatenin’ me an’ pestherin’ me with yer questions? Take yerself off out of this now, or my husban’ ’ll answer yer questions for you in a way you won’t like. . . . Mike——”

Mike appeared with a promptitude which suggested that he had been awaiting this summons just outside the door. “What’s the thrubble, Maggie, eh?” he inquired.

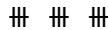
“Och,” replied his wife scornfully, “it’s some nonsense about a child bein’ took away from Gortrisha the night it was burnt down. Did j’ever hear the like . . . comin’ here afther all this time botherin’ me with such ould humbug. Now lissen to me, Misther. I don’t know who you are, nor I don’t care either. But I tell you once for all there was no child at Gortrisha—neither burnt—nor took away. An’ so now I’ll thank yeh to take yerself off, an’ yeh can shut the door afther yeh.”

“Very well, Mrs. Kenny,” replied the visitor rising. “We must only find some other means to induce you to change your mind, then. There was a child in the house, and it was taken away by the Black and Tans. We know that for an absolute fact. He’s alive now. And, with but the slightest hesitation, I tell you that it’s my belief that you and your mother connived at a criminal attempt—seventeen years ago—to represent that that child had died, three years before that—died before it was born. If you still persist in making that false representation, you must face the consequences. Don’t imagine that an offence committed against the law twenty years ago is dead and done with. Colonel O’Malley-Martyn may have induced you to commit that offence—by working on your mother’s and your own loyalty to his family. But he won’t be able to save you from paying the penalty for committing it. Come now—be a sensible woman. The child was Colonel O’Malley-Martyn’s child—isn’t that the truth? Of course it is. And when he came down here from Dublin after the fire, you told him that it had been

burnt to death with your mother—because you believed then that it had been. However, as I've told you—you were wrong. You may—or you may not—be glad to know that. At any rate—you were wrong.”

The sombre-faced Mike had stood looking from Gore's face to his wife's and back again, with growing uneasiness. He moved now to her side quickly and caught her by both arms, as she turned away to escape Gore's unrelenting scrutiny.

“Here!” he said roughly, “no use hidin' yer face from the gentleman. We'd best finish it out now, as it's gone so far. Is it the truth he's been tellin' yeh, Maggie? Give over wrigglin' now, an' answer me. Is it the truth or isn't, he's sayin'? Is that what the Colonel sends you the money for every month? Answer me. Yeh'd best——!”



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Before he left Ballinabar by the evening mail, Gore came on some further traces of Mr. Sinnott's footsteps along the trail which he himself had been following that afternoon. Some surviving relatives of the old Dr. Mulligan who had attended Mrs. O'Malley-Martyn at her premature confinement had been assiduously questioned by Mr. Sinnott, obviously to their entire mystification, as to any comments or references which he might have made during his lifetime on or to that lady. But no such souvenirs had been forthcoming; if the old doctor had had a secret in his keeping, he had kept it well.

None the less, Gore was convinced that Purefoy had returned to Ballinabar for the express purpose of making exactly the same inquiries as he himself had come to make there. And despite the negative results obtained from Hennessy, and Mrs. Kenny, and Dr. Mulligan's daughter and grand-niece, he had certainly left Ballinabar, as he had come to it, with the definite knowledge that a child had been kidnapped by the Black and Tans on that night in 1921. For he himself had seen it with the Black and Tans that night in his mother's house—had assisted at its “christening”—more than probably heard the fate for which Tinsley had at once destined it—his Old Man's circus. Later in that year, 1922, he had gone out to Canada, and remained there until 1935. Thirteen years——But had they enabled the “great lady's man” to forget that kick in the behind—and the laughter that had completed his humiliation? Had it been mere coincidence that by the early part of the year following his return to England, he was living

practically within view of two of the principal actors in that fifteen-year-old farce? That within another twelve months he was back at the scene of his humiliation, on the track of Bonzo? By that time, Gore had no least doubt, he had traced Tinsley from his Old Man's circus to the Ring and Mitre at Catford. Possibly he had been one of those patrons who had paid ten bob for a place in that marquee in the backyard. In the summer of 1937 he had followed the Margessons down to Cullerton. In the summer of 1938 he had gone down there again—with a caravan—always guarded by a ferocious dog—and had pitched his camp little more than a mile away from them. And in that caravan—come to the country for a change—had been, Gore entertained no doubt whatever since his talk with Bryant . . . Bonzo.

Well, as Mrs. Nicolette had asked . . . so what?

A long trail—very nearly eighteen years long. Gore smiled grimly as, against the black windows of his corner seat, the drawing dropped in the letter-box at the convent stood out before his memory with a fresher and stronger significance. The rabbit knew. . . . But its relentless enemy didn't know—yet. . . .

This confidence, however, received a rude shock when, having flown from Baldonnell to Croyden, he arrived at Norfolk Street a little before midday next day. On learning of his return his partner hurried into his room.

“Oh—there you are,” said Mr. Tolley as he entered. “Look here—I expect you'd like to know at once. That chap Purefoy's gone down to Cullerton with his caravan. Someone went with him in the caravan. He went the night before you went away—Thursday night. He has pitched his camp behind some cottage or other—a Mrs. Haines lives in it.”

“Hell!” exclaimed Colonel Gore emphatically. “Who says?”

“Scott. Tinsley went down there the same night. And Scott and Potter followed him down. Tinsley and Purefoy haven't joined up, though. Apparently Purefoy doesn't know that Tinsley's down there—so Scott says. And Tinsley seems to be stalking him.”

Tolley proceeded to such details of this unexpected exodus as he had collected from Scott and Potter over the phone. On the night of Thursday, the 12th, they had followed Tinsley from Kings' Road down to Purefoy's house at Shackelford, where he had arrived about 11.30 p.m. Scott, who had followed him into the grounds, had seen him get out of his car, lock it, and go towards the house. After some time he had returned with Purefoy and there had been an angry discussion, which had terminated by the two going away again and then again returning, in a car to which had been attached a caravan. Tinsley had unlocked his car and, apparently with some difficulty, someone who had been in it all this time had been induced to get out of it and get into the caravan, which Purefoy had then locked up. Purefoy had

then gone away once more for a considerable while and then returned with a couple of suitcases, put them into the car attached to the caravan, and, after some further angry interchanges with Tinsley, driven off. Tinsley had jumped into his own car and followed, but at the gates the car trailing the caravan had gone off towards Farnham, while Tinsley had taken the road back towards Guilford. But almost immediately he had stopped, turned about and followed the other car, which he had caught up just outside Farnham.

So the three cars had travelled through the night until Ockenford had been reached. There Tinsley had pulled up and waited for nearly an hour in his car, but had then gone on to Cullerton and disappeared with his car into the yard of the Crown Hotel in the Market Square.

Patiently Scott and Potter had kept watch until, about two o'clock that afternoon, they had seen Tinsley come out of the hotel yard in his car. Following for some three miles along the Ockenford road, they had seen him leave his car, execute some elaborate reconnoitring, and then drive back to his hotel. Before following him, Scott had discovered that the object of his curiosity had been Purefoy's caravan, which had been parked at some little distance from the road, behind a small cottage.

They had resumed their watch on the Crown Hotel until, about four o'clock, Tinsley had come out again, this time on foot. He had walked out some distance along the same road and had then loitered about until a young woman had come out of a large house near at hand. It had been nearly dark by that time and, as the lights of a car would have revealed to Tinsley that he was being followed, Scott had left Potter with the car and followed on foot until Tinsley and the young woman had arrived at the cottage behind which Purefoy's caravan was parked, and had gone in. Scott had waited. But hour after hour had passed and Tinsley had not emerged; so he and Potter had finally decided to chance their luck and returned to the town for the rest of the night. Their luck had been in. For next day they had seen Tinsley standing in the doorway of the Crown Hotel.

In the afternoon of that day, the 14th, he had again met the same young woman at the same place, and again disappeared with her into the cottage, presumably intending to remain the night there. Scott's last report over the phone, received at 9 p.m. on the preceding evening, had announced his intention of watching the cottage throughout the night. He had ascertained that the cottage was occupied by a Mrs. Haines and her daughter, and that the daughter was employed during the day at the house near which her meetings with Tinsley had taken place, but returned to her home each evening.

"Say where he and Potter were staying?" Gore asked.

“The Royal George. It’s in the Market Square also.”

“ ’Bye-’bye!” said the senior partner and was gone.

The West Country was blanketed in fog that Sunday afternoon and somewhere beyond Exeter Gore discovered that he was heading for Moreton Hampstead instead of Ockenford. His mistake would cost him a few extra miles; but on the other hand, there would be less traffic to reckon with along the route across the moor, and he continued his difficult way until, a mile or so after Princetown had been left behind, a uniformed figure loomed out of the fog with uplifted hand, ten yards in front of his radiator.

At sight of the grave face which looked in at him through the window, Gore stopped his engine.

“Hallo, Yallow!” he said. “You’re a long way from home this afternoon? Want a lift? Or has someone else done a bunk from Dartmoor?”

“No, sir. But there’s been another nasty business back at Cullerton. The same sort, too. Up along the Ockenford road. A man was found bashed to death up there early this morning. He was staying at the Crown in Cullerton under the name of Birmingham. But we’ve found out that his right name is Warden. The chaps that did it were seen. They made off across the Moor—two of them. We’ve been looking for them all the day.” Yallow pointed vaguely northwards into the dingy blindness. “Heading that direction, they were, the last that was seen of them. You can hear the dogs——”

Gore got out and stood for a moment listening to the faint distant clamour of the hunt before endeavouring to get fuller details. But all that Yallow could tell him further was that the murder had taken place about 6.30 that morning, just outside Mrs. Haine’s cottage, and had been witnessed by Mrs. Haine’s daughter and by a man who had pursued the two killers into the fog. A farmer named Bodley and his wife, hearing the cries of the two women, had gone to their assistance and, along their way, had found the dead man, who had apparently been carried some distance from the spot where he had actually been killed. The farmer had driven into the town to inform the police and an organized search for the fugitives had at once begun.

“The strangest part of it, sir, is that the women say that one of the two chaps was a Mr. Purefoy—a gentleman I know well myself—as nice and quiet a gentleman as you could wish to meet. They say he came down with his caravan on Friday night. . . . Excuse me, sir. We’re holding up all cars, you see. . . .”

Yallow moved off towards another car whose lights had appeared dimly a little way ahead, and Gore continued on his way to Cullerton with what

speed the narrow twisting descent into the valley permitted. Neither Potter nor Scott was at the Royal George, nor had anything been seen of either since the preceding evening.

To his relief, however—for he had at once guessed the identity of the solitary pursuer who had followed the fugitives out across the Moor at daybreak—he found them both at the police station, under cross-examination by Inspector Hawley. Scott, he learned, had not actually witnessed the murder; for he had been keeping the cottage under observation during the night from some little distance. But he had heard the cries of the victim and of the two women and, rushing down the track, had caught a glimpse of two running figures making towards Shramley Pound farm. A hundred yards or so farther along the track he had come on Tinsley's body, come to the conclusion that he was dead, and continued his pursuit. But in less than a quarter of an hour he had lost not only all hope of coming up with his quarry but also all sense of direction—fallen into a boghole—sprained an ankle—and ultimately been found towards three o'clock by some of the local searchers four miles out on the moor, exhausted and half-frozen, but still limping doggedly in the wrong direction.

Potter, who had been asleep in the car some way down the road when the screams had awakened him, had succeeded in obtaining from Mrs. Haines and her daughter, before the arrival of the police, some account of what had happened.

“What the girl says, Colonel, is that, very early on Friday morning, Purefoy arrived with his caravan at the cottage without any warning, and asked her mother to let him park his caravan for a few days where he'd had it before. Her mother said yes to that, and they thought nothing about it. But that afternoon the girl—Georgina's her name—found Tinsley—Warden's the name *she* knows him by—waiting for her outside the house where she works during the day, and he told her that she would have to be careful because he believed Purefoy was up to some game with her and that he wanted her to persuade her mother to let him stay in the cottage at night, to look after them both, while Purefoy was about. What I make of it, she was pretty hot on Tinsley, from the way she carried on about him being killed. Anyway, she must have made it all right with her mother—for Tinsley stayed at the cottage that night—and last night, too. About six o'clock this morning, she made some tea for him and let him out at the back, after he'd arranged to meet her again this afternoon down the road. She started to go upstairs to her room, but then she heard him screaming and ran down and opened the back door again, and saw Purefoy just close to it, and another man on the ground beside him, kneeling over Tinsley and bashing him with his fists. She slammed the door and bolted it and ran upstairs to her mother, and they both

started screaming out of the window for help. After a moment they heard someone shouting from the road—that was Scott—and then they saw the other man picking Tinsley up and slinging him over his shoulder, and then he and Purefoy ran off down the cart-track towards Shramley Pound Farm. They saw Scott go running by the cottage after them, hell for leather, and called out to him and pointed which way the other two had gone, and then they lost sight of the whole jing-bang. It was terrible thick round here early this morning—worse, even, than it is now. Then the people from the farm came along, hearing them screaming, and said they'd found Tinsley as they came up the track. I'd got there by that time, so Bodley went back and got his car to drive into Cullerton. I asked the girl just what Tinsley had meant when he had talked about Purefoy being up to some game with her. She says that Tinsley wouldn't tell her—just said he meant to keep an eye on Purefoy so long as she was about the place. But I reckon that's eyewash, Colonel. She's pretty deep—but the blinds went up with a bang when the Bodleys came along and said that they'd found Tinsley dead. However, I didn't like to worry her too much. She was pretty well all in, you see—the mother's a decent woman, but she's just beat by the whole thing. She seems to have thought a lot of Purefoy, and didn't like having Tinsley in the house. Something about a watch . . . I couldn't make head or tail of it. But evidently the daughter bosses her. . . .”

Not until late that night did Mr. Bodley drive in from Shramley Pound Farm with the sole witness of the tragedy's closing scene, one of his own farm-hands. Young Dan Pennuicwick's long legs and deep chest had enabled him to keep going for fifteen hours without rest or food, and his own knowledge of the moor as well as his dog's had saved him from its fog-enveloped dangers. Undaunted by the coming of night or by the silence which had informed him that his fellow-searchers had given up the chase, he had continued doggedly to quarter the area which he had selected for his own particular province, the treacherous ground around Childe's Cross. Ultimately his perseverance had been rewarded by a warning growl from his collie and, listening, he had heard the sound of splashing footsteps some distance from him in the darkness and had begun to move cautiously towards it.

Very cautiously—for he had known that he was then at the very edge of Kistvaen Tor Mire, even in the heart of summer one of the moor's most dangerous bogs—in midwinter, and in the blindness of a night of dense fog, a veritable death-trap. As he had picked his way cautiously from tussock to tussock behind his dog, his sporting instinct had induced him to shout a

warning into the darkness, but the splashing ahead had continued until, at length, a slip, retrieved with difficulty and the loss of a boot, had brought him to a stop and caused him to shout out another warning yet more urgent.

Dan Pennuicuk's nonchalant account of what had then happened suggested that he was a patron of Cullerton's Regal Cinema.

"When they heard me hollerin' they stopped, an' then I heard them comin' back. They was comin' quick, an' I reckoned they meant trouble, so I cocked the old blunderbuss, an' soon's I saw them I let the big guy have it in the legs. He let out a cackle like a gander, but he kept on comin' so I let him have the choke, an' that changed his mind. I slipped in a couple more cartridges while they stood lookin' at me, but then they turned and beat it all out. When I saw which way they were makin', right out into the Mire, I hollered at them and again tried to head them off by firing in front of them. But they carried on, an' then suddenly they stopped goin' an' the little guy began screamin' an' wrestlin' with the big guy, an' I knew then they were in a jam. I couldn't see them rightly 'cept sometimes when the fog shifted a bit. But you could have heard the little guy over at Princetown. The big guy didn't make so much noise to talk of. He went down first, but he pulled the little guy with him. I had a try to get near enough to reach the gun to them. End of that was I lost the gun, an' darn near got caught meself an' Rover with me. So I jus' waited till I couldn't see anythin' or hear anythin', an' then I beat it for the farm. . . ."

And Mr. Bodley added the epitaph:

"Next as'll see or hear anythin' o' them two jokers'll be the God that'll judge 'em."

Before he left Cullerton next day, Gore was permitted, under supervision, an interview with Georgina Haines. By that time he had a long talk with Inspector Granley over the phone and learned that, among other results, his own visit to Mrs. Haines on January 12th had led to the capture of Gallus Anderson, and that Tinsley's two partners in Kings' Road had also been picked up and, as Granley expressed it, dry-cleaned.

"Well, now, Miss Haines," he began encouragingly, "I hear that you sent Mr. Warden—I'll call him that for the moment—I hear you sent him a telegram on Thursday, telling him that someone had been to your mother's cottage that day, making inquiries about him and about Mr. Purefoy and his caravan. As a matter of fact, I've seen the form you handed in at the post office in Cullerton. The reason you bothered to do that, Miss Haines, was, of course, that you knew there was something very queer about Mr. Purefoy and his caravan. Isn't that so?"

"No, it isn't," replied Georgina. "I knew nothing about the beast and his caravan. . . ."

“Oh, yes you did. You knew quite well that there was someone living in the caravan when he was down here last summer—someone whom, for certain queer reasons, he kept always shut up in it, out of sight. Warden had told you about it, and you thought it very queer and all that. I’m talking now about last September—when you came across Warden for the first time—personally, I mean—and didn’t know him—well, as well as you got to know him later. So you thought it very queer that he should talk that way about Mr. Purefoy. Because Mr. Purefoy had been very nice to you—so nice, in fact, that you’d been meeting him up at your mother’s cottage and having nice little chats with him about what was going on at Cullerside—and whether Mrs. Margesson had had any more of her screaming fits—and whether the shutters in her dressing-room were bolted at night—and so on, and so on—and whether you’d been sending off any more postal orders for her—curiously enough, to this very Mr. Warden who had turned up now himself and started to cut Mr. Purefoy right out by saying nasty things about him and his caravan. So you were in a bit of a fix, weren’t you? Because, of course, Mr. Purefoy had been so nice that you’d been able to get yourself all sorts of little things—nice smart clothes for that very nice figure of yours—real good tweeds—well cut. Nice smart shoes. Really good stockings. An autocycle, to save you the fag up from Cullerside to the cottage, or into the town. . . . But Mr. Warden—well, he was a fine, big chap—and he had a way with him. And so you rather changed your mind about little Mr. Purefoy and began to think to yourself that there *was* something queer about him and his caravan. Especially when you thought about things that had been happening lately . . . when you began to wonder, for instance, how on earth anyone could have got up to the window of Mrs. Margesson’s dressing-room. And then—well, of course, it was very queer when the colonel and Miss Joan and Mr. Leonard were all killed that way—such a queer way. That made you think that, really, Mr. Warden *must* be quite right, and that really there *must* be something very, very queer about Mr. Purefoy and his caravan. I wonder, Miss Haines, when you stopped just thinking that—and became quite certain about it? Or did you ever become quite certain about it—until you opened the back door of this cottage yesterday morning . . . opened it, I mean, for the second time. . . .”

Gore stopped and turned towards the three police officials who had assisted at the séance.

“Going to faint, I think,” he said, looking at his watch. “She’s all yours, Inspector. I’ve finished with her. Dear me—just lunchtime. . . .”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

EXTRACT from fourth statement by Tony Purdon, *alias* Sid Ruddock, *alias* Springer Judge. Jan. 17, 1939.

“I first knew William Tinsley in Ireland in the Black and Tans, 1920-1. I remember the burning of a big house at Ballinabar in Co. Mayo in 1921 and a child who was rescued from the fire by Tinsley and afterwards taken back to Dublin by him. In my opinion it was then four or five years of age, to judge by its size and its strength. It could not talk, except to make a few sounds, but it could be taught tricks. It could walk erect but preferred to go on all-fours. It was very hairy and very like a monkey in the face, and very strong and active and could climb anything. It was wearing clothes when it jumped from the window of the house; Tinsley had a uniform made for it by our tailor. It was always well treated while we had it with the company and seemed very happy and contented.

“I saw it on the boat with Tinsley when we came back to England at the end of 1921. I often heard him say in Ireland that it would make a mint of money as a sideshow at his father’s circus.

“I did not see Tinsley again until I met him in London in 1933. He was then licensee of the Ring and Mitre at Catford. After that I saw a great deal of him. . . . I often saw Bonzo wrestling there. He always won easily whenever I saw him. There were no rules at these fights. I was not at the Ring and Mitre the night Jewy Solomons was killed.

“I remember Purefoy coming there. I think it was about the end of ’36 he first came there. I did not recognize him at first as he had grown a beard and looked greatly different. But afterwards Bushy Tinsley told me he was a chap we’d come across at another house at Ballinabar the night we had burned down the big place. He was very friendly with Tinsley and often came to watch the fights or watch Bushy making Bonzo do tricks. After a bit Tinsley told me that Purefoy had told him that Bonzo’s father and mother had been the owners of the place we had burnt down at Ballinabar, but that on account of him being such a freak he’d been kept hidden away under the charge of an old woman, and that it had been given out that the child that had been born had been dead, and that an empty coffin had been buried to kid the people living about. Tinsley said that Purefoy had told him some yarn that

Bonzo had been born like he was because his mother had been cursed by some old dame or other for calling her a monkey and threatening to set the dogs on her. Me and Tinsley thought it was all boloney at first, because Purefoy was always ragging and kidding. But after a bit Tinsley said he thought maybe Purefoy was right and that maybe there might be something in it for us, if we worked it properly, because that Bonzo's father and mother were both still alive and living in England, both of them, and that the mother, anyway, had plenty of stuff and had married another chap called Margesson after she'd been divorced by the chap that had owned the big place we'd burnt down. We talked about it a bit off and on, and Tinsley told me he was making some inquiries, but then he seemed to die on it, and it went out of my mind. However, after a while I found out that he'd got busy with the mother on his own and was getting money out of her, threatening to let her second husband know about Bonzo being alive. She used to send the money in postal orders, big wads of them.

"I didn't want to have anything to do with that game, so I said nothing to Bushy about what I'd found out. After he lost the licence of the Ring and Mitre he got into a bit of a jam and went to Wandsworth, and me and Gallus Anderson looked after Bonzo while he was away. Bonzo was quiet enough if he knew you well, but you had to watch him with strangers. While Tinsley was away, Purefoy came pretty often to see me. That was in the late part of '37. He used to bring cakes and sweets for Bonzo when he came, and Bonzo got very fond of him and used to cry when he went away again. Purefoy was very clever at the drawing and used often to make sketches of Bonzo doing his tricks.

"Tinsley came out in the December and then him and me and Jake Rowley fixed up to start a fish-and-chip joint. We opened in Kings' Road in January, '38. Bonzo used to help serve the customers and was a big draw for us. Purefoy came to Kings' Road sometimes, during the day when it was quiet. Soon as we got started Tinsley remembered about the Margesson dame down at Cullerton and started on her again. As we were partners I didn't want any trouble, so I spoke to him about it then and advised him to lay off that game, as I wouldn't stand for it. He said O.K. to that, but I knew he was still getting money by post. So one day I had a talk with Purefoy about it because I reckoned it had been him that had started Tinsley on the game. But he only laughed and passed it off as a joke, and said that it would serve the Margesson

dame right if she was shown up. I am quite satisfied in my own mind that at this time Purefoy knew the game Tinsley was playing with her.

“At the beginning of May last year, Tinsley took Bonzo out in his car with him one day and didn’t bring him back. When me and Rowley asked him where Bonzo was, he said Purefoy had taken him away to the country for a bit of a change, and he gave us each a tenner, which he said Purefoy had sent us for agreeing to let Bonzo go away, in case it should make any difference to our business, which it did make a big difference. As well as I remember it was the first week in May Bonzo went away. . . .

“I remember Tinsley going away on September 28, last year. He told us he was going to see how Bonzo was getting on. When we asked him, he said that Bonzo was down in Devonshire. That started me thinking, because I knew the Margesson dame lived down in Devonshire somewhere.

“On the evening of October 1st I saw in the paper that a Colonel Margesson and his son and daughter had been found murdered down at Cullerton in Devonshire, and me and Rowley talked it over with Gallus Anderson. So when Tinsley came back on the night of October 3rd, we asked him straight if he’d been at Cullerton. He said no, that he’d been somewhere near Plymouth and that Bonzo and Purefoy were there and that Bonzo was quite happy but was coming back in a week or so.

“On October 10th Tinsley went down to Exeter in his car and met Purefoy there and brought Bonzo back to Kings’ Road with him. When he came back he said that Bonzo had become a bit wicked and would have to be kept out of the shop because he might go for some of the customers. Bonzo seemed quiet enough to us, but a bit sulky, so as he was Tinsley’s concern, we said O.K. and after that Bonzo was kept all the time in the stable at the back. Tinsley told us to say, whenever anyone asked us, that Bonzo was still away, because he was afraid some nosey parker might kick up a dust about Bonzo being kept locked up always, and perhaps go to the police or the R.S.P.C.A. So we said O.K. to that. But we knew that a lot of the people about knew that Bonzo had come back all right and where he was being kept. After a bit, it wasn’t safe to go into the stable without Tinsley, as Bonzo got very sulky with being always locked up and the only one who could manage him was Bushy. Purefoy never came to Kings’ Road after Bonzo

came back that I remember. But Tinsley went down to his place in Surrey, not far from Guilford, sometimes.

“I remember hearing on the night of Christmas Day last that Gallus Anderson’s joint at Catford had been raided. Tinsley and Rowley and me had a talk that night about Bonzo. He said that the cops would be hot on us all, now that they were looking for Gallus, as we were all pals of his, and that it would be awkward if they got poking their noses into the stable. As we’d been guessing there’d been something phoney about his wanting Bonzo kept hid away, we said we wanted to get the whole thing straight and know where we were, and in the end he told us he believed Bonzo had done the murders down in Devonshire, and that Purefoy had set him on to do it and that that had been Purefoy’s big idea all along. That made me and Rowley whistle, of course, and when Rowley saw Anderson the next night he told him about it, and Gallus wasn’t half in a sweat about it. Reason of that was he’d been down himself on the night of the murders at the very place, fetching away some stuff that was at a dump down there behind a bungalow just beside the house where these Margessons lived. And he said that if that came out he’d be in a proper jam, as he was known for a pal of Bushy Tinsley’s. He said Bonzo must be got rid of somehow at once.

“We told Tinsley that and he went and saw Gallus, and they fixed it the best thing was to send Bonzo back to Purefoy and threaten him, if he made any fuss about having him back, to spill the beans. Tinsley went down twice after Christmas and tried to see Purefoy but didn’t. So the second time he sent word to Purefoy by a moll down there that was sweet on him and was looking after the Margesson dame at a house close to Purefoy’s place, where she’d gone to live after the murders. The word Tinsley sent by her was that Purefoy would have to take Bonzo back at once or there’d be big trouble for him. He never got any answer from Purefoy that I know of. Tinsley said nothing to me or Rowley about trying to get more dough out of the Margesson dame while he was down there.

“Me and Rowley had several conversations with Anderson at this time about the murders. Anderson kept saying that Bonzo must be got rid of. I remember him saying that when he got to the dump that night, there was no one about, only a message that he was to lock up after him, and that he thought it queer that the keys

of the shed where the stuff was should have been left in the lock, and had loaded up and got away as quick as he could. . . .

“On January 12th Tinsley got a telegram from this moll of his from Cullerton saying that inquiries were being made down there about him and Purefoy, and the same night we spotted a bloke trying to climb the wall of the stable-yard at Kings’ Road. Tinsley said that settled it and that Bonzo must go pronto, so he took him away that night in the car down to Purefoy’s place in Surrey.

“About an hour after he went, me and Rowley went and saw Anderson and we told him about the telegram and the chap we’d found trying to get into the stable-yard. Anderson got the wind up and said he must shift somewhere else as round Kings’ Road was getting too hot. When me and Rowley left him we walked into it, and the cops went in and got Gallus. . . .

“I know Dopey Cluffe and a pal of his named Bethune. I first came to know them at the Ring and Mitre at Catford while Tinsley had it. They both used often to come there, and Tinsley and Gallus Anderson knew them well. I never knew either of them well. I may have heard that they were dope-pedlars, but have never touched that game myself. I often saw Purefoy with them down there. Some time before last Christmas, when we were talking about the murders down at Cullerton, I remember Anderson telling me that it had been Purefoy who had first told him and Cluffe and Bethune about there being a vacant bungalow down there. At that time the mob Anderson was working with was looking round for likely places for dumps, and he thought this bungalow sounded O.K. In the summer of ’37, when Purefoy was down there, Gallus went down and had a look at it, and afterwards I heard that Cluffe had gone down there to live in it. I think I heard that some time in last July or August. I never heard anything more about the bungalow until after the murders.

“I never heard Purefoy speak of Mrs. Margesson or her husband myself, except the one time I have mentioned above. I had no suspicion or idea why Purefoy took an interest in Bonzo until when Tinsley told me and Rowley on Christmas night that he believed Bonzo had pulled off the job down at Cullerton. . . .

“When Bonzo was with us in Ireland, we all had a habit of whistling for him if we wanted him for anything. Bushy Tinsley had a habit of whistling like a curlew and we all got into the way of imitating him if we wanted to call Bonzo. I often heard Purefoy

whistling the same way, and suppose he picked it up from Tinsley, and me and Rowley. . . .

“In my opinion Bonzo didn’t like coming back from being with Purefoy and being shut up in the stable always by himself made him sulky. Tinsley himself had to watch out when he went into the stable with his food and usually took the cat with him. Bonzo was afraid of his life of cats. . . . When he saw one he’d run off and try to hide himself. . . .

“I knew that Tinsley had had a try with the Margesson dame’s first husband, O’Malley-Martyn, down at Bournemouth, but there had been nothing doing with him. I remember an elderly bloke coming to Kings’ Road one evening while Tinsley was away in September. It was the evening before I read about the murders down there. He wanted to see Tinsley and got tough when we said he was away. He did not say his name, but when Tinsley came back he said he must have been O’Malley-Martyn. We thought he was nuts and chucked him out. He hit his head against the door. We put him in his car and Rowley left him round in Raikes Street. We never heard anything more about it.

“Tinsley told us O’Malley-Martyn believed that Bonzo had been killed in the fire until he told him different down at Bournemouth. Tinsley also told us he believed the Margesson dame thought the child she’d had by O’Malley-Martyn had been born dead until he got busy with her.”

“Interesting, you know, Granley,” commented Gore, when he had perused this illuminating document, “to see how his idea developed. In the rough, it must have been at the back of his head during all those years he was in Canada, that somehow—sometime—Bonzo ought to be able to help him square things up with Margesson and his wife.”

“You think,” asked Inspector Granley, “that he knew Bonzo was her child before he went out to Canada, even?”

“Well . . . he’d seen Bonzo. He knew where Bonzo had come from. He knew that a child had been born. The lodge-keeper from Gortrishia—and, more important still the lodge-keeper’s mother, were living at his mother’s house for three years before he went out to Canada. He knew that Bonzo was certainly not the child either of the old housekeeper at Gortrishia or of her daughter. . . . If he didn’t know whose child Bonzo was at that time, I’m very sure he’d had a good guess. Besides, as soon as he got back to England, it’s obvious he set to work to trace Tinsley. Why? To find out what had become of Bonzo. I expect what happened was that, first of all, he found out

where the Margessons were living. That was easy, and he went to live where he could have them always in sight. And do you think that made the recollection of that kick in the behind any less vivid? *I don't*. So after a bit, when he found that he was not getting any forrarder with the squaring up business, by himself, he thought of a way he could get help . . . and started looking for Tinsley."

"Plausible," commented Granley. "Well—go on."

"I don't expect he had much difficulty in finding Tinsley. The circus people would tell him that the son of the old boss had a pub in south London. . . . No doubt they remembered Bonzo well—told him Bonzo was still alive and kicking. . . . And so—he made contact with Bonzo all right—and began to think exactly how Bonzo could be made helpful.

"I suppose, originally, his idea was simply to make Mrs. Margesson's life hell for her, and that he contented himself with egging on Tinsley to do the dirty work for him. Anyhow, it seems pretty clear to me that the reason Mrs. Margesson sold her house in Surrey in 1936 and bolted off to hide herself away down in Devonshire was that already she was badly scared. Of course, running away was fatal—Purefoy knew he had her on the run, then. And, when he'd been down to Cullerton in the following year and got the lie of the land and seen all its possibilities, his original idea began to develop—and, in the end, of course, it ran away with him. When he bought that caravan in February last year, it must have become something quite elaborate. And it must have been utter joy for him when he saw how Cluffe could be worked into it—or rather, could be let work himself into it. . . ."

"Ingenious, certainly," reflected Inspector Granley. "But to come to the brass tacks of it—let's see. . . . The son was killed separately. That was on the Tuesday night, wasn't it?"

"Early on the Wednesday morning," nodded Gore, "the little doctor down there thinks he and Margesson must actually have heard him being killed. But they thought it was a four-footed rabbit. . . ."

"Where was *he*, then, until the other jobs were pulled off? In the caravan?"

"No. I rather think he was where Cluffe was put afterwards—in that tree. It was a good place—safe—and handy."

"And then . . . ?"

"Well, then Cluffe and the girl simply walked into it. I've no doubt whatever that the girl intended to spend the night at the bungalow with Cluffe. At any rate, she *was* there with him—and Purefoy knew she was there. Some time before those lorries came along, he managed to get in—either by force—or because Cluffe didn't suspect anything wrong until it was too late. Cluffe would show no fight—he'd seen often enough what

Bonzo could do. But the girl probably did make a fight for it—and that was the end of her. The lorries came along—but Purefoy had left that message for them by then—and they went away all right. Purefoy rang up Margesson then, I expect—Bonzo would look after Cluffe while he was doing that—and told him that his daughter was up there with Cluffe—and Margesson went along. We shall never know, of course—but I'm inclined to believe that Margesson himself shot Cluffe. However, whether he did or not, Bonzo, I think, appeared again then—and it was Margesson's turn. . . .

“Well—Mr. Purefoy had a rather unusual sort of mind, I think—I shouldn't like to undertake to explain its workings with any sort of accuracy. But I think we're pretty safe in supposing that, after all this had been done, it had two main ideas. One, to make things look as confused-like as possible. The other, to produce the maximum effect upon Mrs. Margesson. The first idea was carried out by getting Bryant into the picture—dealing with him suitably—playing about with his hat and with Margesson's torch—Cutting the telephone wires—and so on. . . . O'Malley-Martyn was an accident—but he was easily got rid of—and his eyeshade came in handy. His eyeshade put me off the track for a little bit. . . . I thought he had lost it earlier than he really did. . . .

“As for the second idea—that was carried out by grouping the three Margessons and eliminating the irrelevant—that is to say, Cluffe. That, I think, is why the son was resurrected from that hollow tree and dumped alongside his sister—and why Cluffe was put out of sight. It would help the confused-like idea, too, if Cluffe was faded out.”

“Well, but—why was Margesson carted away and left in the wood, instead of being left with the other two—in the group, as you call it?”

“I think that was part of the confusion idea—to connect Margesson's death with the attacks that had been made on people in those woods before that. . . . It left him sufficiently in the group. . . .”

“Why do you think those other folk were attacked? Bad luck—or a sort of try-out?”

“Partly that, perhaps. But also to keep people off the ground at night—and to create a bit of confusion-atmosphere beforehand. You've got to remember that Purefoy couldn't fix a definite zero-hour beforehand. He had to keep on his toes until his chance came along. . . . That was where Miss Georgina Haines was so useful. . . .”

“Why the devil didn't Mrs. Margesson tell her husband straight off?” commented the inspector with some impatience. “Any woman in her senses would have done that.”

“In her senses . . . ? My dear Granley, I don't suppose that at any single moment of her life Mrs. Margesson has ever been in what you and I would

call 'her senses.' Just think what the outlook of a woman like that must be. . . . From the first moment when she was able to understand anything, the whole and sole significance of life became—for her—the fact that she was lovely. So lovely that the whole and sole purpose of everyone and everything about her was to serve and to pay homage to her loveliness—to bow down before it unquestioningly—to humour all its whims—to acknowledge its supremacy and its paramount importance. No use turning on that cynical smile of yours, my dear chap. It has always been so, and it always will be so, and you know that as well as I do. At any rate, I'm very sure that until three years ago Mrs. Margesson's *own* conception of herself—and that's what we're concerned with for the moment—was that of an exquisitely beautiful, graceful, dainty, adorable creature—a thing apart from ordinary folk—finer—more delicate—more precious. And I'm equally sure that her whole existence concentrated itself incessantly and solely on maintaining that impression and effect—in her own mind, just as much as in the minds of other people.

"Well, now—if, three years ago, this ethereal, immaculate creature had discovered, say, that she had developed pyorrhæa—that she had become an offence, physically, to herself and to other people—that all her teeth must come out and that she must wear false ones for ever in future. Well—what do you think that would have meant to her? Just *think*—before you start telling me what any woman 'in her senses' would have felt about it.

"And then let's try to think what *did* happen to this lovely, dainty, precious, fastidious creature three years ago. . . . She discovered that her idolized, beautiful body had given birth to a horror—a monstrosity—to all intents and purposes, an animal—and a hideous one at that. . . . *Are* we thinking? I perceive we are. . . .

"I don't think, however, that Mr. Purefoy is likely to have depended entirely on emotional shock to prevent the very obvious step which, you suggest, any woman 'in her senses' would have taken. I fancy it was conveyed quite clearly to Mrs. Margesson that if she confided her distressing secret to her husband it would be confided to the world at large. . . .

"These, however, as you are eager to point out, are merely my own surmises. The real answer to your question, of course, is—Mrs. Margesson *didn't* tell her husband. She got as far as consulting her first husband. . . . Possibly she might have been driven into owing up to Margesson—if he had lived. However—he didn't."

Inspector Granley grunted ironically.

"All the answers. . . . As a matter of curiosity, Colonel—what put you on to Purefoy—to start with?"

“Well . . . really, what attracted my attention to him first was that he used a word which no one except a hundred-per-cent Irishman would use. Afterwards, I got thinking about that. . . .”

“And you think that, just for a kick in the pants . . . after twenty years . . . ?”

“Now, now, my dear Inspector. Once more I appeal to that imagination of yours. I’ve told you all about that kick in the pants, as the tale was told to me. Think about the humiliating rebuff that had just preceded it—imagine that little cock-sparrow of a lady-killer being taken by the scruff of the neck like a puppy—under the eyes of the lady that had refused to be killed—reflect upon the agonizing complexes—the little-man one—and the social inferiority one. . . . *Think* about it. And remember this. We noble, big-hearted Anglo-Saxons are, as we know, above the paltry pettiness of revenge. And the Irish are just as good as we are at forgetting kindnesses. But never, never—believe me when I say it—never, never does an Irishman forget or forgive an injury.”

“Well,” said Inspector Granley, as his visitor rose to depart, “lots of people get bright ideas, and some of them are lucky as well . . . till they run up against someone luckier anyhow. But what gets me is, how did this bright idea of his happen—in the beginning? You know what I mean . . . that yarn he told Tinsley about the old woman. . . . You say you saw the old woman, yourself. . . . Do you think there could have been anything in that?”

“I don’t want to,” replied Colonel Gore guardedly, as with care he adjusted his hat upon his crinkled head. “But if I met her along the avenue at Gortrisha—say, just before dark—I might. . . . ’Bye-’bye!”

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Stoat* by Alister McAllister (as Lynn Brock)]