

By the Prince of Story-tellers

**JENNERTON**

& CO., LTD

**H&S**



**E-PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM**

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# JENNERTON & CO.

by

E. Phillips Oppenheim

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## CONTENTS

I	THREE BIRDS WITH ONE STONE	<a href="#">565</a>
II	JUDGMENT POSTPONED	<a href="#">586</a>
III	THE TAX COLLECTOR	<a href="#">604</a>
IV	THE LION'S DEN	<a href="#">619</a>
V	THE YANKEEDOODLE KID	<a href="#">633</a>
VI	WAITING FOR TONKS	<a href="#">649</a>
VII	NUMBERS ONE AND SEVEN	<a href="#">664</a>
VIII	TAWSITTER'S MILLIONS	<a href="#">684</a>
IX	THE MAN WITH TWO BAGS	<a href="#">704</a>
X	THE GREAT BEAR	<a href="#">721</a>

## CHAPTER I

### THREE BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

Impatient of the numerous checks which had held up his car all the way from Croydon, Gerald Jennerton let down the window and looked out. London, he realised at once, was swallowing him up. Not the London upon which he had gazed half an hour ago from his earthward-gliding aeroplane—a huge, tumbled chaos of obscurity, with its far-spreading myriads of lights—but an engulfing wilderness of endless streets, through which cars from every direction seemed to be racing to some magnetic centre.

The pavements were thronged with crowds of human beings, multitudinous, innumerable, like drab ants passing before the brilliantly lighted shop windows. Farther northward a deeper red glowed in the misty sky—the reflection of the burning heart of the city. The young man glanced at his watch. After the smooth flying through windless skies, this laboured progress tugged at his nerves. All the time, too, there was that mysterious telegram in his pocket.

Presently, although the crowds grew even denser and the tramway lines more complicated, the thoroughfares became wider, and progress speedier. They passed one of the great railway termini, joined in the slowly moving stream of traffic across the bridge, crawled along the Strand where the December fog was now an actual thing, turned at last into that long, comparatively silent street, which had always seemed to Gerald Jennerton, on his rare visits to it, like the backwater of a turbulent river, and finally pulled up in front of a great stone building from every window of which lights seemed to flash. There were several taxis outside, half a dozen cars parked opposite.

Gerald, descending and entering hastily, passed through a motley little crowd in the corridor on his way to the elevator and mounted to the third floor. He knocked at the door of one of the rooms and was promptly admitted. A large man, of pompous appearance, with grey hair inclined to curliness, and a *pince-nez* balanced on the end of his long nose, greeted him with apparent satisfaction.

“Ah, Mr. Gerald! Excellent! You can go, Miss Smithson,” he continued, dismissing the secretary to whom he had been dictating some letters. “I will ring for you when I am disengaged.”

The young woman disappeared and Gerald took her place.

“You are here sooner than I had thought possible,” Mr. Brigstock remarked. “Which of my wires found you?”

"I was at San Remo. I caught the first train to Nice, flew to Paris yesterday and here this afternoon. What's wrong?"

Mr. Brigstock coughed portentously and removed his *pince-nez*, disclosing red-rimmed eyes of unexpected weakness.

"Something ridiculous," he confided, "yet something in a way alarming. Your father has disappeared."

"My father has what?"

"Disappeared—walked out on us—left the place last Tuesday night without a word or a message to any one, and hasn't been heard of since."

"Good Lord!" the young man exclaimed. "What have you done about it? Have you let the police know?"

Mr. Brigstock frowned heavily. He leaned back in his chair and toyed negligently with the cord of his glasses.

"My dear Mr. Gerald!" he remonstrated. "Think for a moment. We are Jennerton's Limited; we are the greatest firm of private detectives the world has ever known—a more important corporation now than even our American rivals. Who are we to go to the police? If we publish what has happened, we shall be the laughingstock of the world. The head of the firm of Jennerton's tricked and abducted, or a voluntary exile, and his firm unable to discover his whereabouts! Consider the position, I beg of you. We have to be very careful how we move."

There was a brief silence. A puzzled expression crept into Gerald Jennerton's handsome, sunburned face. He was young, apparently about twenty-five or twenty-six years of age. His bearing, voice, everything about him, denoted a secure and gentle position in life.

"Have you moved at all in the matter?" he enquired.

"Our disappearance section has made a few cautious enquiries," Mr. Brigstock replied, "but we are very anxious indeed to keep the matter out of the papers. There is scarcely a soul in this building who knows what has happened."

"Who saw him last?"

"Harmon, his servant. Your father, as you know, was a man of extraordinarily regular habits. At five o'clock on Tuesday he left his office, went upstairs to his apartment, read the newspapers, had a bath, changed his clothes, and punctually at seven o'clock left here and went around to his club, where he usually dined. He has not returned since, although there are several matters of importance here, awaiting his decision. I suggest now that we go up to the apartment and that you see Harmon."

The young man, still a little dazed, rose to his feet, and accompanied by his father's partner, mounted to the top floor of the building where the missing Mr. Jennerton had an apartment. A middle-aged manservant of sombre appearance

ushered them into the living room.

“Queer business this, Harmon,” Gerald remarked, as soon as the door was closed.

“A very strange business indeed, sir,” the man said.

“Was the Governor in good health?”

“I have never known him better, sir.”

“And spirits?”

“Excellent. It was a foggy night on Tuesday, and his last words as he left were, ‘I’m not sure Mr. Gerald hasn’t got the better of us out in Florence.’”

“So far as you know his plans were to spend the evening in the usual way?”

“Absolutely, sir.”

“What was the report from the club?” Gerald asked his companion.

“We have made the most searching enquiries there, as a matter of course. Your father arrived at his usual time, played several rubbers of bridge, dined; but instead of joining his friends in the cardroom afterwards he put on his hat and overcoat and left the club. The commissionaire fancies that he saw him enter a taxi, but he was too far off to hear him give any address.”

“Had my father any important cases which he was looking after himself?” Gerald enquired.

Mr. Brigstock produced a small notebook from his pocket, divided his coat tails carefully and sat down.

“Your question is a very natural and apposite one,” he remarked approvingly. “There are two affairs to which your father was giving his personal attention. The first one concerns the disappearance of a young lady—Miss Clarice Laurieson, by name—photograph herewith, from one of the most exclusive boarding schools on the south coast. We received, some ten days ago, a most agitated visit from Miss Townley, the principal of the establishment, who pointed out that to appeal to the press or to the police would mean ruin for her, and your father promised to interest himself in every possible way in discovering the young lady’s whereabouts. So far as I know he has not met with any success, but he was without a doubt working on the case.”

“And the other affair?”

“A very bad blackmailing case, put into our hands, I am sorry to say, after the—er—victim, Lord Porleston, had already parted with a considerable amount of money. It seems that his lordship was induced by some one or other to go to a private establishment to take dancing lessons. The full details are in your father’s possession, but one gathers—er—that his lordship was discovered by the blackmailer, connected no doubt with the establishment, in a compromising situation with one of the young ladies. The seriousness of the

affair lies principally in the high social and philanthropic position occupied by his lordship.”

“Were these the only two cases on his private book?”

“The only two recent ones, but, as I dare say you know, it has been one of the ambitions of your father’s life to bring about the arrest of Edgar Morris—the Bristol forger and murderer. The police of New York and London have searched Europe for him vainly for three years, and as a firm we were connected with the matter of his last exploit. He has remained undetected so long, however, that until last week interest in the case—‘Murdering Morris’ he was called, by the bye—had faded somewhat into the background.”

“And last week?”

“Your father had a communication,” Mr. Brigstock announced, “the nature of which he apparently did not divulge to any member of the firm—certainly not to me. He sent for all Morris’ records, however, his photographs and the photographs of his fingerprints. He went over to Scotland Yard to see if they had any later information, and for several days he had one of our best men making enquiries in the southwest of London.”

“Where is that man?” Gerald asked quickly.

“Unfortunately, on his way to the States. Your father sent him over to see the Commissioner at New York.”

The house telephone, which connected Mr. Jennerton’s apartment with the offices, rang, and Mr. Brigstock hurried away to keep an appointment. Gerald remained upon the hearth rug, looking around the comfortably furnished library. Mr. Jennerton, Senior, had been a self-made man, but he was a man of taste. The curtains and hangings were harmonious, the few bronzes were excellent, the sporting prints authentic and the furniture Georgian of the best period—a thoroughly comfortable man’s room.

“You have the keys of my father’s drawers, I suppose?” Gerald asked the servant.

“I don’t think there’s a single thing locked, sir,” Harmon replied. “Any valuables or anything to do with the business the master kept in his section of the safe downstairs.”

The young man pulled open the drawers and examined the contents. At the third one he paused.

“So far as I remember, Harmon,” he said, “my father always used to keep a revolver in here.”

“He did, sir. I noticed it last week.”

Gerald searched once more.

“Well, it’s gone,” he announced finally, “and there’s a broken box with six missing cartridges.”

Harmon was puzzled. “I never knew the master to load his revolver in his



life, sir," he confided. "He always used to say that the days had gone by for that sort of thing."

Gerald nodded. "Old-fashioned stunt he used to call it, I remember, carrying firearms. Did you go through the pockets of the clothes he took off on Tuesday afternoon?"

"You will find everything that was there on the corner of the mantelpiece, sir."

Gerald glanced over them—a very harmless collection of oddments. There was a torn fragment of thin pasteboard, however, in the cigarette case, which appeared to be the only object of interest. It was a highly glazed portion of what might have been a plain visiting card, and upon it, in characters so faint that he had to take it to the clearer light to trace them, were written the figures 7107 Chelsea.

"Have you ever heard my father ring up that number, Harmon?"

"Never, sir," the man replied. "As a matter of fact, the master never rang up a number himself. He hated the telephone."

Gerald placed the torn piece of pasteboard carefully in his pocket. "I can stay here, I suppose, Harmon?"

"Your room is always ready, sir."

There was a knock at the door and Mr. Brigstock made his reappearance.

"Know anything about this telephone number?" Gerald enquired, producing the card.

Mr. Brigstock studied it through his *pince-nez*. "Never heard of it," he announced.

"Could you find out who owns the number?"

"We have a special department for dealing with that sort of thing—a matter of five minutes at the most." He spoke through the house telephone and gave a brief order. "No other discovery I suppose, Mr. Gerald?"

"Only one thing, and that I don't quite like the look of," Gerald confided gravely. "My father appears to have taken his loaded revolver with him on Tuesday."

Mr. Brigstock was seriously concerned. "That," he observed, "seems to carry out the idea that your father had got on the track of 'Murdering Morris', though why he should have kept it to himself I can't imagine. I have been with the firm, as I dare say you know, for nineteen years, and there's never been a time yet when he hasn't told me if there was anything serious looming. I don't understand it—I don't understand it at all."

"Neither do I," Gerald agreed gloomily.

"Your father and I are past the age for deeds of violence," his partner continued, pulling down his waistcoat a little over what was an undoubted protuberance. "There are members of our staff who are trained in the use of

firearms, jujitsu, and all means of self-defence, but we ourselves have for years been concerned only with the civil side of the business. Our personalities, too," Mr. Brigstock concluded, "after all these years, are too well known for us to engage with any likelihood of success in what I might—er—call the rough stuff. Your father's action, therefore, becomes the more—er—unaccountable."

There was a knock at the door, and a clerk entered, bearing a typewritten slip of paper. Mr. Brigstock, after a glance at it, passed it over to Gerald:

Number 7107 Chelsea is the telephone address of Miss Vera Cassan, Number 19a, Walmer Street, Chelsea.

Mr. Henry Wenderby, on that same evening, holding an umbrella over his head and, with due regard to his dancing shoes, avoiding the puddles *en route*, crossed the street and rang the bell of Number 19a, Walmer Street, Chelsea. A trim-looking maidservant promptly answered his summons and ushered him into a comfortable little sitting room on the ground floor.

"Mr. Wenderby," she announced.

The girl upon the sofa raised herself and nodded. She was very young and attractive in a queer sort of way—pale, with rather square features, and large, wonderfully coloured eyes of a changing shade of hazel. Her delicately marked eyebrows, light brown hair shingled in the latest mode and the entire absence of cosmetics of any sort gave her an air of peculiar distinction. She welcomed her visitor with a lazy smile.

"Sit down for a moment, Mr. Wenderby," she invited him. "Help yourself to some coffee and bring your chair up here."

Mr. Wenderby obeyed without hesitation. He was a man a little past middle age apparently, stout but with a well-knit figure, a healthy complexion, a humorous mouth and keen grey eyes. His hostess watched him thoughtfully as he poured out the coffee.

"For an Australian, Mr. Wenderby," she remarked, "you have very nice hands."

"It's because of my slack days in London," he confessed. "Somehow or other I don't know how to pass the time, so I just drop in and have a manicure."

"Always at the same place?"

Mr. Wenderby coughed and seemed for a moment embarrassed.

"No fool like an old fool, you know," he observed good-humouredly. "I don't know many folks in London, and I must say I like sitting down and talking to a pleasant-looking young woman sometimes."

She indulged in a little grimace. "You don't pay much attention to me," she remarked.

“You’re a bit above my mark, ma’am,” Mr. Wenderby declared bluntly. “You’ve too many swell friends around for a plain fellow like me. Look at you, all togged out to-night,” he went on admiringly. “I bet you’re off somewhere later on.”

She laughed softly. “You’re overmodest, Mr. Wenderby,” she said. “You are not old, and you are rich, and there are too many girls in the world. You might choose whomever you wished. The truth is, I do not believe that I am your style.”

Mr. Wenderby appeared a little uneasy. “I’m half colonial and half British,” he admitted, “and I was never much of a one for the foreign ladies—beautiful and delicate-looking though they are.”

“You ought not to think me foreign,” she said reprovingly. “I was at school in England. I have lived here all my life. However, it does not matter. I have given you up. I see that I make no impression upon you. To-night you shall have your lesson from my little *protégée*. She is sweet and English and just out of boarding school. Only you must promise me if I leave you alone with her that you will behave yourself.”

“I’ll try,” he agreed, setting down his cup. “I can’t say more than that. It depends upon the young lady a bit, too, doesn’t it?”

Miss Vera Cassan rose gracefully. “I will take you to the studio,” she said. “Afterwards I must go out. Come, my friend.”

Mr. Wenderby held open the door in approved fashion, followed his guide down the hall, out of a side entrance, along a tiled passage and up four steps into a large studio, the door of which she opened with a key she was carrying. There was a phonograph at the farther end of the room, and against it a girl was leaning. She looked at Mr. Wenderby with frightened eyes.

“This is Mr. Wenderby, Clarice,” Miss Cassan announced. “You are going to give him a lesson this evening. He is getting on nicely, but he wants to learn the tango.”

“I’ll do my best,” the girl said doubtfully. “But I am not good enough to give a lesson.”

“You are very foolish to say that,” her friend declared coldly. “You dance very nicely. Do not hurry, Mr. Wenderby. Try and get on with Clarice. She is a dear girl really, but shy. And mind, Mr. Wenderby,” she added, turning away with a mocking little smile, “remember all I have told you.”

“Vera——” the girl began hastily.

“You can come to my room and talk to me when I get home,” the other interrupted. “Have a good lesson, Mr. Wenderby. I may be back before you leave.”

She nodded her farewells and departed, closing the door behind her. Mr. Wenderby glanced at his companion with a little inward chuckle of

satisfaction. He was comparing her with the photograph in his pocket.

“Well, you’ve got your work cut out, young lady,” he said cheerfully, “if you’re going to teach me the tango.”

She affected to busy herself with one of the records. Then she leaned towards him.

“Please do this,” she whispered. “Please go away. It is for your own sake.”

He waited for a moment whilst she started the phonograph. “Hold on a bit till I tie my shoelace,” he begged.

He pushed back the curtains which divided the dancing floor from the small anteroom, and put his foot upon an easy-chair. The girl followed him.

“I can’t explain,” she went on eagerly, “but please go. There is still time. If you call out to Vera, she will come back.”

Mr. Wenderby smiled at her and it was a smile of soothing and infinite protection. His shoelace was tied now and he held out his arms, prepared for the dance.

“Don’t you worry, little girl,” he whispered. “Henry Wenderby wasn’t born yesterday. . . . Start with my right foot, do I? Here goes!”

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It was about half an hour later when Gerald Jennerton, acting upon a somewhat hazy impulse, stepped out of a taxicab and rang the bell at Number 19a, Walmer Street. There was nothing in the least unusual, he realised at once, about the appearance of the place. It was a pretty green and white painted house with window boxes of chrysanthemums and cheerful suggestions of warmth and light through the chinks of the curtains. The door was opened almost at once by a trim-looking parlourmaid. She glanced at Gerald with an air of pleasant enquiry, but as soon as she recognised him the smile left her face as though by magic.

“Don’t come in here, Mr. Gerald,” she begged. “I wouldn’t.”

He looked at her in astonishment. Then he recognized her—the late parlourmaid of some rather intimate friends of his.

“So it’s you, is it, Susan?” he exclaimed. “Why can’t I come in?”

She looked nervously over her shoulder. “I wouldn’t,” she insisted. “You don’t want dancing lessons, and if you did you’d best not take them here.”

There was the sound of the opening of a door upstairs. The girl suddenly stiffened. Gerald pushed gently past her into the hall.

“Will you be so kind as to tell your mistress that a gentleman is here? No need to mention my name,” he added, in a lower tone.

The girl made no further protest. She ushered him into the comfortable little sitting room where a bright fire was burning in the grate. Anything less sinister in the way of a living room could scarcely be imagined, yet Gerald from the moment of his entrance was conscious of a sense of unaccountable

disturbance. The room was small, and there were no communicating doors with any other apartment, yet he had the feeling that he might at any time be called upon to face a crisis.

He was ashamed of the sudden quickening of his pulses as he heard light footsteps in the hall. Then the door opened and Miss Vera Cassan entered. She came slowly towards him, no smile upon her lips, only a slight expression of enquiry. Her walk was graceful, her attractiveness impressive. Gerald was inclined to believe in those first few minutes that she had been a professional dancer.

“You wish to see me?” she enquired. “My name is Vera Cassan.”

“I suppose I ought first to apologise for coming,” he said, feeling inwardly grateful for Susan’s hint. “The fact is, I saw you dancing somewhere the other night, and I heard that occasionally you gave lessons. I wondered whether you’d have me for a pupil.”

She looked at him curiously. Gerald, fortunately for his success in this and various other episodes in life, was a very good-looking young man. His features were well cut, his head well shaped, and his frame the frame of an athlete. The girl looked him over, and it seemed obvious that she approved of him.

“Who told you that I gave lessons?” she asked.

“A man of the party I was with that night. I don’t remember his name. I don’t think I ever heard it. There were rather a lot of us.”

“Are you such a bad dancer that you need lessons?”

“One is never good enough nowadays. Besides,” he went on, with a faintly apologetic smile, “from the right person I thought that lessons might be rather agreeable. You see I have been out of England for some time—haven’t found many of my friends yet.”

She motioned him to a chair, pushed a box of cigarettes towards him and helped herself. Then she sank back among the cushions of the divan and looked at him thoughtfully.

“You cannot have a lesson this evening, if that is what you were thinking about,” she confided. “The studio is engaged.”

“Bad luck!” he murmured.

“If you want to dance very much,” she went on, “you can do so. Some friends with whom I was going out have disappointed me. You can take me to the Embassy if you like.”

“It will give me great pleasure,” he replied.

She rose lightly to her feet.

“What is your name?” she asked.

Gerald, who loved the truth for its own sake and also usually spoke truth as a policy, abandoned it with regret.

“My name is Robinson,” he confided—“Gerald Robinson. I live mostly in Florence.”

“Mr. Gerald Robinson,” she repeated, with a slight contraction of the eyebrows. “And all you know of me is that one of your acquaintances whose name you do not remember told you that I gave dancing lessons. I wonder who he was! There are not many people who know so much. We do not advertise. I give lessons only to people who are worth while.”

“I shall think myself very favoured,” Gerald assured her.

“Wait,” she enjoined. “I will get my cloak.”

She left him alone again, more at his ease now, but disposed to speculate as to whether this expedition to the Embassy was wise. Without a doubt, though, he must pursue his acquaintance with this girl. 7107 Chelsea! What did his father know about the place? And the girl? She was no ordinary dancing mistress.

So far as he could, he made a further examination of the little room. There were several newspapers and magazines lying about, printed in a language which he failed to recognise, half a dozen French novels, a copy of *L'Illustration*, and a few English newspapers. The atmosphere of the room, taken in conjunction with its mistress, notwithstanding its simplicity, was perplexing. He wandered restlessly about. Suddenly he received a shock.

By the side of an easy-chair, half underneath it, in fact, was a man's hat. The longer Gerald stared at it, the more intense grew his sense of familiarity. Mr. Jennerton, Senior, was on the whole an exceedingly well-dressed man. He possessed one eccentricity, with regard to headgear—an inordinate affection for a broad-brimmed black felt Homburg rather like a Spanish sombrero. It was an unusual form of head covering, and practically unmistakable.

Gerald crossed the room towards the door and listened. There was not a sound from the stairs. He turned the hat lightly over with his foot, caught an illuminating glance at the “J” monogrammed inside, and kicked it a little farther under the chair. When, a moment or two later, Vera Cassan came back wrapped in a sable coat, he was standing in much the same attitude as when she had left.

“I have telephoned for a taxicab,” she announced. “It will be here directly.”

“Could we have a look at your studio while we wait?” he suggested.

Again there was that slight contraction of the forehead, the gleam in her eyes, half of question, half of suspicion. Gerald's expression, fortunately for him, was an ingenuous one, and he survived the scrutiny.

“The studio is occupied for the evening,” she told him coldly. “You can see it another day—if I decide to give you lessons.”

“If you decide?” he repeated disconsolately. “I thought that was already a promise.”

She was standing very close to him, and he realised once more her subtle attractiveness.

"I only give lessons," she confided, "to those people whom I like. I am not sure whether I shall like you. I think I may. You are nice to look at, but I prefer to know everything about people whom I receive here. I have a guardian, too, who is very particular. You must tell me more of yourself."

"We will exchange confidences," he proposed. "You are not English, are you?"

"I am thankful to say that I am not," she agreed. "I am a mixture of Polish, Russian, with perhaps a little German—my mother was half English—that is why I speak the language without difficulty."

The parlourmaid announced the arrival of the taxicab and followed them out, carrying her mistress' bag. As she stood away from the door for Gerald to enter, her lips moved; the faintest of whispers reached him—"Don't come back."

---

Mr. Jennerton, Senior, who seemed by some miraculous means to have assumed the clothes and personality of Mr. Wenderby, went puffing and blowing around the studio to the strains of a jazz tune with a nimbleness and vigour which bespoke previous efforts in a similar direction. Once or twice he glanced curiously at his instructress—a very young girl with red-gold hair, slim, pale, with a curious look of disturbance in her eyes and expression. As they reached the far end of the room, she spoke for almost the first time.

"I should like to say something to you," she whispered.

Mr. Jennerton gave no signs of having heard, but he paused, mopped his forehead with a handkerchief and picked up some records.

"Let's sit down in the alcove here and look through these," he suggested, in a loud voice.

They passed behind the curtained space and seated themselves upon a divan. The girl suddenly gripped his wrist.

"This is a horrible place," she confided. "I want you to go away, to leave me—you will be in trouble if you don't go away."

"And leave you here?"

"Take me with you if you will," she went on, her voice shaking with agitation. "I had no idea what it was going to be like when Vera—she was our dancing mistress at school—sent for me and said what a wonderful time we would have. And, Mr. Wenderby, I want you to leave *at once*. If you don't there will be trouble. I didn't understand the first time when Lord Porleston was here. I know now. If you don't take me away, I shall get away as soon as I can."

Mr. Jennerton smiled. "My dear," he assured her, "you don't need to worry

about me. I want to see this thing through. I'm here to find out what's wrong with the place."

Her face lightened. "You mean it?"

He nodded. "What's the programme?" he enquired.

"In five or ten minutes," she whispered, "I bring you in here to rest, and then a horrible man who has a room here—he seems to be in hiding—creeps in and makes a disturbance. You are supposed to be frightened——"

"I understand," Mr. Jennerton interrupted. "We'll see whether we can't turn the tables for once and frighten him, eh? Come along."

They danced again; the girl this time almost joyously. With the terrified expression gone from her eyes, she was remarkably attractive-looking. Mr. Jennerton glanced at the clock. The hour had arrived.

"Would you like to rest?" the girl faltered.

He nodded. They made their way once more to the divan and sat down. Mr. Jennerton lighted a cigarette. Suddenly he leaned forward. His quick ear had caught the sound of stealthy footsteps coming across the room.

"Ought to give 'em a run for their money, put my arm round your waist or something," he whispered, smiling. "Let's have a look."

He tiptoed to the chink in the curtain. A man was crossing the room, dressed in dark clothes, a man with a long, worn face, hollow eyes and closely cropped black hair streaked with grey. He might very well have passed muster as a schoolmaster, or a respectable pedagogue in any walk of life. Mr. Jennerton, however, after his first glance of curiosity, suddenly stiffened through all his ample frame. His eyes flashed, his good-natured face was set in lines of steel. One hand slipped into his pocket; with the other he drew back the curtain.

"Put 'em up, Morris," he shouted—"put 'em up—quicker!"

For the first and last time during his career a master in his profession lost his nerve, and paid the penalty.

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At the Embassy, which Vera Cassan entered with the air of an *habituée*, they found a corner table, and as it was barely half-past ten, decided to sup a little later. Gerald ordered wine and they danced. She nodded as they sat down.

"You will be worth giving lessons to," she admitted.

They drank a glass of wine. Neither the dancing nor the champagne brought any access of colour into her cheeks, or any increased warmth into her tone, but somehow or other he was conscious of a change. Her fingers lingered upon his hand once. Her eyes called him a little closer to her.

"It is agreed," she whispered. "I shall give you those lessons."

They danced again and again, until presently some people came in whom she appeared to know—a big man who was treated everywhere with much respect, and two younger companions. They took a table at the farther end of



the room, and Gerald's dancing partner showed signs of restlessness.

"There is some one with whom I must speak," she confided. "Will you wait for me?"

He stood up and moved the table to allow her to pass. After she had gone he sat, not watching her, but looking at the half-opened platinum and gold bag she had left behind. In one corner, just visible, were two long keys, fastened together with a small gold chain. He recalled Susan's murmured words on the pavement as she had dropped them in—"The keys of the side door and the studio, miss." The studio, occupied for the evening! By whom? For what purpose, if she were the dancing instructress? And why locked?

The sight of the keys fascinated him. More than once his hand stole out across the tablecloth. Then he was conscious that she was returning to him. He stood up again to let her pass to her seat, but she remained standing.

"Do you mind very much," she asked, "if I dance with one of those men? He is a Russian—one of my pupils—and——"

"Please do," Gerald begged. "I shall go and talk for a few minutes to a friend of mine. He has just asked me to have a drink in the bar."

She left him with a little nod. As soon as she had reached the other end of the room Gerald's fingers stole again across the tablecloth . . . In two minutes he was in a taxicab; in a quarter of an hour, outside the house in Chelsea. The lights were dimmed in the front now, but the moon had risen, and he was able to see what had escaped him before—a long side entrance, and at its farther end another building which had obviously been an artist's studio. He made his way cautiously towards it.

There were lights visible from behind the drawn curtains, and a phonograph was playing a fox trot. A wave of doubt depressed him. That sense of the mysterious which had buoyed him up to action since the parlourmaid had whispered her warning, seemed suddenly to fade away. There was something banal and ordinary about the music of that fox trot, something which dispelled at once all his vague suspicions. He was conscious of a most chilling conviction that he was making a fool of himself.

Then, as he lingered upon the step, one slight circumstance rekindled his flagging spirit of adventure—the fact that although the phonograph played smoothly on, there was no sound of shuffling footsteps or voices, and before him the door—an unusually solid one—stood fast closed. He took his courage in his hands, fitted one of the keys into the lock, and threw it open.

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It was exactly at the same moment that Vera Cassan returned to her place, wondering a little at Gerald's prolonged absence, and pushing past the table, glanced towards her bag. The cold light of fear stole into her eyes. Her fingers crept into its furthest folds, and searched—in vain. She half rose to her feet, to

find the big man with whom she had been talking standing in front of her. He leaned down.

“Where is that man?” he demanded.

“Gone,” she answered. “And my keys—he or some one has taken them.”

The man’s face was black with anger. “You fool!” he exclaimed. “Do you know who he was?”

“Only his name—Gerald Robinson.”

He shivered with some sort of emotion, which might have been anger or fear.

“Every man in this world,” he pronounced, “who reaches the end before his proper time reaches it through a woman’s folly. That was Gerald Jennerton, the son of Jennerton, the detective.”

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A brilliantly lighted but empty room, with rows of chairs around the walls—all empty—a phonograph playing apparently for ghosts—and a dead man stretched out upon the shining floor! Gerald looked about him in tragic bewilderment. The curtains at each end of the room were closely drawn; there was no sign or sound of human life. Then a great fear surged in upon him. Surely there was something familiar about the outline of the man who lay doubled up—a shapeless mass—only a few yards away.

Gerald took one faltering step forward, his eyes distended, an agony of apprehension creeping into his heart. One more step—he thrust out his hand—and then darkness!

Gerald, trying to stand upright, found his knees quivering, his heart pounding. Fear, for the first time in his life, had seized upon him. There was blackness, curiously complete. Every light had gone out. The high windows let in not a single gleam of the overhead moon. He could see nothing—not even the shape before him. Only through it all the phonograph played on. The strains of a popular melody rang out through the tragic atmosphere:

“If you knew Susie,  
As I know Susie,  
Oh, oh, oh, what a girl! . . .”

Gerald forgot everything else. An effort of movement seemed to relieve the paralysis of his nerves. He staggered towards the phonograph, threw himself upon it, felt feverishly around its mechanism, found what he sought, touched the switch—and then silence.

He stood there for a moment, making an effort to recover himself. Sanity swept back in waves. He raised his voice.

“Is there any one here?”

There was no reply. The place was obviously empty. He groped his way to

the wall, felt along until he came to a switch, tried it without result. From somewhere or other the lights had been turned off. He felt in his pocket. There was a gold match box attached to his chain. He drew it out and opened it. There was one match. Holding this in his fingers, he made his way slowly back to the middle of the room. His feet, shuffling forward, came into contact with something soft.

He sank on his knees and cautiously felt the body of the man, already a little stiff. For a moment his fingers trembled so that he feared to light the match. Then he drew it swiftly across the corrugated portion of his match box. For a single moment the light flared out. He saw the face of the dead man, the eyes unclosed, the mouth twisted in agony—and the face was the face of a stranger. . . .

With that insurgent wave of relief came a curious lessening of the nervous tension which had almost deprived him of his senses. He stood up and for the first time found his brain working naturally. Whoever had been in this place had left it and closed the door—had left the dead man here to tell his own story. He groped his way along the wall to the door and shook it. He broke the blade of his penknife against the spring lock, from the outside of which, by some evil chance, he had omitted to remove the key, looked up at the windows ten feet above the floor, groped behind the curtains to find a sort of anteroom; but no windows, no sign of an exit.

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He came back again, suddenly stopped and listened. There were steps approaching along the tiled way—light steps and heavier ones—two people. Vera Cassan, perhaps, and a man. He heard them hesitate outside, and then the sound of a key his key—in the lock. He felt a rush of air. He was dimly conscious of two shadowy forms. The girl spoke.

“The lights have been turned off from the house,” she said. “You will find a small switch on the left.”

Then there was light—floods of it—and Gerald, dishevelled, distraught, wild-eyed, as he felt himself and as indeed he was, faced the two newcomers, faced too the wicked-looking cylinder of an automatic which the big man had drawn like lightning from his pocket.

“Who’s this?” he demanded.

The girl sprang forward with a little cry which was half a moan. She was directly in the line of fire. She turned to Gerald.

“Did you do this?”

He shook his head. Just at that moment the power of speech was denied him. The man who had lingered upon the threshold came slowly forward. He was a big, fleshy man, with pendulous cheeks and dark lines under his eyes, but the hand which still gripped the automatic was amazingly steady. Suddenly

Gerald felt his voice strong within him.

"I know nothing about it," he said. "I came in search of my father. I found the place empty."

The girl laid her hand on the barrel of the automatic. "At least," she scoffed, "you should be gambler enough to know the folly of forcing a losing game. Jennerton has been here. He has taken Clarice away."

"This is Jennerton's son," the man muttered. "I hate all detectives. I hate the breed."

The girl stood indifferently between them. "You'd better go," she advised Gerald.

He moved towards the door. The man was scowling, obviously undecided. An instinct of bravado seized Gerald, as he felt the cold draft of air and freedom.

"Those dancing lessons?" he asked.

She smiled at him. "Some day, perhaps."

Then a dash of falling rain and wind up the passage brought sanity.

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Mr. Jennerton, Senior, and a young lady were sharing a bottle of champagne and a plate of sandwiches when Gerald made a somewhat precipitate entrance into the flat.

"Dad!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

Mr. Jennerton held out his hand.

"My lad," he explained, "Miss Clarice Laurieson. Been looking for me, Gerald? Your friend Susan told me you were round that little shanty in Chelsea. Here, take a drink. You look as though you needed it."

Mr. Jennerton, Senior, poured out a glass of champagne; Mr. Jennerton, Junior, promptly swallowed it.

"Glad you turned up," the former continued amiably. "You can take Miss Clarice back to her boarding school to-morrow. By the bye, what made you leave Florence?"

"Brigstock wired me to come—told me when I arrived that you'd disappeared."

Mr. Jennerton sighed heavily. "I shouldn't call it a disappearance," he said. "I changed places with a Mr. Henry Wenderby, an Australian, for a few days. You see, there was this young lady practically held in bondage by an old schoolfellow—very bad lot, I'm afraid, that Miss Vera Cassan; there was poor old Lord Porleston being worried into his grave by a blackmailing hound; and 'Murdering Morris'—well, I admit 'Murdering Morris' was a surprise to me."

"The man you killed!" the girl gasped.

"My dear," Mr. Jennerton, Senior, expostulated gently, "if I hadn't killed him he would have killed us. Every officer in the New York police force, and

every one trusted with a revolver from Scotland Yard has had orders to shoot him on first sight for years. So don't you worry about that. . . . How are pictures, Gerald?"

"I've finished with them," was the prompt reply. "I'm coming in with you, Dad. This is the life!"

Mr. Jennerton, Senior, beamed. From his capacious pocket he drew out a morocco-bound notebook and handed it to his son.

"Oblige me," he said, "by beginning your duties at once. You will find the case of Lord Porleston there; place a red cross against it—blackmailer shot. There are three pages on 'Murdering Morris'—shot. There is the disappearance of Miss Clarice Laurieson—another red cross—returned to her school. It has been the unique experience of my life, Gerald, to finish off three little matters in one night. . . . Have another sandwich."

Miss Clarice smiled across the table, and Gerald decided that she was the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen.

"I'm glad you're going to stay in England," she murmured.

## CHAPTER II

### JUDGMENT POSTPONED

Mr. Jennerton, Senior, scrutinised the card which his lady visitor had presented, passed it on to his son, and waved the former to a chair.

“Mrs. Holman,” he murmured. “What can we do for you, Madam?”

The woman disposed of her somewhat ample person in the chair indicated, deposited her bag upon the edge of the table, and glanced suspiciously at Mr. Jennerton, Junior. She was of approximately middle age, fashionably dressed, although without distinction. Her eyes were of a hard blue, her features inclined to be severe. Her lips, however, were unexpectedly full.

“May I ask whether the young gentleman’s presence is necessary?” she began. “What I have to say is strictly confidential.”

“This is my son,” Mr. Jennerton explained, “my partner and also my secretary. Two heads are better than one, we find, and we know our business too well to be other than discreet.”

Mrs. Holman indicated with a nod that she was prepared to accept the situation.

“No need to say much about myself,” she went on. “You have my name on the card there. My husband was killed in the War, and since then I have been acting as housekeeper to the Reverend Martin Bushe. You know of him, I dare say?”

Mr. Jennerton shook his head. “I am sorry to say that I am not familiar with the name,” he admitted.

“Mr. Bushe,” she explained, “keeps a small but very select school up in Hampstead for advanced scholars only.”

“A sort of coach?” Mr. Jennerton suggested.

His visitor assented. “Mr. Bushe is a very clever man,” she declared. “He is willing to prepare his pupils for anything except the army. A short time ago,” she continued, with a marked hardening of the lines of her face, “it became necessary to engage a typist to deal with the correspondence relating to the establishment. A young person of the name of Sophie Vivian obtained the post, and was with us for about seven months. At the end of that time she left hurriedly, at my insistence. It will be sufficient if I tell you that her attitude towards the senior scholars and one of the undermasters was most unbecoming. I preferred to dispense with her presence and do what typing was necessary myself.”

“Just so,” Mr. Jennerton murmured.

“The services I require from you are that you should discover how Miss Sophie Vivian, as she is called, manages to live without work in a comfortable little house, Number 17a, Richmond Street, just this side of Golder’s Green, and who are her most frequent visitors.”

Mr. Jennerton made a few notes. “This is business,” he remarked drily, “which is usually undertaken by one of the minor departments of our establishment. We do not refuse investigations of this description, but it is not a branch of our calling which we care to cultivate. You can, I suppose, give me no reasons for your curiosity?”

“I am not prepared to do anything of the sort,” was the curt reply. “I am told that you are the best firm of private detectives in London. The job I am offering you is private detectives’ work. Can you tell me how much your fee will be?”

“That will depend upon the circumstances. The matter appears to present so few difficulties, however, that I think you will not find it a serious affair. Shall we report to you up at Hampstead?”

Mrs. Holman rose to her feet and picked up her bag. “I should prefer no correspondence. I will call upon you a week from to-day.”

She took her leave, unconscious of the fact that she had sown the seeds of tragedy.

“A type of woman I particularly dislike,” Mr. Jennerton remarked. “Good-looking but unattractive, severe but sensual, just the sort of person to lose her head over a young schoolmaster.”

“I can guess why the typist left,” Gerald murmured.

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Three days later a card was brought to Mr. Jennerton which he studied for a moment with pursed lips, and passed over to his son.

“Things are moving up Hampstead way,” he remarked. “Here is our friend the schoolmaster to see us. You can show the gentleman up,” he told the commissionaire.

The Reverend Martin Bushe, notwithstanding the fact that he was still of prepossessing appearance, had the air of a man who had found life a difficult business. His long, rather narrow face was deeply lined. He walked with a stoop, wore heavy glasses, and although his hair was still abundant, it had become completely and prematurely grey. There were evidences about him, however, of past elegance; his linen was irreproachable, his sombre black clothes well cut, his footgear bore the stamp of a West End bootmaker. He unfastened an old-fashioned cape as Mr. Jennerton motioned him to a seat, and laid upon the floor by his side a soft black felt hat of clerical shape.

“What can we do for you, sir?” Mr. Jennerton enquired, studying his visitor with some curiosity.

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Mr. Bushe removed his tortoise-shell glasses and wiped his eyes. Notwithstanding his furrowed face, he seemed of no great age. The eyes themselves were hard and bright, his voice firm and pleasant.

“I am recommended to you, Mr. Jennerton,” he began, “as being the head of one of the best-known and highest-class firms of private detectives in the world.”

“I believe,” Mr. Jennerton admitted without undue modesty, “that we have earned that reputation.”

“I keep a school,” his visitor continued—“not a large establishment, but owing to certain successes I have achieved, I am able in a measure to choose my own pupils. They number only thirty, and my sixth-form lads are all working with some specific aim. I employ only two assistant masters, who are both Oxford men. While I am on the subject, I will mention the fact that they both came to me with excellent references.”

Mr. Jennerton bowed. “I have heard your name mentioned, Mr. Bushe,” he confided, “as a very brilliant scholar of your day, and a very successful schoolmaster since you entered the profession. You are also, I believe, a regular contributor to the reviews on classical and theological subjects.”

Mr. Bushe seemed a little surprised. “I scarcely expected,” he admitted, “to find you so well informed. However, now that you know who I am, let me explain the object of my visit. It has come to my knowledge entirely by accident during the last few days that one of my household, whether it be one of my two assistant masters or one of my senior students, I cannot tell, has been in the habit of leaving the school premises late at night, eluding the vigilance of the lodge-keeper by wearing a cape and hat and also glasses similar to my own, and returning at any hour in the morning.

“Furthermore, this person, whoever he may be, has obviously some gift of mimicry. Although the difference in age between myself and the older of my two assistant masters must be at least fifteen years, and in the case of the eldest of my scholars nearly twenty, this person who has taken such an unwarrantable liberty has succeeded on many occasions in being mistaken for me.”

“A situation which might lead to serious complications,” Mr. Jennerton mused.

“A situation which has already involved me in various embarrassments,” his visitor confided. “In the Athenæum Club last night a dignitary of the church, who is one of my closest friends, distinctly avoided coming to my table. I learned afterwards from a friend that I was supposed to have been seen supping at a restaurant called the Trocadero on the previous night with—er—a young lady—er—of—considerable personal attractions.”

Gerald managed with difficulty to restrain a smile. His father maintained



his attitude of sympathetic interest.

“Other similar misapprehensions, I understand, exist,” the schoolmaster continued. “The parents of one of my scholars are under the impression that I spent an evening last week in a retired corner of a box at the Hippodrome, while another of my acquaintances firmly believes that he saw me in a taxicab in Oxford Street, accompanied by a young lady of striking appearance.”

“The position,” Mr. Jennerton admitted, “is no doubt annoying, but, if you will forgive my saying so, I should have thought that it would have been a perfectly easy matter for you yourself to have discovered the culprit.”

“It would appear so,” Mr. Bushe agreed, “but, as a matter of fact, I have made efforts in that direction and failed. It is really not so easy a matter as it appears. My lodge-keeper is not an old servant, and though I am loath to do any one an injustice, I imagine that he is a type of person who might easily be bribed. He assures me that he has noticed no one leaving the house on the various specific occasions I have mentioned, except myself. Then, as to returning, both my assistant masters have latchkeys, and there are several entrances to the gardens.”

“You could, at any rate, see that your outer habiliments are not available,” Mr. Jennerton suggested.

“I have already taken that step,” Mr. Bushe replied. “Such an action on my part has, however, been anticipated. My impersonator, whoever he may be, has provided himself with a cloak and hat corresponding to my own.”

“What about changing your lodge-keeper?”

“That course has occurred to me,” the schoolmaster confessed. “At the same time, however, I have become possessed of a desire to go a little further than merely discover the identity of the delinquent. I should like to ascertain the whole curriculum, to know exactly how the evening has been spent, in what company, and at what hour the truant returns. I could then deal with the matter finally.”

“The commission appears to present no particular difficulties,” Mr. Jennerton assured his visitor. “If a person other than yourself should leave the house any night this week, I think we can promise you all the information you desire. Whom do you suspect?”

His client hesitated. He replied, after a brief pause, with obvious unwillingness.

“Of my two assistant masters,” he confided, “Ernest Drysdale is short in stature, fair in complexion and inclined towards *embonpoint*. He may at once be ruled out. His *confrère*, Reginald Marston, a very distinguished scholar and a young man in whose character I have always had the highest confidence, is, on the other hand, dark, of about my height, and not unlike me in general appearance. He was a member of the Thespian Society at Oxford.”

Mr. Jennerton made a note. "And among the senior scholars?"

"There is only one who need be considered—Geoffrey Wylde. His facilities, however, for leaving the house and returning are nothing like so great."

Mr. Jennerton appeared to consider the situation for several moments. "I would suggest to you, Mr. Bushe," he said, at length, "that this is not a matter in which the services of a detective are necessary. You could place an additional servant in whom you have confidence with the lodge-keeper tomorrow night, instruct them to stop whoever might attempt to leave the place, and deal out your own discipline."

Mr. Bushe frowned. "There would be no discipline to deal out," he objected. "It is no vital offence, even for Wylde, to leave the house, and wearing similar clothes to mine might be simply a matter of taste. Besides, as I have explained, what I require is a record of how the young man, whoever he may be, spends his evening. I should then be in a position to deliver justice conclusively."

"I have the name, Mr. Jennerton," his visitor concluded, "of being a severe man. That may be so, but I am also a just one. I require absolute proof of misdemeanour before I move. Having that proof, I do not hesitate to deal out justice. . . . With regard to the matter of fees?"

"They will not be large," Mr. Jennerton assured his questioner. "The case can easily be dealt with by one of our ordinary staff. By the bye," he added, "this senior scholar of yours, Geoffrey Wylde—are his parents people of means?"

"They are, I believe, moderately wealthy," Mr. Bushe replied gravely, "but I do not think that he is over-well supplied with pocket money. I feel bound, however, to mention the fact that a few weeks ago Mr. Marston approached me and asked for an advance on his salary. I am inclined to regret now that I acceded to his request."

Mr. Bushe rose to his feet and took a dignified leave. Mr. Jennerton, Senior, and his son exchanged puzzled glances.

"Beat!" the latter murmured softly.

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For nearly half an hour the Reverend Martin Bushe, in the seclusion of his library, read and reread the letter which he had received by the evening post from Jennerton and Company, Limited, some few days after his visit to them. He had sat down to its perusal very much his ordinary self, a little tired perhaps with the day's labours, for he was an earnest worker, but with no very serious apprehensions as to the disclosures which he expected. When finally he folded up the letter he seemed suddenly to have become an older and a stricken man. He sat for several minutes without moving, his eyes looking through the

walls of the room, his lips more than once quivering a little as though with pain. Finally he rose and rang the bell.

“Find Mr. Drysdale and Mr. Wylde,” he directed the butler, “and ask them to step this way.”

There was a brief period of delay. Afterwards they entered almost simultaneously. Wylde was a public schoolboy, a little lanky and overgrown, destined for the Civil Service, more or less of an athlete, with an earnest, sensitive face and indications of a mentality in advance of his years; Drysdale was of a more sombre type, gloomy and a little taciturn, disappointed in his college career, disappointed with his first essay in the scholastic profession. Mr. Martin Bushe motioned them both to chairs. He was not a man of remarkably keen perceptions, but it was easy even for him to see that neither was altogether at his ease.

“I have sent for you two,” he began, “to ask you a question. Wylde, you know the regulations of this establishment?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you, Mr. Drysdale, you too know that although I desire my assistants to have every possible liberty, I like them to give notice if they desire to spend an evening out.”

“I usually do so, sir,” the usher replied, after a moment’s hesitation.

“It has come to my knowledge,” Mr. Bushe continued gravely, “that you, Wylde, and you also, Mr. Drysdale, have been in the habit of leaving this house secretly at night; not only that, but one or both of you have had the impertinence to assume the disguise of my outer garments.”

Neither made any reply. Curiously enough, their surprise seemed to be centred upon each other.

“I will speak to Wylde later,” Mr. Bushe proceeded. “I look upon this offence, Mr. Drysdale, as being more serious in your case. You see what your example has done. How can I expect to maintain discipline in this establishment when you, who should be my principal helper, break every regulation of the place?”

“I am very sorry, sir,” the assistant master said. “I admit that I have taken a great liberty. As to your cloak and hat, I know perfectly well that the use of them aggravates my offence. You so seldom leave home at night, however, and Browning, the lodge-keeper, is so inquisitive, that I confess I have made use of them on various occasions.”

“What have you to say for yourself, Wylde?” Mr. Bushe enquired.

“Simply that I had to go, sir,” the boy replied, looking his questioner in the eyes. “I couldn’t have stayed in. I never wore your clothes. I bought some like them.”

“What do you mean by saying that you couldn’t have stayed in?”

There was a moment's silence.

"I had to go," the youth repeated.

The schoolmaster leaned forward and pushed the green lamp a little farther away from him. In its light, his face had seemed almost ghastly.

"The information I have received," he said, "has come as a very great shock to me. You have betrayed your trust, Mr. Drysdale. I shall not think it necessary to ask you to accept the customary notice. You will make it convenient, I hope, to leave to-morrow morning."

"I shall certainly do so," the other assented, turning away.

"Any expression of regret you might think well to tender——" Mr. Bushe suggested with faint sarcasm.

"I have no regrets," the other interrupted as he opened and closed the door.

Wylde started to follow him. Mr. Bushe called him back.

"Stay here, Wylde," he directed.

"I want to speak to Mr. Drysdale," the boy confided, with a curious glitter in his eyes. "There is something I want from him."

"You will have an opportunity later on," Mr. Bushe told him. "Stay here now, if you please. Your father, Geoffrey Wylde, is one of my dearest friends. I am anxious to take no false step with regard to you."

For a quarter of an hour Mr. Martin Bushe sat in silence in the shadows of the room, his eyes fixed upon the fire. Wylde fidgetted in his chair, pulled out his watch and looked at it every few minutes. At last he rose to his feet.

"I can't stand this any longer!" he cried. "Let me go, sir—please let me go."

The headmaster waved him away. "You will report to me before classes at nine o'clock in the morning," he said.

The boy made for the door, forgot to close it, and bounded up the stairs, three at a time. Mr. Martin Bushe rose to his feet and stood for a moment deep in thought. Then he took the letter from Jennerton and Company, tore it deliberately across and threw it into the fire.

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Some hour or so after the despatch of the firm's report to the Reverend Martin Bushe, Gerald Jennerton made a visit, impulsively decided upon, to Miss Sophie Vivian. So far as he was able to judge, she was unexpectedly superior to her type. She welcomed him civilly, but without enthusiasm. It was obvious that she wanted to know definitely the purpose of his visit before she responded to the amenities in which he endeavoured to engage.

"I suppose I really ought to have written," he remarked, as he accepted her somewhat dubious invitation to follow her into the sitting room. "The fact is, I meant to do so to-night, but as I was passing your street it seemed to me that the simpler thing was to call. Personality counts so much with my father, and

correspondence doesn't lead one very far."

"But I don't quite understand," she said, "from whom you heard that I was looking for work."

"Your name was mentioned by the Reverend Martin Bushe," Gerald confided. "He and my father are fellow clubmen."

Miss Vivian frowned slightly. She was far better looking than he had anticipated, better dressed, and obviously better educated. The house was very small, and in a partially built-up neighbourhood, but the little room, even though its furniture was not expensive, had an air of comfort, even of luxury. There was no suggestion that she was in financial straits.

"Mr. Bushe," she murmured. "That really makes it even funnier, because Mr. Bushe knows that I hate typing. Won't you sit down?"

Gerald accepted a chair with gratitude. He felt that he was over the first difficulty.

"What Mr. Bushe really said to my father, I fancy," he remarked, "was that you had recently been engaged at his school, and that he had found your work exceptionally good."

"I had lots of fun there," she admitted frankly, "but it was a horrid place. I was very glad to get away."

"You live here all alone?" he ventured.

She smiled at him. "Why not? Girls are getting used to that sort of thing nowadays. Surely you don't find it strange?"

"Not at all," he assured her. "The only thing is, it seems such a lonely neighbourhood. The houses near you are not finished, and you seem almost cut off at the end of the street."

"I am not a nervous person," she declared.

"Am I to take it," he asked, "that you are really not looking for an engagement?"

She hesitated. "I wouldn't quite say that. Everything is a little uncertain with me just now. Perhaps you had better come and see me again some time." She glanced at the clock and started suddenly to her feet. "Is that the right time?" she exclaimed.

Gerald consulted his watch. "Within a minute or two."

"I must ask you, please, to excuse me now," she begged. "Please go away at once. I ought not to have asked you in. I have an engagement, a visitor coming."

Gerald picked up his hat and rose to his feet.

"I am sorry," he said. "May I hope that you will consider the matter upon which I came to see you? Perhaps I had better write?"

"Yes—yes," she assented hastily. "Write to me. Write and tell me just what sort of a position it is you want me to fill—only, you must go away now at

once.”

Even as he was moving towards the door a look almost of terror suddenly flashed into her face. The latch of the front gate had been raised, and the gate itself opened and slammed. There was the sound of eagerly approaching footsteps along the tiled walk. She drew aside the curtains which led into a room beyond.

“Do as I ask,” she insisted feverishly. “Step in here and wait. The moment you hear any one enter this room, leave the house on tiptoe. I will see that the door is unlatched. You must promise me that you will do this.”

“Naturally,” Gerald answered. “I am very sorry to be in the way. But are you really all alone in the house?”

“Of course I am. Why?”

“It seems such a solitary spot for you, that’s all. Aren’t you ever afraid?”

“Only of intruders,” she answered curtly.

Through the few inches of parted curtains he had a little vision of her as she stood for a moment with her hand pressed to her side, listening intently. Then he heard the sound of a key in a lock, the opening of a door, a step in the hall, a voice. Whereupon—he had been a detective for a few weeks only, and the instincts of his past life were unweakened—he did exactly as he had promised. He stole into the passage without a glance towards the sitting room, or a moment’s pause to listen, opened the door softly and passed out. . . .

As he made his way towards the main thoroughfare he was filled with an almost oppressive sense of the remoteness of this little oasis of half-built houses. He found a taxicab as soon as he emerged on the main thoroughfare and drove thoughtfully back to his club.

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At the end of that dark and silent street, with its ghostly medley of half-built villas, its disorder of cement tubs and heaps of bricks, two men, some hours later, were fighting in the moonless night. If either had any idea of the rules of civilized conflict, he had thrown them to one side, and they fought with a common purpose, as savage men who fought to kill. Both were young, one with some advantage in height.

Backwards and forwards, in the added obscurity of the half-built wall, they sprang at each other, swayed and stumbled, wrestled and wrenched themselves free, only to fall once more to combat. Not a word passed at any time, scarcely a groan, although more than once the taller man seemed locked in the other’s grip, and once his head was banged against the wall with a sickening thud. There was blood upon the pavement as well as upon their faces, and now and then a little sobbing breath escaped from one or the other of them.

They fought as men who have lived for long under the repression of a silent and aching hatred, men who fought without weapons, but aflame with

the desire to kill.

The end, when it came, was unexpected. The taller youth, putting forth what appeared to be his last effort, closed with his enemy, beat him back against the wall, reached his jaw, leaned forward to drive home a second blow just as the other staggered and fell. The victor for a moment threw up his arms, then he, too, overbalanced, slipped in a pool of blood and fell heavily with his head upon the rough edge of the kerbstone. They lay across the pavement, grotesque and repulsive, scarcely a groan from either of them. A distant church clock struck the hour. Down at the bottom of the unfinished road opposite there seemed some commotion outside a small house at the end of a silent row.

A policeman had taken his stand at the gate.

Presently a taxicab stopped, picked up some passengers, came rumbling along the half-made road, was on the point of turning away towards the main thoroughfare when the driver jammed on his brakes and pulled up. The light of his lamps had disclosed the horror on the pavement. Gerald stepped quickly out of the cab, followed by a man in the uniform of a police inspector. They leaned over the prostrate bodies.

“Two of them, sir,” the police inspector said to Gerald. “We weren’t expecting that.”

The latter made no reply for a moment. He was looking at the broad-brimmed felt hat which had rolled into the gutter, and the torn fragments of a black cloak upon one of the men’s shoulders.

“A police ambulance, as quickly as possible,” the inspector directed the taxicab driver. “You’ll find a box at the next corner.”

The man drove off. Gerald, conscious of a sudden nausea, swayed. The police inspector passed an arm through his.

“Take my advice, Mr. Jennerton,” he begged, “and get along home. The rest of this isn’t your job. Mr. Dix insisted upon telephoning you as soon as we found out what had happened, because we knew your men had been shadowing the girl, but this part belongs to the police. You can’t do any good here.”

Gerald nodded. “I’ll see Mr. Dix in the morning,” he said. “One of these two must have met the other coming away.”

The inspector nodded. “Maybe we’ll never know which of them did it, sir,” he observed. “It’s my belief the tall one’s got a broken neck. I’ll get you a taxi.”

He blew a whistle. A taxi came lumbering up, and Gerald stepped in.

“I’ll let you know if there’s any news in the morning, sir,” the inspector promised.

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The “Richmond Street Tragedy”, announced the next morning in lurid

headlines throughout the entire press, made an instantaneous appeal to the sensation-loving public. All the concomitants of horror were there, naked and terrible—a beautiful young woman discovered strangled to death in her lonely little house, and within fifty yards two young men who had fought to the bitter edge of death now lying unconscious in a hospital, with an emissary of the law always in attendance, waiting for the last words of either. The whole neighbourhood swarmed with newspaper men.

The old charwoman who had discovered the tragedy, although knowing little of the young woman, had a great deal to say about a mysterious man who had visited her almost nightly, and who wore always a black felt hat of curious shape, and an old-fashioned cloak. Not one such garment but two had been brought to the hospital with the wounded men, and with them two hats, one battered out of recognition, but still undoubtedly of the shape described.

The participants in that terrible struggle of the night had been identified by the time the midday edition was out. One was Geoffrey Wylde, senior student at the school conducted by the Reverend Martin Bushe at Hampstead, the other Ernest Drysdale, a tutor engaged at the same establishment. The evening papers were able to throw still further light upon the tragedy. They were able to announce that Miss Sophie Vivian, the murdered lady, had recently been engaged at the school of the Reverend Martin Bushe as a typist, and had left rather hurriedly at the insistence of the matron.

The drama of jealousy, at present only dimly outlined, was eagerly surmised by a thrilled public. The question which every one asked was, which was the murderer and which the avenger?

On the following morning, after twenty-four hours of anxiety, both men were still alive, the condition of each equally critical. The inquest was held over, awaiting the possibility of evidence from one of them.

Every hour little pieces of additional information rendered reconstruction by the amateur criminologist an easier task. The story of how first one and then the other of the two young men adopted the same disguise to steal out of the house at night was everywhere made public, but of their meeting in that deserted, half-made street, of the flame of wild passion which blazed there during that fierce struggle, no man knew anything. It could only be surmised that one risked his life as the avenger; one, perhaps, as the jealous murderer.

On the third morning it was announced that Drysdale had recovered consciousness, that the possibilities of his recovery were fairly favourable.

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Shortly after half-past ten on the fourth morning following the tragedy, a taxicab turned in at the drive leading to the scholastic establishment at Hampstead, and Mr. Jennerton and Gerald, admitted by a butler of austere demeanour, were ushered into the library.



“Mr. Bushe is taking a class at present, sir,” the man announced. “I will let him know of your arrival.”

Father and son seated themselves in the worn but comfortable easy-chairs on each side of the fireplace. In less than five minutes Mr. Martin Bushe came sweeping in. He bowed to his visitors and subsided a little wearily into a chair.

“You will pardon my keeping you waiting,” he begged. “I am trying to carry on as usual, but I find the task almost beyond me.”

He had, indeed, the air of a stricken man. His eyes appeared to have receded into great hollow depths, his pallor was almost ghastly, the lines seemed to have become more deeply engraven in his face. “I receive your visit, gentlemen,” he confessed, his voice no longer mellifluous and pleasing, but harsh with a vibrant note of anxiety, “in fear and trembling. It is right, of course, that justice should be done to the perpetrator of this horrible deed, but all my life I fear that I shall be oppressed with the memory that it was I who came to you with the story of what was going on, I who paid you to watch; that it was from my admonitions that these two unhappy young men guessed at each other’s infatuation. I am almost afraid to ask you the question which haunts me. You know—tell me as quickly as you can.”

“You came to us just in time,” Mr. Jennerton confided. “Thanks to your visit and to one other circumstance——”

“Don’t keep me in suspense,” Mr. Bushe interrupted fiercely. “What I want to know is this: are you able to supply the evidence which the police require? Do you know which young man first visited that unhappy girl, at whose hands she met with her death?”

“We do,” Mr. Jennerton replied gravely. “The story as it stands in the Press to-day is very nearly the true version. Not one but both of these young men were in the habit of leaving your house secretly at night, as our report informed you. Both were accustomed to visit Sophie Vivian at different hours. We know which one visited her first and which last, on this fatal occasion.”

“Which?” Mr. Bushe gasped, “Don’t tell me it is Geoffrey Wylde you mean to lay your hands upon! I love the lad. Don’t tell me that it was he.”

“It was not he,” Gerald declared. “As a matter of fact, he did not leave your house until an hour after Ernest Drysdale. The two must have met at the corner of Richmond Street, where they quarrelled and fought.”

Mr. Martin Bushe gave a little groan of relief. “I can’t explain to you,” he faltered, “what a relief this is to me. I was at Oxford with that lad’s father, and although he was my senior, he was my dearest friend.”

Mr. Jennerton now leaned a little forward in his chair. There was scarcely the sympathy in his face which one might have expected.

“Mr. Bushe,” he announced, “in all my experience of crime and criminals, which has been extensive, I have never come across a case exactly like this.

My son and I have decided, under the circumstances, to waive professional etiquette and to make a certain disclosure to you. Before you visited us we had already received instructions from another source to prepare a report upon this unfortunate young woman's manner of life, her means and her visitors."

The schoolmaster seemed for a moment perplexed. "From another source?" he repeated.

"I should prefer to mention no names," Mr. Jennerton continued. "If it had not happened that we had also those instructions to carry out, it is possible that your tutor might find himself in the dock as soon as he leaves the hospital. As things are, however, neither of those young men will ever be charged with the crime."

The Reverend Martin Bushe gripped the sides of his chair. There was a little twitch at the corners of his lips; otherwise scarcely a sign of emotion.

"Neither of them?" he echoed mechanically.

"We were set no arduous task," Mr. Jennerton went on. "We discovered without difficulty that the little house in which Miss Vivian was living had been provided by you, that her means of subsistence came from you, and that you were her most frequent visitor. You were naturally able to pay your visits at a time when your younger rivals were engaged with their duties, although occasionally, as you were beginning to realise, you ran some risks. From our report, you discovered that the young lady was carrying on an intrigue with either your usher or your senior pupil, or both. Whether you had any communication with them upon the subject or not we do not at present know, but it is certain that before either of the two young men had left your premises, you visited Miss Vivian yourself. What passed between you and her is your secret."

Nothing in the whole development of this somewhat curious case had so amazed either Mr. Jennerton himself, or Gerald, as the complete composure of the accused man. There was no shock of surprise, no shrinking of fear, no sign even of great mental disturbance. On the contrary, the haggard look left his face and an expression of positive relief took its place. He leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs in natural fashion. His personality appeared somehow to re-establish itself. He had entered the room a stricken, trembling man. In those few seconds he seemed to revert to his former self—the cultured scholar, the man of the world, at ease with his companions, master of the situation.

"Out of curiosity," he enquired, "may I ask the name of your other client?"

Father and son exchanged glances.

"I think," Gerald said, "that, as we have gone so far, there is no reason to keep the matter secret. It was Mrs. Holman, the matron of your school, who instructed us."

The schoolmaster's expression might almost have been one of pleased interest.

"That is the kind of woman," he pronounced, "from whom one might expect an action of this sort. Jealous, she was—jealous from the moment the girl crossed the threshold—yet perhaps what she did was for the best. . . . Have you news of the young men to-day?"

"Both," Gerald confided, "are now conscious and will probably recover. Their stories have not yet been told, but apparently each believes the other to be the murderer. Hence their furious fight."

"There need be no discussion upon that point," the Reverend Martin Bushe declared firmly. "Not only your facts but also the theory which I have read in your minds are correct. Within an hour and a half of receiving your report I visited the young woman, and in a fit of cold and deliberate fury I killed her. If it is quite convenient to you, gentlemen, I will remain here while you make the necessary arrangements for my arrest."

He leaned back in his chair. Gerald left the room and returned in a moment or two.

"One never knows in these moments of excitement," Mr. Bushe continued, in a low tone, "what might happen to any one. If you would favour me with half a sheet of note paper and pen and ink from the tables there. . . . Thank you, Mr. Jennerton."

In his prim, formal hand, the schoolmaster wrote a few sentences, signed them and paused with the pen still in his hand. The two men, father and son, looked at him curiously. There was a new expression in his eyes—no longer one of fear—a set, far-away look, as of one who gazes curiously into the future. His head dropped a little farther back upon the cushions just as heavy footsteps in the hall drew nearer and paused.

So, as the knocking came upon the panels of the door, Martin Bushe died.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE TAX COLLECTOR

“Gentlemen,” the fat, florid personage, who had entered almost on the heels of the commissioner announcing him, exclaimed, “my name is John Cope—John Bodham Cope, M.P. You may have heard of me. I have come to see whether you can rid me of the most pestilential, idiotic, criminal persecution that ever man had to endure.”

“Won’t you take a seat?” Mr. Jennerton invited, half rising from behind his writing table.

The newcomer advanced to the client’s chair and subsided into its comfortable depths. He laid a glossy silk hat, a gold-topped Malacca cane, and a pair of new gloves by his side, hitched up his grey shepherd’s plaid trousers, and glared at the two men whom he had come to consult.

“My son,” Mr. Jennerton observed, with a little wave of the hand towards his neighbour, seated at a smaller desk.

Mr. Bodham Cope grunted; Gerald nodded pleasantly.

“We know you by name, of course, sir,” the latter remarked. “You are the Member for Bedlington, aren’t you, and on the board of a good many industrial companies?”

“I am a public man, sir,” Mr. Bodham Cope acknowledged—“a well-known public man. There is nothing in my life of which I am ashamed, nothing I have done which justifies this villainous, atrocious persecution to which I am all the time subjected.”

“Perhaps,” Mr. Jennerton, Senior, suggested, “you had better tell us about it. That is, if you wish for our aid.”

“It’s so difficult!” the other muttered, his thick lips turning outwards. “Look here, young fellow,” he went on, addressing Gerald, “just open the door, will you? . . . That’s right. Is there any one hanging around?”

“There is a gentleman waiting,” Gerald announced.

“Fetch him in,” Mr. Cope growled. “It’s the first invitation I’ve ever given him, but he’ll come fast enough.”

“Mr. Bodham Cope asks if you will step in,” Gerald repeated to the person who was seated on a divan in the passage.

The latter promptly rose to his feet, with a politely murmured acknowledgment, and followed Gerald into the room. He was apparently of youthful middle age, dressed in the nowadays somewhat unusual morning coat and shepherd’s plaid trousers; he wore a white flower in his buttonhole and he

carried a silk hat and a Malacca cane in his hand. His smoothly brushed hair was of flaxen hue, his complexion was sandy, his eyes almost china blue. He was clean-shaven, his mouth was large, his manner deferential to the point of timidity. He bowed to Mr. Jennerton, Senior, accepted the chair to which Gerald pointed, and beamed upon Mr. Bodham Cope.

“There he sits,” the latter exploded. “If I could wring his neck, or send him to prison for twenty years, I’d do it to-morrow. Look at him, gentlemen. Does anything strike you about him?”

“He appears,” Gerald suggested diffidently, “to have imitated your style of clothes.”

“He imitates me and he shadows me every moment of my days, every evening of my life,” was the impassioned declaration. “Even in the House, he’s there, in the Strangers’ Gallery, smiling down at me. If I lunch or dine at a restaurant, he’s there. He even worms his way into some of the parties to which I am invited. The only places I am safe from him are in my own house and in my club. Blast you!” Mr. Bodham Cope wound up, glaring across the room.

Mr. Jennerton frowned in perplexity. He looked from one to the other of the two men—the city magnate, his rather coarse features disfigured by an angry scowl, and his small, flaxen-haired miniature upon whose lips there still lingered a pleasant smile.

“Are you suggesting, Mr. Cope,” he asked, “that this—er—gentleman—er—”

“Mr. Winton Pope is my name,” the person referred to assisted graciously.

“That this gentleman, Mr. Winton Pope, is purposely a source of annoyance to you?”

“Confound it all, he’s the curse of my life!” was the angry retort. “He follows me wherever I go, copies my style of dress, calls himself Winton Pope, simply because my name is Bodham Cope, always pretends to be amiable and friendly, and all the time he’s up to dirty little tricks to bring discredit upon me. When I ask him what his game is, he won’t answer. He talks some balderdash about liking to be near me.”

Mr. Jennerton looked across at the object of this tirade. “You hear what this gentleman says?” he remarked. “Is it true that you follow him about?”

Mr. Winton Pope smiled. “I like to be where he is,” he admitted, and curiously enough, although his voice was gentle, almost ingratiating, it held a faint reflex of Mr. Bodham Cope’s more guttural enunciation.

“Why?” Gerald enquired.

“I like Mr. Bodham Cope,” his *bête noire* confided timidly. “I admire him very much. I have nothing particular to do in life. It gives me great pleasure to be where Mr. Bodham Cope is. I like the way he speaks at public meetings and

gives his orders at restaurants. I like to watch him. It gives me pleasure. I am always happy when I am near people of whom I am fond.”

“Blast you!” his victim scowled.

Mr. Jennerton avoided meeting his son’s eye. His voice when he spoke was a little husky.

“Of course, Mr. Pope,” he acknowledged, after a moment’s pause, “this is a free country and you are at liberty, I suppose, to do as you like, provided you don’t make a legal nuisance of yourself, but so long as you understand that your continual presence is an offence to—er—to this gentleman, don’t you think it would be better if you attached yourself to some one else?”

The flaxen-haired man shook his head. “I couldn’t do that,” he said. “There is no one else for whom I have the same affection as for Mr. Bodham Cope. He is a wonderful man, I assure you. The more I see of him the more I realise this. I wish he liked me better,” the little man went on regretfully; “that, however, will come in time. Sincere affection, I always think, must sooner or later beget something of the same sort. Don’t you think so, sir?” he added, gazing at Gerald, with his blue eyes wide open and a wistful note in his tone.

“I—I suppose so,” the latter faltered, disappearing for a moment behind a newspaper which he had picked up.

“This is all tommyrot,” Mr. Bodham Cope declared angrily. “This is the sort of tosh he talks when I get any one to tackle him, and ask what he’s up to. I’ve been to a lawyer, but he couldn’t do a thing. I’ve even tried the police, but they can’t help. Now I have come here. You tackle him, gentlemen. What’s he want, confound it? Of course it’s money; it must be money. Let him name the sum.”

“Money!” Mr. Winton Pope exclaimed in a shocked tone.

“Well, what else do you want?”

“Money is a wonderful thing,” Mr. Winton Pope sighed. “I am, alas, not so well off as I once was, but to talk about money is very embarrassing for a sensitive man.”

“How much do you want to fade away?” his furious victim insisted. “You needn’t tell me—tell Mr. Jennerton here.”

The china-blue eyes seemed wider open than ever. “My dear sir,” their owner expostulated, “if I were to do such a terrible thing, I should feel just like—oh, how I hate the word!—a blackmailer.”

“What else are you?” Mr. Bodham Cope thundered. “It’s a new way of playing the game, that’s what it is. You gentlemen here, Mr. Jennerton and Mr. Jennerton, Junior, you’ve heard all this baby talk of his. Listen to this. In three months’ time he’s done me more harm than any enemy I’ve ever had. He’s a sort of press agent for me, only he’s on the wrong side of the fence all the time, trying to rake up things that all sensible people have forgotten long ago. He’s

always trying to worm his way in among my friends, purring about my goodness and generosity, until they believe him—they believe he's a pal. I get asked to meet him. He gets invited to public dinners where I'm a guest, blast him!"

"You say you've been to a lawyer?" Mr. Jennerton reflected.

"I've been to two," was the curt reply. "They can't do anything. With all that Billiken's face of his, he's as cunning as they make 'em. What I say is, you two gentlemen are in the trade. Get down to hard tacks. Get him to say what he'll take to hop it. I'll give him a thousand pounds—there! You know my address—Whitehall Court, or the House. Talk to him for a few minutes and let me hear from you."

Mr. Bodham Cope rose to his feet, picked up the silk hat, cane and gloves, and prepared to take his leave. His tormentor followed his example in precisely the same fashion, holding his hat and gloves in one hand, and with his cane under his arm. Mr. Bodham Cope leaned forward to shake hands with Mr. Jennerton. Mr. Winton Pope, at precisely the same angle, attempted the same exploit.

"Look at him!" the former almost shrieked, suddenly conscious of the other at his elbow. "He's always up to monkey tricks like that. Found out my tailor even and my hatter. Look at his necktie—same pattern as mine. He'll drive me mad."

Mr. Jennerton laid his hand upon the smaller man's shoulder. "Perhaps," he suggested, "you could spare me a few minutes to discuss this matter."

Mr. Winton Pope glanced at his watch. "Let me see," he murmured, "our bazaar does not open until three o'clock, does it? Yes, I can spare five minutes. Don't be afraid, my dear friend," he added, turning around. "I shall be there to support you."

Mr. Bodham Cope's stock of expletives seemed to have become exhausted. He quivered for a moment with rage. "If I come across you at the bazaar," he shouted, "I'll have you kicked out of the place."

He strode from the room, banging the door behind him. Mr. Jennerton waved his remaining visitor back to his chair and looked at him thoughtfully.

"Not at all a bad idea," he observed. "Original, too." Mr. Winton Pope made no comment. "Can we talk business or can't we?" Mr. Jennerton continued briskly. "A bit of a spoof is all right, but my son and I are busy men. You understand?"

"Perfectly," the other murmured. "You must forgive me if for a moment I am a little confused in my thoughts. I am very fond of Mr. Bodham Cope—very fond of him indeed—but I must confess that during these last few minutes, he has hurt me. It was not only," he continued, "some slight expressions of ingratitude which escaped him, but it was also that sordid, that

terribly sordid mention of such a sum as a thousand pounds.”

“Not enough, eh?” his *vis-à-vis* queried.

“What can one do these days with a thousand pounds?” Mr. Winton Pope asked sadly. “The mention of that paltry sum of money, Mr. Jennerton, hurt me. I am sensitive about such matters. It is only a fortnight ago that he was speaking of a hundred, and later on of five hundred pounds.”

“You wouldn’t care to name the sum yourself, I suppose?” Mr. Jennerton suggested bluntly.

The flaxen-haired little man glanced at his watch and rose to his feet. “I must not neglect my duties—the duties I owe to friendship,” he said, preparing to depart. “Mr. Bodham Cope is opening a bazaar this afternoon at the King’s Hall. I must be there. You will excuse me, gentlemen?”

Mr. Jennerton nodded carelessly. “Look in any time you’re passing,” he invited. “Whenever you’re ready, we are.”

“It is very good of you to adopt this attitude,” the other acknowledged—“very good of you indeed. Good afternoon, gentlemen.”

Mr. Winton Pope took his leave, with a pleasant, confidential nod. Mr. Jennerton, Senior, watched him with admiration.

“A new lay, Gerald,” he observed. “Clever too.”

Gerald was busy brushing his hat. “I’m off to the bazaar, Dad,” he announced. “That fellow’s got me intrigued. I’m certain that flaxen hair’s a wig, and I’m sure I’ve seen him before.”

The Duchess of Blankshire was just coming to the end of her introductory remarks when Gerald squeezed his way into the crowded hall. She was a portly lady, pleasant-looking and fluent.

“I have now told you the history of my scheme for providing homes for gentle people in need,” she concluded, “and I shall call upon our generous benefactor, Mr. Bodham Cope, to declare the bazaar open.”

The Duchess sat down amidst much applause. Mr. Bodham Cope stood up in his place. It was noticeable that he glanced for a moment nervously around the hall before beginning his speech. Reassured, apparently, by what he saw, or rather what he failed to see, he began, with the obvious intention of getting his few words over as quickly as possible. He said sugary things about the Duchess, he spoke noble words as to the duties of the wealthy, he enlarged for a moment upon the joys of giving.

He was followed by the treasurer, a thin, lanky young man, who read out all donations of over five pounds.

Suddenly, a modest little figure, after a word and a bow to the Duchess, stepped to the front. He seemed for the moment almost like a diminutive replica of the man who had shrunk back in his chair by the side of the Duchess and was gazing at the newcomer with ill-concealed aversion.



“Your Grace, ladies and gentlemen,” the latter began modestly, but in a clear, appealing voice. “I have listened to the eloquent address of her Grace and to the few manly words of my friend, Mr. Bodham Cope”—this with a little bow to his scowling neighbour—“and I am going to ask permission to add my name to the list just read out by your treasurer. I shall presently beg to be allowed to contribute a hundred guineas to the fund.”

There was loud clapping, led by the Duchess.

“I am reminded,” the speaker went on, “of a little incident in the career of our dear friend here, which I am convinced has induced him to become your patron this afternoon. Not so very many years ago—at the time when he built that princely mansion in Surrey—it was necessary to construct a new road, connecting the estate offices with the village. There were a dozen old cottages, curiously enough inhabited by formerly well-to-do people, to be demolished.

“I remember at the time my friend Bodham Cope suffered at the thought of depriving these poor people of their domiciles. It had to be. So, in due course, the cottages were pulled down and the road built. There were a few unfortunate incidents, I recollect, in connection with the ejections. An elderly lady failed to recover from the shock of spending a portion of the night out of doors, and a sickly girl died from exposure.

“These are not matters to dwell upon. I mention the circumstance because I feel quite sure that it was at the back of my dear friend’s mind when he associated himself with this present benevolent enterprise. Let me add my good wishes for the success of the bazaar to those of my friend here, and the rest of you.”

The little man bowed to the Duchess, beamed upon Mr. Bodham Cope, and stepped to the rear of the platform. There was a murmur of qualified applause. The Duchess hastily declared the proceedings closed and then turned, with a frown upon her forehead, to speak to Mr. Bodham Cope. Gerald lingered for a few moments, making a desultory purchase or two at the stalls. Just before his departure he came face to face with the treasurer who was wandering about, his list still in his hand.

“What’s the matter with you, Trenton?” some one asked him.

“I’ve been looking everywhere,” he confided, “for the gentleman with the fair hair who offered us a hundred guineas. I can’t find him, nor can I find any one who knows his name.”

Gerald turned away, with a suppressed smile.

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Mr. Bodham Cope renewed his visit to Messrs. Jennerton and Company, Limited, one afternoon later in the week. He seemed larger, more florid and vehement than ever. He was wearing a well-cut blue serge suit, a navy blue tie, and bowler hat, and a red carnation in his buttonhole.

“Look here, Mr. Jennerton,” he said, “I gather you didn’t get on with that scoundrel I left here the other afternoon.”

“We didn’t arrive at anything definite,” Mr. Jennerton admitted. “I came to one very obvious conclusion, however, Mr. Cope, and that is that you are being subjected to a new and most ingenious form of blackmail.”

“Don’t I know that!” his visitor groaned.

“Furthermore, I am almost afraid that if you wish to lead your life in comfort you will have to pay.”

“I have offered him a thousand pounds.”

Mr. Jennerton shook his head. “If you settle at all,” he said, “you will have to make up your mind that it will cost you a great deal more than that. On the other hand, if you can stick it out, he may get tired of it. His funds may not allow him to carry on. You may say to yourself that he has already made use of any little weak spots in your career, that he can do you no further injury. If so, stick it out by all means.”

“A man in my position,” Mr. Cope pronounced gloomily, “who has had to work his way up, is compelled to be a little ruthless at times. Success means enemies here and there, and I suppose I’ve got my share of them. It’s the irritation of the thing that gets me. Your son has told you about the bazaar, I suppose.”

“How much would you feel disposed to pay to get rid of him once and for all?” Mr. Jennerton, Senior, demanded.

“I’d sooner get him locked up than anything,” the other growled.

“So far,” Mr. Jennerton pointed out, “he has kept well within the law and, from what I have seen of him, I think he always will.”

“I’d give five thousand pounds if it was an absolute certainty that I got rid of him once and for all,” Mr. Bodham Cope decided.

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There was a knock at the door. In response to an invitation to enter, Mr. Winton Pope made his tentative appearance.

“I am not intruding, I hope,” he said. “I saw my friend’s car outside, and I thought I, too, might venture to pay a visit.”

He closed the door behind him and came amiably forward. He was wearing a blue serge suit, he had a red carnation in his buttonhole, and he carried a bowler hat in his hand.

“If you are here to talk business——” Mr. Bodham Cope began surlily.

“Not with you, my dear sir,” the other interrupted. “Business between friends is always a mistake. An intermediary is better. I can spare Mr. Jennerton a few minutes, if he has anything to say.”

Mr. Bodham Cope picked up his hat and stick.

“We shall meet again presently, my dear friend. In the meantime, *au*

*revoir*," said Mr. Winton Pope.

Mr. Bodham Cope did not trust himself to words. He slammed the door instead. Mr. Winton Pope shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, well!" he murmured. "A short-tempered person, my dear friend, I'm afraid."

"Let me give you a word of advice," Mr. Jennerton begged. "You're on the right side of the law just now, you know, but you might very easily find yourself in Queer Street. Why don't you talk business while you have the chance?"

"I like to do things my own way," was the soft response. "I abhor crudity in every form. Pardon me if I seem a little absent-minded this afternoon. I was reminded coming along here, by a wine merchant's advertisement, of one of the dreams of my later days."

"Get on with it," Mr. Jennerton invited.

"In the third year of the War," the little man with the flaxen hair reflected, "I was wounded, and in a nursing home at Nice. During my convalescence I explored the neighbourhood thoroughly. I found some amazingly attractive spots there, where a man might settle down to end his days. There was a small farm near Vence, for instance—vineyards and an acre or so of orange grove—a prohibitive price, though, for me, alas!"

"What was the price?" Mr. Jennerton enquired.

"About seven thousand pounds—a little more than a month's income of a man, say, in the position of our friend Mr. Cope. Not very much. I wrote to the lawyers about it only the other day. You can see their reply. The property is still for sale."

He handed the letter across to Mr. Jennerton, who glanced it through. "If it had been five thousand," the latter began.

His visitor shook his head. "These details as to money," he confided, "do not appeal to me. My dream has always been that some rich philanthropist, say like my friend Mr. Cope, reading my War record and knowing of my present circumstances, might buy perhaps an estate like this, without saying a word to me, and press the deeds into my hands. True philanthropy I should call that, Mr. Jennerton."

"Have you ever tried this little game on before?" the latter asked.

"I do not quite understand you, my dear sir," said Mr. Pope. "This is not a little game on my part. I am talking to you very seriously indeed."

Gerald leaned towards his father. "Let him run the show his own way, Dad," he murmured. "It may come out easier in the end. Supposing, by any chance, Mr. Pope," he went on, turning towards their visitor, "one of our rich friends, say Mr. Cope, for example, decided to purchase this little estate and present it to somebody worthy of such a gift—yourself, for instance—do we

understand that you would take up your residence there and remain out of England?"

"I should be content," Mr. Winton Pope assured them both solemnly, "never to set foot in this country again. Up to the time of the Armistice I was a patriotic Englishman. Since that day I have had the feeling that I would just as soon have been born a Siamese."

"Do you know anything about wine growing?" Mr. Jennerton, Senior, enquired.

"I was out in South Africa, growing wine, when the war started, and doing very well."

"Did we ever meet anywhere in France?" Gerald asked curiously. "There are times when your voice sounds very familiar to me."

Mr. Winton Pope seemed afflicted by a sudden deafness. He rose deliberately.

"I am forgetting," he acknowledged self-reproachfully, "that this is a business office. I am wasting your time in idle gossip. I wish you good afternoon, gentlemen. Ah, by the bye, Mr. Jennerton, do you ever dine at a restaurant—you and your son?"

"Occasionally."

"The Milan is a very amusing place," Mr. Winton Pope observed, as he turned towards the door. "You might do worse than pay a visit there now and then. To-night, for instance. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

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It was a crowded and brilliant night at the Milan. Mr. Jennerton and Gerald watched the incoming crowds with interest. Only two tables in their vicinity remained unoccupied; one profusely decorated with flowers, laid with six covers; the other, almost adjoining, for two.

Through the crowded lounge and into the restaurant came Mr. Bodham Cope. He was met at the entrance by a bowing *mâitre d'hôtel*. He made his way to the table laid for six and distributed cards at each place.

He returned to the vestibule and presently reappeared. By his side, looking a little bored, was a very handsome woman whom Gerald recognized as Lady Eileen Maynard, the daughter of an Irish peer. They were followed by two others, whom Gerald also recognized, the widow of a general who was much in evidence at restaurant parties, and a young stockbroker, almost a professional diner-out. Colonel Maynard brought up the rear, with a lady of unassuming appearance, who both father and son decided was probably Mrs. Bodham Cope.

Mr. Bodham Cope seated his guests with pompous solicitude. His wife was the only one to whom he did not make some urbane little speech as he pointed out his or her seat. She, at last, sank wearily into the one vacant place. At the

head of the table, Mr. Bodham Cope looked around at his party with satisfaction.

Vodka was served with the caviar. Mr. Cope finished his at a draught, and bent over to whisper to the lady on his right. Then suddenly he seemed to shrink in his place.

Gerald, who had been watching him, glanced towards the door. The vacant table only a few yards away was in the act of being occupied by Mr. Winton Pope and a young lady. The lady was of sufficiently pleasing appearance, but her style of dress was perhaps a trifle ahead of even the indulgent fashions of the day, and her use of cosmetics was lavish. At the moment of Mr. Bodham Cope's collapse she glanced towards his table.

"Hello, Copie!" she cried out cheerfully. "How are you, old bean?"

"My dear Cope!" Mr. Winton Pope exclaimed, beaming upon him. "Fancy finding ourselves at the next table! *Bon appétit!*" he added, raising his cocktail glass.

Mr. Cope rose shivering in his chair. He attempted a formal bow to the young lady; at his tormentor he only scowled. The lady on his right looked hurriedly away.

Mr. Bodham Cope's nervous fingers were playing havoc with his roll. For the moment he dared not trust himself to speak. His evening of triumph and pleasure—for Mr. Bodham Cope was a snob—was ruined. His wife leaned across the table.

"Isn't that the young person who was a typist in your office, John," she enquired—"the one who always used to be bringing the letters to the house after hours?"

Mr. Bodham Cope glared at her. It was a relief to be able to be rude to some one.

"You're the sort of woman who would remember that," he told her gruffly. . . .

"I think," Gerald murmured, "that Mr. Winton Pope will get his estate at Venice."

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After dinner the Jennertons lingered in the lounge to smoke and watch the dancing. Mr. Cope came over and spoke to them.

"Mr. Jennerton," he said earnestly, "if you don't come to terms with that little devil and stop his persecution, there will be murder done. You saw him to-night?"

"Who was the girl?" Gerald enquired.

"Used to be a typist in my office," Mr. Bodham Cope groaned, looking sheepish. "I—well, I took some notice of her—used to have her up at the house until the missus cut up rough about it. I had to get rid of her at the office

—too much talk down in the city. Where he got hold of her I can't imagine.

"Lady Eileen hasn't been the same with me since," the victimised man went on mournfully. "I wouldn't have minded so much with some people. This just happened to be a rather particular party. Did you get any further with him this afternoon?"

"I think seven thousand pounds would do it," Mr. Jennerton confided.

"I'll go it," Mr. Bodham Cope declared eagerly. "If you can arrange that he leaves the country and never comes near me again."

"There will be no difficulty about that," Mr. Jennerton assured him. "As a matter of fact, he's rather anxious to settle down abroad."

"I'll bring you the money to-morrow," the other promised. "Don't let him back out," he added, turning away to rejoin his party.

Presently Mr. Winton Pope reappeared. He advanced tentatively towards the Jennertons.

"May I sit down for a moment?" he asked.

"Certainly," Gerald assented. "What have you done with your guest?"

"To tell you the truth," he confided, "I arranged with her that our evening's entertainment was to consist of dinner only. I am not particularly fond of feminine society," he went on, "but when I do indulge in it, I am perhaps a trifle critical. I have not, evidently, the same tastes as my dear friend. He may have found some qualities in this young lady—he evidently did—which attracted him. I found her a little—not to use too ugly a word—ordinary. Still, she served her turn."

"A liqueur?" Gerald suggested.

"With pleasure. Have I, do you think, advanced my cause further this evening?"

"I should say," Gerald confided, "that if seven thousand pounds will do it, you are practically established as a landed proprietor, at Vence."

"He's agreed to give it?"

Gerald nodded. "He's bringing the money round at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

A beatific smile parted the little man's lips. "That heavenly sunshine!" he murmured. "The perfume of the orange blossoms in early spring, the coming of the young vines, the sight of those rich bunches of purple grapes! The sun—oh, that gorgeous summer sun! It seems too wonderful!"

Mr. Jennerton knocked the ash from his cigar. "My friend," he said, "you have provided the firm of Jennerton and Company, Limited, with a new experience. In the course of our existence, we have brought to justice, and occasionally compromised with, a good many score of blackmailers. We have never, however, had dealings with one who has conducted his operations to such a successful issue as you have."

“Should you call me a blackmailer?” Mr. Winton Pope asked. “Blackmailing is such an ugly word.”

“Conducted on your lines,” Gerald observed consolingly, “it has its humorous side.”

“I am glad that you appreciate that,” was the gratified response. “I must confess that to me the whole affair presents itself somewhat differently. Mr. Bodham Cope has made, as I happen to know, something like two millions out of the War. I lost every penny I possessed. The more I brooded over this, the more unfair it seemed to me.

“I waited for a grateful country to recompense me for my sacrifice. My grateful country did nothing. Then I remembered an ancient motto: ‘God helps those who help themselves.’ I took a hand in the game myself, and levied my contribution as a war sufferer upon a war profiteer.

“I shall never think of myself, Mr. Jennerton, when I bask in the sunshine and watch the ripening of my oranges and the crushing of my grapes, as a blackmailer. A tax collector—that is the term I shall apply to myself in my thoughts. Men like Bodham Cope owe the soldiers who fought for them a little more than they have paid. Don’t you agree with me, Captain Gerald Jennerton?”

Gerald leaned breathlessly forward. “Good Lord!” he exclaimed. “Don’t I—of course I must know you.”

“I recommended you for your commission,” the other interrupted. “We were decorated on the same day. I remember giving you some advice once, young fellow, when we were in a tight corner. I told you that whatever you were up against, there was always a way out. I was up against trying to live on eighty pounds a year. I found my way out. . . . Shall we say twelve o’clock tomorrow?” he added.

“The money will be there any time after eleven, sir,” Gerald replied.

“Capital!” the other exclaimed, beaming his good night. “I will offer you one more unique experience. You must come and lunch with a—er—a tax collector, afterwards.”

## CHAPTER IV THE LION'S DEN

The world-famed house of Jennerton and Company, Limited, was busy in all its branches except one. There was movement everywhere in this unique establishment save in one direction only—the top. No event had occurred of recent date in the criminal world of London of sufficient importance to merit the personal attention of the head of the firm.

“Bit dull for you, I’m afraid, my lad,” Mr. Jennerton, Senior, remarked to his son in the middle of a morning of idleness. “You’d better get down to the country and have some golf.”

Gerald looked out of the window and shivered. “Pouring cats and dogs, Dad,” he announced—“or rather it’s drizzling, and will be doing worse directly. Why couldn’t I take on one of these shadowing jobs, just for a lark? I’d love, for instance, to follow the errant Mr. Gregs, the grocer from Leicester, through his hectic evening. Trocadero at seven-thirty, and so onwards.”

His father shook his head. “I don’t want you to get mixed up in that sort of business, Gerald,” he said. “Remember, directly you leave here on one of those bread-and-butter jobs you’re marked down. The princes of the criminal world are often as careless as you like, but the rank and file know their job—those who make a regular living of it.”

There was a knock at the door and a card was presented. Mr. Jennerton studied it without particular enthusiasm. There was a great deal to be learned from cards and this one was a printed affair, with the name of a department store in the corner:

Mr. Percy Jayes,  
Bomford’s (Branch B).

“Want to see me personally?” the head of the firm enquired.

“Said that no one else would do, sir,” the secretary replied.

Mr. Jennerton nodded, and Mr. Percy Jayes was shown in. He was a rather undersized man, neatly dressed but of negative appearance. His face was as smooth as a billiard ball. Removing his hat, he displayed a bald patch on the top of his head. His expression, if it could be dignified by such a term, was one of fixed melancholy. He was the personification of unobtrusiveness. Only his voice seemed unusual; for his size and slight physique it was unexpectedly deep.

“What can I do for you, sir?” Mr. Jennerton enquired, as he waved his visitor to a seat.



"I'm afraid when you've heard what I have to say," Mr. Jayes began, "you will consider my visit an intrusion. If you are really a farseeing man, though, Mr. Jennerton, as you should be to have achieved such eminence in your profession, you will appreciate the situation which I have to place before you."

"Proceed," Mr. Jennerton, who was an economist in words, invited.

"I am engaged in the haberdashery department of Bomford's," Mr. Jayes confided. "I have been there for a great many years. There are times when trade is quiet and customers few. I have become accustomed to filling up my spare time by observing my fellow human beings."

Mr. Jennerton was beginning to lose interest. Amateur excursions into psychology were his *bêtes noires*. He forbore to make any remark, however, hoping to get to the end of the matter more quickly.

"In my department," Mr. Jayes continued, "there is a young lady of very prepossessing appearance, in charge of the neckwear counter, named Miss Florence Barnes. There are also two young men, one a shopwalker, and one a senior salesman, named respectively Harold Mason and Edward Angus. These two young men were friends until the last six months. I believe, as a matter of fact, that they still live together. They are scarcely on speaking terms, however, the cause being Miss Florence Barnes."

Mr. Jennerton sighed. Nevertheless, he reflected upon his empty day and resigned himself to listen.

"The climax of this little affair, which I am afraid must sound very humdrum and insignificant to you," the visitor went on, "will probably arrive during the next twenty-four hours. The post of manager of the whole department has fallen vacant. The two most likely candidates are Edward Angus and Harold Mason. It is the general impression throughout the place that Miss Florence Barnes will marry the successful one. It is also my conviction—and I have studied carefully the characters of these two young men—that should Harold Mason receive the promotion, Edward Angus, will, without the slightest doubt, kill him."

"Shop assistants, as a rule, are not a bloodthirsty race," Mr. Jennerton ventured.

"Shop assistants," Mr. Jayes rejoined "have the same human passions as other men, only the routine of their lives gives them fewer opportunities for a display of them. I have studied Edward Angus for years. He is possessed, without the slightest doubt, of homicidal tendencies. I know what he is capable of in a moment of disappointment."

"Well, whereabouts do we come in?" Mr. Jennerton enquired. "We are professional detectives. We are not moral preceptors. It seems to me that it is for you, who know the young man, to use your influence with him."

"I have done my best," Mr. Jayes declared. "I have spent many hours

endeavouring to make the young man see reason. I cannot flatter myself that I have made any real progress.”

“You are here, I presume, as a matter of business,” Mr. Jennerton persisted. “What is your proposition? What do you wish us to do about it?”

“Anything that occurs to you. You cannot possibly have attained your pre-eminence in the profession without some knowledge of and interest in the byways of psychology leading to crime. I have no special regard for either of these young men, yet I know quite well that within a few days there will be murder done unless there is interference. If it is known that you hold a watching brief over those two young men and that their movements are subject to your surveillance, it is my honest conviction that there will be no crime committed. If, on the other hand, the affair makes no appeal to you because of the unusual stage of its development in which your intervention is sought, then you will open your papers one morning, read of a tragedy, and be compelled to say to yourselves, ‘We could have prevented this.’ ”

Mr. Jennerton had had enough of it. He was tired of his visitor and it was almost time for his morning glass of sherry.

“I am sorry, Mr. Jayes,” he pronounced, “but this matter does not interest us. We are concerned in the solution of crimes which have been actually committed. We have no interest in hypothetical cases, which may or may not lead anywhere.”

Mr. Jayes rose to his feet and bowed primly. Afterwards he took his departure.

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It would be hard to imagine a more cheerless place than the haberdashery department of Bomford and Company, at four o'clock that afternoon. Customers were few, but those who were present brought with them an atmosphere of dripping mackintoshes and rain-soaked outer habiliments of every sort. Gerald paused purposely upon the threshold to have a good look around. A young man in the garb of a shopwalker, with pale, sunken cheeks and a slight, black moustache, hurried forward.

“Which department were you looking for, sir?” he enquired.

Gerald studied him for a moment before replying. It was an ordinary face, an ordinary personality, yet there was a slightly nervous twitch about the mouth which might perhaps have denoted the capacity for emotionalism. Just at that moment, out of his cage, where he seemed to have been working upon a ledger, came Mr. Jayes. He passed the two without a flicker of recognition. Only, in passing, he murmured a single sentence.

“I should like the Manchester invoices as soon as possible, Mr. Angus.”

“I'll bring them along presently,” the young man promised. “Where can I direct you, sir?”

“I was looking for neckties,” Gerald confided.

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The shopwalker led the way to an empty stretch of counter, behind which a very pretty young woman was yawning. He held a chair for this customer of somewhat unusual appearance, and Gerald glanced into his face as he sat down. It was more than ever difficult to believe in Mr. Percy Jayes' prophecy. If this were Edward Angus, he seemed to belong to the type of man reckoned as being incapable of killing a fly. The whole atmosphere of the department as a breeding place for the passions seemed impossible.

“What sort of neckties did you require, sir?” the young lady asked.

“Oh—er—any sort—dark colour,” Gerald replied, a little vaguely.

So far as regards the young lady, Gerald thought, as he watched her standing on tiptoe to reach some boxes, Mr. Percy Jayes had told the truth. She was not only pretty—she was remarkably pretty. Her complexion was good, her fair hair deftly arranged, her eyes deep-set and of a most attractive shade of blue. Her voice was scarcely so pleasant, but it was at least amiable. Gerald chose the least revolting of the ties offered, in leisurely fashion, the young lady responding to his conversational overtures in flashes. He noticed that her manner changed immediately Mr. Edward Angus appeared round the corner during his perambulations.

“Do you sell anything besides neckties?” he enquired presently.

“Silk handkerchiefs,” she told him. “We have some very pretty ones.”

Gerald shuddered, but he was getting interested in that sidelong, uneasy glance occasionally bestowed upon him by the restless shopwalker, and he was also wondering whether Mr. Harold Mason might not put in an appearance. He was making his way with mixed feelings through a box of handkerchiefs, when a rather stout, important-looking young man, with neatly parted light hair and a toothbrush moustache, came hurrying up with a handful of invoices. He leaned over the counter and murmured an unheard enquiry to Miss Barnes. She nodded.

“That's all right, thank you, Mr. Mason,” she said. “I'm not really quite out of stock of any of those numbers.”

He passed on, with a keen glance at Gerald, who was certainly not of the type usually to be found in Bomford's. The latter, who felt that his mission was now completed, selected six of the least atrocious of the handkerchiefs and asked for his bill.

“Have you far to go this awful night?” he enquired.

“Miles and miles,” the young lady confessed. “Won't it be horrid?”

“Better stay up somewhere near here and have a little dinner,” Gerald suggested boldly.

“Wouldn't I just love to,” she murmured. “I can't, though. These stupid

people here won't let me have a minute to myself."

"Admirers?"

She nodded. "I suppose so. There are two of them quite foolish. One of them always has to see me home, and then I'm in trouble with the other. If I tried to get off alone, though, it would be worse still."

"Another time, perhaps?"

She smiled at him doubtfully. "I'd like to come, all right," she confessed, "but you don't know how much trouble there is if we take up with any one who doesn't belong to the place. Do you mind paying over there? . . . Oh, I say!"

For a moment she absolutely forgot him, stood motionless, in fact, with his parcel still in her hand. A businesslike-looking young woman had hurried into the department and tapped Mr. Harold Mason upon the shoulder. A little flush seemed to spring into his face at her words. He turned and followed her.

"Well, I never!" Miss Barnes exclaimed to herself. "Harold Mason, after all! Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," she went on, turning to Gerald. "Here's your parcel. If you wouldn't mind paying at the desk over there."

"What about Harold Mason?" he enquired, smiling.

"Silly of me," she apologised. "The Chief's just sent for him, that's all. There's rather an important post vacant up here, and we've all been wondering who'd get it."

"Are you glad?"

There was a slight expression of discontent in her face as she looked at him. "I don't know," she answered. "Mr. Angus is more refined in a way, but I suppose Mr. Mason is more of a man. He plays tennis beautifully, and he's going to buy a motorcycle this year."

Gerald made his way over to the caged-in little office, behind which sat the sphinxlike Mr. Percy Jayes. The latter scrutinised the bill and the five-pound note which Gerald produced, and proceeded slowly to count out the change.

"If you would care to delay your departure for one moment, sir," he suggested—"I'll be as long as possible over the adjustment of this little matter—you may see something."

Gerald, not greatly interested, nevertheless accepted the invitation. After all, though, there wasn't much for any one to see. In a minute or two Mr. Harold Mason returned, the personification of a somewhat arrogant and vain young man, elated with what he was perfectly convinced was a well-deserved success. He shook hands with Miss Barnes, and there was a touch almost of condescension in his manner. One or two of the other assistants came hurrying up. From round the corner in one of his ceaseless perambulations came Edward Angus, stopped short when he saw the little group, then came on with nervous, unsteady steps.

"Watch him," Mr. Percy Jayes whispered.

Gerald watched. They were really only a few yards away, and he could see the blue veins standing out upon the tightly clenched hand, the sallow shade of fury which had crept into the young man's face. His voice, too, was harsh and unnatural—very unlike the suave monotone in which he had greeted Gerald.

"So you've got it, Harold Mason?"

"I have the appointment, if that is what you're referring to," the other replied affably. "I've been offered the general managership of the department at a satisfactory salary. I take over to-morrow morning. Won't you congratulate me?"

"Blast you, no!" was the emphatic retort, as Angus passed on through the wide opening into the next department. . . .

"One pound, two and elevenpence change," Mr. Percy Jayes said. "Thank you, sir."

Gerald pocketed the money. The little man behind the wire grille dropped his voice.

"At least, Mr. Jennerton," he continued, leaning forward in his cage but still without the slightest change in his expression, "however humbly it may have been staged, you have seen the makings of a very human little drama."

Gerald nodded. "That may be so," he agreed. "I don't fancy there's enough vitality, however, about either of the actors, to carry it any further."

Mr. Percy Jayes looked at him almost wistfully from behind his spectacles. "You don't propose to take any action then, sir?" he asked.

Gerald shook his head. "I can't see," he decided, "that it is a matter for any one's profitable interference."

He took his leave, and Mr. Percy Jayes bent once more over his ledger, only for several moments he made no entry, for his eyes were fast closed.

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"It's hades, I tell you! I can't go back. If I see him—Mr. Jayes, if I see him with that fat smile, I shall go mad! He'll be snoring by now, blast him! He doesn't know what it is to lie awake. He snores half the night."

Mr. Percy Jayes poured whisky from the half-emptied bottle which stood between them into his companion's tumbler, and helped himself to soda water.

"Angus," he said, "it's hard luck on you and, believe me, I am one of those who agree that you have been treated unfairly. The post should have been given to you, and if it had——"

"Don't go on," the young man groaned. "That's what I can't bear. Florence! It was my turn to take her home, but they'd gone before I was ready. To think that they've spent all the evening together. They've been talking of getting married!"

"You'll have to face it, my lad," Mr. Jayes warned him. "You'll have to

think of them as man and wife, and before long, too.”

“Oh, don’t, don’t!” the other sobbed.

“Drink your whisky,” Mr. Jayes enjoined. “I’m a temperate man, as you know, Angus, but to-night I think that you are better drunk. If you are going home at all, you had better go home drunk. You can stay here, if you like.”

Angus glanced around at the bare tidiness of his host’s room and shivered. It was not a room to dispel depression.

“I don’t want to go home, and I don’t want to stay here,” Angus muttered. “I’m afraid!”

“What of?”

There was an ugly, a venomous light in the young man’s eyes. The will for evil things lurked there, if not the courage.

“Of seeing Mason,” he groaned.

“Rubbish!” his companion scoffed. “Finish your drink.”

Angus drank. Then his head sank forward, his chin upon his folded arms. In a moment or two he was asleep. . . .

When he woke, Mr. Jayes had removed the greater part of his apparel and was glancing patiently at the clock.

“I don’t want to turn you out,” he apologised, “but I think you’d better go home. I will join you in one more glass of whisky.”

The young man held out his tumbler, which his host filled with no niggardly hand.

“You’ll understand, Angus,” he said, “that in a general way I detest excess in any form. To-night I look upon as being an exceptional occasion. You need oblivion; drink can supply it.”

Angus drained the contents of his tumbler and rose abruptly. Curiously enough, this last drink seemed to have steadied him.

“You’re a good chap, Jayes,” he declared. “Whatever happens, you’ve done your best. Good night.”

He went out and stumbled down the stairs. Mr. Percy Jayes listened for the closing of the door. Afterwards he removed all signs of the night’s debauch and in a few minutes was sleeping peacefully.

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Mr. Jennerton, Senior, laid down his newspaper, just at the same time Gerald abandoned his.

“Well, that little fellow knew what he was talking about, all right,” the former remarked. “I don’t see what any one could have done to prevent it, though.”

“According to the evidence at the inquest,” Gerald pointed out, “Mr. Percy Jayes himself seems to have done everything possible. He kept Angus with him throughout the evening, gave him some dinner, tried to soothe him, kept

him in his rooms until nearly morning, offered to let him stay there. All useless! The young man's mind must have been made up beforehand."

"My paper doesn't give the full details," Mr. Jennerton observed. "What actually happened? Did the fellow give himself up or did they hear the shot?"

"He rushed out into the street into the arms of a policeman," Gerald recounted. "He took him upstairs, and there was Mason in his pyjamas lying across the bed, shot through the heart. According to the policeman, Angus began to stammer out an incoherent story, but he naturally stopped him at once."

Mr. Jennerton clipped a cigar and lighted it. "The person who commits a murder under such circumstances," he observed, "is either a fool or a man of immense courage. Apparently this young man Angus makes no attempt at concealment. He bought the revolver in the store where he worked. For the last few weeks he has been threatening what would happen if Mason got this promotion instead of him, and took his girl away. He doesn't give himself a chance. He goes home at night, half crazy with drink, shoots the man as he had threatened to do, and then blunders out into the arms of a policeman. The Archangel Gabriel couldn't help a fool like that, who declares that he is going to commit a murder, and does it."

"All the same," Gerald ruminated, "I see that he is going to plead 'Not Guilty.'"

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It was a week or so later when Gerald found his way once more to the haberdashery department of Messrs. Bomford and Company. Mr. Percy Jayes' cage was occupied by a stranger, but Miss Florence Barnes, wearing a black dress, was still in her place. She welcomed her prospective customer with a wan smile.

"You haven't worn out all those ties yet, sir?" she remarked.

"I never shall in this world," he confided. "I thought I'd like to see you again, though."

She sighed. "Such a time as I've been through! You read all about it in the papers, I suppose? You were in that very afternoon."

"I was indeed," Gerald assented. "I have been so sorry for you, Miss—er \_\_\_\_\_"

"Barnes," she told him—"Florence Barnes. And indeed I've needed sympathy," she proceeded. "He was always a little crazy, was Edward Angus, but although he'd threatened it often enough, I never dreamed he'd got it in him to do a thing like that."

"I suppose he became thoroughly worked up?" Gerald suggested.

"That's it," she agreed. "Between you and me, I think he should have been made manager. It was the injustice of it that made him furious. And then there

was me,” she went on. “I’m sure I couldn’t help it. One’s dead, and the other’s worse than dead, so I don’t want to say anything that might sound unkind, but neither of them was exactly my sort. And yet, what could I do? They were at me all the time. At last I made up my mind that I’d marry the one that got the raise and could keep a servant for me—and I told them so. You don’t think I’m to blame, do you?”

“Of course I don’t,” he assured her. “As soon as you’re feeling a little more settled, we’ll have that dinner, if you like, and do a theatre.”

“I’d love it,” she whispered, leaning towards him, after a nervous glance around, “only we mustn’t let any one know here. They’re so gossipy, especially after what’s happened.”

“Of course we won’t,” Gerald promised.

“Do you mind buying some little thing now, please?” she begged uneasily. “Mr. Howard, the new shopwalker, is very strict about gossiping, and it’s about time he walked around.”

Gerald selected three black evening ties—the only article of apparel he could think of which he was ever likely to wear. While she was folding them up, the new shopwalker turned the corner and passed. She shivered.

“Do you know,” she confided. “I am sometimes terrified here. I look up, and I think that I see him—Edward—coming round the corner, just as he used to, always looking out to see that I wasn’t talking too much to the customers. It’s been awful to stand here day after day.”

“Where’s the gentleman who took my money last time?” Gerald enquired, as he received his bill.

“Mr. Jayes? Oh, he’s manager of the department now.”

“He’s the man with whom Edward Angus spent the evening before he committed the murder, isn’t he?”

She nodded. “Mr. Jayes did his best to stop him,” she said, “but Edward wouldn’t listen to any advice. He just drank and drank, until he didn’t know what he was doing.”

“What about next week for our little dinner?” Gerald suggested.

“Not until after the trial, please. I couldn’t stand it. And besides, you wouldn’t believe how difficult it is—I’m like a prisoner here.”

“Don’t keep me too long,” Gerald begged. “How do the people here feel about poor Angus?”

“Well, they’re all very shocked and sorry, of course,” she replied, “although he wasn’t exactly a favourite. They’re going to get up a petition. Two disappointments like that in one day—he was perfectly crazy, anyhow.”

Gerald raised his hat and took his leave.

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Mr. Percy Jayes bowed to Mr. Jennerton, Senior, and to Gerald, and



accepted a comfortable chair. He was as imperturbable as ever.

“I was interested to get your letter, Mr. Jennerton,” he said, “and naturally I made it my business to see you at once. If anything can be done for that poor young fellow, it is my wish to help.”

“Very kind of you,” Mr. Jennerton, Senior, remarked approvingly. “It’s my son who’s been moving in this affair. To tell you the truth, I am rather in the dark about it all.”

Gerald drew up his chair exactly opposite his visitor’s. “Mr. Jayes,” he began, “what my father says is quite true. You succeeded in interesting me in these two men when you first called. I paid a visit to Bomford’s that same afternoon, as you know. I even indulged in certain other activities.”

“Certain other activities,” Mr. Jayes repeated mechanically. “I do not quite understand. I came here hoping for your intervention. You refused it.”

“My father refused it,” Gerald corrected. “I myself was sufficiently intrigued to bring a man down to Bomford’s and have Angus watched—Angus and one other person.”

Mr. Percy Jayes made no remark. His manner, however, betrayed an intelligent and sympathetic interest in Gerald’s recital.

“Through the courtesy of his solicitor,” the latter went on. “I have had a few minutes’ conversation with Angus. His solicitor and I have succeeded in getting a little further than that blundering statement of his—‘he didn’t know he’d done it.’ I dare say I may surprise you when I tell you I believe Angus to be innocent.”

There was a brief silence. Mr. Jayes blinked several times rapidly; otherwise he showed no signs of surprise or shock.

“This interests me exceedingly,” he confessed. “You mean, perhaps, that he shot poor Mason when he was drunk, and was therefore not morally responsible for his action. That is my own view, and is to form, I understand, the basis of his defence.”

“Not that at all,” Gerald declared brusquely. “My idea is that Mason was shot by some one else.”

Again that silence, a little curious in the high-ceilinged room.

“Shot by some one else?” Mr. Jayes repeated, and in his strange immobility he seemed like one of Madame Tussaud’s waxen images. “But who else could possibly have had any motive in killing him? Nothing was stolen from his rooms, so it could not have been robbery. He had no other enemy except Angus.”

“I think that he had,” Gerald objected. “I think, Mr. Jayes, that there was a third person who had proposed marriage to Miss Florence Barnes, a third person who had been twice passed over as regards that managership. That third person might also have been Mason’s enemy. What do you think, Mr. Jayes?”

You ought to know, for that third person was you.”

For the first time during their acquaintance, Gerald saw a singular phenomenon; he saw Mr. Jayes smile. The lips parted and a little noise came from behind his throat. Gerald leaned farther across the table. His voice had acquired a new sternness.

“With the help of certain evidence which I have collected, Mr. Jayes,” he said, “I reconstruct what happened after this fashion. It was you who for the last month or so had been inciting Edward Angus to go about, threatening what he would do if Mason got that managerial post instead of him, and if Mason married Florence Barnes. It was you who persuaded Angus that he could frighten Mason. He never meant to murder him really—he hadn’t the pluck—but you took him by the hand up to the threshold of crime.

“You brought Angus home with you the night of the murder—out of kindness, of course! You made him drunk. You probably drugged the whisky. When he was fast asleep and incapable, you took his key and you made your way to Broughton Street. You let yourself in, you crept up the stairs, you knew where to find the revolver, you went to the bedside, and you shot Harold Mason. Then you left the revolver where you found it, came back again, and when Angus woke up you were preparing for bed. You forced more whisky upon him. You sent him out, primed, as you knew, to believe anything when he reached that place and saw the revolver waiting.

“He was quite right in what he said—‘he didn’t know he’d done it.’ You murdered Harold Mason, Mr. Jayes—you who are now the manager of the haberdashery department of Bomford’s and engaged to marry Miss Florence Barnes.”

“I came to you the first time from the best of motives,” Mr. Jayes said thoughtfully. “Edward Angus would never have had the courage to kill Mason. I had. I thought if I could interest you in the case, if you would accept, say, a watching brief, that then I should no longer dare to listen to that murderous little whisper which was in my ears night and day. However, I made a mistake.”

“So far as you are concerned,” Gerald replied, “you certainly did. You have succeeded, however, in your ostensible object—you have saved a human life.”

Mr. Jennerton, Senior, spoke through the house telephone. “Send Sergeant Shields up with that warrant,” he directed.

## CHAPTER V

### THE YANKEEDOODLE KID

Gerald Jennerton, who had been absorbed in the study of a report concerning the misdeeds of a much wanted criminal, was disturbed by a slight tapping a few yards away. He glanced up and discovered to his surprise that he had a visitor. A small boy, immaculately dressed in Eton coat, grey trousers, white and spotless collar, his silk hat rather on the back of his head, was standing before the desk, tapping his leg lightly with a bamboo cane. The boy was apparently of tender years, but he had an intelligent, even an attractive face. His nose was slightly *retroussé*, and he was very much freckled. His eyes were blue and his manner earnest.

“Are you Mr. Gerald Jennerton?” he asked.

“I am,” Gerald admitted. “Who the mischief are you?”

“Mr. Gerald Jennerton, the great detective?” his visitor insisted.

“You’ve got the name all right.”

“Mine’s Philip Fotherhay,” the small boy confided. “I’m at Brown’s—your old house.”

“How do you know that?” Gerald enquired.

“Oh, we know all about you at Worsley,” the boy assured him. “Decent sort of school, isn’t it? The Jay Bird they used to call you. . . . I beg your pardon!”

The moment was an awkward one. Gerald coughed. “That’s all right,” he said. “Every one gets a nickname there.”

“Of course they do,” the boy concurred eagerly. “They call me the Guinea Pig. I’ve always been awfully interested in you, Mr. Jennerton.”

“Very kind of you, I’m sure. You seem to know a great deal about me,” Gerald observed.

“Of course I do,” the boy assented. “We’ve a young cub in Dicker’s house who used to be at that school in Hampstead. He doesn’t think Sherlock Holmes is in it with you or your father. I say, I’ve got a kid waiting outside. Can I bring him in?”

“Certainly,” Gerald acquiesced. “Bring him in by all means.”

The boy crossed the room, and opened the door. “Come in, Yankeedoodle!” he invited.

An exact replica of Master Philip Fotherhay, so far as costume was concerned, obeyed the summons. His complexion was sallow, however, and his figure more wiry. He acknowledged an introduction to Gerald with a

marked absence of shyness, and established himself on the arm of his friend's chair.

"We looked the address up in the telephone directory, but we had to take a taxi. Bit off our beat, this."

"You wanted to consult me professionally?" Gerald asked.

"If you mean what I think you mean, that's what we do," Philip admitted, a little enigmatically.

A smile flickered across Gerald's lips. "Any trouble at Brown's?" he enquired. "Pocket knives being stolen, or cakes pilfered, eh?"

Philip discarded the idea with a scornful gesture. "It isn't any piffling thing like that," he declared solemnly. "Yankeedoodle and I have talked it over, and we believe that something horrible is going to happen where we're staying tonight."

"And where are you staying?"

"Down with Bunny Spencer-Wiley's people at Esher."

"And who, by the by, is Yankeedoodle?" Gerald asked, glancing towards the other boy.

"That's just it," Philip pointed out. "Yankeedoodle's a rum kid—an American, you know—but he isn't a bad sort, and he's been through it once before. They kidnapped him from somewhere in New York State. That's why he's over here now. His name's Hammerton. His father was supposed to be the richest man in the world, wasn't he, Yankeedoodle?"

"I guess he was," the other assented laconically.

"So you are the hero of the famous kidnapping case?" Gerald observed, with a sudden access of interest.

"Yes, sir," was the prompt reply. "They kept me prisoner up in the woods close on a week."

"That's why he's at school in England, you see," Philip explained. "His father's dead, and his mother sent him over here, thinking he'd be safe. Well, Bunny and I have put our heads together the last few days, and we ain't so sure."

"Kidnappers don't stand much chance on this side," Gerald assured them.

Philip leaned forward in his chair. He was obviously very much in earnest. "Mr. Jennerton," he confided, "there have been Americans——"

"Toughs," the other boy muttered.

"Down at Worsley. We've seen 'em hanging about the school. Three or four nights ago there was a burglary at Brown's—at least the room where Yankeedoodle and I sleep was broken into."

"What happened to you then?"

"We weren't there. The men were repairing some pipes outside, and they'd moved us to another room."

“Burglars, eh?” Gerald remarked thoughtfully. “Was anything stolen?”

“Not a thing,” Philip replied. “It was this kid they were after. I’m jolly well sure of that.”

“What did the Head say about it?”

“He wired for Yankeedoodle’s guardian, who came down and gassed a lot, but laughed at the idea that they were anything but ordinary burglars.”

“Who is this guardian of—er—Yankeedoodle’s?” Gerald asked.

“His name’s Howson—Major Howson. He’s staying down with Bunny Spencer-Wiley’s people too.

“He seems very good-natured—laughs and talks a great deal. He gave us both a sovereign tip to spend on ices and things to-day—but I don’t like him—no more does Yankeedoodle.”

“And now tell me why you think something horrible is going to happen to-night,” Gerald invited.

“You’ll think us a couple of funks, I’m afraid,” Philip demurred, “but I’m pretty certain that one of those American chaps we saw down at Worsley was hanging around the grounds at Esher last night. Yankeedoodle saw him; so did I—and he wasn’t alone either.”

“Whom was he with?”

“Major Howson—the kid’s guardian. They were strolling up and down one of the lawns at the back of the house. I wanted to keep Yankeedoodle out of sight, so we got Bunny to do an Indian stalk. He couldn’t hear much of what they were saying, but they kept on talking about to-night and a car at some place on the Ripley Road. Bunny and I think they’re fixing it up to cart him off somewhere.”

“Have you mentioned this to Mr. Spencer-Wiley?” Gerald enquired.

“Bunny tried to give him a hint, but he only laughed. You see, Mr. Jennerton, all he’d do would be to send for the police, and the police never catch anybody, do they? We thought if we could get you interested, you might be able to get hold of these men.”

“You are the quaintest clients I ever had,” Gerald confessed.

Philip moved a little uneasily in his chair. “We ain’t funks,” he declared, “but Yankeedoodle had a horrid time when they kidnapped him before.”

“You’re going up to the match, I suppose?” Gerald suggested, after a moment’s reflection.

“Rather!” was the enthusiastic reply.

“Well, you meet me at the right-hand corner of the members’ stand at tea time and I’ll take you along to our tent. I’ll make a few enquiries and tell you then whether I can do anything about it.”

“Righto! We’ll scoot for the stand directly they go in to tea. . . . I say, Mr. Jennerton.”

“Well, my lad.”

“It was your father who started this, wasn’t it? It was he who taught you detecting?”

“In a sense, I suppose it was,” Gerald agreed.

“We couldn’t see him, could we?” the boy asked.

“Well, I don’t know. I’ll see if he’s in.”

Gerald strolled across to his father’s room and opened the door.

“Dad,” he announced from the threshold, “we have two new clients here who would like a word with you.”

Mr. Jennerton, rosy-cheeked, bulky, carefully dressed, good-humoured as usual, promptly made his appearance. He stared at the two boys in frank surprise.

“Sorry if we disturbed you, Mr. Jennerton,” Philip apologised, looking up politely. “You see, it’s been very interesting to talk to your son, but we thought we’d like to have just a glimpse of you. Yankeedoodle and I—that’s the kid here—want to be detectives ourselves when we grow up.”

“Awfully glad to meet you, Mr. Jennerton,” the American boy said.

Mr. Jennerton sat down in the easy-chair and laughed softly. “Clients, eh?” he observed. “What’s the trouble?”

“It’s something jolly serious, Mr. Jennerton,” Philip confided, “but I feel sure it will turn out all right now. Your son’s going to make some enquiries for us.”

Gerald opened the door. “Well, you mustn’t be late for the match,” he enjoined. “See you both at tea time, and then we’ll have a word or two more about this matter.”

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The umpire had scarcely turned his face towards the pavilion at five o’clock that afternoon when two perspiring boys came hurrying up to Gerald.

“Here we are, Mr. Jennerton,” Philip announced with satisfaction. “Hope you didn’t mind our bringing Bunny,” he went on, as a third boy made a somewhat tentative appearance. “He’s not a bad kid, but he’s a wolf at strawberries.”

Arrived at the tent, the boys, with an unlimited supply of cake and strawberries before them, settled down to business, and light conversation was impossible.

Later on, however, in the first stages of repletion, Gerald asked a few questions.

“How long has Major Howson been your guardian?” he enquired of young Hammerton.

“About six months before I came to England,” the boy replied. “My mother met him in New York, and he kidded her that it would be a fine thing

to send me over here to school.”

“I see. I suppose he’s a friend of the Spencer-Wileys too, as he’s staying down there?”

“I don’t believe he is,” Philip intervened. “I believe Mr. Spencer-Wiley asked him because, if he hadn’t, Yankeedoodle would have had to have stayed alone with him, and the kid wanted to be with the rest of us. I say, Mr. Jennerton—”

“Well?”

“Young Mr. Spencer-Wiley—Bunny’s eldest brother—the one who’s in the Foreign Office, you know—is awfully keen on knowing you. Would you speak to him when we go back to the coach?”

“Of course I will,” Gerald assented. “I think I know his father, anyway. By the bye, what are they going to do with you this evening?”

Philip indulged in a little grimace. “We’re going straight back to Esher,” he answered. “They’ve got a lot of half grown-ups staying in the house and we’re going to have a dance. I’d rather go to a show. Besides, it’s such a lonely house at Esher—just the sort of place for them to get hold of Yankeedoodle in, if they’re really after him—and I do believe they are, Mr. Jennerton. Are you going to try to help?”

“Very likely,” Gerald promised. “There’s the bell. I’ll take you back and have a word with Spencer-Wiley.”

The boys left the tent reluctantly. They made their way to the coach, and Spencer-Wiley—a young man slightly Gerald’s junior, who was in the Foreign Office—expressed his satisfaction at the introduction which the boys effected.

“Awfully good of you to look after these lads,” he remarked. “You know you’re a sort of hero to them.”

Gerald was introduced to some more of the party and found several acquaintances. The boys parted with him later on with reluctance.

“Come down and have a dance with us to-night,” young Spencer-Wiley suggested. “We’re dining early—making a young people’s party of it—seventy-three, I think. If you can’t get down to dine, come down later.”

“Thank you very much,” Gerald assented. “Probably after dinner, if you don’t mind.”

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The Jennerton organisation was notably a perfect one. Two neatly typed reports lay upon Gerald’s desk when he returned. His father glanced across at him enquiringly.

“The Hammerton boy’s the goods anyhow,” Gerald announced. “Only son of the late William Hammerton, multimillionaire, estate valued at thirty-three millions, bulk of it left in trust for the lad, was kidnapped eighteen months ago, providing great sensation in all the American newspapers, rescued by huge

operation on the part of the police, entrusted by mother to care of an Englishman, Major Howson, and sent to Worsley School. Word for word the boy's story, Governor."

"What about Howson?"

"A very colourless report," Gerald admitted. "Retired major, did some liaison work with the American Army during the war, and was invited to Washington, middle-aged, belongs to the Somerset Club, and is apparently impecunious, is sometimes sued for small sums by tradespeople, but nothing definite against him, plays golf occasionally, and frequents the cheaper places on the French coast."

"H'm!" Mr. Jennerton, Senior, observed. "What do you make of it all, Gerald?"

"I'm hanged if I know!" was the latter's thoughtful admission. "But anyway, we can keep an eye on them. Young Spencer-Wiley has asked me to dine and dance to-night. If you wouldn't mind motoring down too we should soon be able to find out if there was anything wrong."

Mr. Jennerton nodded assent. "If those lads aren't mistaken about those Americans down at Worsley, the whole affair seems to me pretty fishy," he admitted.

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Esher Hall was a very magnificent mansion, and Gerald found upon his arrival that the dance was not the impromptu affair he had imagined, but that the guests numbered several hundreds. He danced for an hour, after which time he went in search of his young friend, whom he found seated upon a high stool at a cleverly improvised bar.

"Don't touch the ices, sir—they're rotten," Philip warned him. "Go bald-headed for the fruit salad. I'll have some more myself, please," he added, pushing his plate across.

"Look here, young fellow," Gerald said, "I want you to point out this chap Howson to me."

"Righto! You really think they're after Yankeedoodle, Mr. Jennerton?" Philip asked eagerly between spoonfuls.

"There's just a chance they may be," Gerald admitted.

"But what about your father, Mr. Jennerton? Isn't he coming to help?"

"You don't trust me, eh, youngster?"

"It isn't that, sir," Philip explained apologetically, as he pushed aside his plate, "but you haven't had so much experience as he has, have you? We'd feel safer if both of you were there."

Gerald smiled. "You're a mistrustful young devil," he declared. "However, as a matter of fact, my father is outside."

There was undoubted relief in the small boy's face.



“And now come along,” Gerald continued. “I want you to find Howson, if he’s anywhere about.”

“I’m ready,” Philip agreed, slipping off his stool. “He spends most of his time here, drinking whiskies and sodas, but to-night he seems to be hanging around the side door all the evening. I believe he’s looking for those Americans. Yankeedoodle swears that he heard one of them a little time ago talking to a chauffeur, asking about the Portsmouth road. This way, Mr. Jennerton.”

Gerald and his small companion searched for some time in vain. Finally, in one of the smaller rooms, they came across a man peering out of the window into the avenue.

“Here he is!” Philip exclaimed. “Major Howson, this is Mr. Jennerton. We were just talking about you.”

Major Howson swung round abruptly. He appeared to be a man of some forty to forty-five years of age, high-complexioned, with a moderately good-humoured face and expression, but rather small eyes and a weak mouth.

“Glad to meet you, Mr. Jennerton,” he said, with a marked absence of cordiality.

Gerald acknowledged the introduction perfunctorily. The major’s appearance was certainly not prepossessing. His shirt, though well laundered, was a little frayed at the cuffs. His studs were imitation pearls, his patent-leather shoes were cracked with numerous varnishings. Impecuniosity clung to his exterior and his manner was distinctly uneasy.

“By the bye, where is my young ward?” Major Howson demanded presently, after the interchange of a few strained civilities.

“Oh, he’s playing round,” Philip replied. “He’s got a pash for a little girl from the Priory. I expect he’s sitting in a corner with her.”

The major threw away his cigar. “Well,” he said, “you’ll excuse me. I must go back and dance with some of these children. See you later, Mr. Jennerton.”

He departed and Gerald looked after him thoughtfully. “I don’t fancy the fellow as a guardian, Philip,” he confided.

“He’s all right sometimes,” was the boy’s dubious comment. “He does a very good trick with a handkerchief and a tennis racket. Until last night I rather liked him. Hope he gets it in the neck now, though. Where is your father, sir?”

“He’s outside, looking around,” Gerald replied. “I think, if you don’t mind, youngster, I’ll go and have a word with him.”

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Gerald made his way into the garden and met his father near the courtyard. Mr. Jennerton appeared perturbed.

“The lads are right, anyway, Gerald,” he confided, “as to there being some Americans around—toughs, I should call them too. One of them was walking

up and down the avenue with that fellow Howson only quarter of an hour ago. I think you'd better go and have a word with Spencer-Wiley. Wait a moment, though. Here's one of them coming! Looks as though he were assigned to watch us."

Gerald swung around and suddenly accosted the man who had been loitering in the background.

"May I ask what your business is here?" Gerald enquired.

"What's that got to do with you?" was the brusque rejoinder.

"I belong to the house," Gerald lied, "and if I find stranger hanging about I feel quite justified in asking his business."

The man's manner became propitiatory. "Sure," he agreed. "If you're one of the folk at the house, that's different. See that." He unbuttoned his overcoat and touched a round badge attached to his vest.

"I see it," Gerald admitted. "What's it mean?"

"New York detective force," the man answered, dropping his voice a little. "I'm sent over to shadow a gang who are after that Hammerton kid. I'm hot on their trail down here. Know anything about it?"

"Not a thing. Do you mean the American boy who's staying with us?"

"I surely do. He's been kidnapped once before and the same gang are after him again. The Commissioner sent me over here to keep my eye on the lad."

"I see," Gerald observed quietly.

"I've got a mate here," the man went on. "All we want is to be let alone and we'll see the kid doesn't come to any harm. Pat Harwood, my name is. It was I who rounded up the gang last time."

"Are there any of them down here to-night?" Gerald asked.

"Nope. Nothing doing to-night. All the same, we have to know where the lad is. We shall be going as soon as the folks have gone to bed here. Good night, sir."

The man turned abruptly away and disappeared around the corner of the courtyard. Gerald turned to his father.

"What do you make of that, Dad?" he enquired.

Mr. Jennerton was suddenly very much alive. "Get hold of the boy first and lock him up where he can't be got at," he directed. "Then ring up the police, in my name—the name of the firm. Esher Police Station, or Ripley, will do. Ask the sergeant to get in a car and come over here at once. I'll try to keep my eye on that fellow."

"You don't believe his story?" Gerald ventured.

"I know the New York police badge when I see it," was the swift rejoinder. "Hurry up!"

Gerald hastened into the house and discovered Philip waiting for him patiently.

“Where’s Yankeedoodle?” the former demanded brusquely.

“Messing around somewhere.”

“Let’s find him quickly,” Gerald insisted. “Come on! We’ve got to keep him in sight until the party’s over.”

“Have you discovered anything, sir?”

“Looks rather like it,” Gerald admitted, “Come on!”

They began their search a little breathlessly—Gerald himself disturbed by a distinct premonition of evil. Nowhere could they discern any sign of Yankeedoodle. His small fair-headed companion from the Priory was wandering about disconsolately. Philip hurried across to her, asked a few questions, and came back with a scared expression upon his face.

“I say, sir,” he announced, “she says that Major Howson came up and took Yankeedoodle away. What an ass I was not to have stayed with the kid!”

“Did he say where they were going?”

“Something about showing him the guns while there was no one down in the gun room, she thought.”

“Do you know the way?”

“I think I can find it. Come on, sir!”

They lost their way twice but eventually arrived at a long stone corridor.

“Here we are!” Philip cried in triumph. “It’s the last door on the right.”

They reached it at the double. Gerald tried the handle. It was locked on the inside.

“Never mind, sir,” Philip shouted. “This other door leads into the courtyard.”

They raced to the end of the corridor. There were bolts to be drawn, a chain unfastened and a key turned. Afterwards they stepped out into a spacious courtyard, where a great motor-car was dimly to be seen in the half light. There were two men inside, one of them holding something whose struggles were clearly visible under a rug. The car started with a roar, and dashed out of the gate. A man who had been standing by its side turned and walked back towards the open gun-room window.

“Stay here and see which way they turn, Philip,” Gerald called out. “I’ll be back in a second.” He sprang towards the drive, coming face to face with the loiterer. It was Major Howson. “What have you done with that boy?” he demanded.

The Major shrank back in consternation. In an instant Gerald’s fist shot out and Yankeedoodle’s guardian went down like a log. A chauffeur came hurrying up.

“What’s all this trouble about, sir?” he enquired.

“Never you mind,” Gerald replied. “You’ll know when the police come. Help me get my car out.”

The chauffeur looked at him more closely. "Are you the gentleman who was talking—yes, you are," he broke off abruptly. "The older gentleman you were with, he's got it bad."

"What do you mean?" Gerald exclaimed. "Where is he?"

The chauffeur led the way and Gerald followed. There was a little group at the entrance to the courtyard, standing around Mr. Jennerton, Senior, who had apparently just scrambled to his feet. Across the avenue young Spencer-Wiley was hurrying in their direction.

"Anything wrong?"

"An American gang," Mr. Jennerton, Senior, confided a little faintly. "They've got hold of that lad. They've gone off in a Bentley—LX 3629. Will you telephone to Ripley and Guildford to stop them?" he added, turning to Spencer-Wiley. "Come on, Gerald!"

"Are you all right, sir?" the latter enquired.

His father nodded.

"I'll ring up the police, of course," Spencer-Wiley interposed, "Shall I come along with you, Mr. Jennerton?"

"You see to the police," Gerald directed. "We'll let you know what happens. Let's go, Dad!"

---

Gerald thundered down the Portsmouth Road with dimmed headlights, but at a pace which provoked shouts and remonstrances from every passing vehicle. They flashed through Cobham and raced past the lake on the way to Ripley. Then Mr. Jennerton touched his son lightly upon the arm.

"Slow up here," he enjoined. "We'll call at the police station."

"Is it worth while, sir?" Gerald asked regretfully. "We've been doing sixty-five, and we ought to be up to them directly."

"The police station is on the right there," was Mr. Jennerton's sole reply.

Gerald slackened speed and eventually drew up with a little sigh. His father descended.

"I shall telephone to Scotland Yard," he announced.

Gerald looked down the long, level stretch of road impatiently. The excitement of the chase was upon him, and his foot was aching to be once more upon the accelerator. When his father reappeared, however, he came out in leisurely fashion. He was accompanied by a sergeant.

"Old friend of mine here, Sergeant Clowson," Mr. Jennerton remarked. "They only got through from Esher while I was there, and the Sergeant says that a score of cars have passed during the last twenty minutes."

"Any quantity of them, sir," the sergeant confirmed. "There's a dance on at Guildford to-night. Anything more I can do for you, Mr. Jennerton?"

"Nothing at all, thank you," the latter assured him.

The sergeant took his leave. Gerald pressed the starting button. Mr. Jennerton suddenly came to a decision.

“Turn round,” he directed. “We’ll go back.”

Gerald stared at him in amazement.

“Turn round,” Mr. Jennerton repeated firmly. “I’ll explain as we go along.”

“But I say!” Gerald protested. “We know they’re ahead of us. We can’t give it up like this. An old Bentley, too, you said their car was. They couldn’t live with us on the hills.”

“I’ll explain as we go along,” Mr. Jennerton insisted.

Gerald swung across the road without further comment and turned back towards London. His silence and his manner, however, were alike significant.

“See here, Gerald,” his father continued earnestly, “this gang aren’t fools. They turned out of the gates in this direction with all lights flashing, yet they have been hanging about so long they must know that your car could overtake them at any minute. There’s a catch in it, I’m sure.”

“But what else is there to do except follow them?” Gerald demanded.

“Find out the catch,” his father replied. “So far as following is concerned, that’s a blind business, and it isn’t necessary. I’ve spoken to Henslow at the Yard, and before another hour has passed, the whole of the South Coast will be blocked against them. I don’t think it would matter,” Mr. Jennerton went on thoughtfully, “if we took the Brighton road or the Portsmouth road—I don’t think if we travelled a hundred miles an hour we should come up with them.”

“What do you propose, then?”

“I’m just thinking out myself what I should do if I were the kidnapper.”

About a mile from Esher, Mr. Jennerton spoke after a somewhat prolonged silence.

“Turn to the right here,” he enjoined.

“It’s only a lane,” Gerald objected.

“Never mind.”

Gerald switched on the headlights and made his way cautiously along the narrow thoroughfare for about a mile. Then his father stopped him once more.

“You can turn at the corner there,” he pointed out quietly. “Let’s go back again.”

Gerald obeyed orders in mute but resentful silence. They regained the main road, but his father waved him across it, and they plunged once more into the darkness of a by-road. Soon after they had rounded the first bend Mr. Jennerton uttered an exclamation of interest.

“What’s that?” he exclaimed.

There was no doubt about what it was—a Bentley limousine with no lights burning, deserted, with the off front wheel in the ditch. They came to a standstill and both alighted.

“You see,” Mr. Jennerton explained rapidly, “they did what was after all the most natural thing in the world: they left Esher Hall in a Bentley car, with the number showing clearly, hoping we’d chase it to the coast. What they really did was to take the first secluded lane they could find, pull up, abandon the car and change into another one. You can see where it was drawn up waiting for them.”

“You’re right,” Gerald admitted, with awakening interest. “This lane leads out to the road from London to Weybridge. They could get on any of the main roads lower down.”

“Yes, but they wouldn’t do it,” Mr. Jennerton replied. “They’d know we should have those blocked.”

“Well, you guessed their first move,” Gerald said. “What about their second?”

“That’s a more difficult matter,” his father confessed. “I’ll bet by this time they’re pretty well back in London.”

Gerald lighted a cigarette. “Well?”

Mr. Jennerton opened the door of the Bentley car. “We’re going to search this old vehicle to the extent of ripping the cushions up,” he declared. “They left her in a hurry, I can see that—license holder and name plate both torn off—but if they’ve only dropped a handkerchief it might help. Have you got an electric torch?”

Gerald produced one from the pocket of his car. With it in his hand, Mr. Jennerton entered the limousine.

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At about half-past three in the morning, the *soi-disant* Mr. Pat Harwood—better known as Slippery Sam to his friends of the Bowery, and to the police of New York—was awakened by the sudden turning on of all the lights in his bedroom. He opened his eyes sleepily and then sat up with a start. The hand which crept under his pillow came away empty. He looked into the smiling face of Inspector Henslow of Scotland Yard.

“Is this a nightmare?” he exclaimed, glancing around at several other sinister figures.

The Inspector signed to one of his subordinates. The man in the bed yielded his wrists and scrutinised disconsolately the tokens of his enslavement.

“What’s it for?” he demanded.

“You’re wanted on three charges in New York—extradition all arranged for,” the Inspector replied. “At the present moment we want the boy. Where is he?”

“Next room,” said the captive.

Gerald slipped past the others, unbolted the communicating doors, turned up the lights, and approaching the bed, shook the lightly clad figure concealed

under the bedclothes.

“Wake up, young man,” he enjoined.

Yankeedoodle opened first one eye and then the other. As he recognized Gerald a broad grin slowly transformed his face.

“You all right?” Gerald asked anxiously.

“Sure!” the boy answered. “They doped me good too, but I spat some of it out and shammed. I was pretty well scared but I guessed you’d be along presently.”

“How did you get the envelope?”

“Well,” the boy explained, “as soon as we got in that lane there was another car all fixed up and waiting for us. The chauffeur had brought two notes, which that beast who was holding me opened and read. One of the envelopes, with his address on it, had blown on to the floor, and when he got up to speak to the chauffeur, leaning out of the window, although he had me by the collar all the time, I was just able to reach it and stuff it down behind the cushions. When he turned round again, he tore up the letters and the other envelope without noticing there was one gone. After that I pretended to be asleep, so that they shouldn’t give me any more dope. I knew you’d be along pretty soon. . . . Say, Mr. Jennerton, whatever Philip does, I guess I’ve made up my mind now.”

“What about?” Gerald asked.

“Why I don’t care if I’ve got millions enough to buy this little old island of yours,” Yankeedoodle declared happily—“when I grow up I’m going to be a detective like you.”

## CHAPTER VI

### WAITING FOR TONKS

Mr. Jennerton, Senior, blotted with loving care a cheque which had just been handed over by a grateful client. He looked at the figures and smiled. Satisfaction radiated from his good-humoured face, for Mr. Jennerton was one of those rare people who are generous by disposition, and yet exceedingly fond of money. Gerald, his son, had just thrown open the window to admit the soft, April air, already, even in the unpropitious locality of the Strand, buoyant with its promise of coming spring.

“Money easily earned, my lad,” Mr. Jennerton observed.

“Too easily,” Gerald murmured, wondering for a moment whether the hyacinths were out in a certain little garden on the slopes of Fiesole, whether the mimosa buds were yellowing, and the oranges formed.

“You’ve had four months of work here now,” his father reflected. “What about it?”

Gerald turned away from the window and came back into the room.

“I’ve liked it, Dad,” he confessed, honestly enough. “Of course I miss the other atmosphere, but this one is full of interest. What a hotchpotch of humanity we seem to run across—men and women of all sorts and types—Spanish dukes, murdering parsons, blundering financiers. Sometimes, for a change, I wish that something a little simpler would wander our way.”

“We have to take what comes,” Mr. Jennerton remarked. “You can’t say you’ve had to be idle.”

“No, I can’t say that,” Gerald admitted.

“And you’ve got the *flair* too,” his father acknowledged. “You start at the right end. Our business would be a great deal easier,” he continued thoughtfully, “if our clients would only tell their stories in a natural and straightforward manner. They never do. They always forget the most important part of things. They tell it to us just from their own point of view. Sometimes they make it more difficult for us than if we had to find out everything for ourselves.”

Mr. Brigstock, manager of the firm, came bustling in. His *pince-nez* were even more precariously placed upon his nose than usual. He had the air of a man overwhelmed with affairs.

“Mr. Jennerton,” he announced, “there’s a little man downstairs asked to see the manager, said his business wasn’t important enough for the principals of the firm, but I can’t make head or tail of him, and anyway, we’ve no



department downstairs to deal with what he wants, even if we could find out exactly what it was. Could you just have a chat with him? You've got no appointments until the afternoon, and I've four people waiting now."

"Send him up, Mr. Brigstock," his Chief enjoined cheerfully. "Mr. Gerald and I will find out what he wants."

Mr. Brigstock, portentous, with slow footsteps but diffusing a sense of haste, departed, and a few minutes later a thin, haggard-looking man of rather under medium height and timid presence, neatly dressed in transatlantic fashion, was shown in. He sank into, rather than reclined in the chair which Mr. Jennerton pointed out, and he had the air of a man not only greatly disturbed, but also in a desperate state of nervous unrest.

"Mr. Jennerton," he confided, "I have come on a hopeless errand."

"I wouldn't say that," the principal of the firm expostulated. "We've helped people out of pretty bad scrapes in our time."

"You can't help me," was the lugubrious reply. "I've dug my own grave, and I'm sinking into it. I asked for what I'm getting, hour by hour and day by day. I'll be thankful when the end comes."

"Better explain," Mr. Jennerton proposed tersely.

The visitor passed his hand wearily over his forehead.

"My name is Ben Hammond," he began. "Me and Silas Brocken were partners in some oil territory over in Texas, and we did pretty good. I've known Silas all my life. We were at school together, and though he could be kind of rough when he wanted, we always managed to keep good friends. Likely enough his sister Ruth might have had something to do with that. Anyway, when he comes to me with this scheme, I figured it out that it was about as good a chance of making a pile as might ever come my way, and I joined up willing."

"Oil's rather a speculative proposition," Mr. Jennerton remarked. "What sort of luck did you have?"

"The best," Mr. Ben Hammond declared drearily. "We kept on striking oil, until we got so that we was both of us worth many more dollars than we'd ever dreamed of. Then Silas, he wanted to quit, but I wasn't exactly willing, for it seemed to me the boom was only just coming along. I didn't want to take on his share though, and he didn't want to take on mine, so we drew a line east and west, and Silas he went off to New York to see what was doing. He got in with some of the crowd that knew the territory, and it seems they were anxious enough buyers, for one day I got a cable—'Take your pick, north or south. I'm selling the other.' I wired back—'I choose the south.' Silas cabled—'O.K. Have sold the north.'"

"Well, that seems all right," Mr. Jennerton observed. "An old-fashioned way of doing business, perhaps, but fair enough."

The little man squirmed in his chair.

“That’s just what it wasn’t,” he moaned. “Silas hadn’t been gone more’n three days before seven of the wells we thought dried up on the south end began to gush. You don’t want a long story, gentlemen, and maybe you don’t understand oil. There ain’t many as does. In just that time it took Silas to get going in New York, the south end of our property had got to be worth three times as much as the north, and I never let on. When he offered me my choice, I took the south, like a skunk, sold out to a company of millionaire prospectors who came around, hopped it off to San Francisco, and started for Honolulu.”

“Sharp practice,” Mr. Jennerton criticised, “but still you American gentlemen aren’t in business for your health, are you? If you’re worrying about it, why don’t you own up, and make an arrangement with your partner?”

Mr. Ben Hammond groaned. He produced a sheaf of cablegrams from his pocket.

“He ain’t that sort,” he declared mournfully. “He’s got it up against me real and good, and I tell you, gentlemen, when Silas Brocken is out after any one, there’s trouble afoot. I knew what to expect, and I can tell you I’ve kept going. It ain’t no good though. He’s followed me around until I’m fairly worn out. Look here at these cablegrams. I get one of them every few days. He’s always on my heels. I’ve been around the world twice. He missed me by one hour in Yokohama. This morning, at my hotel in London, this one was handed to me from Paris—‘Flying over to-day. Shall get you this time. Silas.’”

“Exactly what are you afraid of?” Mr. Jennerton asked.

Mr. Ben Hammond looked almost scornful.

“You don’t know Silas. He’ll drop me sure. Why do you suppose he’s followed me for two years except to get his own back? He’ll drop me on sight, and I’ve got about as much chance as a rabbit. I’ve seen him handle his gun when things were wilder out West, and he’s no bungler.”

Mr. Jennerton smiled reassuringly.

“That sort of thing doesn’t happen over here, Mr. Hammond. If your partner so much as lifts a gun to you in this country it’s prison for him pretty quick, and the gallows if he shoots and brings it off. London’s a pretty good sanctuary from that sort of person.”

“What do you suppose Silas cares about what happens to him afterwards?” Mr. Ben Hammond groaned. “He’s not that kind. What he makes up his mind to do, he’ll do, and it ain’t no fear of the law that’s going to stop him. If you’ll just look through these telegrams you’ll see it’s pretty clear what’s in his mind. I got a million dollars the best of that deal, and I’d hand the lot over to-morrow if it’d square matters with Silas. I doubt he’d ever listen to me though. Before I could open my lips, I’d get mine.”

“Well, what do you want us to do about it?” Mr. Jennerton enquired.

“There ain’t much that any one could do,” the little man sighed. “I found out many months ago that he travels all the time with a detective, so as to keep on my track. I wondered, though, whether there was any way I could put him off the scent altogether, or any place I could hide where he’d never get at me.”

“You can’t do that for the rest of your life,” Mr. Jennerton pointed out. “You say he has a detective watching you all the time. Well, I would suggest that you followed suit; that you engaged us, if you choose, to watch him. If he’s on his way to London now, we should be able to discover him before long. Get back to your hotel and lock yourself in if you want to, and we’ll go ahead, find out where he is, interview him, and, if you like to make an offer, see what we can do.”

“He won’t listen to no offer, won’t Silas,” his late partner lamented. “He never was one for reason in a quarrel. He sees red quick, and red never changes to any other colour. I got a gun too, but it’s no use my pretending I’m as quick on the draw as Silas, because I ain’t and never was, and never shall be.”

Mr. Jennerton became a little impatient.

“My dear Mr. Hammond,” he expostulated, “all that talk about guns is out of date here. Unless your partner is an idiot, he’ll have realised that by this time, too. If you were to come across each other in the wilds of the Sahara, or in the loneliest parts of Texas, or Mexico, or any of those lawless places, you might have been able to resort to these primitive means. Nowadays no sensible person attempts force in a civilised country, because he simply can’t get away with it. Go and do as I suggest. Tell me your partner’s name again, and all you can about him, and then lock yourself up in your hotel, if you want to, for a few days, and we’ll see what we can do.”

“His name is Silas Brocken,” the other confided cheerlessly. “He’s a bigger man than me—not so tall he ain’t, but he’s as strong as a bullock. He didn’t use to have no hair on his face in the way of beard or moustache, but it’s pretty well two years since I saw him. Fair hair he had then, with a bit of grey, and a nasty scar on the left temple. He got that in a scrap when we were marking out our claims. I don’t know who you’re sending to tackle him, but he’s apt to be pretty fierce, and when he hears my name there’ll be some talk.”

“I can assure you,” Mr. Jennerton promised, “that the emissary we send to interview Mr. Silas Brocken will not carry a gun, and that he won’t need one. Now, where are we to communicate with you, and what is your offer?”

“I’m at room 387, the Hotel Cecil,” Mr. Ben Hammond announced. “I’m willing to pool up, north and south, and divide fair and square, as we ought to have done at first, and if he wants more than that he can have it and welcome. I’ll pay your fee now, if you like, for you’ll never do any good with him. It won’t be the dollars he’s looking for, it’s just where to let daylight into me.”

“Put up your pocketbook,” Mr. Jennerton enjoined. “We only take fees when we do work. If we square things up with this bloodthirsty partner of yours, you can bring it out again.”

“If you did that,” Mr. Ben Hammond said wistfully, “it would be worth ten thousand to you. Money ain’t no use to me nowadays. I’ve kind of lost my taste for it.”

He picked up his hat and umbrella and made his cautious way towards the door. Arrived there, he hesitated.

“Would you mind taking a look along the corridor and down the stairs, young man,” he begged Gerald. “Silas is close on my heels now, according to that last telegram, and I’m scared.”

Gerald escorted his client to the lift and put him in charge of the commissionaire. The last glimpse he had of him, he was trying to make himself as small as possible behind the bulky frame of the lift attendant.

“Like to take this on, Gerald?” his father enquired, when he returned to the office.

“I fancy I would,” the young man acquiesced. “The picture of this bloodthirsty prospector from Texas rather appeals to me.”

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Gerald Jennerton, very bored, had been seated in the lounge of the Hotel Cecil for something like twenty minutes. Suddenly he was aware of the approach of a large, clean-shaven man, with a great deal of cheek and very small eyes, dressed in a light grey suit, narrow brown boots, a shirt of flamboyant fashion and an indescribable tie. The man had been piloted to his presence by a small page boy.

“This is the gentleman as was asking for Mr. Brocken,” he announced, and, after a few minutes’ lingering, in case a tip was forthcoming, departed.

The large man looked steadily at Gerald, who had risen to his feet.

“Are you Mr. Silas Brocken?” the latter enquired.

“I guess not,” was the emphatic response.

“Then may I ask—?” Gerald began.

“I guess there’s no harm in your asking anything you want to,” the other interrupted. “Let’s get down to it.”

Getting down to it, so far as the newcomer was concerned, consisted in drawing up a heavily upholstered chair to Gerald’s side and sinking ponderously into it. Enconced in safety, he withdrew from his waistcoat pocket a pale-coloured, evil-looking cigar, bit off the end, and handed its fellow to his neighbour, who civilly but firmly declined the attention.

“Mr. Silas Brocken,” the large man announced, “ain’t feeling quite O.K. to-day. I’m his companion, so to speak—secretary, if you like it better. Just what might you be wanting with him, eh?”

"I am afraid," Gerald replied, "that my business is of a private nature."

The newcomer struck a match and lit the compound of vegetables which he apparently regarded as a cigar. Gerald moved a few inches farther away.

"My name," he announced, "is Tonks—Syd Tonks. I'm pretty well known in the States, though I haven't seen much of this little burg. One of Pinkerton's men I was for years, until I put on so much flesh that all the crooks got wise to me. Now I'm on my own, and I'm looking after Mr. Brocken, you understand, sir."

"Does he need any looking after?"

"He does and he does not," was the judicial response. "He's a strong, violent man, is Mr. Brocken," the latter's guardian went on, with a side glance at his companion. "He's the right sort to have on your side in a scrap, but I wouldn't trust him when his blood's up. No, sir. His hand's a darned sight too familiar with his hip pocket for this country."

"He might find it expensive," Gerald suggested.

"Sure," the other agreed, "but the hell of it is, he don't seem to care. I've been travelling with Silas pretty well two years now, and my job has been all the time to keep him and the man he's after apart. I've done all I can to make Silas Brocken see reason. I've taken his six-shooter away twice, but he's beat it on me each time and I've had to give it back, or he'd have been off on his own, and the whole business over. I've tried him with dummy cartridges, but that don't go either. He fires one shot out of his gun each morning, wherever he is, just to be sure that it's in good order. He's a hard man to fool, is Silas."

"He sounds like a most unpleasant person," Gerald admitted. "I suppose you can guess at the nature of my business, Mr. Tonks?"

The latter smoked reflectively for a moment or two. He seemed to attain the best result by screwing the cigar into the extreme corner of his mouth.

"I'd say that you were from Ben Hammond. How's that?"

"Right first time," Gerald acknowledged. "Look here, Mr. Tonks, can't you make your man see reason? We want to get these two together."

"There will be bloodshed if we do," Mr. Tonks said, in a tone of conviction.

"What rubbish!" Gerald declared impatiently. "Mr. Hammond is tired of being chased all over the world. He wants to come to some friendly settlement."

"I guess any guy'd weary some of having a man like Silas Brocken always on his heels, but I don't see what he's going to do about it."

"He wants a friendly settlement," Gerald repeated. "There was some sharp practice in connection with that partnership split-up, and Mr. Hammond's perfectly ready to admit it, and have it put right, according to the ideas of any third person you or Mr. Brocken might nominate. He can't do more than that."

You know as well as I do that all this talk of shooting and revenge is out of date. It's up to you to get your man into a reasonable frame of mind and then we'll bring them together."

Mr. Tonks blew out a dense volume of cigar smoke.

"I'm not looking to be a witness on a coroner's inquest," he announced.

"Well, let me see your client," Gerald suggested. "Let me see what I can do with him."

"You keep out of mischief, young fellow," Mr. Tonks advised. "If your man's anywhere around in this vicinity, you get him away quick. I'll give it to you straight. I want to keep my job, and I want to keep Silas Brocken from the gallows, and the only way I can do it is to keep on Ben Hammond's heels all the time, but to take darned good care that the two men don't meet."

"You're absolutely convinced, then, that Brocken wouldn't listen to any agreement?"

"It's the surest thing on this little planet," Mr. Tonks declared with emphasis. "Dollars don't count with Silas. He's out for the cold stuff. He's got it up against Ben good and hard."

Gerald rose thoughtfully to his feet.

"You wouldn't care to help me get a few words with Mr. Brocken personally," he asked, "just to satisfy my client?"

"Not on your life. I'm not opening the gates of any cemetery for strangers. You take it from me, young fellow, there's no person breathing could live in the same room with Silas if they so much as whispered the name of Ben Hammond."

"Very well, Mr. Tonks," Gerald concluded. "I will report our conversation to my client. Before I go, can I offer you a drink?"

Mr. Tonks struggled to his feet with a greater nimbleness than one would have imagined possible from his bulky, ill-disposed frame.

"We'll get together down in the bar for a while," he proposed. "There's no reason for you and me to fall out, young fellow. Our job is to keep these two guys apart, and as long as we do that, everything will be beautiful."

They made their way to the bar, and it appeared that Mr. Tonks liked his whisky neat with a tumbler of water by his side—which he consistently forgot—to act as a "chaser." There were other kindred spirits lurking about, whom Gerald cunningly inveigled into the little circle. Before long Mr. Tonks was talking as much as he was drinking, and he was drinking a great deal. Gerald slipped away unnoticed.

The waiter on the third floor accepted the treasury note but prophesied difficulty.

"I can let you in all right, sir," he admitted, "but I don't know that the young lady will let you see Mr. Brocken. Kind of queer he seems all the time,

especially when the other gentleman's out of the way."

"So there's a young lady there, is there?"

"Mr. Brocken's sister, sir. Her room's across the way. She's in with him now."

"Just open the door," Gerald begged. "Don't announce me."

The man led the way into the hall of the suite and knocked at the inner door.

"Who's there?" demanded a startled yet pleasant feminine voice.

"Waiter, madam," the man replied.

He threw open the door and hurried off, claspng the treasury note in his hand. Gerald, with a slight tremor of excitement, crossed the threshold. A woman of apparently about thirty years of age was looking at him with dark, perturbed eyes. In the background a man had half risen to his feet.

"Who are you and what do you want?" the woman asked.

"My name is Jennerton," Gerald explained. "I came to see Mr. Silas Brocken, on a matter of business."

The girl hesitated. Gerald took a step forward. A tired-looking, nervous man rose from the depths of an easy-chair and looked at him doubtfully. He was a sturdily built person with a not unpleasant face.

"I am Silas Brocken," he announced. "What do you want with me?"

Gerald was silent for a moment, a little perplexed. There was nothing the least menacing about Mr. Brocken's appearance, nor was there any sign of projected violence.

"I came to see you on behalf of Mr. Ben Hammond," Gerald announced boldly. "I want to find out whether it wouldn't be possible to fix up this little difficulty between you two."

"On behalf of Ben Hammond!" the girl gasped.

"Old Ben!" her brother faltered.

Gerald nodded. There were no indications of the storm which he had been led to expect.

"It seems there was some little trouble between you and Mr. Hammond over the division of some oil property in Texas," Gerald continued. "Mr. Hammond would like to have matters put straight."

"Put straight," Silas Brocken repeated. "Say, that sounds queer to me. What have I been trapezing around the world for two years for?"

"Who are you?" the girl asked.

"I'm just an acquaintance of Mr. Hammond," Gerald explained—"perhaps a little more than that. My father and I are private enquiry agents, and Mr. Hammond has consulted us to see if we could help him bring about a settlement between the two. He is very anxious indeed to straighten matters out. Personally," Gerald went on, with a glance around the room, which

convinced him finally that there was no sign of any stray weapon, "I think that an interview between you would be the most satisfactory thing, if you would guarantee that it would be of a peaceful character."

"Say, what sort of a scallywag do you think I am?" Silas Brocken demanded. "Why should I want to hurt old Ben?"

"Is Mr. Hammond anywhere near here?" the girl enquired eagerly.

"Within a few yards," Gerald replied. "I'll fetch him, if you like."

"Fetch Ben Hammond!" his late partner exclaimed, rising to his feet. "Well, that sounds good to me!"

"You'll promise that there shall be no quarrel?" Gerald insisted.

"Not on my part," was the hearty response.

Gerald, with his fingers upon the handle of the door, felt impelled to ask a question.

"Tell me," he begged, "if you don't want to quarrel with Ben Hammond, why did you keep on sending him those terrifying telegrams?"

"Telegrams?" the girl repeated.

"Telegrams?" her brother echoed in a dazed tone. "I never sent him a telegram in my life. I didn't know where to find him. It was Tonks who was always on the point of locating Ben, but we always seemed to miss him—sometimes by only an hour or so."

"Tonks!" Gerald reflected.

The girl took him by the arm.

"Please go and fetch Mr. Hammond," she insisted, "quickly."

"I will," he promised, "only if Mr. Tonks comes up before I get back, better not say anything about it."

Gerald crossed the corridor, knocked at the door of the room almost opposite, which Mr. Hammond was occupying, and whispered a few words in his ear.

"Wants to see me!" the latter cried. "Where? In this hotel?"

"Look here, Mr. Hammond," Gerald assured him, "there's been some mistake. I'm sure of that. Your partner is in a most harmless frame of mind. He, and his sister too, are only too anxious to meet you in a perfectly friendly fashion."

"Ruth!" Mr. Hammond exclaimed. "You don't tell me she's here, man?"

"She's with her brother—only just across the way."

Mr. Hammond laid his trembling fingers upon Gerald's arm.

"Ruth won't let him get rough," he declared. "She was always the peacemaker. Ruth! Say, that's wonderful!"

They crossed the corridor and entered the suite opposite. Mr. Brocken, who was tramping up and down the sitting room, turned around at the opening of the door. From a distant corner, Ruth came hurrying forward. She held out



both her hands which Ben Hammond grasped. There were tears in his eyes. He was suddenly not in the least afraid.

“Ruth!” he murmured. “Why, this is good, Ruth!”

“Ben—you dear!” she whispered.

Then she stood aside. Silas Brocken came a few steps forward. He and his partner looked steadily across at each other. The expression on their faces was indescribable.

“Silas!” Ben Hammond faltered in a half-choked tone. “You’re not mad with me?”

Silas Brocken looked more dazed than ever.

“Me mad with you, Ben!” he cried. “What’ve I got to be mad about, except that you wouldn’t answer my letters, and made me chase you around these two years?”

Ben Hammond gave one last nervous glance around the room. There were no signs of any six-shooters. There was nothing in the least threatening in his partner’s tone or expression, and a notable flatness about his hip pocket. He extended his hand a little timidly, to find it suddenly clasped in the other man’s.

“I done a dirty trick on you, Ben,” his late associate confessed humbly.

“Getting me scared up, you mean? That’s nothing to what I done to you, Silas, but there hasn’t been a moment since I haven’t been sorry for it. You know what I done—I guess Ruth knows too. When I chose south—those wells had begun to gush.”

“They didn’t gush long,” Brocken confided grimly. “Lucky you sold out when you did, Ben. Them wells was faked.”

“What’s that you’re saying?” Ben Hammond demanded.

“Faked, that’s what they was,” the other groaned. “Faked by me too, a man as had kept honest all the days he was poor, only to become a blackguard when the dollars rolled in. I wanted you to choose south, Ben, the skunk that I was. I knew where the oil was. I’d found it up north before I went to New York, only I wouldn’t have the wells sunk until after we’d closed our deal.”

“Jiminy!”

“You got two millions for your south lot,” Silas Brocken went on—“and you done well—but I got four and a half for mine. Yours weren’t worth the money. You did them prospectors in the eye without knowing it.”

The dawn of a beatific grin appeared on Ben Hammond’s face.

“Done them in the eye, did I?” he repeated. “Gosh, Silas! One of them was ‘Crooked Solly’—him that made ten millions out of poor Widow Grant.”

The reflection of the smile softened Silas Brocken’s anxious face.

“Didn’t I know?” he rejoined. “Gee, it’s the only thing that’s made me smile for two years! But listen here, Ben, I was a skunk. The deal was no

sooner closed, though, than I began to get ashamed of it. Then Ruth caught hold and she gave me hell. That's when we started off after you. But, my God, do you think we could do more than just get on your tracks? I hired one of them detective chaps—used to be at Pinkerton's—and it seems to me as though we'd dragged him around the world two or three times with you just a beat ahead—and never answering a letter."

"I never had a letter from you," Ben Hammond declared. "And Silas, what about them telegrams?"

"I never sent you a telegram since I quit New York," Silas Brocken affirmed.

Gerald, who had been seated astride a chair, listening intently to the whole conversation, ventured to intervene.

"Look here," he said, "I think I can see daylight in this matter. It's Tonks who's been keeping you two apart. He got hold of too good a job to let go. He was pretending to track down Mr. Hammond and all the time he was sending telegrams to frighten him away."

"My, how I always hated that man!" Miss Brocken cried bitterly.

For the first time there was a look in her brother's face reminiscent of those days when he handled six-shooters with the same aptitude as his knife and fork.

"If we ain't a couple of boobs!" he declared. "Gol-darned blithering boobs, that's what we've been. You thought you'd done me in the eye, Ben, because of those ten-day gushers, and that I was mad with you, and all the time I was the blackguard who'd done you in the eye for a cool million and a quarter. There was you trying to keep out of my way because you was scared, and there was I chasing after you, with Ruth here, to make good."

They shook hands once more.

"I sure am a gol-darned fool," Ben confessed.

"No worse than me, to have been fooled by a man like Tonks," his partner acknowledged humbly.

"I was scared of Ruth too," Ben Hammond admitted. "I dursen't have looked her in the face."

"You don't need to be scared, Ben," she whispered softly, and somehow or other Ben found one of her hands in his.

"Four and a half millions I got for the north, and two millions you for the south—darned clever cuss you were too!" Silas Brocken summed up. "That's three and a quarter millions each, which means I owe you one and a quarter."

"What's money?" Ben Hammond demanded, as they made a simultaneous movement towards the whisky bottle.

Mr. Silas Brocken paused to ring the bell. He seemed to have grown in stature and in fierceness. One could almost picture him handling one of those

six-shooters.

“What are you ringing for, Silas?” his sister enquired.

“I’m ringing for another glass for this gentleman,” Mr. Brocken replied, suddenly remembering Gerald and shaking hands with him, “a bottle of champagne for you, my gal, and a messenger boy to look for Mr. Tonks. When we’ve done our bit of celebration,” he concluded, with the light of battle in his eyes, “I’m going to sit right here and wait—for Mr. Tonks.”

## CHAPTER VII

### NUMBERS ONE AND SEVEN

Otterleyes stood with his back to the huge log fire, a cup of coffee in his hand, a liberal splash of brandy in a very large glass upon the table by his side, and a cigar in his mouth. It was the hour which, as a rule, he most enjoyed, the hour of complete relaxation after a long day in the frosty or rain-soaked air. To-night, however, was different—different with him, and with his five guests who stood gloomily around. There was an air of tragedy in the atmosphere of the sombre, oak-panelled room, a sense of tension amongst its occupants. All were men of the world of various types, but not one was at his ease. Otterleyes crossed the floor and turned the key in the lock.

“Look here, you fellows,” he said, “we’ve got to have a few ugly words about what’s been going on during the last few days. Let’s get ’em over. Come and sit around the table, all of you.”

Bolderbeck, who was a Cabinet Minister, a sturdily built, fair-haired man of early middle age, was the first to comply with his host’s suggestion. At first sight, his somewhat stolid features gave little indication of the brilliancy he was supposed to possess. He had only to speak, however, to become impressive.

“One would have to search one’s vocabulary for words as ugly as the thing itself,” he observed. “Let’s talk about it by all means, if you think it will do any good.”

Alderson, the famous surgeon, took the chair opposite him. Not even the long day in the open air had succeeded in bringing the slightest trace of colour to his sallow, almost cadaverous cheeks. He looked across once more at Bolderbeck, from whose face his eyes had seldom been removed during the evening.

“We’ve talked the thing pretty well threadbare,” he remarked.

“Amongst ourselves, yes,” Otterleyes conceded. “To-day, though, we have a newcomer with us—young Jennerton here. Now, in bald words, my friends, Mr. Jennerton is a detective.”

Bolderbeck flashed a quick glance at the young man. There were muttered exclamations of interest from several of the others. Otterleyes continued.

“I make no apologies for Mr. Jennerton’s presence here. It was either him or Scotland Yard, and Jennerton being the son of an old friend, and due for a day or two’s shooting later on—well, I telegraphed up to London for him last night.”

Bolderbeck leaned back in his chair.

"After all," he murmured, "a new intelligence may be able to throw some light upon this strange affair."

"Now, here's the plain truth," Otterleyes went on. "There are six of us in this room—excluding yourself, Jennerton. Begin with me. You know who I am—a person of simple, country tastes, happily married, and, so far as I know, without any enemy in the world. Then there's Bolderbeck. Every one knows about him, more or less, as they do about most public men. Then there's Sir James Alderson, whom you may not have met before."

"Indeed I have," Jennerton observed. "Sir James took out my appendix three years ago."

"No index to character, I'm afraid," the surgeon rejoined, smiling. "Still, I remember the circumstance."

"Then there's Tom Cleyton," Otterleyes proceeded, extending his hand to a smooth-faced, pink-complexioned young man in the background. "He's on the Stock Exchange, a connection of my wife's, and a frequent guest here. Courtlaw you know, of course, by reputation—Sir Henry Courtlaw, the family solicitor. A bit of a criminologist himself, I fancy, although he doesn't own up to it. Then there's young Vincent Pynes, who's been waking up the House of Commons lately. He married Anita Montgomery, the most popular girl in London, about six months ago. May have made himself a few enemies there, but I suppose we shall all get over it in time. That's every one, Jennerton. Look around the table. We seem a harmless lot, don't we? Yet, you know why I've sent for you. One of us is trying to commit a murder."

There was a queer, uneasy little silence. Courtlaw knocked the ash from his cigar. Tom Cleyton moved restlessly in his seat, and seemed about to speak, but thought better of it. Vincent Pynes, with a frown upon his fine forehead, drummed upon the table with his fingers. Bolderbeck alone remained unmoved. He was leaning back in his chair, with his hands in his trousers pockets, gazing up at the ceiling. It was Jennerton who broke the silence.

"There may be some other solution," he reflected.

"Discover it then, and you shall write out your own cheque for your fee," Otterleyes promised swiftly. "There isn't a stranger amongst us. We are all friends, so far as we have ever known, and yet there is some one whom one of us wants to kill. Who are the two secret enemies, Jennerton? You can ask any questions you like."

"You said something about having the keepers up here after dinner," Jennerton observed.

"They are both outside," Otterleyes announced. "I'll have them in."

He rang the bell, unlocked the door, and the two gamekeepers were presently ushered into the room—Marston, the head man, thick-set, fresh-

complexioned, with clear brown eyes, dressed somewhat conspicuously for his class in a dark green knickerbocker suit, with worsted stockings, shoes, and no leggings; Heggs, his assistant, of thinner build, and conventionally attired in livery whipcord and leggings. Both men to all appearance were respectable products of their class.

“This gentleman,” Otterleyes explained, indicating Jennerton, “is making a few enquiries into the trouble down here. Answer any questions he likes to ask.”

They both saluted and drew a little nearer to the table. Jennerton nodded pleasantly.

“Marston is an old friend, of course,” he said. “Heggs is new to me. How long have you been here, Heggs?”

“First season, sir,” the man replied. “I was at Welby before—seven years there. You came down for the duck shooting two seasons ago.”

“I remember it quite well,” Jennerton acknowledged. “Jolly good sport you showed us. Have either of you anything to say about this business?”

“Nothing, so far as I’m concerned, sir,” Heggs answered. “I’m right back with the beaters and I’ve seen nothing.”

“Do you carry a gun yourself?”

“Never on shooting days, sir.”

“What about you, Marston?” Jennerton enquired.

“I can’t say as I’ve seen a thing, sir,” the man confided. “I’ve been around and about too, keeping an eye on the stops, and seeing that the guns were in the right places. The nearest I came to it was to-day, when some one fired near your head and that twig came tumbling down.”

“No idea where that shot came from, I suppose?”

The man shook his head.

“The wood’s too thick around about them stances, sir,” he explained. “I couldn’t even see the next gun from where I was.”

“Any poachers about?”

“Not one on the whole shoot, sir,” the man answered emphatically. “His lordship is too good to the villagers. I’ll guarantee there hasn’t been a snare laid, or a gun fired on this estate for the last ten years.”

“You’ve watched these gentlemen shoot often, I suppose,” Jennerton continued, “and myself too, now and then. Have you ever seen any of us careless with our guns?”

“Never in my life, and never expect to,” was the prompt reply. “His lordship is the most particular gentleman I ever served under. No one gets asked here a second time who takes a chance shot.”

“If you had been partridge driving,” Jennerton observed, “I suppose this sort of thing wouldn’t have been possible.”

“Not likely, sir. Out in the open you could tell in a minute if a gun swung down the line or fired a shot as he didn’t ought. In our woods, you wouldn’t have a chance, that thick they are down the rides. Naturally, too, every gentleman has to shift about a bit for himself to get a clear space in front of him.”

“I see,” Jennerton concluded. “Well, that’s all, so far as I’m concerned, Marston.”

Otterleyes dismissed the men and relocked the door.

“So much for the gamekeepers! Anything you’d like to ask any of us, Jennerton?” he enquired.

The young man reflected for a moment.

“To-day,” he said, “you and I, Lord Otterleyes, and Mr. Bolderbeck, appear to have been the ones in the danger zone. Now, my little dose came from my left-hand side when I was Number Three.”

“I was Number One,” Otterleyes pointed out, “and Pynes was Number Two. You can get what you like out of that. The time I heard the shot whistling by I was Number Five, and you and Bolderbeck were Three and Four.”

“Courtlaw and you, Jennerton, were my neighbours,” Bolderbeck remarked. “There’s just one thing to be remembered, however. If any one of the six of us has gone looney, and is simply trying to get a scare going, he could fire all down the line, miss two or three guns, I mean. There’s nothing much worse than these half dropping shots.”

“None of your womenkind shoot, I suppose,” Jennerton asked.

“Thank God they don’t,” was the emphatic rejoinder. “Luncheon time, and the first drive afterwards, is all they’re allowed here. Any more questions, Jennerton?”

“Not for the moment, thank you.”

“Stay where you are then for a few minutes,” Otterleyes begged. “You others had better get along into the lounge, or we shall be in disgrace. The smoking room’s the most unpopular room in the house as it is. ‘A relic of barbarism,’ Ann calls it. I’m as fond of women as any one,” he added, as he unlocked the door, “but one likes a sanctuary.”

The others filed out. The general sense of discomfort kept them all a little stiff and unnatural. Otterleyes closed the door firmly and came back to where Jennerton was selecting a cigarette.

“Well?” he asked.

“You’ve set me rather a difficult problem,” Jennerton acknowledged.

Otterleyes took up his old position on the hearth rug. He was a rather undersized, fussy little man with a petulant though kindly face.

“It’s too much to ask you for a solution—you or any one else in the world—I admit, but have you any idea at all, any advice to give?”

"I could give you advice," was the meditative reply, "but I am afraid you wouldn't take it if I did."

"Have a shot, and see."

"I should break up this shooting party, if I were you, and take all your guests over to Brancaster to-morrow."

"The hell!" Otterleyes exclaimed irritably. "What about my pheasants?"

"Does it matter about them?" Jennerton ventured.

"Of course it matters about them. The season's late enough already. They'll have to be shot some day."

"Yes, but not by the same crowd."

"You suspect somebody?"

"One has to suspect in my job. The trouble of it is you don't give me time enough to do more than suspect before the tragedy is upon us. There isn't time to do anything much before to-morrow, and to-morrow, I understand, is the last day of the shoot. Take them all over to Brancaster, Lord Otterleyes."

"I wish I knew what the hell you are driving at?"

"Put it like this," Jennerton suggested. "Hasn't it occurred to you as possible that some one is trying to create an impression of careless shooting amongst the party, as an excuse for something more serious?"

"Far-fetched, but conceivable," Otterleyes admitted.

"And to-morrow," Jennerton added, dropping his voice, "is the last day upon which the 'something more serious' might happen."

The door was suddenly thrown open, and the room invaded. Ann Otterleyes, magnificent in black velvet and diamonds, swept in, protesting. A little bevy of brilliant women followed, a few men more gloomily in the rear.

"Ben, my dear Ben," his wife expostulated, "is there a Guy Fawkes plot seething, or a revolution? Have you found poisoned pheasants or what has happened?"

She came up to his side, superbly beautiful. As he looked at her his expression changed. His eyes were filled with almost doglike devotion. He threw away his cigar.

"Apologies to all of you, dear ladies!" he exclaimed, as, taking his wife's arm, he led the way from the room. "Bridge, dancing, whatever you please! The fact of it is, the wind has changed, and we are faced with the horrible possibility of seeing half our pheasants go for Courtlaw's woods to-morrow."

"They'll get only acorns from me," Courtlaw remarked. "You'll have them all back again when they are hungry."

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Jennerton, the victim, as it seemed to him, of an impossible assignation, lingered in the easy-chair before the fire in his bedroom until the music below came to an end and light footsteps passed along the corridor. The women, at



any rate, were coming up. He heard the sound of their voices as they wished one another good night, the opening and closing of doors, the ringing for maids. Then, some time before he had expected her, his own door opened and closed again. A woman stood there for a moment, listening. Then she came quietly forward. Jennerton, not wholly at his ease, pushed another chair towards the fire.

"I am very glad, of course, if I can be of any assistance to you, Mrs. Bolderbeck," he said, a little doubtfully, "but are you sure that this visit is quite wise on your part?"

She sank into the chair and looked across at him with dark, thoughtful eyes. She was a woman of about forty years of age, a beauty in her time, lifeless now, with the air of one prematurely weary. Her figure was still good, almost elegant, but her air of complete and utter indifference to life, its demands and adventures, seemed to have destroyed in her the possibility of any vital attraction.

"I fancy my reputation would stand the test, even if I were discovered in here," she observed, "and as for you—well, I am quite sure that you will not misunderstand the nature of my visit."

"You need my help?" he asked.

"I should think it more probable that you needed mine," she rejoined.

A fragment of log fell spluttering from the fire on to the hearth. He leaned forward and replaced it. Instead of at once resuming his place he stood up and looked down at her.

"That may be so," he acknowledged. "There is something wrong here, of course. Any one can see that. I find it a little difficult though, as a newcomer, to pick up the threads."

"Yet they say that you are clever," she remarked. "I seem to have heard of some of your successes."

"It is very probable," he observed, "that to-morrow you will hear of one of my failures."

"Why to-morrow?"

"Because to-morrow appears to me to be the day of crisis."

"You have divined that?"

"It is apparent."

"You are quite right," she conceded. "By this time to-morrow night, unless we can stop it somehow, one of two men will be dead. It doesn't seem worth while."

Her emotionless tone puzzled him. Such indifference was almost unnatural.

"My husband has been a professional lover of women," she went on, "since the early days of his manhood. I knew something about it before I married him. I thought, as so many foolish women do, that he would change.

Instead of that, I found myself living in a world peopled with the ghosts of his dead loves—not altogether dead either. At every country house we visited I had to get used to having maids slip little *billets-doux* into his hand, to feel myself surrounded, night and day, by a constant cloud of intrigue. I suppose it has amused him, and up till now he has been amazingly fortunate. The *billets-doux*, though, are multiplying, and the time has come, I think, when he is going to pay. Unless we do something, he will be killed.”

“Then that something must be done,” Jennerton declared firmly.

“I have been an unhappy wife,” she continued, taking a cigarette from a case in her bag and lighting it, “but I really believe that I should be quite as unhappy a widow. I do not think that I want George to be killed. I have very little feeling left of any sort, but I fancy that I should be lonely.”

“Why are you so sure that it will be your husband who will die?” Jennerton enquired.

“Because he is a very poor shot, and Vincent Pynes is a very fine one.”

“Vincent Pynes!” Jennerton repeated softly.

She nodded.

“They are going to fight a duel to-morrow,” she confided, “on their way to their places in the Home Wood. They have it all planned out very ingeniously. It will be an accident, of course. All this careless shooting has had a purpose, but the accident will be murder none the less.”

“How do you come to know so much about it?” Jennerton asked.

“I chanced to overhear the beginning of it,” she explained. “Since then, I have watched George making his preparations. He remade his will yesterday and wrote a score of letters. Then, too, I happen to know the cause.”

Jennerton helped himself to a cigarette and resumed his place in his chair.

“Mrs. Bolderbeck,” he said, “it must be our affair to stop this.”

“It is yours,” she answered. “I shall do what I can.”

“Your husband and Vincent Pynes have been close friends for the last three years,” Jennerton reflected. “It was certainly your husband’s influence that got Pynes that post in the Treasury. Therefore this disagreement can only have taken place recently.”

“It happened on Wednesday night,” she confided, “when Vincent found a note which his wife had written to George.”

“God, these women are mad!” Jennerton exclaimed. “She is living in the house, under the same roof. They can see one another all the time. Why on earth write a note!”

“I have never been able to quite understand the stupidity of my sex in such matters,” Mrs. Bolderbeck agreed. “Furthermore, I cannot understand why a woman married to a fine young fellow like Vincent Pynes should want to commence, or renew, a love affair with my husband. But there it was—the

note told its own story. I saw it myself; there was no doubt about it.”

“It was compromising?”

“Hideously and damnably compromising.”

Jennerton smoked thoughtfully for several moments. A busy little French clock was ticking on the mantelpiece; from the smoking room down below came a roar of laughter. Somehow or other it sounded forced. Jennerton shivered as he listened.

“It’s a beastly affair,” he muttered.

She rose to her feet and stood for a moment, listening. Apparently, however, the smoking-room party showed no immediate signs of breaking up.

“You must stop the shooting to-morrow morning, Mr. Jennerton,” she enjoined.

“I’ve done my best to get Otterleyes to put it off as it is,” he declared. “He won’t listen to me.”

She moved softly towards the door.

“I have always heard that you were modest, Mr. Jennerton,” she said. “I have warned you what will happen. It is your rôle to stop this tragedy. You must do it.”

He sprang towards the door but she waved him back. She opened it a few inches, listened, and stole away. When he looked out a minute later, the corridor was empty.

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Jennerton was ill at ease. The threads of the forthcoming tragedy were in his fingers surely enough now, but they led almost to an impasse. The tragedy could be averted, but what then? Two men, between whom lay a grievous wrong, had agreed to fight out their quarrel in a manner which should secure safety for the survivor, and which should cast no reflection upon any living being. Who should say that they had not the right? What mortal claim had any human being to interfere without cant or impertinence? The outraged husband would at least cut a finer figure on the greensward than in the Law Courts, and the seducer had it in his power to make the great atonement. Jennerton kept telling himself that he was a detective, and all the time remembering that he was a man. He wished fervently that the telegram which had summoned him had miscarried, that he had been away from home, that anything had prevented this ill-fated visit of his. The only intervention which seemed possible was intervention of the vulgar meddler in other people’s affairs. . . . And then came the second summons of the night—a low, hurried knocking, barely time for a response, and the swift entrance of a very unexpected visitor. It was Anita Pynes, who, having crossed the threshold, appeared for a moment to repent of her temerity and to meditate flight. The sight of Jennerton, however, in his ordinary dinner clothes and smoking jacket, seemed to reassure her. She came

quickly into the room and sank into the vacated chair.

“Some one has been here already,” she exclaimed. “Who?”

“Mrs. Bolderbeck,” he told her.

“Can’t you do anything to stop this—trouble?” she demanded.

“I wish I could,” he answered. “What the mischief did you want to send Bolderbeck a note for, anyway? I thought that was all over when you married Pynes.”

“So it has been,” she assured him eagerly, “and it never amounted to anything serious anyhow, but I wanted my letters back again. He kept on promising and never sending them, and I thought if I could get him alone for a moment——”

He looked at her steadily.

“It wasn’t an ordinary note of that sort that your husband found,” he interrupted.

She leaned over towards the writing table, took a sheet of paper from the rack, picked up a pencil, reflected for a moment, and then wrote, in a rapid, sprawling hand. She passed it across to Jennerton.

“Of course,” she admitted, “any one could misunderstand, but that is just what I wrote, and it seems scarcely worth all this trouble.”

He read the few lines thoughtfully:

“George I must see you. You are behaving disgustingly. Ten minutes—that is all I ask. Once it was you who were the beggar.

“A.”

“Indiscreet,” Jennerton commented, “but not vital.”

“I suppose it depends how you look at it,” she said gloomily. “Vincent has always been terribly jealous, and heaven knows I’ve never given him any cause—since we were married. This time, he is perfectly crazy. He hasn’t spoken to me for twenty-four hours. He keeps the door of his room locked. I don’t even know—whether he’s spoken to George. The atmosphere of the whole house is unbearable. Can’t you feel it yourself, Mr. Jennerton? There is tragedy lurking in every corner. Something is going to happen—something terrible.”

Jennerton rose to his feet.

“Not if I can help it, Mrs. Pynes,” he promised. “Your letter, of course, was a mistake, but it is not a tragic one. I assure you that I will do all that I can.”

He opened the door and looked up and down the empty corridor. She flitted past him into the shadows. For an hour he sat in front of the smouldering fire. At last he arrived at a decision. He rose to his feet and once more opened his door. This time, the whole house seemed to be asleep. He

stole softly out and vanished in the gloom at the far end of the gallery.

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Bolderbeck, still fully dressed, except that he wore a heavy silk dressing gown in place of his coat, swung around in his chair at the soft tapping at the door. He gave a little exclamation of relief as Jennerton entered.

“Awfully sorry to disturb you so late, but might I have just a word with you?” the latter asked.

Bolderbeck rose to his feet and pushed a chair towards his visitor.

“Thank heavens it’s you,” he rejoined. “I was afraid it might be—”

He hesitated and Jennerton went on.

“I hope you won’t think me a busybody. I came to ask you a question about that letter Anita Pynes sent you.”

Bolderbeck groaned.

“A bad business!” he admitted. “Why these women are such fools I can’t imagine. Look at me, Jennerton. I’m past the prime of life. Why should they keep on badgering me? I’ve had my affairs—more love affairs than most men—but one can’t go on for ever.”

“This letter, though,” Jennerton pointed out—“according to Anita Pynes it was perfectly harmless—simply a request for a few minutes’ conversation with you to ask for some letters back which she appears to have written to you before she was married.”

“Harmless!” Bolderbeck cried. “I wish to God it were harmless. I didn’t interfere with her—I never have since she was married—yet she writes me a violent love letter. I got it away from her husband, but not before he’d read it, worse luck. He’ll either kill me, or I shall kill him before we leave here.”

Jennerton was perplexed.

“I wish you’d show me the letter,” he begged. “I’ve always found Anita Pynes so truthful.”

“The most truthful woman in the world,” said Bolderbeck, “goes crazy when she sits down to write to a man. Look here, I won’t show you Anita’s letter. Her husband’s seen it already, and that’s enough. I’ll show you this—from our hostess—came to-night. What do you think of this? Look! No, don’t touch it. You can read.”

He held up a letter which had been lying on the table. Jennerton read the first few lines, and a little cry broke from his lips.

“When did you get that?” he demanded.

“Not three hours ago—since dinner time,” Bolderbeck replied, thrusting the letter back into his pocket. “I tell you, these women will send me crazy between them. Look here. Wait a moment. I’ll show you something.”

He stooped down and dragged a black box from underneath the bed—a formidable-looking deed box with a patent lock. He opened it and pulled out a

handful of letters. The box was full of them.

“Why the hell I keep them, I don’t know!” he exclaimed. “There they are! Letters from women you’d never believe would even dream of a lover. I tell you, I get sick of them. They make my life a burden. Blast them!”

He thrust the letters back, locked the box, and stood up. Jennerton threw away his cigarette.

“The only letter I’m interested in just now,” he said, “is that letter from Anita Pynes. You are sure her husband has read it?”

“Every word,” Bolderbeck replied. “He has been trying to kill me ever since, blast him! . . . Now, young fellow, I’ve been civil enough,” he went on, with a sudden change of tone. “There’s the door. Out you go or I’ll ring the bell!”

Jennerton went.

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Again on the following morning, Jennerton was conscious of that curious sense of unreality about even the simplest happenings. The figures grouped around the breakfast dishes, lifting covers, pouring out tea or coffee, seemed more like marionettes, quaintly accoutred in homespuns, leggings and gaiters, than an actual company of simple, sport-loving Britons. The usual remarks were interchanged, the usual surmises about the day’s sport, yet the atmosphere of tragedy was never far distant. Vincent Pynes was one of the first down and made only one remark during breakfast time.

“Partridge drives, I hear, all the morning, Otterleyes.”

“Hope you fellows don’t mind,” his host assented, stabbing a kidney with his fork, and adventuring further in the hissing dish of bacon. “The fact of it is,” he added, returning to his place, “we’ve left too many birds—had a rotten wind and bad shooting my big days.”

“That won’t interfere with the Home Wood in the afternoon, I suppose?” Bolderbeck asked.

Otterleyes frowned. He had spent half the night thinking of an excuse to keep out of the wood.

“No, we shall have to do that,” he admitted. “Take it in four beats after lunch.” . . .

The morning’s sport was excellent. Bolderbeck and Vincent Pynes, shooting from numbers One and Seven—places, contrary to custom, which had been allotted to them for the day—shot unusually well. A little fitful sunshine cheered every one up. By luncheon time, the atmosphere of strain had to a certain extent departed. Lady Otterleyes, with most of the other women guests from the house, was at the bailiff’s farm to welcome the guns for luncheon. She was as beautiful and as unperturbed as ever, gracious to all her guests, far removed, it seemed, from all the disquietudes, the shadow of which

still remained. Anita Pynes, with dark, beringed eyes, and skilfully applied but unbecoming rouge upon her cheeks, frankly pleaded guilty to a sleepless night. Mrs. Bolderbeck had little to say to any one—a silent watching figure. After luncheon they all stood about for a few minutes in the garden. It was a perfectly tranquil November day without a breath of wind. Otterleys, smoking a big cigar, drew Jennerton on one side.

“Got through the morning all right, eh?” he remarked. “I’m keeping the same places for this afternoon. If you think there’s anything wrong between those two fellows they’ll be at opposite sides of the woods all through the shooting.”

“What does that mean then?” Jennerton demanded, with a sudden start, pointing to two figures in the distance.

Otterleys looked and understood.

“My God!” he exclaimed. “They are the two outsiders, when they start, but they’re walking down together to the bottom of the wood.”

Jennerton picked up his gun.

“Come along,” he enjoined hastily. “We’ll catch them before they’re out of sight.”

Three times, as they hurried across the stubbles, Otterleys blew his whistle, but the only result seemed to be that the men in front quickened their pace a little. The summons at last, however, became imperative. At the edge of the wood, they looked behind. Reluctantly they paused.

“Will you leave this to me, Lord Otterleys?” Jennerton begged.

“It’s your job, my lad,” the other answered. “Dashed if I should know how to set about it!”

They hurried on to where the two men were impatiently waiting.

“What’s wrong?” Bolderbeck demanded nervously. “We’re on our way to the bottom of the wood. That’s right, isn’t it?”

“Not quite,” Jennerton replied. “You’re a quarter of an hour ahead of time for one thing. The beaters aren’t in their places yet. Just step up this ride for a moment, both of you. Otterleys and I have something to say.”

Vincent Pynes remained motionless.

“I have nothing to say to any one except to Bolderbeck here,” he announced. “I don’t know you very well, Mr. Jennerton, so you must be content with my saying that I should consider any interference in my private affairs an impertinence. Otterleys is an old friend, and later—he will understand.”

“He understands now, and so do I,” was Jennerton’s grave reply. “You are planning to fight a duel with shotguns. Not at all a bad idea if there had been any just cause for it. In that case neither Otterleys nor I would have interfered. A few yards more this way, please.”

They moved on to the turf ride out of sight of the bailiff's lodge. A frightened rabbit scurried away into the wood. A couple of cock pheasants with discordant speeches soared overhead.

"You are proposing to fight a duel," Jennerton continued, "because of a letter addressed to Bolderbeck here by your wife, Pynes, which fell into your hands for a few moments some days ago. Neither Otterleyes nor I have the slightest objection to the duel, providing the cause is adequate. Now, I have seen a copy of that letter, and my opinion is that it is entirely without significance. You married a very popular woman, Vincent Pynes, and the whole world knows that before her marriage she and Bolderbeck were friends. I maintain that they were never anything else. I maintain that the letter is perfectly harmless. Mrs. Pynes has explained to me that her whole desire was to procure the return of her indiscreet, possibly foolish, letters. I believe her. Now, I ask you both to allow Otterleyes, who is a man of honour, and also a man of common sense, to read that letter and adjudicate. If he believes that it indicates what you, Pynes, are suggesting, get on with your duel; if he decides that it does not, shake hands, and don't make damned fools of yourselves."

"Sensibly put," Otterleyes commended. "Let me see the letter, Bolderbeck.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," Bolderbeck protested harshly. "The letter was addressed to me. It is my property."

"It is my justification for killing you," was Vincent Pyne's savage rejoinder.

Otterleyes frowned.

"Look here, Bolderbeck," he remonstrated, "you're too sensible men, both of you, to be talking in this bloodthirsty fashion. Life's worth something, after all. There's Jennerton here, a level-headed young fellow, shrewd as they make 'em, declares that he's seen practically a copy of the letter Bolderbeck has in his pocket, and he believes in your wife's innocence."

"Then he's a fool!"

"Let me be the judge of that," Otterleyes insisted.

Bolderbeck paused to reflect for a moment. His eyes seemed to be watching the swaying flight of a wood pigeon overhead. He may have been seeing even farther. His reply, when it came, was uncompromising.

"I'll shoot any one who dares to try to get the letter away from me," Bolderbeck pronounced doggedly. "I'll shoot him where he stands. Pynes only saw it for a few seconds by a trick. The women who write me letters know that they are safe."

Otterleyes held up his hand. He leaned forward and looked through the trees. The beaters, in a thin, straggling line, were beginning to make their appearance upon the horizon. A frightened hare or two came scurrying into the wood.



“You fellows are all on edge,” he said, looking curiously at Bolderbeck. “Now, listen to me. I’m your host, aren’t I? I’m your friend, too—yours, Bolderbeck, and yours, Pynes. You admit that. Well, then, do as I do.”

He leaned his gun against a tree. Jennerton promptly followed suit. The other two, after a moment’s hesitation, did the same thing.

“Now, come into the middle of the ride.”

They all four stood together. Otterleyes laid one hand upon Bolderbeck’s shoulder, the other upon Pynes’.

“Look here, you two,” he begged, “you’re making a devil of a fuss about nothing.”

“About nothing?” Vincent Pynes flamed out.

“About nothing,” Jennerton echoed. “Let me make my confession. I have had an interview with Mrs. Pynes. I asked her to tell me exactly what she said in her letter. She wrote it down. Here it is. I shall read it to you.”

He pulled out the pencilled scrawl from his pocket and read it aloud. As soon as he had finished, Vincent Pynes snatched the sheet of paper from him, and devoured it word by word.

“Now listen, you two,” Otterleyes began—

“Listen be damned!” Vincent Pynes interrupted. “Do you think I’m a fool? Do you think I’m crazy? Do you think, if Anita’s letter had been like that, I’d have cared a damn? You shall have your way now. You shall read her letter. You shall know now why there’ll be no peace for me until I’ve settled matters with that filthy brute.”

He sprang at Bolderbeck like a madman, tore his coat half off his back, and snatched a letter from the breast pocket, which he handed to Otterleyes. A curious silence fell upon them all. A squirrel was shaking the boughs of a thin elm tree just above their heads. The first of the stops had arrived and was tapping the trees on the other side of the wood so that the pheasants were running through the brush, but from the four men there came no sound until at last Otterleyes, with a little moan, swayed upon his feet, stumbled, and only just recovered himself. He stood there, breathing heavily for a moment or two, the crumpled-up letter still clutched in his hand. Bolderbeck, in Jennerton’s grasp, had ceased to struggle—a curious little gurgling sound was coming from his throat, the broken, hysterical laugh of a man half distraught. The beaters now were scarcely more than a couple of fields away. Otterleyes, a gaunt spectre of himself, picked up Bolderbeck’s gun, handed it to him, and slipped his own under his arm.

“You and I, Bolderbeck,” he said, “will take numbers One and Seven.”

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Courtlaw, who travelled up to town the next morning with Jennerton, took special pains to secure an empty compartment. Ever since the previous

evening, he had treated the young man with marked consideration.

“There are one or two things, Mr. Jennerton,” he confided, as soon as they had started, “which I should very much like you to explain to me.”

“I’ll do my best, Sir Henry,” his companion promised.

“In the first place, when did you begin to suspect that Bolderbeck was mad?”

Jennerton tapped a cigarette thoughtfully upon his case.

“I think it was something which his wife let fall when she came to my room the evening before last. Anyhow, I arrived at the conclusion that if anything was to be done at all, it must be done through Bolderbeck, and later that night, although I must confess that I rather funked it, I went around to have a chat with him. The moment I mentioned the subject of love letters, I knew that I was on the right track. He dragged a huge despatch box out from under the bed, all filled with letters, signed by every Christian name you could think of. Some were in ink, some were in pencil, some were reproachful—well, it was a sickening business. Not only that, but he actually dared to show me the letter which he had just finished writing to himself, the letter which he declared had come from Lady Otterleyes. He showed it to me again after the second drive. That is how I knew that he had it in his pocket.”

“Amazing!” Courtlaw murmured. “You’re sure you don’t mind this cross-examination?”

“Not in the least,” was the good-humoured reply.

“Well then, tell me this. You could have cleared the whole thing up this morning. Didn’t it occur to you that you were taking rather a risk in letting it go on?”

“Of course it did,” Jennerton acknowledged. “I dare say I was entirely wrong, but I have had some experience of men who were in Bolderbeck’s extraordinary state of tension, and it seemed to me that a single word before we were ready to deal with him might transform him into a raving lunatic. That was why I tried to steer the thing through to its natural end. I took some minor precautions, of course. For instance, when they hung their coats up to wash in the bailiff’s farm, I changed the cartridges in every man’s pocket for dud ones, and I sent the men who were carrying the bags around with the beaters—told them we had all that we needed. I knew nothing would happen with unloaded guns until they got around the bend of the wood, and there, as you know, the two doctors whom Alderson had got for me, and the two attendants, were waiting with a car in the road. . . . They are calling it a nervous breakdown.”

Sir Henry stroked his chin.

“You may have taken a few risks,” he observed, “and it must have been a nasty quarter of an hour for poor Otterleyes, but on the whole, I think perhaps that you were right.”

“You see,” Jennerton explained further, “directly he showed me the letter which he said was from Lady Otterleyes I knew that I was on the right track. I have known Lady Otterleyes slightly since she was in the nursery. She would no more dream of sending a pencilled scrawl like that to such a man as Bolderbeck than she would—well, flirt with the butler. It simply wasn’t possible. He was cunning enough to see that I was a little incredulous, and that made him give himself away altogether. It was then that he dragged out the despatch box and began to tell me stories of pretty well every woman one has ever heard of. They did their best to spoil him in his younger days,” Jennerton reflected, “and they certainly succeeded, poor fellow!”

Sir Henry cleared his throat and became, as he sometimes was, very impressive indeed.

“Young man,” he said, “I want to offer you my earnest congratulations. I will admit that I have, throughout my life, been very much prejudiced against anything in the shape of amateur detective work, but I am perfectly convinced that a case like this could never have been handled by any regular representative of the established authorities in such a tactful and successful manner.”

“You are very kind,” Jennerton began——

“Stop!” the lawyer interrupted. “I am about to offer you proof of what I say. I myself—or rather my firm—am to-day confronted with one of those embarrassing tragedies which leave one almost helpless. Frankly, we don’t know how to deal with it. Will you come and see me at my rooms at three o’clock this afternoon?”

“I shall consider it,” the young man answered earnestly, “the greatest compliment which any one in my profession could possibly receive.”

## CHAPTER VIII TAWSSITTER'S MILLIONS

Jennerton felt that he was in luck when the man whom he had been busily and discreetly shadowing during the last week turned and spoke to him upon the Terrace at Monte Carlo. They had exchanged amenities at the *chemin-de-fer* table upon the previous evening, but nothing had passed beyond the ordinary civilities of the moment, and Jennerton himself, although the two men were standing side by side, would not have ventured upon speech.

"A very fine sight, that!" his neighbour remarked, lifting his stick, and pointing seaward.

"The *Mauretania*, I am told," Jennerton replied. "A magnificent vessel! Somehow or other, though, these huge steamers seem a little out of place in a toy paradise like Monte Carlo."

"This one," the other rejoined slowly, his eyes still fixed upon the approaching leviathan, "is very much out of place. The crowds who will presently be hustling each other in the cafés and restaurants here will also be out of place. The man whose special object it is to remove me to another world, if he should be amongst the passengers, will also be entirely out of his element in these surroundings. Will you take your *apéritif* with me, Mr. Jennerton? It will be a couple of hours, at least, before these passengers are landed."

"You know my name then?"

"As well as you do mine," was the calm reply. "I am Tawsitter—Edward Mountford Tawsitter, of Tawsitter Court, in the county of Cornwall, during my youth. Later of New York. Later of London, Paris, Rome—anywhere. You are Mr. Jennerton, the very clever young amateur detective whom my good friend Courtlaw has been writing me about so assiduously. Now we know each other. You'd better stroll up the steps and I will give you a lift to the Royalty Bar."

"I am sorry that I have been so easily discovered," Jennerton regretted. "Sir Henry was particularly anxious that I should make your acquaintance casually. I gathered that you weren't too keen about my butting in on your affairs."

The other smiled. He was a man of apparently from forty to forty-five years of age, clean-shaven and handsome in a way, but with restless eyes and a harassed expression. He gave one the idea of a person with an uneasy conscience.

"It really doesn't make any difference," he said. "I must admit that when Courtlaw wrote me I refused to have anything to do with you, but, after all,

what does it matter? You may not be able to do any good, but you certainly won't do any harm. Step in, please."

A Rolls-Royce was waiting at the exit from the Terrace and they glided smoothly away up the hill.

"I'm sorry you haven't much confidence in me, Mr. Tawsitter," Jennerton meditated. "I have been very interested, however, in what Sir Henry has told me of your present dilemma, and I am not at all sure that I may not be able to be of use to you."

Tawsitter sighed. There was a very hopeless expression about his mouth.

"Mr. Jennerton," he confided, "I do not believe that your big four from Scotland Yard, combined with the famous nine of the City of New York Police, and assisted by the Archangel Gabriel wielding thunderbolts, could save me from the man who is on his way to kill me."

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Sunshine, in one broad, yellow flood, from which the striped umbrellas seemed pleasant but almost inadequate protection, flowers, and flowering shrubs on the cool circle of greensward, white-coated waiters with well-laden trays of amber and pink-coloured cocktails, an agreeable chatter of conversation, the merest tinkle of music in the distance. It was one of those early spring mornings when Monte Carlo sheds its sometimes tawdry mantle and seems one of the fairest spots in the world—a paradise for joy, and laughter, and forgetfulness. But Tawsitter, although upon his arrival he was immediately ushered to one of the best tables in a corner of the Bar garden, although his double cocktail foamed invitingly at the top, and many of the little crowd who came and passed hailed him as an intimate, remained nervous and ill at ease. There was a sunken line under his eyes, a faint contraction of the eyebrows, an occasional far-away though intense gaze, as though he searched for a thing which he feared to see. He leaned forward towards his companion.

"I hate the days these steamboats arrive from America," he confessed. "Some time or other, I know that he will descend upon me. He will send no warning. He will just arrive. And that, I suppose, will be the end."

He shuddered, dropped some cigarette ash upon his waistcoat, and brushed it off nervously.

"You have tried by every means you can think of to get in touch with him?"

"Every means? What, in God's name, could I do more?" Tawsitter demanded, almost angrily. "I had a letter waiting for him with each one of his friends in New York. He had letters and telegrams at the prison up to the last day. My agent, with a car, and a pocketbook, was outside the prison gates at dawn when he was supposed to be released. Somehow or other he came out unrecognised and gave every one the slip. He's been free for two months now.

No one has seen him and he hasn't visited a single one of his old haunts."

"Does he know where you are?" Jennerton ventured.

Tawsitter shivered. It seemed a curious thing to do, seated in a pool of sunshine, without a tremor of breeze and with his second cocktail half consumed, but without a doubt he shivered. Jennerton studied him curiously. Such fear on the part of a man of Tawsitter's type seemed to him a strange thing.

"He'll find out fast enough," was the gloomy response. "I'd have hidden if I'd thought it would have been any good. Mark would have found me in a desert island. You know something of what lies between us, I imagine?"

"I know some part of the story," Jennerton admitted.

Tawsitter moved uneasily in his chair.

"We're all sinners, more or less, I suppose," he continued. "When it comes to the other man or you, though, it isn't many of us would play the Sydney Carton. I'll confess I was in it with Mark, but what good would it have done for me to have gone and said so. I ran away to Europe, I admit. And look what I've done. I've made a fortune. Half of it I've put in Mark's name. Isn't that playing the game?"

"It certainly seems so," Jennerton acknowledged. "You've let him know that."

"Of course I have! I have written him scores of letters. He's had them too. I know that, because I've a friend in New York who has a pull."

"Seems queer."

"I'm a sensitive man," Tawsitter went on—"drink up that cocktail and have another—very sensitive indeed. I couldn't even bear to read the account of the trial. I was positively morbid about it. All that I could do to help afterwards, I did. I have a sort of a pull and I arranged to have newspapers, books, and better food sent in to him."

"None of which he would accept, I believe," Jennerton remarked.

Tawsitter mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"He refused everything. He sent one message—that was all. 'I will see my partner and thank him for his kindness when I come out!' And he's out! He's free now. From somewhere or other, he's on his way here. He might even be on this steamer."

A sudden access of custom gladdened the hearts of Guido and Francis, the two urbane proprietors, and infused new activity into the place. A procession of motor cars and little carriages, each with a number attached, drew up outside and commenced the task of discharging their loads of transatlantic sightseers. Loud and cheerful voices, pitched in an unfamiliar key, proclaimed afresh the beauties of the place. Extra tables were dragged out. Cocktails bearing strange names were freely ordered. A motley collection of pretty girls

in light costumes flitted from one to the other of the little parties. Tawsitter sat in his corner and glowered.

"I tried Cairo last month," he told his companion drearily. "It was just the same there. They arrived in special trains, instead of steamers—horrible!"

The cavalcade of vehicles had come to an end. The newcomers were already settling down into their places. Then there crawled, painfully and slowly up the steep hill, one final carriage. It was a shabby and dilapidated affair, drawn by one weary horse. The *cocher*, who had been obliged to use his whip freely, drew up at last at the entrance with a vain little attempt at a flourish, removed his hat, wiped his forehead, and leaned over expectantly. His fare, who seemed in many respects to match the vehicle, slowly descended. With almost meticulous deliberation, he counted out four five-franc notes, and handed them to the expostulating *cocher*. Then he made his way deliberately into the midst of the gay scene—a man, who, from the first, seemed curiously out of place amongst such a company, or anywhere where gaiety prevailed. He was elderly. His clothes were shabby. His face was lined and his eyes were tired. Yet he made his patient way along the flagged walk like a man with an object. Jennerton, who had been watching him with the idlest curiosity, was suddenly startled by his companion's groan. Tawsitter, ghastly with fear, drops of sweat upon his forehead, was gazing straight ahead of him, like a man who looks on death.

"It's Mark!" he gasped. "Mark Sloane!"

The light babel of conversation flowed on, undisturbed by that half-stifled, unheard cry of terror. No one took any notice of the insignificant little man who walked with something of the air of a somnambulist towards Jennerton and his companion. Yet, to an observant person, he must have seemed curiously out of place amongst this light-hearted gathering—a man who carried the shadow of tragedy engraven upon his face and purpose framed in the grim lines of his close-drawn lips. He brought with him an incongruous air into the sun-dappled places. Watching his coming, Tawsitter shivered as though he felt the approaching chill of death. Jennerton rose to his feet. He moved his position slightly, so that he covered his companion.

"Did you wish to speak to Mr. Tawsitter?" he asked.

The newcomer looked at him as though his voice were the only part of him which really existed.

"Is that any concern of yours?" he demanded. "Mr. Tawsitter and I are old—friends."

"The fact is," Jennerton confided, "that Mr. Tawsitter is in rather poor health just now."

The little man smiled. It was not a gesture which denoted any degree of mirth, but his lips were certainly parted for a moment.

“I expected to find my friend Tawsitter in poor health when the time came for me to put in an appearance,” he remarked. “However, let me reassure him. At the present moment, it is not my intention to make any attempt upon his personal well-being. I shall deal with him in due course. Just now, I have other business here. That being so, I will sit at your table.”

He was there almost before they realised it, seated next to Jennerton and opposite Tawsitter.

“Come, come, Edward,” he continued, with a gibe in every inflexion of his tone, “your welcome is not too effusive. Introduce me to your young friend here and order me a cocktail. A packet of cigarettes too. Be hospitable, Edward. Remember that I have come a long way to see you.”

It was Jennerton who summoned the waiter and gave an order. Tawsitter, as a matter of fact, was almost incoherent. The shabby little man controlled the situation.

“My old friend, I fear, is suffering from nerves,” he went on, as he accepted a cigarette from Jennerton’s case. “Quite a common ailment at his time of life and with his past. It is never a pleasant realisation that the time arrives when one must pay. You were always a good spender, Tawsitter, but you hated to pay. How you are going to hate it now!”

Tawsitter made his effort then—perhaps it was time, for people were beginning to look at him curiously.

“You have a grievance against me, of course, Mark,” he admitted, “but remember that I have made a great deal of money for you whilst you have been—er—away.”

A dry and mirthless chuckle, one swift, contemptuous glance from those deep-set grey eyes, and the words died away upon Tawsitter’s lips. Sloane moved around a little in his chair, as though to take note of the people at the different tables. He eyed them appraisingly.

“They look rich,” he murmured. “Is it my fancy, or is that Silas Leedham, the South African millionaire?”

“That is Leedham,” Jennerton assented.

Tawsitter gathered up his courage once more.

“Look here, Mark,” he began tremulously, “let’s talk together man to man. I did you a dirty trick by scuttling away when the trouble came. I know that, and of course——”

His voice broke. Sloane leaned a little forward.

“If you mention a woman’s name, Tawsitter,” he warned him, “I shall shoot you where you sit.”

“I won’t then—I promise I won’t. But, listen. I came off with the money, I know that, but I’ve always reckoned half of it’s yours. I’ve done well. They speak in the City of ‘Tawsitter’s Millions.’ That may be an exaggeration, but



there's plenty for both of us. My lawyers are all prepared to see you. Lift your finger and you're a rich man; shake hands and you're a millionaire."

"Very interesting," Sloane murmured. "I will imitate your frankness. Whatever your fortune may be—and I hope it is a large one—I am going to have, not a part of it, but the whole, not as an act of grace, but when I choose. I am going to pluck the feathers out of you, one by one, and when I have finished doing that, I am going to see you where I have been. That is if I do not kill you first. I had serious thoughts of killing you when I arrived here. On the other hand, although I should consider I was doing the world a great service, a judge and a jury might not share that idea, and I have a fancy just now for my liberty. Still, be prepared at any time, Tawsitter. If ever the time should come when I could kill you without risk to myself, I shall most assuredly give myself that pleasure. Meanwhile, let me provide you with a little amusement."

He produced from his waistcoat pocket a curiously shaped, black ebony whistle, and, raising it to his lips, blew it—a long, shrill blast, with something strangely menacing in its throbbing note. The cheerful ripple of conversation stopped abruptly. The waiters paused in their hurrying back and forth, and stood like dumb and petrified figures, seeking everywhere to discover from which direction this unexpected sound had come, for the whistle had a peculiar quality in its reverberation which made it almost impossible to locate its actual source. Long before its echoes had died away, there was an amazing sequel. At almost every table, an apparently harmless-looking guest had become transformed into a grim, threatening figure, whose demands were swiftly formulated, and, in almost every case, as swiftly acceded to. The light laughter of a few minutes before was replaced abruptly by the screams of terrified women, and the sunlight in which every one had been basking glittered now upon half a score or more of sinister-looking weapons. As a spectacle, the thing was amazing—a triumph of organisation. One woman fainted. Two men who showed signs of resistance promptly abandoned the idea when they glanced into the dark barrel of one of those steadily handled guns. In less than three minutes, a little stream of unnoticeable-looking men made their way in leisurely fashion down the steps, and four waiting motor cars glided off in different directions. The buzz of recommencing conversation was mingled now with the hysterical sobs of the women, who were clasping their wrists and necks and bemoaning their losses. Mark Sloane leaned forward in his place, and there was a malevolent parting of his lips as he looked into the ashen face and noticed the trembling hands of his *vis-à-vis*.

"Quite like old times, eh, Tawsitter?" he mocked him.

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When Jennerton descended into the lounge of the Hôtel de Paris that evening, he found Tawsitter, his prospective host, in a state of nervous

excitement, consuming his fourth cocktail. The place was filled with little parties from the steamer and the buzz of conversation was almost deafening. Naturally there was only one topic.

“Perfectly scandalous!” an apoplectic-looking Englishman, whose wife had lost an imitation pearl necklace, was declaring, moving from table to table amongst his friends. “They say those fellows got away with fifty thousand pounds’ worth of notes and jewellery, but not a single arrest. All that the police have to say is that the gang probably came from Nice.”

“Slickest hold-up I’ve ever seen,” an American pronounced, with unwilling admiration. “Roadman Sam, as they used to call him, couldn’t have worked a cleaner job in his best days. It was all over before one had time to think.”

“I’m wondering what exactly is our position?” Jennerton observed, as he seated himself by Tawsitter’s side.

“What do you mean?” the other demanded sharply.

“I mean about the whistle. We know very well who blew it.”

“It’s not our business.”

Jennerton accepted the cocktail which a waiter had just brought and lit a cigarette.

“I’m not so sure about that,” he ventured.

“I tell you it’s nothing to do with us,” Tawsitter reiterated. “You’re not down here to help the Monaco police. You’re down here to save my life if you can.”

Jennerton reflected for a moment.

“If you really look upon that as my mission,” he said, “I think you might be a little more generous with your confidence. So far I have had to work in the dark.”

“What do you want to know?” Tawsitter muttered.

“I should not think that you were a coward,” Jennerton continued, “but at the very sight of this man Mark Sloane you relapse into a state of abject fear. I gather that you broke the law together in the States, that you were mixed up in some discreditable adventures, and that when the final reckoning came you left him to face it alone—and he kept his mouth shut. It doesn’t seem to be enough to account for what I have seen and heard pass between you two. Is there anything else?”

“Yes,” Tawsitter admitted in a low, almost inaudible whisper.

At that moment a coincidence happened. The lift doors in front of them were opened, and through the lounge towards the restaurant came strolling an impeccably dressed, distinguished-looking elderly man. He exchanged greetings here and there with some of the loungers, who had probably been his steamer companions, a humorous word or two apparently about the morning’s episode. When he approached Jennerton and Tawsitter, however, he seemed to

stiffen until the very muscles of his face were rigid. Tawsitter gripped at the sides of his chair in a spasm of terror, and Jennerton, watching him closely, wondered how far he had divined the truth. He was wondering still when Sloane came to a standstill in front of him.

“The man who blew the whistle?” he said quietly. “They are all asking who was the man who blew the whistle, the probable ringleader of the band. My friend Mr. Grogan there, who was relieved of forty thousand francs, which he had drawn ten minutes before from the bank, tells me that it came from the direction of our table. You have no theories as to who it was, I suppose, Tawsitter?”

The tortured man looked around. There was no one within direct hearing.

“None at all, blast you!” he muttered.

“And you, Mr. Jennerton?”

“Yes, I think I know who blew it,” Jennerton acknowledged promptly.

“Capital!” Sloane exclaimed. “You must let me go and tell Grogan. He’s very sore about his forty thousand francs. Somehow or other, both he and I were beginning to get the idea that the police over here are scarcely so capable as the police of New York. Not quite so quick at seeing a point. So you think you know who blew the whistle?” he added.

Tawsitter’s hand fell upon his companion’s shoulder in a furious grip.

“He knows nothing,” he declared. “He saw nothing. Leave him alone, can’t you? He is my man. He’s here to protect me—nothing else. I tell you that he saw nothing.”

Jennerton drew away his arm with a little spasm of pain. Sloane was smiling at them both in travestied geniality.

“Well, well,” he murmured. “You, my friend Tawsitter, as I know quite well, are used to having your own way. I expect this will be no exception. Mr. Jennerton will realise that he saw nothing. *Bon appétit?* I have ordered a *poulet à Fleury*, with a mostelle to commence with—a delicious fish, the mostelle. I trust that you, too, will dine well. Do not spoil your appetites with too many cocktails. Au revoir!”

He passed on, the shabby little man transformed, dressed in perfectly fitting dinner clothes, poise and dignity in the deliberation of his movements. Tawsitter looked after him with eyes of hate.

“My nerve has gone,” he muttered. “I’m a broken man, Jennerton. Fifteen years ago—well, I should have dealt with him. Now he taunts me. He knows that I’m afraid. I daren’t speak of what burns in my heart. If I did, he would kill me. Have another cocktail.”

“Certainly not,” Jennerton refused curtly. “We’ll dine, if you don’t mind, but before we go in, remember that my question is still unanswered. There is something between you two men greater and more vital than any ordinary

deceit or quarrel. I am doing my best, but supposing I have made a mistake in my premises? If I am to help you I can never do it on half confidences.”

Tawsitter drained the last drop of his almost empty glass. He sat in that remote corner of the crowded lounge, his fists clenched until the knuckles showed white, gazing with bloodshot eyes over his companion’s shoulder, down the long passage which led to the lift. It was as though he saw something there of which he feared to speak.

“Mark Sloane, before he was tried for felony, was tried for the murder of his wife. He was acquitted. He didn’t murder her. But he believes I did. It’s true I was down at Lone End that night, but I never touched her.”

The two men sat in silence for several moments. The leader of the orchestra wandered out, playing softly the Serenata of Tostelli within a few feet of them. A dinner party passed, all laughter and gaiety. Jennerton rose to his feet.

“If we are going to dine at all,” he suggested, “I think we had better go in.”

In the restaurant they discovered what Jennerton had already ascertained, that it was a Gala Night. Streamers were floating over the tables, such flirtations as can be achieved with small puff balls were in full swing, the busy *maitres d’hôtel* were presenting to their clients a variety of elegantly attired and bored-looking dolls. With his companion’s last words still vibrating in his ears, it seemed to Jennerton that there was something ghastly in the somewhat riotous gaiety of their surroundings. Only a few tables away, in a corner by himself, Mark Sloane was dining, decorously and gravely. Tawsitter, with a little shudder, changed places with his companion to avoid facing his enemy.

“You know something of the truth now,” he said. “I’ll tell you the whole story as soon as I can bring myself to it. You see, both he and I were fond of Sadie in the old days, and he was always jealous of me. I could explain all that he misunderstands, but I know Mark. If I were to begin, at the first mention of her name, he’d shoot me. It’s hideous, of course, but there you are. Money? Well, he mocks at money. What can I give him? What can I do? Sometimes I think that money is too much the measure of all things in this life. I can’t give him a new heart or a new soul. I can’t bring Sadie back to life. I’m just powerless. If it’s my life he wants, he’d better have it.”

There was a quality of despair in Tawsitter’s tone, which was not without its pathos. Jennerton, however, for reasons of his own, remained unsympathetic.

“You have drunk too many cocktails and you are inclined to be melodramatic,” he declared bluntly. “The greatest gift in the world is the gift of life and the man who affects to scoff at it is a fool. You want to live, of course; so does Mark Sloane. If one achieves in life, one should remember it and be proud. If one has dark places, one should atone for them and forget. At

any rate, I know my problem now. Do you mind if I leave you for a few moments as soon as we have finished the salmon? I am going to have a word or two with Mark Sloane.”

“You might as well talk to a pyramid of granite,” Tawsitter replied, with a little shiver. “Don’t waste your time with any silly attempt at arguing him into a reconciliation. He’s here to see the end of me and he’ll see it one way or another.”

“Nevertheless,” Jennerton murmured, “in a few minutes, if you will excuse me, I should like to have a look around the room. And afterwards, just a word or two with Mark Sloane.”

“Take my advice and be careful what you say to him,” his host warned Jennerton. . . .

The dance music began presently and soon afterwards Jennerton rose to his feet, strolled in leisurely fashion around the room, exchanging now and then a word or two with an acquaintance, and finally paused in front of the table at which Mark Sloane was dining. The little gentleman watched his approach without any change of expression.

“Mr. Sloane,” Jennerton asked, standing by his table, “do you know who I am?”

Sloane sipped his claret appreciatively. Then he leaned a little forward.

“I do not, sir,” he admitted “and, to tell you the truth, I can conceive no matter in this world which interests me less.”

“Notwithstanding that,” was the quick rejoinder, “I shall tell you. I am a private detective engaged by a firm of solicitors in London to come down and look after Mr. Tawsitter.”

“He will probably need your ministrations,” Mark Sloane observed. “I trust that one of your duties has been to draft his will.”

“Naturally,” Jennerton continued, ignoring the latter part of his *vis-à-vis* speech, “I did not come out without devoting some little attention to his career—and I may say to yours.”

“It is the sort of impertinence which one may resent,” the other sighed, “but against which one is powerless. However, as my last eight years have been spent in prison, I fear that you have found the soil for your investigations scarcely fruitful.”

“I took the liberty of going even further back,” Jennerton confided. “This morning I received a long cable from my agent in New York which, coupled with something Mr. Tawsitter has just told me, has revealed a somewhat curious side light upon what I must confess that I regarded as an impossible situation. In my own way, in my own time, I propose to share that knowledge with you. Meanwhile, answer me one question.”

“At my discretion.”

“Nine years ago——”

There was an almost murderous light in Mark Sloane’s eyes.

“Young man,” he warned him, slowly and emphatically, “there does not exist a single person in the world with whom I would discuss my past—much less a private detective who is in the service of Edward Tawsitter. Go back to your place and leave me alone. Tawsitter knows what he has to face from me, and a whole army of detectives will never avert what is coming to him. You are beginning to annoy me.”

Jennerton reflected for a moment. It was one of those strange situations in which a single premature word might ruin his carefully arranged scheme. Tawsitter he could manage with ease; this man, he realised, was of different calibre.

“Mr. Sloane,” he said, “you are an obstinate man, you are a rightfully embittered man, but I cannot believe that you are a fool. You don’t want to be bothered with me longer than you can help, and I will show you how to get rid of me. I make you this request and this offer. Will you permit me to bring Mr. Tawsitter to this table—you need not exchange a single word with him—and join us in a brief stroll down the room—just as far, say, as that pillar there. If you are not content, at the end of our promenade, to change your point of view, if I am making a mistake, as I well may be, I will trouble you no more. I will leave Mr. Tawsitter to fight out his own salvation and I will go back to England to-morrow.”

Sloane dipped the tips of his fingers in the bowl which stood by his side and dried them carefully.

“I have always been told, Mr. Jennerton,” he observed, “that the principal hobby of the private detective was the discovery of mares’ nests. To show you that I am not an unreasonable man, I will come and look at yours.”

Jennerton made his way back to his own table, but did not resume his seat. He leaned forward and spoke with unaccustomed earnestness.

“Mr. Tawsitter,” he confided, “during the next few minutes, I am either going to make a ridiculous mistake, or I am going to succeed in my mission and secure your safety. Will you take a sporting chance and place yourself entirely in my hands? I may tell you that Mr. Sloane has agreed to do so.”

Tawsitter rose nervously to his feet.

“Of course,” he acquiesced eagerly. “What is it you want me to do? Is Mark willing to talk things over?”

“I’m afraid I haven’t progressed so far as that,” Jennerton confessed, “but I beg you to do just as I ask for the next few minutes. Follow me and remain silent.”

He led the way to Mark Sloane’s table. The little man laid down his napkin and rose to his feet. Jennerton slipped in between them.

"I want you both to come this way with me, please," he begged. "Never mind if I seem to be asking you to do a ridiculous thing. We will take our promenade like the others."

Jennerton's manner was convincing, and the two men followed him as he threaded his way through the tables, up to the farther and more thinly occupied portion of the room where the less favoured guests had been placed. They rounded a pillar and Jennerton brought them to a standstill.

"Pull yourselves together," he enjoined. "This is either going to be the shock of your lives or the great mistake of mine. Look!"

It was perhaps as well that they had reached a retired position, for even the hurrying waiters and the most casual looker-on must have been more or less conscious of that sudden atmosphere of fierce drama. At the nearest table to them were seated two people whose appearance sufficiently explained their inconspicuous position. The woman was large and fat. She was even gross. She had pendulous, berouged cheeks, pencilled eyebrows, and a mass of yellow hair, indifferent product of the coiffeur's art. She was extravagantly dressed and bejewelled. Her moist, fat hand was filled with the balls which she had been throwing. There were drops of perspiration upon her forehead. She had been entering without a doubt into the spirit of the gala. At the coming of the three men, scenting fresh victims, she poised herself to throw more balls. Suddenly they all dropped from her nerveless fingers. Her face became almost haggard. The rouge cracked, the livid streaks showed underneath. The only natural thing about her was the fear which glazed her eyes. It was at Sloane she gazed and she seemed as one in the presence of the Angel of Death.

"Mark!" she gasped.

Her companion rose to his feet—a very alarming-looking person. He had a massive bull neck, and the huge girth of a fighter—a man of magnificent physique, although he too had run overmuch to flesh. His muscles quivered underneath his dinner coat. His voice, with its note of the Bowery, was threatening.

"Say, what have you guys got on Sadie? What d'you want here, anyways?"

"Don't let 'em come near me, Ned!" the woman moaned. "He'll kill me, sure. I always told you he'd kill me when he got out."

"I'll see to it that he don't," the big man declared menacingly. "Now, then! Let's hear what you've got to say, and keep your distance."

"I have only this one question to ask of the lady who was once my wife," Mark Sloane said, his voice curiously changed and thin. "Why did you leave me to be tried for murder or manslaughter when all the time you were alive?"

She tried to speak but her tone was choked. The man with her emptied the remains of their second bottle of champagne into her glass. She drank it and gained a momentary courage.

“I knew they couldn’t fix it on you, Mark,” she pleaded. “It was Liza they found, who’d got into trouble with some drummer, and was always pinching my clothes. They’d got you safe enough for the other job, and I didn’t want to be mixed up in that, but honest to God, Mark, if they’d brought the other thing on you, I’d have spoke up. I knew they couldn’t, though. Ted Grinnet’s sister—her who was called as witness because Liza boarded with them once—she knew I was alive. I’d seen her. Ned, here, gave her a thousand dollars. She was all fixed about the identification. That’s why I lay low.”

All this time, Tawsitter stood like a man in a dream. Not a word had passed his lips. He was perhaps breathing a little more quickly than usual. Otherwise he was apparently tongue-tied. And then, the big man spoke up.

“You’ve asked your question,” he pointed out. “I’ll ask you now, Mark Sloane, to let my wife be. If there’s any one thinking of making trouble, they’ve got Ned Briscoombe to deal with, and I didn’t quit the ring because I was through with it, mark you. I left it because I’d got all the stuff I wanted, and I’d have you remember this—there isn’t a man in this room I couldn’t knock into his grandmother’s coffin with a flick.”

“I think,” Jennerton suggested, his hands falling upon the shoulders of his two companions, “that there is no need for us to intrude further.”

“You’ve spoke a mouthful,” the big man growled—“a swell mouthful too, at that. I ain’t struck on the fronts of you. Maybe I’ll like the backs better.”

They turned away. The woman was giggling hysterically, and it seemed to them as they passed down the room that the sound followed them. They returned to Mark Sloane’s table and, without a word of invitation or suggestion, they seated themselves there. Tawsitter was still dazed, but Sloane was rapidly recovering himself.

“I knew I hadn’t killed Sadie,” he said quietly. “All the same, I never doubted but that it was her body they’d found, and as it wasn’t I who’d done it, I thought that it must have been you, Edward. She was playing us both off, with Ned there in the background all the time—the only man she cared a damn about. I reckoned you must have found it out when I did—the day I was lagged.”

Tawsitter put his hand to his forehead.

“Sadie never counted that much with me, Mark,” he declared. “It’s true I was down at Lone End that night, but I didn’t go to see her. I went to get our safe deposit receipts. I left you in the hell of a hole, I know,” he sighed, “but what was the use of both of us doing time? I thought I’d better carry on. I haven’t done so badly. If I’d been in Sing Sing with you, we shouldn’t have been the men we are to-day.”

There was a queer brooding silence. Two of the three were following out their own train of thought. Jennerton watched them anxiously. When the wine



was brought, he filled three glasses. Both of the other men drained the contents of theirs at once. Then Jennerton breathed a sigh of relief. Many evil things die between men who drink together.

“Mind if I say a few words?” he suggested, when the glasses had been refilled.

“I should say it was about time,” a new Tawsitter declared. “How on earth did you tumble to all this?”

“Easily enough, except for the final twist,” Jennerton explained. “My agents in New York gave me all the information that was necessary, and as soon as you two met, I could see how things were. I knew it was the other affair that was rankling and I worked on that.”

“But how on earth did you produce these two?” Tawsitter asked, bewildered.

“I’ve been on their track ever since I came out,” Jennerton told them. “I daren’t go near them, though. The woman’s so scared, they’d have left by the next train. I squared one of the *maîtres d’hôtel* here—paid for their dinners, and got a card of invitation to the Gala Dinner to-night sent them from the management. I was terrified that they wouldn’t come, but, as you see, the scheme worked.”

There was another silence. It seemed to Jennerton that his two companions were like a pair of awkward schoolboys, anxious to find some excuse for an ill-considered fight.

“I should just like to add this,” Jennerton continued. “Tawsitter here, of course, might have played the part of chivalrous hero, if he had let himself be taken with you, Sloane, but from the point of view of our ordinary life, he would have been a damned fool. He’s done better than that. He’s made a lot of money—nearly three millions, he tells me—and half of it’s in the bank, invested in your name.”

Mark Sloane looked across the table.

“That’s square of you, anyway, Edward,” he admitted. “I wish to God I’d known! I’d made up my mind not to touch Edward’s money, because I was going to kill him. Ted Heaney and one or two of the lads were on the boat, and we planned that little affair on the hill this morning. How am I going to get out of that?”

Jennerton coughed.

“I gather, Mr. Sloane,” he said, “that, in view of the altered circumstances now existing, and your half share in Tawsitter’s millions, you might be disposed to look upon life from a different angle.”

“I am not a fool,” was the emphatic reply. “I was feeling pretty bitter when I landed, and I had less than a hundred dollars. You can figure it out that I was ready for anything. It was a neat job,” he concluded sadly, “but I’m afraid

we'll never get away with it.”

Jennerton drew his chair a little closer to the table. A good many people had left and their corner was now almost deserted.

“I want to go back to London and feel that I have made a clean job of this,” he confided. “This is what I propose. . . .”

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The crowd at the Royalty Bar on the following morning was greater even than ever, and the hold-up was still the one subject of conversation. The heavy losers occupied themselves with railing at the police, who had as yet made no arrests. Some of the others were inclined to take the whole affair as a stupendous joke—especially a millionaire yacht owner, who had forgotten his pocketbook and been obliged to borrow the money for his cocktails! Guido and Francis were all the time in a state of repressed excitement. They no longer appeared to be facing impending disaster, and, without dropping any definite hint, their attitude towards the affair seemed to have changed. At about half-past twelve came a most sensational and wholly unexpected thrill. Jennerton, who had been occupying the same table as on the previous morning, with the same companions, rose to his feet and climbed up the little mound of sward in the middle of the garden. Immediately afterwards he drew a black ebony whistle from his waistcoat pocket and blew it. A dozen people started to their feet, there was a clamour of voices, and pandemonium threatened. Jennerton's clearly spoken words, however, were sufficient to arrest it.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “I am here on behalf of a person who yesterday indulged in what he now recognises to have been a very foolish practical joke. He wishes to make every amends in his power. Don't go away, please, any of you. The whole proceeds of yesterday's bogus robbery are here in the bag which Guido has just brought out. Your pearls, Lady Ronaldson,” he went on, handing them down. “Lady Barrett, your pocketbook. Colonel Thompson, seven mille five hundred francs, which you had in an envelope. Mr. Grogan, forty mille. Come and fetch your money, please, and do tell your friends who were here yesterday and do not happen to be present to-day, that their belongings are waiting for them in the bar.”

The clamour of mingled laughter, abuse and questions was almost indescribable. So were the expressions on the various faces. Jennerton blew his whistle once more.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he continued, “my client—I am a professional man and merely acting on his behalf—desires to offer you all his most humble apologies for a practical joke which he now realises was an exceedingly poor one. As some slight mark of his regret he has deposited a sum with the tenders of the bar sufficient to pay for all cocktails for to-day and for the remainder of the week, and he hopes that the generosity of your orders will be some

indication of your forgiveness.”

Laughter! It commenced with a ripple. It proceeded to a series of guffaws. It reached an abandon which brought passers-by to a standstill and even sent loiterers in the street below hurrying up the steps. A hundred and fifty swaying forms under those gala umbrellas! Laughter which demanded the services of handkerchiefs! Laughter which wiped away every element of irritation, and in which even the prowling *gendarmes* joined. Then, for a quarter of an hour, the waiters were busier than ever before in their lives. Every one seemed to have made up his mind to get his own back, so far as he was able, out of this mysterious disturber of his peace of mind. Double cocktails were recklessly ordered. Every table was booked for the rest of the week. The three men in the corner, a little removed from the general hubbub, emptied their glasses, and Tawsitter rose to his feet.

“Say, Mark, and you, Jennerton,” he suggested, “what about a bite of lunch?”

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MAN WITH TWO BAGS

“My first Coroner’s Inquest,” Jennerton, the amateur, whispered to his companion, Detective Hewson, during a momentary pause in the proceedings.

“What do you think of it?”

“Miserably inadequate,” was the disappointed reply. “It’s the story of a murder told at secondhand. No thrill about it—no sense of drama.”

The professional detective smiled. He, too, was a man of ideas.

“I’ll tell you why that is,” he explained. “It’s because the human element is lacking. There’s no criminal, there’s no one you can look at in the dock, knowing that behind his nervous twitchings and wandering eyes lies full knowledge of the whole affair. We are rather ghouls, we students of crime. We like to see fear betraying itself, because fear—especially the fear of a slowly approaching and awful death—is a tragedy in itself. This is just a record of events. It should give you something to think about, but it’s your brain rather than your sense of the dramatic which is excited. It’s like reading a play instead of seeing it acted.”

Without a doubt, the *entourage* of the small courtroom, the inquest itself, was a very insignificant affair compared with the tragedy which had preceded it. True, there was a little shudder in the Court when the jurymen filed back to their places, pale and shaken from their brief visit to view the body of the murdered man. Their discomposure, however, was brief-lived and unelectric, and supplied the single thrill of the proceedings. The coroner himself, and the three witnesses, seemed never for a moment to rise to the horror of the situation. Miles Goschen, a septuagenarian, archæologist, scholar and recluse, had been found lying upon the stairs of his small house at the end of one of the avenues between Hampstead and Golder’s Green, his skull battered in by a tremendous blow, his house ransacked of its priceless collection of old Georgian silver. The doctor who had been summoned had nothing to say except that the blow had without a doubt been delivered with an iron banister rail which had obviously been for some time before loose in its socket and easily detached. A lean-faced young man in a brown mackintosh had given the necessary evidence of identification, claiming the deceased as his uncle, whom he had not seen for over a fortnight. The third witness was the only one at all out of the common, and that was because he was wheeled into the Court in a chair, assisted to a seat in the witness box, and listened to questions by means of a trumpet. He was fragile, blue-eyed and shrunken, and when he announced

himself as eighty-one years of age and butler to the deceased, there was an almost incredulous murmur in the Court.

“What might be your age, Joyce?” the coroner enquired.

“Eighty-one, sir.”

“And still in service!”

“I have been with ’e fifty-two years, sir,” the man replied. “He couldn’t do nowt without me.”

“And you heard nothing last Thursday night?”

Joyce shook his head.

“I be deaf, sir,” he confided, “and I do sleep well. I sleep until Mrs. Adams—she be the charlady who comes in to do the work—wakes me and brings me a cup of tea at seven o’clock in the morning. Then I dress and take master his tea. He wouldn’t have no woman near ’e.”

“You heard no sounds whatever in the night then? You had no intimation that there were burglars in the house, that your master was in danger?”

“Not a sound, sir,” was the old man’s sorrowful admission. “I do sleep heavy, and afore I had this trumpet it would have taken an earthquake to wake me.”

That was all the evidence there was. The police had nothing to say. The jury, without leaving the box, brought in a verdict of “Murder committed by some person or persons unknown”, and the little crowd melted away. Jennerton and his friend parted outside.

“Well, thanks very much for having brought me,” the former commented. “I’ll admit my first inquest was a disappointment to me, but I’m glad to have seen one all the same.”

The detective nodded.

“It wasn’t much of a show,” he admitted. “If old gentlemen like that will go and live in a neighbourhood which is only partially inhabited, without any protection and with a collection of valuable silver, it seems to me they are rather asking for it.”

“Have you any line on the murderer?” Jennerton enquired curiously.

His companion pursed his lips.

“There are two men we’re watching,” he confided, “and a third who might be in it. The queer part is the weapon.”

“It seems a natural one enough,” Jennerton observed. “Didn’t the old man say it had been lying out of its socket for days, and some of the others were only just in their places?”

“That’s true,” the detective assented. “All the same, a man who commits murder generally has a slicker weapon than that up his sleeve. However, I think in a week from now we shall be able to tell you all about it. Sha’n’t need to call upon you for help this time, I think, Mr. Jennerton.”

The two men smiled and shook hands. It transpired, however, that the detective was a little sanguine.

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Jennerton, seated alone in his office after hours one evening about ten days later, paused in the middle of the letter he was writing, to listen. There was without a doubt something stealthy, almost sinister, in the sound of those slowly mounting footsteps clearly audible through the half-opened door. It was an unusual hour for visitors, and an unusual thing for any one to mount four flights of stone stairs with a perfectly well-regulated lift in being. These footsteps, however, were human and unmistakable. They reached the last flight but one and still continued. Their soft pit-pat upon the hard floor, mysterious yet significant of purpose, awoke in Jennerton a sense perhaps not of fear but certainly of disquietude. He opened a drawer of the desk before which he was seated, and from its recesses placed ready to hand a light automatic pistol. Then he resumed his former attitude, only with a new element of tenseness. His eyes watched the crack in the door. . . .

The arriving visitor, however, displayed no obviously malevolent intentions. He knocked politely and only entered at Jennerton's invitation. Then he came slowly into view, and the more Jennerton saw of him the more he felt inclined to smile at his vague uneasiness of a few minutes before. Finally he presented himself *in toto*, a small, cadaverous man, neatly dressed in sober black, an apology even for existence in every gesture. The cautious footfall needed no further explanation. Holding his bowler hat in his hand he bowed awkwardly.

"Mr. Jennerton, sir?"

"My name. What do you want with me?"

The newcomer looked around the room as though to be sure that it was empty. Then he closed the door behind him.

"A little matter of business, Guv'nor."

Jennerton glanced at the clock. It was after eight.

"A trifle past business hours, isn't it?" he suggested.

His prospective client coughed.

"In my job we are used to late hours, sir," he confided. "I saw your glim burning from the street, so I hoped I might find you here. I've been waiting some time. I don't care about crowds. I wanted to find you alone."

"What is your job? Who are you and what do you want?" Jennerton enquired, waving his visitor to a seat.

The latter coughed again, deposited his hat upon the ground, and himself upon the edge of the chair.

"By profession, Guv'nor," he confessed, "I am a burglar—a neat, scientific and up-to-date burglar. I guarantee to open any safe of any make you put

before me with my own tools and plenty of time. My name is Hyams—Len Hyams. The other part of your question I will answer when you've put my mind at ease upon one point."

Jennerton stared for a moment in silence at his strange caller. The latter was not in the least a typical specimen of the profession to which he claimed to belong. But on the other hand, notwithstanding his air of complete respectability, there was a curious expression about the eyes and mouth, a stealthiness of tone and manner which gave plausibility to his statement.

"Well, go ahead, Mr. Hyams," Jennerton invited.

"I gather, sir, that you are a member of a firm of private tecs. You don't link up anyway with the cops?"

"Certainly not—and nowadays I work on my own. I am not connected with any firm."

Mr. Hyams cleared his throat.

"I want to put it to you like this, Guv'nor," he explained. "There are times when one of us who's out of luck has to consult with a lawyer. Take a man like Slim Bennett now. You know Slim Bennett?"

"I know whom you mean," Jennerton admitted drily.

"Well, to a man like that you've got to make clean hog's wash of it. You've got to tell the whole truth, and not round the corners. He's got to know whether you've done the job or whether the police are just trying to frame it on you. Unless you go straight, he won't take it on. Very well, then. Whatever you tell him don't go outside the office. Get me, Guv'nor?"

"I think so."

"Then what about these four walls?"

Jennerton considered the point for a moment.

"Same thing, I should think," he decided, "at any rate, so far as regards an ordinary misdemeanour. If it were a crime—a serious affair, mind, like manslaughter or anything of that sort—I should refuse to accept a client's confidence. I wouldn't undertake to assist a client who pleaded guilty to burglary to escape detection, but if the confession of burglary were only part of the affair and I was engaged to help a client in its other developments, I should consider his confession as to the burglary privileged."

"You've got me guessing, Guv'nor."

"I mean that I shouldn't peach," Jennerton explained.

His visitor mused for a moment, twirling his hat around and gazing at the maker's name inside. Then he looked suddenly up, and Jennerton surprised an expression in his eyes which for a moment startled him—an expression of strangely intensive terror. The man's fingers, too, were trembling. Fear was gripping his heart.

"You've read about the Forest Avenue job?"

“Stop!” Jennerton warned him. “I was at the inquest. That wasn’t a case of burglary. That was a case of murder.”

“Too late!” the little man faltered despairingly, with a queer twitching of the lips and drops of perspiration upon his forehead. “It’s up from my inside. It’s upon my lips. I shall go mad if I don’t speak. So ’elp me, Gawd, I never touched the old man! The job was done after I left, but I done the burglary. I got the stuff now, curse it! If I’d known what was coming afterwards, I’d have chucked it in the river.”

Jennerton looked across at his visitor incredulously. The Forest Avenue burglary and murder seemed to have become, on the lips of the public and in the pages of the newspapers, indissolubly connected. Many criminologists, including Jennerton himself, had spent hours trying to arrive at a solution of the crime. There was something manifestly improbable in this man’s crude confession.

“I am afraid that sounds a bit thin,” he remarked. “I’d just as soon you’d kept away from here with a tale like that. What on earth was the use of coming to me? What do you expect me to do?”

“Nab the murderer,” was the eager response. “Some one killed the old josser. I didn’t. See?”

Jennerton stroked his chin thoughtfully.

“You’d find it difficult to convince a jury of that,” he observed, “so long as they knew as much as you’ve confessed to me.”

“Ain’t that why I’m here?” the little man exclaimed excitedly. “Can’t you see,” he went on, a quiver of fear in his tone, “if I’m lagged for this there isn’t a soul who wouldn’t believe that whilst I was on the job I didn’t do the old man in? The police have got it on me good and hard because they know I was in that Burton Hill affair too, though they couldn’t fix it on me. But, Guv’nor, here we are, man to man together. You’ve got to believe me. I don’t even carry a gun. I ain’t got the pluck. I’ve been a sneak thief and a sneak burglar all my life. That’s what I am. I never take on a job unless I’ve got my get-away certain.”

He paused to wipe the damp, unhealthy sweat from his forehead. A silent man by habit, fear had made him loquacious.

“I ain’t never been afraid of being lagged before,” he confided. “I’ve took my chance like the others, and if I’m jugged I’ve gone with a grin. This time I’ve got the ’orrors. I can’t sleep, can’t sit still, can’t even take my beer. If I see a cop my knees give.”

“If you didn’t do the old man in, have you any idea who did?” Jennerton demanded. “Remember, you’ve rather a thin tale to tell, unless there’s something you’re keeping back.”

“This is the whole truth, so ’elp me, Gawd!” Hyams declared feverishly.



“He came down the stairs just as I was filling the second bag. He was in his pyjamas and an overcoat, and he just opened the door and peeped in. I was going to make a dash for the window, when I saw that he hadn’t a gun and he was looking a darned sight more scared than I was. ‘What are you doing here, my man?’ he piped out. ‘Mind your own business and get back to bed,’ I tells him. ‘You’re safer there.’ ‘You’re stealing my silver,’ he moaned, like a child as is losing his playthings. I didn’t make no answer to this, but I moved towards him and for all he was an old gentleman he legs it down the passage and up the stairs faster than I could go. That suits me all right. There warn’t no telephone, and I guessed he was too scared to go shouting about for some time, at any rate, so I just ups with my bags, closes the front door behind me and makes off down the avenue to where my mate was waiting at the corner with a taxi. When I read next morning that the old gentlemen had been done in, I couldn’t believe my eyes. ‘Burglary and brutal murder,’ they called it. My Gawd!”

Jennerton leaned back in his chair and studied his visitor carefully. On the whole, improbable though his story was, he was inclined to consider, even to believe it. The *mise en scène* of that sordid drama became suddenly illuminated with dramatic possibilities. There was something thrilling in the thought of the rifled house, the old man shivering at the top of the stairs, and the stealthy arrival—from where, how—of the real murderer? Terribly improbable, but the greatest crimes in history have seemed like that.

“Let me see,” Jennerton went on thoughtfully, “there was one manservant sleeping in the house, eighty-one years old, older and more infirm, in fact, than his master, and deaf as a post. The women servants, a charwoman and an assistant, arrived together every morning at seven o’clock. It was they who discovered the crime. The manservant was still asleep. That’s right, isn’t it?”

“That’s right, Guv’nor. The old josser has to be woke up by the females and given his tea every morning before he could get up and carry on with his job.”

“You have something else back of your mind that you haven’t told me yet,” Jennerton insisted suddenly. “As it is, you know, the whole thing’s hopeless. Tell me the rest.”

“It ain’t much, and that’s a fact, Guv’nor,” was the somewhat despondent reply. “It’s just this. When I gets out into the street that night, with the front door fast behind me, the first thing I does is to look up and down the avenue. I’d a bag in each hand, and heavy enough they were. At first I couldn’t see no one. So off I starts for where Jimmy was waiting for me with the taxicab. I legged it along, I can tell you. Jimmy takes the bags from me and throws them into the cab, and just for a moment before I steps in I takes off my hat—I was fair sweating—and there, on the opposite side of the road, staring—not at me,

but at the house I'd just left—was a tall, thin man in a brown mackintosh.”

“In a brown mackintosh,” Jennerton repeated.

“You've tumbled to it, Guv'nor,” the little man cried harshly. “You was at the inquest, I know. You was there with a tec.”

“I was there, all right,” Jennerton admitted, “but you don't mean to tell me that you were?”

Mr. Len Hyams' negation was contemptuous.

“I don't put my neck into no noose,” he scoffed, “but there was plenty to tell the tale. The nephew—him who identified the body—you see him step up into the box and you heard what he said. A fortnight, he swore, since he'd seen his uncle. Well, it was 'e on the opposite side of the avenue. I seen him cross the road and go into the house after I'd left it, and, mind you, left the old man alive. He's the heir, ain't 'e? He's got the money. What was he doing in that 'ouse after I'd left it? He seen me all right. He seen me come out with the bags. He knew very well what the game was. What did he care? He let me get away with the swag, all right. He just done in the old man and slipped off. 'Burglary and murder'—that's what the papers called it the next morning. He'd thought it all out, the blasted skunk! It was me who did the burglary, all right, but it was him who did the murder.”

There was a silence, brief but tense. The little man was leaning back in his chair, making strange noises in his throat, his eyes fixed all the time in a sort of frantic appeal upon the stern-faced young man opposite. Once more Jennerton, notwithstanding the thrill which he had brought with him, was inclined to wish that he had been spared the visit of this singular client.

“Tell me, Mr. Hyams,” he begged, “exactly what you want me to do for you?”

“Ain't it easy to tumble to that?” was the feverish reply. “You know who did the job now. I've told you. Fix it on him. I'll tell you what I'll do, Guv'nor,” he went on, his tone changing to one of almost passionate appeal, “fix it on 'im, make me safe, and you shall either have the whole value of the swag I got away with, or if you say the word, I'll go down to the police station and give myself up for the burglary. I can do my three or four years without a whimper, but the thought of the other thing sends the blood around my heart cold. It gives me the death shivers.”

“Have you any reason to suppose that you're under suspicion at the present moment?” Jennerton enquired.

His visitor groaned.

“They've been watching me ever since that night,” he admitted, “but they can't fix it on me yet. Jimmy's too clever for them. We made a clear get-away, and the taxi ain't a taxi any longer. Without 'im they're bothered. There ain't a soul seen me, but the boys is cunning. They're waiting to see if I get busy with

the swag. I strolled past Pat Nathan's store—Nathan the Fence, you know—the other evening, but there was one of 'em watching. I just had me 'ands in me pocket, casual like, and I turned in at the pub at the corner. Nothing doing with any of the stuff for me. I got other money beside that, Guv'nor. I ain't touched that swag, but your fee's all right. Name the sum and I'll cough it up. Honest money too!"

His fingers went towards his breast pocket. Jennerton shook his head.

"We'll let the question of the fee alone until we see what I can do," he decided. "I'll go so far as to make some enquiries about our friend in the brown mackintosh. Come back on Thursday night at nine o'clock. I won't ask your address."

The little man rose reluctantly to his feet.

"Guv'nor," he pleaded, "you're only half believing me, but so 'elp me, Gawd, if I were to die to-night, I didn't do it. I pinched the stuff, all right, but I never touched the old man. He never gave me the chance, but I'd never have touched him if he did. Them ain't the lines I work on. Even the cops know that."

"I'll try to believe it," Jennerton promised, not unkindly.

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Two days later, Jennerton, towards the close of a busy afternoon, found time to study a report which had been handed to him an hour or so earlier. It was of an unexciting character:—

#### STEPHEN GOSCHEN

Wholesale grocer's town traveller, married, with four children, living in South Street, Camberwell. Never in trouble, nothing known against him, but believed to be in debt. Good character from employers. Reported to have come into money recently from the estate of Miles Goschen of Forest Avenue, Hampstead, the victim of the celebrated murder and burglary.

MOVEMENTS ON NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 22ND, difficult to trace, but it is certain that he was at home for supper at nine o'clock, went for a walk afterwards, and had one glass of beer before closing time at the Cat and Fiddle, Royston Street. Arrived at business at the usual hour on the following morning.

Jennerton studied the report with a certain amount of disappointment. Just as he had finished reading it for the second time, there was a knock at the door, and the office boy presented himself.

"Gentleman to see you, sir," he announced. "Rather not give his name."

"What sort of a person?"

The lad's expression was noncommittal.

"Ordinary sort. Rather shabbily dressed, wearing a brown mackintosh."

There was a sudden gleam of interest in Jennerton's eyes.

"Show him in," he directed.

There entered a tall, thin young man, wearing a brown mackintosh which reached almost to his heels. He was clean-shaven, weary-looking, and undistinguished. He carried a traveller's black bag in his hand. Jennerton greeted him briefly, pointed to a chair, and waited until the door was closed.

"Why no name?" he enquired.

The visitor seated himself and deposited the bag by his side.

"My business with you is confidential, sir," he announced. "My name is Stephen Goschen."

"Any relation to the late Mr. Goschen of Forest Avenue?"

The man shivered. There was a touch of the same fear in his eyes as had smouldered in the eyes of Len Hyams.

"Nephew."

"His heir?"

"What he's left comes to me," the other acknowledged. "Half his property went the night he was murdered, though. Six thousand pounds' worth of silver they reckon the burglar got away with."

"Now tell me, please, your business with me?" Jennerton invited.

His visitor hesitated.

"What I say will be treated confidentially?" he persisted.

"Absolutely," Jennerton assured him. "I am not a police official."

"Very well then," the lean young man in the mackintosh continued. "This is what I've come here to tell you. On the very night of the murder, after supper, I went and had a glass of beer at a pub, and whilst I was there I made up my mind to pay my Uncle Miles a visit. I've got a wife and four children, and my salary's four pound ten a week. My wife's been ill, and had to have a nurse, and as soon as she got well, the children came down with the measles. I couldn't pay my way, and the rent was owing as well. I knew all right that Uncle Miles was a miser. He prided himself on never giving a thing away. I never had a bob from him in my life, but I made up my mind that night that we were kith and kin and that he'd got to help me, or——"

"Or what?" Jennerton asked swiftly.

His visitor was for a moment almost ghastly pale. He had the look of a man furious with himself. One word too much!

"I hadn't a shilling in the house," he went on. "I meant to insist upon his giving me at least enough to pay the rent."

"How insist?" Jennerton queried.

"Damn it!" the other burst out angrily. "Let me tell the story my own way."

“So long as you accept my warning that there is one confidence that I could not respect.”

“I know what you mean. I didn’t kill him. I tell you here and now, I didn’t kill him. Have you got that?”

“Go on.”

“That’s what I want to do. I got across to Forest Avenue. I came up on the other side of the road to Number nineteen, and I was just going to cross when I saw the front door of the house open and a small man come out, carrying two bags—much too heavy for him. I stood there watching him. He didn’t seem to be in a hurry, but he looked up and down the road cautiously, without seeing me though, for I was just in the pool of shadow from a lime tree. I didn’t think it was a burglary then. I knew my uncle wasn’t too particular where he bought his antique silver, and I thought he’d either been buying or selling some on the Q.T. . . . Presently the little man picked up his bags again and made off for the corner of the avenue where there was a taxi waiting. It struck me then that there was something queer about it, so I crossed the road, found the front door closed but unlatched, walked in—and—God, you know!—there was a pool of blood in the hall, and Uncle Goschen dead upon the bottom stair, with his legs doubled up under him, and his head all split open.”

The man suddenly covered his face with his hands. A choking sob which was more like a moan crept through his fingers.

Jennerton waited for him to recover himself.

“Why did you not tell this story at the inquest?” he asked at last.

“Because I was afraid,” his strange visitor confessed, with a touch of defiance in his breaking tone. “There was no one else in the avenue. Who was going to believe my story of a man coming out of the house with two bags, and a taxicab waiting for him, and I not interfering? They all know that I was on bad terms with my uncle. They all know—or would have done as soon as the charge against me was brought—that I was in desperate straits for money. Supposing I’d fetched the police, they wouldn’t have listened to my story for a minute. I should have spent the night in jail and God knows what would have become of me afterwards. I had done no harm by just opening the door and looking in. I couldn’t bring the old man to life again by fetching help. I slipped away and left the police to do their job.”

“And compromised yourself hopelessly by committing perjury at the inquest,” Jennerton observed drily.

“I suppose so,” was the grudging admission.

Jennerton considered for a moment. The man’s story was possible but not altogether convincing.

“Tell me now,” he asked, “exactly why you have come to me?”

“Because something must be done about it, and because I daren’t go to the

police,” was the fiercely impatient reply. “I can’t go to the police now and tell them about the little man with the two bags and the taxicab—it’s too late—but I can come to you. You can’t give me away. It’s a job worth having, isn’t it? I can describe the little man to you, and the taxicab. I can’t pay you anything until I touch what the old man left, but there’s a thousand pounds’ reward offered by the *Daily Standard*. That’s worth having, isn’t it?”

Jennerton leaned back in his chair and looked shrewdly across at his visitor.

“Supposing I find the little man with the two bags and he swears that he left the old man alive?”

“Sounds likely, doesn’t it?” the other scoffed. “Why, I was in the house five minutes after him.”

“Precisely, but you wouldn’t care to admit it in the witness box, would you?”

“What’s that got to do with it? My looking in at that door can just be washed out. Didn’t do any harm and didn’t do any good. I tell you the old man had been killed a few minutes before, and there isn’t a soul in his senses would doubt that the man with the two bags had done it—as he had. Are you going to look for him, Mr. Jennerton, or must I go to another firm?”

“I’ll look for him,” Jennerton promised. “Come again on Friday at five o’clock.”

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Punctually at the hour named on the following Friday, Stephen Goschen presented himself. Both in appearance and bearing he was a transformed man. The brown mackintosh had been discarded. He wore a neat morning suit of dark grey. His linen was irreproachable, his manner almost jaunty. He carried a copy of the morning paper in his hand. On its front page, in thick black type, was set out the news which had thrilled a million readers over their morning coffee:—

#### FOREST AVENUE TRAGEDY DRAMATIC ARREST

Yesterday morning, at Bow Street Police Station, a man named Len Hyams, arrested in the early hours of the morning, was charged with burglary at 19, Forest Avenue, and with the murder of Mr. Miles Goschen. The accused man, who collapsed in the dock, was remanded for a week. The taxicab driver has also been arrested, and will be charged with being an accessory to the burglary.

“Is this your work?” Goschen asked.

Jennerton shook his head.

“I had nothing whatever to do with it,” he admitted. “The police managed

it off their own bat.”

The young man lounged in his chair. He had no longer the appearance of a shivering outcast.

“Well, that’s one up for the police, anyway,” he declared. “I gave you the chance, though. You might have touched that thousand quid if you’d got in before them.”

“I’m not so sure that I would have cared about it,” Jennerton replied. “Blood money isn’t the pleasantest sort of thing to handle, you know.”

His visitor was surprised.

“Hang it all,” he expostulated, “a man who commits a murder like that deserves all that’s coming to him for it!”

“Without a doubt,” Jennerton assented.

“Well, do I owe you anything?” Stephen Goschen asked, after a momentary pause. “Any out-of-pockets, for instance, for enquiries you made?”

“Nothing at all.”

The young man rose to his feet.

“Well, there’s no need for me to take up your time,” he remarked, a little awkwardly.

Jennerton touched his bell and the office boy opened the door.

“Very considerate of you,” he acknowledged with a brief nod, keeping his hands in his pockets. “I do happen to be rather busy this evening.”

Mr. Stephen Goschen took his leave—not quite so jauntily as he had arrived.

It was precisely a week later when Jennerton, accompanied by his friend Hewson, left his car at the corner of the Great North Road and a winding Hertfordshire lane, and, after a few minutes’ walk, lifted the latch of a wooden gate and approached a small white-plastered cottage. There were early summer flowers already in the garden, bees humming over the strip of vegetable plot, a general atmosphere of rural peace about the little demesne. Before they could reach the front door, a woman opened it and confronted them.

“What might you be wanting, gentlemen?” she demanded truculently.

“We want just a word with Mr. Richard Joyce,” Jennerton announced.

“Then you can’t have it,” was the curt rejoinder. “It’s only this morning the doctor seed him. ‘Not a visitor, not a word,’ he said. He’s my brother and ’e ain’t going to be disturbed.”

Jennerton glanced down the narrow tiled way to where a small, shrunken-up figure, wrapped in rugs, was seated happily in the sunshine, smoking a diminutive pipe and regarding them with amiable interest.

“I am very sorry, Madam,” he explained, “but this gentleman with me is connected with the police, and we want just a word with your brother about that unfortunate night when his master was murdered.”

“Police!” the woman exclaimed bitterly. “I knowed it. Said to myself as I saw you open the gate that you’d come bothering an old man with one leg in the grave. You ’ad ’im at the inquest. He told you all he knew. I tell you, he ain’t fit to talk. He’s balmy. He went soft in the head directly we got here.”

Perhaps the woman herself scarcely knew how it happened, but the two men passed her before she realised their intention, and made their way to where the old man was seated. He touched his hat as they approached.

“Gentlemen both,” he greeted them, “good morning. I likes visitors. What might you be wanting?”

Jennerton glanced around.

“Well, you have found a very pleasant little home, Joyce,” he observed.

“And about time,” was the querulous reply. “Fifty-two years, gentlemen, I worked for this bit of a home, and thirty years without a penny of wage, unless I could pick a bit up, as I did, maybe, at odd times. That’s a lifetime, gentlemen. All my life—waiting. It be coom a bit late—a bit late.”

He looked out across the fields, his bleared blue eyes filled with a quaint, ugly glimmer. The woman fidgeted uncomfortably in the background.

“He did keep me waiting too long, gentlemen,” Joyce continued, his hands beginning to tremble. “Twenty years ago this were due to me. Week by week I used to ax him. ‘I’m done enough work, Mr. Goschen,’ I used to tell ’e. ‘Give me my bit, and let me go. I want a chair in the garden, and a pot of beer, and my pipe. I’m past work.’ But not ’e. Oh, he were a hard ’un—he were a hard ’un, he were. But he got his due,” the old man went on, his voice rising shrill and quivering. “He got his due. How I hated ’e! That night——”

“Richard!” the woman shouted.

“That night,” he went on, indifferent to her cry, indifferent to the fact that one of his visitors was holding her back—“that night I heard the noise downstairs, although I telled they gentlemen I didn’t. I heard all right, and down I coom to the top of the stairs. He were watching the little man with the two bags go out of the door. Then he turned around and looked at me, and I knew I’d have to wait longer still, now he’d lost some of his precious siller, and I ups with that iron rail, that he’d been too mean to pay for to have put in its place, and God or the devil—who were it—I don’t know—gave me the strength I used to have when I were a young man, and as he crept down towards the closed door—he were going to shout for help, I reckon—I crept after him, and I fetched him one. You should have seen him go, misters both. I looked, and looked, and looked—and I were happy. I’d done it at last. I’d meant to do it many years afore, but I lacked the courage. How I hated ’e!”

The woman’s shriek rang out. Hewson was just in time to catch the chair. The old man’s face was twisted; there was froth on his lips, and it seemed to Jennerton that all the drama that was missing in that dismal little courtroom



was throbbing now in the honeysuckle perfumed air.

## CHAPTER X

### THE GREAT BEAR

Jennerton had a fancy to call at the Clover Club on his way home one evening to partake of a cocktail in a more Bohemian atmosphere than that of his own sedate and almost austere club. The little bar, with its oak-panelled walls and daring sketches, its deep easy-chairs, and tiny grillroom opening out behind, was almost deserted. There was one girl seated upon a stool at the counter, an untasted cocktail in front of her, her head supported between her hands. Jennerton discreetly seated himself some distance away, demanded a dry Martini, and lit a cigarette. At the sound of his voice, the girl turned around, and without even glancing towards her, he was conscious of the interest of her observation. The Clover Club was Bohemian without a doubt, but by no means promiscuous. Even a young woman leaning over the bar and drinking a cocktail alone might be regarded without suspicion. Consequently in a moment or two he permitted himself to look at her more closely, and their eyes met. He felt a vague sense of recognition. She smiled at him slightly.

“You’re Mr. Jennerton, aren’t you?” she asked.

“I am,” he assented, “and I am sure that I have met you somewhere.”

“You met me a few weeks ago at Lawrence Dane’s studio,” she reminded him. “Would it bore you very much to bring your cocktail over to the settee there, and talk to me for a moment?”

“I should like to immensely,” he agreed. “I often think what idiots we are to crouch over a bar when these chairs are so comfortable.”

She led the way without further remark, and they seated themselves side by side in a retired corner. The barman placed a small table before them and produced some dishes of salted almonds and chips.

“I dare say you have forgotten my name,” she said. “It is Estelle Drayton.”

“Of course I remember all about you now,” he declared. “You do miniatures.”

“And you hunt criminals.”

He smiled.

“I hope our tastes,” he ventured, “are not so far apart as our pursuits.”

She seemed scarcely to have heard his gallant speech. The same expression which he had surprised upon her face when he had first entered had clouded her features again. He realised that she was a very beautiful girl in mental distress. She wore her smooth black hair brushed straight back from her forehead in the severest Italian fashion—a method becoming enough in its

way, but rendering even more noticeable the pallor of her cheeks, the lines of trouble under her disturbed, deep-set eyes, the natural scarlet of her lips. Of course he remembered her. She had been the outstanding figure in that crowded studio party.

"Mr. Jennerton," she confessed, "I am in trouble. Just when you came in I was wondering whether I could find the courage to come to you, or some one like you, or to go to the police."

"Of course," he told her gently, "it depends upon what your trouble is. The police are always safe. They are always there as a last resource. When you have once placed a matter in their hands, however, you have no further control over it. Consult me, if you will, unofficially at first. I will give you my honest advice. I will try to point out whatever I think it is best for you to do."

She smiled at him in obvious relief.

"You sound so delightfully human," she murmured.

"I am human enough," he rejoined, looking at her empty glass and summoning the barman, "to insist upon a second cocktail."

The order was promptly given and she drew a little nearer to him.

"You are just the sort of person I can talk to," she confided. "Please listen. First of all, I am engaged to be married, and I am very much in love with the man."

"You start," he pronounced sombrely, "with bad news."

"No gallantries, please," she begged. "This is very serious. My young man's name is Grandlett—Arnold Grandlett. You may have heard of him. He has written a book of travels, a treatise on mining engineering, and one or two other technical articles about metals."

"I have heard of him often," Jennerton assured her.

"Well, then, listen please," she went on; "have you ever heard of a company—oh, you must have—it's quite well known—the Kopthill Concessions?"

"Often. I held some shares in it once—only there seemed so much uncertainty about the whole affair that I sold out."

"That's just the point," she agreed eagerly. "There always has been a great deal of uncertainty, so far as I can gather. They own thousands and thousands of acres somewhere in Africa, which should be terribly productive, but they are always in trouble. They find gold, and then lose it again, and once they thought they had one of the finest diamond mines in the world, but after a few months there were no more diamonds. Six or seven months ago, the company decided to send an absolutely reputable person out to make a report. They asked Arnold to go and he consented. He has been away five months, hard at work, and all that time I have only heard from him twice."

"I suppose he was busy and moving about continually," Jennerton

suggested.

“It wasn’t that at all. The understanding was that he should not write home, except one or two purely formal reports as to the nature of his work to the directors, and a few personal letters, which were subject to censorship. You see, there are two million pounds’ worth of shares in the company on the market, and Sir Matthew Bridgeman, who is the chairman, was very anxious that the value of the shares should not be disturbed one way or the other by vague rumours. Arnold was to complete his investigations, to bring his report back with him, and to present it for the first time at the annual meeting of the company—which is on Friday, by the bye. Sir Matthew’s idea was that no one—not even the directors—were to profit in any way by any foreknowledge as to the nature of that report.”

“I understand,” Jennerton murmured. “That all seems quite sensible and very much to Sir Matthew’s credit. As a rule, these sort of things leak out, and the wrong person makes a great deal of money.”

“Well, Arnold arrived home on Monday evening,” Estelle Drayton continued. “I met him at Waterloo. I thought he looked rather worried, but otherwise he was quite well, and certainly he was just as pleased to see me as I had hoped for, and I looked forward to a wonderful few days. We talked for two or three minutes, and then, when he was trying to collect his luggage—we were going to have it sent around to his rooms, and go straight out to dinner—a man came up, and touched him on the shoulder, and said something to him in a low tone, which I didn’t hear. Arnold asked me to excuse him, and went off to where another man was waiting farther down the platform. They all three walked off together, and I turned around to tell the porter about some of the smaller things. When I had finished, they were out of sight. I waited there for an hour and not one of them returned. I have not seen or heard from Arnold since.”

“Great heavens!” Jennerton exclaimed. “Miss Drayton, you’re not pulling my leg or anything of that sort, are you?”

“Do I seem like it?” she rejoined bitterly. “Do you think I feel like it? I simply haven’t known what to do. I looked after his luggage, which was sent on to his rooms—except a black portfolio which he had handed to me when he left the train—but he has never been there, nor have they heard anything of him. I went home, thinking there might be a message there. Not a word. Arnold just walked off into those little wisps of fog at the end of the station on Monday night, and not a whisper, not a telephone message, has come from him up to this moment.”

“What about the portfolio you spoke of?” Jennerton asked.

“That I locked up in my studio,” she told him. “It is there now.”

Jennerton reflected for a few moments. Certainly, it did not seem like a

case of voluntary disappearance.

“What were the men like with whom he went away?” he enquired.

“The man who was waiting in the background was quite well dressed—a man of about middle age, clean-shaven, the sort of person one might meet anywhere. He had evidently dressed early for the evening, for he was wearing a white silk muffler and a silk hat. The man who came and tapped him on the shoulder didn’t seem to me quite the same type. He might have been a secretary or a superior servant.”

“Should you know them again?”

“I think so. I don’t forget people easily.”

She threw away a cigarette and lit another with nervous fingers. He watched her closely. She was very attractive, very highly strung, and to all appearance terribly in earnest. There were pools of anxiety in her dark eyes, a little quiver of her lips even in repose.

“Was he expecting any one at the station?” Jennerton queried.

“I don’t think he was expecting even me. I had to go to the office of the steamer to know what time the boat train was in.”

“You haven’t been to the police or anything?”

“I haven’t even rung up the offices of the company. You see, Arnold is very peculiar. He hates a fuss, he hates being talked about. He is very secretive in many ways. I have felt somehow or other that what he would like best would be for me to just wait. He has been through no end of adventures and he generally comes out all right. He knows how to take care of himself as a rule. That is why I haven’t done a thing. I simply couldn’t wait any longer though, and when I saw you come in I felt I must speak to you.”

“Has he any relations in London, or intimate friends?”

“Not one that I know of; but what difference could that make? I am his most intimate friend. We were to have been married next month. If he were free to go where he wanted to, surely he would have come to me.”

Jennerton broke off for a moment to exchange greetings with a passing acquaintance. She waited impatiently, clasp and unclasp her fingers, until he resumed his seat.

“The motive is the thing we want to get at,” he remarked. “We must remember that Grandlett’s mission had been one of tremendous importance. Do you know whether the report he brought home was favourable to the company or not?”

“Of course I don’t,” she expostulated. “I’m the last person he would ever think of dropping a hint to. As a matter of fact,” she added, “the only two letters I had from him didn’t come direct. They came from the office of the company, and I am sure that they had been opened.”

Jennerton glanced at his watch. It was five minutes past seven.

“Will you excuse me whilst I telephone for a few minutes,” he begged.

She nodded, and he made his way to one of the two telephone boxes in the outer hall. It was a quarter of an hour before he returned, and he was looking, as he felt, more puzzled than ever.

“I have been trying to speak to one of the directors at the offices of the Kophill Concessions,” he confided. “So far as I can gather, the head clerk, who was in charge there, understood that Grandlett had been expected on Tuesday morning, and since then they have been cabling and writing in every direction. The price of the shares hasn’t changed, however. That’s something.”

“What has that got to do with it?” she asked.

He hesitated.

“Well, supposing some one had got hold of him and he had been robbed of his papers,” Jennerton explained, “the object would have been to have found out from his report in what sort of a state the property was, and to have either bought or sold the shares. Nothing of that sort seems to have happened, however. I’ll go down to Waterloo Station presently and make a few enquiries. In the meantime, Miss Drayton, I don’t mind confessing that you’ve set me rather a problem.”

“Well, it’s a comfort to share it with some one,” she sighed. “It’s been worrying me to death for days.”

Jennerton glanced at the clock.

“Are you on the telephone where you live?” he enquired.

She nodded.

“I am sharing a flat studio in Chelsea with another girl. We had the telephone put in a few weeks ago.”

“I suggest then that you ring up and ask if there is any news, let them know where you are, and that afterwards you have some dinner with me in the little grillroom here. We needn’t change or anything, and with an hour or two together, I may be able to make up my mind how to act.”

“That’s very kind of you,” she accepted gratefully. “I’ll go and telephone at once.”

“And I’ll wash and order dinner. We’ll meet here in a quarter of an hour.”

...

In rather less than that time, Jennerton re-entered the bar. The room was empty, save for a young gentleman of Semitic appearance who was seated upon one of the stools. Jennerton strolled around for a minute or two, glanced through an evening paper, discovering from the financial column the price of Kophill Concessions, and finally ordered a cocktail. There was no sign of his prospective dinner companion. He glanced at the clock. Half an hour had passed since he had left her.

“Do you know where Miss Drayton is?” he asked the barman.

The man looked at him in apparent surprise.

“Miss Drayton was called up on the telephone directly you went out, sir, and she left the Club almost immediately afterwards.”

Jennerton stared at him.

“I don’t think she could have done that,” he remarked. “She had just agreed to dine with me here.”

“I saw her go out, sir,” the man persisted.

The other occupant of the bar leaned forward from his stool.

“Excuse me, sir,” he said, “but if you’re enquiring for Miss Drayton, she drove away in a taxicab just as I came in.”

Jennerton nodded his acknowledgments.

“You are sure she didn’t leave any message for me?” he asked the barman.

“None at all, sir.”

Jennerton made his way outside to where the commissionaire was standing. In a very few minutes he was fully assured of the fact that Miss Drayton had not only left the place without leaving any message, but also without any apparent intention of returning. She had effected a disappearance from the Clover Club as singular as the disappearance of Arnold Grandlett from Waterloo Station.

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Jennerton, without disturbing the somnolent doorkeeper, studied the names painted upon the blackboard in the entrance hall of the new stone block of flats, discovered that Miss Drayton and Miss Aimée Mordant occupied an apartment upon the top floor, and mounted there by the automatic lift. He rang the bell and waited. There was no reply. He tried again, without result. Suddenly a thin thread of illumination which was visible through the fanlight, disappeared, came on again, and once more disappeared. Jennerton stared at it in surprise. It was as though some one were signalling. He pushed the bell the third time without any answer to his summons. Then he stepped back to the lift, descended to the ground floor, and called the porter from the office.

“I have just been ringing the bell of Miss Drayton’s flat,” he confided. “I feel sure that some one is in there, but I can get no reply.”

“Miss Drayton is in herself, sir,” the man announced. “She came in a taxi about half an hour ago.”

“Have you a pass key?”

“Yes, I’ve got a pass key all right,” the man admitted doubtfully, “but I don’t know about using it. The young lady’s probably gone to bed and doesn’t want to be disturbed with callers.”

“Look here,” Jennerton explained earnestly, “I’m not an ordinary caller. The gentleman to whom Miss Drayton is engaged has disappeared, and there are some very singular incidents in connection with his disappearance. I am a

private detective and Miss Drayton has engaged me to help her. She was summoned back here in a most mysterious fashion and I am convinced that there is something wrong in her apartment. If you will open the door with your pass key, I give you my word that I will take all the blame, that I will recompense you for whatever may happen—find you another place if you lose this one—and ask you to accept this,” he concluded, passing over a treasury note.

“I don’t want paying for doing my duty, sir,” the man declared, accepting the note all the same. “I’ll come up and ring, anyway.”

They mounted to the fifth floor again and pressed the bell. The place remained shrouded in solemn darkness. The porter handled his pass key doubtfully.

“I don’t like it, sir,” he demurred, turning on the electric light by the side of the door. “You see there’s no entrance hall to these flats—no privacy, so to speak. The doors open right into a kind of studio living room.”

“I promise,” Jennerton repeated impressively, “that you shall get into no trouble.”

The man still hesitated. Then the key slipped suddenly from his fingers and fell with a clatter upon the stone floor.

“God!” he exclaimed, starting back. “What’s that?”

Jennerton, too, stooped down. From underneath the door came a thin stream of some sort of liquid. In the semi-obscurity it might have been anything. As it gained in volume, however, it lost its first sinister appearance. It was apparently nothing more than water, but it was sufficient to induce the doorkeeper to act. He picked up the key, thrust it into the lock, and pushed the door. The two men stood upon the threshold.

At first they could see little, for the room was large and lofty. The porter, however, after a moment’s groping along the wall, found the switch, and they looked in upon a scene of wild disorder. A great vase of flowers was lying upon the floor, the water from which had trickled in a tortuous stream towards the door. Boxes and trunks, rifled of their contents, lay about in all sorts of confusion. The curtains from the two beds had been torn down, and the bedding cut to pieces. The drawers from a wardrobe had been thrown into the middle of the room and emptied out, apparently at haphazard. At first there seemed not a soul upon the premises. Then there came the sound of violent tapping, and the fainter sound of voices. The porter led the way towards a distant corner.

“There’s a kitchen here, sir,” he explained. “That’s where they are—locked in it, I should say.”

He opened another stout, oaken door. Estelle Drayton, dishevelled, and with a furious gleam in her eyes, staggered into the room, followed by another



young woman. The former recognized Jennerton with a cry of exultation.

"Quick!" she exclaimed. "Let's go after them! They haven't left more than ten minutes."

"Who?" Jennerton demanded.

"Two men. I don't know who they were. They rang the bell here. Aimée was alone, working. They said that I had invited them to see some miniatures. As soon as they got inside, they asked Aimée to telephone for me if I were out. She found me at the Clover Club. I rushed back. I don't know why, but I was terrified—and I came too late."

"What do you mean—too late?"

"The portfolio which Arnold gave me at the station," she cried. "It's gone! They must have found it at the bottom of my mattress. Arnold trusted me with it and it's gone!"

"Did you see these two men?" Jennerton asked the stupefied doorkeeper.

"I saw them come up, sir," the man replied. "I can't say that I saw them go out. I was answering the telephone when some one came downstairs—might very well have been them. They were well-spoken gentlemen enough when they arrived. I should have sent them up anywhere."

"Were they rough with you girls?" Jennerton enquired.

"They were as polite as burglars could be, who meant to have their own way," Miss Drayton acknowledged. "They just carried Aimée in here, tied a gag in her mouth, and locked the door. They did the same thing to me when I arrived, only I was able to get the gag out at once. We've been shouting for at least twenty minutes, but there's not a chance of making any one hear. We're on the top floor, and there's only a skylight. All that we could do was to keep turning the light on and off, hoping it would show through the fan. There's a switch in the kitchen there."

"Do you know what was in the portfolio which they stole?" Jennerton asked, drawing Estelle Drayton on one side.

"I can guess," she answered miserably.

The doorkeeper, who had been looking helplessly around, had a sudden inspiration.

"What about telephoning to the police station, young ladies?" he suggested.

Estelle Drayton glanced enquiringly at Jennerton. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like. It is entirely a private affair, though, and I should think it would be absolutely useless."

"What are we to do then?" she demanded.

"Tidy up, you and your friend, and come and have dinner at the Clover Club," he proposed. "We'll talk the matter over calmly. The portfolio has

gone, and that's the end of it, and if it contains what I suppose it did, there isn't one chance in a thousand that you'll get it in time to prevent mischief. I don't think the police would be able to help, anyhow."

"Nothing more that I can do, then, ladies?" the hall porter enquired.

"Nothing except fetch a taxicab," Jennerton replied, as he followed him towards the door. "I'll be downstairs waiting for you both, Miss Drayton."

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The *diner-à-trois* promised to be a great success. Whilst the oysters were being opened, however, Jennerton asked Estelle a question.

"Why didn't you leave word for me that you'd gone back to your flat?"

She looked at him in surprise.

"But I did," she assured him. "I left word with the barman."

Jennerton excused himself and made his way to the bar. The attendant, who was pretending to be busy with his accounts, obeyed his summons unwillingly.

"Why didn't you give me the young lady's message?" Jennerton demanded sternly.

"I forgot it, sir."

"How much did it cost the young gentleman you were talking to when I came in, to make you forget it?"

The barman was embarrassed. His manner was half apologetic, half defiant.

"Couple of quid, sir."

Jennerton drew a five-pound note from his pocket.

"I'm not complaining," he said. "It was a perfectly fair deal. Here's twice as much for you to tell me the name of the little man, and what he does in life?"

"Name of Foa, sir," was the unhesitating reply—"Mr. Sidney Foa. He belongs to a firm of private enquiry agents, I believe. He was asking about Miss Drayton just before you came in—wanted to know if she was the young lady who was engaged to a Mr. Grandlett."

Jennerton handed across the note and rejoined his two guests.

"Fellow seems to have forgotten all about it," he announced. "He admits that you left a message, though. A dry Chablis with the oysters, Henry, and a bottle of Cliquot '19 to follow."

"Burglars every day for me!" Miss Aimée exclaimed, finishing her cocktail.

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Towards the middle of the following morning, an august-looking gentleman was shown into Jennerton's office, upon whose card was inscribed the name of Sir Matthew Bridgeman.

"We have not met before," the latter said, with genial condescension, "but you probably know me by name. I am the chairman of the Kopthill Concessions Trust."

Jennerton rose to his feet and personally ushered him to a chair. His prospective client was distinctly interesting. He wore the neat but old-fashioned clothes of a past generation. He might very well have been a member of the Stock Exchange of the early sixties, with a villa at Surbiton, a taste for growing orchids, and a palate for old port. He had side whiskers, a flowing cravat, a benevolent but convincing manner.

"I have been advised to consult you, Mr. Jennerton," he began, "with regard to a somewhat singular situation which has arisen. Shall I explain?"

"Please do."

"The Board of Directors, of which I am the chairman," Sir Matthew went on, "have for some time felt that a certain mystery existed with regard to their properties in Central Africa. It was accordingly decided that we should send out there to make special investigations an exceedingly clever young man, who is not only a mining engineer, but a prospector, and a shrewd mineralogist. His name is Arnold Grandlett. He has spent some five months in Africa and he arrived home during the last few days."

"He brought you a good report, I trust," Jennerton ventured politely.

"There we come to the point," was the grave rejoinder. "It has always been my opinion—an opinion unshared, I regret to say, by every one of my fellow directors—that the information brought home by this young man, whether favourable or unfavourable to the company, should not be divulged even to us until the Annual Meeting of shareholders, which is due to be held to-morrow. In case you are inexperienced in such matters, Mr. Jennerton, I may add that this was to give every member of the company, small shareholder or large, an equal opportunity of either making a profit or cutting a loss. You follow me?"

"Perfectly," Jennerton admitted. "It seems a very honourable course of action, although I should imagine a little unusual."

"Well, however that may be," Sir Matthew continued, "I sent a wireless to the young man, telling him not to report himself until half an hour before the meeting, which is to be held in Pinner's Hall to-morrow afternoon. His ship arrived four days ago and I have every reason to believe that he found his way safely to London, and as the price of the shares had remained unchanged up till this morning, I felt no doubt that he was obeying instructions which I sent to him by letter to Southampton and keeping out of every one's way. This morning, however, an entirely new situation has presented itself. The shares, which have been standing at between twenty-six and twenty-eight shillings for the last six months, began to fall the moment the House opened. My broker tells me that they have been and are subject to one of the most determined

‘bear’ attacks ever known. The result is, naturally, that large blocks of the shares are coming on offer apart from the speculative selling. A quarter of an hour ago, their price was twelve shillings. At the present moment it is probably about ten.”

“What do you deduce from this?” Jennerton asked.

“The fundamental fact is obvious and serious enough,” Sir Matthew explained. “Grandlett has evidently found our property overvalued, and its prospects bad. The corollary to that, however, is even more serious. That information, if it belonged to any one, belonged to us. Either Grandlett has broken faith with us and decided to make a fortune for himself, or he has fallen into evil hands, and his report has been stolen.”

Jennerton was silent for several moments. The situation was not without its embarrassments.

“Your visit is singular in one respect, Sir Matthew,” he confided. “I am already engaged on behalf of another client in endeavouring to solve the mystery of Mr. Grandlett’s disappearance.”

“By whom?” Sir Matthew demanded.

“I think I may tell you without committing a breach of confidence,” Jennerton decided—“by Miss Drayton, the young lady to whom he is about to be married. She met him at the station. He was called away to speak to some one, and he never returned. He handed to her, when he descended from the Pullman, a black leather portfolio. After his disappearance, she took it back to her studio with her, and locked it up. Last night her rooms were burgled, and the black portfolio stolen. The attack upon your shares this morning is apparently the result.”

“Good God!” Sir Matthew gasped. “And what about Grandlett?”

“She has not seen or heard of him since he left her on the platform at Waterloo. I have had half a dozen men searching for him since last night. If I have no news within twenty-four hours, the affair must go into the hands of the police. It is too serious a case for me.”

“Do you think that he has been murdered?” Sir Matthew demanded.

Jennerton hesitated for a moment.

“If you ask me my honest opinion,” he pronounced, “I don’t think anything of the sort has happened to him.”

“You believe that he is a rogue then?”

“I am almost sure that he is not.”

Sir Matthew fidgeted in his seat.

“What do you think then?” he insisted brusquely. “Consider my position for a moment. I am holding two hundred and fifty thousand Kopthill shares, which cost me anything from eighteen to twenty-five shillings. With every tick of the clock they are moving on to the dust heap. That’s what comes of trying

to be honest on the Stock Exchange, Mr. Jennerton. If I had ordered Grandlett to send me a special report, as I had a right to do, or to have come straight to my house on his arrival in England, I should, at any rate, have been prepared for this disaster. Now some one else has got hold of him by fair means or foul, the truth has become known twenty-four hours before it was due, and we others are left—left to be ruined.”

“It won’t be so bad as that, I hope, Sir Matthew,” Jennerton ventured.

Sir Matthew rose to his feet. There were tired lines about his face, a queer light burning in his eyes.

“Perhaps not,” he admitted. “I have resources, it is true, but a loss such as this is one which few men, even in the City of London, could meet without disaster. Since you are already engaged upon this case,” he added, “I cannot propose myself as a client, but if you should hear any news of Grandlett——”

“You shall know it as soon as the young lady I am representing,” Jennerton promised.

Sir Matthew took his leave. Out of curiosity, Jennerton went to the telephone and rang up a friend who was on the Stock Exchange. A junior member of the firm answered him.

“Is it true,” Jennerton enquired, “that there is a great slump in Kophills?”

“My God,” was the agitated reply, “I am the only one of the firm left here! They are all in the House. Biggest *débâcle* we’ve known for years. Some special information’s got out twenty-four hours too soon, a report from a fellow who’s been prospecting on the property for the last five months. The whole affair seems to have been a swindle. The shares were at twenty-eight or twenty-nine yesterday—even touched thirty-two once; to-day I’ll sell you as many as you like for ten shillings.”

“Thanks,” Jennerton replied. “I’m not a speculator.”

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At seven o’clock that evening, Jennerton found Estelle Drayton seated at the bar of the Clover Club, inscrutable as ever. Her dark eyes questioned him as he took the stool by her side, but she said nothing.

“Sorry,” he reported. “Absolutely no news.”

“I scarcely expected any,” she admitted. “Tell me, is it because of what they found in his portfolio that the shares have dropped so?”

“I’m afraid there’s no doubt about that,” he assented.

They drank a cocktail together in silence.

“Miss Drayton,” Jennerton asked, “was this portfolio, or whatever it was, locked?”

“It was locked all right,” she replied, “but any one could easily cut round and open it. It was an ancient black leather affair with-pockets. Arnold has had it for years. It has his name and address on a brass plate.”

"Exactly why did you take charge of it?"

"This is just what happened," she explained. "You know how short of porters they were. Arnold was helping the conductor to take his things out of the car, and he passed it to me so as to have his hands free. Then that young man came and tapped him on the shoulder, and he hurried off."

"Shows we don't have to go outside London for adventure," Jennerton observed gloomily. "Stay and dine with me, Miss Drayton. I have told them to ring me up here if there's any news."

"There will be no news," she sighed, "but I'll stay if you like."

Jennerton called a waiter and gave an order. Then, with a word of excuse to his companion, he hurried off to speak to his stockbroker friend who was seated upon a lounge at the other end of the room.

"I rang you up this morning, Charles," he said.

"About those Kopthill Concessions shares, wasn't it? I hope you haven't got any?"

"Sold my few some time ago," Jennerton confided. "I have a fancy to go to the meeting to-morrow, though. How can I get there?"

"Buy a share," the other suggested. "The meeting's at three o'clock. Call at my office at two-thirty, and I'll fill your pockets with certificates for a five-pound note."

Jennerton considered for a moment.

"Charles," he confided, "I am going to make a damned fool of myself. What price do you suppose Kopthill Concessions will be to-morrow morning?"

"Pretty well any price you like to offer," was the terse reply. "Three-and-sixpence—half-a-crown—anything like that, I should think."

"All right. So long as they're rubbish price, buy me a thousand. I'll be able to swagger at the meeting then."

"You're not serious?"

"I am."

"You don't know anything, by any chance?" the stockbroker exclaimed, with a sudden burst of eagerness.

"Not a damned thing," Jennerton hastened to assure him. "So far as regards any information I have, the company's rotten."

"If you're feeling that way," the other went on, "I've got some Zuzu Gold Mines, and a very much watered tin proposition, which doesn't seem to make a hit with the public."

Jennerton shook his head.

"You can keep the rest of your rubbish," he declared. "I want to be sure of getting in at the meeting to-morrow."

"It's only right to warn you," the stockbroker confided, "that a copy of the

actual report is going around. The whole affair has been a swindle from beginning to end. That fellow Grandlett got back a few nights ago, and he's the best and straightest judge of a property who ever went to Africa."

"I know," Jennerton agreed, "but bad though the thing may be, I think it is possible that there may be a little reaction. If there isn't, I don't care at that price."

"God bless you!" the stockbroker exclaimed, taking out his pocketbook and making a note. "I wish we had more clients like you. They nearly all clamour for sound things, curse them!" . . .

Estelle Drayton welcomed him back to the bar.

"What have you been doing with the distinguished looking stranger?" she enquired.

"Buying Kopthill Concessions shares," he told her.

"Are you mad?"

"No, but very hungry," he announced, as he led her to the table.

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It seemed as though every shareholder in the Kopthill Concessions Company must have drunk of the wine of despair and fought his way into the hall where the meeting was being held. Benches and seats were packed when Sir Matthew rose portentously to his feet, only a few minutes after the advertised time. A gloomier collection of faces had seldom been seen.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, after a few introductory remarks, "it had been our earnest hope that Mr. Grandlett, whom you will remember we despatched to your property some five months ago in order that we might arrive at an accurate idea as to its value, would have been here this afternoon. This, I fear, however, for reasons which it will be our duty to discuss presently, is now almost too much to hope for. I will try to explain to you what has happened, to the best of my ability, as soon as the secretary has read the minutes of the last meeting."

There were shouts of interruption and many cries of "Tell us now!"—an angry clamour of hungry voices. A shareholder stood up in his place amidst continued uproar.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, "on behalf of the shareholders of this company, I ask if you have any explanation to make of the fact that the shares have dropped from twenty-eight shillings to rubbish price during the last twenty-four hours, before the report which Mr. Grandlett is supposed to have made has been submitted to this meeting?"

There was a storm of applause, mingled with hisses. Sir Matthew turned sorrowfully to the speaker.

"I should like to tell you, sir," he replied, "that so far as I am concerned, and I believe I may speak on behalf of my fellow directors, neither I nor any

one of us has set eyes on Mr. Grandlett nor received any communication from him since his arrival in this country. Whence this leakage of information has come, I cannot tell you. I shall ask my fellow directors——”

He broke off in his speech. People were standing up and once more shouting wildly. A tall, sunburnt man, who had entered the room quite unobtrusively, was making his way with difficulty towards the head table. There was indescribable tumult. Sir Matthew stared at the newcomer as he might have done at a ghost. Then he turned to the audience and banged the table with his hammer.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “Mr. Grandlett has shown us that he at least has courage. He has come to offer you his own explanation. I beg that you will listen to him.”

Every one was only too anxious to obey the chairman’s request. The silence which followed was almost appalling. Grandlett, who had at last made his way to the head table, leaned upon the back of a chair which some one had vacated for him, bowed to Sir Matthew, and turned around, facing them all.

“Mr. Chairman,” he began, “and ladies and gentlemen, I am not much of a speaker. Later on, I’ll answer any question you want to put to me. In the meanwhile this is what I’ve got to say. I have spent three months on your property, and I drew up a full report on it. Two or three hundred miles off the British coast I tore that report into pieces and threw them overboard.”

He paused for a moment. There were a hundred cries of “Why?”—“What did you do that for?”

“I’ll tell you,” he went on. “Even before I sailed, and from morning until night on the steamer, I was plagued with wireless messages from newspapers, friends, shareholders, people of every sort interested in your company, begging for some hints as to the nature of my report. Now when I left England it was arranged that no definite word should come from me until my return, until, in fact, I presented myself at this meeting. I decided that that was the proper course to pursue, and I’ve stuck to it. The nearer I got to England, however, the more I realised that a good many people who had agreed with me previously had now changed their minds. I could see that I was going to get pretty well torn in pieces directly I arrived in London, and I determined to hide until the time came for this meeting. I have succeeded with some difficulty. Here I am. I’ll now give you *viva voce* the first authentic news of your property.”

The silence had become so intense, eyes were so strained, looking at that tall, sunburnt figure, that no one realised the tragedy which was going on.

“The next concession to yours,” Grandlett continued, “is the Thorndyke Concession. Their pound shares stand to-day at sixty. Very well, if that is a fair price for them, your pound shares should stand at a hundred and twenty. You’ve got gold, you’ve got diamonds, you’ve got the largest and richest track



of alluvial soil I've ever seen in my life. The only trouble is that the whole thing has been shockingly mismanaged by the most ignorant set of people I've ever known placed in authority. I've sacked every one of your managers and put fresh men in their places. We've new machinery being installed, and paid for out of the profits I made the two months I was there. The report will be in the hands of your auditors to-morrow, and all I can say is that if any of you have sold your shares because of this scare, I'm very sorry, but——"

It was impossible to proceed. There was a roar of voices. One man stood upon a table, and by dint of continually screaming out the same question finally made himself heard.

"Can you tell me, sir, the meaning of this slump in the shares?"

"I can," Grandlett replied. "If you'll have patience and listen to me for another moment. Before I landed, as I have already hinted to you, I had clear indications of forthcoming trouble. At Southampton I was met by a special messenger from a person holding a high office in your company, who insisted upon an interview with me the moment I arrived in London. I could foresee the sort of trouble which I was in for, and I replaced the report which I had already destroyed by a bogus one, which I locked away in my despatch case, and which would never see the light unless it was stolen from me. Some one did steal it, and some one I should think is going to pay for this theft, for they tell me that there is a 'bear' of half a million shares out, and all I can say is that I'm sorry for any one who's at the back of that transaction. The bogus report may seem to you, ladies and gentlemen, indefensible. I can't help it if it does. All I can tell you is this—that no one but a thief could ever have got at it, and from my point of view he simply got what was coming to him. That's all, ladies and gentlemen."

The uproar was so tremendous that it was not until after the stampede towards the doors was over that any one noticed the chairman lying with his head upon the table and his hands outstretched—dead in his chair.

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Grandlett, always a reticent man, was curiously averse to discussing the tragedy for which he was indirectly responsible. Quite unexpectedly, however, in the lounge of the Clover Club, a few nights later, when he found himself alone with Estelle and Jennerton, he opened up the subject and closed it again.

"I dare say I could have dealt with those other fellows," he remarked, "but when old Sir Matthew himself sent his secretary and that fellow Crawshay to meet me at Waterloo Station, I knew there was going to be trouble. They made me go and speak to him. He was in a car outside, and he offered me twenty thousand pounds for the report. After that, it seemed to me there was only one thing to be done, and I did it. I got into a taxi, drove to the other side of London, and stayed there. I suppose Crawshay saw that I'd given my portfolio

to Estelle. They weren't content with that, though. They must have hired a professional to go through my luggage in my rooms in Jermyn Street. Sir Matthew, of all men in the world!"

"Was there any one in with him?" Jennerton asked.

"Not a soul, so far as I can hear," Grandlett replied. "He went to twenty-five different brokers to launch his 'bear' against the shares directly he'd read my bogus report. Two of them, they tell me, will be hammered next Thursday. A hundred and ninety thousand pounds they say the difference is."

"What price are the shares to-day?" Jennerton enquired.

"Seventy-two, and dead cheap."

Estelle leaned forward.

"Tell me what made you buy those few shares the other night?" she asked Jennerton.

He laughed.

"Well, there were one or two things I couldn't understand," he admitted. "First of all, why did Sir Matthew come to me unless he was in a terrible state of anxiety and wanted to discover whether I knew anything? Then, from the little I'd heard of Grandlett, I couldn't quite see him leaving a report of such value in that leather case, and clearing out as he did from Waterloo. I just took a chance. Enables me to stand you two dinner, anyway—and another cocktail first," he added, holding up his hand to the barman. "By the bye, Grandlett, you might tell us where you hid. I had three of my best men looking for you. We traced your taxi and then lost you."

Grandlett smiled.

"I changed taxis three times," he confided. "As to where I hid—well, life's a queer show, and I might want to lie doggo again some day."

"Wise man," Jennerton murmured, as he turned to the barman to give his orders.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.  
[The end of *Jennerton & Co.* by E. Phillips Oppenheim]