THE DUKE OF YORK'S STEPS

a detective story

by

HENRY WADE

author of

"The Missing Partners"

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THE DUKE OF YORK'S STEPS

Other books by Henry Wade

THE VERDICT OF YOU ALL
THE MISSING PARTNERS

THE DUKE OF YORK'S STEPS

By
HENRY WADE

Author of
THE MISSING PARTNERS

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CHAPTER I

THE TWO BANKERS

"A GLASS of the Dow for Mr. Hessel, please, Rogers, and I'll have brown sherry."

The wine waiter retired to execute the order and Sir Garth Fratten turned to his guest.

"Too much vintage port last night, I'm afraid, Leo. Old Grendonian dinner. 'Hair of the dog that bit you' may be all right with champagne, but port—no."

His companion laughed.

"I should have thought you were too old a Grendonian to fall into that trap," he said. "Where was it? The Grandleigh? They generally give you pretty good stuff there. I hate those functions myself—not that there are any Old-Boy dinners of the school I went to."

There was a trace of bitterness in Hessel's voice, but his companion ignored it.

"I don't like them myself," he said. "I haven't been to one for years, but this was a ter-centenary affair and I rather had to go. The wine was all right—it was the speeches that were the trouble—they kept at it till nearly eleven. I got mine over early—and shortly—but some of them took the opportunity to let off steam. Pretty indifferent steam most of it was, too. One has to drink something—toasts and general boredom. I couldn't drink the brandy—1812 on the bottle and 1912 inside it—the usual Napoleon ramp. But the Cockburn was genuine stuff—'96. Must have got outside the best part of a bottle—not wise in these soft days. Have some coffee, old man. Shall we have it here? The guests' smoking-room is sure to be packed now, and it's after two—we can smoke in here."

The two men were sitting at a small corner table in the handsome dining-room of the City Constitutional Club, of which the elder, Sir Garth Fratten, was a member. Chairman of the well-known "family" bank which bears his name, Sir Garth occupied an assured position in the esteem, not only of this exclusive club, but of the "City" generally. Still well on the right side of seventy, the banker was commonly regarded as being at the peak of a long and honourable financial career. He had kept his mind abreast of the rapidly

changing conditions of post-war finance, and this faculty, coupled with his great practical knowledge and experience, caused his opinion and his approval to be valued very highly, not only by individuals, but even at times by the Treasury. He had been knighted for his services, financial and otherwise, to the country in the Great War and it was thought not unlikely that his specialized knowledge might lead him to a seat in the Upper House.

His companion, Leopold Hessel, was about eight years his junior, though his scanty hair was at least as grey as Fratten's—probably because his path in life had been less smooth. His skin, however, was clean and, apart from the eyes, unlined, and his figure slim. He had the dark eyes and sensitive hands, but none of the more exaggerated features of his race, and the charm of his appearance was confirmed by the fact of his close friendship with a man of Sir Garth Fratten's discrimination. This friendship had been of untold value to Hessel in the war, when the position of men of even remote German descent had been extremely difficult. Fratten, however, had insisted upon Hessel retaining his position upon the directorate of the bank and this action by so prominent a citizen, being regarded as a certificate of Hessel's patriotism, had saved him the worst of the ignominies that were the lot of many less fortunate than himself. None the less, the scar of those harrowing years remained and was probably reflected in the conversation that was now taking place.

"I wish you'd let me put you up for this place, Leo," Fratten was saying. "I hate having to treat you as a guest—you know what I mean—and take you into that poky little smoking-room on the rare occasions when you consent to lunch with me."

Hessel smiled rather bitterly and shook his head.

"It's good of you, Fratten," he said. "In many ways I'd like to belong here, but . . ." he paused, as if seeking how best to express a refusal that might appear ungracious. "Perhaps I haven't the courage to risk a licking now," he concluded.

Fratten's gesture of denial was emphatic.

"You're not still thinking of that damned war business, are you? That's all forgotten long ago—not that it ever applied to you. Or is it Wendheim and Lemuels? They weren't blackballed because they were . . . because of their religion. It was simply that this club has always asked for other qualifications besides wealth and business success. That ass Erdlingham didn't realize it, or they'd got the whip hand of him or something—he's in all their things—and he put them up and of course they just got pilled—not the sort we want here. You are—you'd get in without the least doubt."

Hessel's hand lightly touched his companion's sleeve. "You are a good friend, Fratten," he said, "a good deal better than I deserve. Don't you see that that's one reason why I won't risk this—you know what your position would be if it didn't come off. No, don't go on. I'm more grateful than I can say, but I shall not change my mind."

Fratten sighed.

"All right, Leo," he said. "I'm really sorry, but I respect your attitude. It's more my loss than yours, anyway. Come on; we must be off. I've got a Hospital Board-meeting at three and I must look in at the bank first."

The two men made their way out into the wide hall, with its handsome double staircase, recovered their overcoats (it was October) and hats from the pegs where they had hung them, and were soon in the street.

As they turned into Cornhill Fratten threw away the cigar that he had been smoking, and cleared his throat.

"I've got something in the way of a confession to make to you, Leo," he said. "I ought to have made it before, but I'm not sure that I'm not rather ashamed of myself. I told you that I'd been to an old Grendonian dinner last night. Well, I met a fellow there who was a great friend of mine at school, though I hadn't seen him since. He was a soldier, did damn well in the war, commanded a division in France towards the end and a district in India afterwards. I don't think he'd ever lived in London till he retired a couple of years ago—anyhow we'd never met. When he left the army he didn't settle down in the country to grow moss and grouse at the Government like most of them do. He . . . are you listening, old chap?"

Hessel had been looking straight in front of him with an expression that suggested that his thoughts might be on some other and more important subject, but he emphatically repudiated the implied charge of inattention.

"Yes, yes, of course I am. Go on—interesting career. Who is he? What does he do?"

Sir Garth, as other and lesser men, liked to tell his story in his own way. He paid no attention to the questions.

"As I was saying, he didn't settle down to a life of promenades and old ladies at Cheltenham; he set up as a bold bad company promoter—and with no mean success."

"Who is he?—What's his name?" repeated Hessel.

"Lorne. Major-General Sir Hunter Lorne, K.C.B., K.C. This and K.C. That. He asked me to . . ."

But his companion had stopped.

"Look here, Fratten," he said. "What is this? What is the confession? I can't hear you in this racket. Come down here."

He took his companion's arm and pulled him into an alley-way that led through towards Lombard Street. It was comparatively quiet after the roar of the traffic in Cornhill.

"What on earth is this story?" repeated Hessel, with a note of agitation in his voice.

"I'll tell you if you'll give me half a chance. He's Chairman of a Finance Company—the Victory Finance Company, I think he called it. . . . He has asked me to join his Board. He thinks my name would be a help—I suppose it would. Apparently they're thinking of extending their scope; they . . ."

"But you didn't consent?" ejaculated Hessel sharply.

"I warned you it was a confession, Leo. I'd had, as I told you at the club just now, more port than was strictly wise. I wasn't quite so—so guarded as I usually am—we were very great friends at school. I was a fool, I suppose, but I promised him I'd look into the thing—he's sending me the details tonight."

Hessel's usually calm face was flushed. He was evidently deeply moved by Sir Garth's information.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "You can't do that. Your doctor . . . You told us—the Board—only two or three meetings ago that your doctor had absolutely ordered you to do less work! Your heart . . . you said your heart was unsound! You've gone off the Board of the British Tradings—I thought you were going off your Hospital Board too. Besides, this Victory Trust; what is it? You can't—with your reputation—you can't go on to the Board of a tin-pot company like that! It's probably not sound. It's . . ."

"Ah, that's another point," interrupted Fratten. "If it's not sound, of course I can't go into it. Apart from my own reputation it wouldn't be fair to the public; they might take my name—for what it's worth—as a guarantee. That I shall go into very carefully before I consent. As to health, what you say is quite true. My 'tragic aneurism' or whatever it is old Spavage calls it, is rather serious. I don't deny that I'm worried about it. It isn't heart really, you know—I only call it that because it sounds prettier. But after all, this Victory Finance Company ought not to mean much work. I gather that it's my name and perhaps some general advice on the financial side of the business that Lorne wants."

Hessel had by this time calmed down and he now spoke quietly, though none the less definitely.

"I think you are misleading yourself, Fratten. You tell me that this company contemplates extending its scope. I know you well enough to be certain that if you go on to this Board and it starts developing fresh fields you will throw your whole energy into the work. You may deceive yourself about that but not me. Now, apart from your own point of view, I want to put two others to you—your family's and the bank's. If you break down, if you over-strain yourself and collapse—that's what happens, you know—is that going to be pleasant for Inez and Ryland?"

"It certainly wouldn't spoil Ryland's sleep," answered Fratten bitterly. "I can't imagine anything suiting him better."

"Oh, come, Fratten; you're unjust to the boy. But Inez—you know well enough that she adores you. I should say that you were the centre of her whole universe. Can't you think of her? Doesn't she come before this school friend?—a friend who means so much to you that you haven't seen him, and probably haven't thought of him, for forty years."

The banker's expression had softened at the mention of his daughter but he made no comment. Hessel renewed his attack from a fresh direction.

"And the bank," he said. "What about that? Thousands of people depend upon the success of Fratten's Bank. All your shareholders—it's been your policy—our policy—for generations to distribute the shares widely and in small holdings—mostly to small people. Small tradesmen, single ladies, retired soldiers and sailors, your own employees. Many of them have all their savings in Fratten's Bank. You know well enough that the position of the private banks is anything but secure in these days—half a slip, and the '*big five*' swallow them. We're doing well now, we're even prosperous—why?—because of you. Your knowledge, your experience, your flair—you *are* the bank, the rest of us are dummies. I don't plead for myself, but my own position, my financial and social position are entirely dependent upon Fratten's."

Sir Garth shook his head impatiently.

"You exaggerate," he said. "The Board is perfectly capable of running the bank without me—probably better. You yourself are worth in fact, though possibly not in the eyes of the public, every bit as much to the welfare of the bank as I am. You may have less experience but you have a quicker, a more acute, financial brain than I ever had and I'm past my prime—I'm depreciating in value every day. No, no, Leo; you've over-stated your case, and that's fatal. I'll take care, of course, but that appeal *ad*

misericordiam—weeping widows and trusting orphans—is all bunkum. Anyway I must get along now—I can't stand here arguing all day."

Hessel's expression was grim.

"You've definitely decided?" he asked.

"If it's sound, yes. I've taken a leaf out of your book, Leo, about the club. I'm grateful to you for your consideration, for your advice, much of it very sound, but—I shan't change my mind."

He moved off down the alley, and Hessel, after a moment's hesitation, followed him in silence. They turned into Lombard Street, both evidently wrapped in deep and probably anxious thought—so much so that Sir Garth, omitting for once the fixed habit of years, stepped into the roadway to cross the street without glancing over his shoulder at the traffic. As he did so, a motor-bicycle combination swooped from behind a van straight at him. With a violent start, Fratten awoke to his danger and stepped back on to the pavement, untouched, while the cyclist, with a glance back to see that all was well, sputtered on his way.

But though there had been no collision, all was very far from being well. The banker took two or three shaky steps forward and then tottered to the inner side of the pavement and leant, gasping, against the wall. His face was very pale, and he pressed his hand against his chest.

A crowd had gathered at the first sight of the unusual and now pressed closely round the sick man, adding its heedless quota to his distress. Hessel, who had come quickly to his companion's side, did his best to drive off the sensation-vultures, but it was not till a majestic City policeman appeared that their victim was given a chance to breathe in comfort. After loosening his collar, the constable and Hessel guided Fratten into the office outside which the mishap had occurred. Quickly recovering himself and declining the manager's offer to send for some brandy, Sir Garth brushed aside the constable's desire to trace the motor-cyclist.

"No, no. No need to make a fuss," he said. "It was as much my fault as his, and anyway you people have got more important work to do than that. I'm quite all right now; it would have been nothing if I hadn't happened to have a dicky heart. I'd like a taxi though. I shan't come to the bank now, Leo; it's getting late. Ask Ruslett to send me round the papers about that Hungarian issue to my house. I shall be there by five."

"But you're going straight home, aren't you?" exclaimed Hessel.

"No, I told you I'd got a Hospital Board this afternoon. It's nearly three now."

“But good heavens, man, are you out of your wits today? You’ve had a severe shock. You must get straight to bed and send for your doctor.”

“Rubbish. I’m quite all right now. I must go to this Board-meeting—I’m in the Chair and I’ve got to report on an amalgamation scheme. Besides, if I’m ill, what better place to go to than a hospital? They’ve even got a mortuary I believe, if the worst comes to the worst!”

Fratten laughed at his companion’s harassed expression and took his arm.

“Now then, lead me out to the ambulance, old man,” he said.

Hessel watched his friend drive off in the taxi, and then turned and walked slowly off towards the bank, an anxious and very thoughtful expression on his face.

The police-constable established himself against a convenient wall, took out his note-book and wetted his pencil.

“At 2.45 P. M., I . . .”

CHAPTER II

AT QUEEN ANNE'S GATE

At half-past four on the same afternoon, Inez Fratten walked into the morning-room of her father's big house in Queen Anne's Gate, pulled off her soft hat and threw it on to a chair, shook her hair loose, and picked up a telephone.

"Wilton 0550 . . . Is that 27 Gr . . . Oh Jill! Inez speaking. Jill darling, come and dine with us tonight and play Bridge. Ryland's dining in, as he calls it, for once in a blue moon. I'm so anxious that one of his dangerous tastes should have the best and brightest home influence to distract him from —et cetera, et cetera,—you know—sweet young English girlhood and all the rest of it—you're just exactly it—with a small 'i'. Yes, Golpin, I'll have it in here. It's all right, darling, I'm talking about tea. I say, did you see Billie last night? She was with that awful Hicking man again—you know, the pineapple planter or whatever it is they make fortunes out of in Borneo or New Guinea or somewhere. Billie's simply fascinated with him because he's got a ruby tooth—she follows him about everywhere and says awful things to make him laugh—he thinks he's made a frightful conquest. They were at the Pink Lizard last night, but you may have left. Who was that exquisite young thing you'd got in tow? No—really—I thought he was a pet. Well, you're coming, aren't you? If you want a cocktail you must have it at home because father's joined an anti-cocktail league or made a corner in Marsala or something. So long, my Jill. Eight o'clock—don't be late, because we won't wait. Poitry."

Inez put down the telephone and walked across to the fireplace. There was a small Chippendale mirror above it and she was just tall enough to see into it while she ran her fingers through the soft waves of her brown hair—peculiarly golden-brown, lighter than auburn, but in no sense red. A shade darker were the low, straight eyebrows which crowned a pair of the coolest, clearest grey eyes in the world—eyes that looked at you so steadily and calmly that you felt instinctively: "lying is going to be an uncomfortable job here." For classic loveliness her chin was perhaps a thought too firm, her lips not quite full enough, but when she smiled there was a bewitching droop at the corners of her mouth that relieved it of any suspicion of hardness.

Altogether it was a face that not only caught your eye but took your heart and gave it a little shake each time you looked at it.

"Mr. Ryland told you he'd be in to dinner, didn't he, Golpin?"

The pale smooth-faced butler, who was making mysterious passes over a tea-table with a pair of over-fed hands, indicated in a gentle falsetto that such was indeed the case.

"We shall be four altogether; Miss Jerrand is coming. Oh, I say, take that ghastly green cake away and bring some honey and a loaf of brown bread, etc. I'm hungry. And you'd better tell Mr. Mangane that tea's ready—not that he's likely to want any."

But in this respect Inez appeared to be wrong. She had hardly helped herself to butter, honey, and a thick slice of brown bread when the door opened and her father's secretary walked into the room. Laurence Mangane had only taken up the post a month or so ago and as he did not as a rule dine with the family—Sir Garth liked to be really alone when he was not entertaining—Inez had seen very little of him. He seemed presentable enough, she thought, as he walked quietly across the room and dropped into a chair beside her. He was rather tall and dark, with a thin black moustache that followed the line of his upper lip in the modern heroic manner.

"Afternoon, Mr. Mangane. Strong, weak, sugar, milk? I thought you didn't like tea."

"I don't. Weak, sugar, no milk, please."

Inez's hand, waving the Queen Anne teapot, paused above a pale-green cup.

"If you don't like it, why on earth do you . . . ?"

Mangane smiled.

"Because I want some tea," he said.

Inez looked at him for a moment, the shadow of a frown flickering across her face. Then, with a shrug:

"Distinction's a bit too subtle for me. Anyhow, help yourself. Is father being kind to you?"

"He's being wonderfully patient. It must be infernally trying to a busy man to have to explain what he's talking about."

"But you've had financial training, haven't you? Father said you'd been with Sir John Kinnick. I thought you probably knew all about it."

"I thought so too; it's been a thoroughly healthy and humiliating experience for me to realize that I don't. Your father's in a class by himself,

so far as my experience has taken me up to now. He sees things from an entirely different point of view—a sort of financial fourth dimension."

Appreciation of her father, if Mangane had known it—and perhaps he did at least guess—was the surest way to win Inez's own approval. It was quite evident that she regarded her father with anything but the tolerant contempt which many of her contemporaries thought it amusing to adopt towards their parents. Sir Garth was a man whom it was possible, and even reasonable, to admire, even if he did happen to be one's own father. Playing upon this easy string, Mangane had no difficulty in justifying his self-sacrifice in the matter of tea-drinking. He was even contemplating another cup when the spell was broken by the abrupt appearance of a Third Player. The door into the hall opened suddenly and a young man slipped into the room, closing the door behind him with exaggerated silence.

"Ry!" exclaimed Inez. "What on earth are you trying to do?"

Ryland tip-toed across the room with long strides and whispered hoarsely in his sister's ear.

"Is the Old Gentleman, your father, to house, maiden?"

"No, you idiot; of course he isn't at this time of night. He does some work."

"Cruel, fair. But, oh Lord, I breathe again. A bowl of milk or I die."

Ryland slid into the big chair beside his sister and with one arm squeezed her to him. Mangane, watching in some amazement, had difficulty in repressing a stab of jealousy at sight of the flush of pleasure on the girl's face. Presumably, this must be Ryland Fratten, her half-brother; there was nothing to worry about.

"Ry, have you met Mr. Mangane? This is my brother, Mr. Mangane."

"Steady. Half-brother; give the devil his due."

Mangane nodded in acknowledgment of the introduction, but Ryland struggled to his feet, walked round the tea-table, and held out his hand.

"I'm so glad you've come," he said. "You're obviously human. Dune was a machine—and I never found the right butter to put into it. I want all the human beings I can get at headquarters."

The charm of his smile, rather than the flippant words, melted the slight chill in the secretary's manner and for a few minutes he remained talking to Inez, while Ryland sat on the sofa, eating chocolate cake and muttering to himself.

"Mangane. Permangane. What play does that remind me of? Oh, I know: *Potash and Perlmutter*."

Mangane laughed and rose to his feet.

"You've been studying Mr. Pelman," he said. "Well, I must go and earn my keep. Thank you so much, Miss Fratten."

When he had gone, Inez turned to her brother.

"Anything the matter?" she asked.

He was silent for a minute, staring at the fire. He looked very slim and young in his well-cut blue suit, but there were dark shadows under his eyes and his skin did not look healthy.

"Why do you ask that?" he said at last.

"Why are you dining here tonight?"

"Is it as bad as all that?—Do I only dine here when something's the matter?"

She nodded.

"That's about what it amounts to."

"Yes, I suppose it is," he agreed with a sigh. "And so there is—something the matter."

"What?" asked Inez, with her accustomed directness. Before he could answer the butler appeared, saying that Mr. Hessel would like to see Miss Fratten if she was not engaged.

"Plagues of his Israel!" muttered Ryland angrily. "Who wouldn't be a Pharaoh?—only I'd have done the job thoroughly."

Inez glared at him and told Golpin to show Mr. Hessel in. Fortunately for Ryland there was no time for her to tell him what she evidently thought of him before Hessel appeared in the doorway. With a sulky scowl on his face, Ryland muttered some sort of greeting and was about to edge his way out of the room when Hessel stopped him.

"Don't go, Ryland," he said. "I'd like you to hear what I've got to say, as well as Inez."

With none too good a grace Ryland complied. Inez, with unerring instinct, went straight to the point.

"Is anything the matter with father?"

Hessel nodded.

"It's about that—no, no, my dear, there's nothing immediately serious," he interposed hurriedly, seeing the look of almost terrified anxiety on the girl's face. "He's quite all right. But something serious *will* happen if you don't both help me. How much has he told you about himself?"

"Nothing," said Inez. "What do you mean? Tell me quickly please."

"Hasn't he told you that his doctor has reported badly on his heart?"

"No, not a word. Is it—is he dangerously ill?"

"Not immediately, no. But he will have to take great care. Surely he must have told you he was giving up a lot of his work?"

"Yes, he did," replied Inez. "But he said it was because he thought he'd earned a little peace and quiet."

"I see. So you really know nothing. I suppose I'm betraying a confidence, but you've got to know now. His heart is in a really bad condition—I don't know the technical terms, but it is a case of disease. His doctor has told him definitely that he must avoid all strain or undue excitement. Now what do you think he's done? He's promised, or practically promised, some ridiculous school friend to go into a gimcrack business with him that will bother him and upset him and do more harm than all the safe, well-oiled work he's giving up."

Hessel proceeded to outline the conversation he had had with Sir Garth that afternoon. Inez listened with close attention, occasionally asking a question that showed the clearness of her intellect. Ryland remained silent, but there was a look of uneasiness on his face that first puzzled and then comforted Inez. In spite of all the hard things that he said about their father, she felt that her brother really loved him and that this look of anxiety revealed the true state of his feelings.

"That's all serious enough," continued Hessel. "But something that happened this afternoon makes it worse. He had a shock—a motor-bicycle nearly knocked him over—and he had a bad heart attack. I tried to make him come straight home but he wouldn't—he was as obstinate as a mule—said he must go to a Hospital Board-meeting, though he'd come home afterwards. He ought to be back at any time; I wanted to see you first. Take care of him, Inez,—and you too, Ryland. Don't let him worry; we simply can't spare him. Above all stop this madcap Lorne scheme."

He stopped and looked questioningly at Inez, who nodded.

"We'll take care of him, Uncle Leo," she said. "Don't you worry. Won't we, Ry?"

But Ryland was sitting with a very white face, glaring at his toes.

“What is it, Ry?” asked Inez, slipping on to the sofa beside him and putting her arm round his neck. “Don’t get upset, old man. He’ll be all right if we take care of him.”

Ryland shook himself and looked at her strangely.

“I’m afraid I . . . I wrote to him last night . . . It’ll upset him if he reads it now . . . I wonder if I can get hold of the letter. . . .”

But once more Golpin, like a figure of fate, appeared in the doorway.

“Sir Garth wishes to see you in his study, Mr. Ryland.”

Ryland rose to his feet and walked slowly to the door. Inez rose as if to follow him, but stopped.

“Ry,” she said, her hand making a slight movement as if of appeal. “Be careful.”

Her brother glanced over his shoulder.

“Oh, I’ll be careful right enough,” he answered. “I can’t answer for the old man. This means a flogging,” he added, with a feeble attempt at humour.

The door closed behind him and Inez turned to Hessel.

“I can’t stop them,” she said. “They’re both as obstinate as pigs. I do wish they got on better.”

“I told your father today that I thought he was hard on Ryland,” said Hessel, “but I suppose he is rather trying in some ways.”

“Oh, he’s rather a young ass, of course. Stage doors, night-clubs, and that kind of thing. As a matter of fact he is really rather keen on the stage himself, apart from its inhabitants; he’s a jolly good actor. I sometimes wish he’d take it up as a profession; good hard work is what he wants more than anything else. He’s perfectly sound really you know; he’s not a rotter.”

“I’m sure he isn’t, my dear,” said Hessel, patting Inez on the shoulder. “And he’s a lucky young man to have a sister like you to fight his battles. Well, I must be going; I ran away early from school to come and talk to you and I must go and do some overtime now to make up for it. Besides, I don’t want your father to catch me here telling tales.”

When he had gone, Inez sat for a few minutes in gloomy silence, then jumped up, shook herself and turned on the loudspeaker. A jazz-band was playing ‘When father turned the baby upside down’ and Inez danced a few steps to its lilting tune. Suddenly, through stutter of drums and moan of saxophones, Inez heard the front door close with a crash. She stopped for a moment, as if hesitating what to do, then flew to the window and flung it

open. Twenty yards down the street she saw the retreating figure of her brother.

"Ry," she called. "Ry, come back."

But Ryland, if he heard, took no notice; she saw him hail a taxi, jump into it and drive away. For a moment she hung out of the window, watching till the cab whisked round a corner out of sight; then turned forlornly back into the room.

"*So father kissed his baby on its other little cheek* . . ." yelled the jazz soloist.

Inez picked up a book and hurled it at the loudspeaker. "Oh, shut up, you filthy fool," she cried.

The instrument crashed to the floor and was still; Inez flung herself on the sofa and buried her face in her arms.

CHAPTER III

THE VICTORY FINANCE COMPANY

THE morning after Sir Garth's confession to Hessel, the cause of it, Major-General Sir Hunter Lorne, K.C.B., D.S.O., stepped from his car outside Ald House in Fenchurch Street, greeted the hall-porter cheerfully, refused the lift ("must keep young, you know, Canting") and climbed briskly up to the offices of the Victory Finance Company on the fourth floor.

The General was a well-built man of about five foot ten, very erect and extremely good-looking, with a straight nose, firm chin, brushed-up moustache, and dark hair only powdered with grey. There was nothing subtle about him; it was quite obvious that he would be an extremely good friend to people whom he liked and frankly contemptuous of those he did not understand. He had done well in command of a division in France (or, what was considered the same thing, the division which he commanded had done well) and was now confidently engaging in a campaign in which he would be even more dependent on the skill of those serving under him.

The offices of this young and promising Finance Company were by no means pretentious. They consisted of a clerks' room, opening on to the landing, a small room for the manager and secretary, and a larger directors' room, which also had a door opening on to the stairs.

Sir Hunter, as was his habit, entered by way of the clerks' room, greeted the two young clerks, asking one about his mother's neuritis and the other about the fortunes of his pet football club ("Always get to know your men and their interests, my lad"), and passed down the short passage into the directors' room. Here he found a fellow-director, Captain James Wraile, a clean-cut, clean-shaven man of forty, with the very pale blue eyes that may mean the extremity of either strength or weakness and are so very hard to judge.

"Morning, Wraile, my boy. Glad you've turned up," exclaimed the General heartily. "How goes the world?"

Wraile smiled quietly.

"Well enough, I think, General, if you aren't in British Cereals."

"Ah, yes, we did well not to touch that. Your advice, I think, Wraile. I don't know what we should do without you."

"It was rather lucky; they looked a good thing at first sight. But one can generally find the weak spot when one gets down to the foundation—as it's our job to do. Lessingham's coming in this morning, Blagge tells me, General. He rang through last night to ask if you'd be here."

"Oh, he is, is he? Very good of him to come at all. I suppose if I see him once a month that's about all I do, and Resston never. It's as well he's coming, though. He's got a flair and we can do with his advice about the Barsington Dirt Track Racing Company. I don't quite know what to say about that business, you know, Wraile. It's a craze at the moment; there's money in it now—big money. But will it last? Especially in the country towns—there's a very limited public there, what?"

"Very limited, Sir Hunter. It's all right for a quick flutter, but a loan—we might find ourselves badly let in."

"Well, we'll ask Lessingham—he may jump on it straight away. I respect his judgment. What time's he coming?"

"Eleven o'clock, he said—should be here any time now."

"Then I'll keep my news till he comes—I've done a good stroke of business for the Company I think, Wraile, a very big stroke. Ah, here he is. Come on, Lessingham; better sometimes than never. Well, I'm glad to see you. We'll have your advice first and then I'll tell you my news—it might put the other out of our heads."

The newcomer was a man of medium height and rather clumsy build—heavy shoulders, with a suspicion of hump in the back, and a large paunch. His hair was black and rather curly, but his complexion was pale and he wore large yellow-rimmed spectacles, with tinted Crooke's lenses. He was smartly dressed—rather over-dressed, with a heavy cravat and pearl pin; he wore dark-grey gloves which he did not remove even when writing, a habit that grated on the well-trained senses of his fellow-director. He spoke in a very soft and rather husky voice, which yet carried a considerable impression of character. As a matter of fact, he talked very little, leaving Sir Hunter to supply the deficiency. The three men sat down at the board table and were presently joined by the manager, Mr. Albert Blagge. Blagge was a tired-looking, middle-aged man, with honesty and mediocrity written all over him in equal proportions. He took little part in the discussion that followed and it was soon evident that he was employed as a responsible clerk and not as an adviser.

On the subject of Dirt Track Racing the General had a good deal to say and said it well. Lessingham sat beside him at the Board table, sifting through his gloved hands a sheaf of prospectuses over which he ran his eyes

—a habit of apparent inattention which intensely annoyed Sir Hunter but of which he had been unable to break his partner. At the end of ten minutes the General had reached his climax and conclusion—the Barsington Dirt Track Company was unsuitable for the Victory Finance Company to handle.

"I agree," said Lessingham, without looking up from his papers.

Sir Hunter frowned slightly and brushed his moustaches. He would have preferred an argument; he liked something to batter down. On this occasion, however, he was anxious to get on to the more important subject that was itching under his waistcoat. Being slightly uncomfortable about his ground, he assumed a more than usually strong and hearty voice:

"Now, my boy," he said, "I've got a piece of news for you that'll make you sit up. I've done a stroke of business that not many people, I flatter myself, could have brought off."

Lessingham turned his spectacled eyes for a moment to his companion's face, then resumed his scrutiny of the Central Motorway Company's prospectus. Wraile looked at the Chairman with interest, but said nothing. The reception of his opening remarks had not been enthusiastic, but it took more than that to throw Sir Hunter out of his stride.

"You both know Fratten—Sir Garth Fratten—head of Fratten's Bank—one of the most solid and respected men in the City? You'll hardly believe me, but I think I have practically persuaded him to join our Board! What do you think of that, eh?"

Sir Hunter paused impressively and looked at his fellow-directors to see what effect this tremendous piece of news would have on them. The effect was certainly visible, but it was hardly of the nature that the General had expected. Wraile looked at him with raised eyebrows—a respectful, but hardly encouraging expression. Lessingham, on the other hand, wore a look of intense anger. His face retained its even white colour but his eyebrows were knit in a heavy frown and his lower lip protruded as he glared at Sir Hunter.

"What's this?" he exclaimed. "Join our Board? Fratten join our Board? What right have you to ask him without our consent? It's a gross liberty, Lorne—a gross liberty!"

Sir Hunter was palpably taken aback. He had expected enthusiasm; he received abuse. Not since, as a Brigadier, he had been sent for by the Corps Commander and, instead of receiving the praise he had expected for a "successful" raid, had been frigidly rebuked for squandering lives, had he

been so thrown off his balance. He grew red in the face, his moustache bristled, and a line of small bubbles appeared on his lips.

"Wh . . . what's that?" he stammered. "A liberty! What the hell d'you mean, sir? It's the best stroke of business I've ever done!"

"I can quite believe that," said Lessingham acidly.

"But, damn it, man, Fratten's name on our Board will draw money like a magnet! Think of the security it offers. Fratten! Fratten's Bank practically guaranteeing us!"

"Fratten's Bank doing nothing of the kind," exclaimed Lessingham angrily. "There's a Board of directors there just as there is here; it's not a one-man show, any more than this is!"

Lorne was staggered. He looked to Wraile for support, but Wraile's face was cold; he looked at Mr. Blagge, but the manager's eyes were bent upon the papers before him.

"Well I'm b——," said the General. "Of all the ungrateful devils! Look here, you chaps, can't you understand what it'd mean? Every investor looking through a list of Finance Companies will see Fratten's name on our Board—the biggest name on the whole list—just what we want! Security! Ballast! We've got brains, we want ballast! What?"

Lessingham's reply was quiet this time, but cold, decided, unsympathetic as a surgeon's knife.

"It is you who don't understand, Sir Hunter," he said. "If Fratten were to come on this Board, he would want control—these big men always do. Why else do they come on to our small company Boards? To swallow them up; swamp them. Fratten's a sound enough man in his own way, but he's old-fashioned—no use to us. He would turn this Company into a 'safe-as-houses,' 'no risk'—and no result—business, with an investment schedule like his own Bank's—the last thing we want. You might just as well close the whole thing down. His name might impress an unenlightened investor, but it wouldn't impress a broker for a minute—a broker would know that Fratten is not the type of man to run an Investment Company, he wouldn't recommend us to his clients—and the number of investors who deal without the advice of a broker isn't worth considering. The thing's a washout, I tell you—a rotten washout!"

Lessingham's anger spurted up again in his last words—his usually controlled voice revealed, in that sentence, the primeval qualities of his race.

Sir Hunter sat back in his chair, a look of blank astonishment on his face. It lightened, however, as an idea seemed to strike him.

"But Fratten wouldn't have control," he said. "He's not coming into this to make money, but to oblige me—as an old friend. I didn't tell you—we were old school friends—we met the night before last at an Old-Boy dinner. He wouldn't want control—or even to interfere. I was going to suggest that we should each of us sell him 5%; but if you aren't keen, I'll let him have 10% of my own—that'll leave me with only 50%, you and Resston'll still have your fifteen and Wraile his ten. He's only coming in to oblige me."

"He's not coming in at all if I can stop it," exclaimed Lessingham fiercely. "I don't know what you think you are, Sir Hunter. You're Chairman of the Board and you hold a majority of shares, but this isn't an infantry brigade—your word's not law. You can outvote us, but we can get out—and if you bring this fellow in, I shall—then see how you get on without me. Wraile can please himself."

As he spoke, there was a knock at the door and one of the clerks came in.

"Gentleman of the name of Fratten to speak to you on the 'phone, Sir Hunter, sir, please. Shall I put him through?"

"Fratten!" Lorne looked round him with momentary hesitation, then straightened his back.

"Yes, put him through, put him through, my lad, what?" he exclaimed.

There was a moment's silence as Sir Hunter held the receiver to his ear, then:

"Hullo, Garth, good-morning; good-morning, my dear fellow; good of you to ring me up. What? This morning? By all means, come when you like; come now." (His eyes wandered defiantly from face to face.) "Yes, of course—delighted to see you, my dear fellow; delighted."

He replaced the receiver and returned the telephone to its stand on the wall behind his chair.

"Sir Garth's coming round now," he said. "Going to look into our doings. Naturally a man in his position can't commit himself without investigation." He cleared his throat nervously. "Naturally he can't, what?"

Lessingham turned towards the manager.

"I'll ask you to withdraw, please, Mr. Blagge," he said. The manager gathered up his papers and left the room.

"Now, Chairman," said Lessingham, speaking quietly but decisively, "this matter's got to be settled here and now—you've invited Fratten to come round here and to join the Board without consulting your fellow-

directors. You've got the whip hand of us in the matter of votes—you can put him on if you like. But if you put him on, I go off—that's final. I don't expect you to settle that in one minute, but you'd better have your mind made up before Fratten gets here. I'm going now; you can let me know what you've decided. Only understand, what I've said is final."

He rose and, without another glance at either of his colleagues, walked out the room. Sir Hunter's face was a dark red; he was deeply offended—and at the same time, seriously alarmed; he knew well enough where the brains of the company lay; Wraile was clear-headed and intelligent, but comparatively an amateur like himself; Lessingham was a financier. At the same time he could not allow himself to knuckle under to a fellow of that type; he could not throw over Fratten; it would be a gross insult to the distinguished banker after asking him to join the Board. Lorne realized that he had acted hastily, perhaps unwisely—but he had gone too far to retire—only a really great general can bring himself to retire.

"You'll stand by me, Wraile?" he said gruffly. "I count on you."

"I will, of course, General, if you're determined on it; I know well enough that I owe everything to you—but I'm sorry you've decided to exchange Lessingham for Fratten—I'm convinced that one's the man for our job and the other isn't."

Before Sir Hunter could reply, the door opened and Sir Garth Fratten was announced.

"Good-morning, Lorne," he said. "Very good of you to let me come round."

"Come in, my dear fellow, come in!" exclaimed the General, advancing to meet him with outstretched hand. "Delighted to see you. Let me introduce Captain Wraile to you—one of our directors. He was our managing-director till a year or so ago but he was enticed away to a more glittering post than we can afford, what? Ha, ha." He clapped Wraile on the shoulder to show that he bore him no grudge. "But we were lucky enough to keep him on the Board. He was my Brigade Major in France in '15—don't know what I should have done without him—ran the whole show—most efficient fellow you ever saw—don't blush, my boy; you know I mean it. Marvellous hand at inventing devilments—stink-bombs, rifle grenades, every sort of beastliness he used to contrive for poor old Jerry—long before the authorities dished us out even a 'jam-pot.' You ought to have seen our catapult battery behind the Pope's Nose at Festubert! Ha, ha, that was an eye-opener for Fritz."

Sir Hunter laughed uproariously, but Wraile, who was intimately acquainted with the moods of his old chief, knew that he was nervous.

"I'm very glad to meet you, Captain Wraile," said Sir Garth, smiling pleasantly at him. "A little fresh blood and ingenuity is the very thing that's wanted in post-war finance. May I sit down, Lorne? I'm rather a crock just now and have to nurse myself."

"My dear fellow, I'm so sorry—inexcusable of me! Have a glass of port [the General's panacea]—no?—a cigar, anyhow—Corona Corona, handpicked by myself, every one of 'em."

"I'll leave you, sir," said Wraile. "I expect you and Sir Garth want to have a talk."

"Not the least need for you to go so far as I'm concerned," said the banker. "You've told him what I came round about, Lorne?"

Sir Hunter nodded, and looked rather anxiously at Wraile.

Sir Garth continued: "All I want is just to know roughly your general policy. Then, if you'll give me a copy of your last Annual Report and Balance Sheet and a Schedule I'll take them away and just run through them in my spare time. You won't mind that, I'm sure."

The Chairman shortly, but not too clearly, outlined the history and activities of the company, and calling in the manager, introduced him to Sir Garth. Fratten looked at him with interest, and evidently realized at once that not here would he find what he was looking for.

"The other members of your Board," he said when Mr. Blagge had left. "Would you mind letting me know who they are?"

"Of course, of course; I quite forgot that—stupid of me, what? There's old Lord Resston—he never turns up—holds 15% of the shares and draws his guineas—great disappointment to me. Wraile here comes pretty regularly twice a week; I'm here most days. The only other director's a chap called Lessingham—Travers Lessingham—very shrewd; doesn't show up much, though—other irons in the fire, I suppose. Still, when he comes, his advice is worth having. That's our Board. Then there's Blagge, our manager, whom you've met; Miss Saverel, our very capable secretary, and a couple of junior clerks."

Fratten nodded. "And do you suppose your fellow-directors will care for me to join you?" he asked.

For a second Sir Hunter hesitated, but before the pause could become awkward—or even apparent—Wraile slipped into the breach—as he had so often done in France.

“Speaking for myself, sir,” he said, “I shall consider it a great honour to work with you.”

The General shot him a grateful glance.

“Of course, I must formally consult my colleagues,” he said, “but, naturally I don’t expect anything but a warm welcome.”

Sir Hunter had burnt his boats.

“Very well,” said Sir Garth, rising, “I’ll look into these papers and let you have a decision within a week or two—it’ll take me a little time—I’m an old-fashioned methodical man and I don’t rush my decisions. Good-day to you, Lorne; good-day, Captain Wraile.”

“I’ll come down with you, my dear fellow—nearly my lunch time—can I persuade you to . . .” the door closed behind them and Wraile was alone. He stood for a moment in thought, then touched a handbell twice. The inner door opened and a young woman, tall, fair, and attractive, came into the room.

“Dictation, please, Miss Saverel.”

The secretary pulled a chair up to the table and opened her note-book.

“My dear Lessingham . . .”

CHAPTER IV

THE EXPECTED HAPPENS

One evening, about a fortnight later, Sir Garth Fratten and Leopold Hessel walked down the steps of the "Wanderers," in St. James's Square, of which rather large-hearted club Hessel was a member, and turned towards Waterloo Place. Fratten usually spent an hour or so at his club, or that of one of his friends, in the evening and walked home afterwards across the Park to his house in Queen Anne's Gate. It was, in fact, the only exercise that he got in the day.

"Thanks for my tea, Leo," said Sir Garth. "First-rate China tea it was too —I wonder where you get it?"

Hessel smiled. "That's one of the advantages of being not too exclusive," he said. "We've got members from all parts of the world and in all sorts of business; it's rather a point of pride with us that each member who can should help the club to get the best of everything. That tea is unobtainable on the market—Rowle gets it for us, he's a Civil Servant in Hong Kong; we've got more than one tea-merchant, but they can't produce anything to touch it."

He paused for a moment, then continued: "I wanted to ask you, Fratten, whether you've really settled to go into that Finance Company. Inez told me a couple of evenings ago that she was afraid you had, but I hope that she misunderstood you."

He looked questioningly at his companion.

Fratten, being conscious of unspoken criticism, answered brusquely, "Certainly I have. I don't know why you all make such a fuss about the thing—it's quite unimportant."

"That it certainly is not, in the sense that it endangers your health. But I am afraid it is no use protesting further. You found the Company sound?"

For a second Sir Garth seemed to hesitate, then: "Oh yes, sound, certainly sound—and interesting," he added with a peculiar smile.

"Exactly," said Hessel, "and you will throw yourself into it with all your strength and wear yourself out."

"Nonsense, Leo; don't be so fussy. Look here, I want to talk to you about Ryland; I want your advice."

For a few paces Hessel walked on, without seeming to attend to what his friend was saying; then he evidently wrenched his mind back from its wanderings.

"Ryland?" he said. "Not another scrape, I hope?"

The banker frowned. "Scrape is hardly adequate," he said. "The young fool has got himself engaged to some chorus girl and now—as usual—he's had enough of her and wants to break it off—naturally she wants money. He wrote to me the other day asking for money—I found his letter when I got back from the Hospital Board the day I had that shock. I sent for him and we had an almighty row—both lost control of ourselves, I'm afraid. I'm rather ashamed of that, but what shocks me so much is that he should have said the things he did. He'd got some queer ideas in his head about entail—he spoke in the most callous and unfeeling way. I was hurt, Leo—deeply hurt. I thought that, at bottom, he was really fond of me."

"So he is, Fratten, so he is, of course," interjected Hessel. "You said yourself that you both lost your tempers—one says all sorts of things that one doesn't mean when one loses one's temper—then one's sorry for them and probably one's too stupid or sensitive to say so. Ryland's all right really, I'm sure he is—a young ass about women, of course, but his heart's all right."

Fratten sighed. "I hope you're right," he said. "My God, what a heavenly evening—what a view!"

The two men had reached the top of the broad flight of steps leading from Waterloo Place down into the Mall. Above their heads towered the tall column from which the soldier-prince gazed sadly out over the London that had forgotten him. Daylight had gone, but the lamps revealed the delicate outline of the trees in the Green Park, their few remaining leaves gleaming a golden-brown wherever the light caught them. In the background it was just possible to get a glimpse of the delicate white beauty of the Horse Guards building, its clock-tower illuminated by hidden lights; beyond, on the right the sombre mass of the Foreign Office loomed up against the purple sky. The soft evening fog mellowed the whole scene to one of real beauty.

Fratten stood for a moment drinking it in; his companion waited with him, but seemed to have little eye for his surroundings. He had lighted a cigar and gave some attention to the way in which it was burning.

“Have you ever thought,” he asked as they moved on, “of getting Ryland to take up the stage professionally—either as an actor or producer? He has considerable talent, I believe. It seems to me that real work of any kind, however . . . hold up!”

They had got about half-way down the triple flight of steps, when a man, evidently in a great hurry, running down the steps from behind them, stumbled and fell against Sir Garth, catching hold of his arm to recover his own balance. Fratten did not fall, though he might have done so had Hessel not been on his other side to steady him.

“I—I beg your pardon, sir,” stammered the intruder. “I’m in a great hurry; I hope I haven’t hurt you?”

The speaker was a well-built man of rather more than average height, without being tall. He appeared to be somewhere in the thirties and wore a dark moustache.

“Are you all right, Fratten; are you all right?” asked Hessel, anxiously looking in his companion’s face. Sir Garth had closed his eyes for a minute, and in the dim light he appeared to be rather white, but he soon pulled himself together and smiled at his companion.

“Quite all right, Leo,” he said.

“In that case, sir,” said his “assailant,” “if you’ll forgive me—I’ll be off—great hurry—important message—Admiralty . . .” and he was off, dashing down the steps as before and disappearing in the direction of the great building across the road on the left. A small group of people had collected but when they found that nothing really exciting had happened they quickly dispersed—all except one middle-aged lady who fluttered round Sir Garth, chattering excitedly about “dastardly attack,” “eye-witness,” “police,” etc., until Hessel brusquely requested her to take herself off. Hessel himself was not a little excited; he insisted on cross-examining his friend as to his symptoms, begged him to take a cab and, when he refused, took him by the arm and almost led him along, gesticulating energetically with his free hand, in which the lighted cigar still glowed. Sir Garth thought that he had never before seen his friend display so markedly the reputed excitability of his race.

Fratten himself appeared to be very little upset by the incident; he listened with some amusement to Hessel’s exhortations and allowed himself to be shepherded across the Mall. The pair stopped for a second on the island in the middle to allow a car to pass and then crossed slowly to the other side; they had reached the footway and taken a step or two towards the Horse Guards Parade when Fratten uttered a sharp ejaculation, staggered,

and then, gasping for breath, sank slowly down into a limp bundle on the ground. Hessel had been quite unable to hold up the dead-weight of the body through whose arm his own was linked; in fact he was nearly pulled to the ground himself. He threw himself on his knees beside his friend and peered anxiously into his face.

What he saw there was deeply disturbing. Sir Garth's face was deadly pale in the dim light, his eyes stared up, unseeing but agonized; his mouth was open and set as if in a desperate effort to breathe. But the gasping breaths had ceased, the body was quite still.

Hessel clasped and unclasped his hands nervously.

"Fratten;" he said. "Fratten; can you hear me?"

No answer came from the still figure on the ground.

Hessel looked up at the ring of pale faces hovering above him.

"Has anyone got a car?" he asked, "or a taxi?"

"Shall I fetch a doctor, sir?" asked one of the crowd.

"Or a policeman?" asked another.

"Or an ambulance?"

"No, no, a car. I want to get him to his own house—quite close here. His own doctor—knows all about this. Sir Horace Spavage. Heart—I'm afraid . . . a car . . ."

"I've got a car here," said a newcomer who had pushed his way through the crowd and heard the last words. "A limousine—he'll be comfortable in that." ("Not much use to him, though," he muttered to himself.) "Lend a hand, somebody; I'll take his shoulders. Put a hand under his head, will you?"

Very carefully the limp form was carried to the car and deposited on the soft cushions of the back seat. Hessel got in beside it and took his friend's hand, which felt to him deathly cold. The owner of the car got in beside the driver and in less than two minutes they had reached Queen Anne's Gate. Fortunately, as Hessel thought, Inez was not in and Sir Garth was carried into the morning-room and laid on the big sofa. There was no lift in the house and Hessel did not like, he told Golpin, to risk the climb to the second floor.

Within ten minutes Sir Horace Spavage had arrived. One glance at the white and agonized face was enough.

"Dear, dear!" he said. "So soon?"

Kneeling down by the sofa, he picked up one of his patient's hands, held the wrist for a few seconds between his fingers and thumb, and laid it quietly down again. Then, undoing the front of the shirt and vest, he laid his hand on the bare chest and tapped it firmly with the rigid fingers of his other hand. Even to Hessel's untutored ears, the sound produced was curiously muffled and dull. Sir Horace rose slowly to his feet, putting away the stethoscope which he had automatically slipped round his neck.

"Yes; as I thought," he said. "The aneurism has burst."

. . . . . .

The funeral of Sir Garth Fratten took place on the following Monday. The actual burial was at Brooklands and was attended only by members of the family and a few close personal friends. Ryland and Inez were the chief mourners, Ryland looking very subdued and unhappy, and Inez worn out with misery but erect and calm—and very beautiful in her black clothes. A few distant cousins had come to establish a relationship which the dead man had allowed to remain distant during his life, whilst Leopold Hessel, Laurence Mangane, Sir Horace Spavage, and Mr. Septimus Menticle, the family solicitor, were also present.

In London a memorial service was held at St. Ethelberta's, one of Wren's most beautiful—and threatened—City churches. The church was packed with City men of all types and standings. A Director of the Bank of England was present to represent that august institution officially, together with members of the committees of Lloyds and the Stock Exchange. All the directors of Fratten's Bank, except of course Hessel, were there, and Major-General Sir Hunter Lorne, a notable figure even among men of note, represented the Victory Finance Company. Every member of the staff of Fratten's Bank, which was closed for the day—a unique circumstance—was there, from the chief cashier to the latest-joined stamp-licker. The City felt that one of its big men had gone—one of the fast-disappearing pre-war type—and it was, beneath its inscrutable surface, genuinely moved.

When the burial at Brooklands was over, the party returned to Queen Anne's Gate. Inez, with quiet dignity, poured out tea and then excused herself and retired, leaving Ryland to act as host to the rather uncomfortable and ill-assorted gathering. When tea was finished a move was made to the dining-room and as soon as the gloomy committee was seated round the big mahogany table, Mr. Menticle produced the last will and testament of his late client. Placing a pair of gold pince-nez upon his aquiline nose, he cleared his throat and, in a precise voice, read the contents of the crisp

document in his hand. The distant cousins were all agreeably surprised by what they heard, the staff of Fratten's Bank were remembered to a man—and girl, various charities were mentioned, though not unduly, and the residue of the estate was divided equally between "my two children, Ryland and Inez Fratten." Leopold Hessel was appointed sole executor with a generous legacy and the instruction that Sir Garth's private and business papers should be in the first place scrutinized by him and their disposal left to his sole discretion.

"There, gentlemen!" said Mr. Menticle, when the reading was over, "that represents the attested wishes of a very big and generous man; if, as one who has known him and his family and affairs for many years, I may be allowed to say so, it represents also a very reasonable and well-balanced distribution of the goods which he largely created himself and which, as we know, it was as impossible for him as for any other to take with him out of this world. With your permission, gentlemen—yours especially, Mr. Fratten—I will now withdraw. I have, I am sorry to say, other work awaiting me at my office which this sad occasion has caused me to neglect."

When the last of the ghouls had left, Ryland Fratten returned to the dining-room and sank again into the chair he had just left. For minutes he sat there, motionless, staring at the polished surface of the table, his face an expressionless mask—except for the eyes, in the depth of which a look of some agonized emotion seemed to lurk—sorrow, remorse, fear?

The door opened quietly and Inez' wistful face peered round it.

"There you are, Ry!" she said. "I've been hunting for you everywhere, since I heard the front door slam. I thought perhaps old Menticle had got his teeth into you about the will or something. What are you doing in here all by yourself, old man?"

Ryland turned his haggard face towards her, an attempt at a smile quivered on his mouth, and then his head sank into his folded arms and a deep sob shook his body.

Inez slipped on to the chair next to him and threw her arm across his shoulders.

"Ry," she said. "What is it? My dear, tell me."

A look of anxiety and almost more than sisterly tenderness came into her eyes as Ryland sat motionless, unanswering.

At the same time, back at his office in Lincoln's Inn—where also he lived, in considerable bachelor comfort—Mr. Menticle emptied his dispatch-case on to the table before him. From the heap of documents he selected

one, a parchment, less soiled than most of the others. He ran his eye over its brief contents, looked for a minute out of the window, as if in deep thought, then slowly tore it across and across.

CHAPTER V

SIR LEWARD MARRADINE TAKES INTEREST

THE sudden death of Sir Garth Fratten, interesting and, in financial circles, important as it had been, was not sufficiently sensational to remain in the public memory more than a day or two after the funeral. But it was not entirely forgotten. About three days later, Sir Leward Marradine, the Assistant-Commissioner in charge of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, called the attention of Chief Inspector Barrod to an advertisement in the Personal Column of *The Times*.

"Duke of York's Steps. Miss Inez Fratten will be glad to hear from the gentleman who accidentally stumbled against her father, Sir Garth Fratten, on Thursday 24th October, some time after 6 p. m. Write 168 Queen Anne's Gate, S.W."

"Make anything of that, Barrod?" asked the A.C.C.[1] "I wonder if it's in any other papers."

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[1] Assistant-Commissioner (Crime).

"Yes, sir, a lot of them. Many of the "pennies" have got a paragraph about it. It's just the sort of thing they seize on to and try and work up into a 'sensation.' "

"I wonder what the girl's got in her mind," muttered Sir Leward.

"Hardly a matter for us, is it, sir?" asked his subordinate.

"No, not at—not as far as I know. You needn't bother about it, Barrod; I know the girl slightly—I'll go and see her quietly, just in case there's something behind this. Now, about these Treasury note forgeries; has Murgate reported yet on the Goodge Street plant? I don't believe myself that that outfit could have produced such high-class work. . . ."

Soon after five that evening, Sir Leward emerged from Scotland Yard and crossed Whitehall in the direction of Storey's Gate, taking off his hat to the delicate Cenotaph which lay on his right.

The head of the C.I.D. was a squarely built man of medium height, with long arms and rather rounded shoulders. In spite of the fact that he had been a soldier, he was clean-shaven, whilst his mouth, with its full lips, was intelligent rather than firm. Occupying a succession of comfortable posts at the War Office during the last three and a half years of the War, he had been at hand to slip into this plum of ex-service civilian posts when it fell vacant, being wise enough to relinquish a better-paid but moribund Army appointment before the returning flood of warriors from sea and land glutted both service and civilian markets.

The sight of the Cenotaph reminded Marradine that Remembrance Day was nearly at hand again. This annual ceremony, the heart of which lay so close to his own work, always filled him with an intensity of patriotic and heroic feeling. What a wonderful sight it must be for those million dead Britons to look down—if they could look down—upon the dense black and white sea of their comrades and descendants, motionless and silent in memory of them. To see the King—head of the greatest Empire the world has ever known—and all his ministers, his admirals and generals, standing there in reverence, with bared heads. Quaint in a way, when you thought of some of the million whose memory they were hallowing—scoundrels, a lot of them, cowards a good many, and the great bulk only fighting and dying because they had to. Still it was a noble death. War itself was a noble, an heroic affair, in a way, bringing out all that was best in a man. Sir Leward felt a thrill of pride that he himself had been a soldier.

The great Government offices were emptying now and the hurrying crowds of men and women, all with the eager look of "home and supper" in their eyes, gave to the familiar scene an air of vitality, slightly romanticized by the soft haze of autumn twilight.

As Marradine expected, Inez Fratten was at home and in the middle of tea in the comfortable morning-room next to the front door. She was looking even more attractive than Sir Leward remembered and he was glad when a dark young man who was with her, introduced by some name faintly resembling his own, muttered some excuse and departed. Marradine accepted a large cup of tea and a muffin.

"How nice of you to call," said Inez, smiling sweetly—as she would have called it—at him, after Sir Leward had murmured suitable words of consolation. As a matter of fact Inez was rather at a loss where to "place" her visitor; she remembered meeting him at some dinner, that he was something important under the Government, and that he had paid her rather heavy-handed attention after dinner, but she was not sure whether, under his

official manner, he was young-old, or old-young, "rather a dear," or "a pompous ass." She didn't even know whether it was worth the bother of finding out. His first words, however, quickly switched her mind off these trivial matters to one of, for her, intense interest.

"I saw your advertisement in *The Times*, Miss Fratten. I wondered whether I could help you in any way—I daresay you know that I'm at Scotland Yard."

"I hadn't quite realized it—I knew you were something important," said Inez. "I hope you don't think it was very silly of me to put that advertisement in."

"What was in your mind? Don't tell me, of course, if you don't want to—I'm not here officially—but if I'm to help . . ." Marradine left the sentence unfinished.

Inez thought for a minute. She wasn't sure that she quite liked what she saw of her visitor, but obviously he could find out far more for her than she could herself. Anyhow, she couldn't very well do any harm by talking to him.

"I haven't got anything very definite in my mind," she replied. "But it seems to me so odd that that man who knocked into father—who must, quite accidentally of course, have been the cause of his death—shouldn't have shown any sign—written to me, or something."

Sir Leward waited for a moment or two to see if there was more to come. It was a curiously lame explanation; he felt that there should be more in it than that—but evidently there was not.

"Don't you think, perhaps, that you're rather exaggerating the man's responsibility?" he suggested. "I do remember something about Sir Garth having been jogged by somebody a little time before he fell. But the doctor—whoever he was—can't have thought much of it; or at any rate, he was evidently expecting your father's death at any time, otherwise he would hardly have given a death certificate without an inquest."

"Oh yes, of course he expected it," said Inez, with a touch of impatience. "At least, he says so now. I knew nothing about it—about his being seriously ill—till about a fortnight before, and then I didn't know for some time that it was an aneurism—we were told it was heart disease. It's all come so very suddenly—I feel somehow that something's wrong."

With most women Sir Leward would at this point have said something soothing and platitudinous, taken a solicitous farewell, and put the matter out of his mind. The whole thing seemed to him so simple—a storm in a tea-

cup. But Inez attracted him; he liked her pale beauty, her calm but decided manner—he liked particularly the peculiar droop at the corners of her mouth when she smiled. It would be easy to see more of her.

"I expect the chap just hasn't noticed about your father. Those people live curiously localized lives—his own office stool and his circle in Balham. They often are quite unaware of what's going on in the world outside that. Probably he'll see this advertisement, though—or someone'll talk about it in front of him. Then he's sure to turn up or write. Will you let me know? I might be able to help."

Marradine rose to go—he knew the importance of brevity in any kind of visit—it enhanced the value, tantalized the imagination.

"By the way," he asked, as he shook hands. "Who was the young fellow I so unkindly drove away? Not your brother, of course?"

"Mr. Mangane? He's father's secretary—was, I mean. There's a good deal to clear up—he'll be going soon, of course."

"Been here long?"

"A month or so, I think."

Sir Leward opened his mouth to ask another question, but thought better of it and went away, leaving Inez, as he had intended, still wondering about him.

Arriving at his office in Scotland Yard at about ten the next morning, Sir Leward sent for Chief Inspector Barrod. It wouldn't do to let Barrod know how trivial he thought the matter, so he piled on the interest a bit.

"It's just possible that there's something in this Fratten business, Barrod," he said. "Miss Fratten is a shrewd, level-headed girl, not likely to make a mountain out of a molehill. She's not at all satisfied with the cause of death; it seems that they'd said nothing to her about an aneurism, which was apparently the trouble—I confess I thought it was heart failure myself—shows how carelessly one reads things when one's not particularly interested. Sir Garth was a rich man, of course, and a big man—he may have had enemies. Probably there's nothing in it, but—a wisp of smoke, you know."

The Chief Inspector was not impressed; he wasn't even interested. He remained silent. Sir Leward was conscious of the lack, and covered it by a still more decided manner.

"We'll look into it," he said. "Put someone on who's not too heavy in the foot. You know what I mean. Who have you got?"

Chief Inspector Barrod allowed a faint smile to hover on his lips, but he spoke seriously enough.

"I've just got the man you want, sir. Poole. Just promoted Inspector—you'll remember that you put him up yourself, sir, after that Curzon House impersonation case. Well-educated officer, sir—public school and college man."

The fact of the matter was that Barrod himself thought very little of Detective-Inspector Poole and was delighted to have the opportunity of pushing him off in search of a mare's nest. Poole was of a type that he did not care for—well-educated, "genteel" (Barrod thought), probably soft, and certainly possessed of a swelled head. A failure—or at any rate, a fiasco—would do him no harm.

"Does he know anything about finance?" asked Sir Leward.

Barrod raised his eyebrows.

"Finance, sir? Do you mean accountancy, or—or what I might call 'high finance'?"

"I don't know that I'd 'fined' the subject down so closely, Barrod. I meant finance generally—accountancy would certainly come into it—stock markets, bill-broking and so on. Hardly 'high finance'—that's more international banking, isn't it?"

"That was rather Sir Garth Fratten's line, wasn't it, sir? He was a banker, and certainly had an international reputation."

"That's not quite the same thing, I should say, as being an international banker—Fratten's was a small private bank.—I should have thought it was more of a family affair. Still, I confess I'm very ignorant on the subject."

"So am I, sir—an abstruse subject. Anyway, I'm afraid Poole won't have it. I believe he did go through a course of economics sometime—I'm not quite sure when. I don't know what he learnt at it."

"Probably his way about a balance sheet—which is more than most of us know. What about women? Can he keep his head or is he liable to be vamped?"

"That Radinska woman didn't put it over him in the Curzon case, anyhow, sir."

"No, nor she did—I remember. Good-looker, too. Bit of a St. Anthony. On the whole he sounds the man for the job."

"I think he is, sir," agreed the Chief Inspector, with an inward chuckle.

"Call him up, then, if he's here. May as well get on with it at once."

Chief Inspector Barrod pulled the house-telephone towards him.

CHAPTER VI

INSPECTOR JOHN POOLE

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR JOHN POOLE had had, as Chief Inspector Barrod had told Sir Leward Marradine, a good education. That is to say, he had been to a private school, one of the smaller public schools, and to the University of Oxford, where he had been an exhibitioner of St. James's College. It was at Oxford that the seed of his rather eccentric ambition had been sown in him. His father, a country doctor with a comfortable practice, had intended him at first to follow in his own footsteps, but when John began to show signs of brain power above the family average, without feeling any of the "call" to a career of healing that is so essential to success in that profession, he had substituted the Bar as the goal of the boy's academical efforts. John had a cool, clear brain, the facility to express himself concisely, and a capacity for hard and persistent work—a dogged pursuit of results—all admirable qualities in a barrister.

For a time young Poole followed the course laid down for him willingly enough. He took his Law Prelim. in his stride, and settled down to the pursuit of Final Honours—a First if possible, a Second as very second best. At the same time he did not neglect either the athletic or social side of University life. In his third year he got an Athletic Half-Blue, running as second string in the Low Hurdles, whilst in the summer he played cricket for his College and once figured, but without conspicuous success, in a Seniors' Match. He began to rehearse a small part in *The Winter's Tale* for the O.U.D.S. but, finding it took too much of his time, mostly spent in hanging about watching the stars spread themselves, he gave it up and took to political and other debating societies.

It was at a meeting of the Justice Club that he first made his mark. The society was debating the rights and wrongs of a certain celebrated criminal trial, and Poole, rising as a comparatively unknown member when the discussion had reached a stage of considerable confusion and imminent collapse, had reviewed the evidence for the prosecution from so original a standpoint and with such logical precision that the "jury" had returned an enthusiastic and overwhelming majority for the defence. As a result of this speech, Poole had been elected a member of the Criminologists Club, a much older and more reputable body, at whose meetings celebrated old

members often attended and spoke. Here he had met Harry Irving, whose personality had fired John with his own enthusiastic interest in the fascinating subject of crime. On another occasion the principal speaker—not a member—was the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, who, speaking on the subject of police work generally and criminal investigation in particular, had definitely opened John Poole's eyes to the possibility of crime investigation as a career.

At first the young undergraduate thought of becoming an independent investigator—a private detective—possibly after a short career at the Bar with the object of picking up the legal side of the work. But after thinking over again all that the Chief Commissioner had said, and reading such books on the subject as he could lay his hands on, Poole came to the conclusion that the powers and machinery of the official police gave them such an overwhelming advantage over the "amateurs" that in the Force itself alone lay the prospects of really great achievement.

For the high offices in the Police Force, the Chief Constables of County Constabularies, the Chief and Assistant-Commissioners of the Metropolitan and City Police, it was not of course necessary to have been a policeman. Such posts usually went to soldiers and sailors, or even occasionally to barristers, though in some of the Borough Police forces promotion from the ranks was becoming more common. But, from the first moment, Poole set his mind on one post, for which—though it was generally so filled—he did not consider that an army or navy training was sufficient. He wanted to be Head of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard.

He quite appreciated the commonly accepted attitude that a Chief Commissioner or a Chief Constable (outside Scotland Yard) needed a wider training, a broader outlook, than were to be obtained by step-by-step promotion in the police force. But for the particular and expert work of criminal investigation, for a degree of experience and proficiency such as he believed a great chief of the C.I.D. ought to have, he did not believe that any soldier, sailor, or barrister was qualified. On the other hand, he doubted, as did the authorities and public opinion generally, whether any policeman, as at present recruited, had the necessary qualifications, of the broader kind, either; in fact, he doubted whether, under present conditions, *any* individual living was properly qualified for the post he sought.

Poole therefore determined to qualify himself by obtaining both the broad outlook and the expert knowledge which he postulated. He completed his time at Oxford, taking a Second Class in Law at the end of his third year; then, in order to get some insight into the legal side of his work, he was

called to the Bar and was lucky enough to get into the chambers of Edward Floodgate, the well-known criminal lawyer, who afterwards leapt into fame in the course of the astounding Hastings trial. With Floodgate he remained for a year, working with great energy to acquire as much knowledge and experience as possible in the short time at his disposal. At the age of twenty-three he joined the Metropolitan Police as a recruit, and after serving for fifteen months as a Constable in "C" Division, succeeded in catching the eye of the authorities and was transferred to the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard. At the age of twenty-seven he was promoted Sergeant and soon afterwards was lucky enough to figure prominently in two celebrated cases, in the latter of which, known as the Curzon case, he had come under the notice of Sir Leward Marradine himself. The A.C.C. was so impressed by the intelligence and persistence displayed by the young Detective-Sergeant that he put his name down for accelerated promotion, a step, as we have seen, not fully approved by Chief Inspector Barrod, in whose section he worked.

Barrod, however, was a fair-minded man, and though he had no high opinion of his new Inspector, he did not allow the latter to be aware of the fact. It was with no misgiving, therefore, that Poole answered the summons to report himself to the A.C.C. Certainly his appearance, as he respectfully acknowledged Sir Leward's greeting, did not belie his reputation. Standing about five feet ten inches, he had the straight hips, small waist and wide shoulders of the ideal athlete, though his clothes were cut to conceal, rather than accentuate, these features. His face, except for the eyes, was not remarkable; the chin was well-moulded rather than strong, the mouth quietly firm, and the forehead of medium height. But the eyes were, to anyone accustomed to study faces, an indication of his character—grey, steady eyes that looked quietly at the object before them, with a curiously unblinking gaze that allowed nothing to escape them. They had, for a detective, the distinct disadvantage that, to anyone who had encountered them, they were not easily forgotten.

"Sir Leward wants you to look into a case for him, Poole," said the Chief Inspector. "It would probably save time, sir," he added turning to Marradine, "if you gave him the facts and your instructions yourself."

Marradine repeated his account of his interview with Miss Fratten and his own impressions on the subject.

"You'll see, Poole," he said, "that so far there is no real case to investigate; the doctor signed a death certificate without question, nobody has laid any information or in any way hinted at foul play. And yet I'm not satisfied—and clearly Miss Fratten is not satisfied. I want you to make one

or two very quiet and discreet inquiries. It mustn't get about that Scotland Yard is moving in the matter—we don't want to bring a hornet's nest about our ears. Of course, you will have to act in your official capacity—the people whom you question will have to know that we are interested—but it must not go any further. Impress that upon them. I would suggest your seeing the doctor—Spavage, I think his name was—and the solicitor. Possibly that chap Hessel, who was with Sir Garth when he died."

Chief Inspector Barrod had been turning the pages of a Medical Directory.

"Sir Horace Spavage, M.D. 1902, L.R.C.B. Lond. 1910, etc., etc., Phys. in Ord. to H.M. the King. Cons. Phys. Heart Hospital . . . is that the chap?" he asked.

"Yes, that'll be him; I remember, the name now—Sir Horace Spavage. The solicitor you'll have to get from Miss Fratten—I don't know anything about him. When you've had a talk with them, come and see me and we'll decide whether it's worth while going any further."

Sir Leward nodded in dismissal and his two subordinates left the room, Poole following the Chief Inspector to the office which the latter shared with three other Chief Inspectors. Barrod sat down at his desk and started to go through some papers. Poole waited in silence for a minute and then, thinking that perhaps his superior had forgotten his presence, he coughed discreetly. Barrod lifted his head and looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"Yes?" he said.

"Any instructions, sir?"

"You've had your instructions from the Chief."

Inspector Poole felt slightly uncomfortable—as if there was a hitch somewhere.

"I report progress through you, I suppose, sir, as usual?"

"Sir Leward told you to report to him. You'd better do as you're told. This case has nothing to do with me."

Decidedly, a hitch. "Very good, sir."

Poole left the room, wondering just what the trouble was. He was not at all pleased at getting on the wrong side of Chief Inspector Barrod at this stage of his career, though he could not see what he himself had done to bring this about. Perhaps the Chief Inspector had forgotten his Kruschen that morning—or taken an overdose. More probably, he had been himself ticked off about something and this was just a case of the office-boy taking it out of

the cat. Anyway, Poole did not propose to allow himself to be put out by this little cloud on the horizon.

The story that he had heard had rather intrigued him. For the moment, of course, there was very little in it; from a criminal point of view there would probably prove to be nothing in it at all. But the chief characters concerned were undoubtedly interesting. In the first place, Sir Garth Fratten, the great banker, whose reputation for financial ability amounting almost to genius had penetrated well beyond the bounds of the City. Then there was his daughter, Miss Fratten. Sir Leward had not, of course, revealed the physical side of his attraction to her—he had not referred in any way to her appearance or qualities; but it was quite clear that she was a girl of character and determination; she would almost certainly be an interesting person to meet. Finally there was the doctor, Sir Horace Spavage—a man of established reputation, "Physician in Ordinary to the King." If it turned out that there had been foul play—and he had given a death certificate of "natural causes"—he would be in a funny position.

Poole decided first of all to visit the doctor. If there was anything questionable about Sir Garth's death it was essential to find out the actual cause. So far he was very vague on this subject.

Leaving Scotland Yard, the detective crossed Whitehall, automatically raising his hat to the Cenotaph as he did so. Having been too young to serve in the Great War, and having himself lost no near relations in it, he naturally did not feel the same personal interest in the national memorial as those who had, but he liked the custom of this quiet salute and always observed it. Taking a S.C. Bus, he was soon crashing down the wide thoroughfare from which the Empire is governed. Past the delicate Horse Guards building, nestling between the sombre Treasury and the great barrack of the Admiralty; past the pretentious *massif* of the new War Office, its grossness shamed by the dignified beauty of its small neighbour "Woods and Forests"; through the lower part of Trafalgar Square, threatened now by the shadow of architectural disaster; into the whirl of one-way traffic round the Guards Crimean Memorial; through the blatant vulgarities of Piccadilly Circus and up between the glaring new commercial palaces of Regent Street; Poole at most times had an eye for London, for its beauties and its tragic blunders, but today his mind was upon the problem in front of him.

Automatically he got down at Oxford Circus, disengaged himself from the "monstrous regiment" of female shoppers, and cutting across Cavendish Square, turned into the long and sombre avenue of Harley Street.

“This dates him a bit, doesn’t it?” Poole muttered to himself, as he glanced up at the name of the street.

Fortunately for him, Sir Horace’s house was at the Cavendish Square end, so that he was saved a possible ten minutes walk of infinite dreariness. Only one plate was on the massive door, he noticed as he rang the bell. Probably that meant that Sir Horace lived here, poor devil. The door was opened by a man-servant in a white jacket. Poole explained that he had no appointment but that, if Sir Horace had a quarter of an hour to spare in the near future, he would like to consult him upon a matter of some importance. The man-servant showed Poole into a waiting-room faintly redolent of mutton and retired, bearing with him Poole’s private card. After the customary twenty minutes wait, the man-servant returned to say that, owing to the failure of a patient, Sir Horace was fortunately able to see Mr. Poole at once—the usual formula of the unengaged.

Poole was shown into a large room, full—or so it seemed—of dark heavy furniture and a countless array of signed photographs; on the big writing table, Their Gracious Majesties; on the mantelpiece, Their various Royal Highnesses—mostly ten or twenty years younger than life; on occasional tables and round the walls the lesser, but still noble fry: Caroline Kent, Minon Lancashire, Grace Wilbraham-Hamilton, George Gurgles —“truthfully yours,” leaders of fashion, men and women of the world, actors and actresses—of the type eligible for “birthday honours”—sportsmen, financiers—yes, prominently now, though probably retrieved by recent notoriety from comparative obscurity, an indifferent portrait of “Garth Fratten.”

Naturally, Inspector Poole did not take in all these photographic “warrants” at one glance, rather they impressed themselves upon his sub-conscious notice and gradually presented themselves one by one, during the course of the interview, to his observant eye. At the moment he was engaged in taking in the principal feature of the room, Sir Horace Spavage himself. Sir Horace was not a tall man, he was in fact, about five foot six, but he was, as he liked to put it, a man of good proportions and of a noticeable presence. His hair was now white and rather long, he had a curling white moustache, good teeth—too good to be true—and more than a suspicion of side-whiskers. He wore a frock-coat and a double cravat embellished by a fine pearl pin.

When Poole entered, Sir Horace was standing behind his desk, tapping the former’s card against his well-kept nails. After a quick glance at his visitor, to see perhaps if he looked sufficiently noble to be shaking hands

with, Sir Horace abandoned any such intention that he may have fostered, and waved to a chair.

"Sit down, Mr.—er—Poole. What may I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

The detective remained standing. He handed across the table his official card.

"That will explain who I am, sir. I thought it better not to send it in by your servant; the matter is confidential."

Sir Horace frowned. He also remained standing.

"What is it you want, Inspector? I have only a few minutes. My next patient . . ."

"I quite understand, sir. I have been instructed to make one or two enquiries about the death of Sir Garth Fratten. Some question has been raised about the actual cause of death—about the circumstances, too, that led up to it. As regards the first question, you, naturally, can give us the information we want."

"You will find the necessary information in my death certificate, Inspector. I don't understand the necessity for your coming to me about it. The matter was all in order."

"Quite so, sir, but I shall be glad, all the same, if you will tell me about it in your own words. Possibly some amplification of the information contained in the certificate may clear things up."

"What do you mean, 'clear things up'? There is nothing to clear up, so far as I know."

"Probably not, sir, but we want to be quite certain on that point. I understand that the cause of death was the rupture of an aneurism. Can you tell me how long Sir Garth had suffered from this—disability?"

The physician stood for a moment looking down at the writing-pad in front of him, his fingers playing an irritated tattoo on the woodwork of the table. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he sat down, signing to the detective to do the same.

"Very well," he said, "I suppose I had better do what you want, though it seems a complete waste of time—yours as well as mine. Sir Garth Fratten had been suffering from a thorasic aneurism for about a year. It was very slight at first, and I had hoped by treatment—the injection of gelatine solution—to cure it. Within the last three months, however, the dilatation had noticeably increased. I ordered complete rest—owing to the position, in

the chest, an operation was out of the question—but Sir Garth was a self-willed man and would not listen to reason. He preferred, he said, to die in harness rather than lead an idle and useless life, though he did agree to knock off a certain amount of his work. There was always great danger of the aneurism bursting in the event of sudden shock and, though I hadn't expected it quite so soon, I was in no way surprised when it occurred."

"I'm afraid I'm very ignorant, sir," said Poole. "Would you mind telling me, not too technically, what an aneurism is?"

This was pie to Sir Horace and he answered with a better grace than he had yet shown.

"An aneurism is a blood-containing cavity, the walls of which are formed from the dilatation of an artery, or of its surrounding tissues. The dilatation is due to local weakness, caused by injury or disease. You might say that the general effect was rather like the ballooning of an inner tube through the outer cover of a motor tire. Naturally, if the aneurism bursts, the blood escapes from the artery into the pleura and death rapidly ensues. Do I make myself clear?"

"Quite, sir. Now can you tell me if it is the case that Sir Garth's family was in ignorance of this condition?"

"Certainly not. Not, that is to say, at the time of his death. It is true that for some time Sir Garth told his family and friends that it was his heart that was troubling him—he considered that deception, I believe, to be a euphemism. But he made no stipulation to me about it and I myself told his son what was the matter with him. The boy and his sister were worried by a slight accident that had occurred to Sir Garth—only a week or two before his death, it was, as a matter of fact—and young Fratten came up here to see me about it. I wrote him out a note of explanation to show his sister—he wasn't sure that he could explain it to her himself. It was obviously desirable that they should know, so that they could use their influence to restrain him from overdoing himself."

Poole felt a slight stirring of interest as he listened, though he was not sure exactly what had aroused it. But he was now coming to the awkward part of his interrogation.

"About the actual cause of Sir Garth's death, sir. I understand about the aneurism bursting, but what exactly caused it to burst?"

Sir Horace fidgeted with a paper-knife.

"Surely," he said, "your people read the papers? There was a slight accident, very slight. Someone stumbled against Sir Garth, upset him to a

certain extent. No doubt it was a shock, as it was on the occasion of which I have already spoken—he was nearly run over in the City by a motor-bicycle. The shock and excitement were quite sufficient to burst the aneurism. I had no difficulty in deciding the cause of death and in giving a certificate to that effect."

Poole took the plunge.

"You will forgive me, sir," he said, "but I shall be glad if you will tell me whether you are quite sure that there is no possibility of mistake. Is it impossible that death was due to some other cause, such as a blow? Some deliberate cause, that is to say?"

Sir Horace sat up abruptly.

"What on earth do you mean, sir?" he exclaimed. "Are you throwing doubts upon my diagnosis?"

"Not for a minute," Poole hastened to assure him. "I fully accept the cause of death as being the rupture of the aneurism, but I would like to know whether it could possibly have been deliberately brought about—by a blow, for instance. May I ask whether you examined the body for any signs of a blow—any wounds or bruising?"

Sir Horace sprang to his feet, his face flushed, his eyes congested with anger.

"This is beyond sufferance!" he exclaimed. "You come here and cross-question me about the way I carry out my duties! Me, a Physician to His Majesty the King! Sir Wilfred (he was referring to the Home Secretary) shall hear of this! It is preposterous!"

He struck a hand-bell angrily:

"Of course there was no wound or bruising. The cause of death was quite simple and in accordance with my certificate. The whole of this questioning is ridiculous. Have the goodness to remove yourself, sir. Frazer, show this man out."

Inspector Poole retired with what grace he could, but with a smile at the back of his mouth. As the front door closed sharply behind him, he said to himself:

"That chap's got the wind up."

CHAPTER VII

SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION

AFTER a quick luncheon and a visit to the library of the Yard to look up "Aneurism" in the Encyclopedia Britannica, in order to check Sir Horace's description, Inspector Poole presented himself at 168 Queen Anne's Gate. On this occasion he did not present his private card, as he thought it unlikely that Miss Fratten would see him on that alone, and he certainly did not intend to entrust his official card to a butler or footman, who would certainly start talking about "a visit from the police"; instead, he enclosed his official card in an envelope with a note explaining that Sir Leward Marradine had instructed him to call.

Poole was standing in the large and comfortable hall, waiting for the return of the butler, when a door on one side opened and a tall young man with a dark moustache came out into the hall and walked towards the staircase. Throwing a glance at Poole, the newcomer hesitated, a puzzled expression on his face, then stopped abruptly and exclaimed:

"Good God; Puddles! What on earth . . . where have you sprung from?"

For a moment Poole struggled with an effort of memory; then a smile broke on his face, and he took a step forward with extended hand:

"Mangane! Laurence Mangane!"

Suddenly he checked himself and his hand dropped to his side, a peculiar expression replacing the smile on his face.

"Good-afternoon, sir," he said.

A look of amazement came into Mangane's face and he, too, checked his approach.

" 'Sir'?" he exclaimed. "What on earth are you talking about?"

Poole glanced round to see if anyone else was present.

"I'm Detective-Inspector Poole, sir," he said.

Slowly Mangane's face cleared and he broke into a broad grin.

"Good Lord, yes," he said. "I'd forgotten all about your quaint career. So you're a detective, are you? And an Inspector at that? Jolly good work. I . . ."

Poole made a gesture to stop him. The butler was coming downstairs.

"Miss Fratten will be down in a few minutes, sir. Will you step this way, sir, please?"

He led the way into the morning-room; Poole followed and Mangane brought up the rear. When the door had closed behind the butler, Mangane took the detective's arm and gave it a friendly shake.

"Now, Puddles," he said, "tell me all about it, and drop this 'sir' nonsense."

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind," replied Poole. "If I don't sink myself completely in my identity as a policeman it may make my position impossibly difficult if I run across any of my old friends in an official capacity. I thought at one time of changing my name when I joined the Force but that seemed making rather a mystery of the business. It's possible, for instance, that I may have to question you, among other people. That's absolutely confidential at the moment, please. But if I do, you can see for yourself that I can only do it as an unidentified policeman. You understand that, don't you—sir?"

Mangane slowly nodded his head.

"Yes, I see," he said. "You're probably right, though I don't like it. If at any time you do relax your . . ."

He was interrupted by the opening of the door into the hall. Inez Fratten walked in, Poole's note in her hand. Her eyebrows lifted slightly as she saw the two men talking together. Mangane evidently divined at once what was passing in her mind—the suspicion that he might be trying to "pump" the detective as to his business there.

"Inspector Poole and I are old friends, Miss Fratten," he said. "I haven't seen him for a great many years, though."

Inez's face at once cleared and broke into a smile.

"How jolly," she said. "Then I shan't be afraid of him. It makes me feel fearfully inquisitive though; I can't help imagining that he ran you in at some time in your indiscreet past."

She laughed lightly, and Poole fell an instant victim to her charm. Mangane threw a glance of enquiry at the detective, who nodded.

"We were at Oxford together," said Mangane.

Inez just checked herself in time from an exclamation that would have been hardly polite to the policeman.

"Better than ever," she said. "I'm so glad you've met again."

“I’m afraid it’s not much use to us,” said Mangane. “Poole insists upon remaining a policeman with a number and no old friends. I’ve no doubt he wouldn’t have let me tell about Oxford if he hadn’t known that you must be wondering why we were talking to each other. But I mustn’t stop here talking; you’ve got business, of course.”

He touched Poole’s shoulder and walked quickly out of the room. Inez made a mental note that he had gone up a step.

Poole’s interview with Inez Fratten did not reveal anything fresh. She talked about her advertisement and told him that she had not yet had any reply to it. She explained how Mr. Hessel had told her and her brother of the accident to their father in the City, and had warned them to stop him, if they could, from taking on some fresh work that he was contemplating; she did not tell him of the stormy interview that Ryland had had with her father on the same evening nor of the difficulty she had had in getting into touch with her brother again after that unfortunate occurrence; she explained how she had cross-questioned her father about his illness and how the latter had at last testily advised her to find out all about it from Sir Horace Spavage; finally, how Ryland had, at her request, gone up and interviewed Sir Horace —she was laid up with a chill and could not go herself—and had brought her back a note explaining all about the aneurism.

“I was horribly frightened about it,” she said, “but father was quite hopeless—you couldn’t turn him, once he had made up his mind to a thing. I feel pretty sure that he would have killed himself with overwork, even if it hadn’t been for this accident. That doesn’t make me any the less want to get hold of the rotter who knocked into him, and hasn’t the decency to come and say he’s sorry,” she added vindictively.

“I expect we shall find him, Miss Fratten,” said Poole. “In the meantime, will you tell me the name of your father’s solicitor?”

And with the name and address of Mr. Septimus Menticle of Lincoln’s Inn, Poole took his departure.

Mr. Menticle, however, was not in, and Poole was wondering what else he could do to further the enquiry when it occurred to him that Sir Leward had added the name of Mr. Leopold Hessel to the list of his preliminary investigations. The detective had gathered that Mr. Hessel was a director of Fratten’s Bank, so turned his steps now in that direction. He was lucky enough to find Mr. Hessel still in the bank. As soon as Poole had explained his business, the banker motioned him to a chair and sent for an extra supply of tea.

"Now, just what is it you want to know, Inspector?" asked Hessel. "About the accident—though it was scarcely as much as that really—before Sir Garth's death? I'll tell it you as well as I can, though it's extraordinarily difficult to be clear in one's mind, even about the most trivial happenings, when one has to be exact. We were walking from my club in St. James's Square towards Sir Garth's house in Queen Anne's Gate—you know it, I expect. He always walked home across the Park in the evening, though generally from his own club. On this occasion he happened to have had tea in my club and I was walking part of the way home with him; we got absorbed in a topic of conversation and I went on with him past the Athenæum and the Duke of York's column, though I had not at first intended to go that way. As we went down the steps, some man, who was apparently in a hurry, stumbled and fell against Sir Garth, who in his turn knocked against me."

"Just one minute, sir, please," interrupted Poole. "I'd like to get it quite clear. You say that the man stumbled and fell against Sir Garth. Could you define that rather more closely? What was the actual degree of force with which he struck into Sir Garth?"

Hessel thought for a minute.

"It's just as I said," he replied—"so difficult to be exact. I was talking, of course, and not noticing very much what was going on around me. I think I was just conscious of some slight noise or commotion—an exclamation, perhaps, and then Fratten staggered against me. Not very heavily—I don't think he would have fallen if I had not been there. But he was upset—clearly shaken—I suppose it was a shock. The man was very apologetic—seemed quite a decent fellow. As Fratten appeared to be really none the worse there seemed to be no point in detaining him—he was in a hurry—and said something about the Admiralty and a message. He ran on down the steps in that direction and Sir Garth and I walked slowly on—I took his arm in case he was still feeling shaken. Just after we had crossed . . ."

"May I interrupt again one minute, sir? Before you leave the incident on the Duke of York's Steps—can you say definitely whether or not the man who stumbled against Sir Garth actually struck him? Struck him with his fist, that is to say, or some instrument, with sufficient force to cause his death?"

Hessel stared at the Inspector with surprise.

"I see," he said. "That's what you've got in your mind? I wonder what put the idea there—still, I suppose that's not my business. No, I should say myself pretty definitely that such a thing did not occur. I feel quite sure that I

must have been aware if any force of that kind had been used. Besides, there were any number of people about—there is always a stream of them going that way towards Victoria and Waterloo at that time of day. Some of them must surely have noticed if any blow had been struck."

Poole thought over this point for a moment; it seemed unanswerable.

"I see, sir," he said. "There really were, then, a lot of witnesses of the occurrence?"

"Any number. A small crowd collected round us at once."

"You didn't take any of their names, I suppose?"

"I didn't; it never occurred to me to—the whole thing was a pure accident and at the time I thought it unimportant. If Sir Garth had fallen dead at once, it might have been different; but, as you know, he did not do so till after we had crossed the Mall. By that time they had probably all dispersed, and in any case I am afraid I was so upset that I didn't think of it—only of getting him home as quickly as possible."

"I quite understand, sir," said Poole. "Now about the actual death. You said that you had crossed the Mall."

"Yes, we crossed the Mall all right and were walking towards the Guards Memorial when he suddenly staggered, made a sort of choking, gasping sound and sank to the ground. He nearly pulled me down with him. I had my arm linked through his, as I told you. I believe he died almost at once, though I did not realize it at the time."

"It must have been a great shock for you, sir. I suppose there was no further accident just before the fall?"

"Oh no, nothing. Evidently it was the result of the shock he received on the steps. After all, it was only a hundred yards or so away."

"And the man concerned, of course, had disappeared by then?"

"Absolutely. I never saw or heard of him again."

Poole thought for a while, trying to find some fresh line of approach.

"It's probably quite immaterial," he said at last, "but could you by any chance tell me what was the subject of your conversation with Sir Garth that evening? You said that you were so engrossed in it that you went out of your way."

The slight raising of Hessel's eyebrows had a curious effect of rebuke upon the detective.

"If it is material, I can tell you," he replied. "We were talking of Sir Garth's son, Ryland Fratten. He was worried about him. They were a case of

father and son, both very charming people, not understanding one another. I always thought Sir Garth rather unjust to Ryland."

Poole had pricked up his ears.

"What was the trouble between them, sir?"

But Hessel evidently thought that he had said enough.

"Ah, Inspector," he replied, "I don't think I can enter into what amounts to little more than gossip—it's not quite my line. So far as our conversation that evening went, it concerned Ryland's affection or apparent lack of affection for his father. That is what I can tell you of my own knowledge; beyond that I am not prepared to go."

Poole decided not to press the point. He tried a fresh tack.

"Sir Garth was a rich man, Mr. Hessel, and of course, in his way, a powerful man. I suppose it is possible that he may have made enemies?"

But Hessel was not to be drawn. He smiled and shook his head.

"Aren't we verging a little bit on the melodramatic, Inspector?" he said. "I suppose your suggestion is that some City magnate hired an assassin to put a hated rival out of the way. That may have been the custom a couple of centuries ago, but hardly today—quite apart from the fact that I can't see how you make the death out to be anything but accidental."

Poole realized that he had now lost the sympathy of his audience; he wisely decided to go. Thanking the banker for his help and courtesy, as well as for his tea, the detective made his way out into the street. When he called upon Mr. Menticle in the afternoon he had learned that the latter lived in Lincoln's Inn, as well as working there, and might well be at home later in the day. He decided now to try his luck again.

He arrived at Mr. Menticle's chambers at about six o'clock and found that the owner had "sported his oak." In ordinary circumstances Poole, as an Oxford man, would have respected this appeal for privacy, but as it was he felt that the chariot wheels of justice must roll through even this sacred tradition. He knocked firmly on the outer door.

There was no answer to his first knock, but he had the curious feeling that the silence within had become even more silent. He knocked more sharply and soon heard footsteps approaching, followed by the opening of the inner door; he stepped back a pace and the heavy outer door swung slowly out towards him. In the doorway stood a curious figure, which might have stepped out of a page of Dickens; an elderly man, dressed in baggy subfuscous trousers, a worn velvet jacket, and a tasselled cap, such as Poole imagined to have been extinct since Balmoral lifted its ban upon smoking.

The face underneath the cap, however, was by no means Victorian; the nose certainly was aquiline and carried a pair of gold pince-nez, but the skin was clear and healthy, the mouth sensitive, and the eyes bright and intelligent. Probably Mr. Menticle amused himself in his solitude by posing as a participator in Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

At the moment there was a frown of displeasure on the lawyer's fine brow. He remained in the doorway, waiting for his visitor to explain his presence.

"I'm very sorry to disturb you, sir," said Poole. "My card will explain my insistence."

Mr. Menticle took the card, glanced at it, and, with a short nod, signed to Poole to come in.

"Shut the outer door behind you," said Mr. Menticle. "It may prevent our being disturbed."

Poole thought he caught a slight emphasis on the "may" and a faint chuckle from the retreating figure of his host. He followed, and found himself in a remarkably comfortable room, with a soft carpet, two easy-chairs, and a blazing wood fire. The walls were lined with bookcases, with an occasional well-balanced engraving, whilst over the fireplace hung a photograph of an O.U. Cricket Eleven. Poole checked with difficulty his natural inclination to go straight up and look at it.

"Take a chair, Inspector," said the lawyer, pointing to the least worn of the two. "You've come just in time for a glass of sherry."

He opened an oak corner cupboard and brought out a cut-glass decanter, two tulip sherry-glasses, and a tin of biscuits.

"Amontillado," he said. "Sound stuff. Not to be found everywhere in these days."

The two men lifted their glasses to each other. Poole's glance lifting for an instant to the photograph over the fire, Mr. Menticle allowed his gaze to rest for a time upon his visitor's face, before he spoke.

"What year were you up?" he asked.

Poole stared at him, then broke into a laugh.

"You're very quick, sir," he said. " '17 to '19. St. James's."

"Get a blue?"

"Half-blue, sir—Athletic. I played in a Seniors match once, but didn't get any further in cricket."

" 'Tics, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"And now you've taken to police work—C.I.D. Very interesting career. And I suppose you want to forget all about Oxford when you're on your job?"

"That's exactly what I do want, sir. Curiously enough it's come out twice today, and I'm rather annoyed with myself for letting it."

"Well, Inspector, I'll forget about it now. What did you want to see me about?"

"It's about the death of Sir Garth Fratten, sir."

Poole was watching the lawyer very closely when he said this, and he thought he saw a shadow of distress or anxiety come into his eyes. He gave no other sign, however, and the detective continued.

"We have been given to understand that there are some grounds for uncertainty about the circumstances of the death. I must say frankly that so far we have very little to go on, but I have been instructed to make certain preliminary investigations, in which you, sir, as the family solicitor, naturally take a prominent place."

Mr. Menticle nodded but did not volunteer any statement.

"There are one or two points, sir," Poole continued, "which I thought might help us. In the first place, the will. I could of course, get particulars from Somerset House, but I shall get a very much clearer idea of it if you will go through the principal features of it with me."

Mr. Menticle gave the suggestion a moment's thought, then nodded his head.

"Yes," he said. "I think I can do that. I might refuse, of course, but you would get the information just the same, by using your powers, and I should merely have established an atmosphere of hostility."

He rose, and, leaving the room, presently returned with a bundle of papers which he laid on the table beside him. Poole could not help admiring the cool common sense with which his host made a virtue of necessity.

"The will is a very simple one," said Mr. Menticle, laying it out on his knees, and running over its clauses with his finger. "Sir Garth left comfortable though not large legacies to various distant relations, to his employees at the bank and to his domestic staff. There are various bequests to charities and two special legacies of £5000 each, one to myself and one to his intimate friend, Mr. Leopold Hessel, whom he appointed his sole executor. But taking all these together, the total forms a very small portion

of his fortune, the residue of which, after paying all duties, was divided equally between Mr. Ryland and Miss Inez Fratten."

"His son and daughter?" said Poole and, as Mr. Menticle made no comment, took silence for consent.

The detective had jotted down the outline of the will as Mr. Menticle sketched it. He ran his eye over it again.

"And the residue will amount to?" he asked.

"Impossible to say yet. Sir Garth had very wide interests. The death duties, of course, will vary according to the total amount dutiable."

"But roughly?"

"Roughly, between four and five hundred thousand pounds, I should say."

"So that Mr. Ryland and Miss Inez Fratten will each get over £200,000."

"Presumably."

"Large sums," said Poole, "even in these days. Very large compared with the other legacies, I gather. What was the largest of those?"

"Mine and Mr. Hessel's. None of the others amounted to more than an annuity of £100."

"Hardly enough to invite murder—still, one never knows. Now, Mr. Menticle, I am going to ask you a straight question. Do you believe that any of these legatees, residuary or otherwise, had any inducement to bring about the premature death of the testator?"

Mr. Menticle rose abruptly from his chair and, walking over to the window, pulled aside the curtain and looked out on to the November night. Coming back into the room, he stood in front of the fire, with one foot on the fender, seeming to seek for inspiration from the blazing logs.

"That is a very direct question," he temporized.

"It is," said the detective, "and I want your answer, please, Mr. Menticle." The expression of Poole's face would have told anyone who knew him that, having got his grip, nothing now would cause him to relax it.

At last the lawyer straightened his shoulders and, turning his back to the fire, looked down at his interlocutor.

"I think I must tell you," he said, "that a week or so before his death, Sir Garth instructed me to draw up a new will. I was to have brought it to him to sign the morning after he actually died."

"There were important alterations?" Poole's voice was tense.

“There was one. Ryland Fratten was cut out of the will as a residuary legatee.”

CHAPTER VIII

RYLAND FRATTEN

POOLE sat for a while in silence, allowing this significant piece of information to sink into his mind.

"That means, then," he said at last, "that if Sir Garth had died on the evening of the 25th of October instead of the 24th, Miss Inez Fratten would have inherited the whole of the residuary estate of her father—nearly half a million pounds—and her brother would have had nothing?"

"Not nothing. He was to have received an annuity of £300; Sir Garth did not want him to be quite destitute—he doubted Ryland's ability to earn a living for himself, and to a certain extent he blamed himself for bringing the boy up in the expectation of idle riches."

"Still, it meant £300 a year instead of £10,000?"

"Exactly."

"That," thought Poole to himself, "may be considered to be a motive for murder."

Aloud, he said: "Did Mr. Ryland Fratten know of this new will?"

"That I cannot say for certain," replied the lawyer. "I gathered that Sir Garth had made use of some expression—something about 'cutting off' or 'disinheriting,' perhaps—that might have given Mr. Ryland an idea of what was in the wind."

"But did he know that the new will was to have been signed on the day you say it was—25th October?"

"That again I don't know—I should doubt it."

Evidently that was a point that must be looked into; Poole made a mental note of it and turned to another line of approach.

"And the cause of the change, sir?"

Mr. Menticle, who had been standing all this time, returned to his chair on the other side of the fireplace and slowly filled and lit a long-stemmed brier pipe. Poole got the impression that the lawyer was taking time to arrange his ideas. After a draw or two, and the use of another match, Mr.

Menticle replied to the question that had been addressed to him. He spoke slowly and deliberately.

"It was, I think, the culmination of a long series of disagreements and even quarrels between the two. Sir Garth was a man of very strict, perhaps narrow, views, particularly as regards women and money. Ryland, on the other hand, though an attractive and charming boy—in my opinion—is very weak on both these points. His head is turned by every girl he meets, with the inevitable consequence of entanglements, and he has no idea of the value of money. When I tell you that he was very keen on everything to do with the theatre and moved in—shall I say—rather Bohemian circles, you can understand what those two weaknesses led him into."

Poole nodded. "Definite trouble?"

"Definite trouble. About two years ago he got engaged to a young lady of the name of Crystel—Pinkie Crystel—that was her stage name; her real name was Rosa Glass—I know because I had to negotiate the ransom, so to speak. That cost Sir Garth £10,000. He was very angry—not without reason. Ryland was repentant, swore to leave chorus girls alone, promised definitely not to get engaged again without his father's consent. Within a month the chorus girl business had begun again—he could not keep away from them—and they cost him money—more than his allowance. From time to time Sir Garth had to hear of it, had to stump up—comparatively small sums, it is true; still the irritation was there. At the same time Ryland, who really, I am sure, was devoted to Sir Garth, felt his affection being chilled by repeated rebukes. He saw less and less of Sir Garth, ceased living in the house—steered clear of him as far as possible. Miss Inez, naturally, was miserable about it—did everything to bring them together, but without success—they were both obstinate men.

"Finally, about a fortnight before Sir Garth's death, he received a letter from Ryland saying that he had got entangled with another girl—I don't know the name in this case—and that she was asking for £20,000 or matrimony—and Ryland was straight enough to say that he had found he didn't like her after all and simply couldn't marry her. Naturally there was a flare up; unfortunately Sir Garth read the letter when he got back to his house just after having an unpleasant shock—a narrow escape from being run over—in the City. No doubt he was feeling unwell; he sent for Ryland, who happened to be in the house—as a matter of fact I believe the boy had come there to face the music—had a first-class row with him and finally packed him off with a 'curse and a copper coin,' as it used to be called.

Ryland left the house and never returned to it in Sir Garth's lifetime, and then only at Miss Inez' urgent entreaty, as she herself told me."

Mr. Menticle turned to the table beside him and began rummaging among the papers that he had brought in.

"That, Inspector," he said, "is all I have to tell you—and I have not enjoyed telling it. Here, if you wish to see it, is the revised—and unsigned—will. After the funeral and the reading of the effective will, I so far forgot myself as to tear this one across—I was upset. But here are the four pieces, they are still quite good as evidence if required—though only corroborative evidence—of mystery, of course. Being unsigned, they are no absolute evidence of Sir Garth's intention; I might have drafted the will out of my own head, for all anyone knows. There are also, of course, the rough draft and my own notes taken at the time of Sir Garth's instructions to me, but none of them bears Sir Garth's signature, nor, I believe, any of his handwriting—he made no corrections."

Poole felt that, for the moment, he had got as much out of Mr. Menticle as he could expect, though he would almost certainly have some more questions to ask him later on. It was by now nearly eight o'clock and the detective felt he had done a fairly full day's work. In any case, he wanted time to think over things before going any further. Being a single man, living in cheap rooms in Battersea—(he had refused to allow his father to supplement his professional earnings)—he had formed the habit of taking his meals at a variety of inexpensive restaurants in different parts of London. Without revealing his professional identity, he made a point of getting into conversation with the proprietors and waiters, and sometimes with the habitués of these places, with the result that he had picked up a good deal of valuable knowledge about London life, and had made a number of potentially useful friends.

On this occasion, he made his way to the "Grand Couronne" in Greek Street, Soho, and after ordering himself a special risotto and a large glass of Münchener—which had to be fetched from "over the way," the restaurant possessing no licence—set himself to review the progress he had made. In the first place he knew fairly thoroughly the nature of the disease which had resulted in Sir Garth Fratten's death, together with the circumstances which had led up to it; he had a fairly clear picture of the scene on the Duke of York's Steps, when the accident which caused his death had occurred; he had, he thought, solved the mystery surrounding the nature of the disease—the ignorance of the family and friends was evidently a foible of Sir Garth's, and even so, not very closely adhered to; finally he had discovered that one

person at any rate had a very strong motive indeed for desiring the death—and the death within very narrow limits of time—of the late banker.

Not very much perhaps, but still, more than was known twenty-four hours ago.

His satisfaction was somewhat modified when he turned to a consideration of the progress he had *not* made.

He did not know, in the first place, whether a crime had been committed at all—a rather vital point! Assuming that it had, he did not know who had committed it, nor how it had been committed. If he had found one person with a motive, he had by no means eliminated all possible alternative suspects—in spite of Mr. Hessel's chaff, he still believed that rich and powerful men often made dangerous enemies. On that line alone he had a great deal of ground to cover. He had, in fact, a long way still to go before he even created a case, let alone solved it.

Finishing his modest dinner, he invited the manager, Signor Pablo Vienzi, to join him in a cup of coffee and a cigar. Signor Vienzi was only too willing, but was unable to repay this hospitality by any useful information. Poole's discreet pumping revealed only the fact that the proprietor had never heard either of Mr. Ryland Fratten or of Miss Pinkie Crystel—though Poole did not expect much help from the latter line. The detective paid his bill, said good-night, and went home to bed.

Arriving at Scotland Yard soon after nine the next morning, Inspector Poole went through the small amount of routine work that awaited him and made his way to the room of the Assistant-Commissioner. On his way there, he hesitated outside the door of Chief Inspector Barrod. He felt that the correct procedure was for him to report in the first place to his immediate superior, and through him, if necessary, to Sir Leward. But Chief Inspector Barrod had been very curt and decided on the point, and Poole, with some misgiving, complied with this short-circuiting of established routine.

Sir Leward himself had only just arrived and was going through his letters when Poole reported, but, remembering the charms of the young lady who had inspired this investigation, the Chief sent away his secretary and listened to the detective's report.

"Does Mr. Barrod know about this?" he asked, when Poole had finished.

"No, sir. He told me to report direct to you."

"Better . . ." Sir Leward checked himself, remembering the Chief Inspector's obvious lack of interest. "All right, we'll keep it to ourselves for the moment. Now what's the next step?"

"That's as you decide, sir. If I might make a suggestion, I think I ought now to interview Mr. Ryland Fratten and find out whether he knew about that will and the date of its signature."

"He'd hardly tell you, would he?"

"He might, if he were off his guard; or at any rate he might make some statement which might later be proved false. Assuming, that is, for the moment, that he is guilty. And that's a big assumption, sir, when we don't even know that there has been a crime."

"No. I suppose we don't. Still, it looks more like it than it did. You've done very well, Poole, to get so far with so little to go on."

Poole shook his head.

"I didn't do well with the doctor, sir. I don't know now whether he examined the body for marks of violence or not; he only said that there weren't any."

"A different thing, eh?"

"Yes, sir; he was angry and wanted to get rid of me. I oughtn't to have let him get angry. He wasn't an easy subject though, sir."

"I'll bet he wasn't; I know those knighted physicians—benighted, most of them."

It took Poole the better part of the day to find Ryland Fratten. He had not the heart to go and ask Inez Fratten for her brother's address; it was so like asking her to help in putting an halter round his neck. He did not care, either, to ask the butler at Queen Anne's Gate; he did not want to start any gossip yet in that quarter. He ran him to earth at length, by dint of trying all the theatrical and semi-theatrical clubs in London in turn.

The "Doorstep" Club, in Burlington Gardens, caters for a mixed clientele—(it is a proprietary affair, and a very profitable one at that)—of young bucks interested in boxing, horse-racing, and the stage. Apart from the young bucks themselves, many of the leading jockeys, the more amusing actors, and the least unsuccessful boxers, were members of the club, though their subscriptions were in many cases "overlooked" by the intelligent proprietor. Poole was admitted, presumably on the strength of his good looks or his athletic figure, by a hall-porter who ought to have known better. He was shown into the small and dark room on the ground-floor-back which was reserved for visitors, and his private card: "John Poole, 35 Vincent Gardens, S.W."—a guileless looking affair—sent up by a "bell-hop" to Mr. Fratten.

Ryland Fratten appeared after about ten minutes, with a half-finished cocktail in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. Have a cocktail. Here, boy, wait a minute. What'll you have? Strongly recommend a 'Pirate's Breath.' "

"No, thanks," said Poole, omitting the "sir" in the presence of the boy. "I won't keep you a minute."

"Quite sure? All right; hop it, Ferdinand."

When the door had closed behind the boy, Poole held out his official card.

"I'm sorry to bother you in your club, sir," he said. "I didn't quite know where to find you."

Ryland Fratten looked with surprise at his visitor. His first impression of him had suggested anything but a policeman.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "Not the usual car-obstruction rot?"

Poole smiled.

"No, sir. It's rather a confidential matter. I wondered if I might have a talk with you somewhere where we shan't be disturbed—your rooms, perhaps."

"I haven't got much in the way of rooms," said Fratten, "and they're a long way off. No one's in the least likely to barge into this coal-cellar. I wish you'd have a drink. Have a cigarette, anyway."

"No, thank you, sir. I've been instructed to ask you for certain information regarding the death of your father, Sir Garth Fratten."

Poole watched his companion closely as he said these words. He saw the light-hearted, careless expression on his face change to one of serious attention—Ryland Fratten was listening now, very carefully.

"To be quite frank," the detective continued, "we are not quite satisfied with the circumstances surrounding Sir Garth's death; there really should, strictly speaking, have been an inquest, though Sir Horace Spavage informs us that he was perfectly satisfied that death was due to natural causes, arising out of his disease, and that he had no hesitation in giving a certificate. Can you by any chance throw any light on the matter?"

"I don't think so. What sort of light?"

"You weren't with your father, or near him, when the accident occurred?"

"No, I wasn't," said Fratten. "I didn't hear anything about it till my sister got on to me at Potiphar's in the middle of supper. I'd been to a show—she didn't know how to find me."

Poole noticed that he did not give any indication of his lack of touch with his father; still, he had not been definitely untruthful on the subject.

"Were you surprised when you heard of your father's death?"

"It was a great shock, naturally, but I wasn't really surprised; I knew that he was very ill—that he had something the matter with him that might cause his death at any time."

"Heart trouble, wasn't it?"

"Yes—no. That is to say, I used to think it was heart trouble, but actually it was a thing called an aneurism—something wrong with an artery."

Poole wondered whether the sudden correction was a slip or a lightning decision that deception was too dangerous. For all his careless manner, Fratten had intelligent eyes and Poole was not at all convinced that he was a fool. He decided to try fresh ground—and to take a risk over it.

"There's a point I wanted to ask you about the will," he said. "When did you discover that your father was making a fresh will?"

"When he . . . Good God, what do you mean? What are you suggesting?" Fratten had sprung to his feet and his dark eyes blazed out of a white face. "Are you trying to make out that I killed my father? You damned swine! You can take yourself straight to hell!"

He stood for a moment glaring down at Poole, then swung on his heel and strode out of the room, slamming the door behind him. The detective rose slowly to his feet. A glow of satisfaction was spreading over him. This was something better than he had hoped. That second correction, within a bare minute of the first, was unmistakable. Fratten had begun automatically to answer the question about his knowledge of the new will, had pulled himself up with a jerk and, to cover the slip, had put up a display of righteous indignation. He had been extraordinarily quick, too, at picking up the implication of Poole's question. It was obvious, of course, but only a clever man could have picked it up so instantaneously. Undoubtedly the plot was thickening.

Poole picked up his hat and had taken a step or two towards the door when it opened and Ryland Fratten came back into the room. His face was still white but his eyes were calm.

"I've come to apologize," he said. "I had no right to say that to you—I didn't really mean it to you personally—of course you're only doing your

duty. Will you please forgive me?”

When Poole left the club a minute or two later, most of the satisfaction had died out of him. Instead, he had a curious sensation of shame at ever having felt satisfaction.

CHAPTER IX

SILENCE

THINKING over his interview with Ryland Fratten, Poole felt rather uncertain as to what deduction to draw from it as to his character. Undoubtedly he was a much more intelligent—and consequently a potentially more dangerous—man than he had expected to find. On the other hand, without any practical justification, Poole realized that he rather liked what he had seen of him. Obviously, he must not build on such slender material and he cast about in his mind for the best means of studying Fratten's character more closely. His sister, Inez, was out of the question; Mangane was possible, but Poole did not quite like the idea of pumping him. Finally it occurred to him that his own past history might provide a key to the problem.

In his undergraduate days, and to a lesser extent as a young barrister, he had not been above a little mild stage-door flirtation, during which he had made the acquaintance of various stage-door keepers, and especially that of Mr. Gabb of the "Inanity." It was probable that Mr. Gabb knew the life-stories of more lights of the musical-comedy stage, together with their attendant moths, than any man in London. It was more than probable that he would know Ryland Fratten, and quite likely the history of his entanglement. Anyhow it was worth trying.

Returning quickly to his lodgings, Poole invested himself in the suit of immaculate evening clothes, the light black overcoat, and "stouted" top-hat, which were the carefully preserved relics of his less sombre past. There had always seemed a possibility of their coming in useful, and now Poole was glad of his foresight in keeping them by him and in good order. After standing himself a good, though light, dinner and a half-bottle of Cliquot at the Savoy Grill, with the object of imbibing the necessary "atmosphere," Poole strolled round to the stage-door of the "Inanity" a little before nine. He knew that the interval would not take place before a quarter past at the earliest, so that he had plenty of time for a heart-to-heart with Mr. Gabb.

The result more than fulfilled his expectations. Gabb knew Ryland Fratten well, and all about his various affairs of the heart. He liked him, but he clearly felt a certain contempt for a man who, no longer a callow boy, wasted his life in fluttering about these tinsel attractions. Fratten's latest flame was Miss Julie Vermont; she had a small speaking part in the piece

now on. The affair had lasted about six months—longer than usual—and more serious than usual, though there had been a hitch in it lately.

At this moment, the swing-door leading into the theatre was pushed open and a girl in the exaggerated dress of a parlour-maid so popular on the lighter stage, stood for a moment in the doorway. She was extremely pretty, in a rather hard way, with closely-shingled auburn hair; Poole noticed a diamond and platinum ring on the third finger of the well-manicured hand that held open the door.

"Oh, Gabb," she said, "if Mr. Gossington comes round tell him I can't come out tonight, will you?"

Gabb made an inarticulate grunt and scribbled upon a pad in front of him. With a quick glance at the attractive figure of the detective, the girl vanished.

" 'Talk of the devil,' " said Gabb; "that's his girl—Mr. Fratten's that is—Miss Vermont. At least she was, but it's cooled off a bit lately, I think, diamond ring and all. Maybe something to do with his father's death. Anyway he hasn't been round lately and she's been going out with this young Gossington—Porky Gossington's boy in the Blues, he is. Here's the interval now, sir."

Poole drew back as a trickle of young men in evening clothes, mostly bareheaded, came round from the main entrance. Poole watched with sympathetic amusement the well-remembered and unchanging scene: the confident assurance of the accepted cavalier, chaffing Gabb and exchanging pleasantries with the little cluster of girls who occasionally poked their heads through the swing-door; the shy diffidence of the fledgling presenting his first note, his blush of delight when it returned to him with an evidently favourable answer, his crestfallen retreat at the verbal message: "Miss Flitterling is sorry she's engaged," or, worse still: "No answer, sir." It was all very laughable, and very pathetic, thought the emancipated Poole.

Feeling that, for the moment, the stage-door keeper had yielded as much information as could be extracted without arousing suspicion, Poole said good-night and walked out into the Aldwych. He had not gone far when he felt a touch on his arm and, looking down, saw a small and shabby individual ambling along beside him.

"Beg pardon, guv'nor," said his new acquaintance, "but if yer wants hinformation abaht the Honerable Fratten, I'm the chap with the goods."

Wondering how this seedy creature could know of his question, the detective looked at him more closely and presently remembered that he had

seen him come in with a note for Gabb when he and the latter had been talking together. Probably the man had picked up the name then; possibly he had hung about outside and caught a bit more—and was now out to take advantage of his eaves-dropping. Probably whatever information he proffered would be worthless, if not purely imaginary, but it was never safe to turn one's back upon the most unlikely source of news.

"Well, what is it?" he asked carelessly.

The man smiled. "It's sumfing worf 'aving, sir," he said. " 'Arf a Fisher'd do it."

Poole, of course, in his official capacity, had no need to pay for information, but he did not wish yet to reveal himself as a police-officer. His informant probably took him for a jealous rival—if not an injured husband.

"How am I to know it's worth paying for?" he asked.

"Dahtin' Thomas, ain't yer? S'posin' I tells yer one bit an' keeps the other up me sleeve till yer pays? Then yer'll know what quality yer buyin'."

"All right," said Poole, "fire away."

His companion leant closer to him and said in a husky whisper.

"E's paid 'er off!"

"Paid her off? Who? What d'you mean?"

"Fratten. E's paid off that Vermint gurl—blood-money, breach-o'-prom., alimony—whatever yer calls it. Five bob a week she'd 'a bin lucky to git if she'd moved in my circles—at the *worst*," he added with a leer.

"How do you know?" asked Poole, who was now definitely interested.

" 'Eard 'er buckin' about it to 'er pals. Not much I don't see an' 'ear rahnd the 'Hinanity'—worf sumfin' sometimes. That's the first part, mister—the rest's better." He held out his hand.

With some repugnance Poole slipped a ten-shilling note into the grimy palm. The man spat on it and tucked it into his belt.

"I knows where 'e got it from—the spondulics to pay 'er with." He paused for encouragement, but receiving none, continued: "I 'eard 'im this time, it was, arstin' a pal where 'e could raise the wind—said 'e'd tried all the usual—father, 'uncles,' Jews, Turks an' other infidelities—nuthin' doin'—'ad enough of 'im. This pal put 'im on to a new squeezer—chap called 'Silence' in Lemon Street, back o' the Lyceum. Seen 'is place meself—neat an' unpretenshus. That's the chap. That's worf anover, ain't it?"

Poole shook his head.

"We'll stick to our bargain for the moment," he said. "What's your name, in case I want you again?"

But that was asking too much.

"That ain't part o' the bargain," he said. "If yer wants me, yer can alwys find me—round the 'Hinanity'—Mr. Gabb'll give yer a reference."

And with a peck at his cap the man was gone.

Poole felt that this might well be a useful line of inquiry; he turned his steps automatically towards the Lyceum—of course, it was long past business hours but he might as well have a look at the place.

Lemon Street proved to be a very short and very dark alley that ran out of Wellington Street almost immediately behind the Lyceum Theatre. There were not more than half a dozen houses in it, all gloomy and nondescript. On the third of them, Poole descried a small black plate over an electric door-bell, inscribed in white with the one word: SILENCE. It looked more like an injunction than a name. The detective was conscious of being intrigued. Stepping back across the street to get a better view of the house he became aware of a glimmer of light over the fanlight of the door—it appeared to come from a room at the back—possibly in this queer neighbourhood and with an unusual clientele, office hours might be so unconventional as to include ten o'clock at night. Deciding to put this theory to the test, Poole went back to the door and touched the bell. He heard no answering trill; but in a moment or two the door opened silently and at the same time a light, shaded so as to throw its beam upon anyone on the doorstep while leaving the passage in darkness, was switched on.

Poole could just make out a dim figure beyond the door, then the light was switched off, and a hand beckoned to him to enter. He did so and the door closed quietly behind him whilst the figure led the way down the passage to a room at the back. Poole could see now that the man who had admitted him was short and slightly hunchbacked, and, when he turned to motion Poole to a chair in the inner room, that his face was sallow and covered with faint pockmarks, whilst his hair was black and meagre. Truly a figure worthy of its setting.

"Silence?" said Poole, by way of opening the interview. The man bowed but did not speak.

Feeling that this was an occasion when his diplomacy would probably be outmatched, the detective produced his official card.

"I am Inspector Poole, of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard," he said in a crisp voice. "I have come to ask you for

information regarding a sum of money advanced by you to Mr. Ryland Fratten."

This was banking rather heavily upon the slender framework of his late informant's credibility. Poole was relieved to see an unmistakable flutter of apprehension pass over the otherwise inscrutable features in front of him. Following up his advantage, Poole assumed his most official manner.

"You will probably realize," he said, "that you will be well advised not to attempt to conceal any phase of this transaction. The consequences of any deception would be very serious for you."

He paused to let these words sink in.

"What precisely do you want to know?" Silence asked, in a low but curiously refined voice.

"I want to know how much you lent Mr. Fratten, on what security, and at what rate of interest?"

The man remained silent, his fingers beating a tattoo, his eyes cast down upon the writing-pad before him.

"My business is supposed to be confidential," he said at last.

"I realize that, but if the police require information it will be advisable for you not to withhold it."

Poole knew that this was a delicate point as between police and public, but a man engaged in such a business as this probably was, could afford to run no risks. He was not mistaken.

"I lent Mr. Fratten £15,000 for three months only, at 10% per month. The rate of interest is high but Mr. Fratten's reputation is not good. I know well what trouble others in my profession have had to recover their advances. I could only do business on very special terms."

"And the security?"

"A note of hand only."

"Surely something more? If Mr. Fratten's reputation is so bad, what expectation could you have had of being repaid within three months?"

The moneylender fidgeted uneasily.

"He showed me a letter," he said at last, "a letter from his father's (Sir Garth Fratten's) doctor. I gathered from it that Sir Garth's expectation of life was very short; Mr. Fratten was his heir. I took a risk; it came off."

A shadow of a smile crossed the pale face. Poole felt a shudder of repugnance—this gambling upon a man's life was an ugly business. Ugly

enough, from the moneylender's point of view—hideous when applied to father and son.

He learnt nothing more of interest from the rather melodramatic moneylender, except the significant fact that the transaction was affected on 17th October, exactly half-way between the date of Ryland Fratten's threatened disinheritance by his father and the latter's death. After a thoroughly blank and unpromising beginning, Poole felt that the day had ended well. He went home to bed, carefully folding his evening clothes before putting them away until next time.

The following day was a Sunday, but on Monday morning Poole reported again to Sir Leward and the latter, after hearing what he had to say, decided that the time had come to call Chief Inspector Barrod into their councils. Barrod listened with attention to the précis of the case given by Poole, but showed no sign of making any amends for his former scepticism.

"Yes, sir," he said, "you've got the motive all right; you've probably got the murderer; but have you got the murder?"

Sir Leward looked at Poole. The latter nodded.

"I agree," he said, "that's the missing link up to date. So far there is nothing to prove that a murder has been committed."

"And how are you going to prove it?"

"In the first place, we ought to have a look at the body."

"Exhumation?"

"That's it, sir."

"Do you agree, Barrod?" asked Sir Leward, turning to the Chief Inspector, who had remained silent.

"If you want to go any further, sir, yes."

Marradine was not quite so sure now that he did want to go further; the chances of "seeing more of" Inez Fratten, under favourable conditions, whilst pursuing her brother for murder, were hardly promising. Still, he had gone too far now to turn back.

"Very well," he said, "get an exhumation order and let me have the surgeon's report as soon as possible."

"What about re-burial, sir? If it's to be done without attracting attention it'll be much better to do it straight-a-way—that is to say, if you decide not to proceed with the case. On the other hand, if you do proceed, there'll have to be an inquest and, if it's not too far gone, the jury'll have to view the body. In that case it had better come straight up to the mortuary here."

"Well," said Sir Leward testily, "what do you suggest, Barrod?"

"Either that you come to Woking yourself, sir, and have the preliminary examination there—in which case, if there's nothing you can give the order for the re-burial on the spot; or else that you authorize me to take the decision in the same way."

"But I don't know that there need necessarily be visible signs on the body, even if a murder has been committed. The cause of death was the rupture of an artery due to shock—the shock need not necessarily have left marks."

"I think you'll find it difficult, sir, to persuade a coroner's jury, let alone a petty jury, to bring in a verdict of murder if there aren't any marks. Personally I don't see how your murderer could count on death ensuing from a mere push—there must have been a blow—and if there was a blow, there must be a mark."

So it was eventually decided, that Barrod, Poole and a surgeon should proceed to Brooklands Cemetery that night, exhume the body by arrangement with the Cemetery authorities, and carry out a preliminary investigation on the spot. If there was the smallest suspicious sign, the body was to be brought to London and subjected to expert examination. If not, it was to be re-buried at once and a further conference would be held the next day to decide whether or not to drop the case.

As the three officials travelled down to Brooklands by the 5.10 train that evening, Poole thought that Chief Inspector Barrod was treating him with more respect than he had previously done, but he did not discuss the case upon which they were engaged. Probably, thought Poole, he did not want to commit himself. Instead, the talk turned entirely on another case which had just closed, and in which the police-surgeon had been actively engaged. The train reached Brooklands at 5.55 and as soon as it was dark the work of the exhumation began. It took nearly an hour to bring the coffin to the surface and even then the actual exposure of the body took some time, owing to its being enclosed in a lead shell, a possibility which neither Barrod nor Poole had taken into account.

At last the grisly work of unwinding was completed and the body laid upon a table. Naturally, after ten days, the flesh was beginning to show signs of decomposition, and to Poole's untrained eye it appeared as if these marks might conceal what he was looking for. But the doctor had no such misgivings. Running his eye and his fingers rapidly over the chest, he shook his head.

"Nothing here," he said. "Turn it over."

“It would be on the back,” muttered Poole.

The nauseating odour emitted by the moving of the body drove Poole to the door for a breath of fresh air. When he returned, he found the more hardened Barrod and the surgeon closely examining a mark upon the left centre of the back. The whole surface was stained, as was inevitable, but in one spot there was a deeper and more clearly defined stain. The surgeon pressed it gently with his sensitive fingers, then, producing a magnifying-glass, turned the beam of a powerful electric torch on to the spot and examined it with minute attention. After a couple of minutes he straightened his back.

“Yes,” he said, “this is more than ordinary post-mortem staining; there clearly has been rupture of small capillary vessels. That means a blow, and from the look of it, a violent and concentrated blow.”

CHAPTER X

THE INQUEST

THE inquest on the exhumed body of Sir Garth Fratten was held at Scotland Yard, as any unnecessary movement was considered undesirable in view of the stage of decomposition that had been reached. For a similar reason it was arranged to hold the first stage of the inquest at once, without waiting for the collection of further evidence. After the inspection of the body by the jury, evidence as to identity, cause of death, and other preliminaries, an adjournment could be obtained and the body decently re-buried.

As can be imagined, the news of the prospective inquest was received with intense interest, and even excitement, by the press and public. The applications for the few available seats ran into hundreds, and for every curious spectator who found a place in the body of the court, twenty were turned away. When the Coroner, Mr. Mendel Queriton, took his seat at eleven o'clock on Wednesday 6th November, the room was packed to suffocation—so much so, indeed, that the jury, filing back from their unpleasant duty, demanded and obtained a wholesale opening of windows.

After the preliminary formalities, the first witness to be called was Sir Horace Spavage. Sir Horace identified the body and gave evidence as to the cause of death. He explained the nature of the disease, using very much the same terms and similes as he had done to Poole, but the detective noticed that the distinguished physician did not now display the same confidence and impatience as he had done on the first occasion.

"Knows he's skating on thin ice," thought Poole.

Having listened to what Sir Horace had to say, the Coroner caused to be handed to him a narrow sheet of paper, on which were visible both printed and written words.

"That, Sir Horace, is the certificate of death signed by you immediately after Sir Garth Fratten's death?"

"It is."

"In it you certify that death was due to natural causes arising from the rupture of a thorasic aneurism?"

"I do."

"You still hold that view?"

"Certainly. I know of no facts which would cause me to alter my opinion."

"That death was due to natural causes?"

Sir Horace inclined his head.

"Did you examine the body?"

"Naturally. I exposed the chest and percussed it, and finding it dull, knew that the aneurism had burst and that the chest was full of blood. It was exactly as I had expected—I may say that it was inevitable."

"You found no signs of violence?"

"Certainly not."

"Did you examine his back?"

"I did not. Why should I?"

"You knew there had been an accident."

"The gentleman who had been with Sir Garth, Mr.—er—Hessel, certainly told me that there had been some slight *contretemps*—that someone had stumbled into Sir Garth and upset him; I should not have described it as an accident."

"Do you mean by that that it was intentional?"

"Certainly not. I mean that it was too slight to be described as an accident. Still, I will accept the word, if you like."

The Coroner bowed.

"And in spite of all this you did not consider it necessary to hold a post-mortem or to ask for an inquest?"

"I did not. As I have already said, I had known for a considerable time that Sir Garth had been suffering from an aneurism of dangerous size that was liable to rupture at any time in the event of shock or sudden violent physical exertion. When I was summoned and found that the aneurism had burst and that there was a history of shock—that this slight—er—accident had occurred, I had no hesitation in signing this certificate."

"And you still hold that view?"

"Certainly. As I have said, no fresh facts have been brought to my notice which might cause me to alter it."

"Possibly, Sir Horace, the course of this inquiry may cause you to reconsider the correctness of your action. That is all, thank you; you may

stand down."

Sir Horace glared at his tormentor, but, finding nothing to say, stood down.

Ryland Fratten was now called. After identifying the body and answering a few formal questions about himself and his father he was, at a sign from the Coroner, about to stand down when Chief Inspector Barrod rose to his feet.

"May I ask this witness some questions, sir, please?"

The Coroner looked rather surprised, but signified his consent. He had been given to understand that the police did not intend to press the inquiry beyond preliminaries at the present hearing—certainly not as regards their suspect. Still, presumably Chief Inspector Barrod knew what he was about.

The fact was that Barrod, after watching Ryland Fratten give evidence, had formed the opinion that this was just the type of young and attractive gentleman whom his rather inexperienced colleague—of a similar type himself—might find it difficult to tackle successfully. It will be remembered that the Chief Inspector, while appreciating Poole's education and qualifications, did not set great store by them—even thought them rather dangerous. He decided, therefore, to take this opportunity to examine Fratten himself.

"You are your late father's heir, Mr. Fratten?"

"I was one of his heirs."

"Quite so. You and your sister—your half-sister, that is—Miss Inez Fratten, are joint residuary legatees?"

"Yes."

"You each inherit a very large sum of money?"

"I suppose it is."

"How much?"

"I don't know."

"But approximately how much? You must know that."

"It is very difficult to say, till all the accounts are in and probate granted. My solicitor would be able to tell you better."

Mr. Menticle half rose from his chair near the Coroner's table, but Barrod signed to him to sit down.

"I am asking you, please, Mr. Fratten. Roughly, now; somewhere about a quarter of a million, eh?"

There was a gasp from the crowded court; it sounded a vast sum.

"Roughly, perhaps it is."

"Thank you. Now would you mind telling me, what were your relations with your father?"

Ryland seemed to draw back into himself. He was clearly distressed by the question; but he answered it.

"They were not good, I'm afraid," he said in a low voice. "I was a pretty rotten son. I got into debt and displeased my father in other ways. He had very little use for me."

"You had a serious quarrel a week or so before your father's death?"

At this point Mr. Menticle, who had been showing increasing signs of indignation, scribbled on a piece of paper and had it passed to the Coroner. The latter read it and nodded to him, but, possibly because the Chief Inspector had shifted on to fresh and less dangerous ground, took no immediate action.

Barrod questioned Fratten as to his knowledge of the nature of his father's disease, as Poole had done, but this time eliciting a quite straightforward reply. He did not touch on the question of the new will. Finally:

"There is just one formal question I must put to you, Mr. Fratten. Where were you personally at the time of your father's death?"

Ryland Fratten's hesitation was barely noticeable before he answered.

"As a matter of fact I was in St. James's Park," he said.

A glint shone in the Chief Inspector's eyes.

"What were you doing?"

Mr. Menticle sprang to his feet.

"Mr. Coroner!" he exclaimed.

The Coroner held up his hand.

"You need not answer that question unless you like, Mr. Fratten," he said. "I do not know where this examination is trending, but I think it probable that you would be wise to consult your solicitor, and to be represented by him."

Fratten gave him a smile of gratitude.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "It isn't really a case of a solicitor. I am not afraid of incriminating myself, but I do rather dislike exposing myself to

ridicule. I was waiting in St. James's Park, at the Buckingham Palace end of the Birdcage Walk, to be picked up by a girl."

"Picked up by a girl! Do you mean . . . ?"

"I mean," interrupted Fratten, blushing hotly, "that a girl—a lady—had arranged to pick me up there in her car."

Barrod held him for nearly a minute under his stare.

"And who, sir, was this—er—lady?"

"I can't tell you."

"Do you mean you can't or you won't?"

"I can't tell you," Fratten repeated.

Barrod opened his mouth as if to renew his interrogation, but, apparently changing his mind, resumed his seat, with a sardonic expression.

"That's all, sir," he said, rising and bowing to the Coroner.

Mr. Menticle had boldly walked across to Ryland's side and engaged him in a whispered conversation. The Coroner indulged him by writing up his notes. Having finished his colloquy, Mr. Menticle turned to the Coroner.

"Mr. Fratten has asked me to represent him, sir," he said. "I trust I have your permission."

The Coroner looked at him, a curious expression on his face.

"It occurs to me, Mr. Menticle," he said, "that such a course may give rise to some difficulty. I understand that you are yourself to give evidence before this inquiry. Under the circumstances would it not, perhaps, be better . . ." he left the sentence unfinished.

Mr. Menticle turned slowly red and then deathly white.

"I . . . I had forgotten, sir," he stammered. Pulling himself together he turned to his client and after a further consultation, asked leave to have Mr. Raymond Cullen called to represent Mr. Fratten in his place.

"Very well," said the Coroner, "let it be so. We will adjourn now for the luncheon interval."

When the Court re-opened, a clean-shaven and acute-looking young man was seen to be sitting next to Ryland Fratten—evidently Mr. Raymond Cullen. Hardly had the Coroner taken his seat when a small, quaintly-dressed woman rose from her seat at the back of the Court.

"Mr. Coroner," she said, in a high, penetrating voice. "I want to give evidence in this case. I saw the whole thing. A brutal outrage it was, a . . ."

"Order, order," called the Coroner's Officer, glaring fiercely at the interrupter.

"If you wish to give evidence, madam," said the Coroner, "you should communicate with the police, or with my Officer, in the proper manner. In the meantime, I will call the witnesses as I require them. Dr. Percy Vyle."

Dr. Vyle, the police-surgeon who had been present at the exhumation, described his share in the proceedings at Brooklands. He explained the nature of the marks which he had discovered and his reasons for believing them to have been caused by a blow before death. In his opinion the blow had been a severe one, caused not by the flat of a hand or even a doubled fist, but rather by a blunt instrument, such as the knob of a stick. In answer to a question by Mr. Cullen he had no hesitation in saying that the blow could not have been delivered after death—the appearance of the bruise was not consistent with post-mortem injury.

Dr. Vyle was succeeded by Inspector Poole, who corroborated the surgeon's account of the exhumation. After him came distinguished Home Office experts enlarging, at an enlarged fee, upon what had already been said about the bruising on the dead man's back. Cullen's questions beat upon this weight of official testimony with as much effect as rain upon a steam-engine.

There followed the important testimony of Mr. Leopold Hessel. The banker repeated the account of his last walk with his friend that he had given to Poole. He said nothing, and was not asked, about the subject of the conversation that had so engrossed them, but otherwise Poole could notice no discrepancy. Hessel repeated his assertion that he did not see how a blow could have been struck without his being aware of it, though he admitted that he could not be absolutely positive. Still, there had been a number of other witnesses present and none of them had given any signs of having seen violence used.

"I did!" exclaimed the same shrill voice from the back of the room. "I told you at the time that I saw—a murderous attack—a gang of . . ."

"Order, there," roared the Coroner's Officer.

"Remove that person," exclaimed the Coroner himself sharply.

The quaint little figure was led from the room by a large policeman, protesting loudly.

Proceeding, Mr. Hessel told of how his friend had pulled himself together, seemed to be really quite recovered, how they walked on slowly,

arm-in-arm, and then of the sudden collapse and, as was now known, almost instantaneous death of Sir Garth.

"And he said nothing before he died?" asked the Coroner.

"Nothing. He seemed to gasp—more than once, as if he was choking. And then he collapsed, almost pulling me down with him. He never spoke."

Mr. Hessel himself spoke in a quiet, restrained voice, but it was evident that he was deeply affected.

"You are—you were Sir Garth's closest friend, were you not, Mr. Hessel?"

"In a sense, I suppose I was. He was very good to me."

"You are his sole executor?"

"Yes."

"And he left particular instructions that his papers were to be committed to your charge?"

"That is so."

"Have you been through them?"

"Cursorily only."

"From what you have seen or from what you know, have you formed any opinion as to who could have wished to bring about his death?"

"Absolutely no. Even now, even after what all these expert medical witnesses have said, I find it difficult to believe that Sir Garth was murdered, or even that there was an attack upon him. I know it must sound unreasonable in the face of such testimony, but I simply cannot bring myself to believe it."

The Coroner gave an almost unnoticeable shrug of the shoulders.

"Fortunately the unpleasant duty of finding a verdict on that point does not fall to your lot, Mr. Hessel," he said. "I have no more to ask you."

It was now late in the afternoon and the lights had been lit some time. Mr. Queriton glanced at his watch.

"There is time to take one more witness," he said, "and that will be the last—we will then adjourn—Mr. Septimus Menticle."

The lawyer looked anything but at his ease as he took his stand. As his examination proceeded, however, his face gradually cleared. He was asked about the will—the effective will, for which probate was now being applied. He gave its outline from memory and handed a copy of it to the Coroner, who, after a brief glance, passed it on to the jury. He gave a rough estimate

of the figures concerned and explained the difficulty of stating them accurately at the moment. He was not—to his intense relief—asked about the new will, the will that was never signed; probably it was only an agony deferred but he was human enough to be thankful for the reprieve. It looked as if his evidence, and the day's work itself, were finished when the Coroner, blotting his notes, put a careless question, apparently as an afterthought.

"Practically," he said, putting his papers together, "Sir Garth's two children divide the estate, so that, had he died intestate, the result would have been approximately the same?"

Mr. Menticle did not answer. The Coroner looked up.

"Eh?" he said, "that is so, is it not?"

Mr. Menticle hesitated.

"Am I obliged," he asked, "to answer hypothetical questions?"

"You are obliged to answer the questions I put to you," said Mr. Queriton sharply.

The lawyer slowly nodded his head.

"In that case," he said, "the answer is in the negative."

"What? They would not have divided it? Why not?"

"The whole—or practically the whole—would have gone to Miss Inez Fratten. Mr. Ryland Fratten is not Sir Garth Fratten's son."

CHAPTER XI

THE INTERVENTION OF INEZ

As the room cleared, at the adjournment of the Inquest, Chief Inspector Barrod turned to his subordinate.

"There you are, Poole," he said. "I've given you a start on that young fellow. You stick to it now and don't leave go till you've got him. You'll have to keep him shadowed now."

"Very well, sir, I've arranged to go round and see him at his house this evening—I'll go into that girl question then. If you'll excuse me, sir, I just want to catch Mr. Menticle to get a bit more out of him about this parentage business."

"Yes, you'll want that. I slipped a line to the Coroner not to press it too far in Court; we've done enough for the moment, as far as the public's concerned."

The Inspector caught Mr. Menticle before he had left the precincts of the Yard and the latter invited him to walk down the Embankment with him towards the City.

"All in my way," he said, "and a minute's tram run back for you. I always walk down this bit of the Embankment on an autumn evening if I can—one of the loveliest views I know—London at its best."

"Yes, sir; I wonder how many of us would have realized that if it hadn't been for Whistler."

They walked on for a minute or so in silence.

"You want me to amplify about Sir Garth and Mr. Ryland," said the lawyer.

"I do, sir, but in the first place I'd like to know why you didn't tell me when I came to see you on Friday," said the detective dryly.

"You didn't ask me, Inspector," replied Mr. Menticle with a chuckle, "and yet I told you no lies. If you could review our conversation now you would find that I never referred to them as father and son—always as Sir Garth and Mr. Ryland."

"I see, sir. I suppose you had some object. It seems a pity."

"I still hoped that there was nothing behind your inquiries—that you would drop the case."

"It makes it harder than ever for us to drop a case, sir, when we find that information is being withheld from us," said Poole quietly.

"Yes, yes, Inspector. I accept your rebuke; it would have been wiser to have been quite frank. Now about the past; there is really not much that I did not say in Court, though I noticed that the Coroner was not pressing me. Sir Garth Fratten was, as you know, married twice, his first wife dying in 1902 and his second in 1918. By the second wife he had one daughter, Miss Inez Fratten, born in 1905, but by his first wife he had no child. A child was, however, born to her a short time before their marriage. Sir Garth was, I believe, aware of what was about to occur before he asked her to marry him—he was deeply attached to his first wife, almost worshipped her—and, he adopted the child as his own son. That was Ryland Fratten. Sir Garth could, of course, make him his heir or co-heir, but that is quite a different thing to his becoming the automatic heir in the event of intestacy. It was for a similar reason, I believe, that Sir Garth refused the suggested offer of a baronetcy—he did not wish it known that Ryland was not his son. That is all, I think."

"Did Ryland know that he was not Sir Garth's son?"

"To the best of my belief he did not. Unless in that last quarrel that they had, Sir Garth divulged the fact to him; he did not tell me one way or the other, but evidently the break was very complete."

"Can you tell me who was Ryland's father?"

Mr. Menticle shook his head.

"I never knew. I doubt if anyone does know, unless the man himself is still alive."

As there appeared to be nothing more to be learnt in this direction, Poole said good-night to Mr. Menticle and returned to the Yard. After arranging for the shadowing of Ryland Fratten, the detective made his way to Queen Anne's Gate to keep his appointment. The butler, who evidently recognized him and had had his instructions, showed him straight into the morning-room, which was empty. He had not been waiting a minute, however, when the door opened and Inez Fratten came in. Poole inwardly cursed the butler for his stupidity, but Inez's first words explained what had happened.

"I'm so sorry to butt in, Mr. Poole," she said. "I know you've come to see Ryland but I want to see you first. Ry came back from the inquest—I wasn't there, you know; Mr. Menticle said I wasn't needed—in an awful state. He seems to think that the police suspect him of murdering father. I

needn't tell you what nonsense that is, but I do want to know what has made him get that impression."

Poole fidgeted from one foot to the other. This was a new experience. Inez looked at him with growing wonder.

"Good heavens, Mr. Poole," she said, "surely *you* don't think that?"

Her voice was strained and anxious, but her eyes were full of courage. Poole thought what a glorious creature she was and how much he would like to have such a sister to stick up for him when he was in trouble.

"It isn't what I think, Miss Fratten," he said, realizing that he must say something. "The investigation has not got very far yet—we certainly haven't reached the stage of accusing anybody."

"But you are frightening Ryland; you must be, or he wouldn't be in such a state. I don't mean that he's *frightened*," she hurried to correct an unfortunate impression, "but he's frightfully miserable. What is it?"

"I'm afraid I really can't tell you, Miss Fratten. I'm not at liberty to . . ."

"Oh, rot!" Inez tapped the floor impatiently with her foot. "I don't want any deadly secrets, but I must know why you have got your knives into Ry. Come, Mr. Poole, you must see that I've got to know—put yourself in my place. He's my brother—all I've got now. And who can I ask except you? You must tell me."

Poole took a minute to think over his position. Obviously he could not give away the cards that the police held. Still, he would like to help the girl if he could do so consistently with his duty, and it was possible that he might get useful information at the same time.

"I'll do what I can, Miss Fratten," he said at last, "and you might be able to help. As you yourself appear to have suspected from the first, your father's death was not due to an accident—it was deliberately brought about—and apparently by somebody who knew and took advantage of his dangerous state of health. Having established that much, we have to look about for a probable author of the crime. When there is nothing more direct to go on, one usually turns first to two considerations: motive and opportunity. Taking motive first, the most direct line to follow is pecuniary advantage—the will. In Sir Garth's will, the only people who benefit largely are yourself and your brother, Mr. Ryland Fratten. That is nothing in itself, but there are one or two other points that make it impossible for us to overlook Mr. Fratten in our search."

"And me, I suppose," said Inez.

"The 'other points' that I spoke of don't refer to you, Miss Fratten."

"What are they?"

"I can't tell you that. That's motive—not so important by itself, but combined with opportunity, very vital. Now, this is where you may be able to help, Miss Fratten—your brother as well as us. At the inquest this afternoon Mr. Fratten was asked where he had been at the time that your father was killed. He answered that he was in St. James's Park—not half a mile from the spot—waiting for a lady to pick him up in a car. He wouldn't give her name."

"Good Lord," said Inez, "sounds thin doesn't it?"

"It does."

"But then you don't know Ryland. He's a hopeless fool about women. You want me to find out about her?"

"I'm not asking you to, Miss Fratten. But if your brother really has a sound explanation of what certainly sounds like a very poor alibi—the sooner we know about it the better."

"I'll do what I can. But look here, Mr. Poole, why should you put so much emphasis on the will as a motive? Surely there may be plenty of others?"

"Plenty. I only gave that as the first step. If you know of anything else—if you can make any other suggestion that would give us a line to work on, I should be only too grateful."

Inez curled herself into one corner of the big sofa.

"I wish you'd smoke or something," she said—"while I'm thinking." Poole did not fall in with this suggestion but he sat down on the nearest chair. He was not sure what his chief would think of the line he was taking, but for the moment, it was very pleasant to sit and look at this delicious young creature, with the attractive frown of thought on her brow.

"There's just one thing that occurs to me," she said at last. "For more than a week before he died, my father seemed rather worried about something. He'd given up working after dinner for some time, but during the time I'm speaking of, he used to go off to his study soon after dinner and stay there till nearly bedtime. I went in once to see what he was up to and try to get him out of it—it wasn't good for him. He'd got a whole pile of papers on his desk—balance sheets and things, and he was making a lot of notes on some foolscap. It wasn't like him to be worried—he always took business so calmly. I don't suppose there's anything in it."

"You don't know what the papers were?"

“I don’t. Mr. Mangane might, of course.”

“I’ll ask him. Thank you, Miss Fratten. Now what about your brother? I ought to see him.”

Inez slipped off the sofa to her feet and came towards Poole.

“Let me speak to him first,” she said. “You have a go at Mangane. I promise he shan’t run away.”

The steady gaze of those calm grey eyes, so close to his, intoxicated Poole. He felt for a moment an overpowering impulse to say: “Oh don’t, please, bother any more; I won’t do anything to hurt your brother or you.” With a wrench he recalled himself to his duty. He must do it, however unpleasant it was—still, there might be something in the idea of her seeing her brother first—she might make him talk. He decided to take the risk.

“Very well, Miss Fratten,” he said. “I’ll do that.”

Guided by Inez, Poole found Mangane in his slip of an office on the other side of the study. When the girl had departed Mangane turned to his visitor with a sardonic smile.

“Well, Inspector, what can I do for you? Shall I be out of order if I ask you to sit down and have a smoke?”

“I’d like to smoke a pipe more than I can say,” replied Poole with a smile. “I haven’t had one since breakfast. Not even when I took the jury into the mortuary. I’m very glad to find you, sir.”

Mangane shrugged his shoulders.

“If you must, you must,” he said.

“I want to ask you about Sir Garth’s business affairs. Have you any reason to suppose that one can get a line there as to the motive of his murder?”

“You’re convinced that it was murder?”

“Must have been—look at the wound—the bruising.”

“Couldn’t it have been done when he fell?”

“Hardly. The localized nature of . . .” Poole checked himself. “Anyhow, for the moment we are assuming that. Now, had he any business enemies?”

“Heaps I should think. But I don’t know of any. What I actually mean is that he must have run up against people from time to time, but I’ve never heard of anyone bearing him any malice.”

“You can’t suggest anything?”

“I can’t.”

"About his business papers—his personal ones; what's become of them?"

"So far as I know, they are all here. Mr. Hessel is his executor; he has the keys."

"Has he been through them at all, or taken any away?"

"I don't think so. He locked the study up and except for a short time, nobody's been in there since. The housemaids are getting rather restive."

"And no one else could have got at them?"

"No. He sent for me directly the body was carried upstairs—Sir Garth was brought into the morning-room first, you know, and as soon as the doctor had finished his examination, the body was carried upstairs. Hessel sent for me at once and said that he knew Sir Garth had appointed him sole executor and that it would be well to lock up all the papers and so on at once. I took him into the study—it's next door to the morning-room, you know—between that and this. I took him into the study and showed him where everything was. We locked everything up—we got Sir Garth's keys, by the way—the wall safe was locked already and so were some of the drawers in his desk. I was able to show Mr. Hessel pretty well what the different drawers contained—Sir Garth was a very methodical man. After that we locked all three doors of the room—the one into the hall, the one into the morning-room, and this one."

"So that after that, nobody could have got into the study without Mr. Hessel's knowledge and consent. But before that, was the door leading from the study to the hall locked?"

"Oh no."

"So that anyone could have got into the study from the hall?"

"Yes."

"Or, of course, from this room?"

Mangane smiled.

"Or, of course, from this room."

"But as far as you know, no one did go in there between the time of Sir Garth's being brought back and your going in with Mr. Hessel to lock up?"

"No. Nobody went in through this room, because I was in here myself, and I certainly didn't hear anyone go in from the hall."

"Thank you, sir," said Poole. "I expect you think I'm being very fussy, but I want to examine those papers presently and I like to know first what chance there has been of their being disturbed."

"Oh they've been disturbed. I told you they had, once. The day after the will was read, Mr. Hessel came here with Menticle, the solicitor, and we went into the study and together ran through the papers in the table and in the 'In' and 'Pending' baskets—just in case anything wanted attending to at once. There was nothing of importance."

"You were all three together in the room all the time?"

"Yes; we were only there about a quarter of an hour. Mr. Hessel said he hadn't time to do more then. I've been trying to get him to come along and tackle the job but he keeps on putting it off. I believe the old chap's really rather upset."

"I can quite believe it. He told me that Sir Garth had been extraordinarily good to him."

Poole paused for a minute to jot something down in his note-book. "There's just one thing more I want to ask you," he continued. "Miss Fratten says that her father was working rather hard every evening latterly on something that seemed to worry him. Do you know what that was?"

"Oh yes," replied Mangane. "That was about a finance company he thought of going into—he was looking into its dealings to see if it was sound. I don't quite know why he wanted to go into it—beneath his notice I should have thought. There may have been some personal reason, of course. I shouldn't have said he was particularly worried about it—he was interested, certainly—he always was in anything he took up."

Poole nodded.

"What was the company?"

"The Victory Finance Company—quite a small affair, as those things go nowadays."

"Did you come across the papers when you went through with Mr. Hessel and Mr. Menticle?"

"Oh yes, they were all there—with his notes."

"Could I see them?"

"I should think so—but you'd have to ask Hessel—he's got the keys."

The detective nodded and rose to his feet.

"Now if I could just see the butler for a minute," he said, "and then perhaps Miss Fratten . . ." He slurred the sentence off; it was better not to let Mangane know about his allowing the girl to talk to her brother first.

The dignified Golpin, interviewed in the morning-room, was able to assure Poole that there were no duplicate keys to the study, that no one had

entered it from the hall between the time of Sir Garth being brought back and Mr. Hessel locking it up with Mr. Mangane—he had been in the hall himself all the time, telephoning for the doctor from a box under the stairs, waiting to admit Sir Horace, etc.—and that Mr. Hessel had not been back to the house, except for the reading of the will—when he had certainly not entered the study—and on the occasion when he, Mr. Menticle and Mr. Mangane had all been into the study together. The detective thanked him and was asking him to go and enquire whether Mr. Fratten could now see him, when the door opened and Inez came in. Poole thought that the girl looked paler than when she had left him an hour or so before, and there were shadows under her eyes. But her voice was firm enough.

"Mr. Poole," she said, when Golpin had disappeared, "I'm going to ask you for another favour. Will you leave my brother alone tonight? You won't get anything more out of him; I haven't myself—anything really useful—and I terribly want him not to be more upset. I'm going to find out more as soon as ever I can, and if you will leave him alone now, I give you my word of honour that I will tell you everything I find out—*everything*, even if it doesn't look well for him. Will you trust me?"

Poole looked at her. He was taking a big risk if anything went wrong now—if the man slipped away, unquestioned. But he felt absolutely certain that the girl was straight and meant what she said. He nodded his head.

"All right," he said with a smile. Then, remembering his position, added more formally: "Very well, Miss Fratten, I will do what you ask."

CHAPTER XII

"BREATH OF EDEN"

WHEN INEZ left the detective on the first occasion, she found her brother, where she had left him, in her own sitting-room, hunched up in an arm-chair and staring gloomily at the fire. If environment has the effect upon human spirits with which it is now popularly credited, there was no excuse for the expression on Ryland's face—Inez' room was as cheerful as any London room in November can possibly be. The walls and ceilings were painted in three shades of peach, the floor covered with a thick carpet of chestnut brown. The small Heal sofa, and two arm-chairs, were upholstered in an old-fashioned cretonne, with cushions of green and brown loosely flung in unsymmetrical profusion. A rosewood baby-grand piano, a sofa-table, acting now as a writing table, a small china cabinet, two or three delicate Sheraton chairs and old tray tables, and a walnut fire stool completed the furniture of the room. Over the mantelpiece hung a Chippendale mirror, while a pair of exquisite girandoles and two coloured Bartolozzi engravings were the only other ornaments on the walls. Vases of chrysanthemums and autumn foliage, Florentine candle-lamps, and a brisk coal and wood fire gave the finishing touches to a very charming effect.

Inez herself, in a dark-grey georgette which made a perfect background for a single string of exquisitely graded pearls, was very far from detracting from the beauty of her surroundings as she slipped on to the arm of the chair beside her brother. Her beauty was only enhanced by the sombre colour of her clothes and her face now showed none of the anxiety which her interview with the detective must have engendered.

"Ry," she said softly, while her fingers gently caressed her brother's shoulder, "who was the mysterious lady of the Birdcage Walk?"

Ryland looked up at her quickly.

"Who told you about that?" he asked sharply.

Inez smiled.

"Anybody who had been at the inquest might have, I suppose; but as a matter of fact, the handsome but earnest Mr. Poole did."

Ryland tried to jump up from the chair, but Inez pressed him gently back.

"Blast the fellow! Has he been bullying you again?" he said angrily.

"He hasn't; I bullied him. He came to see you but I waylaid him. I . . ."

"But why should he . . ."

"Don't interrupt, Ry; let me tell my simple story in my own old-fashioned way. Odd as it may seem, I wanted to know what had been happening today that had worried you so much. You didn't tell me anything worth hearing so I went to the *fons et origo mali* and turned it on. It was a bit sticky—'not at liberty to divulge' and all that sort of eyewash—but it's a nice young man really and responded to my womanly appeal—as one sister to another effect, you know."

Ryland snorted.

"It's quite all right, Ry; I didn't vamp him—at least, not much. He told me what you seem to have told the Coroner, and pretty thin we both thought it. He naturally wanted to hear a bit more; that's what he came here for—to put you through it—third degree—in quite a nice, gentlemanly sort of way. Well, knowing what sort of a Ryland my brother Ryland is, I thought I saw him getting a bit mule-headed and sticking his toes in and giving a general representation of a man who has got nothing good to tell and won't tell it. So I told him to go off and apply third, fourth and even fifth degrees to the pantry boy while I asked you what it was really all about. You see, I start with the advantage of knowing that you are telling the truth, however thin it may sound, so I . . ."

"Inez, did you know that father wasn't—wasn't my father?"

Inez started.

"Ry!" she said. "Haven't you been listening to what I was saying?"

"Did you know, Inez?" repeated her brother.

Inez looked at him, in a curious expression on her face.

"Yes, Ry, I knew," she said quietly.

"Who told you?"

"Mother—but she made me promise not to breathe a word about it to anyone."

"Why should you know, and not me? Surely I had a right to know if anyone had."

"I think father didn't want anyone at all to know—out of kindness really—people of that generation—Victorians—had odd ideas about its being shameful to be the child of an unmarried mother."

There was silence for a minute or more as Ryland sat with a look of deepening bitterness, staring into the fire.

"Then I'm not your brother?" he said at last.

Again that curious expression, half contemptuous, half tender, came into Inez' face.

"Fancy that!" she said lightly, slipping from her place on the arm of Ryland's chair.

Ryland, catching the ironical note in her voice, looked up questioningly, but Inez only returned to her original attack.

"Now then, what about this Birdcage lady?" she asked. "It wasn't Julie Vermont was it? I thought you were off her."

Ryland shook his head impatiently.

"Oh dry up about her," he said.

Slightly changing her tactics, Inez gradually coaxed the story out of him. It was a curious story; in the first place he did not know who the girl was, nor where she lived, but he was none the less very much in love with her (he always thought that—for a month or two). It appeared that about ten days previously he had been leaving his rooms in Abingdon Street when he noticed, just outside his door, a girl struggling to change the back tire of a Morris saloon car. A glance had been enough to show him that she was attractive and therefore a fitting subject for a good deed. He had offered his services, which were accepted, and—in not too great a hurry and with a maximum of mutual help—the task had been accomplished. An offer of a wash and brush up had followed (fortunately Ryland had a well-kept bath-room, with lavatory basin, clothes-brush, etc., that Inez sometimes used when she came to see him) and was laughingly accepted. The girl was uncommonly pretty—prettier than he had at first realized—with dark hair, large dark eyes, and small, well-kept hands. The whole interlude having lasted nearly half an hour, she had offered to drive Ryland wherever he had been going—she herself not being in any hurry. Ryland had made a feeble attempt to pretend that he was going to lunch alone and tried to induce her to join him, but she had laughingly pointed out the time—it was half-past eleven—and firmly dropped him at the "Doorstep" Club—but not before he had extracted a promise from her to have tea with him at Rumpelmayer's on the following day.

"That was a good tea, as teas go," said Ryland, reminiscently, "but the drive afterwards was much better. We went out in her car to Richmond Hill and sat there, looking out over the river—devilish romantic in the twilight, I

can tell you. We must have been there an hour or more." Ryland was smiling now; the memory of that evening had momentarily blotted out much that had happened since.

"You sat there for an hour or more," said Inez, "talking about—what?"

"Oh I don't know; nothing in particular."

"I only ask," said Inez airily, "because I want to know what one does talk about when one picks up a young man and takes him out to Richmond. You might be more helpful; anyhow, what do you *do*?"

"What on earth are you talking about?" exclaimed Ryland. "*You* can't do that."

"And why not?"

"Because you . . . oh, it's this silly sex equality stuff you've got in your head, I suppose. Let me tell you, it doesn't work—not where that sort of thing's concerned anyhow."

"I suppose you hold each other's hands," went on Inez inexorably. "Do you kiss? Rather familiar with a complete stranger, isn't it?"

"Shut up, will you? I don't like to hear you talking like that."

"All right, all right. Go ahead with your love's young dream."

Ryland frowned at her, but Inez' face bore an expression of such innocent appeal, that he burst into a laugh.

"Curse you, Inez; you're pulling my leg. Well, as a matter of fact we didn't get much forwarder really that evening—self-possessed young person she was. I tried to fix up something for next day but she said she was going away. The best I could get out of her was that she would take me for another drive on the following Thursday. She said she'd pick me up in St. James's Park—at the end of the Birdcage Walk—as soon after five as possible. It sounded rather surreptitious and jolly and of course I agreed. I got there at a quarter to five and waited till nearly seven, but she never came. I haven't seen her since—as a matter of fact, I've hardly thought about her."

The gloomy look had returned to Ryland's face; the story had brought him back to grim facts.

"But who is she, Ry? Where does she live?" asked Inez.

"I tell you I don't know. Daphne—that's all she'd tell me in the way of a name. And she wouldn't tell me where she lived. I believe she's got a job somewhere—that was why she wouldn't come to lunch—but where or what it is I don't know and she wouldn't tell me."

"Can you get hold of her? How did you propose to meet again? I suppose you were going to?"

"I can't get hold of her. She was going to meet me, and as she didn't I don't know in the least where she is."

"Good Lord," said Inez. "It is a blank wall—and a thin story. What was she like?"

"I told you—dark hair, dark eyes, about your height."

"Dark eyes? What colour?"

"Oh I don't know—brown, I suppose. Or it may have been her eyelashes that were dark."

"What a rotten description. What did she wear?"

"Oh the usual sort of thing. Brownish-grey coat and skirt and one of those small hats—reddy-brown I should think. Brownish stockings."

"That identifies her precisely," said Inez sarcastically. "You're quite hopeless. Wasn't there *anything* to distinguish her from twenty-thousand other shop-girls?"

"She wasn't a shop-girl! She was . . ."

"Oh yes, a princess in disguise of course—especially the disguise. But wasn't there anything?"

Ryland thought for a minute. Suddenly his face brightened.

"There was! Scent! Marvellous stuff—simply made you feel wicked all down your spine."

"Pah! Patchouli, I should think—fines it down to ten thousand, perhaps. Look here, Ry, you've got to find this girl. Put a notice in the Agony Column—'Daphne, Birdcage Walk. Broken-hearted. Write Box something. Boysie'—or whatever silly name you let her call you. Seriously, you *must* find her. It's not the least use your seeing this detective with a story like that. I'll put him off. And just you get your nose down to it and do some finding."

So it was that Inez returned to the morning-room with her tale of woe. It wasn't true, of course; but on the other hand, her promise to tell Poole everything that she found out was honestly given; she had pledged her word of honour—a mysterious distinction, surviving perhaps from schoolroom days.

The period of grace won for him by his sister's diplomacy did not at first appear likely to be of great benefit to Ryland Fratten. He spent most of the evening in almost voiceless gloom, growled at Inez whenever she talked to

him—especially when she tried to get him to take some interest in his own predicament—and left the house for his lodgings soon after half-past nine.

On the following morning, however, he appeared in time for breakfast, looking much more his usual, cheerful self. Inez was already in the breakfast-room, brewing coffee; Ryland went up to her, put his arm round her waist, and kissed her affectionately.

"I suppose I've no right to do that now," he said.

"Just as much as ever you had," replied Inez.

"Yes, but I didn't know it before. Where ignorance is bli . . . I mean,—no, I don't; I'm getting muddled. What I really mean is, that there's no fun in breaking a rule if you don't know you're breaking it. In other words, now I've no right to kiss you—I really want to."

A faint flush appeared on Inez' usually calm face.

"You'd better get yourself something to eat," she said crisply. "Your mind's not very clear before food."

Ryland laughed.

"My mind's been working to some tune since I saw you last. I've got a clue!"

Inez turned quickly.

"What?" she exclaimed.

"That scent! You remember, I told you that Daphne used a very attractive scent; well, I've found it. That's to say I've found a handkerchief of hers that still smells of it. I remembered last night that she'd dropped her handkerchief getting out of the car and I'd pinched it—rather romantic—something to remind me of her—that sort of thing."

"So as not to get her muddled up with half a dozen others?" said Inez. "How thoughtful of you, Ryland. Let's smell the beastly stuff."

If Inez had expected the usual cheap sickly scent that she had spoken of, she must have been greatly surprised. The handkerchief—a fine cambric, with a thin edging of lace—gave off a very faint bitter-sweet perfume which was quite unlike anything she had met before. She at once became interested. The scent was so unusual that there seemed quite a possibility that it might be traced. She suggested to Ryland that he should take the handkerchief to one or two of the leading perfumers—Rollinson in Bond Street, Duhamel Frères, Pompadour in the Ritz Arcade—and ask them whether it was one of their creations. But Ryland seemed to have lost interest in the subject as soon as his sister took it up; he declared that the

whole thing was nonsense—he wasn't going to traipse round London making a fool of himself, just because some silly detective was getting excited about a mare's nest.

Inez was furious with him, but neither gibes nor entreaties could stir him to make the suggested enquiries. Eventually she declared that she would do it herself, thinking perhaps that that might move him; he merely told her that she could if it amused her.

Put on her mettle by this cavalier treatment, Inez ran up to her room, put on a hat and a pointed fox fur, and was soon bowling along in a taxi to Rollinson's. With an air of considerable *empressement* she demanded to see the manager and, as her appearance and her card were sufficiently important to open such an august portal, she soon found herself in that aristocratic gentleman's room. Having already divulged her name, Inez knew that it was no good trying to invent some cock-and-bull story to cloak her inquiry; the report of the inquest was in all the papers that morning, including, of course, the account of Ryland's abortive liaison with an unknown young lady in St. James's Park. Very wisely, Inez decided to take the manager entirely into her confidence. Needless to say, the poor man was easy game for Inez, who, when she chose to exert her full powers, could wring sympathy out of a University Professor; had she not, only a few hours previously, derailed an ambitious young detective under full steam? Mr. Rodney-Phillips (in private life, Rodnocopoulos) became at once her ardent collaborator in the search for truth—and "Daphne."

Inez produced the handkerchief.

"This is our only clue," she said. "Is it possible to identify the scent? If anyone can do it, I know you can."

Mr. Rodney-Phillips bowed and held out a fat white palm. The handkerchief being placed on it, he conveyed it to within about six inches of his fine nose, closed his eyes, and gave a long, slow, and utterly refined sniff.

Instantly he opened his eyes.

"Why, certainly, madame," he exclaimed. "This is one of our own perfumes—one of our choicest, and most 'chic' conceptions—'Breath of Eden.' It is, of course, exclusively purveyed by ourselves; there is every hope of our being able to identify the purchaser by the help of your description of the lady—though, of course, a certain amount is sold over the counter to casual purchasers. I will send for Miss Gilling, our head assistant."

Miss Gilling, however, was less hopeful—was, in fact, rather bored by the enquiry. There were, she declared, a number of ladies among their clientele, answering broadly to the vague description which was all that Inez could produce. The scent was a popular one and was sold in considerable quantities to both regular and occasional customers.

Inez's hopes were dashed by the uncompromising and unhelpful pronouncement, but the manager was not going to allow his promises to be so lightly upset.

"But we must enquire, Miss Gilling," he exclaimed. "The books must be examined. I have promised Miss Fratten that we will identify the purchaser."

Instantly Miss Gilling pricked up her ears and discarded the pose of supercilious languor that she had hitherto adopted.

"Miss Fratten?" she exclaimed. "Are you Miss Fratten? Oh, then I think I can help you. I have myself on more than one occasion supplied this very perfume to the order of your . . . of Mr. Ryland Fratten!"

CHAPTER XIII

EYE-WITNESSES

POOLE realized that before pinning the crime of murdering Sir Garth Fratten to any individual, he must first find out, or at any rate try to find out, how that murder had been committed. It was clear enough *when* it was done but, so far, in spite of the presence of a number of witnesses, it was not at all clear *how* it was done.

In addition to Hessel, a number of witnesses had written to or communicated in other ways with the police, offering to give evidence at the inquest as to the "accident" on the Duke of York's Steps. Preliminary investigations had suggested that none of these witnesses had any very different story to tell than had already been provided by Hessel, and it had not been thought necessary to call them for the initial stages of the Coroner's enquiry. Poole, however, had their addresses and, on the morning after his interview with Inez Fratten—and his failure to interview Ryland—he determined to make a round of visits and go exhaustively into the question of what the eye-witnesses of the accident had seen.

The first name on his list was that of Mr. Thomas Lossett, of 31 Gassington Road, Surbiton, employed at Tyler, Potts and Co., the Piccadilly hatters. Mr. Lossett proved to be what was popularly known as the "hat-lusher" at this celebrated establishment—that is to say, he wore a white apron and a paper cap and ironed or blocked the hats of the firm's aristocratic clients. By permission of the manager, whom Poole took into his confidence, the detective was allowed to interview Mr. Lossett in a small room set aside for the storage of customers' own silk hats when out of town—from the comparative emptiness of the shelves Poole deduced that the practice of silk-hat farming was in decline.

Mr. Lossett was a loquacious gentleman of about fifty. He was, it appeared, in a position to give an exact account of the incident because he had been only a few yards away from Sir Garth when the accident occurred. He had first noticed the gentlemen as they stood underneath the Column before beginning the descent of the steps. He was on his way from Piccadilly to Waterloo—he often walked, if it were a fine evening, being a firm believer in the value of pedestrian exercise—and his attention had been attracted to the two gentlemen by the fact that they both wore top-hats—a

comparatively rare phenomenon on a week-day in these degenerate times. Descending the broad steps a little behind and to the side of them, his attention had never really left them and he had been fully aware of the hurried descent of a man in a light overcoat and a bowler hat, who stumbled just as he was passing the two gentlemen and knocked against Sir Garth Fratten—as Mr. Lossett had afterwards discovered the taller of the two to have been.

Poole questioned Mr. Lossett closely on the actual impact, and obtained a very clear statement. Lossett had seen the man before he actually struck against Sir Garth and was perfectly certain that no blow had been struck with the hand or with any instrument. He had stumbled against Sir Garth's side, rather than his back, and had clutched the banker's arm to prevent himself from falling. As for his appearance, he was decidedly tall and wore a black moustache. He had spoken in what Mr. Lossett described as a "genteel" voice, had apologized handsomely, saying that he was in a great hurry to get to the Admiralty, and, as Sir Garth appeared to be all right, had hurried off in the direction of that building. Lossett had not himself waited to see what became of Sir Garth, as he had not too much time in which to catch his train; he had been intensely surprised to read of the fatal outcome of the accident, as it had seemed to him so trivial. He put the time of the accident at somewhere between 6.15 and 6.30.

The detective was distinctly disappointed by this account. It was so very clear and certain, and gave no indication as to how the banker had received the fatal blow in his back. No amount of cross-questioning could shake the hat-lusher on that vital point.

Pondering over the problem which this evidence provided, Poole made his way to the Haymarket, where he found Mr. Ulred Tarker, a clerk in the offices of the Trans-Continental Railway Company. Mr. Tarker, interviewed in the manager's own room, had not a great deal of light to throw on the subject. He had not noticed either the two bankers or the man who had stumbled against them before the occurrence; then, hearing a commotion behind him, he had looked round and seen what he believed to be two men supporting a third between them. Two of the figures were evidently elderly gentlemen of good standing, the third a younger man, dressed very much as ninety-nine men out of a hundred at that time and place, in the evening rush to one of the stations, would be dressed—a dark suit and either a bowler or a trilby hat—Mr. Tarker was not sure which. Although he had stopped for a second or two to see what the excitement was about, Mr. Tarker had soon realized that it was nothing interesting and had gone on his way, not noticing anything more about any of the three figures concerned. He had not seen any

blow struck, but then he had not looked round till after the accident. The third man, the one not wearing a top-hat, had appeared to him middle-aged or getting on that way, and probably had a moustache. He had left the office soon after 6.15 and walked straight to the Duke's Steps and so on to Westminster.

That was all, and Poole felt that he had wasted his time.

Katherine Moon, a cashier at the Royal Services Club, Waterloo Place, proved more interesting. She had waited for a minute or two in Waterloo Place for a friend to join her; half-past six was the time arranged; during that time she had noticed a man in a light overcoat waiting at the corner of Carlton House Terrace, to one side of the Steps; she had noticed him because for a second she had thought he might be the friend for whom she was waiting, though she had quickly seen that he was taller than her friend and wore a moustache, which her friend did not. That was all that she had seen; she had no real reason for connecting him with the tragedy and had not at first done so, but on hearing of the exhumation and having previously read Miss Fratten's advertisement, she had put two and two together and wondered whether they could possibly make four. Poole thought her a particularly smart girl; there had been so very little really to connect the two incidents in her mind, and yet the detective felt that she might well be right.

Four more names remained on the Inspector's list—three from the Haymarket neighbourhood, and one from Paddington Square. Poole was puzzled for a moment to find practically all the witnesses coming from such a conscribed area, till he realized that the number of people who would use the Duke of York's Steps as a homeward route after the day's work must be closely limited—it was a distinctly long way to Victoria or Waterloo and not too close even to St. James's Park Underground Station.

Mr. Raffelli, owner of a small antique shop in Haymarket Passage, had not, it transpired, seen the accident at all, but had been present when Sir Garth's body was carried to the car, arriving on the scene probably five minutes after he fell. More wasted time, thought Poole.

After a hurried luncheon at Appenrodt's, the detective called on Mr. Julian Wagglebow, employed in the London Library. Mr. Wagglebow, a precise old gentleman who disliked being hurried, described how, after finishing his day's work, which consisted of indexing a number of newly-purchased books, at 6 P. M., he had proceeded to Hugh Rees's shop in Lower Regent Street, to buy a copy of *The Fond Heart* for his daughter, whose birthday it was. Leaving Hugh Rees's he had walked down past the Guards Crimean Memorial and the new King Edward statue—a misleading

representation, Mr. Wagglebow thought—to the Duke of York's Steps. Being rather short-sighted he was descending the Steps slowly and carefully when he was startled by someone rushing down past him. "That man will have an accident if he isn't careful," he had thought to himself, and sure enough, at that very moment, the man had stumbled and lurched against a gentleman in a top-hat who was walking with another gentleman, similarly attired, just in front of him, Mr. Wagglebow.

Poole interrupted at this point, to impress upon his informant the extreme importance of an *exact* description of the accident. The exact description was forthcoming and it was as disappointing as that of Mr. Lossett, the hat-lusher. The man had *lurched* against Sir Garth—rather heavily, it is true, but he had not struck him. No, his shoulder had not struck Sir Garth in the back; it had been more of a sideways lurch against Sir Garth's arm—perhaps at an angle of forty-five degrees, if the Inspector knew what he meant by that—between the back of the arm and the side of the arm. That was natural, because the lurch, although to a certain extent sideways—as if the ankle had turned over—had also been forwards, because of the pace at which the man was descending the steps. Mr. Wagglebow was able to be so precise because, as he had already explained, he had at that very moment been thinking to himself that if that man were not more careful he would have an accident, and sure enough he did have one—as Mr. Wagglebow was watching him.

This certainly was clear evidence and the detective saw that Mr. Wagglebow would be a difficult man to shake in a witness box. As to the man's appearance, Mr. Wagglebow was less clear—he had not been particularly interested by the individual but rather by the incident, which had so exactly borne out his warning. He believed that the man wore an overcoat—he could not say of what colour, but probably not quite black—and a bowler hat. He had appeared to be of ordinary size and appearance—a young man, undoubtedly. At the foot of the Steps, Mr. Wagglebow had turned to the right towards St. James's Park Suspension bridge, and had seen no more of the parties concerned. Allowing for the time spent in buying the book at Hugh Rees's Mr. Wagglebow thought that he could not have reached the Steps before 6.30.

The last name in this neighbourhood was that of Hector Press, of Haymarket Court. Haymarket Court proved to be a block of bachelor flats just behind His Majesty's Theatre, and Mr. Press, a valet employed in the flats by the management, to look after such of the residents as had not their own men to valet them. Mr. Press wore a neat black suit, well-oiled hair, and blue chin. His voice was carefully controlled and he displayed a slight

tendency to patronize a "policeman." He had, he said, submitted his name as a witness since reading the account of the inquest in last night's evening paper, because he had been struck by a possible discrepancy between the evidence there given and his own observation. On the evening in question (something after six—he couldn't say nearer), he had been going from Haymarket Court to visit an acquaintance in Queen Anne's Mansions—he usually had an hour or two off, between five and seven if he had got the gentleman's dress clothes ready—but on reaching the top of the Duke of York's Steps, he suddenly remembered that Captain Dollington required his bag packed for a visit to Newmarket. Shocked by his forgetfulness, he had whisked quickly round and had been nearly cannoned into by a gentleman walking just behind him. This gentleman had evidently been startled or annoyed by the check to his progress because he had sworn at Mr. Press in a manner that caused the valet to stare at him as he hurried on. So it was that Mr. Press had seen the gentleman break into a run down the steps and, a few seconds later, to stumble and knock against two gentlemen in tall hats who were about half-way down. The particular point that Mr. Press wished to make was that this gentleman had been referred to in the evidence as an Admiralty messenger, or, if not quite that, at any rate the impression had been given that he was a man of the clerk class, taking a message to the Admiralty. Now Mr. Press had had great experience of gentlemen and he not only knew one when he saw one, but still more when he heard one. The particular oath which had been hurled at him had unquestionably been a gentleman's oath and the voice was a gentleman's voice. Of that Mr. Press had no doubt at all and he was prepared to state his opinion on oath. Questioned by Poole, the valet was not prepared to say for certain that a blow had not been struck but he had certainly not seen one, though he had been watching the gentleman right up to the moment of the collision. As to appearance and clothes, he had no hesitation in saying that the gentleman was of medium height, about thirty-five years of age, and wore a dark moustache, together with a bowler hat and an overcoat of medium-grey cloth—the latter by no means new or well cared for. He had not gone down the Steps to see what had happened, as he was in a hurry to get back and pack Captain Dollington's bag.

Poole felt that this might prove to be the most useful information that he had yet received, though it still left him in the dark as to how Sir Garth had come by his injury. His last remaining witness, who had written from an address in Paddington Square and wished to be interviewed there, was a clerk employed in the Chief Whip's office at the House of Commons. Probably Mr. Coningsby Smythe did not wish it to get about in the House

that the police had been interrogating him—perhaps he feared that it might damage the credit of the Government, but Poole did not feel inclined to wait till a late hour and journey all the way up to Paddington when his information was waiting for him so close at hand. Accordingly he made his way to the House and, by the good offices of one of the officials, obtained a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Smythe in a corner of the Visitors' Lobby.

Mr. Smythe, it appeared, had been returning to the House after delivering an important note to a Minister (Mr. Smythe was very discreet) at the Carlton Club. As he walked down the Duke of York's Steps, he had noticed two gentlemen in top-hats about to cross the Mall. He had wondered, such was the rarity of the "topper" in these degenerate days (Mr. Smythe was unconsciously echoing the hat-lusher) whether the two gentlemen were Members, and had hurried his steps in order to satisfy his curiosity. They had checked on an island in the middle of the Mall and he was within ten or fifteen yards of them when they crossed the second half. His view of them had been interrupted for a moment by a passing car and the next he saw of them, the taller of the two was just sinking to his knees, and so to the ground, while the shorter—Mr. Hessel, it now appeared—tried to hold him up. Mr. Smythe had hurried to the spot—had, in fact, been the first there—but Sir Garth had not spoken, nor even moved again. Mr. Hessel was evidently deeply distressed, and kept wringing his hands and calling his friend's name. He, Mr. Smythe, had suggested calling a doctor, but at that moment a gentleman had offered a car and he had helped to lift Sir Garth into it.

Poole was getting impatient, but concealed his feeling.

"Yes, sir," he said. "But what about the accident; did you see that?"

"But I've just told you, Inspector!"

"No, sir; I don't mean that. The accident on the Steps, when Sir Garth was knocked into."

"Oh, no, Inspector, I didn't see that. I saw Sir Garth practically die—I thought you would wish to know about it."

Smothering his annoyance, the detective thanked Mr. Coningsby Smythe for his information and released him to his important duties. As he left the House, Poole remembered that there was one name that he had not got on his list—that of the woman who had caused a disturbance at the Inquest. It was a hundred to one against her having anything of importance to say—probably she was one of the many half-witted people whose object in life is to draw attention to themselves; still, Poole had been in the Force long

enough to learn that it was never safe to turn one's back upon the most unpromising source of information.

Returning to the Yard, he obtained the name and address which the woman had given to the Coroner's Officer: Miss Griselda Peake, 137 Coxon's Buildings, Earl's Court. It was now nearly five o'clock and Poole felt that the lady would almost certainly be at home for the sacred office of tea-drinking. He proved to be right; Miss Peake was at home—in a small room on the seventh floor (no lift) of Coxon's Buildings, and received him with great dignity and the offer of refreshment.

"I have been expecting to hear from Scotland Yard, Officer," she said. "I have important information to give and I should have been heard by the Coroner. I thought him an ill-mannered official, but still I understand that red-tape is red-tape and I am prepared to meet the wishes of the authorities."

Miss Peake spoke calmly, with none of the excited shrillness of her appearance at the Inquest. Perhaps the environment of her home was soothing. She was a very small woman, of about fifty-five, dressed in the period of the nineties. Her long, tight-sleeved dress was youthful in cut and ornament and probably represented a well-saved relic of her young days. Possibly her mind had never advanced beyond that age—she both looked and spoke like a figure from the *Strand Magazine* in the days of L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace.

"I was present at the time the outrage was committed on Sir Garth Fratten," she said, impressively. "I was standing—two lumps, Officer?—at the foot of the Steps at the time, or rather, I should say, half-way between the foot of the Steps and the carriage-way—the new carriage-way, you know—it has all been altered—Germanized—a grave mistake I always feel. I happened to be waiting there, watching the Members on their way from the Cartlon to the House—Mr. Balfour often passes that way—a great man, Officer, a charming speaker, but I fear that he will never be a leader. I saw two gentlemen, evidently Members, coming down the Steps, and the next moment I saw it all. A dastardly outrage, Officer!"

Miss Peake's voice rose suddenly in a shrill cry of excitement. Her eyes blazed and she rose to her feet, nearly pushing over the tea-table as she did so. Evidently the poor lady's mind could not stand excitement.

"A brutal attack!" she cried. "Ruffians—a gang of ruffians—Fenians!"

Suddenly she sank back into her chair, looked dazedly about her, and passed her hand over her eyes. After a moment, she spoke again in a dull, level voice.

“The man rushed down the Steps after committing his fell deed,” she said. “I saw him leap into a waiting vehicle and drive away. The villains! The cowards! Nihilists! Radicals!”

Once more the excitement had seized her and she broke into shrill cries, only half intelligible. Poole saw that it was useless to expect any lucid account from her. Waiting only for a quiet moment in which to take his leave, he thanked poor little Miss Griselda for her valuable help, and left her to finish her tea in peace.

“Please tell the Secretary of State that I am at his service at any time,” said Miss Peake as she ushered him out of the door.

CHAPTER XIV

SIR GARTH'S PAPERS

ALTHOUGH he had had a hard day's work and it was nearly six o'clock, Poole felt that he had made so little progress that he could not leave things as they were. Consequently, he returned to the Yard, and taking his note-book and a sheet of foolscap, set himself to analyse the evidence that he had obtained during the day. As was only to be expected, there were discrepancies in the accounts of the incident which the various eye-witnesses had given him. In the first place, the "time" was very vague—varying from "some time after six" by Press, to "not before six-thirty" by Wagglebow. The evidence of Tarker and Miss Moon, however, made it fairly certain that the time was well after 6.15. Referring to his note-book Poole discovered that he had not got a definite statement by Mr. Hessel on the subject—he made a note to get it at the first opportunity. Then, as to the appearance of Sir Garth Fratten's assailant, there was much difference of opinion. Tarker had described him as "getting on for middle-age," while Wagglebow thought him "undoubtedly young"; but then Tarker was himself a young man and Wagglebow an old, which would probably account for the difference, each judging from his own standpoint. The observant Press was probably near the mark in putting him at thirty-five.

The consensus of opinion pointed to a bowler hat, but the overcoat varied from "light" (Lossett), through "medium-grey" (Press), to "not quite black" (Wagglebow). All seemed agreed on the subject of a moustache, but whereas Press and Wagglebow thought him of "medium" or "ordinary" size, Lossett had described him as "decidedly tall."

The question of the man's "class" was unsatisfactory. Poole had not questioned his earlier witnesses specifically on this point—he blamed himself for not doing so—but he had certainly gathered the impression, both from them and previously from Mr. Hessel, that he was of middle class, a clerk or responsible messenger. Press, however, probably an expert witness on this subject, had been absolutely certain that the man was a "gentleman"—by which he probably meant someone accustomed to command obedience. It was a point which might be of the very first importance and Poole made a note to question Lossett, Tarker, Wagglebow, and possibly Miss Moon, as well as Mr. Hessel, about it in the near future.

On the really vital point of the blow, however, there was remarkable unanimity of opinion; not one had seen a blow struck or believed it had been struck, whilst two—Lossett and particularly Mr. Wagglebow (who might be regarded as a most reliable witness)—were absolutely certain that a blow had *not* been struck. This was a most serious matter; it left a really vital gap in the chain of evidence.

For some time the detective sat pondering over this problem and gradually the glimmerings of an idea took shape in his mind. They were so vague, however, that he deliberately put them aside until he had got more information by which to test them. In the first place he determined to try and see Mr. Hessel again that evening and with that object in view, put a call through to the Wanderers' Club to enquire whether that gentleman was in. While waiting for a reply, he sent for Sergeant Gower, who had been detailed to work under him in this case. Before starting out that morning, Poole had detailed Sergeant Gower to go to the Admiralty and make enquiries about the identity of any possible messenger, either to or from the Admiralty, answering the description given by Mr. Hessel, on the evening of 24th October. The task had not, it appeared, taken Gower long; every incoming message would automatically go through the Registry, as would all outgoing messages, except those sent privately by very senior officers who could afford to ignore, and did sometimes ignore, the regulations. The number of plain-clothes clerks who could be so employed was strictly limited, and when it was further reduced by the condition of a moustache—in a naval office such appendages were as scarce as its marines—it did not take long to discover that no such messenger had been either from or to the Admiralty on the evening in question. As Poole had expected, the Admiralty message was nothing but a myth.

At this point, the hall-porter of the Wanderers' rang through to say that Mr. Hessel was not in the Club—and would not divulge whether he had been in it that day or was expected. Cursing the ultra-discretion of Clubland, Poole determined to try Hessel's rooms, of which he had previously obtained the address. No reply could be extracted from the flat in Whitehall Court. Nothing daunted, Poole determined to walk round there; it was just possible that Mr. Hessel was at this hour himself walking home from club or office. He was right; when he got to the great block of flats behind the War Office, he found that the banker had just come in.

Mr. Hessel received the detective with a friendly smile. At Poole's request, he repeated his account of the accident, but without throwing any fresh light on the question of the blow. He had not actually seen the man knock against Sir Garth, but he felt sure that he must have been conscious if

anything so definite as a blow had been delivered. As to time, he had no means of fixing precise limits, but he would say soon after six. Poole thanked him for his information and turned to the question of appearance.

"Would you say that the man was a gentleman, sir?" he asked; "perhaps I ought to put it rather differently: did he appear to be a man of leisure, a business or professional man, a clerk—or what?"

Hessel thought for a time, before answering.

"Now you press me," he said. "I find it rather difficult to answer. From his remarks—something about a message to the Admiralty, as I told you—I certainly formed the unconscious impression that he was of the clerk type. But I am not really at all sure. He was quite a nice-looking, pleasant-spoken young fellow; he might really quite well have been a professional man, I suppose. His clothes were not very smart, so far as I remember—but of course that tells one little in these hard times."

"You saw him quite clearly, sir?"

"Oh, yes—quite."

"Is it possible that he was someone that you know by sight—disguised?"

Hessel stared at the detective.

"Who do you mean?" he asked.

"I am not for the moment suggesting that he was anyone in particular, but I should just like to be certain whether such a thing was or was not a possibility. If, as we think, this man made a deliberate attack upon Sir Garth, he would almost certainly be disguised. The old idea of the false beard and glasses is rather played out now—partly because beards are so little worn, partly because false ones seldom look real, and partly because it is now realized that a very slight alteration of a face can completely change it. This man wore a dark moustache; probably he was a clean-shaven man. I rather gather that his voice was 'refined,' but not quite that of a gentleman." (For the moment, Poole thought it better to keep to himself Press's evidence about the "gentlemanly oath.") "A lower or middle class man would have difficulty in counterfeiting a gentleman's voice, but a gentleman could easily convey the other impression—especially if he knew something about acting."

Slowly an expression of astonishment, almost of horror, crept into Hessel's face.

"Good God, Inspector," he said. "You are suggesting that—that it might be Ryland!"

"Is it impossible, sir?" pressed Poole, leaning forward eagerly.

"Ryland! Ryland! His height, yes, perhaps—even his figure. But—oh no, it is impossible, Inspector. I should have recognized him, of course. Besides, the whole idea is unthinkable; he is a charming boy, devoted to his father. . . ."

"Was he?"

"Why, yes; why, of course he was!"

"The first time I spoke to you, Mr. Hessel, you told me that on that very evening, a few minutes before his death, Sir Garth was talking to you about some trouble with his son—about the son's lack of affection for his father. You said yourself that they did not understand one another, that Sir Garth was unjust to his son—his adopted son, it now appears."

Hessel looked pale and troubled.

"Yes, yes, Inspector," he said. "That may be so. But what I said in no way implied that there was *serious* trouble between them; at bottom, I am quite certain, they were both deeply attached to one another."

"I happen to know, sir," the detective persisted, "that there *was* serious trouble between them. I also know that Mr. Ryland Fratten has not satisfactorily accounted for his whereabouts at that hour—and I know other things. Now I want, sir, direct answers to two questions, if you will be so good as to give them to me. First, do you believe that the man who knocked into Sir Garth on the Steps that evening was Mr. Ryland Fratten?"

"No, I do not!" exclaimed Hessel emphatically.

"Very well, sir; now, do you give me your assurance that, beyond all reasonable doubt, it was *not* Ryland Fratten?"

Poole's steady eyes searched into the depths of the harassed face of the banker; they saw doubt, anxiety, and, finally, determination.

"I . . . I . . . yes, I am sure—absolutely sure—that it was not Ryland," said Hessel.

Poole looked at him quietly for a second or two, as if to give him time to change his mind; then, with some deliberation, made an entry in his note-book.

"Now, sir, if I may, I want to ask you about a quite different point. When I first spoke to you—last Friday, I think it was—I asked you whether you thought Sir Garth had any enemies; you rather naturally pooh-poohed the idea, or at any rate the implication, and said that of course the death was accidental. I was not in a position to press you on the point at that time—it

was before we had definite information to work on—but now that we know for certain that Sir Garth was murdered I must return to that point. You are, I believe, Sir Garth's executor, and have sole control of his business affairs—his papers and so on. No doubt you have been through them; can you tell me whether you have found anything to indicate that Sir Garth was threatened, or in danger, or likely to be in danger, or engaged in any work which was bringing him into opposition with dangerous people? I am afraid I am being rather vague, but you probably see what I am trying to get at. We are trying to establish a motive for this crime, and, of course, to find out a possible author of it."

Mr. Hessel answered at once, quietly but firmly.

"In the first place, Inspector, I cannot agree with your assumption that murder has been committed—that of course is only my personal view. Leaving that—assuming your view for the moment—you implied just now that Ryland Fratten had killed his father; now you are asking me to provide you with an entirely different type of murderer—if I may say so, a rather melodramatic type. What am I to understand by this sudden change of front?"

"I think that you misunderstood me, sir," said Poole. "I did not imply that Mr. Ryland Fratten *was* the murderer; I asked you for your opinion as to whether he possibly *might* be; I am looking into various alternatives. Perhaps you will let me have a reply to my questions."

Hessel frowned; Poole's remark hinted at a rebuff.

"I don't think I can help you, Inspector—not by direct information, that is. As a matter of fact, I have not been through Sir Garth's papers, except very cursorily with Mr. Menticle and Sir Garth's secretary—Mangane. I am afraid I have been rather remiss; Mangane has been pressing me to do it—I have rather shirked a task that is very unwelcome to me—prying into my dead friend's affairs. Now, if you like, we will go round to the house this evening, and look into them together—then you can get the information you want directly from the source. Let me see, it's not far off eight o'clock; will you come and have some food with me? In the meantime, we will warn Mangane that we are coming round. Yes? Capital."

The arrangement suited the detective well. He would, as Hessel had said, get direct access to Sir Garth's papers—untouched, as seemed fairly certain, except for the hurried survey that Menticle, Hessel and Mangane had all supervised. Secondly, he would, by dining with him, get an excellent opportunity of sizing up Mr. Hessel himself, and Poole always liked to form a personal opinion of the chief characters in a problem—Hessel was

obviously a very important character, with his first-hand evidence that he was able to give and his intimate knowledge of the dead man's affairs. Poole realized that Mr. Hessel was not altogether in sympathy with him—probably he had been too brusque in pressing him for answers to difficult questions; this would be an opportunity of gaining the banker's confidence.

By tacit consent, the case under investigation was not referred to during the meal at Rittoni's, that quiet but very high-grade restaurant below one of the great shipping offices in Cockspur Street. Hessel was an excellent host, not pressing hospitality upon his guest, but seeming to understand by instinct the type of food and wine to suit both taste and occasion. He was a good talker, too, full of quiet but extremely interesting information, and with an individual sense of humour. He did not in any way monopolize the conversation, but drew the detective out—not on the subject of his work, but in an expression of opinion and experience on the general affairs of life. Undoubtedly, both men felt an increased respect for one another by the time they had walked across St. James's Park—passing, without reference, the scene of Sir Garth's death—to the Fratten's home in Queen Anne's Gate.

Mangane was waiting for them, together with a severe-looking head-housemaid ready to remove—as soon as Hessel unlocked the neglected room—the outer coverings of dust; it was patent from her expression that she regarded men's methods with anything but approval.

As soon as the housemaid had finished and gone, Hessel, who kept Mangane in the room to help him find his way about, took out his keys and unlocked the writing table drawers. It was at once apparent that Sir Garth had been an extremely methodical man. Each drawer was labelled to show the general subject with which it dealt. "Bank," "Hospital," "Private Accounts," "Personal," "Company Boards," "Investments," etc., and in each drawer the different subdivisions of the same subject were filed in paper jackets. Quickly but methodically Poole examined each drawerful in turn; in that labelled "Company Boards," he at once found a jacket marked "Victory Finance Company," the concern which Mangane had told him had been the subject of Sir Garth's investigations each evening up to the time of his death—investigations which his daughter had thought were causing him considerable worry. Poole said nothing about this jacket at the moment but passed on to another drawer until he had been through them all.

"He kept everything of importance in these drawers, did he, sir?" he asked, looking up at Hessel.

"So far as I can see, everything, except that there's a certain amount of money, notes and silver to the value of £200 or £300, some old private

account ledgers, and a bundle of private letters in that safe in the wall."

Poole pricked up his ears.

"Private letters?" he said. "May I have a look at them?"

"If you like—or rather, if you must. They are all old letters; from what I could see they are all in the same hand—a woman's—and the signature—a Christian name only—is that of Sir Garth's first wife."

Poole nodded.

"I see, sir," he said. "Perhaps I should just look through them. It will take a little time; if you will just count the letters—initial them if you like—I will give you a receipt for them and let you have them back in a day or two. I need hardly say that unless they have any bearing on the crime they will remain absolutely private. May I also take Sir Garth's private account book and those company jackets?—I will give you a receipt for those too. The Fratten's Bank papers, I take it, are all in order, sir? You would know about that."

Hessel smiled.

"Perfectly, I think, Inspector, but don't take my word for it. You had better take them too—we shall have to get you a cab."

Having made out the necessary receipts, Poole declined Mr. Hessel's chaffing offer of transport, but borrowed an attaché case from Mangane, and made his way home. Late as it was, he still did not give up the day's work, but sat down to examine his booty.

Turning at once to the subject that interested him most, he took up the jacket of the Victory Finance Company; he found that it contained a copy of the company's last Annual Report, to which was attached a typewritten schedule of investments and advances, and three sheets of notes in the dead man's handwriting.

The Annual Report was in places underscored in pencil; Poole could not see any particular significance in these markings. The list of investments and advances was not marked at all, but corresponding headings appeared on Sir Garth's sheets of notes, with the banker's comments upon each.

Apparently, so far as Poole's limited knowledge of the subject took him, the Victory Finance Company was in the habit of investing a certain proportion of its money and lending the remainder. The list of investments appeared to have passed Sir Garth's scrutiny with little criticism, most items having a simple tick against them, and a few the words "discard," "enlarge," "concentrate," "doubtful" and so on. The list of advances was more fully annotated; evidently the banker had been at pains to scrutinize the

antecedents and activities of each of the concerns to which the Victory Finance Company had lent money. In all but three cases—the South Wales Pulverization Company, the Nem Nem Sohar Trust, and the Ethiopian and General Development Company—there was a tick against the name, as if Sir Garth had been satisfied of its soundness; in the case of the S. W. Pulverization Company and the Nem Nem Sohar Trust there was a separate sheet of notes for each, ending with the underscored words "*overcapitalized*" in the first case, and "*too political*" in the second. In the case of the Ethiopian and General Development Company there were no such notes.

Poole sighed as he finished his scrutiny.

"This is going to be deep water for me," he muttered.

A quick scrutiny of the other "Company Boards" jackets showed the detective that Sir Garth had either resigned his seat or was contemplating doing so, or else that the work was of so simple or nominal a character as to be of no importance. The jacket dealing with Fratten's Bank was clearly too big a subject to be tackled that night—and Poole was extremely doubtful of finding the clue that he was looking for in that well-established concern.

There remained the personal letters—the bundle of faded letters in a woman's hand. Poole felt a guilty sense of intrusion as he opened the first. For nearly an hour he sat, not noticing how the time went on, reading the beautiful and tragic story of a woman's life—her humiliation, her courage, her love, her deep gratitude to the big-hearted man who had given her a new life. There was nothing in the letters that Poole did not already know, no scrap of help to him in his difficult task, but rare tears of sympathy stood in the detective's eyes as he reverently returned the last letter to its carefully-treasured envelope.

CHAPTER XV

"EAU D'ENFER"

INEZ FRATTEN, on hearing from the sedate Miss Gilling that the scent she had been trying to trace to Ryland's mysterious charmer had been actually bought by Ryland himself, felt a chill of apprehension creep over her—a chill so vivid as to be almost physical. What could it mean? It was possible, of course, that Ryland had given it to the girl himself, but from the way he had spoken of it—as a possible clue to her identity—that seemed quite out of the question. A reference to Miss Gilling confirmed this view; the last purchase had been made several weeks—possibly two months—ago, and Ryland had said that he had only met the girl about a fortnight previously.

Was Ryland lying, then? The thought sickened her. That he should lie to her, and at such a time, would have seemed to Inez impossible had she not known, only too well, the streaks of baser metal in Ryland's alloy—he was weak, if not worse, about both women and money; might he not also be a liar—a liar of this calibre? And if a liar, a liar to her, Inez, about so desperately serious a subject, might he not be even worse? Inez shuddered again as the thought forced itself upon her.

Thanking, though perfunctorily, Mr. Rodney-Phillips and Miss Gilling for their help, Inez made her way out into the street. The same chain ran repeatedly through her head and she had walked as far as the bottom of St. James's Street before realizing where she was going. Having got so far on the way home, she decided to go straight back and have it out with Ryland—if he was still at home. But why—the thoughts kept turning over in her head—why should he have told her this silly lie? Was it just to put her off? If so, why again? To gain time? If so, what for? The thought flashed into her like a stabbing knife—to get away? To get her out of the way while he made off?—made off from her, who had practically given her word as bail to Inspector Poole! It was a terrible thought; she forced herself to stop thinking till she could get face to face with the truth.

To her intense relief, she heard that Ryland was still in the house—Golpin had seen him go into the morning-room only a few minutes previously. Inez walked straight to the door, opened, and shut it firmly behind her. Ryland was sitting at the writing table, with several sheets of foolscap, covered with what appeared to be aimless scribblings, in front of

him. Inez walked across the room and dropped the handkerchief on the table in front of him.

"You bought that scent yourself," she said. "Why did you tell me the handkerchief belonged to that girl—Daphne?"

Ryland looked up in surprise, which deepened when he saw the cold look on her face and realized the hard inflection of her voice.

"Bought it my . . . ?" Ryland picked up the handkerchief and sniffed it. A frown appeared on his face; he sniffed again, and then again.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "I am a fool. That's Julie's handkerchief. I remember now; I bought her some of that stuff myself—from Rollinson's probably. I quite thought that was Daphne's scent. I am a fool, Inez. I'm most awfully sorry to give you all that trouble for nothing."

Inez looked at him with cold contempt; the icy fingers of doubt and fear were clutching at her heart again.

"Do you expect me to believe that?" she asked. "Am I such a complete fool?"

"Inez, what do you mean?"

"I mean that you're telling me lies. You couldn't have made such a mistake; you deliberately deceived me. Probably the whole story's a lie—there is no Daphne. And if there's no Daphne. . . ."

She did not finish the sentence, but stood staring at Ryland. She saw his face turn slowly white; the colour seemed literally to drain out of it before her eyes. His eyes grew large and seemed to sink into his haggard face. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but only a hoarse sound came from it. He licked his parched lips, and a gulp moved the Adam's apple in his throat.

"Inez!" his voice was little more than a whisper, but the agony in it was unmistakable. He moved his hand towards her—"you don't believe . . . ? You don't . . . Inez, not *you*?"

A look of anguished appeal came into the dark eyes. Inez felt a quiver of doubt—of hope, almost. Was it possible that Ryland, her Ryland, could be what, for a moment, she had thought him? But there can have been no softening in her face, because Ryland's hand dropped to his side; beads of perspiration came on to his white forehead; the look of appeal changed to one of bitter determination; without a word he turned and walked towards the door. Inez watched him go—for five steps—then:

"Ry," she said. "Ry, I don't mean it! I don't believe . . . I can't . . . Ry, tell me what it means! Tell me!"

Ryland stopped and turned slowly towards her. His lips quivered; suddenly he put his hands to his face and a deep sob shook him. Inez ran to him and flung her arms round him—pulled him down to the sofa beside her, pressing her check against his hair.

"Ry! Ry!"

"Oh Inez!" he sobbed. "How could you, how could you?"

"Ry, my darling! Ry, don't! I was a beast—a swine. Oh, Ry, my darling, forgive me!"

Ryland lifted his face and looked at her with deepening wonder in his eyes.

"Inez! You've never called me that before! Why do you call me that?"

"Oh Ry, you little fool—can't you see?"

She looked into his eyes, the delicious smile twitching at the corner of her mouth, while tears sparkled in her eyes.

"Inez—but I was—till yesterday I was your brother!"

"No, never, never! I've always known you weren't."

"And yet . . . ?"

Inez nodded vigorously, a sob still choking her voice.

"Yes, and yet . . . and yet. . . . Aren't I a fool, Ry?"

Ryland looked deeply into her lovely face. It was more than a minute before he spoke.

"Inez, I'm the most unworthy beast any girl could love—and especially you. I'm a waster, a liar, a dissolute rotter, a fool, pretty nearly a thief, pretty nearly everything—except what, for a minute, I thought you thought I was. How can you love me?"

Inez smiled at him calmly.

"That's not the point, Ryland. The point is that I've just told you, in the most immodest way, that I love you—that I've always loved you—and you haven't said a word about loving me. Do you?"

The man would have been inhuman who could have turned his back on the wistful loveliness of her expression. Ryland shyly took her hands in his.

"Inez, I've only known you about twelve hours—except as a sister—and being a sister is the most complete disguise imaginable. I wonder if you'll believe me; since last night—since you told me about my not being your brother—you've appeared to me someone entirely different. I've thought about you—I couldn't think why. I haven't consciously thought about you,

but when I was trying to think about something else—about this horrible muddle—I have found myself thinking about you. I didn't know what it was—I was rather annoyed even. Oh, Inez, what a fool I am! What a fool I've been! I'm simply and absolutely unworthy of you!"

Inez rose to her feet.

"Yes, I think you are, Ry," she said, "at the present moment. It's for you to decide whether you want to stay like that. In the meantime you can just forget what I've told you. Now, what about this handkerchief?"

Ryland slowly flushed—a healthier colour than the ghastly whiteness of ten minutes ago.

"What I told you was true, Inez. I did make a mistake." He grinned feebly. "I believe it was partly your fault. I told you just now that I kept on finding myself thinking about you when I wanted to be thinking about this Daphne business. Good Lord, doesn't that seem a ghastly business now—how could I ever—but I'm not going to talk about that. You know I'm a fool—you've always known I was a fool—and yet . . . ! Now, I've got to show you whether I'm always going to be one—or not."

Inez nodded gravely. There was a minute's silence, each deep in thought. Inez was the first one to break it.

"Look here, Ry," she said. "You were very positive this morning about that handkerchief—you said you remembered her dropping her handkerchief when she got out of the car and your bagging it. Now you say that you made a mistake and that it was one of Julie Vermont's. Do you mean that you *didn't* pick up one of Daphne's handkerchiefs?"

Ryland looked perplexed.

"Yes, of course I did—I know I did—but this can't be it."

"Then," said Inez triumphantly, "where is the one you did pick up—Daphne's?"

"Good Lord, Inez—I see what you're getting at; probably I've still got it somewhere! By Jove, that's an idea; I'll go and hunt for it."

He sprang to his feet and dashed impetuously out of the room.

"Hi, Ry, come back a minute!" called Inez, but the slamming of the front door told her that he was gone. The girl smiled happily, almost for the first time since the trouble had begun; it really seemed as if Ryland was making an effort at last—and at least she had destroyed the old false relationship between them, whatever might come of the new.

Leaving the morning-room, Inez walked across the hall to the little room on the other side of the study. She knocked at the door and, in response to Mangane's answer, opened it and walked in. The secretary's face brightened as he saw her. He sprang to his feet and offered her the small arm-chair beside her table.

"I don't believe I've been in here before, Mr. Mangane," said Inez—"not since you came. Mr. Dune always had the window shut—I couldn't face it—I did come in once to ask him about something—it was awful."

Mangane laughed.

"I can promise you fresh air, Miss Fratten—and a welcome. As I face north, the only sunshine will be what you bring yourself—that's terribly old-fashioned and stilted, isn't it? But the door does face south, so even the gloomy Golpin brightens the room a bit when he comes in."

"What you want are some flowers; how rotten of me not to have thought of it before. I'm so sorry."

Inez whisked out of the room and returned in a minute with two vases of chrysanthemums—yellow and russet—from her own sitting-room.

Mangane almost blushed with pleasure and stammered his thanks.

"Now, Mr. Mangane," said Inez, "I want your help. I believe Inspector Poole has asked you about it already—I told him to. It's about those papers that father was fussing over every night just before he died. Do you know what they were?"

"The Victory Finance Company, I expect you mean. Yes, Poole did ask about them; he's got them now."

Inez's face brightened.

"Has he? Then that means that he's following up that line!"

"Not necessarily, I'm afraid, Miss Fratten. He took all the Company papers he found in your father's table, and the Bank papers, and his private accounts. The Victory Finance just happened to be among them; he didn't seem specially interested in them."

Inez's face fell. Then her air of determination returned. "Then we must follow it ourselves," she said. "Can we get those papers back?"

"I expect so; he said he'd bring them back in a day or two. We shall have to get Mr. Hessel's leave."

"Oh bother Mr. Hessel; you must get hold of them, Mr. Mangane. In the meantime, will you talk to Ryland about them? Explain to him what they are—you know something about them, I expect?" Mangane nodded. "Make

him understand about them—see if he can't find something to take hold of. There must be a clue somewhere—there simply must. I know the police think Ryland killed father but of course he didn't! Anyone who knows him, knows that." (Inez had forgotten her own terrible doubts of an hour ago.) "I don't believe it's got anything to do with the will. I believe it's some business enemy. You don't know of anyone, do you?"

Mangane shook his head.

"I'm afraid I don't, Miss Fratten. Poole asked me that."

"Then we must hunt for him. I believe those papers are the key. You understand that sort of thing; you could see things that we should miss. Oh, I'm asking you an awful lot! But you will help us, won't you?"

Mangane looked steadily into her eager face.

"I'd do anything to help you, Miss Fratten," he said quietly.

The front door opened and shut and Ryland's voice was heard talking to one of the servants. Inez excused herself and hurrying out led the way to her own sitting-room. Ryland's face was serious; there was none of the jubilation of the early morning, but he held out his hand and again there lay in it a woman's cambric handkerchief. Inez seized it eagerly and put it to her nose.

"Pouf!" she said, dropping it hurriedly. "My aunt, what stuff!"

"It is a bit fierce, isn't it? I rather like it, though."

"You would; it's the sort of stuff men do like."

She sniffed the handkerchief again; it gave off a strong, pungent, almost burnt, odour—much too strong to be attractive to a woman, and yet clearly possessing a quality of rather oriental fascination.

"Hot stuff."

"It is, and it's Daphne's; I remember it unmistakably now. Can we trace it, do you think?"

"We can try. I doubt if it's Rollinson's—or any respectable London perfumers. It's more likely Paris—a small shop behind the Opera; more likely still, it's Port Said. But we can try."

Ryland held out his hand for it.

"No," said Inez. "This is my job; you'd make a mess of it—men are too bashful to worry shops. You go and talk to Mangane now; he's got a job for you—I've been talking to him."

Laid on to her new scent, Inez once more set out upon the trail. Returning to Rollinson's, she found Mr. Rodney-Phillips noticeably less accommodating than upon the occasion of her previous visit. One sniff of the handkerchief was enough for him; he had never sold, nor ever would sell such a low-class perfume; he knew of no establishment (he had no cognizance of "shops") which might be likely to deal in it; he wished her good-morning.

Duhamel Frères were slightly more helpful. They produced no such article themselves, though they believed that there was a certain demand in Paris for similar effects. They were willing to refer the enquiry to their Paris house if Madam would leave the handkerchief with them. After a moment's thought, Inez borrowed a pair of scissors and snipped a quarter off the unknown Daphne's five-inch square of absurdity.

"Pompadour" was interested. Madame Pompadour, who ran the business herself, with two good-looking assistants, knew Inez by name, and was intrigued by what she had read of the Inquest on Sir Garth's death; she was still more intrigued by what Inez, taking one of her quick decisions (which seldom erred on the side of discretion) told her. She did not agree with Mr. Rodney-Phillips that it was a low-grade perfume; on the contrary, it was in its way a work of art, though the taste which demanded it might not be high. She made nothing of the kind herself, but she knew one or two small undertakings which might have produced it. She gave Inez, in the first place, two addresses: "Orient Spices" in North Audley Street and "Mignon" in Pall Mall Place.

Inez took the nearest one first. She found "Mignon" to be a small, dark shop in the celebrated passage which leads from Pall Mall, nearly opposite Marlborough House, into King Street. It was faintly lit by electric candles in peculiar-looking sconces. There was a heavy reek of exotic perfume, and a very pretty but too highly coloured houri was in attendance. The girl looked as if she were more accustomed to being cajoled by members of the other sex, but she was not proof against the ingenuous (and ingenious) charm of Inez's appeal; she proved, in fact, to be, beneath her rather spectacular exterior, a very simple and friendly girl, deriving from no more dashing a locality than Fulham.

Once more Inez revealed the nature of her quest; Mignon's assistant—she answered popularly to the name of "Mignonette"—was thrilled to the tips of her pink and pointed finger-nails. She applied the remaining three-quarters of Daphne's handkerchief to her pretty nose and, after one sniff, exclaimed excitedly:

"Why, it's our *Eau D'Enfer*!"

"What?" cried Inez, eagerly. "You know it?"

"We make it! Or rather it's made for us—exclusively. Fearfully distangy—quite unique."

"But could you trace it to anyone particular?"

"Might; there aren't so many that buy it. I believe I can remember most of them that's had it this year. D'you want men or women?"

Inez thought for a moment.

"Women in the first place," she said. "It'll be almost impossible to trace it through men, unless you know the woman they were buying it for."

Mignonette screwed her face into a pretty frown of thought.

"There's old Lady Harlton—nasty old hag—sixty if she's a day—'twouldn't be her. Then there's Mrs. van Doolen—she's no chicken either—pretty hot stuff though."

"No, no," said Inez. "Daphne must be fairly young."

"Well then, there are a couple of actresses—Gillie Blossom—you know her, of course—and Chick Fiennes" (she pronounced it Feens) "—she's at the Duke's Cabaret show now, I think."

"What's she like?"

"Very small—petite, she calls herself—strong American accent."

"No good," exclaimed Inez impatiently. "Isn't there one with dark hair—must be attractive, voice and all."

Neither of the girls noticed that the small door at the back of the shop had opened and that a woman dressed in black, her large chest draped with a string of huge artificial pearls, was listening to them. The proprietess' face was hard now, but years ago it must have been beautiful.

"Nobody dark except Gillie," said Mignonette.

"She's no good—Ry would know her," said Inez.

"Well, the only other good-looker I can think of is . . ."

"Miss Vassel!"

Both girls started and turned towards the figure in the doorway.

"What do you mean by revealing the names of customers? It is absolutely forbidden." Turning to Inez: "I don't know who you are, Madam, or what you want, but will you please leave my shop."

A glance showed Inez that neither argument nor appeal would be the slightest use here. She shrugged her shoulders and turned to the door. As she did so, she shot a glance at Mignonette and saw that unrepentant young woman jerk her head as if to indicate "round the corner." At the same time she spread out the fingers of one hand.

Outside, Inez glanced at her watch; it was ten minutes to five—the girl's meaning was obvious. Turning in the direction that Mignonette's nodded head indicated, Inez walked up the passage into King Street and there waited, looking at the bills outside the St. James's Theatre. She had not long to wait; at five minutes past five Mignonette appeared, in a neat mackintosh and small black hat.

"I always come out for a cup of tea at five," she said. "We don't close till eight, so as to catch the swells going to their clubs. The old woman's in a tearing hair."

"Come and have some tea with me," said Inez. In five minutes they were in Rumpelmayer's, with an array of marvellous cakes before them.

"There is one other," resumed Mignonette, "but she's not dark. She's jolly good-looking though—scrumptious figure. Matter of fact I believe she lives somewhere near me—I've got a dig in the Fulham Road and I've seen her walking along it several times in the morning when I start for work. She's generally rather quietly dressed then—looks as if she might be in a job herself—but I've seen her on Sunday mornings too in a car, looking pretty posh—same chap with her each time—nice-looking chap, too."

"What sort of a car?" asked Inez eagerly.

"Don't know, I'm afraid. I'm not up in them. But it's a two-seater of sorts, one that shuts up if you like."

"But who is she?"

"Funny thing is I don't know her name. Whenever she's been to us, she's paid for the stuff and taken it away."

"But could you show her to me?"

"I should think so; if you like to come down to my place one morning early we'd look out for her."

"Of course I will—I'll come tomorrow. Bother it, I wish she'd got dark hair."

"P'raps she has—sometimes," said Mignonette laconically.

CHAPTER XVI

RECONSTRUCTION

WHEN POOLE reached Scotland Yard on the morning after his perusal of Sir Garth's papers, he went straight to the room of Chief Inspector Barrod. That officer had just arrived but was quite ready to hear Poole's report before going through his own papers. He listened without interruption while the detective detailed his various interviews of the previous day and nodded his approval of the *résumé* of the evidence which Poole had compiled and now laid before him.

"What's your conclusion?" he asked.

"I haven't formed one yet, sir, though I have got an idea. My great difficulty is to see how the blow was struck—in the face of that evidence. Two good witnesses practically swear that no blow was struck in the scuffle on the steps, and yet it's impossible to believe that that was an accident. I'm convinced that that fellow gave a false account of himself and was probably disguised. I wondered, sir, whether you would help me stage a reconstruction of that, to see whether it really would have been possible to strike that blow without anyone noticing it. I thought on the broad staircase leading up to the big hall; we ought to have the doctor to see that we hit hard enough."

Barrod agreed readily enough, but asked for an hour's grace to enable him to clear his "in" basket. To fill the time, Poole walked across to Queen Anne's Gate and asked to see Mr. Mangane. He had brought with him the "Company Board" jackets and explained to the secretary the conclusions he had so far arrived at. Mangane confirmed his belief that nothing significant was to be found in any but the Victory Finance Company file. Poole opened the latter.

"Now, sir," he said. "I've decided to ask your help. I know a little bit about finance generally, but the details of a finance company like this are rather beyond me. You probably know something about this already; perhaps Sir Garth consulted you. I've got no one whom I know better than you to consult. If I started nosing about in the City myself—cross-questioning these people—they'd probably shut up like oysters, and if there's anything wrong the criminals would be warned. Anything you did in

that way would come much more naturally. Now, will you help me? Will you look into this Victory Finance Company business and see if you can give me a line?—I can give you an idea or two of my own to work on perhaps. I expect you want to clear up this business of Sir Garth's death as much as most of us; will you help?"

A curious expression had come into Mangane's face as the detective propounded his request; it ended in a smile.

"I'll be very glad to help you, Inspector," he said. "I do know a little about this business. Sir Garth asked me to make some enquiries himself and I made an appointment or two for him that I fancy had something to do with it. I won't bother you with details now; I shall be able to give you something more worth having in a day or two."

Thanking Mangane, Poole left the house, without—as he had secretly hoped—catching a glimpse of Miss Fratten. Returning to the Yard, he collected Dr. Vyle (by telephone) and three intelligent plain-clothes men and having coached the latter in their parts, sent one of them to fetch Mr. Barrod. Asking the Chief Inspector to represent Mr. Wagglebow; Dr. Vyle, Mr. Lossett; and one of the constables, Miss Peake; Poole set the remaining constables, Rawton and Smith, to walk side by side down the broad stone staircase, while he himself waited behind a corner at the top. The lights were turned out so that only the feeble daylight lit the stairs. When the two constables were about half-way down, with Barrod a few steps immediately behind and Dr. Vyle to their right rear, Poole came running down after them and, stumbling, bumped into the left shoulder of Detective-Constable Rawton; as he did so, he swung his closed right fist with a vicious half-hook into the centre of Rawton's back. With an involuntary, but realistic, "Ow!" Rawton staggered against Smith, who held him up and asked anxiously what was the matter.

"Nothing, mate; only a 5.9 in the small o' me back," said Rawton ruefully.

Poole apologized profusely and then made swiftly off down the stairs and disappeared round a corner to the left, whilst the third constable, entering with gusto into his part, came and clucked round the other two in the manner he considered appropriate to a highly strung and imaginative female.

"Well, sir," asked Poole, returning, "any possibility of mistakes?"

"Of course not; not the way you do it—much too obvious. You should . . ."

"You have a shot at it, sir," said Poole, slightly nettled at this reception of his best effort. "I'll take your place. We'll do it again."

"Could Kelly change with me, sir?" inquired Rawton anxiously. "He's a single man; I've a wife and kids dependent on me."

Poole laughed.

"General Post," he said. "Doctor, will you take the lady; Kelly you be Sir Garth, and Rawton, you Lossett."

The reconstruction performance was repeated, with an altered cast. Chief Inspector Barrod stumbled at a point rather farther behind his victim than Poole had done, and fell with nearly his full weight against the back of Kelly's shoulder.

"Christ, I'm killed!" yelled that unfortunate. "What have ye in y'r fist, Chief?"

Barrod chuckled delightedly and extracted an ebony ruler from up his sleeve.

"That'll leave a bruise all right—I'll back mine against yours, Poole—and I'll bet you didn't notice anything more than the fall."

"No, sir, your body was between me and his back. But I don't think that answered Wagglebow's description of the accident."

"And I saw the blow, sir, anyhow," said Rawton. "I'm sure Lossett, if I'm placed right, couldn't have said that he was sure no blow was struck."

"I think I should have known he'd been violently struck, sir," said Smith, who had taken the part of Mr. Hessel.

The Chief Inspector looked nettled at the reception of his rendering.

"All right, have it your own way," he said. "How much further does it take us?"

"If I might bring the doctor along to your room, sir, and have a talk?" answered Poole. "That'll do, you three—many thanks for your help. Kelly if you're really hurt you'd better show yourself in the surgery."

"It's no surgery I'm needing, sir; 'tis a mortuary I'm for."

The man's half-doleful, half-laughing face restored even Barrod to good humour.

"I'll come and take your last wishes when you're ready, Kelly," he said.

A minute later the three men were seated at the Chief Inspector's table.

"I fancy it amounts to this, sir," said Poole. "The blow wasn't struck on those steps at all."

"And the Peake woman's evidence?" queried Barrod.

"Oh, she's a looney. No, sir; I don't understand what that affair on the steps means—I'm convinced it has a meaning; but I believe Sir Garth was struck where he fell."

Barrod stared at him in silence for several seconds.

"Humph!" he said at last.

"Now look here, doctor," said Poole, turning to the surgeon, "how soon after he was struck would you expect a man in that condition to fall—struck as Sir Garth was, that is, on the danger spot?"

"At once."

"But he *might* have walked a certain distance after being hit?"

"A few steps perhaps—half a dozen."

"But surely you don't exclude the possibility of his having walked further—from the Duke of York's Steps to the place where he fell?"

"I don't know where he fell. I always assumed that it was a few paces beyond the Steps—you never told me anything to make me assume anything else. How far away did he fall?"

"Thirty or forty yards."

"Good Lord, impossible! At least—wait a minute. If the injury to the aneurism was only slight—a very slight tear or puncture, so that the blood only oozed out, then he might have walked the distance you say before collapsing. If it burst on impact, he must have fallen within half a dozen paces."

"You can't say which kind of injury it was?"

"Not definitely now. It might have begun with a small tear and then become larger—it would look like a burst."

Poole stared at him.

"And what are you driving at, Poole?" asked the Chief Inspector. "That Hessel himself struck Fratten?"

Poole looked at his Chief coolly.

"That's jumping a bit far, sir, but we've no proof at the moment that he didn't—only his own story."

"What about that chap at the House of Commons; didn't he see Fratten fall?"

"Smythe? He saw them walking in front of him, then a car came between them and when it cleared, Fratten was going down. He saw no blow—at least he said nothing about one."

"On which side of Fratten was Hessel walking?"

"I don't know, sir. Coming down the Steps, of course, he was on Fratten's right."

"And probably was here. Find out about that, Poole, and also whether Hessel is right- or left-handed. Anyhow I don't believe it. Hessel said, if I remember aright, that he had his arm through Fratten's—Smythe can probably confirm that; he could hardly have taken it out and struck him a violent blow without someone seeing. We'll assume the linked arms and the left-handedness for a moment; come on, we'll try it."

The imagined scene was reconstructed. It required a noticeable effort on Poole's part to strike the Chief Inspector in the back; it was hardly credible that such a thing could have been done, unnoticed—still, there was no absolute impossibility.

"Check those points, Poole, and call for witnesses of the actual fall and death. Everybody's concentrated on the accident on the Steps so far."

After giving the necessary orders for advertising for the required witnesses, Poole made his way to the House of Commons. Mr. Coningsby Smythe kept him waiting this time, just to indicate his own importance, but when he did come, was quite definite. He remembered quite well that the shorter man was on the right. Furthermore, he was sure that only one car had passed between them; he did not believe that the shorter man could have disengaged his arm and struck a blow during the fraction of time that the obscuring had lasted. The detective thanked him for his help, cautioned him not to reveal what he had been asked, and made his way back to the Yard.

As he walked, he puzzled his brain as to the best way to find out about Mr. Hessel's right- or left-handedness. It sounded so simple and yet, in fact, with the restrictions that the circumstances imposed, it was by no means simple. He could not ask either Hessel himself or his immediate circle of friends and acquaintances—the question so obviously implied a terrible suspicion. If Hessel had been a man who played games, either now or in the past, it would have been easier, but it was fairly certain that he was not. It would be quite easy to find out, by observation, whether he wrote with his right or left hand, but that would be no proof (in the event of his writing with his right) that he was not ambidextrous—many people use one hand for writing and the other for throwing a cricket ball. The brilliant detectives of fiction—Holmes, Poirot, Hanaud (not French, he was too true to life)—

would have devised some ingenious but simple trick by which the unsuspecting Hessel would have been tested in both hands simultaneously. As it was Poole could think of nothing better than to put a plain-clothes man on to shadow the banker and watch his unconscious hand action. It was unimaginative, but it might produce a result.

Back at the Yard, Poole telephoned through to the appropriate Divisional police-station and inquired as to the name and whereabouts of the police-constable on duty in St. James's Park at the point nearest to the scene of Sir Garth's death on that night; he learnt that the man—P. C. Lolling—was at that moment off duty but would be back at the station a little before two in preparation for his next tour. Poole was just wondering what to do in the meantime when he was summoned to Chief Inspector Barrod's room.

"What's this young Fratten up to?" the latter asked as Poole entered.

Poole's expression was sufficient answer to the question.

"That chap that you put on to watch him, Fallows, rang up when you were out to say that Fratten had slipped him—a deliberate slip, he thought it was—the old back-door trick. What's his game?"

"Has he taken anything with him, sir—luggage?"

"Fallows didn't know—I asked him that; he'd rung up directly he realized that Fratten was gone. He's gone back to Fratten's lodgings now to find out about his kit. You must get on to this, Poole; I don't mind telling you that I think you've given that young man too much rope—you haven't pressed him hard enough. This business of Hessel's now; what's your idea there? What's the motive?"

"Not much at the moment, sir. He's down for £5,000 in the will, of course—not much, unless a man's desperately in need of money; I've no proof that Hessel is—but then I haven't been looking for it. I'm going to now, though. I haven't been through Sir Garth's Fratten's Bank papers yet; there may be a suggestion there, though it's hardly possible that Sir Garth suspected anything wrong—he seems to have trusted Hessel completely."

"Well, I don't think much of that line," said Barrod. "Hessel could have found a better place than that to hit Fratten in—St. James's Park's a bit public."

"Exactly, sir; that's got to be explained, whoever did it. But we must remember this—barring his son and daughter, nobody's so likely to have known about the aneurism as his best friend, Hessel."

The Chief Inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"Did you ever ask him if he knew?"

“No, but I’m going to.”

“Well, I don’t mind your following that up so long as you don’t drop young Fratten. If he slips you, Poole, you’re for it.”

There was a knock at the door and a constable came in.

“Young lady to see Inspector Poole, sir,” he said. “Name of Fratten.”

The two seniors exchanged glances.

“Show her in here,” said Barrod.

In half a minute, Inez Fratten appeared. Her checks were flushed and her eye sparkled.

“I’ve foun . . .” she began, but Barrod interrupted her.

“Where’s your brother, Miss Fratten?” he asked abruptly.

Inez stared at him.

“My brother?”

“I beg your pardon, miss; I mean Mr. Ryland Fratten.”

“But what do you mean— ‘where is he?’ ”

“Was he at your house this morning?”

“No; no, as a matter of fact, he wasn’t.”

“Or last night?”

“No, he didn’t come to dinner last night either; as a matter of fact, I particularly wanted to see him. But he doesn’t live with me, you know; he’s got lodgings in Abingdon Street.”

“He’s done a bolt, Miss Fratten; you’re not asking me to believe that you don’t know about it.”

“A bolt! I’m quite certain he hasn’t! What makes you say he has?”

Barrod explained.

“Pooh!” said Inez; “that doesn’t mean he’s bolted, that simply means he’s fed up with being watched—so would anyone be. He’ll be at his lodgings tonight—probably at our house before then. D’you want to see him?”

“I want to know where he is. You’d better tell him not to play that game again, Miss Fratten—if it is a game; it’ll be landing him in trouble.”

“It won’t,” said Inez defiantly. “It won’t, for the simple reason that I’ve found the girl he was with that evening!”

“What’s that?” exclaimed both men simultaneously.

“Well, I’m pretty sure I have; that’s why I wanted Ryland—so that he could identify her. But it’s more than a coincidence that the one clue we’d got has led straight to the very place I’ve been suspecting.”

She turned to Poole.

“Who do you think ‘Daphne’ is, Mr. Poole?—the girl who threw herself at Ryland’s head and then left him kicking his heels at the very time and place that would make things look bad for him—she’s Miss Saverel, secretary of the Victory Finance Company!”

CHAPTER XVII

THIS WAY AND THAT

INEZ explained to the two detectives how she had obtained from Ryland the handkerchief with an unusual scent which had belonged to Daphne, the mysterious girl who alone could have confirmed, or at any rate supported, his alibi. She told of her tracing it to "Mignon's" and of how the assistant there had fined down the likely owners to a single one whom she herself knew by sight. She told of how she had gone down the following morning to the girl's room in the Fulham Road and how the girl had presently pointed out to her a young woman, simply but well dressed, who was walking along the other side of the road. Inez had followed her to South Kensington Station, and thence in the Underground to the Monument, from where the girl had walked to an office in Fenchurch Street. Inez had not dared to follow her into the building but, after a discreet interval, had scrutinized the names on the board and among them found, to her intense excitement, that of the Victory Finance Company. After a few minutes' thought, she had applied to the hall-porter as to whether he knew if a friend of hers, Miss Tatham (a creature of her imagination) was still employed with the Victory Finance Company, to which the porter had replied that so far as he knew the only young woman employed by the Company was Miss Saverel, who had only that minute arrived—but she could obtain further information from the Company itself—on the fourth floor—he offered her the lift. Inez had declined his offer, given him a shilling and departed. She had herself tried to find Ryland but, failing to do so, had come in to Scotland Yard.

"What's all this about a Victory Finance Company?" asked Barrod. "Why should you have got your eye on them, Miss Fratten?"

Poole explained the connection and told the Chief Inspector briefly of his own examination of Sir Garth's file connected with it and of the enquiries that Mangane was making for him. After some further discussion it was arranged that Poole should meet Miss Fratten at the Monument Station at half-past five that evening and that together they should trail Miss Saverel to her home, after which the detective would consider whether to question her. If Ryland Fratten could be found in the meantime, he was to be brought along, in order to identify his "Daphne." As soon as Inez had gone, Barrod turned to his subordinate.

"Who's this Mangane?" he said. "Why's he doing your work for you?"

Poole flushed at the curtness of the enquiry.

"He's doing something for me that I couldn't do nearly so well myself. I can trust him, I know; we were at . . . I knew him well before I joined the Force."

"That's no reason for trusting anyone," said Barrod. "Take a word of advice from me, young man, and don't call in any gifted amateurs—you'll get let down one of these days if you do."

Feeling considerably nettled at the two rebukes he had had from his superior that morning, Poole made his way out into Whitehall. Owing to Miss Fratten's visit, he had missed his rendezvous with P. C. Lolling at the police-station, but the sergeant in charge had told him over the telephone whereabouts the constable was likely to be found; Poole found him, in fact, talking to the Park-keeper who lodged in the Admiralty Arch. Having detached the constable from his gossip, Poole questioned him as to his knowledge of the tragedy on October 24th. Lolling had seen nothing of the incident. He had noticed a crowd at the spot where—he afterwards learnt—Sir Garth had fallen, but as he approached it, it had dispersed—not, presumably because of his awful presence but because the body had at that moment been put into a car and driven away. He had made a note of the incident in his note-book, the time being recorded as 6.40 P. M.

Foiled once more in his attempt to get first-hand evidence of the death, Poole was about to turn away, when Lolling volunteered that he knew of somebody who had seen the accident—the gentleman's death, that was. Curiously enough he had been discussing that very subject with his friend, Mr. Blossom, the Park-keeper, when the Inspector had come up. Mr. Blossom, it appeared, had an acquaintance who had actually seen . . . At this point Poole interrupted to suggest that Mr. Blossom should be asked to tell his own tale.

The Park-keeper had not, fortunately, gone far afield. He was secretly thrilled at meeting the detective who had charge of the Fratten case, but the dignity of his office did not allow him to reveal the fact. It was the case, he said, that an acquaintance of his, a Mr. Herbert Tapping, a tuning-fork tester—had actually witnessed the death of Sir Garth Fratten. He had had an argument with Mr. Tapping only yesterday, after reading the account of the Inquest. He, Mr. Blossom, had advanced the thesis that Sir Garth had been done in by his companion, the Jewish gentleman, at the place where he fell, but Tapping had countered this by replying that he had actually seen Sir Garth fall and that Mr. Hessel could not have struck him—he was holding

his arm at the time that Sir Garth staggered and fell. Moreover, Mr. Tapping had gone so far as to state that nobody else was near enough to strike a blow at that time; he himself was about the nearest and he was fifteen yards away. Mr. Tapping's theory was that the blow had been struck by the "Admiralty messenger" on the Duke of York's Steps, or, alternatively, that someone had thrown a stone at Sir Garth.

Poole asked for and obtained the address of Mr. Herbert Tapping and, thanking Blossom for his help, made his way towards the Underground Station at St. James's Park. As he walked, he turned over in his mind the baffling problem which this new evidence—if Mr. Tapping confirmed his friend's story—only helped to deepen. Reliable witnesses stated categorically that Sir Garth had not been struck on the Steps; now a new witness, possibly reliable, said that he had not been struck at the spot where he fell. Where, then, in the name of goodness, had he been struck?

Mr. Tapping had suggested a stone; the idea was a wild one; who could throw a stone so accurately as to strike the small vital spot in Sir Garth's back—and from where had it been thrown? No one had been seen doing such a thing. Coningsby Smythe, of course—the House of Commons clerk—had been close behind but he had—according to his own story, at least—been separated from Fratten by a passing car. . . . Poole stopped dead. A passing car! That must have been within a few feet of Fratten! He had actually fallen a little distance beyond the carriage-way, but he might have staggered a step or two before falling. Was it conceivable that he had been struck by someone in that car?

Poole's brain raced as he searched aspect after aspect of this theory. Another thought struck him: Miss Peake had said that she had seen Sir Garth's assailant on the Steps "leap into a waiting vehicle and drive away." Poole remembered the words clearly, though he had not taken them down; the old-fashioned "vehicle" had caught his memory. Miss Peake, of course, was mad—quite useless as a witness—but, if he remembered rightly, that sentence had not been spoken in the hysterical outburst, that had shown him how hopeless she was, but in one of her more lucid moments. He had thought nothing of it at the time; her hysteria had discounted everything she had said—and, of course, she was clearly wrong in saying that the man had struck Fratten on the Steps—the evidence of Hessel, Lossett, and Wagglebow, all independent of one another, was too strong to allow of any doubt on that head.

Poole decided to take the first opportunity of testing the car theory; the test might even be made at the very spot if it were done late enough at night;

in the meantime he would go back and question both P. C. Lolling and the Park-keeper, Blossom—if Miss Peake's story were true and there had been a waiting "vehicle" somewhere near the Admiralty Arch, one of them might have seen it.

There was no difficulty in finding Lolling; he had not, apparently, moved twenty yards from where Poole had first found him, and was talking to a mounted constable; the detective wondered whether conversation might not be rather a weakness of P. C. Lolling's. Lolling himself appeared to be aware that appearances did not favour him, for he hastened to explain to the Inspector that he had just been questioning the mounted constable about the events of 24th October—apparently the latter's beat took him occasionally down the Mall. It had not done so, however, on the evening in question; he knew nothing of the circumstances of Sir Garth's death, nor, in reply to Poole's enquiry had he seen anything of a suspicious-looking car "loitering" in the neighbourhood of the Admiralty Arch. Lolling, to his infinite regret, was equally unable to help Poole in his new quest, though he thought it more than likely that his friend the Park-keeper could. The united efforts of Poole, Lolling and the mounted constable, however, failed to reveal the present whereabouts of Mr. Blossom; after wasting half an hour in fruitless search, Poole gave it up, directing Lolling to send the Park-keeper to Scotland Yard as soon as he came off duty.

It was now too late to go in search of Mr. Tapping if he was to keep his rendezvous with Miss Fratten, so Poole decided to look in at Scotland Yard and refer his new theory to Chief Inspector Barrod, prior to taking the Underground from Westminster to the Monument. Barrod, however, had just gone across to the Home Office with Sir Leward Marradine, on some diplomatic case that was worrying the government, so Poole had to cool his heels for half an hour before starting for the City.

The evening rush had already begun when Poole reached the Monument. The shoals of small fry would not be released till six o'clock, but at 5.20 P. M. when the detective emerged from the "east-bound" platform, a steady stream of superior clerks, secretaries and managers, was pouring into the "west-bound" as quickly as was consonant with their dignity.

To Poole's surprise, Inez Fratten was already waiting for him. Dressed in a dark mackintosh—there had been intermittent drizzle all day—and a small black hat, the detective did not at first recognize her as she stood, meekly waiting, in a corner just out of the rush of passengers. Her smile of welcome sent a thrill of pleasure through him and seemed to brighten up the drab surroundings of the east-end station.

“You’re very punctual, Miss Fratten,” said Poole. “I hope I haven’t kept you waiting.”

“You’re before time,” replied Inez. “I came early because I suddenly got a qualm that she might get off at five. She hasn’t been this way, anyhow.”

Together they made their way upstream towards Fenchurch Street. A squad of newsboys hurrying out with the last editions alone seemed to be going in the same direction as themselves—everyone else was making for home and supper. Poole thought gloomily of the amount of work he had in front of him before his own supper was likely to be eaten; a further sigh escaped him as he thought of the loneliness of the “home” that awaited him at the end of the day; he did not often think of that aspect of his work—its endlessness, its loneliness; perhaps the presence of the girl at his side had started a train of thought that had better be promptly quenched.

A glance at Inez showed him that she had no such thoughts; her eyes were alive with interest as she scanned each approaching female face; so far as she was concerned, the hunt was up and the thrill of it had thrust into the background the sadness of her loss and the anxiety of her “brother’s” position.

Arrived at Ald House, the two hunters took up a position outside, and to one side of, the entrance. To avoid an appearance of watching they had arranged to stand as if in conversation, Poole with his back to the entrance and Inez Fratten, half-hidden by him, facing it; in this way she would be able to see everyone who came out and her own presence would be unlikely to attract the attention of their quarry. For a time they actually did converse, Poole doing most of the talking—about plays, books, politics, football—any subject that came into his head—while Inez answered in monosyllables and kept her gaze steadily fixed upon the entrance. After half an hour of it, however, even Poole’s eloquence—inspired as it was by the happy necessity of gazing into those enchanting eyes—began to dry up. Fortunately the six o’clock rush made their presence less conspicuous than it had been, and for another quarter of an hour Poole did little more than look at Inez while she kept her unwavering eyes focussed on the doorway through which “Daphne” must come.

By 6.15 the stream had begun to thin; only an occasional junior clerk or typist hurried eagerly from office or counting-house towards bus or train, buttoning up coat collars or huddling under umbrellas as the gusts of rain swept down upon them. It was none too pleasant standing in the open street; besides, now that it was emptying, their continued conversation had an air that lacked conviction.

They discussed their course of action. They might move into the entrance and watch from some dark corner, or—now that there was no crowd to obscure the line of vision—they might take up a position further from the spot they had to watch. On the other hand their quarry's continued failure to appear suggested that she might after all have left earlier in the day and they be wasting their time by further waiting. They had reached the point of discussing the possibilities of enquiry when footsteps coming out of the entrance hall of Ald House caught their ear. Instantly they resumed their former attitudes; Poole with his eyes fixed upon Inez' so that he could read hope or disappointment in their expression. He had not long to wait; he heard the two quicker steps of someone taking the two stone steps from Ald House on to the pavement and on the instant a look of astonishment flashed into the girl's eyes. He heard her quick gasp of surprise and then the steps passed behind him and he turned his head to look; a man, of medium height and slightly built, was walking away from them, his coat collar turned up and his soft hat pulled low over his eyes. He had not gone ten steps when he checked, as if hesitating whether to go on or turn back. As he turned his head back towards the house he had left the light from a passing lorry fell upon his face; it was Ryland Fratten.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE METHOD

WHETHER FRATTEN recognized him or not, the detective could not be certain; he did not appear to look at him, but turned away and walked off at the same pace as before. Poole gave a quick glance at his companion's face and saw that its expression had changed slightly, from astonishment to puzzlement—there was a slight frown of thought on Inez's brow as her eyes followed Ryland's retreating form.

Poole had to think, and decide, quickly. What was Ryland Fratten doing here? He had said that he did not know the whereabouts of "Daphne"; Inez Fratten presumably had not told him—she had said that she had not seen Ryland since she picked up Daphne's trail. Could it be that he was in some way connected with the Victory Finance Company? If he were, it was most unlikely that his father had known about it; it was an uncomfortable thought. Should he himself follow Ryland now—Ryland, who had slipped the police that morning? It would mean losing Daphne, for the time being at any rate—unless Inez Fratten followed her alone. Poole did not like the idea; if Daphne were really the dangerous woman that Ryland's story indicated, she was capable of playing some desperate trick on anyone who crossed her path; it was a melodramatic thought, but not entirely discountable.

In the meantime Ryland Fratten was nearly out of sight; Poole was on the point of telling Inez to go home and himself following Ryland when the girl seized his arm; at the same instant footsteps in Ald House again caught his ear. A second later two people, a man and a woman, came out of the entrance and turned towards the Monument station; as they passed, the man glanced casually at Poole and Inez but took no notice of them.

"That's she!" whispered Inez excitedly.

"Who's the man?"

"I don't know."

The short glance that Poole had got at him had shown a man of rather more than medium height, well-built and carrying himself well, with an expression of strength and a close-cut moustache. The woman he had not time to observe, except that she was good-looking. Once again Poole's mind had to work quickly. Should he follow these people and let Fratten go? He

would get into trouble if the latter disappeared from the view of the police, but on the other hand he badly wanted to know, not only who "Daphne" was and where she lived, but who her companion was. His decision was helped by the fact that Ryland was no longer in sight; he would follow the pair now and keep his eyes open for Ryland.

As they followed—at a very discreet distance—Poole arranged his plan of action with Inez. If, as seemed likely, Daphne and her friend took the Underground, Poole would enter the coach on one side of theirs, Inez that on the other; this would make them less conspicuous and would double the watch on their quarry.

As Poole had expected, the couple they were following turned down into Monument Station. Poole and Inez kept in the background and, when a west-bound train appeared, took their seats in separate coaches as arranged. Through the double glass doors Poole could get a fair view of Daphne and her friend. The girl—Poole thought that she might be anything between twenty-five and thirty—was distinctly pretty. Her small close-fitting hat concealed her hair but she certainly gave the impression of being fair. The man was rather older, with a firm chin and rather tight-lipped mouth below his clipped moustache; his eyes were light and his general colouring suggested brown hair. The pair, sitting close to the central doors of their coach, seemed to be talking quietly about trivial matters; they certainly showed no sign of being aware that they were watched.

At Cannon Street and Mansion House more belated workers got in; though the big rush was over the train was fairly full; there were no strap-hangers, however, so Poole saw no necessity to get any closer. At Charing Cross there was a fairly large exodus; this, with the subsequent oncoming passengers, kept the detective fully employed in maintaining his watch. The man and woman, however, remained seated and as the doors began to slam Poole relaxed his vigilance.

Suddenly the pair jumped to their feet and, slipping out of the double doors, hurried towards the exit stairs. Poole leaped up and dashed for his own door; as ill-luck would have it some railway official was in the act of closing it and Poole had to exert all his strength to force it open. Even then the man tried to push him back, shouting angrily to him to keep his seat; with a great effort Poole forced his way out on to the platform; the train had by that time gathered speed and the detective fell heavily to his hands and knees. More railwaymen gathered round him and his first opponent seized him angrily by the arm and shouted excitedly about "assault."

Poole saw that he might be seriously delayed if he stopped to explain. With a sudden wrench he burst his way clear and dashed up the stairs, followed by the loud shouts of the officials. The ticket collector at the top tried to bar his way, but the detective dodged past him and made for the entrance. By the time he got out the other passengers had dispersed, though there were plenty of people about; there was no sign of Daphne and her companion, but a taxi was disappearing past the Playhouse and Poole felt convinced that his quarry were in it. Not another cab was within sight and before he had time to go in search of one or to make enquiries a couple of railroad porters had seized him and pulled him back into the entrance hall, where they were soon joined by the stationmaster and the angry victim of his assault.

Poole had no difficulty in explaining what had occurred and his ample apologies soon elicited the sympathy and help of his former pursuers. Exhaustive enquiries established the probable identity of the taxi—which had been noticed waiting for fares—and, after taking its number, and the name of its driver (an habitué of the station rank) Poole started to walk back to Scotland Yard. Inez Fratten had not appeared and it was clear that the sudden move of the quarry had been too quick for her; she would probably get out at Westminster or St. James's Park and go either to Scotland Yard or to her own home—there was no point in Poole's searching for her.

The detective felt thoroughly displeased with himself; he had got a sight of two, if not three, people whose whereabouts ought to be known to the police and he had allowed all three to escape him; following his double rebuke from Barrod earlier in the day this, unless it could be quickly remedied—he was too honest a man to conceal it—would be serious for him.

Having decided to make a clean breast of his failure to his superior, Poole was none the less sensibly relieved to discover that Chief Inspector Barrod had already gone home; something might be done during the remainder of the evening to restore the situation. In the first place, he set in motion machinery to trace the taxi which had just picked up Miss Saverel and her friend at Charing Cross Underground Station—a very simple matter in view of his probable knowledge of the driver's identity. He found plenty else to keep him busy. The plain-clothes man he had put on to watch Hessel had returned; Poole sent for him and learnt that the man had established beyond reasonable doubt that the banker was right-handed; he had seen Hessel use his right hand to blow his nose, use his latch-key, light a match, carry an umbrella—more important still, change the umbrella into his left hand in order to use his right for picking up a fallen handbag; he had not

seen him use his left hand for any active purpose. It was not conclusive evidence, but it was convincing.

Following on the heels of the plain-clothes man came the Park-keeper, Blossom. P. C. Lolling had told him to report to Inspector Poole at Scotland Yard as soon as he came off duty, and though he doubted whether he was under any obligation to do so, Blossom was too deeply interested in the case to stand on his dignity. Poole explained to him something—not all—of his theory of a waiting motor-car and was at once rewarded by a definite response.

"Why, sir, I saw the very car!" exclaimed the Park-keeper excitedly. "A two-seater it was—Cowpay I think they call them—the sort that shuts up like a closed car but opens down when you wants 'em to. It was standin' there near the arch—about opposite the Royal Marines' statue I should say—for quite a time that evening. There was a girl in it—couldn't see much of her, 'cause she'd got a newspaper up in front of her as she made out to be readin'. She wasn't readin' it all the time though, 'cause I saw her watching up the Mall—towards the Duke's Steps, now I come to think of it—as if she was waitin' for someone—her young man I took it to be. I didn't see him come, nor I didn't see her move off—more's the pity—but I know she was there soon after six, 'cause I saw her when I come out from my tea, and I knew she was there for some time 'cause I didn't go into the Park at once but stayed talkin' to a friend or two—that was how I come to notice that she was watchin' for someone. She was gone at seven when I come back that way again."

Poole was deeply stirred by this information; it fitted in so exactly with the theory that he had begun to form. He tried his utmost to get a description of the girl but Blossom could only say that she seemed youngish and didn't wear spectacles; he asked for the number of the car: Blossom had not noticed it, though he had noticed the type of body; he couldn't even give the make, though it wasn't a Rolls, a Daimler, or an original Ford—the only makes he could recognize. It was desperately tantalizing, but even without identification or exact descriptions the information was of great value.

Having got so far, Poole felt that the time had come for another reconstruction. He was so eager to make it that he decided not to wait till the small hours of the night but to take advantage of the quiet period between the ingoing and outcoming of the theatres. Chief Inspector Barrod would not, of course, be present—Poole did not feel inclined to face the unpopularity of recalling his superior officer from his evening's recreation—but Barrod's presence, though helpful, was also rather damping. Discovering

that neither Detective-Constable Rawton nor his Irish mate had yet gone off duty, Poole arranged for them to report to him at half-past nine; he also secured the services of a closed police-car. Having made these preparations he took himself off to the nearest restaurant for a little supper.

During his meal, the detective studiously switched his mind off his problem—thought was bad for digestion—and read the evening paper, but over a cup of coffee and a pipe he allowed it to return to the absorbing subject. One point in particular worried him—the identity of the girl in the waiting car. The obvious inference was that she was the "Daphne" who had lured Ryland Fratten into a compromising situation and left him there to incur inevitable suspicion—the "Daphne" who, according to Inez Fratten, was Miss Saverel, secretary of the Victory Finance Company. It was a tempting theory—so tempting and so obvious as to make him mistrust it.

The thought that worried him was that the whole theory of this girl—her incarnation as Daphne and her identity as Miss Saverel—depended so far upon the evidence of the two Frattens—the two people (Poole hated himself for the thought) who really benefited by the death of Sir Garth. It was true that he had himself seen a reputed Miss Saverel this evening and that she and her companion had behaved in a highly suspicious manner by giving him the slip at Charing Cross. But, now that he came to analyse it, their conduct was not necessarily suspicious—it was only so if she were the girl the Frattens said she was; there might be a perfectly natural and simple explanation of their action—a forgotten appointment—a sudden change of mind.

The girl in the waiting car: was it conceivable—a horrible thought—that she was Inez Fratten herself? Poole realized that he had no knowledge of her whereabouts that evening; he only knew that when her father's dead body was brought back to the house she was "out." He made a note to look into the matter—an odious duty but a duty that must be done—and then, shaking the matter from his mind, walked back to Scotland Yard. He found that the Charing Cross taxi-driver had already been traced. The man could give no clear information about his fare; he only knew that a lady and gentleman had engaged him at Charing Cross and paid him off at Piccadilly Circus—a dead end.

Soon after half-past nine the police-car pulled up close to the Marines South African Memorial, a hundred yards or so west of the Admiralty Arch, and the experimental party emerged. Poole had brought Sergeant Gower with him to act as a witness and he now directed Detective-Constables Kelly and Rawton to walk slowly arm-in-arm from the Duke's Steps across the

Mall, passing over the "island" on their way. Sergeant Gower was to follow them at about twenty paces distance, representing Mr. Coningsby Smythe, and Poole himself, armed with a walking stick with a rubber ferrule, took up his post in the car.

From where he sat, nearly a hundred yards away from the Duke's Steps, it was only with difficulty that he could make out the figures of the two detectives; it might be darker now than it was at 6.30 P. M. on the 24th October, but Poole doubted whether the visibility was much worse, especially as there were no other foot-passengers about to distract the eye.

He could just see them as they approached the Mall and at what he considered the appropriate moment, he gave an order to the driver of his car. Acting under previous directions, the man drove slowly to the point where the two detectives were crossing and, as they left the island, pulled in as close behind them as he could, without obviously checking speed or altering direction. As the car passed behind them Poole leant out of the left-hand window and jabbed fiercely at Rawton's back with his stick. The point of it just reached Rawton, brushing against his right shoulder—Poole cursed himself for his bad aim.

"Pull up, Frinton," he said. "You'll have to get closer than that—I only just reached him—no force in the blow at all."

"Don't think I can get much closer, sir, without hitting them. You see, my bonnet's got to clear them first and by the time the window's behind them they must have taken at least another pace. Any closer would have made them think they were going to be run over and they'd have skipped."

"It was all pretty obvious, Inspector," said Sergeant Gower, who had come up. "I can't believe the gentleman I'm supposed to be impersonating wouldn't have noticed something odd. The car was going much slower than is natural—unless there's traffic to check it, which I gather there wasn't—and even so I thought it would run into them. Seems to me Frinton drove very well and that even so it was obvious."

"And even so I didn't hit Rawton," added Poole, frowning. "I may have to get hold of Smythe and find out if he remembers anything definite about the pace of the car. Meantime, we'll try it again. Gower, you get in the car; go a shade faster, Frinton, and see if you can get any nearer. I'll watch."

The reconstruction was repeated; Frinton drove faster and with great skill, missing the two detectives so narrowly that Sergeant Gower, leaning well out of the window, was able to reach Rawton with the point of the stick; the blow, however, was a glancing one, and did not hurt him.

“Bad shot, I’m afraid, sir,” said the sergeant, getting out of the car. “It isn’t easy to make a good one at that pace.”

“I thought he was going to knock us over,” said Rawton. “Made me jump it would, if I hadn’t known Frinton.”

“Ay, an’ I saw the Sairgint from the corner of me oye,” interrupted Kelly. “Lanin’ that far out av the car y’r little man was bound to shpot him.”

“Hessel was, you mean?”

“Ay, him.”

“I’ll be Hessel this time then,” said Poole. “Repeat.”

There was no doubt about it. With the car coming so close and Sergeant Gower leaning out to strike, Poole, in the part of Hessel, could not have failed to notice what had happened.

“Can Hessel be in it?” muttered Poole.

“Could he not have thrown a shtone, now?” asked Kelly. “That would let the car be further off and the man not so visible.”

“We can try it,” said Poole. “But it’ll be harder than ever to make a good shot. What shall we throw?”

“Not a stone, sir, please,” begged Rawton. “You *might* make a good shot by mistake.”

“Nobody’s got a tennis ball, I suppose?” queried Poole.

Nobody had.

“Would this do, guv’nor?”

A small crowd, consisting of P. C. Lolling’s relief and a City of Westminster street scavenger had by this time collected. Poole had not noticed the latter till he spoke. The man was holding in the palm of his hand what looked like a long, rounded stone, shaped rather like a shot-gun cartridge, but shorter. Poole picked it out of the man’s hand and found that it was made of rubber but was distinctly heavy; close inspection proved that it had a metal core, to one end of which was attached a very short fragment of thin cord.

“What on earth’s this?” asked Poole.

“It’s something I picked out of that very grating, sir. It’s my job to clear them and I often find things that have fallen through,” replied the man. “I was puzzled to know what it was and I kept it in my pocket in case anyone came along and asked about it.”

“You found it here? When, man, when?”

“Matter of a fortnight ago, sir. The night after that poor gentleman died.”

CHAPTER XIX

THE ETHIOPIAN AND GENERAL DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

"Good God; it's a bullet—a rubber bullet!"

"Weighted with lead!"

"Phwat'll the shtring be for?"

"What gun'll fire a thing like that—look at the size of it—it's bigger than a twelve-bore!"

"How could that kill a man?"

"Bust his artery, they said."

"I don't believe it."

"It's a fact."

"A bloody shame it is."

"Bloody clever I call it."

The burst of excited comments, by no means separate and consecutive, that followed the scavenger's revelation was checked by Poole.

"That'll do," he said. "We don't want all London here. I'll do the talking about this—and the thinking."

Poole sent the police-car, with Detective-Constables Kelley and Rawton in it, back to Scotland Yard, keeping Sergeant Gower with him. He questioned the scavenger, whose name was Glant, closely on the subject of his discovery. The man was positive that he had found the bullet in the sump below the grating close to where they stood,—under the curb exactly between the island and the spot where Sir Garth fell. The grating had an unusually open mesh and the bullet—Poole tested the point—could just drop through. Glant fixed the date clearly enough by the excitement of having a death practically on his beat; he had not connected the two in the sense of cause and effect but merely as the one fixing the date of the other.

Poole turned the matter over quickly in his mind. He felt pretty sure that this was the explanation of how the murder had been committed. Somebody who knew about the aneurism and realized the nature of the blow that could

cause it to burst without penetrating, or even abrazing the skin, had devised this missile for the purpose. What weapon could throw such a missile? A shot-gun was out of the question—the explosion must have been heard; an air-rifle was probably precluded by the size of the bore; a catapult? Probably something of that kind; for a moment its exact nature was not of vital importance.

What did the tag of cord imply? Probably that the bullet—a significant object if found near the spot—had been attached to a cord which could be used for pulling it back into the car after the shot was fired. The bullet had evidently fallen on to the grating and dropped through the bars, the cord breaking when the strain came. In that case, surely the murderer would have come back to look for and, if possible, remove such a dangerous clue. Poole turned to the scavenger.

"You didn't see anyone search around here, I suppose," he asked.

"Can't say I did, sir."

The police-constable—Lolling's relief—who had been standing silently by all this time, except when he moved on two passers-by whose curiosity had been aroused by the unusual group, now cleared his throat and made his first contribution to the discussion.

"I wouldn't say but what I'd seen the chap myself, sir," he said, with ponderous gravity.

Poole looked at him questioningly. The constable continued at his own pace.

"I was on duty here on the night in question, sir. I relieved Police-Constable Lolling at about 8 P. M. and he informed me of the incident" (he accented the second syllable). "I took no great note of what appeared to be a death from natural causes. Soon after I came on duty I noticed a bloke—a person, sir—a male person, dressed like a tramp he was—shuffling along down the gutter and looking about him—scavenging cigarette-ends, I took it to be. I was standing not far from here and he didn't hang about. About an hour later I was not far away—under those trees to be exact—there was a slight drizzle—when I saw the same party come back. He hung about here a bit this time and as I don't like that sort of party hanging about on my beat, I passed him on."

"Did he say anything?"

"Nothing, sir."

"What did he look like?"

"I couldn't really say, sir. Just a tramp."

"Had he a moustache—a beard?"

"There again I couldn't say, sir, at this distance of time. He was a dirty sort of bloke—that's all I could swear to."

Poole could get nothing more definite; he did not try very hard—it was obvious that the man would be effectively disguised. Thanking the constable and Glant for their help and taking a note of the latter's address, Poole walked across the Park in the direction of Queen Anne's Gate. He was not feeling in the least tired now and was eager to press closely along the growing scent; for a time he thought of looking up Mangane, to see what the latter had discovered about the Victory Finance Company, but second thoughts told him that if he were to throw himself into a complicated financial maze his brain must first have a night's rest. With some regret therefore, he took a bus home from Victoria Street.

The following morning he reported the progress of the case fully to Chief Inspector Barrod. The latter was unexpectedly reasonable about Poole's failure to track either Ryland Fratten or Daphne and her companion —possibly because he could see from Poole's manner that the latter had something besides failure to report. He listened with close attention to the combination of evidence and experiment which had led up to the solving of the "method" of the murder—the waiting car, the woman driver, and the firing of the heavy rubber bullet from the passing car.

"It all points one way, Poole," he said at last. "Or rather, it points definitely in one direction and suggestively—and supernumerarily—in a second."

Poole looked at him questioningly.

"Queen Anne's Gate is the one way—the two Frattens. And Hessel may or may not have been in it."

"And this woman 'Daphne,' sir?"

"Doesn't exist. She's been forced on to you by the Frattens—exactly as a conjurer forces a card. Miss Fratten's an attractive woman, Poole—I've made a point of having a look at her since the Inquest—she's been playing with you. I'm not going to rub it in, because I think you've learnt your lesson. As for the girl you followed, she was Miss Saverel of course, going out with a friend—possibly one of her employers. There's nothing significant about her—the significant part was all put up by the Frattens."

Poole realized that this reading was for the moment unanswerable; he did not, at any rate, intend to argue about it—but he did not believe it. He arranged for Sergeant Gower to interview Mr. Tapping, whilst he himself

went across to Queen Anne's Gate to see Mangane. It was an infernal nuisance that a Saturday—followed by Sunday—should intervene just when he was getting on to a hot scent.

Before seeing the secretary, however, Poole knew that he must get through a very unpleasant duty. He asked for Miss Fratten and was shown into her sitting-room. Inez received him with an eager smile and an extended hand. Poole felt a treacherous brute as he took it.

"Have you see your brother, Miss Fratten?" he asked.

"Yes, he had breakfast here. I asked him what he was doing at that place last night; he got very stuffy—told me to mind my own business—or words to that effect—so I did."

Poole nodded; he saw no point in discussing Ryland's conduct with Miss Fratten—that must be done with Ryland himself.

"My man told me he'd come back to his lodgings last night—I haven't had a report about this morning. Apparently he apologized to Fallows for slipping him and said he might have to do it again. I hope he won't—I shall have to double the watch."

"Anyhow it proves that he's not going to bolt," said Inez. "If he was, he could have done it yesterday."

Poole laughed.

"Perhaps"; he said, "but it might have been a trial run. What I really wanted to see you about was a piece of routine work that I ought to have done before—as a matter of fact I've been ragged by my chief for not doing it. In a case of this kind we always ask everybody closely connected with it for an account of their movements at the time that—that is in question. May I have yours?"

Inez looked at him steadily for some seconds before speaking.

"I see," she said, speaking slowly. "Yes, I think I understand. I had been to tea with an old governess down at Putney. I'll give you her address so that you can confirm it; I got there a little before five and left some time after six." She sat down at her writing table and scribbled on a piece of paper.

"Did you go in your car?"

Inez looked up in surprise.

"How did you know I'd got a car?"

"You'd be very exceptional if you hadn't. Is it a two-seater?"

"It is—why?"

"Coupé?"

"No, an ordinary touring hood—it's a 12 Vesper. I don't know what you're getting at, Mr. Poole, but if you want to see it, it's in the garage at the back."

There was a troubled look on Inez's face that made Poole curse himself as he said good-bye to her. He had to pull himself up short when he realized where his feelings for this girl were leading him.

Mangane greeted him almost eagerly.

"I've got something that'll interest you, old man—er, Inspector," he said. "I won't bother you—unless you want them—with details of the investigations I made yesterday—I'll just give you the gist of them. Cigarette?"

Poole pulled out his pipe and lit it, before settling himself down in a chair at the side of Mangane's desk with his note-book before him.

"There seems to be no doubt," continued Mangane, "that the Victory Finance is a sound and genuine company. It's a private company, the four directors holding all the shares between them; Lorne—Major-General Sir Hunter Lorne—I don't know whether you've heard of him—is chairman and holds 60% of the shares; old Lord Resston holds 15%—he's only a guinea-pig—never functions; a fellow called Lessingham has 15%, and another ex-soldier, Wraile, 10%. Wraile was their managing-director at one time; he gave that up but kept his seat on the Board. The present manager's a different type—head-clerk, really—Blagge, his name is.

"The Company's business is partly investment and partly loan. Their investment list is very sound—I can't pick a hole in it; their loans are more interesting—and much more difficult to follow. I followed up your suggestions—those loans that Sir Garth had not ticked. The first one—South Wales Pulverization—is a simple case of over-capitalization; the Victory Finance have burnt their fingers over that, I fancy—they'll be lucky if they recover their advances without interest. Sir Garth spotted that quickly enough—that's why he queried it—it's a bad loan, but there's nothing shady about it that I can see.

"The second one is much more interesting—the Nem Nem Sohar Trust. It's a Hungarian company—the name means something like 'Never, never, it is unendurable,' the Hungarian 'revise the peace-treaty' slogan; nominally the Trust is for land development on a big-property basis—the sort of thing that would appeal to a true-blue like Lorne; it is that, but it also has a strongly political flavour—there is actually a clause in the charter urging the

elimination of Jews from the national and local government posts. I don't wonder Sir Garth put a blue pencil through it—I don't say it isn't a good thing politically or sound financially, but he'd never touch a thing that was so directly tinged with politics. Whether you think it's worth looking closer into or not, I don't know—that's for you to say.

"The third company that he queried—Ethiopian and General Development—I looked into more thoroughly, partly because there were no notes about it. I'd rather like to know why there are no notes. I told you I knew something about these investigations of his, and that I'd made some appointments for him; one of them was with the managing-director of the Ethiopian and General. Whether he saw him or not, of course I don't know—I only made the appointment. I tried to see him myself today but he was busy and couldn't see me—suggested my coming on Tuesday—apparently they have a Board-meeting on Monday. But I saw one of the clerks and I got the company's last report and schedule of operations from him; I had to buy them—there must be something rotten about that show or I shouldn't have been able to. I read 'em while I had lunch—I lunched in the City—and talked them over with a pal I can trust—didn't let on what I wanted to know for, of course.

"That company, my pal told me, used to be absolutely sound—a genuine development concern—lending money and buying up properties that looked promising or that only needed money to make them pay. But the Board's getting a bit ancient and a bit lazy—inclined to leave things pretty well to their managing-director. According to my friend, this managing-director is playing a funny game; he hasn't been there more than a year or so but in that time the company's lost a certain amount of 'caste'—nothing definitely wrong, nothing demonstrably shady—but the City doesn't trust it any longer.

"I gathered that there was one particular undertaking that was thought to be a bit fishy; a mine in Western Rhodesia that they'd bought from a thing called the Rotunda Syndicate. Nothing unusual in that, of course, but apparently the Ethiopian and General hadn't sent out their usual mining engineer to report on it, but employed a local man out there. The explanation was that it was a very long way inland and a particularly unhealthy climate; extra expense, delay, the possibility of the London man crocking up; so the local man—probably recommended by the Rotunda—was employed, reported very favourably, and the Ethiopian and General bought the property. An unusual way of doing business, to say the least of it.

“I haven’t had time to go into the terms of the sale—I’ll try and get at that on Monday—but there’s one point—two points rather—that will strike you at once. The Rotunda Syndicate is Lessingham and the new managing-director of the Ethiopian and General is Wraile—both directors of the Victory Finance Company!”

CHAPTER XX

THE ROTUNDA MINE

RETURNING to Scotland Yard, Poole reported this new and significant development to Barrod. The latter decided that the time was ripe for a reference to Sir Leward Marradine and together the three men discussed the situation and decided on the lines which future investigations should follow. It was now well past mid-day on Saturday and nothing much could be done in the way of further enquiries in the City until the week-end was past. It was clear that both Wraile and Lessingham—and probably Miss Saverel as well—must now be directly interrogated, but, apart from the unlikelihood of finding any of them now, neither Barrod nor Poole was in favour of approaching them in a half-hearted manner. It would be much better to complete the enquiries about the Ethiopian and General Development Company first and so have something really definite with which to confront them. Finally it was decided that Poole should take his week-end off in the ordinary way, in order that he might return to the attack on Monday with the full vigour of both mind and body.

Poole was by no means sorry for this decision. Since the previous Friday he had worked unceasingly at this case, with only the week-end break. He had worked very long hours and his mind had been at work even when his body was not. Though far from tired out, he was conscious of the effort that was required to keep going at full steam; he would unquestionably be the better for a rest and he determined to switch his mind completely off the case until after he had had his breakfast on Monday morning. It would not be easy, but it would be worth doing.

Ever since he had joined the C.I.D., Poole had given up all forms of outdoor games and sport except golf and shooting. He had an aunt—his father's very-much-younger sister—who lived in the New Forest, and with her he often stayed a week-end and played two or three rounds of golf at Brockenhurst. Miss Joan Poole was the only one of the detective's family who thoroughly approved of his choice of a profession. His father, still practising in Gloucestershire but leaving an increasing amount of the work to his young partner, was always glad to see John, but he was not prepared to put himself out for him—to depart from his own hobbies or amusements—in order to provide the pig-headed young fool with suitable recreation.

Joan Poole, on the other hand, was thrilled at the possession of a nephew who, she was sure, was going to become a really big man in a really interesting profession. She loved having him to stay with her and stretched her none too ample means to the uttermost in order to keep a few acres of rough shooting for him.

On Saturday afternoon, therefore, Poole spent the hour and a half before it got dark in mopping up seven rabbits, a cock-pheasant and a wholly unexpected woodcock, with the help—and some hindrance—of his aunt's enthusiastic but quite untrained cocker spaniel. After tea he settled himself into a large arm-chair in front of the fire and gave himself up to the joy of uninterrupted and uneducational reading—an hour of Mary Webb and one of Henry James. A retired Admiral and his wife came to dinner, cursed the Government (the sailor, not his lady) drank three glasses of indifferent port (again, he) and played two rubbers of still more indifferent bridge—indifferent in the sense of being unscientific, but eminently amusing—good, talking, light-hearted games with a veto on post-mortem discussion.

Sunday involved a visit to the local church—Joan Poole was sufficiently an aunt to think it behooved her to keep an eye on her nephew's spiritual welfare, and after an early lunch, twenty-seven holes of rather high-class golf. Joan, though over forty, was a really useful performer and it took John, out of practice as he necessarily was, all his time to give her half a stroke and a beating. After tea, more Mary Webb and, as a contrast to the Victorian James, two of Max Beerbohm's incomparable "Seven Men." After supper—everything cold and deliciously appetizing on the table—John yielded himself up to the favourite recreation of his hostess,—a good long gossip—about relations, politics, books, neighbours, and the prospects of early promotion. The latter was approaching forbidden ground but Poole warded off his aunt's most disingenuous leads and, much to her disappointment, said not one word about the Fratten case. As he sped to London by the 8 A. M. train on Monday morning, Poole felt that he had recreated every tissue in both body and brain and was ready to exert to the utmost the full powers of both in an attempt to bring his case to a successful conclusion.

On arriving at Scotland Yard, the detective found a message from Mangane to say that he was starting early for the City and would ring him up at lunch time if he had anything to report. That meant that Poole would have a clear morning in which to tidy up a variety of small points that needed attention.

In the first place he went round to the House of Commons and once more extracted Mr. Coningsby Smythe from his holy places; Mr. Smythe

was inclined to mount his high horse, but Poole quickly brought him to his senses by telling him that he would shortly be required to give evidence in a trial for murder, and warning him that if he put any difficulties in the way of the Crown (more effective than the "police" with this type of witness) obtaining the evidence it required, he would find himself in severe trouble. Having thus prepared the way he asked Mr. Smythe if he had noticed anything about the appearance and behaviour of the car that had obstructed his view of Sir Garth just before the latter fell. Mr. Smythe stared at Poole in some surprise, but seeing that he was in earnest bent his brows in an effort of recollection.

"I did not really notice the car, Inspector," he said at last. "I was watching the men. I should say that it was certainly a closed car and not a large one; I think it was dark in colour."

"You did not notice whether it was driven by a man or a woman—or a chauffeur?"

"I'm afraid I didn't."

"Did anything strike you about the way it was driven—was it slower than was natural on such a road? Did it go very near the two gentlemen?"

Mr. Smythe shook his head.

"I'm afraid I didn't notice anything special—it certainly wasn't going very fast."

"Would you say it was a saloon, or a coupé, or just an open car with the hood up?"

"I should say certainly not the latter; probably it was a small saloon—but it might have been a coupé. I couldn't really be sure."

"Could you swear it was not an open car with the hood up?"

"Not swear, no—I didn't notice particularly enough; but I have a very strong impression that it was not."

With that strong impression Poole had to be satisfied; confirming, as it did, the testimony of the Park-keeper, Blossom, it seemed to eliminate Inez Fratten's open Vesper. While the question was before him Poole thought he should have a look at the car, so he went round to Queen Anne's Gate and, with Inez's permission, had it run out of the garage. One glance was enough; it was a low, distinctly "sporting" model, with a hood which, when lifted, fitted closely over the head of the driver. Poole felt sure that Mr. Smythe could not possibly have gained the impression of a small saloon or coupé from this little whippet. He heaved a sigh of relief, thanked the chauffeur and walked away.

His next visit was to a gunsmith, a man from whom he bought his own cartridges and whom he knew to be an expert in his own line. Poole showed him the rubber bullet and asked him to suggest a weapon that might have fired it.

"We had an idea it might be a powerful catapult," he said.

The gunsmith examined it closely, using a magnifying eye-glass. After nearly three minutes of scrutiny he removed the glass from his eye and handed it and the bullet to the detective.

"It's not been fired from a rifled barrel; there's no characteristic corkscrew grooving. On the other hand, there is a very faint longitudinal groove—look at it yourself—all along each side of the bullet. That suggests some running pressure along each side. I don't see how a catapult would do that, but what about a cross-bow? The half-open barrel of a cross-bow would allow very slight expansion of the rubber in the upper half of the bullet; as the bullet lies in the open barrel, half of it appears above the wood or metal, whilst the lower half fits into the half barrel and may be ever so slightly compressed by it. When the bullet is forced along the barrel this pressure or friction in the bottom half and lack of it in the top half would be liable to cause a slight groove to appear all the way down on each side—like what you see on that bullet. That's the solution that occurs to me, Mr. Poole; I should be interested to know sometime if it fits in with the facts."

On his way back to Scotland Yard, Poole called in at Dr. Vyle's house and, showing him the bullet, asked whether, if fired from something like a cross-bow, it was capable of inflicting the injury which had caused Sir Garth's death and of making just so much mark on the flesh as subsequent examination had revealed. The police-surgeon was intensely interested by Poole's "exhibit"; he weighed it in his hand, pinched it, struck it against his own forehead and examined it minutely through his magnifying glass.

"It's the very thing to do the trick," he said. "It's soft enough to spread a bit on impact—that would both extend the surface of the blow and act as a cushion to prevent abrasion; it's heavy enough—thanks to the lead heart—to burst, or at any rate puncture, the aneurism if the propelling force was at all strong. A good catapult or cross-bow would give that, especially at such close range; it would be pretty nearly silent, except for a sort of slap, and I should think it throws pretty straight. There's no doubt you've got the weapon, inspector."

"I've got the missile, anyhow, doctor, and it won't be my fault if I haven't got the weapon before long. Thank you."

As he entered Scotland Yard, Poole met Sergeant Gower.

“I couldn’t find that chap Tapping on Saturday, sir,” said the Sergeant. “He’d gone off to an annual conference in Manchester the night before—all the tuning-fork testers in the country meet there every year and talk about how it’s done—excuse for a dinner and a ‘jolly,’ his wife told me it was really. Anyhow she didn’t expect him back till late Saturday night—football match in the afternoon, Arsenal playing the United up there. I went again this morning and found him in—didn’t look to me as if he knew the meaning of the word ‘jolly,’ but you never know. Anyway, he confirmed what Blossom said all right: Hessel had his arm through Fratten’s, he was sure—anyway he never hit him—Tapping swears to that and to there being no one else near enough to. He thinks somebody threw something at him.”

“He’s not far out,” said Poole. “Thank you.”

At one o’clock Poole was called to the telephone and found Mangane at the other end. The secretary reported that he had made a definite advance and now needed further instructions as to what move was required. Poole asked him to come straight to Scotland Yard and attend a conference with the Assistant-Commissioner; within a quarter of an hour Mangane had arrived and the two repaired to Sir Leward’s room, where Barrod was already in attendance.

Sir Leward greeted Mangane with some reserve. In the first place, he was not at all keen on the introduction of amateurs into Scotland Yard investigations—he proposed to say a word or two to Inspector Poole on that head when the case was over; secondly, he still remembered the look on the secretary’s face when he (Sir Leward) had interrupted the *tête-à-tête* tea at Queen Anne’s Gate on the occasion of his visit to Miss Fratten. The development of friendly relations with Miss Fratten—to which he had so much looked forward—had not materialized, in view of the direction which the investigations instigated by himself had followed—the suspecting and shadowing of Ryland Fratten—not a happy introduction to his sister’s good graces. Mangane, however, appeared quite unconscious of Sir Leward’s reserve; he was clearly eager to disclose the fruit of his morning’s enquiries.

“As I told Inspector Poole on Saturday, sir,” he began, “although I knew that the Rotunda Syndicate had sold their property to the Ethiopian and General, I didn’t know anything about the terms of sale; today I’ve been able to find out something about that. It hasn’t been very easy, because the two parties to the transaction—Lessingham, representing the Rotunda Syndicate, on the one side, and Wraile, representing the Ethiopian and General, on the other—are both hostile to any form of enquiry. I didn’t attempt to get anything from Lessingham—that Syndicate obviously

wouldn't give anything away. I managed it at last by bribing the same E. & G. clerk who sold me the Company's schedule—the one I gave you on Saturday. It cost me £50—the fellow was taking a pretty big risk—but the normal means of finding out would have taken days or weeks and I gather that you're in a hurry.

"The terms are tremendously favourable to Lessingham. I don't know, of course, how much of a dud this mine is—it may be a good thing but there's quite a possibility that it's a group of surface veins and nothing more—but for the amount of prospecting that's been done, even if every test had been favourable, the price is a fancy one. I've got a copy of the report on the mine here; you'll see that the Rotunda don't pretend to have sunk a tremendous lot in exploration—probably they knew that if they claimed too much for initial expenditure (that's being repaid to them in cash by the E. & G. D.) there would simply *have* to be a proper report. All it amounts to is that they have sunk a few bore holes at wide intervals (no doubt in the most hopeful spots) and this optimistic report is based on the assumption, first, that the whole area is as good as the bore holes show the carefully chosen spots to be and, secondly, that the ore continues as such to deeper levels.

"It's a report that wouldn't deceive a sound Development Company for a minute—not to the extent of plunging in as the E. & G. are doing. On the strength of it—and of course at the instigation of Wraile—they are forming a Company with a capital of £500,000 divided into £300,000 in 7% preference shares and £200,000 in 1/- ordinary shares—that is to say 4 million shares. The Rotunda—Lessingham—in addition to having all their initial expenditure in prospecting etc., refunded to them in cash, are to receive as purchase price half the ordinary shares—2 million—plus an option on a further million at 5/- per share if exercised within six months or 10/- per share if exercised within a year.

"The public is to subscribe the £300,000 in Preference Shares, and to get one Ordinary Share (of 1/-) thrown in as a bonus for each £1 Preference Share subscribed. The object of the high premium on Lessingham's option, of course, is to create an artificial value for the Ordinary shares—to make the public think that they are valuable—and so enable Lessingham, with the propaganda at his disposal through all three companies—Rotunda, E. & G. and Victory Finance—especially the latter—to start a market in them at anything from 5/- to 7/6 a share and so make a large fortune out of his allotted two million. If he sells at even 5/- he makes £500,000 on them, and if the market goes really well he has his option on another million—in fact he's in clover.

“The new company, when it’s floated, will have a different name, so that it’s more than likely that Lessingham’s connection with it will not be known to the public and the Victory Finance Company will be able to push it without its Chairman, Lorne, realizing either—unless he’s a much sharper man than I take him to be.

“What the Ethiopian and General Board was thinking of to agree to such terms, I can’t think. Wraile must have got them pretty well under his thumb. I believe that what weighed very strongly with them was that Lessingham said that if they gave him favourable terms he would arrange for the Victory Finance Company to make them a big loan for the development of this mine and other properties on easy terms. The V. F., being a reputable company, would also help to create a market at a premium on the ordinary shares. Lessingham has only a 15% share in the Victory Finance and is using its money for his own purposes. He’s the real directing brain of the company; he does genuinely good work for them—makes big profits for them by his advice—and makes use of the kudos he so establishes to land them in an undertaking of this kind. Eventually, of course, both the Ethiopian and General and the Victory Finance will be liable to smash over it. By that time Lessingham will have made his pile and cleared out—and Wraile too, of course. He’s only got 10 per cent in Victory Finance and 10 per cent in E. & G. D.—probably both he and Lessingham will have sold their shares before the smash comes—but he can afford to lose them altogether if he’s sharing with Lessingham in this Rotunda swindle. They’re a pretty couple.”

CHAPTER XXI

GENERAL MEETS GENERAL

On his return to the offices of the Victory Finance Company on Monday afternoon, Major-Gen. Sir Hunter Lorne found awaiting him a note brought by a young man in a neat dark suit. Sir Hunter tore it open and read it, a frown, first of surprise and then of annoyance, deepening on his face as he did so.

"What the devil? Of all the infernal impertinence!" he exclaimed, then struck the hand-bell sharply. A junior clerk appeared at the door.

"That chap who brought this note still here?" he asked aggressively.

"Yes, Sir Hunter."

"Send him in here, then. I'll . . ." Sir Hunter did not disclose his intentions, but stood gnawing one end of his handsome grey moustache and glaring at the door.

"Who are you?" he asked, when the messenger appeared and the clerk had departed. "Are you a policeman?"

"Yes, sir. I'm secretary to the Assistant-Commissioner in charge of the Criminal Investigation Department."

"This chap Marradine?"

"Yes, sir; Sir Leward Marradine."

"What did he want to send you for? Is the unfortunate taxpayer to fork out £5 a week for men who are employed as messengers?"

"I believe Sir Leward thought that you might dislike having a uniformed officer sent here, sir."

"So I should, by Gad! Damned thoughtful of him; damned thoughtful! Why didn't he come himself? What the devil does he want to know? Why should I be sent for to Scotland Yard like a . . . like a . . ."

The General, finding no adequate simile, blew out his cheeks and snorted. The secretary apparently thought that these questions were rhetorical and required no answer; at any rate he gave none. After a moment's thought, Sir Hunter stumped out of the Board Room and into the small office shared by the Manager and Secretary.

"Captain Wraile coming in this afternoon?" he enquired.

Miss Saverel looked up quickly but it was Mr. Blagge who answered.

"No sir, he never comes on Mondays; he has a Board-meeting in the afternoon."

Sir Hunter stood irresolute.

"Anything I can do, sir?" asked Mr. Blagge.

"No, no; nothing, nothing," exclaimed the Chairman testily. "I'll attend to it myself. Damned *embusqué*!" he added irrelevantly as he returned to the Board Room. Taking his hat, coat, and umbrella, he stalked out of the room without a word to Sir Leward's messenger, but having slammed the door almost in the latter's face, presently opened it again.

"Give you a lift back," he said gruffly.

Within a quarter of an hour the irate general was being ushered into Sir Leward Marradine's room at Scotland Yard. The Assistant-Commissioner rose to greet him.

"Very good of you to come, Sir Hunter," he said suavely. "We haven't met since . . ."

"What does all this mean, eh?" broke in Sir Hunter, ignoring the other's extended hand. "Pretty thing when a man in my position—or any respectable citizen for that matter—can be hauled out of his office to a police-station without rhyme or reason. What's it mean, eh?"

"It was hardly that, Sir Hunter," replied Marradine, keeping his temper with some difficulty. "Won't you take that chair? As I told you in my note, we are in need of some information that you can give us—information respecting a serious crime. I thought that it would be much less disagreeable for you to come here than to have an interrogation carried out in your own office."

Sir Hunter reluctantly took the proffered seat.

"Serious crime, eh? What am I supposed to know about it? Am I supposed to have committed it? Have you got someone waiting behind a screen to take down what I say, or a dictaphone, or some such infernal contraption? What?"

Sir Hunter knew perfectly well that none of this was the case and that he was behaving rather childishly, but he was irritated by an entirely extraneous consideration. He was, in sober truth, jealous of the position of power occupied by Marradine, a man considerably junior to him in the Army, a man, furthermore, who had only served for about five minutes in France and

that only in a soft "Q" job. Lorne had never actually met him but he had heard of him, and he had heard nothing to his advantage—a precocious young pup (in his "young officer" days), a pusher, a bloody red-tab, and finally, a damned *embusqué*. Sir Hunter would not in the least have objected to being interrogated by a proper detective—he merely objected to Marradine.

Sir Leward wisely ignored his visitor's petulance.

"It is in connection with the death of Sir Garth Fratten that I want your help," he said. Lorne pricked up his ears. "I understand that Sir Garth was about to join your Board—that is the case, isn't it?"

Sir Hunter was all attention now.

"That is so, certainly," he replied. "I invited him to join us on—let me see—the 8th of October. He came to see me and talk things over at my office about three days later. He seemed satisfied by what I was able to tell him but asked for some reports and schedules and said he would let me have his decision in a week or two. I was expecting every day to hear from him, when he suddenly died—a tragic business, what? A great loss to the country and to us." Sir Hunter shook his head gloomily.

"Would you mind telling me why you wanted him to join your Board?"

"I should have thought that was obvious enough. Big man in the City, carry great weight, give great confidence to investors, what?"

"Then why did your fellow-directors not welcome his appearance?"

Sir Hunter stared.

"How the devil . . . ? What makes you think they didn't?"

"It is the case that they did not, then?"

The Chairman shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Now you mention it," he said at last, "one of the Board wasn't particularly keen on it—thought Sir Garth might want to run the show—jealousy really, I put it at."

"And that was?"

"Lessingham. Able man but liked to have his own way. I don't doubt that he'd have come round. I broke it to him rather suddenly. My fault, perhaps."

"And Captain Wraile?"

"You seem to know all about us, eh? Wraile was willing enough."

"But Lessingham strongly opposed it?"

"Well, yes. I suppose he did. I thought he was most unreasonable—most ungrateful to me, too—it isn't everyone who could get Fratten on to their Board."

"Did Lessingham threaten strong measures if you persisted?"

"He threatened to resign."

"He didn't talk of anything more serious—violence, for instance?"

"Violence? Good God, what are you driving at?"

"Is he the sort of man who might go to extreme lengths—even to murder—to get what he wants?"

"Murder? You mean, . . . you mean—that Inquest—are you suggesting?" . . .

Sir Leward nodded.

"There are pointers that way, I'm afraid, Sir Hunter. Would you think him capable of that?"

"Lessingham! Murder! Good God! Good God!"

The General was plainly knocked off his usual balance. As Marradine did not really need an answer, he did not press for it.

"Now I want to ask you some questions about your Company's business," he said. "You do a certain amount in the way of loans, don't you?" Sir Hunter nodded. "Who advises you on that?"

"We have no advisers; we—the Board, that is—settle that for ourselves. We all have a certain amount of experience—except, of course, Resston, who never turns up—we put our heads together." He paused for a moment, frowning, as if in thought. "As a matter of fact, now I come to think of it, Lessingham generally has more to say on the subject than Wraile or I—looks on it as his pigeon, rather, I think."

"Not long ago you advanced a large sum—£100,000—to the Ethiopian and General Development Company?"

The Chairman nodded.

"On what security?"

"Their notes—the usual thing."

"Were you yourself satisfied with that transaction—and that security?"

"Oh yes, certainly. The Ethiopian and General's a sound concern—old established business—quite reliable. As a matter of fact, Wraile—you were speaking of him just now—a member of our Board—is managing-director

of the Ethiopian and General; left us to go to them—they offered him very good terms, I believe."

"And naturally he was in favour of the loan."

"He was, certainly—and I suppose, naturally."

"And the loan was suggested by him? Or by Lessingham?"

"By Lessingham, I fancy. Wraile supported it and I agreed."

"Thank you, Sir Hunter; that's very frank—very helpful."

Marradine was clever enough to see that his visitor was now nervous and that a little judicious flattery and sympathy would enlist his willing help.

"Do you know much about the operations of the Ethiopian and General?"

"Can't say I do; they go in, I believe, for the purchase and development of properties in Africa and elsewhere, and also for loans to the same sort of concern. Very profitable business, I believe, but needs great experience and flair."

"Have you ever heard of the Rotunda Syndicate?"

"Never, so far as I know."

"Then you are not aware that your loan was required for the purchase of a mine from the Rotunda Syndicate?"

"I think I remember something about mining property—I don't know that I heard the name—didn't really affect me."

"It would surprise you to hear that the Rotunda Syndicate is owned by your fellow-director, Lessingham, and that your money—your loan—has gone direct into his pocket—in cash and shares?"

Sir Hunter's face turned slowly a deep shade of red; the flush spread over his forehead, over his ears, and even down his neck. Marradine saw a small twisted vein stand out on one side of his forehead and pulse violently—a bubble or two appeared at the corners of his mouth. With considerable tact the Assistant-Commissioner rose from his seat and walked to a bookcase, from which he pulled a book of reference. When he returned, Sir Hunter had largely regained his composure, but his face was dark with anger.

"You're suggesting something very dirty, Marradine," he said. "Are you sure of this?"

"Pretty sure, I'm afraid, Sir Hunter, though I haven't seen it proved yet. There's fraud in it, I'm afraid—though of that I've certainly no proof yet.

The suggestion is that the mine's a dud, that Lessingham knows it, and that Wraile knows it."

"Wraile! Good God, you don't say he's in it? He—I—I'd have trusted him anywhere. I put him into our company—as manager; I got him allotted shares—I—I— He was my Brigade Major in France—a damn good fellow—damn fine soldier. I can't believe it, Marradine—you must be mistaken."

Sir Hunter rose from his chair and paced agitatedly up and down the room. Marradine waited for him to calm down.

"I've got worse than that to tell you, I'm afraid," he said. "We suspect that Sir Garth Fratten was murdered to prevent his joining your Board. So far we have no evidence pointing to either Wraile or Lessingham; we've only just begun to look for it. But we have evidence that your secretary, Miss Saverel, was employed to lure young Fratten into such a position that suspicion would fall on him. What do you know of her, Sir Hunter?"

Sir Hunter was past astonishment now, past indignation, even past anger. He had sunk back into the comfortable chair beside Sir Leward's desk and was staring helplessly at his persecutor.

"I—I—nothing, really, nothing," he stammered. "Wraile engaged her, soon after he came to us as manager. Charming girl—quiet, respectful, none of your modern sauce and legs. I—I don't . . ." His voice trailed off as he realized that he was feebly repeating himself.

"You don't remember, of course, anything about her movements, or Wraile's, or even Lessingham's, on the evening Sir Garth was murdered—" Sir Leward referred to a paper before him. "Thursday 24th, October, between 6 and 7."

Lorne consulted his pocket-diary.

"Can't say I do," he replied gloomily. "I wasn't at the office that afternoon."

"Any particular reason why you weren't there?"

"Matter of fact I was at Newbury—took Fernandez down—that Argentine millionaire, you know. He was over here floating a loan and we wanted to get in on it. We thought a little entertaining might do the trick—as a matter of fact it did—bread cast on the waters, what—bright idea really . . ." Sir Hunter suddenly checked himself, then, after a few moments' thought, continued slowly: "It was Wraile's idea."

There was silence, both men evidently absorbed in their thoughts. Marradine was the first to speak.

“Fratten was murdered in a very curious way, Sir Hunter,” he said. “You probably read the story which came out at the Inquest about the accident on the Duke of York’s Steps?” Sir Hunter nodded. “That was evidently a plant of some kind—I don’t quite follow it. He was actually murdered a few minutes later. He was shot by somebody out of a car as he crossed the Mall—he was shot by a heavy rubber bullet fired from something in the nature of a cross-bow.”

“Cross-bow?” Sir Hunter sat bolt upright. “Why, why that’s what Wraile used to use in ’15—when he was my Brigade Major—for throwing grenades and things at the Huns!”

CHAPTER XXII

MISS SAVEREL

A FEW minutes after Sir Hunter Lorne left the offices of the Victory Finance Company, Inspector Poole presented himself at the door and asked the junior clerk who answered his ring to take a note in to the manager. A minute later he was himself shown into the Board Room, where Mr. Blagge, a look of mingled dignity and anxiety on his face, was awaiting him.

"No trouble I hope, Inspector?" he asked. "Sir Hunter Lorne, our Chairman, has just gone out—you have only just missed him."

"Thank you, Mr. Blagge," replied Poole, "it's you I want to see—in the first instance. As a matter of fact, Sir Hunter is himself at Scotland Yard now, giving certain information to the Assistant-Commissioner—oh, no," he added with a smile, as he saw the look of horror on the manager's face, "Sir Hunter himself is not in trouble. The matter, however, is a serious one, as serious as could well be." (Poole knew when to be ponderous.) "It is concerned with the death of Sir Garth Fratten, who, you are doubtless aware, was on the point of becoming a member of your Board when he died—a sudden and violent death."

Mr. Blagge's reaction was exemplary—pale face, enlarged pupils, twittering fingers.

"Now, Mr. Blagge," continued Poole, "it is in your power to help the police in the execution of their duty; I need hardly add that should you attempt to hinder them you will render yourself liable to arrest as an accessory after the fact."

The manager was now ripe for exploitation.

"You have as active members of your Board, in addition to your Chairman, a Mr. Travers Lessingham and a Captain James Wraile?"

Mr. Blagge assented with a gulp.

"Now, I want you to tell me in the first place, anything that you know about the whereabouts of Captain Wraile and Mr. Lessingham on the late afternoon of Thursday, October 24th—the afternoon on which Sir Garth Fratten met his end." (Poole groaned in spirit at the expression, but he felt sure that it would be unction to the soul of Mr. Blagge.)

The manager, after a deal of head-scratching and note-book searching, and after being refused leave by Poole to consult the secretary or other juniors, at last evolved the information that Mr. Lessingham had not been to the office that day at all (he had come in late on the previous afternoon and remained talking to Captain Wraile after he, Mr. Blagge, had gone) and that Captain Wraile had been in in the morning but not at all in the afternoon—Captain Wraile was, the Inspector might not be aware, managing-director of the . . . the Inspector was aware and cut him short.

"And your secretary, Miss Saverel; where was she?"

Mr. Blagge looked at him in surprise but, receiving no explanation of this curious question, did his best to answer it. Miss Saverel never left the office before six; Mr. Blagge was certain that she had not done so on any occasion within the last three months or more. She occasionally stayed on late to finish some work—she was not one to rush off directly the hour struck. Whether she had done so on the day in question he could not say; she herself might remember, or, if the Inspector did not wish to question her, then Canting, the hall-porter, might do so—he was generally about and had a good memory.

This was as much as Poole could expect in this direction, so he switched to another. How regularly did Captain Wraile and Mr. Lessingham respectively attend at the office and what were their respective addresses? This was a comparatively simple matter and Mr. Blagge answered with more assurance. Captain Wraile came to the office about three times a week—generally from about four to five, but occasionally first thing in the morning. He attended all Board-meetings, which had been specially arranged so as not to clash with his own at the Ethiopian and General Development Company. Sir Hunter, the Chairman, relied a good deal upon Captain Wraile's advice and seldom took an important decision without consulting him. Mr. Lessingham, on the other hand, came very seldom—often not for three weeks at a time and then generally only for an hour or so at the end of the day. Mr. Blagge believed that he was a gentleman with a good many irons in the financial fire, but knew very little about him. He had, in spite of his irregular attendances, been of great value to the Board, especially in the matter of loans, for which he had a "flair" that was almost uncanny.

"And the addresses?"

"Captain Wraile lives in the Fulham Road, No. 223A" (Poole pricked up his ears). "Mr. Lessingham has his communications sent to the Hotel Antwerp, in Adam Street—off the Strand, I fancy it is. I don't know whether he lives there regularly or only when he's in London; I believe, as a matter

of fact, that he has a good deal of business in Brussels and is there as much as he is in London—if not more. What we send him doesn't amount to much—notices and agenda of Board-meetings and any special business that the Chairman wants him to attend to. He said he didn't want—Mr. Lessingham that is—he didn't want prospectuses of every company and flotation that we were interested in sent after him—if there was anything important we were to send it—not otherwise."

"And when was he in last?"

"Thursday evening, as a matter of fact, Inspector. He was here sometime and hadn't left by the time I left myself."

"Thank you, Mr. Blagge; and now, Miss Saverel—where does she live?"

"I'm afraid I really can't say that—I've never had occasion to enquire."

"Can you find it out without asking?"

"Oh yes, I can look in the address-book. I'll do so at once."

Mr. Blagge was only away a few seconds and returned with a small note-book in his hand.

"Here it is, you see, Inspector: 94 Bloomsbury Lane, W.C."

"Bloomsbury?"

Poole quickly smothered his surprise.

"Perhaps I might see the young lady," he said. "If you would ask her to come in here I should not have to keep you from your work any longer."

The manager nodded and made his way to the room next door, which he shared with the secretary.

"Inspector Poole, of Scotland Yard, wants to see you, please, Miss Saverel," he said solemnly.

The girl looked up quickly. Her fine, arched eyebrows rose slightly, but no expression, either of alarm or excitement, appeared on her attractive face. She sat for a moment, as if in thought, her eyes fixed on the centre button of Mr. Blagge's black coat.

"All right," she said. "I've just got this to get off—then I'll go and see him." She tapped a few bars on her typewriter, whisked the paper out, scribbled a signature, folded and placed the letter in an envelope and addressed it. Rising, she went out into the narrow passage and opened the door into the clerks' room.

"Take that round at once, please, Smithers," she said, then closing the door, walked down the short passage to the Board Room.

"You want to see me?" she asked lightly.

Poole found himself admiring the calmness and poise of this woman, who, if she was what he thought her, must know herself to be face to face with deadly peril—at the very least, an appalling ordeal. He could not be certain that she was the girl Inez Fratten had pointed out to him on Friday evening and who had slipped him at Charing Cross. He had not had a close view of "Daphne," who, in any case, was wearing a hat and an overcoat. This girl was certainly of much the same build, a slim, graceful figure, with short, fair hair and extremely attractive brown eyes. She was dressed in a black skirt and grey silk shirt, with a touch of white at her throat.

"I have to ask you one or two questions, Miss Saverel," he said, "some of them routine questions—in connection with the death of Sir Garth Fratten. You perhaps know that Sir Garth was invited by your Chairman, Sir Hunter Lorne, to join the Board of the Company; we have reason to believe that that invitation was not acceptable to every member of the Board; can you confirm that?"

"I can't," replied Miss Saverel calmly.

"You mean you don't know?"

"How should I?"

"Surely you must have heard some conversation about it—the matter must have been discussed in your presence at one time or another?"

Miss Saverel shrugged her shoulders but said nothing.

"I'm afraid I must press you for an answer, Miss Saverel."

"You can press as much as you like. Even if I knew anything I shouldn't tell you; there is such a thing as being loyal to your employers."

"Not in the eyes of the law, if it involves shielding criminals. Please think again, Miss Saverel."

The girl merely shook her head. Poole could not help admiring her attitude; whether she was a guilty party or not she was playing the right game for her side. He tried a new and more direct attack.

"Then I must ask you something about yourself. This is quite a routine question, as a matter of fact—I have to ask it of everyone even remotely connected with the case; where were you on the evening of Thursday 24th October, between six and seven? That is roughly the time, I should tell you, at which Sir Garth Fratten was killed."

Miss Saverel seemed not in the least disturbed by the question.

"I was here till six, anyhow," she said. "I may have been here longer. I'll have a look in my diary—it's in the other room—you can come with me if you think I'm liable to bolt."

Poole opened the door for her and watched her go down the passage and enter the small room next door; he heard Mr. Blagge speak to her and her reply; immediately afterwards she came out with a diary in her hand.

"October 24th," she said, turning over the pages. "October 24th—here it is—oh yes, I was here till quite late that evening—look." She showed him the diary; under the date, October 24th, were written, in a bold, clear hand, the words: "Captain W. and Chairman discussed Annual Report A. M. Typed draft till 7."

"You were here till seven?"

"I was, for my sins—and no overtime."

"Was anyone here with you?"

"Not after six. Smithers and Varle, the two clerks leave then. After that I was alone."

"Did anyone see you leave?"

"Canting may have—the hall-porter. He's generally about—but he'd hardly remember the day."

"Nobody else?"

"I don't think so. I'm afraid you'll have to take my word for it—or not."

"Thank you, Miss Saverel; now just one thing more. Would you mind telling me where you live?"

He took out his note-book as if to compare her answer with an address in his book. The girl looked at him keenly, then moved towards the window.

"It's dark in here with that blind down," she said, "you can hardly see your book."

She pulled the blind up the few inches that it had dropped, then turned back towards him. Poole realized that she now had her back to the light, whilst he had it in his eyes, his back to the door into the outer lobby. He thought, however, that he could still see her face sufficiently well to make it unnecessary for him to manœuvre for position.

"It's very charming of you to take such an interest in me," she said. "I live in Bloomsbury Lane—94; fashionable neighbourhood—in my grandmother's time."

"You haven't ever lived in the Fulham Road, have you?"

There was the merest fraction of a pause before the answer came.

"The Fulham Road? No, never. You must be getting me mixed up with Captain Wraile, one of the directors—he lives there."

"But you haven't lived there yourself?"

"No, I told you I hadn't."

"But you go there sometimes?" persisted Poole.

"Aren't you being rather offensive?" she said.

"Please answer my questions; do you ever go to the Fulham Road?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I expect I've been down it at times—it's not out of bounds, is it?"

"Have you been there lately?"

"I may have."

"Were you there last Friday morning?"

Poole felt sure that there was a waver in the assurance of the fine brown eyes that had looked so calmly into his.

"I think you're trying to insinuate something beastly; I shan't answer you."

"You refuse to answer?"

"Certainly I do; I don't know what right you have to ask me that."

"Then I will ask you something else; do you drive a car?"

Before there was time for a reply, Poole heard the door of the room close—the door on to the landing. He turned quickly and saw standing just inside the room a well-built, soldierly-looking man—the man whom he had seen on Friday evening leaving this building in company with the girl whom Inez Fratten had declared to be "Daphne."

"Good-afternoon, Inspector; my name is Wraile," he said. "Blagge told me you were here. Miss Saverel is rather embarrassed by your question about the Fulham Road; you see, you've stumbled on a secret that we were trying to keep—Miss Saverel is my wife."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOTEL "ANTWERP"

"You see how it is, Inspector," continued Wraile; "when I first came here as manager I was very hard up indeed. We had got married just after the War, when everyone thought they were millionaires and a golden age was just beginning. You know how all that dream crashed; we were driven down into two rooms on a top floor back—pretty desperate. Then I got this job and saw a chance of getting Miriam one too—she had been a typist and secretary in a small business before we married. There was a secretary here—an elderly and incompetent female whom I couldn't stand; I sacked her and put Miriam in her place—but I didn't dare say she was my wife—it would have looked too like a plant. I gave out that she had been recommended to me by a friend and as she soon showed herself absolutely efficient no questions were asked. Obviously she couldn't give her real address—mine—so she gave the address of an old nurse who keeps a boarding-house in Bloomsbury Lane and who forwards any letters there may be and is generally tactful. There's been nothing criminal about it—but it was a secret that we could hardly let out—having gone so far—and she naturally was embarrassed by your questions."

Poole wondered just how many of those questions Captain Wraile had heard. He realized now that he had not heard the door of the Board Room open but only close—perhaps deliberately closed to catch his attention just when he had asked that question about the car. He wondered, too, whether that manœuvring of Miss Saverel's had been less to get her back to the light than to get his to the door. Could she have known that Wraile was coming in?

While Wraile had been talking the detective had been thinking and had come to the decision not to press his question about the car; it looked very much as if the Wrailes were on the alert now and if too much alarmed—that question about the car had perhaps been too clear an indication of the extent of his knowledge—might bolt before his case was ready. He could almost certainly find out about the car by having Wraile watched.

"I quite understand, sir," he said. "I'm sorry to have upset Mrs. Wraile—I admit that her answers about the address made me rather suspicious—I happened to know that she lived in Fulham Road but that the address she

gave here was a Bloomsbury one. I had to have an explanation—I'm very glad you happened to come in and give it."

Poole thought he saw a lessening of tension in Captain Wraile's face; the latter took out a cigarette-case, offered one to Poole, which was declined, and took one himself. His first exhalation of a lung-full of smoke certainly seemed to indicate relief.

"Now you're here, sir," continued Poole, "perhaps I may ask you one or two questions. I've already explained to Mr. Blagge and Miss Sav—Mrs. Wraile, that I am here in connection with the death of Sir Garth Fratten. It has been suggested that the possibility of Sir Garth joining the Board was not welcomed by some of the directors; can you tell me about that?"

Poole noticed that Mrs. Wraile evidently intended to remain in the room while he interrogated her husband; in the ordinary course he did not like to question anyone in the presence of a third person, but in this case he realized that whatever passed would be discussed by Wraile and his wife whether she was there or not; he thought it might even be useful to have her there as he might intercept some glance between the two that might be a guide to him. It was even yet possible that their connection with the case might be an innocent one; their joint attitude now might give him an indication as to whether it was or not.

Wraile had received the detective's question, first with surprise and then with a frown of thought.

"I expect I know what you mean, Inspector," he said at last, "but though there was some disagreement about it I don't think it amounted to anything at all significant. I saw the account of the Inquest; I gather that you think Sir Garth may have been murdered and that you're looking about for a motive. There may have been some lack of enthusiasm about his joining the Board but it was a molehill that you mustn't make a mountain out of."

Wraile's smile was disarming.

"I don't know whether you know our chairman—Sir Hunter Lorne? A damn good fellow and a fine soldier, but not brimming over with tact. He threw this business at us like a bomb—without a word of warning—said he'd invited Sir Garth to join the Board and that he'd as good as accepted. Of course he'd got no right to invite him without our consent—or at any rate without consulting us—he's got a majority of shares so of course he can outvote us. But his inviting Fratten without consulting us put us in a very awkward position and he made out he'd done something wonderful and was only waiting for the applause. Lessingham was furious and I confess I was a good deal irritated myself. When I'd had time to think it over I came to the

conclusion that Fratten's joining the Board would, on balance, be a good thing; I told Sir Hunter so. I don't know whether Lessingham came to that conclusion or not—I've only seen him once since and we didn't refer to it then—it was after Fratten's death. You'd better ask him yourself if you want to know."

The detective thanked Wraile for his very lucid and helpful explanation and asked his "routine" question about his whereabouts on the evening of 24th October. Wraile looked in his diary and replied that he must have been at his office—the Ethiopian and General Development Company's office—till nearly half-past five as he had had an appointment with a man named Yardley, managing-director of Canning, Herrup, at five and their talk couldn't have lasted much less than half an hour—Yardley might be able to confirm that. He had then gone to his club, the Junior Services, in Pall Mall, had tea, and had another interview there with a potential client—Lukescu, the Roumanian company promoter. He was at the club certainly till seven, if not half-past, because Lukescu had been late for his appointment. There should be no difficulty in proving that because he had been very annoyed about being kept waiting and had more than once enquired whether the man had not come. Probably the hall-porter or one of the waiters would remember something about it.

Poole made careful notes of this story and tried to pin Captain Wraile down to more exact time, but the latter did not appear to take great interest in the subject and declared himself quite incapable of being more exact. The detective realized that he must go to the club and make some very close enquiries—an extremely difficult task, as clubs are very reticent about the doings of their members. There was other work nearer at hand, however, and Poole, taking a respectful leave of Captain and Mrs. Wraile, made his way down the four flights of stairs and introduced himself to the hall-porter.

Mr. Canting proved to be a man who did the duty that he was paid for. His employer gave him, he said, a good wage to be on duty in the hall, or in his cubby-hole looking into it, or working the lift, between the hours of 9 A. M. and 7 P. M. on week-days, 9 and 1.30 on Saturdays, with reasonable time off for meals. Being an old soldier (his row of medals—M.M., 1914 star; British and Allied Victory Medals; Belgian Croix de Guerre—showed that his had been no hollow service) he knew his duty and did it. He remembered 24th October because General Lorne, under whom he had served and who had got him this job, had given him a tip for the Ormonde Plate which had come off. The General always put him on to anything good that was going and very seldom let him down—if he did he sometimes gave him something to make up for it—a proper gentleman he was. On this occasion the General

had said early in the morning he was going to Newbury and would not be back again that day.

That same evening, just before he went off duty at 7 P. M., he remembered Miss Saverel, as she went out, saying something to him about "Blue Diamond" having won—had chaffed him about his "Turf successes," as she called them. A very nice young lady, pleasant but not familiar—always said good-night to him when she left. This had been one of her late evenings; about once a week on an average she stayed for an hour or two after the others had gone—probably finishing up some work. In reply to Poole's enquiry, Canting was quite sure that she had not left earlier and come back, as he had been in the hall or his office (as he rather euphemistically described his cubby-hole) all the evening—he always was. Oh yes, he sometimes left it to work the lift—often during the daytime but seldom in the evening—it was all "down and out," not "in and up" then. After 6 he didn't suppose he worked that lift once in a blue moon—certainly he hadn't within the last month or so. No, there was no back- or side-door; everyone coming out had to pass him.

This rather water-tight alibi sounded to the detective much less genuine than the more loose and casual one of Captain Wraile; Miss Saverel had so clearly impressed her late exit upon Canting by referring to a horse whose victory could be exactly dated by reference to the sporting press. Poole was prepared to bet that if he questioned the clerks and Mr. Blagge he would find that she had also drawn their attention to her presence in the office at the last possible moment. When he had time he would get a time-schedule down on paper and see what her limits—if she was indeed the driver of the wanted car—must have been; he would then know exactly what he had got to tackle. In the meantime, he must get in touch with Lessingham before closing time.

There were two obvious ways of doing this; one by going to the address given him by the Victory Finance Company—the Hotel Antwerp in Adam Street; the other by trying the office of the Rotunda Syndicate. Obviously, Lessingham would not be at his hotel at four o'clock in the afternoon; he might be at his office. Poole went to the nearest telephone-box and looked up the Rotunda Syndicate; it did not figure in the directory.

On second thoughts the detective realized that the Rotunda Syndicate was just the kind of concern (from what he had heard of it) that would *not* be in the Telephone Directory, though it might be on the telephone. There remained the Ethiopian and General Development Company, which would certainly have the address, or its managing-director, Captain Wraile; the

latter was closer at hand but Poole thought he had been disturbed quite enough for one afternoon.

To the offices of the Ethiopian and General, therefore, Poole made his way and, after asking for the manager—who, of course, was not in—obtained what he wanted, without too great a strain upon his skill and veracity, from the head-clerk.

137A Monument Lane was the address of the Rotunda Syndicate and, when found, proved to be a tall and narrow building squeezed between two more imposing edifices. It also proved to have no lift, and Poole had the pleasure of climbing six flights of stone stairs—only to find a locked and unresponsive door at the top.

"One-man show, for a monkey," thought Poole.

Nobody in the building knew anything about Mr. Lessingham, of the Rotunda Syndicate, but a clerk on the floor below had occasionally seen a stoutish middle-aged chap with a stoop mounting to, or descending from, the top floor. Once or twice, also, he had seen a girl, who looked as if she might be a typist. Poole realized that he had stupidly forgotten to ask Mr. Blagge for a description of Lessingham, but he felt pretty certain that this must be he.

There remained the Hotel Antwerp; at least something could be learnt about Lessingham there, even though it was not likely to produce a meeting. On reaching Adam Street, Poole was surprised to find that the Hotel Antwerp was a small and rather shabby affair, which seemed hardly the place to provide congenial accommodation for a financier, even if he were not a particularly stable one. However, there was no accounting for taste; possibly Mr. Travers Lessingham preferred to economize on his bedroom in order to allow of expansion elsewhere.

Within a few minutes Poole was closeted in the manager's office with Mr. Blertot, himself a citizen of the no mean city from which his establishment took its name. This, the detective decided, was a case where authority, rather than tact, was required. With the more select hotels and, still more with clubs, it was inadvisable to display the mailed fist—managers and secretaries, not to mention hall-porters, in those places, were extremely jealous of the confidential status of their clients and members, and needed very gentle handling if any information was to be obtained. But a small, second-rate hotel desired above all things to be on good terms with the police; therefore Poole produced his official card and corresponding manner.

"I am, as you see, a police-officer, Mr. Blertot," he said "an Inspector in the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard. I require some

information about one of your patrons, and I must impress upon you how serious would be your position if you withheld information or divulged the fact that you have been asked for it."

"But yes, of course, of course. Anything I can do," the manager—and proprietor—hastened to assure him. "You have but to say how it is that I can serve you, sir. My hotel, it is absolutely respectable—absolutely. I hope, I sincerely hope, that nothing has happened that will bring discredit upon it."

Poole ignored the pious—and probably optimistic hope.

"The person in question," he continued, "is Mr. Travers Lessingham; I understand that he is a permanent, or at any rate a regular, visitor here."

Mr. Blertot looked surprised.

"A visitor yes, certainly; but a permanent, a regular, no, not at all."

It was Poole's turn to look surprised.

"But is he not staying here now?" he asked.

"Oh no, indeed no,—not for some time. I get you the Visitors' Book; it is all in order, most regular."

He sprang to his feet, as if eager to prove the immaculate compliance of his establishment with the laws of his adopted land; Poole waved him to his seat.

"Not necessary at the moment," he said. "I want to ask you some more questions first. You might ring for it, though," he added as an afterthought. "I certainly was given to understand that this was Mr. Lessingham's permanent address; is not that the case?"

"In a sense, yes, perhaps it is. Letters for him come here often; we send them on to him. He has an arrangement with us to do so—for a small consideration. He lives mostly, Mr. Lessingham, in Brussels, I understand, but comes over sometimes for business in London. Then he comes here, to the Hotel Antwerp; we make him so comfortable, he says. Sometimes he comes, but not to stay—to fetch any letters, perhaps to lunch or dine—our *cuisine* is first-rate. Ah, here is the book!"

A waiter, who had previously answered the bell, laid a large and rather soiled black volume upon the table before his employer. From the book's appearance Poole judged that the flow of visitors was not sufficiently rapid to necessitate its frequent renewal. The manager ran his finger quickly up and down the names—scrawling, ill-written signatures for the most part—written carelessly or in a hurry with the indifferent pen and worse ink provided by the management.

"Ah, see, here he is!" exclaimed M. Blertot. "October 11th, almost a month ago. As I say, he is not regular, not at all. I look back."

An exhaustive search through the book revealed the fact that for the last two years Mr. Lessingham had visited the hotel at fairly regular intervals of about three weeks, sometimes more frequently, sometimes less, but averaging out at three weeks. Sometimes he stayed for a night only, sometimes two, three, or even four; there again, the average was something between two and three. The letters, mostly in typewritten envelopes, came—also on the average—about twice a week and were at once forwarded, with the extra stamp, to Mr. Lessingham's Brussels address, unless he had notified the management that he was on the point of visiting the hotel.

"And the address?" asked Poole.

"175 Rue des Canetons, Brussels, IV."

"And you know of no other address of his in London?"

"No, absolutely."

Poole made a note of the address, asked the manager to let him know at once if Lessingham came to the hotel, and took his departure. What he had just learnt puzzled him considerably, but it did not altogether surprise him. According to Mr. Blagge, Lessingham had been in London the previous afternoon; he might of course have arrived from Brussels in the morning and returned the same night, but according to M. Blertot, when he did that he generally called at the hotel for letters. According to Mr. Blagge again, Lessingham's visits to the Victory Finance office corresponded—so far as regards intervals—with his visits to the hotel; it would be a simple matter to check the actual dates with the list he had noted down from the "Antwerp's" Visitors' Book. That must remain till tomorrow, however; Poole did not feel inclined to return to Fenchurch Street that evening. He wanted, before taking any further action, to get down to pencil and paper and work out the possibilities of the Wraile alibi—male and female. When he knew exactly what he was up against he would know where to begin in his task of breaking it down.

As he walked down the Strand towards Whitehall his mind reverted, by a natural chain of thought, to the last occasion on which he had been in that romantic thoroughfare in connection with the case, and so, by a further step, to the rather melodramatic interview that he had had with the hump-backed moneylender, Silence. It struck him that he had allowed that unsavoury episode to pass too completely into the back of his mind; could it be that he had deliberately pushed it there, influenced, as Chief Inspector Barrod had

hinted, by his sympathy for—perhaps, even his attraction to—Ryland Fratten's charming "sister"?

Now, as he walked, he deliberately forced himself to review the ugly subject again. Silence had told him that on 17th October, a week before Sir Garth's death, Ryland Fratten had borrowed from him £15,000—at an exorbitant rate of interest—on the sole security of a note from Sir Horace Spavage saying that Sir Garth's expectation of life was very short. The money was lent for three months only, so that Ryland must have expected the death within that period. What justification had he for doing so? Sir Horace Spavage certainly had put no such limit on his patient's life, though he had not been in the least surprised when death had come to him so suddenly. He determined to try and see the actual note, or at any rate to get Sir Horace's version of what it contained.

In the meantime he resolved to review Ryland Fratten's connection with the case, to keep a closer eye upon his movements, and to thrust all unprofessional sympathy out of his mind. He had taken up the trail of Lessingham and the Wrailes with such keenness that he had neglected his first objective; it was not impossible that Ryland might be involved with them.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALIBI

THE two trails that Poole was now following—excluding, for the moment, Ryland Fratten—had diverged; one remained in London, the other led to Belgium—Brussels. He had to decide which to follow himself and which to allot to an assistant. His inclination was to give Lessingham the place of honour, but if he were to go off to Brussels now he would be out of touch with events in London—and he had a feeling that events would soon become more rapid. It was possible, too, that though Lessingham's trail led to Brussels, he himself might still be in London. Poole decided, therefore, to send Sergeant Gower to the address in the Rue de Canetons, whilst he himself investigated the alibis so kindly provided for him by Captain and Mrs. Wraile.

Returning to Scotland Yard, he sent for Sergeant Gower and told him to look up the train and air services to the Belgian capital and to be ready to catch whatever would get him there quickest. Gower, who had the reputation of being a walking Bradshaw, replied at once that there was an 8.30 P. M. train from Liverpool Street to Harwich which would get him to Brussels some time after 9 A. M. the following morning. As it was not barely six there would be no difficulty about catching it; what were his instructions? The question at once brought Poole to a realization of the difficulty that confronted him. It was easy enough to say: find Lessingham; but, if found, what was to be done with him? It was not, as yet, a question of arrest; when that time came the Belgian police might have to be called in. It was rather a question of interrogation and Poole wanted to do that himself. For the moment, therefore, he instructed Sergeant Gower to investigate the address; if possible get in touch with Lessingham, and then telephone to him, Poole, for further instructions. He gave certain definite hours at which he would try to be on the end of the telephone at Scotland Yard.

When Gower had gone, Poole took a sheet of foolscap and started to work on the Wraile alibis. Assuming for the moment that Mrs. Wraile was the driver of the car, and Wraile the man who had first jostled and then shot Sir Garth, he jotted down the times within which each of them must have been away from their alibi. Reviewing all the evidence as to time, it seemed fairly certain that the accident on the Duke of York's Steps had taken place

at 6.30 P. M., the death a few minutes later. With that assumption the time-table worked out as follows:

Mrs. Wraile must have been in position near the Admiralty Arch by 6.25 P. M. at the latest, probably by 6.20 P. M. In a car, it would take her quite 15 minutes to get from Ald House to the Admiralty Arch. She might therefore have left Ald House at 6.5 or 6.10 P. M. That was a significant time: it allowed the remainder of the staff to have left (and supplied her with the first part of her alibi) before she left herself. As for her return, she would probably have dropped her husband somewhere near his alibi (Pall Mall) and driven straight back to Ald House; getting there any time after 6.45. Canting, the hall-porter, had said that she left the building just before he went off duty at 7 P. M. It was a close squeeze, but just possible. How she dodged Canting so as to make him think that was the first time she left the building that evening, had yet to be shown.

Now for Captain Wraile. He must have been near the top of the Duke of York's Steps by about 6.20 P. M. That was, at the most, five minutes' walk from his club (The Junior Services in Pall Mall) which he must have left at 6.15. If, after the shooting of Fratten, Mrs. Wraile had driven straight up the Mall and turned past Marlborough House into Pall Mall she could have dropped her husband near his club by 6.40. Wraile had, therefore, only to be absent from his club from 6.15 to 6.40 P. M. It remained for Poole to find out whether that could have been done.

Having completed his schedule, the detective looked at his watch; it was twenty minutes to seven, a comparatively quiet time at clubs—and the same staff would probably be on duty as were there at the time of Wraile's alibi for 24th October. Poole put on his hat and coat, walked out into Whitehall, flung himself on to a 53 bus as it gathered way past the Home Office, and was duly dropped as it swung past the Guards Memorial in Waterloo Place. From there it was two minutes' walk to the Junior Services—at least two minutes to come off Wraile's danger-period.

Poole knew the ways—the excellent ways—of Club servants; they would give him no information whatever concerning their members. He therefore asked for the Secretary and was lucky enough to find him in.

Captain Voilance had been a Regular in his young days, had left the army in order to make a living on which to keep a young and attractive wife, had made that living working as a super-shopwalker in a big men's outfitting store in New York, had thrown up his job in August 1914 in order to re-join his regiment and had lost any chance of recovering it by having his face mutilated by a bomb in the Hohenzollern Redoubt in 1915. Three years of

home duty and constant operations had not sapped his courage, but they had sapped his capital, for his pretty wife was bitten by the war fever for restless enjoyment, and when she left him for a better-looking hero in 1918, Voilance found himself with about four hundred pounds, a daughter aged five, and his honourable scars.

Fortunately for him, those scars did actually—and exceptionally—profit him in his search for work. The Committee of The Junior Services, realizing that a sentimental public draws the line at grotesque horrors, appointed him Secretary of their club out of an application list approaching four figures. They got a very grateful and a very competent servant.

After the first shock, Poole realized at once that he was dealing with a man—not a "correct" machine. He gave Captain Voilance his professional card.

"I am a Scotland Yard detective, as you can see, sir," he said. "I have come here to get information about one of your members. I know that clubs don't give information about their members to detectives—not till they're absolutely forced to. It would take me a little time to put force into action and I don't want to do it—I want willing co-operation. I'll put my cards on the table."

Poole sketched the history of the case, without mentioning the name of Lessingham or Mrs. Wraile.

"My point is this, sir," he concluded. "A particularly beastly crime has been committed—apart from the murder, the attempts to incriminate an innocent man puts the murderer beyond sympathy. I strongly suspect Captain Wraile of being at least closely connected with the crime. He has told me a story which puts him in this club all the time that the murder was being prepared for and committed. I want you to help me either to prove or disprove his story. If it is proved, then he is cleared; if it is definitely disproved, then there can be no shadow of doubt that he is a murderer and that the sooner he ceases to be a member of your club the better for the club. Will you help, sir?"

Voilance sat for a minute looking blankly at the calendar in front of him.

"I know what my own answer is, Inspector," he said. "But I'm bound to consult a member of the Committee if there's one in the club. If you'll wait a minute . . ."

Within three minutes he was back.

"Not one of 'em in," he reported. "General Cannup was leaving the club as I came down the stairs—I wasn't quick enough to catch him." A shadow

of a smile flickered across the distorted features. “I must decide for myself. I’ll do what I can to help you. What’s the first move?”

“Time of entering and leaving club—do you keep a check on that?”

“We do, as far as possible.” Captain Voilance turned to the house-telephone. “Send me up the entry book covering 24th October,” he said.

“Then,” continued Poole, “I want to know what Captain Wraile was doing while he was in the club—he says he had tea and that later a visitor came to see him—a Roumanian gentleman called Lukescu.”

“Better have the hall-porter up himself,” Captain Voilance had recourse once more to the house-telephone. Within half a minute the porter appeared—a well set-up, handsome man of about fifty, with a fine show of medals on his livery.

“Come in, Parlett. This is Inspector Poole, of Scotland Yard. He’s making some confidential enquiries about a member—Captain Wraile. I’ve heard all the facts of the case and decided that the club shall give Mr. Poole all the information it can; it’s really in Captain Wraile’s interest. Sit down, Parlett; now, Inspector, fire away.”

Poole drew out his note-book.

“You’ve got the Entry Book there, Mr. Parlett,” he said. “Can you tell me what time Captain Wraile entered the club on 24th October?”

Parlett turned the pages.

“5.45 P. M., sir. Colonel Croope came in at the same time.”

“And left?” More pages turned.

“7.40 P. M., sir.”

“Do you know anything about him between those times?”

Parlett looked blank.

“It’s three weeks ago, sir. I’m afraid I . . .”

“I’ll jog your memory; a foreign gentleman—a Mr. Lukescu—was to call on him that evening.”

Parlett’s face at once brightened.

“Oh, yes, sir; now I remember well; the gentleman was late—Captain Wraile was in a proper fuss about it. I’ve got the time Mr. Lukescu arrived in the Visitors’ Book, but I remember well enough—he was expected at 6.30 but he didn’t come and didn’t come—not until close on 7. One of the waiters came and told me that the gentleman was expected at 6.30; I made a note of

it on my pad. He didn't come, though, and Captain Wraile kept on popping down to see if he hadn't come and been shown somewhere else."

It was Poole's turn to look blank.

"Do you mean to say that you saw Captain Wraile yourself between 6.30 and 7?"

"Yes, sir—two or three times."

"You can't say exactly what time? Could it have been before 6.45 that you saw him?"

"I couldn't say that I'm sure, sir. I only know that he came along at intervals to ask if his guest hadn't come."

"And the waiter who told you about Mr. Lukescu coming—did he bring that as a message from Captain Wraile?"

"That's right, sir; came straight from him!"

"At what time?"

Parlett scratched his head.

"Trying to think which one it was, sir; might have been Buntle or it might have been Gyne—most likely Gyne—he would have been on the smoking-room bell. Shall I send for him, sir?"

"Find out first if he remembers the incident," said Captain Voilance. "If not, try Buntle."

"I can't try him, sir; he's away today—burying a mother-in-law or something."

Poole groaned.

"It'll be him for certain, then," he said. "Just a moment before you go, Parlett; could Captain Wraile have left the club without your seeing him—between those hours you've given me, I mean?"

"Could have, sir; but most unlikely; either I or one of my assistants is in the box all the time—we could hardly have missed him—not at that time of day."

"No other door? Ladies' annex, or anything?"

The hall-porter snorted.

"No, sir, there's not. We leave ladies' annexes to the Guards and the Carlton," with which withering remark he set out in quest of Mr. Gyne.

"Looks pretty water-tight so far, doesn't it?" said Voilance.

"It's an open question yet, sir—my time theory isn't burst yet—not definitely, though it looks as if I should have my work cut out to prove it. That's the trouble; the proof lies with me, not with him."

Within five minutes Parlett returned, to report that Gyne knew nothing of the incident—it must have been Buntle who brought the message. Gyne, however, remembered Captain Wraile having tea in the smoking-room at close on six one day about that time—had said something to him about it's being so late but he'd had no lunch.

Gyne was interviewed and was able to fix the date as after 19th October because he had been ill for a week before that, and not within the last week or two—he was sure of that. On reference to his book Parlett was able to say that 24th October was the only day since the club had re-opened after its annual cleaning that Captain Wraile had come in before dinner-time. That seemed to fix Gyne's recollection to 24th October—not an important contribution in any case. Parlett reported that he expected Buntle back on duty at 3 P. M. the following afternoon. Poole rose to leave but the Secretary detained him.

"How long do you go on working, Inspector?" he asked when Parlett had left. "All night?"

Poole laughed.

"No, sir; not always. As a matter of fact I shall knock off now; nothing more I can usefully do tonight."

"I wish you'd take pity on a lonely man and come and dine with me—not here—too near our work. It would be a treat to me to have a yarn with someone who isn't a stereotyped soldier or sailor."

Poole was more than delighted to fall in with the suggestion and the two men spent a pleasant evening, dining at Pisotto's in Greek Street and, after a leisurely meal strung out by much reminiscent conversation, turning in at the Avenue Pavilion to see the revival of one of Stroheim's early masterpieces. It was twelve o'clock before Poole got into his bed in Battersea—tired, but much refreshed by his evening's relaxation.

The following morning Poole had a long interview with Sir Leward Marradine and Chief Inspector Barrod, reporting the result of his visit to the Victory Finance Company's office, his interviews with Mr. Blagge, Miss Saverel, and Captain Wraile—especially the relationship between the two last, and his failure to get in touch with Travers Lessingham. In his turn he learnt of Sir Leward's interview with the Chairman of the Company and particularly of Sir Hunter's declaration as to Wraile's experience of such

weapons as cross-bows—a regular genius in inventing devilments of that kind, Sir Hunter had reported his late Brigade Major to have been. As a result of the discussion that followed it was decided that warrants should be issued against Captain and Mrs. Wraile, to be executed in the event of Poole being able to break down their alibis, but that nothing definite could yet be charged against Lessingham; a good deal must depend on Sergeant Gower's report and Poole's subsequent interview. A statement from one or both of the Wrailes after arrest might, of course, implicate Lessingham, but Poole doubted if either of them was the type to give away a friend.

"And young Fratten?" asked Barrod. "What about him?"

"Oh surely you're not still after him?" said Sir Leward, who was hoping to return to favour in Queen Anne's Gate. "He's cleared by the exposure of this Wraile conspiracy, isn't he?"

"More likely to be in it," growled Barrod. "Don't forget that Poole saw him coming away from the Victory Finance offices the other day."

"Fallows reports he's been quite quiet lately, sir," interposed Poole. "He hasn't tried to give him the slip again. I haven't forgotten about him though, sir—I'm trying to see where he fits in. There's someone else I'm not quite happy about either."

"Eh, who's that?"

"Mr. Hessel, sir; if the Wrailes had the close-fitting time-table I think they had it seems to me more than a coincidence that Sir Garth should have walked right into it; I can't help thinking that he was led into it."

Sir Leward whistled. Barrod was silent.

"Have you questioned him since you had that idea in your head?"

"No, sir; it's only very hazy—and I've been afraid of putting him on his guard prematurely. It's only since yesterday that I've realized just how close the Wraile alibi must be. Shall I see him again?"

It was agreed that Poole should interview Hessel that morning and try to probe the latter's possible connection with the Wrailes and Lessingham. At one o'clock he was to be back at the Yard in expectation of a telephone call from Sergeant Gower in Brussels; at three he was to interview Buntle, the club waiter. It looked like being another full day.

Mr. Hessel, however, was not at Fratten's Bank; the manager thought he was away in the country as he had not returned since the week-end. His address was so-and-so. Poole returned to the Yard and, taking out his note-book, went through the whole case from beginning to end to see whether any fresh light struck him. As he read, he felt a growing conviction that

Hessel *must* have known of the projected attack upon his friend. Upon his friend! It was impossible to believe that any man could be guilty of such treachery—the luring of a friend to his death—the act of a Judas.

Deep in these thoughts Poole was startled by a call to the telephone—a call from Brussels. Faint but distinct came the voice of Sergeant Gower. He had called at 175 Rue des Canetons and found it a mean tobacconist's shop kept by an old woman of the name of Pintole. The lady had blankly denied all knowledge of anyone of the name of Lessingham but a combination of threat and bribery—threat of the Bureau de Police and the flourishing of a hundred-Belgian note—had at last pierced her obstinacy and she had confessed that a gentleman of that name had once called there and arranged for her to receive—for a consideration—any letters addressed to him there—and to destroy them. No, he never came there himself—she had not set eyes on him since his first visit, more than a year ago.

Poole instructed his subordinate to call at the headquarters of the Brussels Police and try to trace Lessingham through them, but he felt small hope of success—the trail, he was sure, led back to London. Nothing was to be gained by beating about the bush now; he must go to the offices of the Ethiopian and General and try to get in touch with Lessingham through them. Although it was the middle of the luncheon-hour Poole made his way at once to the City and, having found that both Captain Wraile and his secretary were out at lunch, tried to pump the junior clerks on duty. Wraile, however, evidently knew how to discipline his staff—with the exception of the clerk whom Mangane had been able to bribe; anyhow, Poole could get nothing from them but a request to wait till Mr. Lacquier, the secretary, returned. When he did return the result was little better—Mr. Lessingham was to be found at the offices of the Rotunda Syndicate—137A Monument Lane.

This was nothing more than he had learnt on the previous afternoon—but it was all that he was to learn on the subject from that office, even when Captain Wraile returned and graciously received him.

Feeling savage, and defeated, Poole made his way back by bus to Pall Mall. It was four o'clock by the time he got to The Junior Service Club but he was soon introduced to the bereaved waiter. Mr. Buntle proved to be as shrewd a man as the early disposal of his mother-in-law suggested. He quite well remembered Captain Wraile sending him with a message to the hall-porter about a Mr. Lukescu (he pronounced it Lookaskew) being expected. The Captain was sitting in the small library at the back—the room to which

visitors were generally taken for prolonged conversation; he was actually sitting at the writing table in the window when he (Buntle) entered.

"You don't remember what time, that was, Buntle?" asked Poole eagerly.

"I do so; Captain Wraile asked me what time it was—he couldn't see the clock from where he sat, sir. It was 6.25 pip emma."

"6.25! You're certain?"

"Absolutely, sir; because he said the gentleman was expected at 6.30 and I thought to myself 'I must slip along or he'll be here before I get there.' "

Poole felt blank depression settle upon him. This was surely cutting Wraile's limits too close for possibility.

"That clock," he asked, "is it accurate—does it usually keep good time? Is it set regularly?"

"Every day, sir; my own duty, as soon as it comes through each morning, is to get round and check every clock in the Club by the time from 2 LO. That clock's dead regular."

Poole groaned. This was surely defeat.

"That's what made me wonder, sir, when I checked the clocks next day and found this one was ten minutes fast."

Poole leapt to his feet.

"Ten minutes fast! Do you mean—do you mean that it had been put on?"

"Looks re—markably like it, don't it, sir?" said Buntle with a wink.

Poole stared for a second at the clock, then dashed to the window and threw it open.

"Where does this give on to?" he exclaimed ungrammatically.

"Yard at the back, sir, leading into St. James's Alley."

Poole leaned out. Dark as it was, he could see just below him the top of a large ash-bin. It would be a simple matter for an active man to climb out of the window—and in again.

"By God, I've got him," exclaimed the detective eagerly. "Called the waiter in to see him at 6.15—clock at 6.25—slipped out of the window the moment he was out of the room; back at 6.40 and straight down to the hall-porter—apparently only 15 minutes unaccounted for! Now for Mrs.—? What's her game?—probably the window-trick again—they generally repeat themselves."

Poole hurried to the nearest call-box and was soon through to Chief Inspector Barrod at Scotland Yard.

“The bottom’s out of Wraile’s alibi, sir. I’m going down now to see about his wife’s. But we ought to have them both shadowed from now on; if you agree, sir, will you send me down a couple of plain-clothes men to Ald House, in Fenchurch Street, about thirty yards west of Tollard Lane? I’ll put them on to their people.”

“Yes, that’s all right,” came the reply; “but hold on a minute, there’s a message for you. Fallows rang up half an hour ago to say that Mr. Fratten had slipped him again; he’s trying to pick up the trail.”

CHAPTER XXV

JUSTICE

THREE people sat in the Board Room of the Victory Finance Company—Captain James Wraile, his wife, and Mr. Travers Lessingham. A fire burnt in the hearth, the blinds were down, and the clock on the mantelpiece recorded 6.23. Lessingham was speaking, in a low and rather nervous voice.

"The fellow was at my hotel yesterday—they gave him my Brussels address. It's ten to one that he's out there now."

"He's not that," interposed Wraile, "because he was at my office this afternoon. Yesterday evening he was at my club, sucking in all the details of the alibi I made for him. I left them vague on purpose when I talked to him and let him find them out for himself—he'll think he's been clever as hell—till he discovers that there's not a quarter of an hour for him to play with. He can hardly accuse me of bumping into Fratten on the steps and then bumping him off on the Mall all within fifteen minutes."

"But he's been down to my office in Monument Lane too, I tell you," persisted Lessingham. "A fellow on the floor below told me—described him to me. He's on our track, Wraile."

"He may be, but I don't believe he's got anything definite against us. Of course, he must know something about the Rotunda, but there's nothing criminal about that—folly's not indictable, you know," he added with a laugh.

"What about the General, Jim? I don't like their sending for him," said Mrs. Wraile.

"I'd forgotten that for the moment. But what can he tell? Only about the Company's connection with the E. & G. and possibly the Rotunda—and that they know already."

"He was very queer when he came back. He didn't send for me for his evening letters as he usually does; he just sent for Blagge and I could hear their voices booming away through the wall for nearly an hour. I just caught a glimpse of his face through the door as he went away—it was quite different—grey and lined and black under the eyes. He didn't say good-night to anyone—as he always does."

"Eh, what, my boy?" quoted Wraile. "Of course he looked grey if the Yard had been putting him through it—generals aren't accustomed to that kind of thing."

"Yes, yes, Wraile, that's all very clever but you're not facing facts. They've dropped young Fratten, they . . ."

"They haven't; he's shadowed wherever he goes."

"Only by an underling, to keep an eye on him. They don't suspect him any longer. There's no use in hanging on now—we can never make the market now—too much'll be known."

"Don't you believe it; unless they prove anything criminal against us they'll never put their feet into business—it's not their job. I'm going to hang on as . . ."

Wraile stopped abruptly, his head cocked on one side as he looked at the window nearest to him. The blind was down and nothing was to be seen—nor, as the pause lengthened, could anything be heard save the steady tick of the clock on the mantelpiece. After their first glance of surprise, following his to the window, Wraile's two companions turned their eyes back to his face; evidently they had seen and heard nothing and were looking to him for an explanation. Wraile rose quietly to his feet.

"Someone on the fire-escape," he whispered, and began tiptoeing towards the window, signing to his wife to do the same. Slowly he drew an automatic pistol from his hip-pocket and waited, his ears straining for a sound. His wife, on the other side of the window, quietly watched him, knowing that her instructions would come; Lessingham remained seated, a look of strained expectancy on his face.

Suddenly, at a touch from Mrs. Wraile, the blind flew up; almost simultaneously Wraile flung up the window and, thrusting the pistol in front of him, called out: "Put up your hands, you!"

Lessingham shrank back in his chair, his hands clutching at the arms. He could see nothing beyond the figures of Wraile and his wife; unknown danger lurked beyond. Again the sharp command of the ex-soldier broke the short silence.

"Now come in—don't drop your hands for a second."

He drew back slightly and Lessingham could see a man's leg flung over the window-sill, followed presently by a crouching body and two outstretched arms. As the man straightened himself up and, his hands still above his head, turned to face his captors, Lessingham gave a gasp of

surprise and, half-rising from his chair, stared blankly at the intruder. It was Ryland Fratten.

"Search him, Miriam," said Wraile curtly. The girl passed her hands lightly over Ryland's pockets.

"Nothing," she said.

"Bit rash aren't you, young fellow, to come burgling without a gun?" asked Wraile lightly. "What's your game, anyway? There's no till in a Finance Company's office."

Ryland paid no attention to him. He was staring in amazement at the girl beside him.

"Good God; are you Daphne?" he said at last in a strangled voice.

Wraile searched his face closely and evidently gathered that surprise or misunderstanding would be waste of time.

"From which I take it," he said, "that you're Master Fratten, the Banker's son—or bastard, or whatever you are. I had a shrewd suspicion of it before you spoke, though I hadn't had the good fortune to see you before. Yes, that's Daphne—and that makes your position a bit awkward—you know rather more than is convenient."

Ryland stared at him, but soon turned his eyes back to "Daphne."

"What have you done to yourself?" he asked. "I hardly recognize you."

"Wonderful what a difference a black wig makes," replied Mrs. Wraile lightly. "Our acquaintance was so short that I'm quite surprised at your recognizing me at all."

"When you've quite done your charming reminiscences—which, I may say, are hardly tactful in the presence of the aggrieved husband—we'll just go through the mere formality of tying you up, young fellow. Got any rope about the office, Miriam?"

"There's some cord of sorts, I believe in the clerks' room."

"Get it, there's a good girl. If it won't do we'll have to use the blind cord. Oh, by the way, you can put your hands down now—but stand back in that corner where my gun'll reach you before your fists can do any harm."

Wraile, for all his bantering manner, did not for a second take his eye off his captive, while he kept him covered with an unwavering pistol. Miriam Wraile was soon back with a length of coarse but strong packing cord.

"Now, Lessingham," said Wraile, "it's about time you took the stage—you truss him up—then you'll be as guilty as we are. Give it him, darling."

Lessingham recoiled from the proffered cord.

"I—I'd rather not," he said. "I don't know how to—I don't think I've ever tied anything."

Wraile looked at him with surprise, not unmixed with contempt.

"Oh, all right," he said. "Give it to me. You'll note he doesn't protest against the assault, Fratten; his moral assent to it is just as incriminating as active participation. What a pity there's no one to witness it."

"Oh, I'll do that for you," said Ryland. "Don't worry; you're evidently all in it."

"Yes, but the trouble is that—well, you know the old proverb—too hackneyed to quote."

While he was speaking Wraile had tied Ryland's hands behind his back and also bound his ankles together, while Mrs. Wraile kept the unfortunate young man covered with her husband's automatic. At the last words Ryland's normally pale face turned a dead white, by comparison with which his accustomed pallor seemed the glow of health.

"Just what do you mean by that?" he asked, in a voice that he was evidently doing his utmost to keep steady.

Wraile laughed shortly and was about to reply when Lessingham broke in:

"I—I don't like this," he said. "What are you going to do, Wraile? You're not going to . . ."

"Oh, dry up," the other broke in curtly, his patience with his confederate evidently wearing thin. "You know perfectly well we can't afford to let this chap go now."

"Yes, but can't we put him somewhere till we're—till we're—you know what I mean."

"Yes, I know what you mean, and I'm not going to—not yet—not till I'm at my last gasp do I give up this chance of a lifetime now that it's at our very mouths. No, we're going through with this—and this young fool'll have to be put out of the way."

"Aren't you being just the least bit cold-blooded? discussing the poor boy's fate in front of his eyes?" interposed Mrs. Wraile. "Supposing we adjourn to my office."

"Not much, there's no fire there. We'll put him in there if you like. No, don't shout, Fratten; no one'll hear you and you'll get a bullet for a certainty; as it is, you've got just a hundred to one chance that we may hit on

some way of pulling this off without wringing your neck. Lessingham will plead for you and I'm sure your Daphne'll do all she can for her fancy boy. Come on, you'll have to hop."

Within two minutes, Ryland Fratten was securely tied to the table on which Mr. Blagge was accustomed to do the daily and exciting tasks which were his work in life. With his back flat along the table top, one arm tied to each table leg at one end and an ankle to each at the other—with a ruler stuffed in his mouth and tied round his head with a duster, Ryland was unable to move an inch or make the slightest sound.

"We'll leave your eyes and ears free," said Wraile jokingly—and thereby made, in all probability, the most vital mistake of his life.

The door closed, and Ryland was left alone in the dark and bitter cold—alone with his thoughts and with fear—the fear of death, immediate and solitary—death without a word or a look from his friends, from those he loved—not a touch of the hand from the girl who had just begun to dawn, in all her loveliness, upon his awakening consciousness. In a frenzy of rage and terror Ryland struggled to free his wrists or legs, to shout for help—even if it meant bringing death upon him; not a sound could he make, not the slightest loosening of his bonds could he effect; he could not even move the table to which he was bound.

Back in the Board Room, Wraile dropped the chaffing manner that had carried him through the none-too-pleasant task of preparing a fellow man for his death. His face now was hard and drawn. Lessingham greeted him with a nervous protest.

"Look here, Wraile," he cried, "this is madness. You can't kill the boy like this—here, in our own office, without any preparations, any plans. Think of all the time and trouble we had to take to . . . even that has been as good as found out. If we do this now, they're bound to trace it to us."

"Oh, cut it out!" exclaimed Wraile angrily. "D'you think I'm going to slit his throat here and let him bleed all over Blagge's papers? Give me a minute or two to make a plan, for God's sake. You must see that we can't let the fellow go now. Apart from his recognizing Miriam—that's one thing they haven't spotted yet—he may have heard everything we were saying in here. I can't remember now exactly what we did say, but we must have given ourselves away pretty completely."

While this wrangle over a man's life was going on, Miriam Wraile sat, swinging a leg, on one end of the Board table, busily engaged in polishing her well-shaped nails with a small pad taken from her handbag. It was

evident that, as far as she was concerned, the issue would be settled by her husband—all she had to do was to wait for orders.

Lessingham, too, apparently recognized that he could not, single-handed, oppose the stronger will of his confederate; he relapsed into gloomy silence. Wraile sat, his elbows on the table, his head in his hands, deeply wrapped in thought. Once more silence, save for the ticking of the clock. . . .

Slowly the minute hand moved towards the hour; there was a faint preliminary whirr, a short pause, and then—ping, ping, ping, ping, ping, ping, ping. The noise penetrated to Wraile's consciousness; he lifted his head and looked round. As he did so, startingly loud in the silent building, three sharp taps sounded upon the outer door—the door opening on to the staircase.

The three occupants of the room sat, rigid with consternation, staring at the door; even Wraile's usually calm face mirrored the shock of this startling summons. In the next room, Ryland had heard it too; hope leapt into his heart; he concentrated all his strength on one despairing effort.

Once again the three knocks—more insistent than before—shattered the silence.

"Open this door, please!"

The sharp, authoritative ring of the voice left no doubt as to its owner's status.

"Police!" gasped Lessingham, clutching at the table before him, and staring wildly at his companions.

Miriam Wraile slipped quickly to her husband's side and whispered in his ear. He shook his head.

"No—no. It may be watched. We must bluff them," he whispered. Then, aloud: "Who's that? What do you want?"

"Police-officer. Will you open the door, sir, please?"

"Board-meeting! Papers, Miriam! Take the Chair, Lessingham!" whispered Wraile. He pushed back his chair, walked slowly to the door, and —as Miriam slipped back into the room with a bundle of papers and scattered them on the table, turned the key and opened the door.

"What on earth do you want?" he said.

Without answering, Inspector Poole stepped quietly into the room, almost brushing Wraile aside as he did so. The latter took a quick look out on to the landing and then shut the door, but did not resume his seat. Poole's eyes moved quickly round the room, resting for a second on Lessingham

and Mrs. Wraile, and taking in the details of the scene. There was no expression, either of disappointment or surprise or pleasure on his face as he addressed himself to Lessingham, now seated in the Chairman's place at the end of the table.

"Very sorry to disturb your meeting, sir," he said. "There's a report of a man having been seen to enter your offices by way of the emergency staircase. May I ask if you have seen him?"

"A man? No, certainly not," answered Lessingham. His glance strayed towards Wraile, who quickly took command of the situation.

"How long ago is this supposed to have happened, Inspector? By the way, Lessingham, this is Inspector Poole, who came to see me yesterday about poor Fratten's death."

Lessingham bowed, and Poole half raised his hand to his bared head.

"About half an hour ago, sir. The information was a bit slow getting to us and then we had to find out from the porter which offices it would be."

"Half an hour ago? Oh, no; we've been in here ever since six and Miss Saverel's been in her office—she's only just come in. That's the only other room that opens on to the escape. The porter must have made a mistake."

Poole hesitated for a second, as if doubtful what to do in the face of this direct denial. The momentary pause was ended by a terrific crash from the adjoining room. Quicker almost than thought, the detective whipped an automatic from his pocket.

"Stand back!" he cried. "Put your hands up, Captain Wraile—all of you —back in that corner."

He took a quick step back to the door and, with his left hand, felt for and turned the key, which he slipped into his pocket. Still keeping his pistol pointed at the group across the table, he moved quickly across to the door into the passage leading to the manager's and clerks' rooms.

"Stay where you are till I come back," he exclaimed sharply and, leaving the Board room door open, darted quickly into the manager's office. A glance showed him a heavy table turned over on its side and on it the crucified form of Ryland Fratten. Snatching a knife from his pocket he had just cut the cord binding Fratten's right hand when he heard the door of the Board Room shut and the lock snap. At the same instant a window was flung up and there came the sound of hurried footsteps on the iron staircase.

Poole dashed to his own window, forced back the catch, threw up the sash and had got one leg across the sill before he realized that there was no

staircase outside it. A laugh came from the darkness and Wraile's mocking voice:

"Sorry, Poole; I misled you about the fire-escape. This is the only window that has it. You must try the stairs!"

The detective flashed a torch to the sound of the voice and followed its beam with the pistol in his other hand, but, though he made out a dim movement below him, the twisting flights of stairs made shooting impossible, even had it been advisable. Thrusting his body out as far as it would go he bellowed with all the force of his lungs:

"Hold them, Fallows! Hold them!"

There came an answering shout from below, a moment's pause, and then a terrible cry of fear, followed, a moment later, by the sickening thud of a heavy body striking the hard ground.

Poole sprang back from the window, thrust the knife into Ryland's free hand, and darted down the passage into the clerks' room. The outer door on to the staircase was locked, the key nowhere to be seen. It was useless to return to the Board room; that would mean certainly one, and probably two locked doors. Placing the muzzle of his pistol against the keyhole Poole fired twice, then, drawing back, crashed his heel twice above the shattered lock. The door, of course, was made to open inwards and so could not be forced out, but after two more shots the detective was able to tear his way out on to the landing. Dashing down the stairs, three steps at a time, Poole rushed out into the street and up an alley on the right of Ald House. In a small yard at the back, he came upon Detective Fallows seated on the ground, propped against the wall, his face white and a bleeding cut on his forehead. A few yards away lay a huddled form. Poole strode up to it and flashed his torch upon the face. What seemed to be a black wig had been forced over one ear, a broken dental plate protruded from the gaping mouth, but, in the bright beam of light, there was no mistaking the dead face of Leopold Hessel.

CHAPTER XXVI

. . . MAY BE BLIND

POOLE turned back towards his unfortunate subordinate.

"What happened?" he asked curtly. "Where's that constable?"

"Revolver, sir, I think," replied Fallows weakly "—hit me with it—on the head. Munt ran to the body—when it fell. I waited—below stairs—there's a drop. Chap jumped—hit at me as he came down—knocked me out. Don't know—where—Munt is."

He gave a gasp and collapsed into unconsciousness. Poole straightened himself and turned again towards the alley-way. As he did so, Ryland Fratten emerged from it, hobbling uncertainly.

"Sorry I couldn't get out before, Inspector," he said. "My legs were asleep—they'll hardly carry me now."

"What were you doing up—no, never mind that now; we must find these people." He ran down into the street and looked to right and left. From the direction of Cannon Street Station a disconsolate-looking uniformed police-constable was approaching at an awkward shuffle.

"Where the hell have you been?" demanded the Inspector angrily. "Where have those people got to?"

"Couldn't say, I'm sure, sir," replied the constable in an aggrieved voice. "When the body fell, sir, I ran to it. Then I 'eard a shout, and lookin' round, saw the other 'tec bein' laid out by a bloke with a gun. I darted after 'im" (the idea of the solid police-constable Munt "darting" anywhere would have tickled Poole at any other time). "The girl 'ad gone off down the alley—'er mate follered 'er. I made after 'im and as I turned into the street 'e was waiting for me and caught me slap in the wind with 'is knee—doubled me right up. 'E pushed me over and give me two more with the 'eel of 'is boot—in the belly and them parts—brutal it was, sir. Took me a couple o' minutes to come round. But I'd seen which way 'e'd gone—turned up Chaffer's Way there—'undred yards along—leads into Leadenhall it does. I went after 'em as soon as I could but I couldn't see nothing of them."

"Did you spread the warning? Did you tell the nearest possible points or patrols?"

"No, sir. I come back to see if I could 'elp that pore 'tec what 'ad been knocked out."

"You blasted fool," exclaimed Poole in a white heat of rage. "Your superintendent shall hear of this. If they get away I'll have you hounded out of the force. Get off now and telephone to your divisional headquarters—give them a description—Captain and Mrs. Wraile—tell them to look out for a two-seater Caxton coupé and to search all garages in this neighbourhood for it. Tell them to ring all the garages round here and warn them not to let that car out—to hold the owners if they can. Then get round to the men on point duty round here yourself and warn them—and any patrols you meet. It's murder they're wanted for, mind. Do this job thoroughly and I may forget the rest. Shift yourself."

P. C. Munt went off at the nearest to a "dart" that he had ever attained. Poole turned to Ryland.

"There ought to have been two plain-clothes men here from the Yard long ago," he explained. "I was going to put them on to the Wrailes in any case; luckily I linked up here with Fallows, who was on your trail, Mr. Fratten, and we picked up that uniformed fool just outside. I can't stop to explain more now, sir, but if you wouldn't mind staying with Fallows till I can send an ambulance—I'll get on to the Yard and get general information out. These people'll make for the ports in all probability. The roads and railways must both be watched—they may not use their car. I wish I knew what garage they used round here—it must be close at hand—I ought to have asked that fool Munt for the nearest ones—fool myself."

Poole dashed off to the nearest telephone, and was quickly through to the Chief Inspector Barrod. Within half an hour every station in London, and many in the suburbs, was being watched for the Wrailes. Within an hour all County Constabularies within two hundred miles of London had been warned of the possible car or train passengers, whilst every port in the kingdom had a similar description. A message to the divisional police in the Fulham district ensured that the Wrailes' lodgings would be at once put under watch.

Poole's part in this had taken less than ten minutes—the time of his telephone conversation with Barrod; immediately it was finished, he rang up the divisional station, found out that Munt had put his message through correctly and that all possible steps were being taken to search for the runaways, and finally asked for the locations of the nearest garages to Ald House. Only three were within the five minutes' walk that Poole, with his knowledge of Mrs. Wraile's time-table, put as the outside limit. Within

another ten minutes Poole had found the car in a garage almost at the back of Ald House—within less than a minute's walk. The Wrailes had not been near it since it had been left there in the morning.

Poole again rang up Scotland Yard and arranged for a plain-clothes man to be posted at the garage, in case the Wrailes even now came for their car. He also arranged for all cab ranks and shelters in the neighbourhood of Ald House to be interrogated—there was a strong possibility of the Wrailes having picked up a taxi as they had not taken their car.

Returning to Ald House, Poole found that the two plain-clothes men from Scotland Yard had at last turned up; they had come by Underground from Westminster and had been held up for twenty minutes by a break-down on the line. Soon after their arrival, a police ambulance had also turned up and removed Fallows and the body of Leopold Hessel. P. C. Munt, who had been explaining the situation to the plain-clothes men, reported that the other gentleman had said that he was returning to Queen Anne's Gate and would be there for the rest of the evening if Inspector Poole wanted him. The detective felt that Ryland's explanation of his peculiar behaviour could now wait; there was no longer any possibility that he was a confederate of the murderers. Besides, there was a lot of work still to be done before he could feel that the net spread for the Wrailes was complete; in all probability Chief Inspector Barrod would do all that could be done, but Poole was not going to leave anything to chance now.

During the hours that followed, the Victory Finance offices were searched, the Wrailes' rooms in Fulham not only searched but turned inside out; the owners had not been back since morning and there was no sign of a hurried flight. Poole collected all the papers he could lay his hands on for future inspection, but for immediate use he concentrated on an exhaustive search for photographs of the fugitives—he wanted to get their likenesses broadcast through the country with the least possible delay. A cabinet photograph on Mrs. Wraile's writing table gave an excellent representation of Sir Hunter Lorne's late Brigade Major in uniform, but it was not till a volume of snapshots had been unearthed and searched that a picture of his wife was forthcoming.

The rush of work had kept Poole's mind from the problem of Hessel's identity with Lessingham. Although it had come as a complete surprise, the detective had felt too suspicious of the banker's connection with the case—and particularly with the five minutes following the "accident"—to be entirely astonished. Now, as he worked on the creation of the net to catch the living criminals he felt that he could well thrust the problem of the dead one

into the background until his immediate task was completed. By the time he got back to his Battersea lodgings, well after midnight, he had forgotten all about it and dropped asleep the moment his head touched the pillow.

The succeeding days were trying ones for Inspector Poole. Once the machinery of Scotland Yard and of the County Constabularies was in full working order, there was little he could do himself in the way of pursuit. For days the search went on, at first with confidence, then with patient hope, finally with dogged persistence—but little more.

At a conference with the Assistant-Commissioner on the morning after the affair at Ald House it had been decided to take the public fully into the confidence of the police—primarily in order that the full power of the press might be brought to bear in the search. Placards bearing the likeness of James and Miriam Wraile were posted at every police-station and post office; all but the most dignified newspapers printed similar reproductions, together with minute descriptions, and every detail of the escape and many possible and impossible theories and suggestions. The B.B.C. gave nightly encouragement to the searchers, both professional and amateur.

An inquest was held on the body of Leopold Hessel, at which his identity with the financier, Travers Lessingham, was revealed, together with his association with Captain Wraile in the Rotunda Syndicate transactions. Nothing, however, was said at the first hearing about the Fratten murder, though naturally the public jumped to their own conclusions. The circumstances of Hessel's death could not, of course, be fully established without the presence of the Wrailes, and the inquest was adjourned for a fortnight.

Poole busied himself in connecting up the carefully concealed threads which had united this latest Jekyll and Hyde. Travers Lessingham had apparently been in existence since the year following the war, though he had begun his operations in the City in a very minor key—feeling his way, as Poole phrased it. In addition to his arrangement with the Hotel Antwerp and Mme. Pintole of the Rue des Canetons, Hessel had kept a small studio in the neighbourhood of Gray's Inn; this he had used for changing from one identity to the other, and as the tone of the lower grades of studio life is anything but inquisitive, there was small risk of anyone giving him away.

The actual disguise was a simple matter; a wig of curly black hair, darkened eyebrows and whitened face, tinted spectacles (too common in these days to excite suspicion), a differently shaped dental plate, coat padded on the shoulder-blades, and waistcoat and trousers in front—these required no great skill to adjust and manipulate. His appearances as Lessingham in

the City were so rare that no one had time to get to know him and so to begin to take an interest in his movements. That at least was how such of his City acquaintances as admitted to it explained their deception. The complete details of his performance would probably never be known unless the Wrailes chose to reveal it. They must, in the months of his more active life as Lessingham, have manipulated a great deal for him—and they would now, in all probability, never disclose the facts.

. . . . . .

Ten days after the escape of the Wrailes,—ten days in which not one whiff of scent came to the eager nostrils of the public, so that even their press-fed enthusiasm was beginning to wane—Inez and Ryland Fratten, with Laurence Mangane, were sitting at tea in the morning-room at Queen Anne's Gate when Golpin entered to announce that Inspector Poole was waiting in the hall and would like to see either Miss or Mr. Fratten or both.

"Oh, show him in, Golpin," said Inez. "And bring another cup. He may have some news."

Mangane rose to his feet, but Inez stretched out a detaining hand.

"Don't go," she said. "He can't be here 'with hostile intent' now. Ah, there you are, Mr. Poole; come and have some tea. We thought you'd forgotten all about us. Have you got any news?"

Poole smiled and took the chair that Ryland pushed across to him.

"I haven't quite forgotten about you, Miss Fratten; I've come to ask some questions."

"Oh-h!" groaned Inez. "I thought that was over."

"Not quite, but to show they aren't of 'hostile intent'—as I think I heard you say—I'll accept your kind offer of some tea." He turned to Ryland. "It's you, sir, really, that I want to ask questions. They're really more to satisfy my own curiosity than of official necessity. D'you mind if I do? They're quite harmless."

"No, of course he doesn't," answered Inez, who had seen Ryland hesitate. "But remember—we've got our own curiosity—you won't do all the asking."

Poole laughed.

"That's a bargain then. It's just this, Mr. Fratten. I gathered from you that you went up that fire-escape to try and overhear what Wraile and

Lessingham were talking about; how did you know they were going to be there, and how did you know about the escape?"

"I was there two or three nights before—as I believe you know. I heard Wraile and his secretary—as I believed her to be then—I didn't recognize her voice—talking about Lessingham—that he'd be there on Tuesday evening after the office closed. I found the fire-escape, because I went back that same night to look for it—as I was going home it suddenly struck me that there might be such a thing and that if there were, it was the very way to hear what was going on."

"Good for you, sir," said Poole. "But why didn't you tell me what you were after—that you were on the trail of this Rotunda business?"

"Why indeed?" broke in Inez. "Because he was a pig-headed idiot! He wouldn't tell me when I saw him next morning—snubbed me when I asked him what he was up to—so I didn't tell him about Miss Saverel being his precious Daphne. Nearly cost him his life, that particular bit of pig-headedness did."

"I'm afraid I'm partly to blame, Inspector," interposed Mangane. "I put you both on to the same trail without letting the other know. I knew Fratten didn't want anyone to know what he was doing and I thought that if I told him you were on it too, he might whip off."

"So I should have," said Fratten. "I don't suppose any of you'll understand, but I wanted to do something useful for once in my life, without shouting about it. You see, I've behaved like a first-class swine over this whole business—both before and after my father's death. There's one question that you haven't asked me, Inspector, and I know you want to—you're a real brick not to have let it out. You see, I know that you went to that chap Silence and found out about Sir Horace's letter—he told me when I repaid him the other day. I want you all to know about that—yes, you too, Mangane—then I shall have got everything off my chest and be able to start again."

Behind the tea-table Inez's hand crept along the sofa and slipped into Ryland's.

"You know I was engaged to a girl at the 'Inanity'—Julie Vermont? One says 'engaged,' but I don't think either of us ever thought of getting married—it was just rather fun—and quite a common thing with fellows who went with that crowd. But she meant business—money. When I suggested we should break it off—we'd had quite enough of each other—she talked of breach of promise. I needn't tell you the whole story—it worked out at £15,000 in the end—practically blackmail—she evidently knew how I stood

with my father. I was pretty desperate—I tried to get it out of him—wrote to him. He sent for me and gave me hell—you remember that, Inez—it was the day he had that accident—I couldn't help it then—he'd got my letter and sent for me. He practically turned me out. You know about that.

"Soon after that, Inez got me to go and see Sir Horace Spavage—the doctor—about father's health. I couldn't understand much of what he said—it was rather technical—so I got him to write it down. It amounted to a pretty poor 'life,' as the insurance people say. I was taking the note back to Inez when it occurred to me that I might use it as security for raising the money. Most of the money-lenders wouldn't look at me—I'd borrowed all over the place and they knew that father wouldn't pay up any more—but that fellow Silence will always go one further than the rest—at a price—and I took the note to him. He advanced me the £15,000 on that—for three months—at a terrific rate of interest. It was a gamble. That's the awful part about it; I didn't properly realize it at the time, but of course directly he was dead I did—I was gambling with my father's life."

Ryland stopped and sat, with haggard face, staring at the cup in front of him. Inez gently squeezed his hand, the others sat in awkward silence. Poole was the first to break it.

"Good of you to tell me that, sir," he said. "I appreciate your telling me—I shouldn't have asked. Well, it's your turn now, Miss Fratten." He looked at his watch. "I can give you ten minutes—I've got to catch a train."

"Oh, but I've got thousands of questions," exclaimed Inez. "I want to know about Mr. Hessel—did you know he was in it? I couldn't make out from the inquest."

"I didn't know he was Lessingham, if that's what you mean, Miss Fratten. But I had a very strong suspicion that he was in the plot to kill your father. Not at first—he completely deceived me; but as the actual facts of the murder came out—how it was done and how closely the Wrailes' alibis fitted to the actual time of the attack—it seemed to me that it couldn't possibly be a chance that your father and Hessel had walked into the trap at the one and only time that would fit in with the alibis that the Wrailes *had arranged beforehand*—Captain Wraile, remember, had asked someone to visit him at the club at seven, and Mrs. Wraile had to be back in time to see the hall-porter before he went off duty at seven—and couldn't get away till appreciably after six. No—Sir Garth must have been led at the exactly right moment, into the trap—led by Hessel. I remember now that the first time I interviewed Hessel he told me that your father always walked home across the Park in the evening. That, no doubt, was to make me think that his walk

was well known by other people—and on that they based their plan—but the *exactness* of the time couldn't have been counted on—it must have been manufactured.

"Then there were the 'Ethiopian and General' papers—they were missing from Sir Garth's carefully collected wrapper on the 'Victory Finance Company.' They must have been stolen. The opportunities of stealing them were very slight—Hessel called Mr. Mangane within a few minutes of Sir Garth's body being carried upstairs out of here, and had the study doors locked—took the keys. He carefully did not come back here till days afterwards, and then only went into the room with Menticle and Mr. Mangane as witnesses—to create the impression that nobody had a chance of touching anything—that nothing *had* been touched. Actually, there was a possibility that they might have been taken *before* he and Mangane locked the study. It was hardly likely that they were moved before the body was brought back—though not impossible. While the body was in here, Golpin was in the hall and swears nobody entered the study. Mangane might have gone in from his room—nobody else could have because he was there all the time. But I didn't think he had—I knew him personally. There remained the possibility that Hessel had gone in himself in those two or three minutes after the body was moved and before he sent for Mangane. There was no earthly reason why he shouldn't have—I came to the conclusion that he did.

"I should say that there's no doubt that your father had begun to smell trouble about the Ethiopian and General, Miss Fratten, and that his notes made that pretty clear. No doubt that was why he seemed to you to be worried—he was unhappy at finding a friend—Sir Hunter—mixed up in a shady business. That's why Hessel only took the 'Ethiopian and General' papers. Why he left the other notes—the details about the Nem Nem Sohar and South Wales Pulverization and the queries about all three, which attracted our attention to the Ethiopian and General,—I don't know. Probably he lost his head—or tried to be too clever—it's generally one of those alternatives that hangs a murderer.

"Of course I only came to this point quite late—the last developments came with a rush and I couldn't do everything at once—I had no time to question him again, though I tried to once—he was away. But we should definitely have linked him up in a day or two. Now, Miss Fratten, I've taken rather longer than I meant over that—I haven't time to answer more questions—because I've got something to tell you.

"It's what I really came here for—to read you a letter. My chief—Sir Leward Marradine—told me to come and show it to you—reading will be

simplest.

"It's a letter from Captain Wraile—postmark 'Liverpool,' date yesterday—no other indication. This is what he says:

"Dear Commissioner,

I'm taking a leaf out of the book of a man I've a great admiration for—the man who killed Sir John Smethrust. After he got clear he wrote to Scotland Yard and explained how he'd done it—said he liked to tidy things up. So do I. By the time you get this—it will be posted ten days from now—Miriam and I will be absolutely clear—not only across the water but across half a continent—start looking for us if you like. If you find us you're smarter than I give you credit for—but you won't take us alive—and one or two of you'll get hurt.

There are a few details I'd like to make clear. I take it, as a basis, that you know how the killing was done and the alibis arranged—your Mr. Poole seemed fairly sharp on that, though I don't quite know how he turned up at Ald House when he did on Tuesday night."

("By the way, Mr. Fratten, I was following you. Fallows rang up that you slipped him and we traced you there. I was looking for Mrs. Wraile's way out too—after finding that her husband had left his club by a back window I guessed that they'd repeated the trick at Ald House.")

"After Poole disturbed us, we cut down the escape. Poor Lessingham didn't know the rail was missing at one turn—he went over—quite accidentally, I needn't assure, Mr. Commissioner. We slipped your not very vigorous watch-dogs, got a taxi, and so—by stages that I won't mention—to the beginning of our long journey.

Now about earlier times. Lessingham—Hessel—struck on me when I was on my beam ends, like many other soldiers. He was on them too—psychologically, and for a different reason. He had had a devilish time in the war—'German Jew' and all the rest of it. His one idea was to get his own back—he was quite unscrupulous—and unreasonable as to how he did it and who he did it to, though he probably wouldn't have picked on his own friend, Fratten, if Fratten hadn't stumbled across our path—might have, though—complexes are funny things.

You've got to the bottom of the Rotunda game by now—I needn't bother you with that. By the way, my poor old General was quite innocent of what was happening—as he has been all his life—don't run him in. Resston, too, of course. Lessingham's official letters were sent by the clerks to the Hotel Antwerp and by them to Mme. Pintole, who destroyed them. But another set, and anything of importance, was sent privately by Miriam to his own home address—as Hessel. In that way he was kept absolutely up to date all the time though he only came near us about once a month. In the same way, he wrote to her or to me. It all went swimmingly till Fratten blew in.

The idea of how to kill him was Hessel's—I wish I could claim the credit for it. On the very day that Fratten told him about having been invited to join our Board he also told him about having a thorasic aneurism. By the merest chance, Hessel knew what a thorasic aneurism was—and where it was—he'd had a relation or someone with it. What's more, just after he heard about it, Fratten was nearly run over by a motor and the shock nearly did him in—that gave Hessel the idea. The affair on the Steps of course, we staged to distract attention from the actual attack. It would probably be put down to an accident and it was a million to one against my being traced. I don't know now how you got on to it. After the 'accident' I made for the car and Hessel led Fratten exactly where we wanted him, waving a bright cigar end to mark his course. The shooting was easy, but the damn slug caught somewhere and the cord broke. I went back to look for it but couldn't find it—perhaps you did.

My own disguise for the part, of course, was very slight—moustache darkened with grease stick—easily wiped off—and a clerk's voice. My overcoat and hat I'd hung on the visitors' peg in the passage outside the small library—the coat was a shabby one, so I'd walked in with it over my arm. My appointment with Lukescu was made officially by my office for 6.30—no doubt you checked that—but I telephoned to him privately not to come till 7. Of course the times were very carefully worked out and Hessel neatly steered Fratten into them.

Just two small points to interest the good Inspector. When he and Miss Fratten sleuthed us on the Underground that evening and we slipped out at Charing Cross Station, we took the only taxi on the rank—pure luck that—we'd had no time to plan—and then

slipped down into the tube at Piccadilly Circus. When he came to interview Blagge and 'Miss Saverel' at the Conservative office, she sent a note to me from under his very nose, telling me he was there and asking me to cut her out. I did.

Anything more you want to know, you must ask—but you'll probably be blue in the face before you get an answer.

Adieu, cher Commissionaire,
James Wraile.

P. S. I dedicate the identical cross-bow—it's killed Boches as well as bankers—to the Black Museum—you'll find it in the cloak-room at King's Cross."

"That's the letter, Miss Fratten."

"Well I'm dashed, he's got a nerve," said Ryland.

"So they've slipped you after all, Mr. Poole," said Inez—her voice poised half-way between relief and disappointment.

Poole shook his head.

"Four days ago," he said, "a bus conductor recovered from an attack of influenza—and saw our appeal. He came to me and told me that the Wrailes had boarded his bus in Leadenhall Street and got off at King's Cross. He probably wouldn't have noticed where they got off if they'd got off in the crowd at the King's Cross stop—but (as I found on pressing him) they got off one street short of it, by pulling the cord—and he noticed them. They took that turn to the left—they didn't go to King's Cross or St. Pancras.

"I searched the neighbourhood and found a garage from which they took their *other* car. They were already slightly disguised—in their walk from the bus to the garage—evidently they always carried small sticks of make-up in case a bolt was necessary. They had bought that car months ago and kept it in that garage—for the bolt and for one other purpose. That evening they drove quietly out of London, stopping somewhere to change their appearance properly—no doubt a make-up box was part of the car's equipment. They drove through the night—no one was looking out for a Morris saloon with a middle-aged couple in it—down to their cottage in North Wales—near Ruthin. From there, of course, it was a simple matter to run up to Liverpool—yesterday—and post that letter. They'd taken that cottage last spring and been there for very occasional week-ends—as the middle-aged Mr. and Mrs. Waterford—in that Morris car. ['That's the car she drove me in,' thought Ryland.] Nobody had paid any attention to them—nobody does now—except the police. The last link in the story that I've been telling you was completed by us this morning; their place will be

surrounded as soon as it's dark—it is already. I'm going down now to take them."

Poole rose to his feet.

"My train's at seven—I must go. Good-night, Miss Fratten—thank you for giving me tea—and for all you've done to make a beastly job bearable. Good-night, Mr. Fratten—you won't mind if I wish you good luck? Good-night, Mr. Mangane."

He turned on his heel and walked quickly to the door. The three others still sat, almost petrified by astonishment at the sudden change of situation. Inez was the first to recover herself; she sprang to her feet and ran after Poole shutting the door firmly behind her. The detective was just opening the front door.

"Mr. Poole, wait!" she said.

He turned back to meet her.

"I just wanted to say—that letter of Captain Wraile's—they're desperate people, Mr. Poole—do be—do be as careful as you can."

Poole looked down into the girl's flushed face and sparkling eyes—eyes in which sympathy and anxiety at least were present. A great longing seized him.

"If you . . ." he forced back the words that were surging to his lips. "Thank you, Miss Fratten," he said. "I shall do my duty."

He turned abruptly, opened the door, and walked out into the night.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

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

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Duke of York's Steps* by Sir Henry Lancelot Aubrey-Fletcher (as Henry Wade)]