

THE

HANDSOME YOUNG MEN

**HULBERT
FOOTNER**



*FURTHER CRIME
INVESTIGATIONS
OF* **MADAME
STOREY**

A **CRIME
CLUB**
Book

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This is the Story

PARIS! PARIS in June! Paris under the night sky! Dejeuner in the Bois; dinner on Montmartre; ices, and *such* ices, any time of the day or night, at the Café de la Paix, the centre of the world. No wonder Miss Brickley, secretary to the famous woman detective, Madame Storey, was thrilled at the prospect of accompanying her employer. It ought to have been a vacation trip, but turned out to be something more strenuous. Almost too strenuous, in fact, but Miss Brickley at any rate came near blessing the little widow who had asked Madame Storey to investigate the mysterious death of her millionaire husband. Here are new exploits of the famous Madame Storey in a new setting, revealing her more fascinating, more ingenious than ever.



By the Same Author

THE OWL TAXI

OFFICER!

THE DEAVES
AFFAIR

UNDER-DOGS

MADAME STOREY

QUEEN OF CLUBS

A SELF-MADE
THIEF

THE VELVET HAND

THE DOCTOR WHO HELD HANDS

THE SUBSTITUTE MILLIONAIRE

THE HANDSOME YOUNG MEN
HULBERT FOOTNER



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THE HANDSOME YOUNG MEN

I

MY older readers will remember the great sensation that was caused some twenty-odd years ago by the marriage of Van Sicklen Harker to Cornelia Mittlinger, thus uniting two of the greatest fortunes in the country. In due course this couple had a daughter, who was also christened Cornelia. The newspapers dubbed her the billion dollar baby. Throughout her childhood items about her feeding bottles, her lace caps and the diamond buckles on her little slippers continually found their way into the press. If ever a child was reared upon publicity this was it. When she was about ten years old her parents were divorced; and each subsequently re-married; but Van Barker's second wife and Mrs. Barker's second husband have nothing to do with this story. Throughout her childhood, little Cornelia lived in her own great house surrounded by her own servants; and was visited in turn by her father and mother.

I suppose the old-timers were astonished when they read in the papers of little Cornelia's own love affair. That is the way with children; they will grow up. It may be objected here, that quite enough about Cornelia Barker's affairs has already been printed. Upon the death of her father recently, the whole thing was rehashed in the press. But that is the very reason I have made up my mind to write it. The exact truth never has been told; and during the few years that have elapsed since these things happened, so many fables have become attached to the story, that it is almost unrecognisable. It is an amazing story, worth telling for its own sake, quite apart from the prominence of the people concerned in it.

It broke with dramatic suddenness in the account of how Van Sicklen Harker, one of the best-known men about town, attempted to thrash a youth named Arpad Rody in the crowded lobby of the great Hotel Palazzo. They were separated by friends. Rody was described as a handsome young Hungarian, who had been engaged by the hotel as a sort of semi-professional dancer in the tea-room. The cause of the quarrel was kept out of the papers for the moment; but of course it was freely whispered about that Cornelia had become infatuated with her handsome partner in the tango.

A few days later all reason for secrecy vanished, when Cornelia, then eighteen years old, sent for the reporters to her house, and bluntly informed them that she was in love with Arpad Rody, and he with her; and that they intended to get married in spite of all the fathers in Christendom. What a sensation this interview caused! Every phase of the affair was conducted in a blaze of publicity.

Her father countered by summoning the reporters to his house in turn, and informing them that his daughter was under age; that she possessed no means in her own right; and that if she persisted in marrying Rody, whom he termed an unprincipled adventurer, it was his intention to cut her off without a cent. Upon this I believe Rody sued Harker for libel; but this side issue was soon lost sight of in the events which followed.

Cornelia's answer to her father's pronouncement was to march out of the great house with which he provided her, carrying only a satchel containing her dressing-case and night clothes. She engaged a room in a cheap boarding-house, and hired herself out as a cashier in a down-town restaurant. The proprietor of the restaurant had to call on the police for help in handling the crowds that besieged his place.

After a day or two Harker succeeded in rescuing his daughter out of the restaurant; and a truce was patched up. Each announced to the press that a reconciliation had been effected. They appeared in public together. Young Arpad Rody was not in evidence. Finally father and daughter departed for a visit to the Grande Canyon in Harker's private car.

In three days Cornelia was back. She announced that her father was too dictatorial for her taste, and she was not surprised that her mother had found it impossible to live with him. She established herself in her big house again, where Arpad Rody was a frequent visitor. The young couple were photographed together twenty times a day. They ostentatiously visited Tiffany's to buy a ring.

From his house Mr. Harker announced that he and his daughter were sailing on the *Baratoria* in a week's time for a world tour.

From her house Cornelia announced that she had no intention of leaving New York.

Harker repeated his statement that they were going away.

Cornelia repeated hers that they were not.

The *Baratoria* was to sail on a Wednesday. On the Monday a fresh sensation was created by the disappearance of Cornelia Harker. She had walked out of her house on Sunday afternoon; and had failed to return. Neither was Arpad Rody to be found. The father was in a state of distraction.

On Tuesday the young pair turned up smiling. They announced that they had been married in Wilmington. They did not return to Cornelia's house, but engaged a suite at the Hotel Palazzo. And everybody supposed that the

play had ended—ended as plays ought to be with the discomfiture of the stern father.

Up to this moment it had been pure comedy. It was looked on as a sort of burlesque upon the evil of having too much money. In view of the girl's ridiculous bringing up, it was held that Harker had received no worse than he might have expected. Popular opinion was bound to be on the side of the handsome young lovers, who made a bluff of daring poverty for the sake of love. There was nothing for the father to do but to back down as gracefully as he could. Good comedy; everybody was laughing at it.

The Tuesday evening papers carried a brief story of the marriage; and the Wednesday morning papers amplified it. At noon on Wednesday I was startled by hearing the boys cry an extra in our street. Their voices suggested that something was really the matter, so I hastened down to the door and bought a paper. What I read in it turned me a little sick with horror. An hour before, Arpad Rody had been found shot dead in the suite at the Palazzo, with his bride lying in a faint near by.

II

I CARRIED the newspaper to Mme. Storey in her private office. This was the long room that I have so often described, furnished with priceless Italian antiques, and lighted by a row of casements at one end looking out on Gramercy Park. Here at a wide black oaken table with her back to the windows, works my beautiful mistress like a chemist in his laboratory, analysing souls. Like everybody else she had been interested and amused in following the Harker affair from day to day. When I showed her the brief, bald announcement, she did not, like others, waste her breath in protestations of horror. Her face turned grave. She said:

“Bella, we will be called on to act in this matter. Send a boy to obtain a room plan of the Palazzo, showing the suite occupied by the young couple. Make a file of the newspaper reports of the case. Get in touch with Inspector Rumsey at Headquarters; and tell him that I would be obliged if he will furnish me with the latest information. Order Crider and Stephens to report at the office.”

I was back in my own room attending to these instructions, when the outer door banged open, and four men came tumbling in. They were well-dressed men; they looked like persons to whom consideration was due; but at the moment all four had a frantic air. I had never seen any of them before. They all cried in a breath:

“Madame Storey . . . where is she?”

“Who are you, please? And what do you want of her?” I asked in astonishment.

“I am Van Sicklen Harker,” said one. . . . “He is Mr. Van Sicklen Harker,” echoed the other three.

“Please be seated,” said I, making for the door of Mme. Storey’s room.

I doubt if they heard me. They all seemed half beside themselves. When I opened the door they pushed in with me. What could one do?

As it turned out, Mme. Storey was acquainted with Mr. Harker, and she took in the situation at a glance. All four men began talking to her at once. I picked out such phrases as: “Rody has been shot! . . . Cornelia taken to Headquarters! . . . We fear she may be arrested! . . . No weapon has been found! . . .”

“Gentlemen! Gentlemen!” protested Mme. Storey, waving her hands in front of her. “One at a time! . . . Who are these gentlemen, Mr. Harker?”

“My friends . . .” he said helplessly.

He was truly a pitiable object. A man accustomed to show a good front to the world, his path had always been smoothed for him, and now he suddenly found the ground cut away. At the touch of tragedy his weakness was revealed. His hands shook; his eyes rolled; his tongue stuttered. He looked very young to be the father of a married daughter; not above forty. The other three were merely his toadies; his hangers-on. Harker was the type of millionaire who always carries them around with him. There was nothing genuine in their distress. They were secretly pleased at being concerned in such an important affair. They lent a comic touch to the grim situation.

“What is it you want of me?” asked Mme. Storey.

“Help me . . . help me!” said Harker imploringly.

He seemed to be unable to get any further; and one of his friends stepped forward. He was the most intelligent-looking of the three; a clean-shaven man of indeterminate age with a wary blue eye. He was elegantly dressed and there was a subtle assurance in his manner; Fifth Avenue, Newport, Lenox, was stamped on him, like labels on a piece of luggage. A comely man, but a little too soft and smooth.

“Poor Harker is overwhelmed,” he said solicitously. He had the flat, reedy voice of his type. “I am Algernon Bleecker. I have had the pleasure of being presented to you; but perhaps you have forgotten me.”

“I remember you very well,” said Mme. Storey with a polite and inscrutable smile.

“How nice of you,” purred Mr. Bleecker. “Let me explain this matter to you.”

“I am sorry,” interrupted Mme. Storey, “but I must deal with the principal. If you gentlemen will be good enough to wait in the outer room . . .”

All three gentlemen were indignant; but they dared not show it openly in the light of my mistress’s cool and level glance. With angry glances among themselves, they retired into my office. I have no doubt Mme. Storey was well abused in there.

“Sit down,” said Mme. Storey more kindly to Harker. He dropped into a chair. She pushed the cigarette box towards him. “Perhaps a few puffs will

steady you.” He mechanically helped himself to a cigarette, but forgot to light it.

“Pull yourself together!” said Mme. Storey in her blunt and cheery fashion. “This is a bad matter; but it might have been worse. It might have been your daughter who was shot.”

“They have taken her . . . to Police headquarters,” he stammered like a man distraught.

“I understand no weapon was found,” said Mme. Storey. “And if she did shoot him, she probably had good cause.”

“She *couldn't* have done it!” said poor Harker. “She was infatuated with him, God help her. He had laid a spell on her with his confounded Continental manners; kissing her hand, and so on. After that our honest, rough and ready American boys had no attraction.”

“Well then, let us find who *did* do it.”

“But if they let her go, they will fasten it on me!” cried Harker, all but wringing his hands. “For I was the last one to see them together.”

“Did you shoot him?” asked Mme. Storey quite calmly.

“No! No! No!” he cried. “I swear it!”

“Tell me the whole story,” said my mistress. “Begin at the point where you first learned that your daughter was married to Rody.”

He made a visible effort to calm himself. “That was yesterday afternoon,” he said. “Cornelia called me up.”

“What did she say?”

“Very little. Just a bare announcement. Asked me to come to see them at the Palazzo at ten to-day.”

“But was it not her place to come to see you?”

He shrugged helplessly. “That is Cornelia’s way. I can’t do anything with her. . . . Besides, she and my wife do not get along together.”

“Did she say what she wanted to see you about?”

“No. But of course I knew. It was to discuss a settlement.”

“But you had said you would do nothing for them.”

He spread out his hands helplessly. “I couldn’t let my girl starve.”

“Did you hear from them again before this morning?”

He shook his head.

“You went there at ten?”

“Yes.”

“Please tell me exactly what happened.”

He jumped up agitatedly. “I can’t remember everything,” he cried. “It was too painful . . . too painful! A long wrangle! . . . I expected Rody to stand out for all he could get. That didn’t trouble me. I thought perhaps it might bring her to her senses to see him revealed in his true colours. But no! She supported him throughout. She was worse than he! Oh, to see my own child taking sides against me with that young blackguard . . . it was more than I could bear! . . . I can’t remember everything that was said. It went on for an hour. . . .”

“Well, I won’t press you now,” said Mme. Storey. “But if I am to help you, I shall have to question you again. What was the upshot? Did you agree to a settlement?”

“Yes. I agreed to give them five hundred thousand down and to allow them ten thousand dollars a month hereafter.”

“Hm!” said Mme. Storey.

“I wrote a letter to that effect, and signed it,” Harker added. “It was found by the police.”

“Why was it necessary to write a letter?” asked Mme. Storey.

“Rody exacted it.”

“Supported by your daughter?”

“She wasn’t in the room at that moment. She had become faint. She was under the care of her maid.”

“How many rooms had they?”

“I can’t tell you. Three I think; and two bathrooms. It was a corner suite looking out on Fifty-seventh Street. You entered it through a private foyer which had six sides, and a door in each side. The corner room was the sitting-room. My daughter’s maid occupied a room to the left of the sitting-room, and my daughter’s room was on the right. At Rody’s suggestion, we went into that room to talk so that the maid could not overhear.”

“And it was in that room that the body was found?”

“So I suppose. I do not know for certain.”

“What happened when your daughter felt ill?”

“She went back into the sitting-room.”

“How long were you alone with Rody?”

“I don’t know. Five minutes; ten minutes.”

“After you had written the letter did you see your daughter again?”

“No. What was the use? She was on his side. I was too sore and bitter. I got out as quick as I could.”

“Through the sitting-room?”

“No. There was a door from the bedroom into the foyer. I went that way.”

“Are you able to fix the time when you left?”

“Yes. When I got down into the street I noticed that it was five minutes to eleven.”

Mme. Storey glanced at the newspaper. “The body was found at ten minutes past.”

“So they say.”

“Mr. Harker, do you own a revolver?” she asked bluntly.

His eyes rolled wildly. “I . . . I suppose so,” he stammered. “In fact I think I have several. But it is many years since I have had any occasion to handle . . . to look at them. . . .”

“But somehow, one does not forget one’s guns,” said Mme. Storey mildly. “You must realise how important to you this question is. Can’t you give me a more explicit answer?”

“I . . . I should have to think it over . . .” he said nervously.

Mme. Storey appeared to let the matter go. “One last question,” she said. “What did your daughter say upon regaining consciousness?”

“I have not seen her,” said Marker. “I am told that she has refused to make any statement whatsoever.”

III

MR. HARKER wanted to carry Mme. Storey down to Police Headquarters that she might interview Cornelia. "No use my trying to talk to her," he said bitterly.

"Very well," said Mme. Storey, "I'll go. We are rather a large party. Is it necessary for the gentlemen outside to accompany us?"

"They are good friends of mine," said Harker.

"I don't doubt it," said Mme. Storey dryly. "Still . . ."

"I'll send them away," said Harker.

"Let Mr. Bleecker come with us," suggested my mistress. "I'd like to talk to him."

As we were leaving the office we met our operative, Stephens, coming in in response to my summons. Mme. Storey, dropping back, instructed him to get hold of Mr. Harker's valet if he was able, and bring him down to Headquarters. They were to wait outside in a car.

The four of us set off down town in the Harker limousine. Mme. Storey sat on the back seat between Mr. Harker and Mr. Bleecker; while I was on one of the extra seats in front of them. I do not believe that Harker opened his mouth the whole way. Mme. Storey and Mr. Bleecker talked. She was affable and friendly as if she had repented of snubbing him; but I, who know her methods so well, could see that she was sounding him out. He answered like a man without a care on his mind. He had a boyish, impulsive manner, which may have been a pose, but was not unattractive.

From his talk I learned (a) that his family was one of the best in New York; and that he was related to all the other Knickerbockers: (b) That he pursued no regular occupation, but lived the life of a gentleman of leisure: (c) That "Society" was the be-all and end-all of his existence: (d) That for many years he had acted as a sort of superior social secretary to the billionaire Harkers; that is to say, he had supervised all their entertainments, and had advised them whom to cultivate, and whom to drop. It was clear that Harker leaned on him to an absurd degree. During the drive no reference was made to the immediate tragedy.

We must have been expected at Police Headquarters, for we found a whole brigade of press photographers lined up on the sidewalk. Mme.

Storey's appearance in the case created an additional sensation. Inside, the whole building was pervaded by an air of excitement; and I may say it takes something out of the common to get them going at 300 Mulberry Street. The hardest-boiled door-keeper amongst them was affected by it. Even the high officials, who are in general no respecters of persons, were impressed by the magic name of Harker. Clearly they did not know exactly what to do with so grand a young lady as Cornelia. They had tried to get information out of her, but had not liked to push her too hard.

We were taken up to a big room on the second floor where a sort of informal investigation was in progress. Everybody connected with the case was coming and going. We found that the police end was in charge of our friend Inspector Rumsey. There was also a representative of the district attorney's office present; a man called Harden, whom we were to know only too well in another case. A well-known criminal lawyer named John Jerrold was representing Cornelia. With Jerrold was his clerk, a dark, Spanish lad as handsome as Antinous. I did not learn his name until later. It was Pedro d'Escobar.

I wondered about this Jerrold. He was quite well-known; but why had they not engaged one of the best in town, I asked myself. A curious thing was, that, though he was working in Cornelia's interest, he received Mme. Storey with scarcely veiled antagonism. Inspector Rumsey was perfectly willing to allow my mistress to question the girl in the presence of the police, but Jerrold said no.

"I must stand upon the rights of my client," he said stiffly. "A charge may be laid later." So saying, he went off to consult with Cornelia.

Mme. Storey made no comment; but Harker looked at Bleecker in surprise. "What's the matter with him?" he asked.

Bleecker shrugged. "Jealous," he said. "He is afraid that Madame Storey will steal the limelight. These court-room stars are as temperamental as opera singers. I'll speak to him."

A succession of prospective witnesses was examined while I was in the room; Cornelia's maid; guests who had occupied nearby rooms; various employees of the hotel. None of these people were able to say they had heard the sound of a shot.

I listened to the maid's story with keen interest. At ten o'clock that morning she had admitted Mr. Van Sicklen Harker to the suite, and had ushered him into the sitting-room. She had then returned to her own room.

At first she could hear nothing. When the gentlemen began to quarrel she could hear the angry voices, but could not distinguish anything that was said.

She had no suspicion of any serious trouble until, a good while after, her mistress called her into the sitting-room. She found Cornelia in a hysterical and half-fainting condition. While in the sitting-room, she could hear the angry voices of the men in the bedroom; but she had been too much concerned about her mistress's condition to take note of anything they said. She half led, half carried her mistress into the further bedroom; that is to say the maid's own room, where Cornelia fainted on the bed. Some time passed before she succeeded in bringing her to; she was unable to say just how long. When she came to her senses, though she was still weak and shaken, she insisted on returning to the men. She ordered the maid to remain in her own room. During all this time she had said nothing that gave the maid any clue as to what the men were quarrelling about.

The maid had remained in her own room for awhile. She could hear nothing. She became very anxious. She finally ventured out into the foyer. Still she could hear nothing from the bedroom opposite. She listened at the door of that room and no sound came to her. At last she knocked. There was no answer. She tried the door. It was not locked, yet it resisted her at the bottom. She thought somebody was holding it. There was no sound from inside. Screaming with terror, the maid ran out into the main corridor of the hotel. A number of the guests ran out of their rooms; and various employees were attracted to the scene. The maid refused to return to the suite; and it was a hall-porter who actually discovered the tragedy.

This man stated that he had not attempted to enter the bedroom from the foyer; but had gone through the bathroom which lay between bedroom and sitting-room. None of the doors were locked. He beheld Arpad Rody lying on his back on the bed with a gaping wound in his temple. Mrs. Rody was crumpled up in a heap against the door into the foyer. That was why the maid had been unable to open it. There was a smell of gunpowder in the room. There was no gun visible anywhere. The wound had bled some on the bed, but not so much as you might expect. Rody's clothing was not disarranged in any way; nor did the room show any indications that a struggle had taken place. The body was still warm of course; but as far as the porter could tell, the man was already dead. The next persons to enter the room were the hotel physician, and one of the managers. The porter had then been stationed at the door to keep everybody else out.

The physician deposed that the man was dead when he first looked at him. Death must have been instantaneous. He had been shot with a bullet from a gun of .32 calibre. The gun must have been pressed close to his head. The bullet had passed through his brain and was lodged against the skull on the other side. The physician had also discovered a swelling on top of the man's head, which suggested that he had been struck by some instrument; probably a blunt instrument; but he could not say positively. There was no abrasion. The lady was only in a swoon. She was carried into another room and brought to her senses. The doctor described, meanwhile, the vain hunt for a weapon. When the lady recovered, she had broken away from those who were attending her, and had rushed back to her husband's body, where she gave vent to extravagant protestations of affection. Nothing that she said suggested that she had any knowledge of who had shot him. She was incapable at that moment of answering any questions intelligibly.

Mme. Storey asked permission of Inspector Rumsey to put a few questions: This was readily accorded her.

"Doctor," she said, "please tell us more particularly the position in which you found the body."

He said: "There were two beds in the room, Madame, which were shoved together. The body was lying across both of them, the head pointing towards the windows."

"Were the legs touching the floor?"

"No, Madame, the body was lying completely across the beds."

"Had the room been made up for the day?"

"No, Madame, the bed-clothing was tumbled."

"The door into the foyer, I take it, was opposite to the windows?"

"Not exactly, Madame. The foyer being an irregularly shaped room, the door was cut across one corner of the bedroom."

"I see. And where was the door into the bathroom?"

"Facing the foot of the beds, Madame."

"These were the only doors in the room?"

"No, Madame. There was a door near the head of the beds, on the side above the windows. This led into a clothes closet. We looked in there for the gun."

“I get it. We can check this up later on the plan. Now please tell us what sort of a man, physically, the victim was in life.”

“A very well-made young man, Madame; tall and muscular.”

“A difficult customer to handle, eh?”

“So I should say, Madame.”

“About what weight?”

“A hundred and seventy pounds.”

“Thank you. Now please describe the effect when a man is shot through the brain.”

“Why, Madame, he drops like a felled ox.”

“There is no movement afterwards?”

“No, Madame—That is, if he was in motion when he was shot, he might stagger forward a step, or spin around. But if he was standing, he would drop all of a piece.”

“Was there blood anywhere in the room except where it had run down on the bed?”

“No, Madame.”

“Thank you very much. That is all.”

IV

JOHN JERROLD returned to the room, and announced to Inspector Rumsey that his client was now ready to make a full statement to the police. This made all the members of our party uneasy. We didn't know what was coming. It would have been far better for the girl, we thought, if Mme. Storey had been permitted to talk to her first. But Jerrold was evidently determined to keep his client out of my mistress's hands. Mme. Storey could not seek to interfere between Cornelia and her counsel. She merely shrugged.

Inspector Rumsey ordered the girl to be brought in.

The big room was full of people. I did not know who they all were, nor what their business might be with the case. Inspector Rumsey sat at a desk with his back to the windows; the assistant-District-Attorney was on one side of him, my mistress on the other. I sat close to her with my pencil and book in case she wished to dictate any memoranda. There was also a police stenographer present. Lined up behind us was a whole crowd of police; some in uniform, some in plain clothes. The rest of the persons connected with the case formed a group at the other side of the room. No representatives of the press were admitted at this juncture.

A curious thing was, that in all that crowd there was not one to claim kinship or friendship with the slain man. Nor did any ever appear during the progress of the case. This young fellow who was described as being so good-looking in life, seemed to have appeared out of a void, just as he had now disappeared into another. There was no way of telling if he was as bad as the Harkers made out, because he had no one to speak in his defence.

While we waited for the girl, John Jerrold paced back and forth with an important manner. He was a stocky, middle-aged man with a cold grey eye, and a bristly, clipped moustache. He had once been connected with the District-Attorney's office; and he had the look of the overbearing prosecutor of fiction. Perhaps that was the reason he had been dropped.

Finally an inner door was opened; a policeman stepped in followed by the slight figure of Cornelia Rody; and another officer who closed the door behind him. You could hear everybody in the room take a breath at the sight of this little girl; this heiress to untold millions; this bride of a day, who had

perhaps seen her handsome young husband shot down by—well, of course the same thought was in everybody's mind.

She scarcely looked her eighteen years; it was piteous to think of her as one of the principals in a tragedy. She was very pretty too, with fine blue eyes and a mass of short, curly, bright brown hair. She was, it goes without saying, most expensively and beautifully dressed. But it was rather shocking to see how perfectly self-assured she was under those circumstances. That was the rich man's child brought up with a crowd of servants to wait upon her. She was very pale it is true, but she looked around at the crowd with the greatest coolness, and made a signal of reassurance to her father. She then seated herself in the chair which the young Spaniard, Jerrold's clerk, pushed forward for her; crossed her pretty feet, and folded her hands in her lap.

Her father looked to be at the point of collapse. I did not at first grasp the significance of the signal that Cornelia made him, but I saw my mistress's face become grave.

"You wish to make a statement," said Inspector Rumsey to Cornelia.

"Yes," she said composedly. "It was I who shot Arpad Rody."

Everybody in the room gasped. This was not what we expected to hear. Harker leaped to his feet; and his chair fell over backwards. He flung a hand across his eyes. "No! No! No!" he cried. "It cannot be!" A policeman pressed him back into his chair. He covered his face.

"Stop!" cried Rumsey sharply to the girl. "Do you realise what you are saying? Are you speaking by advice of counsel?"

"Yes," she said calmly.

"Why did you not warn us of this?" asked Rumsey of Jerrold.

"I thought it best to let her speak for herself," answered Jerrold with a defiant stare.

"You might at least have given her friends some inkling."

Jerrold merely shrugged.

Cornelia, having been duly warned, continued her statement; and it was taken down. She spoke in a low, clear voice; her expression never varied. She related the terrible story without a falter. "Immediately after the ceremony," she said, "my husband revealed his true nature. It was a relief to be himself, he told me with a sneer. He was coarse and brutal and selfish. His one aim was to get as much money as possible out of my father, when

my father came to us this morning, I was so ashamed I could scarcely face him. But I had married this man in the face of his opposition, and I felt that it was up to me to stick it out. So I made believe to side with my husband against my father; though it hurt me very much. They quarrelled violently, and it got to be more than I could bear. That is how I came to faint.”

Cornelia then described how, upon feeling ill, she had gone into the sitting-room and had called her maid. The maid had carried her to a bed in the further room, where she lost consciousness for a space.

Continuing, Cornelia said: “When I came to myself, I went back to the room where I had left the men. I found that my father had gone. Arpad was lying on his back across the beds feeling very pleased with himself, because he had got the better of my father. He had forced my father to sign an agreement to pay us a large sum. I didn’t mind that; but when he went on to abuse my father, to call him dreadful names—after he had been so generous to us—I felt as if I could stand no more. In fact I didn’t know what I was doing. The pistol was lying there on the bureau. I just picked it up and shot him. He never moved after.”

“But the doctor has stated that the pistol must have been held directly against the man’s temple,” said Rumsey.

“Yes,” said Cornelia. “Arpad couldn’t see what I was doing because of the footboard of the bed. I picked up the pistol from the bureau, and walked to the bed, holding it down low. I reached over the footboard, and put it to his head and fired . . . He never moved after.”

I think everybody in the room shuddered at the repetition of that dreadful little phrase.

“Are you accustomed to handling pistols?” Rumsey asked her in rather a shaky voice.

“No. I just pulled the trigger and it went off.”

The good inspector was deeply moved; he had a daughter of Cornelia’s age. “This story cannot be true!” he said loudly, and looked truculently around, as if defying any of his men to say that he was not acting the part of a good policeman. “If you shot the man as you say, the gun must have been found afterwards. . . . What became of the gun?”

“I do not know,” said Cornelia in the same composed voice. “In fact I cannot remember anything else. It all went black before me.”

“The gun was not found!” cried the Inspector, striking his desk.

“I do not know about that,” said Cornelia, with a sort of quiet obstinacy. “I have told you what happened.”

“Whose gun was it?” asked the Inspector.

“I don’t know. I supposed it was Arpad’s.”

“Had it been lying on the bureau when you were in the room before?”

“I am not sure. I don’t think it could have been. It occurred to me that Arpad might have used it to intimidate my father.”

“Did you know that your husband possessed such a gun?”

“He had spoken of owning a gun, but I do not know what kind it was. He had never shown it to me.”

“You say you fainted immediately upon the firing of the shot?” asked the Inspector.

“Yes.”

“Then how do you know that your husband never moved?”

“Well, I looked at him first. I didn’t faint until it came over me that he was dead.”

“You can remember nothing else?”

“Nothing at all.”

“But you were found leaning against the door to the foyer. How did you get there?”

“I supposed I must have staggered there. It wouldn’t be but half a dozen steps from the bed.”

Inspector Rumsey flung himself back in his chair non-plussed. He didn’t want to believe the girl’s story, but as a witness against herself she was too much for him. He looked at my mistress. When she was present he always leaned heavily on her. What do you think of this? his eyes asked. Mme. Storey shrugged non-committally.

“Do you want to ask her any questions?” asked Rumsey.

“Not at present,” said Mme. Storey.

While Cornelia was signing the statement which had been prepared for her, another plain clothes man entered the room by the outside door, and going directly to Inspector Rumsey, whispered something in his ear. Rumsey started violently, and said: “Where is it?”

By way of answer, the man took an automatic pistol from his pocket and laid it on Rumsey's desk. Again one could feel the thrill of excitement go through the whole company there.

"Where did you find it?" asked Rumsey.

"On the roof of the dwelling-house which adjoins the Hotel Palazzo on the Fifty-Seventh street side."

"That would be under the windows of the room where the man was shot?"

"Yes, sir."

Cornelia spoke up quickly: "Oh, it just comes back to me now. In my excitement I threw the gun out of the window. You had better add that to my statement."

"Mr. Jerrold," cried the exasperated Inspector, "will you please warn your client, for her own sake, to confine herself to answering my questions!"

Jerrold retorted sharply, and some confusion resulted. Under cover of it, Mme. Storey leaned towards me, and whispered: "Go down to the door. If Stephens is there with the man I sent him for, bring the man up here."

I found Stephens and another man waiting in a car below. The man's name was Clemmons. He was a tall, weedy-looking youth dressed in a style of cheap elegance; in fact the typical valet. He was sweating with nervousness at the prospect of having to face the police.

When I re-entered the room with Clemmons, Mr. Harker looked at him in mute horror, while his bosom friend, Bleecker, flushed red with anger.

"Who are you?" asked the Inspector.

"I am Mr. Clemmons," said the youth with a nervous simper. "I work for Mr. Harker."

Mme. Storey whispered to the Inspector.

"Have you ever seen this gun before?" asked the Inspector.

Clemmons turned the gun over in his hands, and then laid it down on the desk. He glanced wildly around as if seeking a way of escape.

"Well, sir?" said the Inspector sharply.

"Do I—do I have to answer?" stammered Clemmons.

Algernon Bleecker jumped up. "I protest!" he cried. "This man is entitled to the advice of counsel."

"Be silent, sir!" cried Inspector Rumsey. "Nobody suspects this man of having committed the crime!" He looked at Clemmons. "Answer my question!"

"It is Mr. Harker's gun," murmured the valet.

Everybody in the room strained forward to hear. The silence was breathless.

"Are you sure of that?" demanded the Inspector.

Clemmons nodded. "I cleaned it only last week," he murmured. "I saw Mr. Harker take it out of the drawer this morning before he went out. He did not know that I saw him take it."

You could hear a long breath escape from the strained listeners.

Inspector Rumsey involuntarily looked over at Cornelia. It was then that the girl betrayed her only symptoms of cracking under the strain.

"What of it?" she cried hysterically. "I told you the truth! Arpad was alive after my father had left the hotel! I swear it!"

I heard a slight sound on the other side of me. Then Mr. Bleecker cried excitedly:

"Mr. Harker has fainted! A glass of water, please!"

The faithful toady conveyed by his horrified tones that the Heavens had fallen, and all business must stop. But I am afraid nobody else in the room was much impressed by the multi-millionaire's greatness at that moment.

V

CORNELIA'S confession stood up in spite of the valet's disclosure. No person of discernment who heard the girl make that confession believed a word of it—but there it was! She stuck to it through thick and thin; and even added convincing little details from time to time.

Harker was obliged to change his story. Who could tell whether his second version was any nearer the truth than the first? He said:

“It is true that I took my pistol with me when I went to see Rody. I was beside myself with rage and grief, and it seemed to me when the truth came out that nobody would blame me for shooting that blackguard. In the ugly scene that followed after I got to the hotel, he revealed his nature to be even more brutal and coarse than I had expected. The thought that my little girl was committed to the keeping of such a scoundrel drove me mad! It seemed providential to me when Cornelia left us together; and I pulled out my gun. If the intention of shooting him is a crime, I am ready to take my punishment. But I did not shoot him. He jumped on me and disarmed me. He was stronger than I. He then pointed the gun at my head, and made me write the agreement that I left behind me. As I ran out of the room I heard him fling the gun on the bureau. This is the truth! But Cornelia could not have shot him either. Whatever she may say now, she was completely infatuated with the man!”

A curious situation resulted. Whenever Harker was permitted to see his daughter, he begged and implored her to take back her confession, but she stood firm. Throughout the whole affair she displayed much more strength of character than her father. If she had weakened, Harker would have been promptly arrested, but as long as her confession stood, the police could not touch him.

Everybody believed that Harker had shot Rody, and nobody was inclined to blame him for it. It was supposed that Cornelia knew her father had done it, even if she had not actually seen him fire the shot, and that she was lying to save him. And Harker, people thought, was withholding his confession, because he considered that Cornelia's youth and innocence would stand a better chance with a jury. If this was the true explanation of the situation, it certainly showed up poor Harker in a contemptible light; and in my heart I never believed it. Harker was a weak man, and somewhat spoiled by too much wealth, but there was something manly and likeable in him

underneath. And certainly the poor fellow was suffering the torments of the damned.

No other explanation was forthcoming. If neither one of the Harkers had shot Arpad Rody we were up against a blank wall. The whole action was narrowed down to fifteen or twenty minutes. No other person had been seen to enter or leave the hotel suite. In a hotel like the Palazzo, they have watchers and servants in every corridor. Cornelia's maid had never left the suite, and the outer door had been locked throughout. One of the most baffling features of the case was that nobody had heard the shot.

What my mistress thought about the case at this stage, I do not know. She went about her investigation with an inscrutable smile. I ought to mention that immediately after the inquiry in Inspector Rumsey's office which I have described, she proceeded to the Palazzo Hôtel where she made a patient survey of the scene of the crime.

If it was a fact that the Harkers and their advisers had agreed amongst themselves on the course of action they were following, it certainly proved to be a politic one. For Cornelia became the heroine of the day. It was true she had to be confined in the city prison, but if one could believe all one heard, she was treated there like a royal guest of the state. She received enough flowers and candy, it was said, to furnish an entire hospital. Two secretaries were required to attend to her mail. Everybody knew that her trial would be a mere form; no jury on earth would have convicted her.

Cornelia was naturally a sweet little thing, and the course she was taking, mistaken though it might be, proved the goodness of her heart. But long before this happened she had been spoiled by her bad upbringing; and the adulation she received in prison completed the turning of her pretty head. She became as puffed up with vanity as a little pigeon. It was very difficult to deal with her. As a matter of fact somebody had prejudiced her against Mme. Storey in the beginning. After one or two attempts to create a better understanding, Mme. Storey was obliged to disregard her in the unravelling of the case.

I might say that, saving Mme. Storey and Inspector Rumsey, everybody connected with this case seemed to become intoxicated with the attendant publicity. That is not to be surprised at, perhaps, when you consider that it was the most sensational case that had ever come before the public up to that time. The newspapers seemed to give up everything else during those few days. The reporters and photographers dogged our footsteps. Good Heavens! you had the feeling of being spied upon even in your bed. The publicity

attached to our cases always angers me. Maybe if I were the beautiful young heiress to millions I should feel differently.

Too much publicity has a curious effect on people. Algernon Bleecker, I thought, made a perfect ass of himself, the way he thrust himself forward as Van Sicklen Barker's most intimate friend, and undertook to speak for Harker in everything. The others were almost as bad. Even the valet Clemmons went about town attended by a whole train of sycophants hanging upon his slightest word. As for Cornelia, she issued interviews from her cell on every conceivable subject, whether she knew anything about it or not.

Cornelia was thrown entirely into the hands of John Jerrold. I considered this very unfortunate. I did not believe that Jerrold was actuated merely by childish jealousy in his antagonism to my mistress. I suspected a more sinister motive. When I suggested this to my mistress she merely smiled. I hate the whole multi-millionaire atmosphere anyway. There is more wire-pulling, underhand dealing and general crookedness amongst their hangers-on than in ward politics.

When Jerrold did not go himself to visit Cornelia in the prison, he employed the handsome Spanish lad, Pedro d'Escobar, as his messenger.

One day when Mme. Storey and I went to the prison to talk to Cornelia (and this, by the way, was the last occasion on which my mistress made any attempt to see the girl she was trying to save) we were told at the gate that Miss Harker (Cornelia had resumed her maiden name for its effect on the public) was already in the visitors' room engaged with her counsel. We had to wait in the rotunda at some little distance from the door, but in full view of it. It was fairly dark where we were.

While we sat there, the door into the visitors' room was opened, and for an instant we saw two figures framed in the doorway, sharply silhouetted against the strong light within. It was Cornelia and—not the gross form of Jerrold—but the slender one of young d'Escobar. A very pretty pose; the graceful girl offering her hand to the youth, who took it in his own, and gazed at her, as we could see even at that distance, with an expression of adoration. He then bent his body with infinite grace, and kissed her hand.

This troubled me greatly, but I could not instantly piece together the reasons for it. Then a light broke on me. I glanced at my mistress. She was surveying the scene with a peculiar smile.

“Shall we go in?” I said.

She slowly shook her head. "No need now," she said enigmatically. "This has revealed more than I would ever get out of the girl."

She drew me over to the other side of the rotunda where d'Escobar would not pass us on the way out. I watched him with the keenest interest. He was almost the perfect Latin type of male beauty, with large, full dark eyes, features of a charming regularity, and an air of suppressed passion. He was not very big, but well-knit and vigorous. He ought to have been acting in the pictures. He was too good-looking for one to be able to judge anything about his character. He might have been either rogue or saint.

After he had left, Mme. Storey and I made our way out of the building.

On the following day we ran into young d'Escobar at the Harker house where he had been sent on some errand by Cornelia. A sidelong look from my mistress; an alluring smile was sufficient; the youth succumbed forthwith. He was apt in gallantry; in fact that was all there was to him; he had more gallantry than good sense. It must be remembered though, that my mistress was an extremely beautiful woman. Beside her, little Cornelia was as a candle to a star. A moment later they were whispering and smiling apart, and I was not surprised therefore when the young Spaniard turned up at our office that afternoon.

He was most beautifully turned out, and his big black eyes were shining. His manners even towards me, were charming. I had it in mind though, that a charming young man can be a bad egg, too. It was about four-thirty, and tea had been had in for him. My mistress had put on one of her beautiful Fortuny gowns for his benefit. When I ushered him into the big room, she looked at me in a certain way, and reached under her desk. This was to signify that I was not expected to remain in the room, but was to listen to all that took place. She had turned on the dictaphone.

Back in my own room, I locked the outer door to forestall possible interruptions, and clapped the headpiece over my ears. The young man talked an attractive jargon of American slang with a strong Spanish accent. I shall not attempt to reproduce the accent. He said:

"I would catch the devil from my boss if he knew I was here!"

"Why?" asked Mme. Storey lazily.

"He doesn't like you . . . very bad taste, I say."

"Why?" she asked again.

“I don’t know. He thinks you’re trying to—what do you say? gum his game somehow.”

“I don’t know what his game is,” said Mme. Storey laughing.

“To the Dickens with him!” said the young man. “I shan’t tell him where I’ve been. . . . *Dios!* how beautiful you are when you show your white teeth!”

“Like the wolf in Red Riding Hood,” said Mme. Storey airily.

“Voolf? What is that?” he asked in a surprised voice.

“Oh, never mind.”

“They tell me you are the cleverest woman in New York,” he went on; “and for myself I can see you are the most beautiful! How good of you to let me come here!”

“You’re a fast worker, aren’t you?” she said. “Here’s your tea.”

“A fast worker?” he said inquiringly. “Oh, I get you! That’s a good one. I must remember that.”

“How about little Harker?” suggested Mme. Storey.

“Oh, Mees ’Arker,” he said carelessly, “I have to make love to her in the way of duty, but my heart is not in it. But with you . . .”

Mme. Storey interrupted him. “What do you mean, duty?”

“A widow,” he said, “and so rich! One owes it to oneself.”

“I suppose so,” said Mme. Storey dryly. “Unfortunately in this country a man is expected to be faithful even to a rich wife.”

“How tiresome!” said d’Escobar. “We manage better on the Continent.”

Their conversation (which I took down at the time) was too long to reproduce in its entirety. Suffice it to say that this young sprig was like wax in the clever hands of my mistress. Without committing herself to anything, she allowed him to suppose that his big black eyes had found a joint in her armour, and he became a little drunk with gratified vanity. She led him into making many admissions about himself. He knew how dangerous his situation was, for he was continually pulling himself up on the verge of some important disclosure. If he had had good sense he would never have come near our shop; it was about as safe for him as a lion’s den; but my mistress’s beauty and allure had been too strong for him. I could see (or

hear, rather), that he thought he was being very prudent, he had no idea how much he was giving away.

He said he had been in America for a year. He claimed to be descended from old Spanish grandee stock, but that was palpably a fiction. Under the veneer of elegance he revealed a sharp and common nature. I suspect that he had assumed the aristocratic name of d'Escobar for American use. We gathered that in Madrid he had really been of that flash type of sporting character which is common to great cities all over the world, a hanger-on of the bull-ring, and an associate of the most disreputable persons. He had been put to all sorts of shifts to make a living, and had unquestionably known what it was to go hungry. Among other expedients he had occasionally acted as a guide to tourists in Madrid, and in this way he had become acquainted with an American, who had offered to bring him to America and put him in the way of winning a rich wife.

This interesting fact slipped out inadvertently; d'Escobar, laughing instantly sought to turn it into a joke. Mme. Storey accepted it as a joke, and allowed him to change the subject. By the most circuitous course she gradually led him back to the fact of his American benefactor, and d'Escobar never realised whither he was being steered. He was very leery of giving any information in this direction. He could not be got to say anything definite about the man. He repeated that he had been given the money for his passage to America, but claimed that he had never seen the man after. Mme. Storey could not question d'Escobar directly, of course.

“What a funny man!” she said carelessly.

“Oh, he had so much money he didn't know what to do with it,” said d'Escobar.

“Then I hope he staked you well.”

“Staked me?”

“Gave you money, I mean, to get a start with.”

“No. Only for my passage.”

“What! Didn't he put you in the way of getting a job? Didn't he even give you letters to his acquaintances in America?”

“No.”

“What a heartless way to act!”

“Oh, he was a rich and impulsive Señor. Five minutes after he had given me the money he had forgotten me.”

“Well, I must say you showed pluck in venturing across the world to an unknown country where you couldn’t even speak the language.”

“What would you?” said d’Escobar; and I could imagine the careless shrug that accompanied the words. “My position in Madrid was hopeless. What is a gentleman to do without money? I am the last of my family. I had no influential relatives. In Spain a d’Escobar could not soil his hands with common labour; but in America it makes no difference.”

“That’s a fine spirit,” said Mme. Storey flatteringly.

“Oh, don’t let’s talk about me,” he said. “Let me go on telling you how beautiful you are! I could never tire of that!”

I could imagine my mistress’s slightly bored smile. But she gave him his head, and he rhapsodised to his heart’s content. She encouraged him with sly flattery. After a while she said:

“You poor boy! Do you know I am haunted by the thought of you landing in America friendless and without a cent!”

At this moment he was slightly giddy with gratified vanity, and he answered thoughtlessly: “Oh, I was well taken care of!”

To cover his slip—for she did not want him to break down, Mme. Storey said quickly: “By your fellow-Spaniards, I suppose.”

“Yes,” he said; “Spaniards. They got me jobs of one kind and another. As soon as I learned English I was all right.”

“You speak it awfully well.”

“Well, it was a question of life or death,” he said with a laugh.

“Did you have to live in one of those awful immigrant boarding-houses down near the Battery?” asked my mistress solicitously.

“No; but it wasn’t much better. It was a tall house overhanging a cliff with rocks at the bottom, and the river. You could toss things out of our windows right in the water.”

“Oh, somewhere out of town,” said Mme. Storey.

“No. It is right in New York. The Sound steamers go by.”

“I never heard of any cliffs in New York,” said Mme. Storey, to lead him on.

“It was a polyglot house,” he said. “There were six of us; a Frenchman, a Belgian, two Italians, a Rumanian and me.”

“All young fellows?” asked Mme. Storey idly.

“All young.”

“Only six of you in that big house? That doesn’t sound poverty-stricken.”

“Oh, we only had a flat on the ground floor. It was a fifteen family house.”

“Well, with six young fellows together, I expect you had a lively time.”

“No. They kept us too strict. The Countess was an old devil!”

“The Countess?”

“Oh, just a name we had for the French housekeeper. I was thankful when I graduated. All day long they kept us at our lessons like schoolboys; English and deportment.”

Mme. Storey took pains not to notice this slip, but he immediately became conscious of it. “Of course I didn’t have to have any lessons in deportment,” he hastily added laughing. “But the other fellows were ignorant peasants. They had to be taught how to behave before they could expect to get jobs in America.”

“Oh, of course,” said Mme. Storey.

For awhile he was uneasy, evidently fearing that he had given too much away. But my mistress’s bland and careless manner gradually restored his confidence. She applied judicious flattery again, and made no further attempt to get anything out of him.

When he left, he put his heels together, and bowing low from the waist, kissed her hand in the best Continental manner. It was charming. Mme. Storey invited him to come to her house on the following night. There is nothing like striking while the iron is hot.

VII

HE did not come to Mme. Storey's house. In fact we never saw him again. That handsome and too-talkative young man simply vanished.

On the following day another man replaced him in the rôle of John Jerrold's clerk. This one was obviously no more or less than a lawyer's clerk; a dull, plodding fellow, with no pretensions to gallantry. He does not figure in the story in any way.

We had already set on foot cautious inquiries among Jerrold's employees, and we learned that d'Escobar had simply not turned up for business the day before, and that nobody in the office knew where he was. Jerrold had given it out that he knew nothing about the young man's movements outside office hours, and was not sufficiently interested to inquire. From the same source we obtained d'Escobar's last address.

In company with Inspector Rumsey and myself, Mme. Storey immediately proceeded there. It was an old-fashioned walk-up apartment house on 104th street, which had been sub-divided into small suites, which were let furnished by the week. A thoroughly respectable house with no pretences to style. In such a house the tenants come and go with great frequency; d'Escobar had not been established there more than a fortnight, but his uncommon good-looks had fixed him in the minds of the employees. They called him "the handsome Dago."

From the negro telephone boy we got a fairly straight story. This was a Friday. On Wednesday evening, the boy said, that would be the evening of the day on which d'Escobar had tea at our office, the young Spaniard was called down to the telephone about eight o'clock. There were no extension 'phones in the building. The negro was standing beside him while he talked over the 'phone. It was very brief. Somebody must have told him he was wanted somewhere, for d'Escobar had said: "Is anything the matter?" He had apparently received a reassuring answer. He had then said: "All right, I'll come right away." The other person then said something, to which d'Escobar replied: "Very well, I'll be careful." He then hung up.

He asked the telephone boy to get him a taxi, and went up to his flat for his hat and coat. His flat was the second floor front, West. A taxi had been procured from a garage in 107th street. It would be easy to find the man who drove it. D'Escobar had never returned. They knew that because the maid

had reported his bed had not been slept in. He had carried no bag, nor anything at all in his hand when he went.

While Inspector Rumsey went to look up the chauffeur Mme. Storey and I were let into the flat. It was the usual thing, parlour, bedroom and bath, furnished in a cheap style, but comfortable enough. The most curious thing about it was, that the youth who lived there apparently had no personal belongings, no photographs, no knick-knacks, nothing but some packets of cigarettes and a couple of dog-eared paper-covered novels in Spanish, with lurid pictures on the covers. And his clothes, of course; he had plenty of those; and fine ones, too; all neatly put away on hangers in the wardrobe.

The place was in apple-pie order, but Mme. Storey's sharp eyes presently discovered evidence that it had been ransacked since the owner left. The lock of d'Escobar's trunk had recently been forced; the marks of the break were fresh. The contents of the bureau drawers were tumbled in a way that was incompatible with the orderliness of everything else. Of the coats hanging in the wardrobe, some of the fronts had been carelessly turned back, as by somebody hastily feeling for the breast-pockets. There was a little desk by the front windows, and a clean sweep had been made of that. Even the desk blotter had been carried away, as if in fear that it might reveal some tell-tale line of writing in a mirror. The negro boy, who had frequently been in the room, insisted that there had been a blotter on the desk two days before.

"Has any person visited these rooms to-day or yesterday?" Mme. Storey asked him.

"Not that I know of, Madam."

"But you would know if anybody had been here?"

"All kinds of strangers come in and out the house, Madam. I don't question them if they seem to know where they're going."

"Has any other boy been on duty in the hall?"

"Yes'm, I got a relief."

"This room is right over where you sit. If anybody had entered these rooms while you were on duty, you must have heard them."

"Yes'm. I reckon so."

"Have you seen a good-looking young foreign man passing in or out of the house to-day or yesterday?"

“No, Ma’am.”

“You would have taken note of such a one as that?”

“Yes’m. I sure would.”

The other boy having been sent for, he returned the same answers.

Finally Mme. Storey asked: “What time is the house closed?”

“Eleven o’clock. Madam. The switchboard is closed, and the outer door locked.”

“Every tenant has a key to the outer door, of course?”

“Yes’m. Every tenant gets two sets of keys when he moves in.”

Mme. Storey pointed to three keys on a string, which were hanging inside the entrance door to the flat. “There is one set,” she said. “Therefore, the person who ransacked this flat must have had d’Escobar’s keys.” She turned away to the window.

“What do you think of it?” I asked anxiously.

“I think,” she answered in a grave, low tone, “that our young friend has paid for his indiscretions to me, with his life.”

I turned a little sick with horror. Another murder! “Oh!” I breathed. At that moment I could think only of the young man’s beauty.

She looked at me queerly. “I can’t feel very sorry for him, Bella,” she said quite coolly. “This is a case of my country first. I don’t care how many of these scoundrelly young foreigners bite the dust if I am enabled to break up the traffic!”

I stared at her in amazement. At the moment I was not yet able to grasp the thing in its entirety.

Inspector Rumsey came in. He had got hold of the taxi-cab driver, who had told him that d’Escobar had ordered him to drive to the Metropolitan Building at Madison Avenue. The driver was interested in his fare because, he said, the handsome young foreigner reminded him of —— (He named a famous Motion Picture star.) And that seemed a funny address to give after business hours. So after he had set d’Escobar down, he drove on a little way, and stopped to watch him. It appeared that d’Escobar was only waiting for another taxi. He hailed the first one that came along, and was driven past the waiting car without noticing it. The chauffeur’s curiosity was now highly

excited, and he went to the trouble of taking down the number of the second taxi. He had furnished it to Inspector Rumsey.

There was nothing further to be learned at the Hundred-and-Fourth street house, and we separated in our several directions for dinner. At eight o'clock we came together again at Mme. Storey's house. Inspector Rumsey had brought along the second taxi-driver, and his car was at the door. This man had a clear recollection of his foreign-looking fare of two nights before. He had driven d'Escobar to the corner of Pleasant Avenue and a street in the Seventies. Pleasant Avenue is on the far East side. It corresponds to Avenue D further down town.

Mme. Storey suggested that we follow forthwith. She dressed herself in an inconspicuous coat and hat, and we set forth in the taxi. We found that Pleasant Avenue had been named without any regard to the fitness of things. It was a wide, raw, miscellaneous kind of thoroughfare on the edge of the Island. It was paved with granite blocks. At the point where we got out of the taxi, the roadway was torn up for repair, and further progress was blocked by a barrier. This driver's curiosity had not been excited by his fare, and he could give us no information as to what had become of him when he stepped out of the cab.

Telling the man to wait, we walked on up the street at a venture. This out-of-the-way avenue was well lighted, but was sparsely frequented after nightfall. A little way along we came to a great pile of granite blocks alongside the sidewalk. On the walk an old man was seated in a kitchen chair tipped back against the stones. His feet were cocked up on a rung of the chair, his derby was pulled over his eyes, and he was smoking a disreputable cutty pipe with evident enjoyment. Beside him on the pavement stood a watchman's lantern.

"He was probably sitting there two nights ago," murmured Mme. Storey. "Let us ask him."

The old man betrayed no sign of being aware of our approach, but as soon as he was spoken to, we realised that he had been watching us.

"Good-evening," said Mme. Storey.

"'Even', mum." He looked up at her sharply, but did not otherwise move. He was too old to be polite.

"Is it your job to watch these stones all night?" she asked.

"So it would seem, mum."

“But I shouldn’t think anybody would steal paving stones!”

This evidently touched a sore point.

“They’d steal anythin’, mum,” he said indignantly. “It ain’t but two nights ago since two of these very blocks was pinched. They was missed in the morning because the pile was piled regular. I caught hell for it.”

Now all three of us were thinking about two nights ago, and this simple fact seemed therefore as if it might have some significance for us.

“What on earth would the thief want of them!” said Mme. Storey.

“You kin search me, mum. No good purpose, I’ll be bound.”

“No good purpose,” she agreed thoughtfully.

I shivered.

“You see that taxi-cab standing there?” asked Mme. Storey.

“Well, I still got my eyesight, mum.”

“Did you see a taxi-cab stop in the same spot two nights ago, just at this time or a few minutes later?”

“Meanin’ no disrespect’, but what is that to you, mum?”

Turning back his coat, Inspector Rumsey exhibited the police badge. The old man’s chair came to the pavement with a thump. He stood up, and pulled off the battered derby. “Excuse me, Captain. And you, mum. But how was I to know? . . . Yes, I see’d a taxi stop there two nights ago this time. They ain’t common in these parts.”

“Did you see a man get out?”

“Yes’m.”

“What sort of man?”

“Handsome young foreign gent. Dressed real elegant.”

“That is the man. Did you see where he went?”

“Sure, mum. I ain’t got much to occupy myself. I watches every little thing. This young foreign gent, came right up here, and walked on up the avenue to the corner of Seventy- —— street. Then he turned down towards the river.”

“Did you see him come back?”

“No’m. He never come this way again.”

Mme. Storey gave him a tip, and we left him bowing and tipping the ridiculous derby.

We turned down the street the watchman had indicated. It was no more than a half block to the river. The end of the street was closed by a low stone parapet, topped by an iron railing. Looking through the bars, you beheld the East River was some forty or fifty feet below you, heaving silently and restlessly, showing a furtive gleam under the night sky. On the other side lay Blackwell's Island with its forbidding institutional buildings, already darkened for the night. Beyond that again, the other channel of the river, and the sparkling lights of the Long Island shore.

When my mistress and I looked at the last house on the South side of the street, I think we both knew what to expect. It was a five-storey, double flat-house of the style that was erected in such numbers twenty-five years ago and more; a fifteen family house; every New Yorker knows them. It is the type which intervenes between the villainous old "dumb-bell" tenement, and the "new-law" house. On the river side it fairly over-hung the cliff, being supported on a tall retaining wall with buttresses. Looking down we could see the rocks at the foot of the cliff. These would be partly covered when the tide rose.

Mme. Storey and I exchanged a look. By what a strange chain of circumstances we had been led to the very house we wished to find!

Seeing us look at each other. Inspector Rumsey asked if we knew the house.

"It is the house which has been described to us as containing the headquarters of the gang," said Mme. Storey. "The ground floor flat on the river side."

The front windows of that flat were dark. We could not see, of course, if there was any light in the rear. We knew the plan of that flat just as well as if we had been in it. On the ground floor the usual "private hall" of each flat is cut off by the entrance hall, and the rooms open out of each other in a string, sitting-room, one or two narrow bedrooms, dining-room and kitchen. On the other side of the entrance, there would be an exactly similar flat, and in the rear of the building a four or five room flat arranged in the form of a square.

My mistress was peering around. By this time I was able to follow her thought.

"However could they get down to the rocks?" I asked.

“What would they want to get down there for?” asked Rumsey innocently.

Mme. Storey pointed to a narrow opening at the end of the parapet, across the road from the flat-house. Here we found a rough, wooden stairway leading down to a ramshackle structure near the water’s edge. There was a little makeshift landing there, it was evidently a sort of bathing establishment for the neighbourhood. We saw that from the foot of the steps one could easily make one’s way back over the rocks to a point under the windows of the flat-house.

Mme. Storey said to Inspector Rumsey: “I suggest that the police come up the river in a launch to-night and grapple for a body off those rocks. Let them show no lights, and work with the greatest care in order to avoid attracting the attention of anybody in the flat. If a body should be found, let the fact be concealed until we can consult together.”

“But a strong tide runs up and down here,” objected the Inspector. “A body thrown in here might be found miles away.”

“Not if it was weighted down with two granite blocks,” said Mme. Storey gravely.

VIII

THAT night the body of Pedro d'Escobar was fished up from the bottom of the East River. It was found tied to a heavy canvas bag which contained the two paving stones. He had been garroted. The body was carried to a private undertaking establishment, and for the time being no word of the gruesome find was allowed to reach the press. Inspector Rumsey wanted to raid the flat where the murder had certainly been committed, but Mme. Storey shook her head.

"You would not find the principal there," she said, "and he's the only one who matters. If either of us makes the slightest false move he will escape us."

"Well, I'll see that the occupants are kept under surveillance," said Rumsey.

Mme. Storey still objected. "If any strange man were to appear in that quiet street, no matter if he were the cleverest sleuth on your staff, they would be sure to take alarm. Leave them to me. I will watch them myself."

Rumsey has unbounded confidence in my mistress—he has good reason for it; but he looked at her dubiously. "How could you . . . in such a neighbourhood," he began.

"You'll see," she said, smiling. "I'll keep in touch with you."

From that point on, Mme. Storey gave no direct attention to the murder of Arpad Rody. We would gradually approach that, she said, by way of the killing of the other handsome young foreigner. I could perceive the general outline of her theory, but I was still in a fog as to the actual connection between the two crimes.

We left the Harker case to be threshed out in the newspapers; and day by day they continued to make the most of it. To be sure, after the sensational disclosures of the first day, the result of their labours was mostly chaff; but it seemed to make little difference to the public; they subscribed for it just as eagerly. Two great parties were formed amongst the public; those who thought Van Sicklen Harker had fired the fatal shot; and those who ascribed it to Cornelia. Feeling ran high, and the newspapers were bombarded with letters. Both parties, however, were able to unite in idolising little Cornelia.

The "news" consisted almost exclusively of the successive efforts of the various persons connected with the case to break into the headlines. I remember that Algernon Bleecker succeeded in holding the centre of the stage for an entire day by getting himself ejected from the District-Attorney's office. I suppose he had made an intolerable nuisance of himself there, by reason of his self-imposed activities on behalf of the Harkers. The unfortunate District-Attorney had a hard row to hoe anyhow. He was the villain of the piece. He had to prosecute the public idol.

In the absence of any real news, the daily interview with Cornelia was the leading feature. Once a day in the prison, Cornelia held a levee for the gentlemen and ladies of the press. It was really rather scandalous; but the tide of popular interest in the case was simply not to be resisted. Every day, for my sins, I had to wade through many columns of the nonsense thus produced, in order to make sure that nothing of significance escaped Mme. Storey's attention.

The only time I was ever rewarded for my patience was upon stumbling on this paragraph in one of the more intelligent papers:

"The interview (with Cornelia) is limited to one hour. Every day between fifty and sixty newspaper men and women attend. In addition to the local press, every leading newspaper in the country has assigned a special writer to the case. As it would be impossible within this brief period of time for so many people to question Miss Harker, it became necessary for them to elect one of their number to talk to her. Miss Harker herself was invited to nominate the interlocutor, and her choice fell upon Mr. Albert Fleury of the *New York Universe*. Mr. Fleury is probably the youngest reporter on the case, and certainly the newest recruit to newspaperdom. His article yesterday on 'The Ideals of Cornelia Harker' was especially pleasing to that young lady. She held a clipping of it in her hand during the interview to-day. Mr. Fleury is a Belgian. He is an exceedingly personable young man; and his elegant manners are the despair of the graduates of Park Row."

When I showed this to Mme. Storey she said: "What, another! . . . Have you seen his articles?"

"Yes," said I. "They attracted my attention because they were even more fulsome than the general run."

"Hm!" she said; and reached for the telephone, to call up Morrow, managing editor of the *Universe*, who was an acquaintance of hers.

Morrow said the young man had been recommended to him by Sterner, a vice-president of the Corlears Trust; the banker said he had brought a letter of introduction from the president of the Union Leather Company, one of their largest customers; the leather manufacturer said he had him from John Jerrold the well-known lawyer.

“Hm!” said Mme. Storey again.

She did not call up John Jerrold.

“Bella,” she said, “I will write a meaningless letter to Cornelia, which will nevertheless sound important. You carry it down to her, taking care to deliver it while the reception to the press is going on. Then you can have a look at this young man.”

This is the report that I brought back to my mistress:

“Albert Fleury is several years older than d’Escobar, and, I should say a much wavier and more astute young man. I think he must have lived in America for a longer space of time, because he is thoroughly on to our ways, and can speak English with scarcely a trace of accent. But when he spoke to Cornelia I noticed that he stuck on the French accent. Like d’Escobar, he is extremely good-looking, but in an entirely different style, being tall, blonde, with strongly chiselled aquiline features that give him a bold look. When he speaks to Cornelia he allows a rapt look to come into his eyes; and a hushed tone into his voice. She is fascinated. The other reporters hate him; but he has firmly entrenched himself in her favour, and he doesn’t care. His eyes are false and shallow; but she can’t see that.

“During the few minutes that I was in the room, Fleury never appeared to look at me. He was *too* indifferent. It suggested to me that he was highly conscious of my presence; and on fire to learn what had brought me. He has undoubtedly been warned against us.”

“Well, naturally,” said Mme. Storey. “After what has happened.”

IX

DURING the early part of my association with Mme. Storey, I was solely the secretary and office-manager; there was never any question of my doing work in the field. Then in the Melanie Soupert affair, circumstances forced me to play the part of Canada Annie, and it was considered that I acquitted myself quite well. Since then I have been compelled to adopt a disguise on several occasions. Women operatives of the exact type that we require are very hard to find. And I have the sort of ordinary face that does not unduly impress itself on the memory. To be sure I have red hair, but that may be dyed black, or covered with a wig.

A few hours after Inspector Rumsey brought us the news of the recovery of d'Escobar's body, Mme. Storey and I might have been seen drifting up the sidewalk of Pleasant Avenue; but our closest acquaintances would never have recognised us. Mme. Storey was wearing a sandy wig, upon which was perched an odd little black bonnet; and her lovely complexion was made up to look coarsened and spoiled. Her figure was stuffed out under a cotton dress, and an old-fashioned, shabby black mantle. She was the good-natured New York cleaning-woman to the life—of Irish extraction. It was a treat to see how well she did the walk of a stout, middle-aged woman, still vigorous; coming down on the flat of her foot with every step.

I was a thinner, paler, younger edition of the same; not so good-humoured. My hair had been rendered drab and lifeless with water colour; and was screwed into a hard knot. I was wearing a bedraggled lace hat, and a ridiculous fawn-coloured jacket which was inches too big in the bust, and cocked up like a sparrow's tail behind. My skirt hung down behind in that dejected manner which is peculiar to scrub-women. All these were genuine old clothes; we made sure they were properly fumigated.

We walked a foot or two apart, talking so that anybody might hear. Mme. Storey did most of the talking; she has the East Side jargon down pat, whereas I have to think what I'm saying. She is richly humorous at such moments. It is her custom when we make these excursions into the lower world, to introduce me as a superior person, "who reads books." Her theory is, the more fantastic the part, the easier it is to get away with it. You can get away with anything, she says, so long as you can contrive not to look self-conscious.

Mme. Storey also possesses to a high degree the faculty of being able to enter into conversation with strangers. She paused to talk to a woman, loitering on one of the stoops. We were in search of a couple of nice cheap rooms, she announced. The woman hunted up the janitor, who showed us a hole into which the light of day scarce penetrated. Mme. Storey rejected it as being too dear.

“Aah! you won’t find nottin’ cheaper on t’ Avenoo,” the man said disgustedly. “You bett’r try t’ side streets.”

We turned into Seventy- —— Street. As I have said before, there was only about a hundred yards of it between Pleasant Avenue and the edge of the cliff. On the south side the flat-house at the corner ran back for a hundred feet; then there was another flat; then several nondescript wooden shanties; and finally the house overhanging the cliff. On the other side of the way, most of the space was taken up by a yard for the storage of wagons at night. On this side overlooking the river was a picturesque, old-fashioned wooden dwelling which was still fairly well kept up.

We went boldly into the house that we were interested in, to ask for rooms. It appeared that there were no vacancies. I looked with a little inward shiver at the partition which cut off the murder flat, wondering what was going on within at that moment. This flat had two doors opening on the long entrance hall of the house; one just inside the front door, which would lead into their parlour; the other further back, which would be their usual entrance, and would admit you to their dining-room.

On the other side of the road, adjoining the entrance to the wagon-yard, there was a little building which had once been a store, but now housed one of the quaint little manufactories, which are to be found everywhere in New York. Horse medicines were put up here. There were two windows over the store, which attracted Mme. Storey’s notice. With a jerk of the head to me, she headed across. Through the open door of the store came a strong smell of condition powders. A boy was engaged in breaking eggs into a small vat. His expression suggested that the eggs were not very fresh. He was the sole employee.

Mme. Storey beckoned the proprietor to the door. He was a tall, lanky horse-doctor; a genuine American type, such as is rare in New York. He looked like an original New Yorker, embittered by finding himself in a city of foreigners.

“What’s upstairs, Mister?” asked Mme. Storey genially.

“What’s that to you?” he answered sourly.

“Well, bein’ as t’ windas was so dusty, like, I t’ought maybe t’ rooms was vacant and . . .”

“They are vacant,” he said. “I give up tryin’ to rent ’em, because decent folk won’t live in such a place, and I don’t want no riff-raff.”

“Riff-raff!” cried Mme. Storey, planting her arms akimbo. “*Riff-raff!* I’d have you to know, Mister, that me and my sister here don’t answer to no such description. Poor we may be but . . .”

“Aah, keep yer hair on,” he said disgustedly. “I wasn’t gettin’ at you. . . . There’s no conveniences. You’d have to come down to the yard for water.”

“Well, I could stand that if it was cheap enough,” said Mme. Storey. “Me an me sister, we ain’t got no man to provide for us. . . .”

“Any children?” he asked suspiciously.

“Divil a chick!” she said, beaming.

He finally condescended to show us the rooms; and after a spirited bargaining, an agreement was struck at \$3.15 per week. The first week’s rent was paid over on the spot. The landlord’s parting shot as he went out of the door was:

“Mind you, if you’ve got a passel of brats waitin’ round the corner, out you’ll go next week! I know you Irish!”

Mme. Storey and I rocked in silent laughter.

To reach our new quarters, you mounted an outside stairway from the wagon-yard. It was not a very inviting place; it had been given up to the dust and the rats for many a month, years maybe; and it was pervaded by a strong smell of horse liniment. But that didn’t matter so much since we had no intention either of eating or sleeping there. We congratulated ourselves on obtaining so good a point of vantage. We were not immediately opposite the house overhanging the cliff; but everybody who entered or left it, passed our windows.

From a second-hand store in Pleasant Avenue we purchased for camouflage, cots, chairs, a table, some pots and pans and a cook stove.

There was a teamster’s family living in a shanty at the back of the wagon-yard, and the wife, who could see nothing from her own windows, seemed to spend the time standing at the gate yard. Within an hour, Mme. Storey had struck up a great friendship with her. She proved an invaluable

source of information. She missed nothing that passed in our street; moreover, she was the intimate friend of the wife of the janitor across the way.

The particular flat which we were watching, had aroused considerable interest in the street, owing to the invariable comeliness of the young men who lodged there. "They may be Wops or Huns or Dagoes or whatnot, mum, but they're always pretty fellows," said our informant. "It seems funny." The housekeeper was known as the French Madam. Before the afternoon was out, the teamster's wife was able to point her out to us, returning with her purchases from the store. We saw an enormous shapeless figure swathed in black, moving slowly along under the burden of her fat, looking from side to side with sullen pained eyes. Her face showed the remnants of a rather remarkable beauty, ruined by fat and evil living. It was a tragic and a sinister figure.

Thereafter, during the hours of daylight, one or another of us was always on duty in the rooms over the horse medicine shop. We cemented our friendship with the wife of the teamster. That honest woman brewed her own beer in the shack at the back of the wagon yard. It was a vile decoction; but it was the occasion of friendly little gatherings every morning, which enabled us to meet Mrs. Regan, the wife of the janitor across the street.

Mrs. Regan didn't like the French Madam. "Aah! the big fat slob!" said she, blowing the froth off her beer. "I'd like to paste her one!"

"What for?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Aah, she ain't just human, like. Not like you and me. Looks at you like you was dirt!"

It reassured us to learn that the French Madam had just paid a month's rent in advance. Evidently they had no intention at the moment of giving us the slip. At this time she only had two lodgers, whom Mrs. Regan described to us as a dago and a little Frenchy. The dago was a bad egg, she said; once he had kicked her cat clear off the sidewalk just for getting in his way. But Frenchy was a nice little feller. He looked real sorrowful at being in such company. She could even supply their names. According to her the dago was called Hot-Willy Oh-come-all-ye; and Frenchy Denny the Cash-boy.

When we were alone I asked Mme. Storey what she could make of these extraordinary appellations.

She answered without hesitation: "Attilio Camagli and Denis de Cachebois."

We had no difficulty in identifying our men. They were sent out every afternoon for an aimless walk. These were the neophytes; they were still shabbily dressed. Apparently there was no love lost between them, for they always separated on the doorstep. The French boy would turn aside and remain staring at the river through the bars of the railing until the Italian had walked off out of sight. This French lad was as pretty as a girl. He was evidently of the Northern provinces, with tight blonde curls all over his head, and big blue eyes which were at once saddened, and secretly terrified. What had those eyes beheld, I wondered. As soon as she saw him, Mme. Storey said:

“They slipped up when they picked him. He’s already cracking under the strain.”

The Italian on the other hand was a big, stalwart fellow, black as the Knave of Spades. He was undeniably good-looking; but with the good-looks of a brigand. His full, red lips were curved in a perpetual sneer; He looked at women through his lowered sooty eyelashes with an expression of insolent triumph.

“Good Heavens!” said I, “surely no gently brought-up girl would ever fall for him!”

“On the contrary,” said Mme. Storey, “if they can give him a slight veneer of good manners, that sort of man is irresistible to inexperienced girls.”

On the second day after we had installed ourselves in our rooms, we arranged it so that we ran into the French boy on Pleasant Avenue, as he was listlessly drifting home. Mme. Storey addressed him in French. The effect was electrical; he stopped short, his cheeks coloured up, his eyes glistened. He answered her in a perfect torrent of his own tongue.

I do not know the language myself, but Mme. Storey speaks it like a native; and I am continually listening to her. She was not speaking good French now, but a sort of jargon. However, he understood it well enough. It was pathetic to see how the boy’s whole nature went out to her. They talked a little while then suddenly he choked up, and the blue eyes filled. He put his head down, and fairly ran away.

“That kid is worth saving,” murmured my mistress.

“How on earth did you account to him for your ability to speak French?” I asked.

“Oh, I told him I was a hospital cook in France during the war,” she said shrugging.

“What made him cry?”

“I spoke to him of his own country.”

On a subsequent afternoon when I went to the rooms on Seventy- — Street to relieve Mme. Storey, I found little Denis there. I could hear his eager, rapid voice as I went up the outside stair. It still held a suggestion of the reedy tones of boyhood. He stopped abruptly when I went in. Evidently, from his face, the tears had been falling again. My presence embarrassed him very much, and he soon left. When the door closed behind him, I looked at my mistress inquiringly.

“Oh, he was very discreet,” she said, reaching for a cigarette. When we were alone in the flat, the contrast between Mme. Storey’s absurd make-up and the natural elegance of all her movements, created a very strange effect indeed. She was like some delightful, incredible figure out of a dream. “The fate of d’Escobar is still fresh in his mind,” she went on. “He confined himself to talking about La Belle France.”

On the following afternoon I ran into Denis loitering unhappily along the pavement of Pleasant Avenue. He gave me a piteous look, and glanced in terror over his shoulder. Clearly he wished to speak to me, and was afraid to do so. Close beside me there was a fruit and vegetable display on the sidewalk, and in order to give him a chance, I paused, and affected to look over it.

He drifted up to my side, and likewise scanned the vegetables in the manner of an intending purchaser. Out of the corner of his mouth he murmured in his charming broken English: “Please . . . not to look at me Miss. Please . . . to tell your sister I can’t come no more. Please . . . I thank her from my heart for the kindness to a French boy. Please . . . if we meet on the street do not notice me at all. It is very dangerous.”

With that he was gone.

X

MME. STOREY had seen the janitor's wife enter the wagon-yard below, and before knocking off for the day, my mistress went to pay a call at the teamster's shanty to see if anything new was to be picked up. Meanwhile I sat down to my vigil at the window. We had taken care not to wash the windows, and the accumulated grime offered a very good screen for any one watching from within.

I saw Dennis return home from his empty wanderings about the streets. He was followed shortly afterwards by Camagli, the Italian lad, whose cruel, complacent, half-sleepy expression suggested a gorged cat-animal. He had been up to some mischief I could have sworn. This would be about half-past three.

Half an hour later I saw coming at a smart pace from the direction of Pleasant Avenue, a man I had never seen before, but I instantly guessed that he was connected with our case. Like all the others, he too, was a pretty fellow, but a few years older than those we had been dealing with, and completely Americanised. He was foreign born, but his foreign expression was gone. Hat, coat, boots, gloves all suggested Madison Avenue. He was just such a figure as you may pick out between Forty-Second and Forty-Seventh any day in the year. He had a grace of feature and of figure that filled me with a helpless anger, because you could see with half an eye that he was perfectly worthless. Physical beauty has us all at such a disadvantage! He had a look of arrogant authority, a trick that is very easily learned—especially if your pockets are well-lined. Young as he was, his face was beginning to be marked by dissipation. One of his eyebrows was cocked a little higher than the other, which made him look as attractive as the devil, and bad clear through.

He disappeared within the flat-house across the way. I was filled with excitement. Would this be the leader, the directing spirit, the master mind, that Mme. Storey was so keen about laying her hands on? Somehow I doubted that; there was no power in that handsome face. More likely a successful graduate of the academy. I was in a horrid state of indecision whether to stay at the window or go warn my mistress.

I remained where I was; and it was well that I did so; for almost immediately all three young men issued out of the house together. He with the lifted eye-brow walked in the middle with Denis and Attilio on either

hand. The neophytes were regarding the finished product with respect, not to say awe. The three of them set off briskly for Pleasant Avenue.

It was of the highest importance to find out where they were going if I could. Snatching up my things, I slipped down the stairway, and out through the gate of the wagon-yard. There was no time to warn Mme. Storey then. I was close behind my three men, but on the other side of the street. I could not cross over, of course, nor appear to be hurrying unduly. From where I was I brought to bear on them whatever powers of observation my mistress has succeeded in fostering in me.

The man with the lifted eye-brow was talking animatedly to the two youngsters, but in low tones, for they held their heads close to hear. Since they were of different races, I judged he would be speaking in English; but alas! there was no chance of my over-hearing a word! He was evidently instructing them; they listened like children. Fortunately for me, he had retained something of the foreign habit of gesticulation. Pausing for a moment, he leaned over and drew the back of his hand down the seam of his trouser leg, the other two following him with eager attention. Next he threw back the lapels of his coat, and pointed to his waist line. Pausing again, he made Attilio stand back a step, and gazing at him through half-closed eyes, drew his spread hand down through the air, like a painter visualising a picture. Little Denis he dismissed with a curt gesture.

At the corner they turned down town. I was now half a block behind them, and the people in front of the shops obstructed my view. To my great disappointment I saw that there was a taxi-cab waiting below the barrier where the street improvements began. They got into it, and were driven away. There was no other taxi to be had in that part of town. I had to let them go.

When I returned to our rooms I found Mme. Storey there, somewhat surprised at my absence. I described to her exactly what I had seen. She smiled to herself. She waved aside my regrets at having been prevented from following the young men further.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said. “It is obvious where they have gone.”

“Where?” I asked like a child.

“He is taking them to the tailors’ to be measured for their new clothes.”

Why of course!

“Say half an hour to go,” she said computing to herself; “an hour to be measured; another half an hour to return. Now if Madame la Comtesse will

only go out as usual at this hour to do her shopping . . .”

“There she is,” I said, pointing to where the woman was at that moment turning sideways, to lower her huge bulk carefully down the steps of the flat-house. “But why?”

“I am going over to have a look at that flat,” she said.

My heart sunk like a stone. “Oh-h!” I groaned. “Think of the danger!”

She shrugged. “The principal danger is that they take alarm too soon,” she said. “I must chance that. As for myself, well, I have this.”

From the battered little bag that she carried as part of her present make-up, she took an automatic pistol, and slipped it inside the stuffed out bodice of her dress. The sight of the ugly, black weapon made me feel a little sick.

“How will you get in?” I cried. “Have you got a key?”

She shook her head. “When we were in the hall of that house I took note of the lock on the door. Old-fashioned spring lock. Child’s play to open, as many a sneak-thief in New York has discovered to his profit. This is the tool he uses. I’ve been keeping it in readiness.”

From the bag again, she produced a small rectangular piece of steel so thin and lissom that it could be bent over until the ends touched.

Now I am no heroine, as those of you have read these stories must know by this time. Whenever a situation like this arises, my heart simply turns to water, and I would give a million dollars to be safe out of it. At the same time there are certain things that, afraid or not, one is forced to do.

“Well, if you’re going, I’m going too,” I said in a very disagreeable voice.

Mme. Storey laughed, and gave me an affectionate glance. “There is no need of it, my Bella, really.”

“You will have to examine into everything,” I said. “You need me to stand watch in case they return.”

“I can trust my ears for that,” she said. “There are two entrances to the flat.”

“I don’t care what you say,” I said. “I’m coming.”

“Very well,” she said coolly. “Come ahead.”

We stood at the gate of the wagon-yard until Madame in her snail-like progress had turned the corner of Pleasant Avenue. Then across the street, and into the flat-house. The entrance door was never locked during the day. My poor heart was beating like a trip-hammer. Some day I shall have heart failure at such a moment, and disgrace myself eternally. Proceeding down the narrow hall, Mme. Storey rapped on the door which led into the dining-room of the flat we meant to enter.

“This is the proper procedure,” she whispered to me, grinning. “A sneak-thief always knocks first.”

I was in no condition to answer her grin. I stood between her and the entrance door in case anybody should enter or leave. I was straining my ears for sounds from the flat opposite. One of our greatest dangers was that the door immediately behind us might be opened at that moment.

The doors of these cheaply-built houses are always ill-fitting. That’s what the sneak-thief counts on. While I made a shield for her with my body, Mme. Storey inserted her wafer of steel opposite the keyhole of the spring lock, and worked it in, pressing the lock back. In a few seconds we were inside. She softly closed the door.

Shaking like a person in an ague, at first I could see nothing.

“Take heart, Bella,” she said cheerfully. “Remember, we have only to run out into the street to be safe.”

The extremity of my fear passed, and I looked around me with a growing curiosity. I was astonished, I remember, to find the place so orderly. One thinks of abandoned criminals as living in filth and squalor; but this flat, while it contained nothing but the barest necessities, was a model of neatness and cleanliness.

“That’s the French of it,” remarked Mme. Storey.

There was a table covered with a red and white checked cloth, and half a dozen cheap wooden chairs standing about. Another plain deal table served them for a sideboard. A sewing machine under one of the two windows gave the room a homely touch. There was also a much worn arm-chair standing with its back towards the entrance to the bedroom. No pictures; no touches of ornament of any sort, it was like the eating-room in a humble estaminet.

We looked into the kitchen at the rear. The same rigorous neatness prevailed there. Nothing of interest to us in that room. On the other side of the dining-room you entered the first bedroom through an archway hung with a pair of shabby chenille portieres. This was Madame’s room. To obtain

a little privacy, she had hung cotton curtains around her bed in the French manner. We found nothing in that room. Next came a short hallway connecting the two bedrooms of the flat. The bathroom opened from it. Nothing for us there.

The second bedroom was evidently shared by Denis and Attilio. It had two cots. The moment we entered this room Mme. Storey pointed to a great hook which had been screwed into the top of the window frame outside the sash. No comment was necessary. On the floor of the wardrobe we found lying a coil of new rope, and a pulley. Above the rope, amongst other clothes, hung the elegant grey suit that d'Escobar had worn when he came to tea with Mme. Storey. His hat was there also, and his shoes. In one of the pockets of the coat within a twist of paper, we found the ring with a turquoise scarab that I had seen upon his finger; also his gold pencil and his tortoise-shell cigarette case of the latest design.

“How methodical!” said Mme. Storey grimly.

From a drawer in the bottom of the wardrobe she presently took a sinister little object. It was a circle of steel not much thicker than a heavy wire. The ends were pulled together by a long screw which turned with a handle.

“What is that?” I gasped, though in my heart I knew already.

“One form of a garrotte,” said Mme. Storey.

Before my mind's eye I could see the devilish instrument slowing drawing around the comely throat of that poor, foolish d'Escobar who had talked too much. I covered my face with my hands; but that didn't shut out the sight. Mme. Storey put the thing back.

In front of this bedroom was still another room, which would ordinarily serve as the parlour of the flat. But these people had used it as an extra bedroom. It had a window looking on the street. There were three cots placed about the walls; all neatly covered with spreads, but having no bedding beneath. Obviously this room was not being used at the present time. As I have mentioned before, it had a door leading into the public hall of the house. This door had a spring lock like the other one, also the common lock that is in every door. The key was in this lock, and it was turned. This fact afforded me no little comfort, as showing that the occupants could not come in that way, and catch us between two fires.

When Mme. Storey beheld the turned key she smiled to herself. I did not then realise what was passing through her mind.

Our tour of the flat had consumed a good bit of time, and I was getting horribly anxious about the possible return of the occupants. My mistress, absorbed in her patient investigation, was absolutely oblivious to the danger. I suggested that I had better take up my stand behind the lace curtains at the front windows; and she agreed. She went back into the rear of the flat; and for another space of time I neither saw nor heard anything of her. Finally I could bear it no longer. I softly called her back.

“Our two hours is about up,” I said. “We *must* go!”

She said: “I’m not going, Bella.” She pointed to the turned key. “I have a perfect line of retreat. The opportunity is too good to be missed. I desire to overhear their talk.”

A sort of despair seized me. It was useless to attempt to argue with her. “Well, if you must, you must,” I said. “I’ll have to stay too.”

“There’s no need of that,” she said. “Why, you’re terrified at the mere idea.”

“I know I am,” I said crossly. “But if I had to sit there across the road watching for you to come out that would be worse. I couldn’t stand that.”

Mme. Storey, being entirely unacquainted with fear, never realises what I suffer at such moments. “Oh, all right,” she said cheerfully. “Two watchers are better than one.”

In due course I saw the three young men approaching on the sidewalk. As I could only see a few yards along the street, without exposing myself, they were almost at the steps.

“Here they come!” I gasped.

Mme. Storey looked over my shoulder. “The third man is Raymo Borghini,” she said coolly. “One meets him everywhere. He married Mildred Winterson, daughter of the basket-machine millionaire.”

XI

WE remained in the front room, taking care to unlock the door into the hall, and to catch back the spring lock, in case we had to make a quick getaway. The three young men were taking no pains to be quiet, and we could follow all their movements. They came into the bedroom to hang up their hats and coats. Ah! how my heart beat when one of them came to the very door behind which I stood! They were talking in English. Clothes was still the subject. I did not hear the voice of little Denis.

They then returned to the dining-room. Mme. Storey stole through the first bedroom, and the little hall into the second bedroom, and I followed perforce. It was their habit to leave all the doors open except the door into the front room; and this saved us a lot of trouble. We were now separated from them only by the portieres hanging in the archway. Thank God! in the actual moment of danger there is something that comes to your support. I was still afraid; but I had command of my faculties now.

It was growing dark out-of-doors, and they switched on the light in the dining-room. We could hear every word they said; and we could even catch glimpses of them as they moved back and forth in front of the narrow interstice between the portieres. There was a pause while matches were struck, and they drew deep at cigarettes. Presently the aroma came wafting through the portieres, and I heard a little sigh of desire escape my mistress. For more than two hours she had been deprived of her usual stimulus.

We had no difficulty in distinguishing between the various voices. Camagli's was a rumbling bass; Borghini's, the Americanised one, a smooth baritone with a sneer. We already knew the sound of Denis's voice; but he rarely spoke. Camagli said something in Italian, and Borghini quickly caught him up.

"Speak English! You've got to learn to think in English."

"One suit!" grumbled Camagli. "What good one suit!"

"I was only obeying instructions," said Borghini. "The Maestro wants to see how you look in it, before he puts any more money into you. You're dumb, Attilio! My God! with your looks and figure you ought to rise high. You've got everything—except the trifling matter of brains."

"You order t'ree suit for Denis."

“Denis can wear clothes. It comes natural to him.”

“Yah! Denis, he scare’ of a shadow. He trembla if you frown.”

“Well, that’s up to the Maestro. What I’m trying to do is to lick you into shape . . . Walk across the room and back.”

Camagli obeyed, presumably.

“Elbows in; chest out; head up;” commanded Borghini. “Rise on the ball of your foot.”

“I am doing so,” growled Camagli angrily.

“Sure, you are,” said Borghini sarcastically, “just as if you were pulled by strings! You’ve got to keep on doing it, too, until you look as if you were born to it . . . Denis, show the mutt how a European gentleman walks into the room.”

“Show me, you,” growled Camagli.

“Oh, I’m an American now,” laughed Borghini. “I can do as I damn please. I’ve landed my fish!”

The crack of light that came between the portieres showed me the look of set, cold anger on my mistress’s face.

Denis illustrated as he was bid. At that moment Camagli was standing close to the portieres with his back to us, and we heard him mutter:

“By God! I’ll kill the little ——!” The epithet was in Italian.

“That won’t improve *your* style any,” sneered Borghini.

Down the public hall outside, we heard approaching an unmistakable, slow pad, pad, pad. Mme. Storey and I softly retreated into the front room, closing the last door after us. We heard the old “Countess” enter the dining-room, and address the young men complainingly. Her voice was as hoarse as a man’s. She then entered her own room. After a while we heard her go back and join in the conversation. We waited a moment or two, then stole back to our former post of observation.

She had seated herself in the shabby arm-chair, which, as I have said, was a little to one side, and immediately in front of the curtained archway. By peeping sideways through the crack between the portieres I could just see the coil of greasy hair on top of her head which was still as black as a raven’s wing; also one shapeless forearm, and puffy hand. She was busy with something that I could not quite follow. I heard a click as of an opening

box; the hand appeared outstretched with a flicking movement; then she sniffed loudly, and the box snapped shut. I did not get it until in dumb-play, Mme. Storey illustrated to me the act of taking snuff.

The old woman was sitting there, grumbling away in French. The young men paid no attention to her. The lesson was still going on. Borghini was making Camagli take a cigarette and go through the motions of lighting it over and over. Borghini said:

“As soon as you do it right you can have the Spaniard’s tortoise-shell case for your own.”

As he said that it happened that Denis was just in line with my vision through the crack, and I saw an involuntary spasm of horror pass over the white face. I shivered too.

The old woman, angered at being ignored, raised her voice, and Borghini barked at her over his shoulder:

“Aah! you know that Attilio and I can’t speak your lingo. If you want to be answered, speak English!”

She did not, however, repeat what she had been saying. She took snuff again.

“Now come on,” said Borghini, in the voice of a snappy college coach; “make out that the Countess is a rich American dame who has asked you to dinner. Come in from the kitchen, and pay your respects.”

Camagli proceeded to obey. As he crossed the dining-room Borghini warned him:

“Mind! No matter how many people there are in the room, you must keep your eyes on her!”

I could only see the end of this performance; that is, where he bent from the waist to kiss the bloated hand that was extended from the easy chair. I was astonished to see how well he did it. He was probably only of peasant stock. He was no more than four feet from me, and for the first time I realised how good-looking he was in his swarthy, insolent fashion. From a purely animal standpoint, he was the handsomest of them all. I was appalled to think of the harm he might work.

Borghini was not satisfied. “Denis, show him how,” he said.

If I thought Camagli did it well, when Denis did it I saw the real thing. He kissed that unpleasant-looking paw with a reverential air that was

irresistible. He must have had good blood. Certainly his father and his grandfather had been doing that before him.

“You’ll never be able to do it like that,” said Borghini to Camagli, “but you can keep on trying.”

“Ah well, Denis, he is Franche,” rumbled the old woman. “Dere ees no lovairs anywhere lak de Franchmens.”

Borghini made a coarse rejoinder that I need not repeat. “Denis has style,” he added, “but he’s got no more spirit than a louse.”

“Ah, well,” said the Countess, taking snuff, “dere ees all kin’ reech girls, too. When le Maestro fin’ nice, sof’ gentle lil girl, it will be Denis’s turn.”

Camagli was obliged to repeat the hand-kissing performance. Borghini planted himself astride a chair with his arms resting on the back, and exhorted them from the heights of his superior experience.

“You fellows ought to be damned glad to work like hell for a few months. It means a palace on Easy Street for the rest of your lives. After you catch your bird you don’t have to keep up this foolishness. You can let yourself go. Never forget how lucky you are that the Maestro’s eye fell on you. He does all the real brain work. Nothing is required from you but a little high-class comedy. You can depend on the Maestro. He’s no piker. Nothing less than eight figures attracts him. Eight figures; do you get it? And dollars at that. I couldn’t do the sum in lire or francs. Look at Albert Fleury. He’s the lucky dog. Booked for Rody’s widow. But there are plenty of others.

“These girls get the bit between their teeth early. They’ve already got the old man well broke before we come along. So everything is right for us. They get the mon’ out of the old man, and we get it out of them, see? I can give you plenty of points how to make your wife fork out. They take this hand-kissing business seriously; they think we’re going to keep it up. Oh Gee! it makes me laugh to think of the surprise that is waiting for them. They don’t understand us Europeans; they think we’re soft-headed, and easy led by the nose like their own men. Whenever you get sick of kissing their hands, remember, your time is coming. Some of them have got spirit, of course. They’ll kick you out. But that’s all right. You can make it cost them a hell of a good price to get rid of you; and if there’s been no public scandal, the Maestro will put you on to something new.

“All you fellows have got to do is to stick to the Maestro. He’s a great man. Lie back on him; he’ll run your show for you. Could you ask more?”

But never, never allow yourselves to think that you can get along without him. His arm can reach right around the world. You saw what he did to d'Escobar last week. And you know what happened to Arpad Rody a few days before that. Rody, the poor fool, was so swollen up with having married the Harker billions that he dared to hold out on the man who had gotten it all for him. Well, pow! Rody got a bullet through the brain, and that was the end of him . . . !”

I glanced at my mistress marvelling for the hundredth time at the unerring intuition which guides her. Leaving police, public and press to mill around in a futile circle unable to decide whether Van Sicklen Harker or Cornelia had shot Arpad Rody, she had struck off alone on the true course.

Borghini continued in the same vein, but furnished us with no further information of first-rate importance. While he talked, and Mme. Storey watched him with a stern set face, I saw her unconsciously fingering the place in her bodice under which the pistol lay. Involuntarily the thought had come into her mind that was in my own: What a deed of righteousness it would be to shoot down this conscienceless young scoundrel!

Finally Borghini resumed the lesson. He said to Camagli: “Make out that Denis is the girl you have been told to take down to dinner. Bring her to the table. . . . Don’t poke your elbow at her like a gowk. Just have your arm ready in case she wants to take it. . . . Beside your plate you’ll find four or five knives and as many forks according to the number of courses that are to be served. Leave them lay; that’s all you got to do. They’re fixed especially for boobs like you. You can’t go wrong if you take the outside one each time. The littlest knife is the butter spreader. . . .”

At intervals throughout this scene, the old woman in front of us had been taking snuff. Each time she helped herself to a pinch, she flicked the surplus powder off her thumb nail on the air. I was so absorbed in the scene, that the possible effect on myself never occurred to me until I felt the sneeze coming between my eyes. Oh, Heaven! A sneeze is supposed to be a comic performance; but I assure you that was the most dreadful moment in my whole life! That sneeze came upon me as relentless as doom!

I turned and fled from the portieres. Mme. Storey must have thought I was crazy. I got across the first room, and through the little hall. In the second bedroom, as I reached for the handle of the door into the parlour, it overtook me. I buried my face in my arm, but the sneeze broke through with a roar. I have never sneezed like that before or since.

In an instant Mme. Storey was at my side. We heard a chair overturn in the dining-room, and the sound of running feet. We got into the parlour. The door into the public hall was unlocked; but it had not been opened for some time; and it stuck. Oh, the agony of that moment! By the time we got it open, Camagli had run through the public hall, and we found him facing us. He charged blindly through the door, forcing us both back, and kicked the door shut behind him. At the same moment I was struck over the head from behind.

All the strength ran out of my limbs like water; and I sank to the ground. I was not completely unconscious; for I was aware that somebody had turned on the light. And I could still hear the sounds of the struggle; but no cries, only a strident, furious whispering. I heard one man gasp out: "Madame Storey!" I, myself, was desperately striving to cry out, but I had no power over my tongue. That nightmare horror of being unable to make a sound is the last thing I remember. Everything turned black.

XII

I CAME drifting back to consciousness in the same manner that I had drifted away. First I was merely aware of *being*; then I heard a droning sound that resolved itself into a murmur of voices; then I opened my eyes and beheld the light. I found myself sitting in a chair. The first object that resolved itself out of the general haze was the figure of Mme. Storey seated in another chair beside me. Her eyes were fixed upon me, big with concern. When they met my eyes they smiled wonderfully; but she had a handkerchief over her mouth. For a moment my poor, confused wits puzzled over that, then full consciousness returned with a jerk.

It was an awakening to despair; for I perceived that my mistress was tied to the back and to the legs of the chair in which she sat; and the handkerchief was a gag. She had lost the sandy wig and the little black bonnet, and her own shining dark hair had shaken down about her head. Mme. Storey bound and helpless! My world was in ruins. To be sure, I was in the same condition; but that seemed to be a matter of small moment. That one so glorious as she should be at the mercy of this scum of humanity, was to me an outrage too great to be borne. Yet her eyes were calm and clear; there was even a hint of amusement in them.

I had the dreadful feeling that I was responsible for her plight. Had she been alone, she could no doubt have escaped; but she could not leave me behind. Somewhere in that populous house I heard a door slam. How sharp the pain of the realisation that the ordinary life of New York was going on all about us while we lay there helpless. In my agony of mind I groaned under the gag, and strained at the ropes that bound me. Borghini cursed me under his breath. I cared nothing for that; but Mme. Storey warned me with her eyes to be silent; and I obeyed her.

The four members of the gang were sitting around one side of the table, all facing us at a distance of ten or twelve feet. The obese Frenchwoman was planted in her chair like a shapeless sack of flesh. A bottle of cognac, and Mme. Storey's pistol lay on the table before her. The three young men leaned across with their heads close, whispering together; and darting furtive looks of terror at Mme. Storey's proud head. However little Denis may have been disposed towards us and towards them in the beginning, terror had driven him back into their arms. He was one with them now.

It was no satisfaction to me to see that they were terrified of my mistress even bound as she was. They had caught more than they bargained for; they were paralysed by the magnitude of the situation; they did not know what to do. But I knew only too well, that a frightened man is more dangerous than an angry one. There lay the loaded pistol on the table; and how easy to solve an impossible situation with a bullet! At any moment I expected to see one of the men snatch it up. I gave up hope.

How terrible it was to *see* them discussing our fate, and not to be able to follow the discussion. I knew they must be talking English, for it was the only language common to the four of them. At first all that was plain was that they could not agree. Borghini argued in vain. He had lost his ascendancy over Camagli. That man's furious brutality now showed forth without disguise. And Denis in the extremity of his terror seemed to side with him. The woman said little. She was the least afraid of the quartette. She had more than one pull at the bottle, and her drunken eyes fixed themselves on Mme. Storey, stupid with hate.

Finally they began to quarrel, and their voices rose.

“La garrotte!” said the old woman in her hoarse, guttural voice.

“Denis, bring me la garrotte! It ees the only way!”

Denis, however, made no move.

“No, by God!” said Borghini, banging the table. (He evidently wished us to hear this.) “I’ve kept clear of murder up to now, and I’ve no desire to feel an electrode on the back of my neck!”

“Yah!” snarled Camagli, threatening him with his fist. “I’ll kill you too! You t’ink you get out of it, eh? You t’ink you leave us to pay!”

Borghini sprang up and away from the man. He was yellow with fright. “You fool!” he snarled, “if we get to fighting amongst ourselves, she’ll escape!”

“La garrotte!” repeated the old woman stupidly.

“Oh, for God’s sake!” cried Borghini. “She wouldn’t have ventured in without support. She may have twenty men concealed in the street.”

The woman shrugged ponderously. “Then we hang any’ow,” she said. “I’ll keel her first.”

“This is not a question for any of us to decide!” cried Borghini. Bethinking himself of prudence, he went around the table, and whispered in

the old woman's ear. This time I was able to read his lips. He said: "The Maestro must know."

"Who's to tell him?" she asked.

"I will. I'll telephone."

Like a cat, Camagli sprang between Borghini and the door. "Non! Non! Non!" he said, showing his teeth like an animal; and wagging his uplifted palm back and forth. "If de police is dere, he bring him in to save his own skin! I will go. I am true!"

Borghini affected to shrug. He scribbled what I suppose was a telephone number on a scrap of paper; and handed it over to Camagli. Glancing at his wrist watch, Borghini addressed Camagli in Italian; but the old woman pounded the bottle and commanded him to speak English.

"He'll be at home," said Borghini. "At this hour he is dressing for dinner. You had better hang about our steps for a bit, to see if you are watched. Walk up and down the street. Stand in front of our window, and make out you're giving a signal to somebody inside. Then if you're not interfered with you may know there's nobody on watch. Telephone from the booth in the drug-store. Don't give anything away over the telephone. Just tell him we've got the Bird of Paradise and her partner caged here; and what's to be done with them."

"When you come back," put in the old woman with a truly hideous smile. "Buy a basket, wid a covaire and steal two paving stones. We will need dem to-night."

Camagli fetched his hat and coat and went out. Borghini, biting his fingers in suspense, brushed past me, and went on through to the front of the flat. I supposed that he had gone to watch what became of the other. He remained away. That left the Frenchwoman and Denis facing us. The woman took a pull at the bottle, and undertook to feed her hatred by taunting my mistress. She spoke in English. I shall not repeat her foul and stupid words. Mme. Storey was oblivious to them.

Failing to obtain any satisfaction, the old woman fell silent, and thenceforward devoted herself to the bottle. We were all silent; and in that silence a strange little drama acted itself out. The woman was too drunk by now to perceive what was going on under her nose. I, of course, was always watching my mistress. Being alongside of her I could not see directly into her face, but I could see that her gaze was fixed unwaveringly on Denis. In Denis's eyes I read her purpose by reflection.

The boy sat in a huddle at the table on the old woman's right, looking even younger than he was; looking like a child sunk in misery. The extremity of terror that he had been through had left him mute and apathetic. For a time he refused to meet Mme. Storey's gaze, though the very turn of his averted head betrayed that he was electrically conscious of it. But at last by a power stronger than his own will, his miserable, lustreless, child's eyes were dragged around to hers. In his shame he made them look stupid and hard. He quickly lowered them.

But they came back to her, they had to come back, and the expression subtly changed. Fear sprang up in them; a wild, panic terror. He looked away quickly, his face worked, he even made as if to get up and leave the room, but dropped back in his chair as if he had been pulled down. He looked at her again, terrified imploring, helpless. He seemed half out of his wits. Perfect silence in the room, and those eyes crying out: I cannot do it! Don't ask it of me! I cannot! I cannot! I cannot! One held one's breath in the presence of that struggle going on in the boy's soul. Not a muscle of Mme. Storey's face changed. I could just see the side of her full, bright eye, fixed so gravely on the boy.

Another change took place in his eyes. The panic died away. A self-forgetful look appeared there that made his eyes beautiful; a look of rapt devotion. The struggle was over. They lifted and clung to my mistress's eyes like a dog's. And as they clung there, the final change appeared. One saw resolution grow in their depths like the starting of a fire. The whole pale face hardened and became manly. All this happened in a minute or two, of course. Denis jumped up all of a piece and snatched up the gun from in front of the old woman.

Suddenly made aware of her helplessness, a look of drunken terror appeared in the Frenchwoman's slack face. She struggled to her feet, but had not the strength to leave the support of her chair. "Raymo! Raymo!" she cried hoarsely and breathlessly.

Having got the gun in his hands, Denis for a moment appeared to be at a loss what to do with it. But in the same instant Mme. Storey's hands appeared as if by magic from behind her. While sitting there before their very eyes she had succeeded in freeing the upper part of her body.

"Give me the gun," she said crisply to Denis in French. "Quick! fetch a knife to cut my legs free."

She stood up. Thus when Borghini came tumbling through the portieres it was to find the blunt barrel of the automatic almost sticking in his face. He

caught his breath on a loud sob, and went staggering back against the door into the hall. His eyes were crazed.

“Stand where you are!” said Mme. Storey. And to the woman: “Sit down! If either of you move without permission I will shoot. After what I have heard here I would be glad of the excuse to shoot.”

Denis meanwhile had brought a wicked-looking bread-knife, with which he proceeded to cut the ropes that bound her legs. Both Borghini and the old woman glared at the lad with inhuman venomous hatred. My mistress stepped clear of the chair, stamping her feet to restore the circulation. Mme. Storey was herself again. Her eyes were as bright as stars. As always at moments of deadly tension, a little smile played about her lips. Denis transferred his attentions to me.

“Cut the rope as little as possible,” said Mme. Storey. “I have further need of it.”

When Denis was done, Mme. Storey possessed herself of the knife. The old woman began to vituperate the lad in her slow and heavy fashion. I could not understand a word of it, but it was clear her wicked tongue was distilling poison. Denis flinched from it. Mme. Storey, glancing sideways at him, made up her mind. When I stood free she said to Borghini:

“Hold your hands above your head.” To me, she added: “Feel of his pockets to see if he has a weapon.”

It was an ordeal for me to have to put my hands on him. I kept my face averted. I could feel hatred coming out of him as in waves. But he dared not move. He was not armed.

“Now, Bella,” said Mme. Storey, “go to the top drawer of the woman’s bureau, and arm yourself with her gun. It is the only one in the house.”

I obeyed. The gun was about as much use to me as to a young child; but they did not know that.

Borghini was forced to sit in a chair, where I bound him fast to the back and to the legs, making very sure there could be no slip. While I was so engaged, he whined to Mme. Storey for mercy.

“I was on your side from the start. I leave it to your friend here if I wasn’t trying to save you. If it hadn’t been for me you’d be dead by now.”

Mme. Storey smiled at him in a steely fashion. She helped herself to a cigarette from the mantelpiece, and blew a cloud of smoke with manifest enjoyment.

I gagged the man also; and then by Mme. Storey's orders, Denis and I dragged him chair and all into the kitchen out of sight. We likewise tied the old woman to her chair, but the ropes were hidden under the table. Denis's eyes were continually on the door into the hall, full of dread at the imminent return of Camagli. The poor kid was shaking. Mme. Storey flung an arm around his shoulders.

"Courage, mon brave!" said she. "You are my man now. It is impossible that you should fail me!"

The boy lifted his eyes to her with a rapt look, and snatching up her hand pressed it to his lips. There was no art in that gesture.

As for me, strange to say, I was not frightened at that moment. I did not feel anything in particular. I was like an automatic woman moving this way and that under the direction of my mistress's glance.

She bade me to sit down exactly as I had been sitting in the first place, with my hands behind me as if they were tied to the back of the chair, and my legs pressed close to the rounds. She said:

"He will not notice in the first instant that the ropes are gone."

She tied a handkerchief loosely over my mouth, and, gagging herself in the same manner, sat down beside me as at first. She, however, kept her right hand out to cover the woman with the gun. She said to the woman:

"If you attempt to warn him I will shoot."

Finally we heard Camagli's firm tread coming along the hall. Mme. Storey whispered encouragement to Denis in French. At the same time she raised the gun and sighted along the barrel. The Frenchwoman closed her eyes as if in sudden faintness. It appeared that that great jellyfish knew the meaning of fear, too. Camagli tapped on the door in a particular way, and softly spoke his name.

Denis opened the door and Camagli stepped in. At first glance, of course, except for the absence of Borghini, the room appeared exactly as he had left it. He spoke out without hesitation:

"He come right away. Ten minute. He say put a white cloth on the front window-sill if all is safe for him to come in."

Mme. Storey stood up. "Thanks," she drawled. "That was what I wanted."

Camagli spun around on his heel. In him Mme. Storey had very different material from Borghini to deal with and she knew it. He was as lightning-quick as a wild animal. He sprang at her regardless of the gun. Giving ground a little she dropped the gun, and whipping out the bread-knife, caught him full on the point. The knife drove clear through his body, entering in the fleshy hollow between shoulder and breast.

He whirled around like a tee-totum, his face convulsed in a horrible expression of shock, while he dragged at the handle of the knife. He got it out and flung it crimson and dripping across the room. Then he toppled over sideways with a crash. A long-drawn groan escaped him. I handed the gun back to my mistress.

She stood looking down at him coldly. She said: "I could not take the risk of rousing the neighbourhood with a shot. He is nothing. It is he who is coming that I want. . . Help me to take him into the kitchen, Bella."

Denis was sent into the front room to display a white cloth on the window-sill. In the kitchen Mme. Storey deftly cut away the wounded man's clothing and improvised a bandage out of a clean towel, which we scorched on top of the stove in the approved manner. He was bleeding profusely, but it was not a dangerous wound. Throughout the operation he glared at us with his soulless, animal eyes, without making a sound. Close beside us in the narrow room sat Borghini, bound and gagged, and in a state of collapse through sheer funk. We had to work swiftly. It was necessary as a matter of precaution to bind Camagli's uninjured arm behind his back, to tie his ankles together, and to gag him.

When we got back to the dining-room, Denis was in a pitiable state. "I cannot face him!" he gasped out. "Not *him!*"

Mme. Storey gripped his shoulder. "Denis," she said, "I must have you to open the door for him. The instant the door is opened you may slip out, and go telephone the police." She wrote down Inspector Rumsey's telephone number. "And, Denis," she added kindly, "do not come back here; I don't want to have to hand you over. Go to my office and wait for me."

"But you? But you?" stammered the boy.

"Oh, we shall be all right," she answered, smiling broadly. "I have taken his measure."

Turning his back on us, Denis leaned his arms against the wall and buried his face in them, struggling to get a grip on himself.

Then we had nothing to do but wait. Ah! that is shattering to the stoutest nerves. I began to tremble all over. When I thought of the crimes of this man we were waiting for, he swelled up in my imagination like a nightmare creature. Hysteria gripped my throat. I dug my nails into my palms. Mme. Storey lit another cigarette, humming a little tune.

We heard a soft, heavy tread come down the hall, and little Denis turned a ghastly face.

He tapped on the door in the same manner that Camagli had tapped, but did not speak. Denis opened the door and he stepped in. Denis disappeared without my seeing him go. Mme. Storey and I had drawn back against the portieres that the man might not see us too soon. Thus he presented his back to us. A dignified figure and elegantly dressed. There was something familiar about that back. Still, I did not recognise him immediately. Mme. Storey did.

“Good-evening, Mr. Bleecker,” she said musically. “What a charming surprise to find *you* here!”

He turned around.

XIII

AN hour later, Mme. Storey and I were sitting in Inspector Rumsey's office at Police Headquarters, our four prisoners safely disposed in cells. Ah! how good it was to find oneself in that ugly, garishly-lighted room, surrounded by muscular blue-coats. Safe! Safe! Safe! I could not get over it. My mistress in a scarlet evening dress with a sable wrap about her shoulders was recklessly smoking one cigarette after another. What a contrast between that picture and the one she had made an hour before in the sordid flat on East Seventy- —— Street!

“Well, what are the main lines of your case?” asked the Inspector, rubbing his hands together in high satisfaction.

“You have already guessed a good part of it,” said Mme. Storey. “Here was Algernon Bleecker, an impoverished man with the most expensive and luxurious tastes, and no moral sense whatever. His one asset consisted in his social connections which were of the very highest sort. He has acted for years as a sort of steerer in society for the fabulously rich, but that didn't provide scope enough for his talents. He found his opportunity in the general laxity amongst the rich since the war. Why, nowadays, our rich youngsters get married as carelessly as they go to dinner!

“Bleecker, with characteristic acuteness, perceived that the foreign nobleman had had his day. The comic strips have made him ridiculous. So he conceived the new idea of importing handsome foreign youngsters. He was perfectly indifferent to their social status so long as they were good-looking. But they had to be poor and obscure, so that he might obtain a complete ascendancy over them. He frequented the worst quarters of European cities, looking for suitable subjects. When he got them here he had them put through a course of training according to their needs.

“I don't know how long he's been at it. It would be better not to inquire. It worked like a charm. Apparently he has met with no check whatever until the past week or two. The extreme good-looks of the young men, their foreignness, their beautiful manners, rendered them highly romantic figures in the eyes of our hothouse girls. If the full truth of Bleecker's operations became known it might bring about a social cataclysm. We must suppress it so far as we are able.

“I charge Bleecker with the murder of Pedro d’Escobar. His motive was the anger or fear induced by learning that d’Escobar had talked imprudently to me. All the evidence is in your hands. Moreover, Denis de Cachebois, who witnessed the murder, will take the stand for the State. It was a remark that I overheard Borghini make to-night that informed me Bleecker had himself killed d’Escobar. I was not surprised, because the first time Bleecker approached me I apprehended that there existed under that smooth, effeminate, luxurious exterior, an insane streak of cruelty. Bleecker *enjoyed* committing those two murders. And how many others I don’t know. . . .”

“*Two murders?*” interrupted the Inspector.

“Yes. I also charge him with the murder of Arpad Rody.”

“What!” cried Inspector Rumsey.

“Ah,” said Madame Storey smiling, “you gentlemen of the force have not displayed your usual perspicacity in respect to that case. It was evident to me from the beginning that neither Van Sicklen Harker nor his daughter could have fired the shot that killed Rody. Otherwise the maid must have heard it, not to speak of others in the hotel. It struck me as strange, too, that they all went into the bedroom of the suite for their conference about the money settlement. The reason given was that the maid might not overhear; but if you will examine the plan of the suite you will see that there were the same number of doors between sitting-room and bedroom as there was between bedroom and bedroom: *i.e.* two. If they didn’t want the maid to overhear, why didn’t they send her out of the suite altogether? Arpad Rody had some other reason for leading them into the bedroom.

“What reason could he have had? A friend concealed in the bedroom perhaps to overhear all that passed? Where could such a man have been concealed? In the clothes closet near the head of the bed. As soon as I examined the bedroom I discovered why no shot had been heard. Rody had first been rendered unconscious by a blow on the head, his body then laid on the bed and the gun pressed to his temple, *covered by a pillow*. How did I discover this? The pillow had been tossed back to its usual place at the head of the bed. There were no burns upon the pillow-case. The murderer had provided against this by placing something—let us say his handkerchief, between. But several hours after the murder one of the pillows in the room, and only one, was still strongly impregnated with the odour of gunpowder.

“You, and everybody else engaged on the case, believed that Van Sicklen Harker was lying when he gave his second version of what had happened; but from this point I preferred to go upon the assumption that he had told the

simple truth. What then had happened after Harker had rushed from the suite in a distracted state, after signing the settlement? Rody's friend or partner had stepped out of his hiding-place, they had quarrelled over the division of the spoils, whereupon the unknown man had snatched up Harker's gun, struck Rody over the head with it, and afterwards shot him in the manner I have described. He tossed the pistol out of the window and made his escape. The certain finding of the pistol gave him no concern since he knew it was Harker's.

"That was as far as I got then. The murderer was unknown to me. But in d'Escobar's unwitting disclosures about the American who picked up likely lads in Europe and brought them over here to get them rich American wives, I got my clue. When d'Escobar was murdered next day I knew that in his murderer I would lay my hands on the murderer of Arpad Rody. And so it happened. From Borghini's lips to-night as we were hidden we heard the proof of it. Bleecker was concealed in that room in order to advise Rody how to proceed in his negotiations with Harker. Perhaps they had arranged a code of signals. We will find, I believe, that Bleecker had engaged a room on the same corridor, to be used while Bleecker was in the clothes closet. At any rate, after he had got the best of Harker, Rody, flushed with triumph, thought he could get the best of his master, too. He undertook to turn Bleecker down, and Bleecker killed him."

The Inspector shot forth his hand. "Magnificent!" he cried. "You have never done a finer piece of work!"

"Nonsense!" cried Mme. Storey, rising. "I'm glad we got him though! You should have seen his face when he turned round and saw us! That was worth a year's income! . . . And now Bella and I *must* get our dinners! See you to-morrow!"

As we drove up-town I said: "You knew it was Bleecker before he came through the door?"

She admitted it.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"Oh, by a dozen indications, too trifling in themselves to take into court. The murder was written in his eyes. I knew, and he knew that I knew, but he didn't think I could bring it home to him."

Everybody knows the result. Since Denis was ready to testify for the prosecution, Bleecker was tried first for the murder of d'Escobar. If he had

by any fluke escaped, the State was ready to proceed with the other case. But he was convicted, and in due course executed. The Countess (who by the way was a genuine Countess, a de Courcy), and Attilio Camagli set up the defence that they had acted under duress, and they got off with verdicts of manslaughter. They are serving long terms. According to Denis's story on the stand, he had no hand in the actual murder. Whether this was true or not I can't say. At any rate the State was satisfied with having him deported to France. I for one was glad of it.

Raymo Borghini was never tried at all. He was not present at the murder, and it was thought better not to bring any charge of conspiracy against him. Shortly afterwards his rich wife obtained a French divorce, and he disappeared from the American scene, as did likewise the handsome Albert Fleury, late of the New York *Universe*. No actual connection was proved to exist between Bleecker and John Jerrold, but the disclosures at the trial ruined Jerrold just the same. He, too, left our shores. People speak of meeting him wandering about Paris a miserable creature.

A complete reconciliation took place between Van Sicklen Harker and Cornelia, and they sailed away together for their delayed tour of the world. I have never seen little Cornelia since; but I do hope that this experience knocked some sense into her pretty head. She has since, as all the world knows, married an upstanding young Anglo-Saxon, and they appear to be happy.

LONDON AND GLASGOW: COLLINS' CLEAR-TYPE PRESS.

THE END

NEW 7/6 DETECTIVE NOVELS

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IT was in a sordid Apache case that Geoffrey first saw her—the Lady of Despair, beautiful ward of Paul Daburon, the famous advocate. If he did not actually fall in love with her there and then Geoffrey Barsette was certainly more than a little interested. His luck was in. That very night he made a good friend of Inspector Patras, by rescuing him from a skirmish with two Apaches from the Parisian underworld, into which his duties as detective had led him. M. Patras needed no introduction to Barsette, the author of many thrilling mystery stories. He was able to tell him all about Madelon Marly, the mysterious society beauty whose charm had attracted a number of suitors, each of whom had—was it by unhappy coincidence?—met a sudden death in the very moment when their love seemed about to be returned. A few days later the Vicomte de Caramie, the latest aspirant to Madelon's hand, and already a rival of Geoffrey, was found in his apartment murdered, with a fencing foil through his heart!

HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of *The Under Dogs*, etc.

THE VIPER

PARIS! Paris in June! Paris under the night sky! Dejeuner in the Bois; dinner on Montmartre; ices, and *such* ices, any time of the day or night, at the Cafe de la Paix, the centre of the world. No wonder Miss Brickley, secretary to the famous woman detective, Madame Storey, was thrilled at the prospect of accompanying her employer. It ought to have been a vacation trip, but turned out to be something more strenuous. Almost too strenuous, in fact, but Miss Brickley at any rate came near blessing the little widow who had asked Madame Storey to investigate the mysterious death of her millionaire husband. Here are new exploits of the famous Madame Storey in a new setting, revealing her more fascinating, more ingenious than ever.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover has been created for this ebook.

[The end of *The Handsome Young Men* by Hulbert Footner]