THE NEW MADE GRAVE

HULBERT FOOTNER

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A Crime Club Story

WEIR LAMBERT, a young man fresh from college, had acquired the proprietorship of the *Kent County Witness*, a small country newspaper that had almost ceased to circulate. Weir was proprietor, editor, compositor and printer, and yet had plenty of time to worry. Nothing ever happened in Kentville; that, to an ambitious newspaper man, was a tragedy. And when at last something did happen, that, too, was a tragedy—a murder mystery that would have got front-page position in any city newspaper. But Weir didn't print it because back of his mind was a picture of a beautiful girl and a new made grave, and Weir had promised to help. Hulbert Footner makes a grand job of a dramatic situation and keeps his plot boiling with excitement to the end.

By the Same Author

THE SUBSTITUTE MILLIONAIRE

THE OWL TAXI	OFFICER	DANGEROUS CARGO
THE DEAVES AFFAIR		RAMSHACKLE HOUSE
THE UNDER DOGS		MADAME STOREY
A SELF-MADE THIEF		QUEEN OF CLUBS
THE VELVET HAND	THE VIPER	EASY TO KILL
THE FOLDED PAPER MYSTERY		DEADMAN'S HAT
THE CASUAL MURDERER		MURDERER'S CHALLENGE
RING OF EYES		THE ALMOST PERFECT MURDER

MURDER RUNS IN THE FAMILY

THE NEW MADE GRAVE

HULBERT FOOTNER

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I

TWELVE o'clock noon, and along the main and only street of Kentville all was peace. Everybody was indoors at dinner. The only living thing in sight was Giddy Withers' rabbit dog energetically searching for a flea at the root of his tail. The season was late April, the day Wednesday when the county weekly came out.

It was a pleasant miscellaneous sort of village with a few plain old houses behind fine trees, and one or two perky bungalows sticking out like sore fingers. In the middle of it there was a new brick courthouse with a war monument in front; next door a clapboarded town-hall, and across the way the ancient wooden Kent County Hotel. A cement sidewalk had been talked about, but was still a long way from being laid.

Half-way between the courthouse and a side road running down to Shepherd's Point stood a long shed with moss-grown shingles and an immense sycamore tree in front. The shed was so old nobody could remember how old it was, and it had never been painted. There were two horizontal windows in the side facing the road, and a door with a sign over it in quaint old-fashioned lettering reading: *Kent County Witness*. Touring artists had more than once been known to stop and sketch the printing shop, but the villagers considered it an eyesore.

Weir Lambert was proprietor, editor, compositor and printer of the *Witness*. "Smallest newspaper in the U.S.A.," he would call it, grinning; "unpaid circulation 375 copies weekly." At twelve-twenty Weir issued from Miss Mollie Powell's where he took his meals, and opening up the printing shop pulled a chair into the doorway and sat down, filling his pipe and grinning. Weir was usually grinning, though not of late always mirthfully. At the moment the grin was fixed in hard lines like that of a man who is looking forward to getting back at his enemies.

He was not popular in Kentville. His innovations had been badly received. The *Witness* had been coming out in its present form for over one hundred years and the Kent Countians liked it that way. The notion that a newspaper ought to give the inside dope about local happenings angered everybody. Certainly they were not going to let any young college fellow from the north tell them where to get off. This had been carried so far that even when Weir began to urge in his columns that the tide-water terminal of

the new railway from the coal fields ought to be established somewhere along Kent County's magnificent water front, it made the old shellbacks sore, and the proposal died for lack of support.

Just before going to dinner Weir had despatched his weekly edition to the local post-office to be distributed with the day's mail, and now he was awaiting results. Hence the grin. This week's paper contained an item more sensational than any which had appeared during the whole year of Weir's ownership. They couldn't blame him for it because it had originated outside the shop.

At twelve-twenty-five the mail arrived per motor truck from Newcastle, the capital city, seventy-five miles away. The post-office was on the ground floor of the town hall. The truck backed up to the door and the bags were carried inside. Along the village street men came out of the different houses chewing toothpicks, and gathered in a group outside the post-office gossiping while they waited for the distribution to be completed.

Weir could see them from where he sat. The first to issue from the post-office with a copy of the *Witness* in his hand was old Tasker Teeple who looked upon himself as a sort of Kent County encyclopædia. He showed the paper to the other men, rapping it with his forefinger. About three minutes later he appeared in front of Weir with the offending sheet clutched in his hand. Tom Horsfall, Jim Means, Giddy Withers and others trailed after him.

Tasker Teeple was so excited that his upper plate came loose and he had to keep shoving it back with his tongue. This gave his utterance a somewhat broken effect. "What the hell . . . does this mean?" he demanded.

"What it says, I reckon," answered Weir, idly swinging on the hind legs of his chair.

Tasker Teeple was pointing to an inch and a half display ad. in the middle of the front page of the *Witness*. It read:

PERSONAL

TO THE WHIP-POOR-WILL:

HE HAS GONE AWAY. COME TO ME QUICKLY.

"What the hell! . . . What the hell! . . ." all the men were murmuring, looking at each other, with wondering, puzzled, half-angry expressions.

"Nothing like that ever happened down here!" said Tom Horsfall indignantly.

"What are you doing?" demanded Gid Withers, "trying to have some fun with us?"

"I gave that up some time ago," said Weir dryly. "This is just an advertisement that was offered to me in the regular course of business. I saw no reason why I shouldn't run it."

"Who offered it to you?" asked several voices at once.

"I don't know."

"What like person . . . was it brought it to you?" stammered Tasker Teeple. "You tell us . . . and we'll find out . . . who it was."

"I didn't see her," said Weir. "The ad. came to me through the mail with twenty-five cents in stamps to pay for it."

"You charge a dollar for an ad. that size!"

"Sure," said Weir coolly. "I admit I thought it had a certain news value, so I gave it a display."

"News value!" snorted Tasker Teeple. His plate dropped all the way down, and he had to turn his back while he adjusted it.

"Aah! he's only fooling us, men!" said Gid Withers. "This is just one of these here now hoe-axes! Weir made it up hisself!"

Weir got up from his chair and went to his desk inside. He came back with a sheet of cheap notepaper on which copy for the ad. had been painstakingly printed in pencil. Also an envelope with the address made out in the same way.

"You see it was mailed right here in Kentville yesterday," he said, referring to the postmark. "Probably dropped in the box sometime night before last."

"Right here in Kentville!" they murmured, glancing at each other almost in fear. It was as if the foundations of their existence had been shaken.

Miss Nannie Bellhouse, a prominent member of the Ladies' Auxiliary, came down the road from the post-office in her Ford. She drew up outside the group of men in front of the printing shop.

"I think it's perfectly disgraceful!" she cried. "Printing such things in the newspapers! It's corrupting to the young!"

Miss Nannie was no great favourite amongst the men of the village, who called her Nice Nannie or Nosey Nannie behind her back, but in a situation of this sort they felt obliged to back her up. "She's right! . . . She's right!" they muttered. "We don't hold with such doings in Kentville!"

"Corrupting to the young!" said Weir, honestly surprised. "I just don't get you."

" 'He has gone away!' " quoted Miss Nannie from her copy of the *Witness*. "Who is *he*? The husband, of course. The brazen creature is publicly advertising her shame! In all the years of my life I have never been so mortified by anything which has appeared in our county paper! Action ought to be taken about it, and I'm going to see that it is!" She let in her clutch with a jerk and went bouncing down the road.

"She's absolutely right!" said Tasker Teeple. "This is our county and our newspaper, and if it ain't run decent we will know what to do!"

Weir was getting pretty well fed up with Tasker Teeple. "Lend me your paper for a moment," he said blandly. He called the old man's attention to a standing ad. on the front page which had appeared every week for six months past:

FOR SALE!

THE KENT COUNTY WITNESS

PLANT AND GOOD-WILL, $600

Weir Lambert.

"This newspaper is mine," said Weir, "because I paid my good money for it. If you don't like the way I run it, it's up to you to buy me out for the

same price I paid. If no one man amongst you has the money to put into it, make up a company and appoint your own editor. . . . How about it?"

The men moved their feet uneasily, and looked up and down the road.

"As a matter of fact," Weir went on, "I've had two openings to sell the paper and Tasker Teeple blocked them both. Why? Because Tasker fancies himself as an editor, and he thinks he can get the rag for half price, or maybe for nothing at all if he can make the county too hot to hold me! But I'm here to tell Tasker Teeple and the rest of you too, that that will never happen so long as I have two good fists to defend myself and a voice to speak up for my rights!"

Weir relighted his pipe to give this time to sink in. Tasker Teeple got red in the face and champed his false teeth together, but said nothing.

"Aah!" growled Gid Withers. "I don't believe there's nothing in this ad. nohow. What's to prevent Weir from writing it out hisself and posting it to hisself."

"Wrong again," said Weir. "I'll prove it to you."

He fetched a pad of copy-paper out of his shop. "I don't know if you men are aware of it, but there's just as much character in print letters as in ordinary handwriting. Watch me!"

He copied out the ad. and handed the two specimens to Gid. They were passed around.

"A newspaper man is accustomed to print characters from making up advertising copy and so on. Whereas anybody can see that the original copy for this ad. was written by some young person who was not used to writing print."

They were only partly convinced. "If you don't believe me," said Weir indifferently, "appoint a committee of one and let him search through my shop and personal belongings to see if I have any paper and envelopes the same as that."

"What's the use of that?" growled Gid to his mates. "If he had any such paper it's well hid or he wouldn't make the offer."

Weir had recovered his original copy. "If you want to get to the bottom of this matter," he said, "why don't you go round to the different stores and find out who sells paper like that, and who has bought any lately?"

"Will you let us take that paper to show?" demanded Gid suspiciously.

"Sure!" Weir divided the sheet in half. "You can take the part that isn't written on," he said. "I might want to do a little sleuthing myself later."

Gid took the paper and immediately started off for Riordan's store, followed by his friends. It made Weir grin to think of these simple-minded villagers undertaking the part of detectives.

Tasker Teeple lingered long enough to shake a bony forefinger under Weir's nose. "Don't think you've heard the last of this!" he snarled. "You've done nothing but make trouble ever since you come here, and we've had about enough of it, see?

"Oh, yes?" said Weir. "I suppose you never had any trouble before I came."

"Don't you bandy words with me, young fellow!" cried Tasker furiously. He strode off after the others.

Weir's grin faded when there was no longer any necessity of keeping his end up. His face became hard and sore. Locking up his shop, he turned up the road in the opposite direction.

In the path leading to Willie Penrose's front door a group of women were excitedly gossiping over a copy of the *Witness*. Mrs. Penrose called out with a smirk of false friendliness:

"Oh, Mr. Lambert, who put this funny ad. in the paper?"

One of the things which Weir had had to learn was that all the village ladies must be addressed with the unmarried prefix though they might be grandmothers. "I don't know, Miss Mamie," he answered politely. "It came to me anonymously."

An ugly look of balked curiosity came over the women's faces. Weir could feel their hostile stares in the back of his neck as he walked on.

The sheriff, Frank Baker, lived in the last house of the village where the Shepherd's Point road struck off to the left. Weir found him at the door of his garage working over his car. He was cleaning spark-plugs. Weir sat down dejectedly on the running board, resting his elbows on his knees.

"What's eating you, lad?" asked Frank in his friendly fashion. "You look like you bit into a green p'simmon." Frank was a man of fifty who looked thirty-five. Blue eyes, close-cropped brown poll; shoulders like a prize-fighter, and a waist like a boy's.

“Frank, I wish you’d tell me why the folks around here hate me!” Weir burst out. “Every man’s hand is raised against me and every woman all but sticks out her tongue as I pass by. God! what a bunch of nitwits!”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that,” said Frank calmly. “I’m related to most of them, and I know them all. I wouldn’t claim that we had presidential timber in Kentville, but, at that, we just about measure up to any village.”

“Then what’s the matter with me? I was popular enough at college. As far as I know I never had an enemy in the world until I came here.”

“Well, ’taint exactly your fault neither.”

“I wish you would explain it to me.”

Beside the car stretched one of Frank’s long chicken runs enclosed by a high wire fence. Up and down inside it strutted his portly buff Orpingtons, pecking in the dust with dignity. Frank tossed a pebble through the wire. All the nearby hens ran to investigate the windfall and turned away in disgust.

“See them hens?” said Frank. “You couldn’t imagine anything more pious and respectable than them biddies. But suppose I was to take a hen pheasant, clip her wings and drop her in the middle of their run. What would happen? Them same hens would ruffle up their feathers like furies out of hell and run at her and peck her to death. For why? Just because she was different from them.”

“I see your point,” said Weir gloomily, “but men ought not to act like hens.”

“This is an unusual out-of-the-way neck of the woods,” said Frank. “With the sea in front of our county, and a big estuary on either side, our folks don’t get no chance to mix up with the world much, and what a man don’t know he fears. That’s why they act so ugly.”

“You’re not like that.”

“Oh, I travelled when young,” said Frank with a twinkle. “It broadened my outlook.”

“I was a fool ever to have come here!” said Weir bitterly. “I thought it would be a good life, and give me leisure so that I could learn to write. What a foolish dream! . . . And now that I’m here, how the hell am I going to get away? Every cent I have is sunk in the *Witness*. I hate to own to being licked!”

“Well, it’s a good bit like marriage,” said Frank soothingly. “The first year is the worst. This here animosity will cool down.”

“Yes, if they don’t get me first,” muttered Weir. “They’re ripe for it now. And all for no reason except that I undertook to print the truth in my newspaper.”

“It’s contrary to custom,” said Frank dryly.

“Any night when it’s too dark to see their faces they are likely to descend on me and smash up my plant.”

“I’m here to stop that, kid.”

“Sure. But you have to travel all over the county. They’ll choose a time when you’re out of the way. If you come back and find me smashed what could you do? Or anybody?”

“I’ll look into this business,” said Frank.

“Frank,” said Weir earnestly, “I can’t help but feel that there’s something more behind it than mere village prejudice.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve got three real enemies here. A man cannot mistake his enemies. They are Tasker Teeple, young Earl Souter, and Peter Birkett the States’ attorney. They egg the others on. Now I’ve never harmed these men. Consequently I feel as if they had some *interest* in running me out of the county. It’s *worth* something to them. There’s somebody paying them.”

“Who could it be?” demanded Frank blankly.

“I don’t know.”

“I reckon they’re excited about this ad. in the paper, eh?”

“Excited! Half out of their minds with balked curiosity.”

“Do you think the ad. is genuine?”

“Sure, I do! Who would ever think up a joke in just that way? It has too strange a sound to be a fake. There are only a few words in it, but they ring true. ‘Come to me quickly.’ Some poor girl is in a jam. I’m certain of it.”

“But I just can’t see any of our Kent County girls putting an ad. in the paper like that.”

“It wasn’t a local girl. A local girl wouldn’t be familiar with the idea of a personal ad. This is somebody who has read the New York newspapers.

Besides a Kent County girl would say: 'Come to me quick.' "

"You appear to have doped it all out," said Frank.

"I've got nothing else to think about," said Weir.

"There is no foreign girl anywhere in the county," said Frank. "If there was I would hear of it certain. I have to go everywhere. Why, you could count the foreigners of both sexes on the fingers of one hand."

"You're just like the rest of them," said Weir good-naturedly, "you think you're bound to know everything that's going on. But, after all, Kent County's no different from the rest of the world. There is plenty going on here that is only known to two!"

"Maybe so. Maybe so. What do you calculate is behind this?"

"A fellow and a girl have met accidentally, and fallen hard for each other," said Weir. "They don't know each other's names. Hell! when you're absolutely crazy about a girl, what does her name matter? Somebody belonging to the girl, father, brother, husband—it's nothing to me if she's married, has driven the fellow away, and she's trying to get in touch with him. It's perfectly simple."

Frank shook his head. "Don't seem possible here in old Kent," he said. "Every white person knows every other white person."

"But it *has* happened," said Weir, "and it won't let me rest."

"If she has a fellow, why not leave it to him."

"No, something has gone wrong," said Weir. "She wouldn't advertise like that unless she felt desperate. Maybe her people have *got* the young fellow. Or maybe he's no good, and has abandoned the girl to her fate."

"You have made up quite a story about it," said Frank.

"Well, that's my business," said Weir.

"Even if it should be the way you say, what could another young fellow do for her?"

"I don't know, but I can't let the thing drop. It has got under my skin, Frank. You see she's a young girl, real young, not much more than a child. The evidence shows that. It's like a cry for help in my paper. I can't rest until I find out what's in it."

"Well, you certainly are going out of your way to find trouble," said Frank. "But you're a good-hearted lad at that. I'm with you if I can be of any

help."

"Sure, you can help."

"What's your plan?"

"The only lead I have is in the signature to the ad.," said Weir; " 'The Girl on the Hill.' As soon as I saw that I sent to Washington for the geodetic survey maps covering Kent County. These maps show every house as a little black dot, and of course the contour lines give you all the hills at a glance. You can help me to eliminate the houses on hills that you know are out of the running, and I will visit the others one by one. I'll make believe to be canvassing for subscriptions to the paper. The maps ought to be here to-morrow if the government is anyways . . ."

"Cheese it!" Frank hastily interrupted. "Here comes the Long and the Short of it with murder in their eye!"

Miss Nannie Bellhouse had stopped her car in front of the house, and she and her side partner, Miss Sally Atwill, were marching up the drive towards the garage. Miss Nannie was short and plump as a snowbird; Miss Sally elongated, bent and rusty as an old rook. Miss Nannie did the talking.

"Sheriff," she said, biting off each word with a snap, "it appears that there is a wicked and scandalous situation existing in our county. The Ladies' Auxiliary have held a meeting about it, and Sally and I have been delegated to call on you and urge you to take action."

"Have you got a warrant?" asked Frank with a perfectly straight face.

"No!"

Frank wiped his grimy hands on an old shirt, and produced a dilapidated note-book from his back pocket. "Names and full particulars, please," he said.

"Don't you trifle with me, Frank Baker," snapped Miss Nannie. "You know perfectly well what I am talking about. I guess you read the paper. We want you to find out who put that ad. in."

"Well, this is a new view to take of the duties of the Sheriff," drawled Frank. "But I'll do my best, ladies. Always happy to oblige."

"You will have plenty of help," said Miss Nannie. "We have telephoned to the ladies of the other churches. A committee will be formed in each parish to inquire into the matter. . . . Moreover," she added with a poisonous

glance in Weir's direction, "we will soon know it if you don't do your full duty in this matter!"

She and Miss Sally marched back to their car.

"God help the poor girl, whoever and wherever she may be!" muttered Weir.

"So say I!" added Frank.

II

IT appeared that the government was not too prompt in answering its letters. One day after another passed, and the maps did not arrive. Weir started his search anyhow because a state of inaction was intolerable.

He had a car, but was hampered by an insufficiency of money for gasoline and incidental expenses. Scarcely anybody ever paid for a subscription to the *Witness*. It was simply not the custom to do so. Yet Weir could not stop circulating the sheet, or he would have lost what advertising he had. His meagre income from that source was far in arrears.

"People around here must expect a newspaper man to live on air," he said bitterly to Frank.

"They think he grafts enough at election time to last him through the year," said Frank grimly.

Weir started at the lower end of the county where there were but few hills, and worked his way northward. He spent a couple of precious dollars on motor-boat hire out to the sea islands. The only hills there were sand dunes, but he was determined to neglect nothing. The sea-islanders were like a race apart. Few of them could read or write and the *Witness* was almost unknown to them. Weir obtained no clues from them.

The other searchers confined their activities mainly to the northern part of the county. But Weir was aware that he was closely watched every day. Wherever he happened to be, on Tylee Island, in the village of Bethany, or at the head of Merryman's creek, he was always accidentally running into Giddy Withers or Tom Horsfall. Evidently they believed that he possessed private information.

There were at least three other searches going on. Weir heard that the church ladies, driving in pairs, were burning up the roads all over the county. They concentrated on the homes, and had no hesitation in asking the most intimate personal questions. They turned up more than one hidden scandal, but not what they were after.

On the other hand the men working under the general direction of Tasker Teeple, made a focal point of each general store in the county. Every family had to patronise some store, and they were naturally the distributing points

of local news. Tasker kept in touch with the proprietor of every store by telephone.

Weir awaited the result of these activities with a keen anxiety. At least he had the satisfaction of knowing he would not be kept in suspense. If anything was discovered it would instantly be known to all. Three days passed and the searchers were still baffled. The clue of the notepaper was no good, because half the stores in the county carried such paper.

Meanwhile Frank Baker was pursuing his own quiet investigation. His duties as sheriff took him into the remotest corners of the county. He had the faculty of winning peoples' confidence. They knew he had a close mouth. But even Frank was unable to gain the slightest clue to the identity of the girl on the hill.

Every night late, Frank and Weir met to talk over the situation. In order that the villagers might not think they were working in collusion, Frank would leave his house by the back door, descend into a gully and climb up to the back door of Weir's place. They sat in Weir's bedroom with the door closed so that no lights would show to the road.

By Sunday night Frank had become completely incredulous. "These nosey women and evil-minded men have gone over the county with a fine tooth comb," he said. "Nothing else has been talked about for three days. The story has been advertised in every shack. It just ain't possible that such a situation could exist, and that it could be hidden through all this."

"It does exist and it is hidden," said Weir stubbornly. "You never could convince me that there is anybody in the county with imagination enough to have thought up that ad. unless there was something behind it."

"Well, have it your own way," said Frank good-humouredly. "Maybe the fellow and the girl have come together again as a result of the ad. and are laughing to themselves at all the to-do that is being kicked up about them."

"Let's hope so," said Weir. "Maybe I'll know to-morrow."

"What do you mean?"

"If he *hasn't* come to her, maybe she'll put in another ad. this week. I'll be looking for it."

"It'll never get by the post-office," said Frank. "Every postmistress in the county has her eye peeled for letters addressed to the *Witness*."

"If the girl has got sense she will realise that," said Weir. "Maybe she can find some other way of getting it to me."

On Monday morning Weir had to give up his search for the time being. He would require the whole of the two remaining days to get out his paper. He had to set up the front and the back pages himself. The two inside pages came to him from town already printed. Thus he got his paper free. This week he had a whole sheaf of indignant letters from subscribers to run.

On Tuesday the village wags began to come in with answers to the mysterious ad. that they wished to insert, couched in phrases of more or less crude wit. Amongst them was Earl Souter with half a dozen of his cronies. Earl was the only son of the richest farmer in Kent. He was a handsome fellow in his way with thick shining hair and a red face. Though he was married, he still went around with the young bachelors. A loud laugh and a well-filled pocket-book provided his passport to popularity.

Earl threw an ad. on the counter, saying with his laugh: "Put that in, Weir!" Weir read:

> TO THE GIRL ON THE HILL
>
> SEND YOUR ADDRESS IN TO THE PAPER, DARLING, AND WE WON'T SEE YOU WRONGED.
>
> *The Boys of Kentville.*

"I won't print that," said Weir.

"Hell! I'll give you a dollar for it," said Earl, producing a fat roll and peeling off the outside bill.

Weir resisted the impulse to tell him what he could do with his dollar. "Nothing doing," he said.

"If you took that ad. last week why not take this?" demanded Earl truculently.

"Because I believed that to be genuine, and I know this is a fake!"

"Who's going to say what's genuine and what's a fake?"

"I am."

"Who do you think you are?"

"The editor of this paper."

A noisy wrangle resulted. “I’ve a darn good mind to smash your old press and throw your type on the floor!” shouted Earl.

“Go ahead!” said Weir, taking out his pipe. “I could recover from you.”

The matter went no further because Frank Baker happened to stroll by in the road. He cocked a weather eye towards the door of the printing shop and Earl Souter *et al.* retreated, making out that it was all in fun anyhow. That means I’ve made another half-dozen enemies, Weir thought ruefully.

He went through his mail that day with more than usual eagerness. He doubted if curiosity would be strong enough to induce anybody to rob the mail though it might tempt some person to tamper with a letter. However, there was no communication of any sort from his unknown advertiser.

As night drew on he could not down the hope that something might happen before morning. He sent Frank Baker home early and put out all the lights in his shop. He did not go to bed in his lean-to bedroom, but sat in the shop with his feet up on the desk, smoking pipe after pipe and dreaming. A flashlight lay handy on the desk.

He could scarcely remember a time when he had been so stirred up about anything. Reckon I’m a fool, he thought, there’s probably only some sordid mess behind this if there’s anything at all. Oh well, it will just be another item to chalk up to experience. Meanwhile it’s pleasant to imagine I might be of use to some fellow-creature. I wonder if she’s good-looking. Life has been dull lately.

The intervals between the cars rolling up and down the road outside became longer and longer. After midnight they ceased altogether. The front windows of the shop were open, and the little sounds that came in—an idle breeze rustling the big leaves of the sycamore or the crow of a cock on an outlying farm—only gave substance to the silence.

A pair of field mice crept in through some hole and cruised around the floor rattling the waste papers in their search for crumbs. Incorrigible optimists, thought Weir.

He fell asleep in his chair; waked and slept again. Suddenly he was brought up all standing by a sharp rap on the floor behind him. He instinctively snatched up the flash and cast its light on the spot; an envelope with some printed characters upon it.

With one jump Weir reached the door and flung it open. An ancient T model Ford was just beginning to move away; a touring car with a half

collapsed top. Weir ran after it. The driver of the car let it into high too soon. The engine coughed and stalled. Weir sprang on the running board.

His flashlight revealed the face of a boy behind the steering wheel; a slender half-grown boy with big frightened blue eyes and curly dark hair. Then he began to see more clearly. A boy? . . . no! . . . a girl, bless her heart! in a pair of worn riding breeches and a ragged sweater. A girl of perhaps seventeen years old, with panting breast and trembling lips, all woman, yet something of the child too, and completely adorable.

Life suddenly began to have meaning for Weir; things started moving inside him. "Oh, you beauty!" he murmured. "I didn't know that anybody like you existed."

She had got her engine running again, but would not let in the clutch while Weir stood on the running board. "Get off! Get off!" she stammered imploringly. "Oh, get off and let me go!"

"I'll go with you," said Weir. "I'm your friend."

"No! You don't know anything about me! I have no friends!"

"All the more reason," he insisted. "I have no friends either. You and I will stand together!"

Her face hardened and anger flashed out of the blue eyes. She was terrified, but she was not cowed. She snatched up a crank from the floor of the car. "Get off!" she cried, "or I'll hit you. . . . I don't want to do that!"

This fearsome threat forced Weir to laugh, though he was in earnest too. He moved back on the running board out of her reach. "Don't turn me down until you try me out!" he urged. "I am truly your friend!"

The laugh did him no good with her. "Get off!" she cried, brandishing the crank handle.

"If the other fellow has failed you, you need me," ventured Weir.

Her arm dropped. "Other fellow?" she gasped. "What do you know about him?"

"Nothing," said Weir. "He is keeping good and quiet."

"Then what made you say he had failed me? You haven't read what I wrote to-night."

"I knew it because you came back to put another ad. in the paper. . . . God! I can't believe there is a man in the world who wouldn't come back to

you," he added, leaning towards her. "He isn't a man! You are well rid of him!"

She shrank away. "You are talking wildly," she said scornfully. "I don't know you. Get off, and let me go."

"I'm not going to force myself on you," insisted Weir. "Just give me a chance to make good. Where can I meet you sometime?"

"You can't help me," she said sombrely. "I've got to depend on myself."

"Nobody can stand alone!"

She leaned out of the other side of the car, glancing anxiously up and down the road. "Oh, let me go!" she murmured in distress. "I am afraid of these people!"

"I am not one of them."

Tasker Teeple's house was about a hundred feet north of the printing shop and on the other side of the road. Weir heard the whirr of a starter from that direction.

"Somebody's coming!" cried the girl in a fresh access of terror. "I couldn't bear it if everybody knew I had put that ad. in the paper! Let me go! Let me go!"

Weir thought of Tasker Teeple's fishy eyes and his wicked senile grin. He couldn't expose the girl to that. "Go ahead," he said sullenly, and dropped off the running board.

She raced her engine, let in the clutch and sped away south through the village with a loud rattle of loose gears. Weir glanced at her licence plate. It had been so smeared with mud that the figures were indecipherable.

He retreated inside his shop, closed the door and went to the window. He saw Tasker Teeple back out of his garage, turn around, and run out into the road. He headed south after the flying Ford. Tasker had a better car, but he was notoriously a timid driver, so that the race was not so unequal as it might seem. Weir breathed a silent prayer that Tasker might blow out a tyre.

The noise of the two cars faded away into the distance. Weir turned on a light, and picked up the envelope on the floor. It contained a hard object which proved to be an old-fashioned onyx brooch, oval in shape, and having a little twist of brown hair let into the centre of it under glass. There were two sheets of paper with it, the first being another ad. for the paper.

TO THE WHIP-POOR-WILL:

I AM ALONE. COME TO ME. I NEED HELP.

The Girl on the Hill.

This simple message filled Weir with a powerful confusion of feelings; rage because it was addressed to another—and pity. His eyelids prickled almost as if the tears were rising. He laughed at his feelings as a man will.

On the other sheet was a brief letter to himself, written in the same laborious printed characters:

> "I have no money to pay for this, so I send you my mother's brooch. Please don't sell it, as it is the only thing of my mother's that I have left. I will buy it back as soon as I can."

As Weir read this the girl's face seemed to rise before him; so young, so frightened, and so game! His hand closed protectingly over the brooch. You poor kid, he thought; anyhow you're safe with me!

Presently he heard the noisy Ford returning, and made haste to turn out the light. The girl sped past for all there was in the old rattletrap, forty miles an hour perhaps. Her head turned apprehensively towards the printing shop. A moment later she was out of sight.

Quarter of an hour later Tasker Teeple came back, driving slowly. Turning into his own place, he ran into the garage. In a moment he reappeared and ill-temperedly slammed the doors. Evidently the girl had given him the slip. Her secret was still safe.

III

BEFORE breakfast next morning old Tasker Teeple came banging at the door of the printing shop. Weir made his face a blank before letting him in.

"That woman stopped here last night!" cried Tasker.

Weir hesitated before answering. He thought: It will put him off his stride if I tell the truth up to a certain point. He said: "Reckon she must have been. I found another ad. lying on the floor of the shop when I got up."

"Didn't you see her?" demanded Tasker suspiciously.

"Me? No! Did you?"

"I almost did."

"Too bad!" said Weir.

"Let me see the ad.," demanded Tasker.

Once more Weir hesitated briefly. "That ad. was sent to me," he said in a mild voice. "You have no right to demand it of me. I just want that to go on record. As a matter of fact there's no reason why you shouldn't see it if you want. Here."

Tasker read the paper. "Are you going to run this?" he snarled.

"Why sure!" said Weir as if surprised at such a question.

"How did she pay for it?"

"With more stamps."

"Humph! I'm going to take this for awhile."

Weir, without any hesitation this time, reached out and repossessed himself of the paper. "I'll make a copy of it for you," he said with an innocent air. "I must keep the original for my file, you understand."

Tasker went away with his copy.

The much-desired maps came in the mail that day. Weir, who was busy making up his paper, put them to one side until he should get a chance to go over them with Frank Baker.

Frank dropped in after dinner. “What’s this Tasker Teeple is telling around town?” he asked with a grin. “You had a call from your unknown advertiser in the middle of the night!”

Weir’s feelings were now so deeply concerned with the girl that he couldn’t bring himself to talk about her even to Frank whom he trusted. He allowed Frank to suppose that the story being circulated by Tasker Teeple was the whole truth.

“You weren’t very bright to let her get by with it like that,” said Frank.

Weir merely grinned. “The maps have come,” he said.

They unrolled them, and started on the sheet which depicted the northern part of the narrow county, penned between its broad estuaries. First they put a ring around each hill, then, one by one, Frank checked off the houses on hills that he was familiar with. This was Sam Jessup’s place. No woman in that house under forty-five years of age. This was Bissells’ who was Frank’s own cousin and as close to him as his shoe to his foot. This Sep Johnson’s, a negro tenant. And so on. And so on.

Kent was not a thickly-populated county, and the first sheet did not hold them long. In the end it appeared that there were only three houses marked on hills that Frank had not visited recently. “This is the old Tanner homestead,” he said, putting the point of his pencil on a dot. “It burned down since this map was made, and there’s nothing there now but two big chimneys sticking up in the air.”

His pencil shifted to the second dot. “The Darden place. The family lives in the city now and there’s a tenant on the land. Name of John Didge. Poor whites. He’s got children of every age; slews of them. But I would bet my last dollar there’s none of them with education enough to put an ad. in the paper.”

Frank’s pencil came to rest on the last dot. It represented a house in the extreme North-eastern corner of the county, overlooking Cumberland Sound. “Funny,” he said thoughtfully, “I didn’t know there was a house up there. Must be a fine site. You see how far away it is from the public road, a mile or more. And that public road just peters out to nothing on the beach there. Years ago there was a ferry across the Sound at that point, but it was abandoned long before my time.

“Can’t think who lives in that house. I’ve never been up in that corner. The farthest I’ve been along that road is to Dick Bowers’ house which is here. I noticed that the track ran on past Bowers’, but I thought it was only

to the abandoned ferry. Bowers' has the name of being the lonesomest place in the county. Now it seems there's somebody even lonesomer than him. Bowers never spoke of having any neighbours."

Frank chewed his pencil, studying hard. Finally his face cleared and he clapped his thigh. "I've got it! That's the Cowdin place! Lord, the Cowdins have been forgotten so many years it's no wonder the name was slow in coming to mind."

"Are they all dead?" asked Weir.

"No. Lee Cowdin is still alive as far as I know. But he's a hobo and a bum. Ain't been seen in the county for many a year. Man about my age."

"Did you know him when you were young?"

"I've seen him. Handsome man. But he wasn't never my friend. In the days before automobiles came in we didn't get around all over like we do now."

"Does he still own this place?"

"So far as I know, he does. I would have heard if it had been deeded out of the family. It's the largest single tract of land in the county. Twenty-five hundred acres or more. Mostly jack pine."

"Doesn't anybody work it?"

"I reckon not. There's many a good farm in this county that has gone back to woods. Under trees that are now forty feet high you can still follow the furrows of the last crop of corn."

"If Lee Cowdin is a hobo and a bum, how can he pay the taxes?"

"He don't pay the taxes. They are years in arrears. The County would sell it for taxes if there was any chance of finding a buyer. Kind of shame."

"Why a shame?"

"Well, Lee Cowdin has a child somewheres whose interest ought to be protected."

"How old would this child be now?" asked Weir casually.

"Well, let me see," said Frank. "There was quite a tragic story about that. But I haven't thought about it for years. It happened while I was a sailor on the old *Valerian*, New York to Buenos Aires." Frank counted on his fingers. "That child would be seventeen years old now."

Weir lowered his eyes so that Frank might not read too much in them. “Boy or girl?” he asked carelessly.

“Blest if I know,” said Frank. “. . . But wait a minute! I think it was a girl. Sure it was a girl! That’s what made the story seem more tragic like.”

“What was the story?”

Frank loved to tell a story. He lit his pipe and tipped back in his chair, blowing smoke and squinting while he arranged in his mind. Finally he began.

“My grandpap told me this. The Cowdins came into Kent county from Beaulieu shortly after the revolutionary war, and built a grand house overlooking Cumberland Sound. They were the richest and best born folks hereabouts. Their mahogany furniture, their big travelling coach with Russian leather cushions and their tall-masted sloop for journeys by water were the talk of the county. They called their big house Ancaster. Thomas Jefferson once stopped there.

“Well, time passed, and the Cowdins went down as old families do, though they were always fine people. It was a peculiarity of the family that they never had but one son in each generation, so they didn’t spread like other families. Finally the civil war ruined them altogether like so many others. All their slaves but one or two marched north after the Union armies, leaving the crop standing in the fields.

“Lee Cowdin was an only son. His father and mother still managed to live in a genteel way though they were poor as Job’s turkey. All the Cowdins had fine manners, but no faculty for getting out and digging for themselves. Lee’s father and mother died while he was still a young man, and he went to the bad altogether. Got to running with the negroes.

“A striking-looking fellow, Lee Cowdin. Strong as a bull. Black hair, no colour in his face, black eyes that would pierce you right through. Unnatural bright eyes. He didn’t trouble the county much. Would cart off a load of the family furniture to the city, and when he had run through that come back for another.

“But Lee could always spruce up and act the gentleman when he had a mind to. One time when he was about thirty years old he surprised the county by bringing home a wife. I never saw her, but folks said she was a real nice girl, gentle and fair as a lily. Come of a good family in New York state. Seems like them’s the kind that always fall for the bad eggs.

"Well, Lee took her to the big house which must have been pretty near stripped by that time, and that was the last seen of *her*. Folks was sorry for her naturally, but the place had such a bad reputation nobody wanted to go there. And the county people never have cottoned much to strangers nohow. . . ."

"So I've noticed," put in Weir dryly.

"When the baby came a year or so later," Frank continued, "old Doctor Sadler was sent for. He's the only man I've heard tell of who ever got inside the house. According to his story it was pitiful. The New York woman did her best to keep things a little nice, but she had nothing to do it with. Already in three years she had wasted away to a mere wisp of humanity, he said, but there was ne'er a complaint out of her. She made out to old Doc that everything was going fine. Some women are like that. It was a mystery how they lived at all.

"Shortly after that she died. Lee didn't tell anybody, and there wasn't no funeral nor nothing. He just put her away somewheres on the place. News of it got out through the negroes. There was a hell of a to-do about it then, you can bet. It was freely said that Lee had murdered his wife. The younger fellows talked of organising a lynching party.

"But before this came to a head old Doc Sadler came out on his porch one morning and found the baby lying there in a chip basket. Lee Cowdin had skipped the county, and he ain't been seen since.

"Lee Cowdin couldn't have picked a better home for his kid. Old Doc and his missus hadn't any of their own, and it was like finding a purse of gold to them. I mind my mother saying that old Miss Patty Sadler used to fuss over that baby like a hen with one chick. Dressed her up like a French doll, she said. The baby had her father's black hair and her mother's big blue eyes."

"What was her name?" Weir asked softly.

"I disremember," said Frank,". . . if I ever knew. . . . Old Doc and Miss Patty were real old people," he resumed, "and they used to worry about the kid's future when they were gone. Moreover it was rumoured that her mother's people were well-to-do, so they considered it their duty to hunt them up. The baby was two years old then.

"The upshot of it all was that the baby's mother's sister come down here and took her back to New York state. A hard woman they said; took away the kid without a word of thanks to old Miss Patty for what she'd done. But

maybe folks here were prejudiced against the New Yorker. At any rate that was the last of the Cowdins in Kent County. Old Doc and Miss Patty have been lying in the churchyard for many a year now."

"That poor kid certainly got a raw deal," murmured Weir.

"I reckon!" said Frank. His chair dropped to the floor, and he put away his pipe. "Pass over the middle sheet of them maps," he said.

"Let's do that to-morrow," said Weir without looking at him. "I've got to make up my paper now."

"Well, I'll be getting along then," said Frank, unlimbering his long frame.

"If I get through before dark I might take a run up to Ancaster," said Weir, stabbing the desk with his pencil.

"You won't find nothing there but an empty old ruin. If the Cowdins ever came back it couldn't be hid."

"I know. But just for curiosity's sake. It's an interesting story."

"Wait till to-morrow and I'll go with you. Got to go over to Beaulieu County this evening."

"Hardly worth while your coming," said Weir carelessly. "I'll need you when I get a real clue."

"All right," said Frank. "See you later." He went out.

Weir set to work feverishly. It could hardly be said that his mind was on what he was doing; nevertheless by five o'clock he had his formes locked and ready for printing next day. Immediately afterwards he set off up the road in his car.

Apparently nobody was taking any special notice of his movements to-day. Since Tasker Teeple had circulated the story of chasing the mysterious girl south over the State road and losing her, the search had transferred itself to the lower part of the county. Weir had the northern districts to himself.

He had the map in his pocket. Kent County was a peninsula shaped like a leaf with a stem attaching it to the mainland. The road system resembled the veins of a leaf with the State road running through the middle from stem to tip, and side roads wandering off at either side, each one finally tapering off at a house facing the water. Weir drove north for thirteen miles, and turned to the right over the last road leading over the hills towards Cumberland Sound.

It was a clear warm afternoon, and the whole country had gone mad with green. For three miles the side road was graded and surfaced; it then shrunk to a passable country road which gradually disintegrated into a bad country road torn with gullies on the hills and heaped with powdery sand in the bottoms. The well-kept farmhouses gave place to dilapidated negro shacks, and long patches of woods alternated with neglected little fields.

Weir took but small notice of the passing scene. He forced his car over good roads and bad, regardless of springs. He was filled with a curious mixture of anticipation and dread. He fully expected to find the girl at the end of the road—but what else would he find? Frank's history added to what Weir already knew suggested tragic possibilities. Over and over like a wheel the same thought was running in Weir's head: The poor kid! The poor kid! Good God! what must she have been through!

While he was still a long way from the Sound he began to catch glimpses of its wide blue expanse from the hilltops. The big house he was in search of was not visible anywhere from this side.

After descending a long hill through the woods, he came out on the last clearing. This he knew from his map must be Dick Bowers' farm. Bowers had rich bottom lands alongside a little stream which emptied into the Sound nearby. There was no sign of life about the house when Weir passed. He hoped he was unseen.

Beyond Bowers' the road was a mere track through the grass bordering the stream. But here and there in soft spots Weir could distinguish the thin tread of a T model Ford, and he knew he was going right. He missed the side turning off to Ancaster, and coming out on the beach, had to turn back and search for it more carefully.

There was nothing to indicate the turn-off but slight depressions left in the grass by the wheels of the old Ford. It had been driven through the stream and up the farther bank. Once there had been a bridge over the stream. Weir saw the crumbling remains of a stone pier. He followed the tracks of the Ford through the water and up the rise beyond.

There were signs that this had once been a fine graded avenue; magnificent trees bordered it here and there. But it was so washed with the rains of many years and choked with young growth, Weir could scarcely force his car up the hill. The tracks of the old Ford still led him on.

After passing through a stretch of woods on the level he started to climb again, and suddenly came out on a little clearing with a view of the Sound.

On one side of the road stood a miserable clapboarded house, its broken windows stuffed with rags; on the other side was a shed even more dilapidated in which rested the T model Ford with the half collapsed top. Its rear licence plate was still caked with mud. He had arrived.

In the middle of its patch of dusty earth the house stood up on brick piers without a spear of grass or a bush or a tree to soften its crass nakedness. Weir had never seen so poverty-stricken an outfit. No chickens, no cow, no pile of fodder. What do they eat? he wondered. The only sign of life about the place was an incredibly old blind negress squatting against one of the brick supports in the late sunshine.

"Who come? Who come? Who come?" she squalled in great excitement.

Weir could see where the driveway had once swept on up the hill to the big house, but a glance showed him that it was impracticable for a car beyond this point. Moreover a barrier of fallen trees had been heaped up in the place where the gate had once stood. So there was nothing to do but stop and get out.

The squalling of the old woman brought the rest of the negro household out on the run; a burly man armed with a shotgun, a scowling half-grown boy, and a gypsy-like woman in a soiled red waist, yellow skirt and bandanna round her head. All three were as black as ebony, and all had the savage expressions of those who are cut off from their kind.

The man faced Weir truculently. "What you want, boss?" he demanded. He was a superb physical specimen. Under the ragged shirt his naked breast swelled like a barrel. With his cropped head, flat nose and thick lips he was hideous from the white point of view; the pure African type. A bluish scar divided one cheek from temple to chin.

It had not occurred to Weir to arm himself before starting, and in the face of such a display of force he had no choice but to return a soft answer. "Is this the old Cowdin place?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I heard there was a fine old house on the place. I just wanted to have a look at it."

"You can't go up there, boss."

"Why not?"

"Because I is here to stop you."

Weir laughed. “Well, that’s right to the point.”

His laughter had no effect on the three scowling blacks.

“Is there anybody living there?” asked Weir.

“Nobody live there.”

“Then what harm in letting me look around?

“This private property,” said the black man. “I caretaker here. Nobody allowed to pass. That’s my orders.” He patted the gun.

Weir stalled for time. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“Saul Cowdin.”

“Cowdin?”

“My grandpap was slave here.”

“Well, you’re all right, Saul,” said Weir with assumed heartiness. He pulled a dollar out of his pocket. “Take this and let me look around. Can’t do any harm.”

A dangerous new furrow appeared in the negro’s brow and his scar turned livid. He took his gun in both hands. “Put your money away, white man,” he said hoarsely. “Get in your car and go back where you come. Ise an honest man, though my skin be black.”

Weir shrugged, and walked slowly to his car. He started the engine and turned around. The three blacks watched him in silence.

IV

WEIR snaked his car slowly down the first broken slope and half-way across the level space amongst the trees. He had no notion of giving up the pursuit, but, faced with the determined negro and his gun, he found it necessary to use guile.

On the way up he had seen a rough track running off between the trees to the left, no doubt a road formerly used for bringing out wood. He now turned into it, and running his car with as little noise as possible, followed the track until a bend in it hid him from the view of anybody passing up or down the old driveway.

Here he left his car and started straight up the hill on foot. If they find the old boat I suppose they'll smash it up, he thought, but I'll have to chance it.

It was hard going through the tangle of down trees laced with wild grape-vine and greenbriar. He had nothing with which to cut his way through but a pocket-knife. It was difficult to impose patience on his hot eagerness. He had not much more than an hour of daylight remaining. There were moments when he was ready to curse and stamp his feet at the senseless obstructions.

The westering sun in the tree-tops gave him his direction. He shaped a course that would bring him around the negro shack and back into the old driveway somewhere above. Breathless and sweating, he finally came out on the path connecting the negro shack and the big house. It was so thickly overgrown he could see neither before nor behind.

A bend in the path suddenly brought the old mansion into view rising above its broken terraces. Weir stopped short astonished by its gracious beauty; a long façade with a noble Corinthian portico rising to the roof. At first glance it looked just as it had when the lumbering coaches of other days had discharged gallants in laced coats and ladies in hoops and paniers at the door. One could almost see the bowing negro servants on the porch and indoors the leaping fires on the hearths, the candles in sconces, and the groaning board.

It was only when he drew closer that he perceived the hanging shutters, the broken panes. Some of the chimneys had blown down, and the porch

floor was sagging and rotten. A melancholy stillness hung over everything. All the rear premises were choked up in a jungle of young locust trees that pressed up to the back windows. The front door stood open.

Weir mounted the front steps and turned around to look at the prospect. Under the weeds and young growth, the dignified lines of the old terraces could still be followed. Over the tops of trees below, he looked out across the Sound and for miles up and down. A white sail showed here and there; the distant shore was veiled in haze. What a site! he thought.

There were a couple of planks laid across the rotting porch. On the threshold of the house a strange dank breath from within chilled his blood. Death, decay and despair were suggested; a cloud of forlorn ghosts seemed to float out on it. Weir's legs twitched with the desire to run. He repressed it. If she can stand it I can, he thought.

He put up a hand and tapped the old knocker—lightly so that the sound might not carry to the negro shack down the hill. Inside, the hall was completely bare; not a stick of furniture; not a rag of carpet. The stair rail was broken and missing in places.

A door slammed upstairs and there was a sound of running feet. The girl looked over the stair rail. Weir, framed in the doorway below, was only a silhouette to her. A breathless little cry escaped her, and she came cascading down the stairs as fast as if she had been on a hundred feet. When she got to the bottom she saw that it was not the one she hoped to see. She stopped, and her face went sullen.

"Who are you?" she asked in a flat voice.

"You saw me last night," said Weir. The sudden quenching of the light in her face made him feel savage.

"Oh, the newspaper man!"

There was a silence. Sore as he might be, Weir's eyes devoured her. She was dressed as on the previous night; old riding breeches, shirt open at the throat, ragged brown sweater. On her legs she was wearing the tops of a pair of riding boots—expensive boots, Weir noted. The feet had worn out and had been cut off. In place of them she had on a pair of cheap canvas sneakers. In the full light from the doorway she was more beautiful than he had looked for. Her bold, hurt, proud look struck him down.

She was getting angry. "How did you get up here?" she demanded.

“Oh, it wasn’t the fault of your watchdogs,” said Weir bitterly. “I gave them the slip.”

“You followed me here!”

“No. I doped it out that this must be where you lived.”

“It is known!” she murmured with a hand stealing to her breast. Weir noticed that there was a strained tight look about her eyes that had no business to be there at her age.

“No one knows it but me,” he said, “and I’m not telling.”

There was a silence. Again the faint charnel house smell crept into Weir’s nostrils, and made him shiver slightly. Finally she said:

“What did you come for?”

“I told you last night.”

She slowly shook her head. There was infinite sadness in the gesture. “You’d better go,” she said.

“I can’t go!” Weir burst out. “I can’t leave you in a place like this! You’re not like the people around here. You’re gently bred. What are you doing alone here?”

“I’m not living alone,” she said quickly.

“Who lives with you?”

“My father.”

“Where is he?”

She hesitated painfully before answering. “He’s . . . gone away . . . for a few days.”

“Where has he gone?”

“I don’t have to stand here and answer your questions,” she answered indignantly. “You’re a stranger to me.”

“My name is Weir Lambert,” he said stiffly, “not that it matters. I only want to help you.”

“I didn’t ask for your help,” she said quickly. “My . . . my father has business in the city. I am expecting him back any day now.”

From the difficulty with which she brought this out, Weir judged that she was lying. “And left you in this horrible place!” he said, looking around.

“It is my home,” she said with her chin up. “I have no other.”

“Your father is Lee Cowdin,” said Weir. “How long has he been back?”

She refused to answer.

“How did he get away from here? How will he get back again?”

No answer.

“How do you eat?” he finally cried in desperation.

“Verdy cooks for me down at the cottage,” she said stiffly.

“You mean they share their food with you. Negro food!”

“It is enough!”

Weir felt that he was getting nowhere. There was a horribly comic aspect to the situation; standing there glaring at each other like two quarrelling children. It was pity that put Weir in a rage. Beauty in rags, so young and so terribly alone. He tried again in a gentler voice.

“Don’t let’s fuss with each other. I want to be your friend.”

She paid no attention. Looking over his shoulder she said in a stony voice: “Here comes Saul now with my supper.”

Weir startled, turned his head. The negro was just appearing from amongst the trees below. Weir stepped inside out of his range of vision. Weir was no weakling, but his skin crawled at the sight of the hulking brute. He carried it off with a laugh.

“Reckon he’ll kill me when he finds out how I’ve tricked him. I’m no match for a human gorilla.”

“It’s your own fault,” said the girl. “You shouldn’t have forced yourself on us.”

“Oh yes?” said Weir sorely. “All right, let him kill me.”

There was a silence while their two pairs of eyes angrily contended for the mastery. Weir was about ready to give up hope. He could actually hear the heavy tread of the negro outside, before the girl suddenly gave way and opened a door at the side of the hall.

“Go in there,” she said in a strangled voice, “and wait till he’s gone.”

Weir entered the room with a joyful heart. Anyhow I made her show some sign of human feeling, he thought. He put his ear to the crack of the door in the hope that the talk outside might throw some light on the

situation. He heard the loose boards on the porch creak as the negro walked across them. There was no greeting exchanged, only a clump as the negro put his pail down.

"You hear from your pap?" he growled. It had almost a threatening sound.

"How could I hear from him?" answered the girl.

"Where you take car last night?"

"That's my business," she answered stoutly.

"Master not let you go off place," he muttered.

"Well, he's not here now."

"When he come back?"

"I told you before that I don't know exactly. When he gets his business done."

"When he go way before Master tell me he going," grumbled the negro. "Why he no tell me he going?"

"He told me to tell you."

Saul then asked the same question Weir had asked. "How he go?"

"He walked, I told you."

"No tracks in the road."

"Then he went through the woods." Weir thought he heard her voice tremble.

Apparently the negro turned away then. Weir heard the boards on the porch creak. But Saul stopped and his thick voice came back: "Verdy say you want she come up here and sleep to-night?"

"Not to-night," faltered the girl. "Maybe . . . to-morrow . . . if he doesn't come home."

The negro went down the steps without further word. This little colloquy only mystified Weir. Apparently the girl had told him the truth about her father having gone away, but it solved nothing. The negro's hostile attitude made Weir more anxious than ever on her account.

He waited for a moment before venturing out. He was in the vast drawing-rooms of the old mansion which occupied half of the first floor. They were divided in the middle by a pair of fluted pillars, and each half had

a fine marble mantel and a glittering chandelier more or less broken. There was no furniture except a broken piece or two not worth selling. The floors were bare. There was a strong smell of rats on the air.

The girl opened the door. “As soon as he disappears among the trees you can go,” she said coldly. “It will soon be dark.”

The negro had put a pail of water and a plate tied up in a napkin on the floor. Without answering her Weir picked up the plate. The napkin was full of holes, but clean enough. There was nothing on the plate but a square of murky looking corn bread which smelled of rancid fat.

“Just what I expected!” said Weir hotly. “That’s not fit food for a white woman!”

“Put it down,” she said. “And go.”

Weir blew up altogether then. “I’m damned if I will!” he cried. “You can say what you like, I’m not going to stand for this! I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going to drive to a store and buy some decent food and bring it back here!” He glanced at his watch. “It’s six-thirty. I’ll be back by eight.”

“I won’t let you in,” she said. “And if you leave food outside the possums and the foxes will eat it.”

“I’m not going to leave it,” he retorted. “I’m going to stay and see that you eat it! If you won’t let me in I’ll sleep on the porch until morning. If you’re going to be stubborn, I can be stubborn, too!”

“I won’t let you in!” she repeated with a stony face.

He flung away down the steps in a passion. But before he had gone a dozen steps he was asking himself: Why do I have to get in such a rage with her? The poor kid! The poor kid! It would break a man’s heart just to see her!

V

WEIR got back to his car before the darkness closed down altogether. Half an hour later he was back on the State road. To have gone to any Kent County store to buy his supplies would have betrayed his secret, so he turned north in the State road and in three miles had crossed the neck into Cumberland County where nobody knew him.

He stopped at a big store in the village of Dundalk. It gave him a keen pleasure to spend all his money on the best it afforded, and plenty of it. Sliced breakfast bacon, fresh eggs, baker's bread from the city, butter, potatoes, all sorts of canned goods, coffee, sugar, cream and any little luxuries that happened to catch his eye, finishing up with a bag of oranges.

He borrowed a grass bag from the storekeeper to carry it in. This man, who was built on Falstaffian lines, was frankly curious as to the identity of the liberal customer who had dropped from the skies, and Weir, in order to forestall gossip which might spread over the border into Kent, casually explained that he and a couple of other fellows from the city were camping over on Cumberland Sound.

He filled his tank, and tore back into Kent at the best his old car would do. Notwithstanding the stony way the girl had treated him, his heart lifted up as soon as he turned back in her direction. Just to be seeing her again!

The rush of air past his ears was good; the night smelled good. The prospect of ham and eggs filled him with rapture. And what sport it would be to feed *her*! He marked the different stages of the trip with impatience; The Neck, which marked the boundary between the two counties; St. Barnabas' hill; Mt. Melody, where he turned off the State road; Isaac Ticknor's farm, and the rough places beyond.

He coasted down the last hill, and drifted silently past Bowers' house, lights out. Quarter of a mile beyond Bowers' he ran his car in amongst the trees and left it. He was afraid to take it farther for fear that the play of his lights would give warning of his coming to the negroes across the stream.

With his grass bag on his back he waded through the stream and started up the hill. He had a flashlight to help him over the pitfalls. He turned aside into the old wood road, and his flash helped him to find the path he had cut

and trampled through the briars on his previous journey. It did not take him so long now.

When he came out of the woods below the old house the moon was rising over the Sound and casting a faint pinkish radiance on the Corinthian portico. A dead house; no crack of light showing anywhere. The silence was like something pressing against the ears. The whole scene had a ghostly look, yet somewhere within those walls was a very living girl. The thought made Weir's heart hit up its pace.

He mounted the steps. The front door was shut and locked. The shutters on the french windows opening on the porch were intact and firmly fastened from within. No entrance from this side. When he put his ear against the door Weir heard a measured knocking inside the house. The uncanny sound struck a cold fear into him he could not have said why. He tapped very gently with the knocker and the sound ceased. He waited but there was no response to his knock.

He ploughed his way around through the rank weeds to the side of the house. A strong smell of horse-mint rose on the air. The ground floor window-sills were above his head. No chance here unless he improvised a ladder. Suddenly the measured knocking started again, over his head now, and he stopped, rooted to the ground.

The sound was louder here, because so many of the side windows were broken. Weir located the window from which it issued. The bedroom over the rear drawing-room. Fastening his gaze on this window, Weir perceived a spot of light within it. Some fabric had been draped inside to shut off the light, but there was a tiny hole in it. Weir found a pebble and threw it up against the glass. Instantly the heavy knocking inside ceased. But the curtain was not disturbed.

"Oh, girl!" Weir called softly. "Cowdin girl! Come down and let me in! I've got the grub!"

There was no answer.

Well anyhow, she knows I'm here, Weir said to himself. It needn't frighten her if I make a noise getting in.

He went on around the house to the back, picking his way with his flashlight between the locust saplings. He came to a back porch; the steps had rotted off, but it was no trouble to swing himself up. There was a door, locked; a window, locked; but it had a broken pane. He thrust his arm through and feeling around found the stick that held down the lower sash,

and removed it. Raising the sash, he went over the sill with flashlight and grass bag.

He found himself in a larder with shelves as bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard. A door and a short passage admitted him to a big kitchen. His light revealed an oil lamp on the table. He lit it, and looked around him with a grin of triumph.

This was evidently the family living room. It was bare enough; a pine table, two chairs with broken backs, a few odds and ends of cooking pots and dishes, but everything was scrubbed until it shone. There was an ancient cast-iron cook stove and a box of wood. Weir took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and in a few minutes had the satisfaction of hearing the fire roaring in the stove pipe.

He put on the coffee pot and the iron skillet. When the latter got hot he dropped his strips of bacon in it, and then set open the door in to the pantry and from the pantry into the main hall beyond. Upon opening the second door the faint graveyard smell met his nostrils again. Something rotten in this house! he thought. No fit place for people to sleep.

Returning to the kitchen he set out all the fixings on the table. Not exactly stylish, but tempting at that. He sniffed the nutty fragrance of the bacon with a grin. That ought to fetch her down! Transferring the bacon to a plate, he broke his eggs into the skillet, and ran to the door into the hall.

"Supper's ready!" he called up. The sound of his own voice in the echoing stillness was almost frightening.

In a moment or two she appeared in the doorway with an extraordinary hangdog look like a boy who is sorry for something he has done but hates to admit it. Weir wanted to hug her, but restrained himself.

"Sit down," he said, making believe to take no notice.

She walked slowly to the table. Meanwhile Weir was transferring a generous portion of ham and eggs to her plate. She did not immediately start eating, but sat there with her head down.

"I am ashamed to eat your food," she murmured.

It made a lump come into Weir's throat. "Aw, forget it!" he said roughly, "and dig in."

"The smell of the bacon coming upstairs made me feel faint."

"That's what I was counting on."

“I can’t fight against you any more.”

“Why should you?”

She took a bite, and for awhile there was no further conversation at the table. Weir, while he fed his mouth, feasted his eyes also. It was odd in those rough surroundings to see how prettily she used her fork. For the most part she kept her eyes down. She had long black lashes curving upward, that a movie queen might have envied. She was enjoying every mouthful. A little colour came into her pale cheeks.

Occasionally Weir ventured a wisecrack, but he could not make her smile. It was as if that young face had forgotten the trick of it. Weir silently made a bet with himself that he would force her to smile some day.

Finally she said: “I can’t eat any more.”

Weir lit a cigarette. “By the way, what’s your name?” he asked casually.

“Leila.”

“I like it.”

“I had forgotten what good food tasted like,” she murmured.

“How long have you been here?” he asked.

“Over two years,” she answered. Apparently she didn’t mind answering his questions so long as he was sufficiently casual. Weir was learning how to handle her.

“How did you happen to come?”

“My father brought me here.”

“Where did you live before that?”

“With my aunt in New York. She was well off. She sent me to an expensive school.”

“What a change from that to this!” muttered Weir.

Leila continued her story without any further prompting. “One time my father came to see us in New York. I had never known anybody so handsome and gentlemanly. I thought he was wonderful. My aunt hated him. She told me terrible things about him, but I didn’t believe them. I used to meet my father outside. He had some money at this time. I don’t know where he got it. He used to take me places.

“My aunt was a good woman. She always did her duty by me, but she was cold and I thought she didn’t care for me. On the other hand my father, though he was erratic, was truly fond of me. He persuaded me that my place was with him, and in the end I went away with him without telling my aunt, and he brought me here.

“Of course I saw right away that things were not at all the way he had said they were, but it was too late then. The fine house he had described to me was only an empty ruin. When I reproached him with deceiving me he turned ugly, and I soon learned to keep my mouth shut. We lived like prisoners. He was always telling me that there were terrible people living around us, and that they had hounded my poor mother to death. . . .”

“As I heard the story the shoe was on the other foot,” muttered Weir.

“Things were always getting worse,” Leila continued. “We had no money at all. The negroes fed us. My father did nothing but sit and brood. Sometimes he was not himself, and I was afraid of him. What could I do? I had made my bed as they say, and I had to lie on it. I couldn’t write to my aunt after what had happened.”

“You poor kid!”

“Don’t sympathise with me!” she said quickly. “I can’t stand that!”

“Well, anyhow, you and I are going to be friends from now on, aren’t we?”

She gave him an intense searching look that was hard to stand up under. “I think you’re a good fellow,” she murmured. “I think you are!”

Weir was more moved than he cared to show. “I can’t write any testimonials for myself,” he said roughly. “You’ll have to make up your own mind about me.”

“We could be friends if . . . if . . .”

“If what?” he asked sharply.

She suddenly blushed deeply, and became pale again. “If you could forget I was a woman,” she said quickly. “If you could treat me like another man.”

“That’s not so easy when I look at you,” he muttered.

She squared her shoulders and scowled like a boy. “Last night you started right in by telling me I was a beauty, and all that. That’s puts the devil in me. I can’t stand it.”

“There’s one man you don’t mind hearing it from,” growled Weir.

“Well,” she said frankly. “I can’t help that, can I?”

“No,” said Weir, “and I can’t help it if it makes me savage because he comes first with you. He’s no good! He left you in the lurch!”

“You’ve no right to say that! Maybe he just didn’t happen to see the newspaper last week.”

“You can’t fool yourself with that. Every soul in the county has read that ad. Nothing else has been talked about since it came out!”

“Oh!” she murmured, frankly terrified, “I never thought anybody would notice it except him.”

“You don’t know these people.”

“Maybe he’s gone away,” she said faintly.

“Are you willing to tell me about him?” asked Weir.

She shook her head. “I couldn’t,” she said very low.

“All right. Let’s keep off it. . . . Let’s wash the dishes.”

While they were working away together Leila said: “Perhaps it would make it easier if you called me by a boy’s name. Call me Jack.”

“Okay, Jack!”

Unluckily they could not keep away from the forbidden subject. “I must get you out of here, Jack,” said Weir.

“Wait a few days,” she said.

“What for?”

“Until you get the paper out.”

“Still thinking of him?” he said bitterly.

When the dishes were washed she said: “You must go now.”

“But why?”

“It’s getting late.”

“Only eleven. And what of it? There are no strings on either of us. Why can’t I sleep here on the kitchen floor?”

“Oh, no!” she said with a glance of pure terror.

“Are you still afraid of me?” he said sorely.

“Not of you,” she whispered.

“Then what?”

“Please go,” she said. “Come back to-morrow night. I shall be more myself then.”

“Why more yourself to-morrow night than to-night?” he asked stubbornly.

“To-day has been so upsetting,” she faltered.

It suddenly occurred to Weir that she had been trying to get rid of him for some time past. “You’re only stalling,” he said sorely. “You’re a rotten liar.”

She turned away without speaking.

“I just can’t bear to leave you,” he said in a softer voice.

“Now you’re beginning again,” she murmured warningly, without turning around.

“No! I swear I’m not thinking of myself but you. How can I leave you alone in this house? There’s something uncanny about it! It’s enough to give a full-grown man the horrors, let alone a girl. It stinks of corruption.”

She whirled around with a face so bloodless, he thought she was going to faint. “What . . . makes you say that?” she gasped.

“Why . . . nothing!” said Weir, amazed. “I suppose every old empty house gets a bad smell.”

“Oh!” she said in a flat voice. She leaned against the table with her head hanging. It was a long time before she could control her shaking.

“What’s the matter, Jack?” said Weir gently. “I can see that there’s something special to-night, something worse than anything you’ve told me.”

“Oh no,” she said. “You just imagine that. Please go.”

“How could I go and leave you frightened?” he cried. “You’re not easily frightened. Why I’d go crazy walking around, wondering what was the matter. You’ve got to tell me what’s the matter or I’ll find out for myself. . . . *What were you doing upstairs when I came?*”

She looked at him half frantic with terror. “N-nothing,” she stammered. “My bed broke down. I was just hammering it together.”

“You’re lying,” he said. He started for the door.

“Oh, no, Weir, no!” she cried. “Oh, don’t go up there. Oh, please, Weir, please!” Her knees gave way under her. He heard her fall, but he would not stop.

He ran out into the central hall and started up the stairs. Before he got to the top he heard her crawling after him, still gasping: “No, Weir, no. Oh, don’t go in there! Don’t go in!”

The door of the room that he wanted was immediately at the head of the stairs. A crack of light showed underneath it. It was locked but the key was in it. Weir turned it and threw open the door. The smell rushed out almost overpowering him.

A bare room like all the others. The first thing Weir saw was the coffin that Leila had been making from odds and ends of plank out of the old house. It lay almost completed on the floor at his feet with its cover beside it. Weir looked around. There was a bed in the corner with a significant sheeted form upon it.

Weir reached it in three strides and pulled down the sheet. He uncovered the head of a black-haired man with a bullet hole in the middle of his forehead. He had been dead some days and was not a comely sight. Even so he showed the remains of a great physical beauty in life.

By this time Leila had reached the open door. She put up her arm against the door-frame, and leaned her head against it sobbing. “Now you know the worst!” she said.

Weir went towards her. “Well, it’s better so, isn’t it?” he said. “Two can handle a thing like this better than one.”

With a cry she tottered towards him, arms out. “Oh, you are a good man! I was nearly crazy before you came. I didn’t see how I could get through with it.”

Weir took her in his arms. He understood quite well that there was nothing of sex in this. It was merely the cry of a hard-pressed soul who had found help. He soothed her.

“Is this your father?” he said.

“Yes,” she murmured. “I must bury him to-night. The grave is ready.”

“Why did you wait so long?”

“I only found him yesterday. In the woods. I’ve been looking for a week.”

“How did it happen?”

“He did it. I told you he was sometimes not himself. He couldn’t bear his life.”

Weir glanced over at the figure on the bed. There were no powder burns on his skin. It was not possible that he could have shot himself. However, Weir said nothing.

VI

LEILA quietened down, and unobtrusively inched herself out of Weir's embrace. He let her go. It was evident from the expression on her face that she was prepared to deny she had ever been in his arms. What could you do with a girl like that?

The two of them were silent for a while, and the wrecked shape of humanity on the bed was dreadfully silent too. His discoloured face was blankly turned up to the ceiling. Leila slipped across and pulled up the sheet again.

"What shall we do?" Weir murmured at last a little helplessly.

"Bury him," she said quickly. "I told you the grave was ready. I have been digging it all day."

He looked at her almost in fear. "How can you speak of it so calmly?"

She shrugged. "I have to."

"But a woman like you . . . a mere girl!"

"When a thing has to be done women are no different from men," she murmured. "What's the use of carrying on about it?"

"How will we get the box down the stairs?"

"I have thought it all out. I have a rope. We will let the box slide down ahead of us. It will be easy for two. . . . I had to bring him up here," she added, "or Saul would have found him."

A picture of the girl carrying that thing into the house came into Weir's mind, and he violently shook his head to rid himself of it. It was too terrible to be thought about.

"A man can't be put away in secrecy like that," he objected.

"Why not?" she demanded. "That's what I would want done with me."

"The authorities must be notified."

Instantly her face turned hard and antagonistic. "Is that what you call helping me?"

“Leila, I’ve got to tell you the truth,” he said desperately. “Your father didn’t shoot himself.”

She stared at him out of a snow-white face. Her hand stole to her throat. “What do you know about it?” she asked huskily.

“There are no powder burns in his skin.”

“It’s too late to tell.”

“No! that’s something which doesn’t change. Powder leaves marks like tattooing in the skin.”

“No! No! you are wrong!” she cried wildly. “He *must* have shot himself. Who else could have done it?”

“I don’t know,” said Weir helplessly. “That’s why there must be an investigation.”

“Investigation?” she stammered in terror. “You mean by these hard-eyed people who live around here? The people who drove my mother to her death?”

Weir said nothing. What could he say?

“It’s no business of theirs,” she cried stormily. “They are nothing to us nor we to them. They hate us. They would be delighted to come nosing into our affairs. I won’t have it!”

“There is something called the law, Leila,” he said sullenly.

“What has it got to do with me? I’m an outsider. I don’t belong to anybody. I have nobody but my dad and I’ll take care of him.”

“They have *got* to be told, Leila.”

“No!” she cried in plain terror. “Look at me! Look at me! These are all the clothes I have. Once when my father was not himself he burned everything else. To keep me from running away. If I went amongst these people how they would stare and point at me. I would die with shame.”

“I can easy find clothes for you.”

She walked back and forth between the bed and the coffin, squeezing her hands together. “I couldn’t face them,” she cried. “I couldn’t! I couldn’t! Because they hate me. Maybe they would say *I* killed my father, and lock me up in one of their jails.”

A new fear drove all the blood out of Weir's face. His eyes fastened on the girl as if they would drag the secret out of her. She turned her back.

"I couldn't face them," she said in a strangled voice. "It would kill me!" Her voice hardened. "I *wouldn't* face it! If you bring them here you'll find me dead."

"I don't understand you," said Weir sullenly. "Sometimes you seem braver than a man, and now you're talking about dying of fright."

"You don't understand very much," she said bitterly. "If something has to be done I do it. But I'm afraid inside. It is because I am so terribly afraid that I act as if I wasn't afraid."

Weir couldn't stand out against this. "Oh, Leila!" he cried, making a stride towards her. "Leila . . .!"

"Don't touch me!" she said sharply. "I'm Jack to you."

He turned with a groan and went back to the door. There was a silence.

"Well, why don't you make up your mind?" she said in a strained voice. "Are you going to help me? Or are you going to bring them here to arrest me?"

"It's not so easy," muttered Weir. "Law means more to a man than to a woman."

"Then I'm glad I'm a woman," she said scornfully. "A woman makes her own law. When she sees something that's got to be done she does it without shifting from one foot to the other."

There was another silence.

"Oh, go away! go away!" she said in a breaking voice. "Go and fetch your people here to arrest me."

"No," said Weir slowly, "I've made up my mind now. There isn't going to be any more shifting from foot to foot. After all a man can only do what he *can* do. If it gets me in wrong with the law I'm not going to holler."

She turned to him with a distressed face. "Oh, when you say that you make me feel badly. You shouldn't let yourself be persuaded by a girl."

"You haven't persuaded me," said Weir. "I've doped it out. There's only one thing I can do. If I handed you over to the Kent County harpies I just couldn't live with myself any more."

She looked at him hard to see if he meant it. Then turned away. “It’s getting late,” she said bluntly, like a boy. “Help me lift him into the box.”

That was all. Weir obeyed her with a resentful expression. She might at least have looked grateful.

It was near morning before Weir and Leila finally stood beside the open grave on the hill behind the old house. A stable lantern on the ground beside them threw strange shadows in their faces. The crazily constructed coffin had fallen to pieces when they first lifted it and Weir had had to make it over. Now it was in its place at last.

This was the family burying-ground of the Cowdins. Weir had pushed the coffin up hill on a wheelbarrow, while Leila walked alongside with the lantern, steadying the load. Though all the hillside was covered with a thick growth of young trees there was a good path. Lee Cowdin, it appeared, amongst his many freaks of character, had been in the habit of visiting his wife’s grave.

The low brick wall which bounded the place was concealed under a wild tangle of greenbriar, blackberry and poison ivy. “Watch that stuff!” warned Leila. “It’s bad this time of year.” Young trees grew up thickly inside the enclosure, pushing the old gravestones this way and that, and knocking some flat. The last previous grave was just inside the gate. It bore a clumsy wooden cross on the arm of which was painted: Beatrice Cowdin. Leila had dug the new grave alongside. It was too shallow. The cover of the long box was almost flush with the earth. But it was too late to remedy that, for Weir was afraid of being caught on the road after daylight.

Leila’s eyes were enormous in the strange light thrown up by the lantern. “He is the last of them,” she said, looking around at the dim leaning stones.

“How about you?” said Weir.

“Oh, I’m a woman. They don’t count in families. . . . It’s a poor funeral for the last of the Cowdins.”

“Good as he deserves,” growled Weir.

“Ah, don’t blame him now,” she murmured. “The Cowdins haven’t had any luck. He was fond of me when he was himself. Up to the time he came I had never known what it was to have somebody fond of me.”

Weir had the spade in his hand. “Sorry,” he said roughly, “but we must hurry.”

“Say a prayer over him,” pleaded Leila with a catch in her voice.

“Can’t,” muttered Weir. “I’m not fit.”

“Then I’ll say it. To myself.”

For a moment or two they stood with bowed heads in the little room of light made by the lantern under the arches of the young trees. Down around the house the whip-poor-wills were sounding their unchanging plaint back and forth, and far away a fox barked. When Leila raised her head Weir threw the first clods on the coffin.

Later they paused in front of the old house. “You must hurry away,” Leila said.

“Come with me,” said Weir. “I can hide you all day in my room back of the printing shop.”

“What a foolish idea.”

“I can’t bear to leave you here alone,” he said, fairly grinding his teeth.

“Oh, the horror has gone out of it now,” she said quietly. “What would I have done without you!”

He caught up her hand and pressed it against his cheek.

“Don’t!” she said, snatching it away. “You make me feel so mean and selfish. I can’t help it, Weir. *Please* try to think of me as a boy.”

He laughed mirthlessly. “Sure! that was the bargain. . . . Well, good-night, Jack. I’ll be back early to-morrow night all set to fetch you away from this God-forsaken place.”

“No!” she murmured.

“By morning we’ll be far out of the state.”

“Where could you take me?”

“I’ve got plenty of friends in the north who would be glad to take you in until we can look around and decide what’s to be done.”

“In these clothes, Weir?”

“I’ll bring you a coat that will cover you up entirely, and we’ll buy other things along the way.”

“Not to-morrow, Weir,” she said very low. “I couldn’t leave here.”

“Still thinking of that other one?” he said bitterly.

“I can’t help myself, Weir. Be my friend.”

VII

THOUGH he drove at reckless speed it was full day when Weir got back to Kentville. About five o'clock. As he passed the Teeple house with its gingerbread porch and fancy turret, a blind on one of the upper windows was snapped up, and he saw the long grey nose of Tasker Teeple projecting between the curtains. The sight caused him a keen anxiety. Hitherto he had striven to balk his neighbour's curiosity merely because he didn't want them poking into his business. But now it had become literally a matter of life and death to keep them in the dark.

In his own room behind the printing shop he flung himself on his bed without undressing for a brief sleep. But here in the quiet he was forced for the first time really to face the situation he was up against, and the realisation drove away sleep.

The unexplained murder; the suspicious negro, Saul; the new made grave and Leila's obstinate refusal to leave the spot; it made a dangerous combination. He saw clearly enough that if there was a slip-up and the secret was discovered, his efforts to help Leila would only rivet the case against her. He foresaw that he would never know a peaceful moment until he got her safely out of the county.

But chiefly what made Weir thresh his hot pillow was the bitter thought that Leila would not confide in him freely. She asked him to be her friend, yet she kept her own secret. You're a fool! Weir told himself. You're an accessory after the fact now. You're risking your liberty to save a woman for another man!—Yet all the time he knew he could act no differently.

He slept in the end because he was exhausted; but it was brief and broken with tormenting dreams.

Immediately after breakfast, with the aid of a boy who came in to help him on Wednesday mornings, he set to work printing his paper, and kept at it so savagely that the sheet was out and delivered to the post-office nearly an hour before the usual time. Only to leave Weir faced with the same unbearable blankness. How was he to put in all the hours of the day until it became dark enough to drive back to her?

The appearance of the *Kent Witness* this week did not cause the same excitement as before, because Tasker Teeple had already circulated the news

of the second advertisement addressed to "The Whip-poor-will." But feeling still ran high. The usual crowd gathered outside the post-office including Tasker, Giddy Withers, Tom Horsfall, Peter Birkett, and Earl Souter with his satellites. Miss Nannie Bellhouse was one of the first to drive up for her paper.

Weir had to pass through these people in order to get into the post-office for his mail. They were making no attempt to hide their ill-feeling, but he made believe not to see it. "Howdy, everybody," he said, nodding to the right and left.

There was no answer. Some stared at him dumbly; some sneered. Weir got hot then, but he was not going to provoke trouble. He looked them all over with a hard eye which said as plainly as eye could say it: Well, you can all go to hell then; and went on in.

When he came out an ugly voice called to him: "Where were you last night, Weir?" Evidently Tasker Teeple had spread the story of Weir's early home-coming. Weir could not see the speaker who was crouching behind a friend's back, but he recognised the voice. "Just where you ought to have been, Earl," he retorted, "home and in bed."

From anybody else this would have raised a great laugh; coming from Weir the men scowled at it. Earl Souter, showing his red and angry face, shouted back: "It's none of your —— business where I spend my evenings, Yankee!" . . . "Well, the same to you!" returned Weir, proceeding on his way.

Others took up the epithet, muttering: "The —— Yankee! Why the hell can't he stay where he belongs? We don't want him down here!" etc. etc.

Quarter of an hour later one of Gid Withers' boys ran into Weir's shop, threw a note on the desk and ran out again. Printed on a torn piece of a paper bag it ran:

WE DON'T WANT ANY MORE OF YOUR DIRTY STUFF
IN OUR COUNTY PAPER.

COMMITTEE.

Weir tossed it in his waste-paper basket.

After dinner the tall spare figure of Frank Baker darkened Weir's doorway. The hard and friendly quality of Frank's grin was like a tonic. Weir had a mighty yen to unburden himself of the whole tormenting story to his

friend. Frank had the coolest, wisest head in Kent County. But, unfortunately, Frank being the sheriff was the man of all men from whom the truth must be kept.

"Just stepped by," said Frank.

"Come on and sit down!"

"Can't do it. Got to go to my office to make out some papers. . . . Did you drive up to Ancaster yesterday?"

"Sure!"

"What did you find?"

Weir hated to lie to Frank. "Nothing. I never got to the big house. There's a negro on the place name of Saul Cowdin, stopped me with a gun. The road was barricaded too. There's nobody there."

"Sho! I thought maybe you'd run into something," said Frank, "being as you was out last night, and your car gone."

Weir had to find a good lie and a quick one. "Oh, I drove down to Bethany to see Clark Weaver. He wanted to change his ad. Thought I'd better explain to him that I couldn't change anything after the formes were locked. If I'd telephoned he might have got sore, and he's the biggest advertiser I've got."

Frank appeared to be satisfied with this. "Tasker Teeple's telling a story around that you didn't get home in the car until five this morning, and you came from the north," he remarked.

"He's lying," said Weir coolly. "When he can't find any scandal he's got to make it up."

"Maybe there is somebody at Ancaster big house," suggested Frank.

"It isn't possible," said Weir with a confident air. "Where would they get food?"

"But why should the nigger barricade the road, and stand you off with a gun if there wasn't anybody there?"

"Said it was his orders given him years ago," said Weir.

"Maybe so," said Frank. "Lee Cowdin was queer." He took a sideways bite off his plug. "Funny how things come around," he went on. "Once you begin talking about a place or a person seems like you're bound to hear more of it directly."

A fresh anxiety made Weir's breast tighten up. "What are you referring to?" he asked.

"Well, I told you I had to go across the Sound to Beaulieu County yesterday," said Frank. "Got that nigger John Digges who's wanted for robbing Jim Pritchard's store. When I was over there two fellows come up to me, fishermen I reckon, and they says: Are you the Sheriff of Kent County? I allowed I was, and they said: Who lives in that big house up in the nor-'east corner your county? You can see it up and down the Sound for miles and miles."

"Well, as you and me had been talking about it that very day I was right there with my answer. 'That's the old Cowdin place,' says I. 'Ain't nobody lived there for years and years. Ain't but one Cowdin left nohow, and he's a tramp and a hobo.'

"And these Cumberland men says: 'That's what folks on this side told us; the old Cowdin place, and all the Cowdins are dead and gone. But there's something funny about it. Sheriff. Twice lately me and my mate here when we was night fishing over near your side, we seen a light in that there house. Not a regular lighted up window, like, but a little small light that went on and off.' "

Weir found himself sweating gently. He undertook to laugh it off. "Lord! that's like the stories that pass current around here," he said scornfully. "Pretty soon they'll have the house filled with Japanese spies!"

"Maybe so," said Frank grinning, "but when you put this with that there might be something in it. I'll go up there with you some day just to satisfy ourselves. If I flash my badge on the nigger he'll have to let us by."

"All right," said Weir carelessly. "Some day." Inwardly he was panicky. I've got to get her away from there to-night whatever she may say, he thought.

Frank Baker went on to his office, and Weir started pacing up and down his shop. Now that the paper was out he had nothing to do but brood on his anxieties. He felt as if he would fly off the handle entirely before night came. Yet with the whole village watching him, he dared not start in Leila's direction before dark.

He counted his remaining money. Twenty-four dollars. Darn little on which to engineer an escape for two. He had promised to bring her a coat that would cover her up. Where in thunder was he to get her a coat? To have bought it in one of the village stores would have started every tongue in the

place wagging. He was not on sufficiently friendly terms with any woman in Kentville to borrow a coat for her.

While he was debating this problem he suddenly saw Leila's old Ford moving in the road outside. It brought him up like an electric shock. When his eyes focused on it it had already passed his door, and he could not see who was driving. But there was no mistaking the car with the back part of its top half collapsed. What did this mean?

Scarcely knowing what he was doing, Weir slammed the door of his shop and set off running up the road after the car. It stopped in front of the courthouse, and the powerful, slow-moving figure of Saul Cowdin got out and started up the cement walk. Weir felt half sick with anxiety. The savage negro who lived almost completely cut off from his kind; what had brought *him* to town?

Weir was about two minutes behind him in entering the courthouse. All the doors on the corridor stood open; county clerk, county treasurer, county commissioner; Saul was in none of these offices. It was not until he approached the Sheriff's office at the back that Weir heard the rumbling voice, and there he found him. The negro stood in front of Frank Baker's desk, sullen with terror at the ordeal he had imposed on himself, but doggedly seeing it through.

"Ha! Weir, you come just right!" cried Frank. "Shut the door. Here's Saul Cowdin with a story to tell. Didn't I say we would hear more about Ancaster? By God! Saul says that Lee Cowdin and his daughter have been living there for over two years past. Sit down and listen."

Frank was so intent upon the negro that he failed to notice the agitation of his friend. Weir dropped in a chair, and surreptitiously wiped the sweat off his face.

"Who that man?" asked Saul scowling. He did not talk in the glib manner of the negroes who hung around the village, but childishly like the pure African.

"This is Weir Lambert," said Frank. "Tell him your story too."

"What for he come my place yesterday?" growled Saul.

"Never mind that," said Frank. "Go ahead."

The negro could not stand out against the voice of authority. He said: "One day I take food to Master Lee and girl at big house——"

"How long ago was this?" asked Frank.

Saul counted on his fingers. “Ten days, boss.”

“Go ahead.”

“Master not there. Girl say he gone away. I think she lying. Master tell me when he go away before. I drive him in car. Now he don’t take car. No tracks in road. He got no boat. She sure lying.”

“Well, what did you do about it?”

“Do nothing. I wait.”

“Well, go ahead!”

Saul’s eyes rolled like those of a terrified horse. “Last night,” he said hoarsely, “no wind; all quiet; I hear funny noise from big house. Knock . . . knock . . . knock. Stop long time then come again. Knock . . . knock . . . knock. I sleep; I wake; knock . . . knock . . . knock. I think she hammering coffin for master.”

“My God!” murmured Frank. “Did you go up there?”

Saul slowly shook his head. Tiny beads of perspiration stood out on his black skin.

“You were afraid,” said Frank. “Well, go ahead.”

Weir had passed the stage of sweating now. He felt frozen. He felt as if he had left his body and was looking at himself from the outside, sitting there listening calmly to the negro’s story. He wondered in an indifferent sort of way if he would be able to get by without betraying himself. Fortunately Frank never looked his way.

Saul was breathing hard. “This morning,” he said, “I go up there. I go around the woods so she not see me. I go to graveyard. Never go there before. The white woman, Master Lee’s wife, she sit there on her grave, comb her yellow hair and mourn. Many times I hear her. I don’t go there. This morning I go. I crawl because my legs like water. I see new grave, boss. Alongside white woman’s grave. New fresh dirt just thrown. New grave since rain.”

Weir laughed. It sounded natural enough. “He’s had the nightmare,” he said. Weir took out his pipe, watching his hand to see if it trembled. It didn’t.

Saul scowled at him savagely. “I know what I see,” he rumbled.

“He couldn’t have imagined it all,” said Frank. “The girl and her father living there and all. That in itself is strange enough. We’ll go up and

investigate." He addressed himself to the negro. "What did you do then?"

"I run to my house," mumbled Saul.

"You think that this girl has murdered her father and put him away?"

"Sure!"

"Seventeen years old!"

"She's a woman," said Saul.

"Why should she kill him? Did he treat her badly?"

"Master Lee good man," said Saul evasively.

"Maybe the girl resented being kept there like a prisoner."

"Master not want his girl run around wild."

"Oh, I reckon there was no lack of motive for the deed," said Frank dryly. He rose decisively. "Come on, we'll go up and investigate this before we say anything about it. Saul can take us direct to the grave without our showing ourselves at the house. We'll open the grave before going to the house."

Weir got up stiffly. Everything was whirling around inside him. Yet he heard his voice saying casually enough: "Count me out."

Frank turned to him in astonishment. "What's the matter? Not coming! Why, this is your case!"

Weir searched desperately in his mind for some convincing reason, but all was confusion there. He could find nothing to say. In the end it was Frank, staring at him incredulously, who gave him a lead.

"You look half sick, man."

Weir seized on it. "A bit upset," he said off-hand.

"It's not this case, is it?" said Frank with a momentary suspicion.

Weir contrived to laugh. "Lord, no! This case is nothing in my life. . . . I was upset when I got up this morning. I just have to lie by and treat myself."

"Well, I'm sorry," said Frank. "I'd sooner have you with me on this than anybody. But it's too serious to wait. I'll have to take George Case with me. I'll give you the dope when I get back. Come on, Saul."

Frank strode out of the courthouse with the negro at his heels. Weir let them get ahead, as he did not wish to appear to be associated with the

Sheriff in public. There was a grass plot in front of the courthouse with a cement walk crossing it. In the middle of the open space was the Kent war monument with the walk passing around it on either side. Many cars were parked in the road, the Sheriff's among them.

Frank forced Saul to enter his car, since he had no intention of accommodating his pace to the ancient Ford. "I'll bring you back here, and you can get your car," he said.

There were always a few loungers in front of the courthouse. Jim Means called out: "What's doing, Frank?"

"A little trouble up in the first district," answered the Sheriff. "Tell you when I get back."

"Who's that nigger you got with you? Never seen *him* before."

Frank, making believe not to hear, let in his clutch and moved away.

Meanwhile Weir escaped notice by taking a side path across the little green and passing around the end of the line of cars.

Weir was on the road in his car about three minutes behind the Sheriff. Frank was known as a fast driver, but within half a dozen miles Weir had come in sight of him. He followed along about a quarter of a mile behind him. There was no short cut, no possibility of passing him without discovery. Weir had to hold his speed down, no matter how the blood throbbed in his ears. His only hope lay in the fact that the Sheriff had announced his intention of opening the grave before making himself known to the girl.

When they turned out of the State road Weir had to fall farther behind, as the presence of a following car in the unfrequented side road would have excited suspicion. Weir would stop awhile, groaning and cursing in his impatience; then tear ahead until he caught sight of the first car, and stop again.

When he came out into the open beyond Dick Bowers' place, the Sheriff's car was slowly climbing the old broken driveway across the small stream. Weir did not follow him through the water, but ran on to the beach, and leaving his car concealed under the bank, splashed through the mouth of the stream, and set off running at top speed over the hard sand at the edge of the water.

On his left rose the "cliffs" which were really gigantic cut banks of earth and gravel, continually being undermined by the storms on the Sound. They

cut off all view inland and also cut Weir off from the sight of the Sheriff and the men with him. Weir figured that he must run about half a mile.

In the end he found a fairly well-marked path coming down from the house. The cliffs had flattened out here. He was at the bottom of the long gradual slope that had once formed the terraces of Ancaster. To his surprise he saw footprints in the path, not very recent. He could not stop to examine them now, but plunged on up the hill with gasping lungs.

He paused at the edge of the open space, looking this way and that through the trees. Before him the half ruined terraces swept up to the noble old house forlorn in decay. The air seemed to quiver in the strong sunshine. There was no one in sight, no sound except the crazy singing of the birds.

A minute later he was running through the open door softly calling: "Leila! Leila!"

She appeared suddenly through the pantry door at the back of the hall, a doughty little figure, her eyes big with surprise. "Weir! So soon! You said . . . why, you're panting!"

"Leila, for God's sake, quick! We must get out of here!"

"Get out of here? I told you——"

"The Sheriff is coming. He's here already. Up on the hill back of the house. He knows everything. He has come to arrest you!"

"He knows! You told him!" she cried accusingly.

"What do you think I am?" returned Weir angrily. "It was Saul told him. Saul came to his office an hour ago, and charged you with killing your father. Saul saw the grave. The two of them are there now!"

All the colour left her face. "I, kill my father?" she gasped. She ran forward and gripped Weir's forearm. "Weir, do you believe I killed my father?"

"I don't care whether you did or not. We're in this together."

"That's not enough. You must tell me!"

"Leila, for God's sake don't start an argument. We must get out of this. Get your things."

Without another word she turned and ran up the stairs. "Half a moment," she called back.

Weir would not show himself out on the porch; it was too open. He walked back and forth through the empty echoing rooms; drawing-room, hall, and dining-room. In this way he could watch through the windows on every side.

There was nothing stirring anywhere. The sunshine laid a spell on the broken old trees and the thickly springing saplings. At last with a groan of relief he heard her running along the upper hall. At the same moment he glanced through the drawing-room window and saw Frank Baker appearing from out of the jungle-like growth to the south of the house. George Case and Saul followed him. This was the path from the graveyard.

Weir met Leila at the foot of the stairs. “Too late,” he said heavily; “they’re coming.”

Terror made her look like a child. The trembling of her hand on his arm drove Weir wild with compassion. But her eyes remained steady. “Couldn’t we hide?” she faltered.

“No good,” he said savagely. “Only make us look more guilty when they found us.”

There was a silence.

“Nobody knows you’re here,” she whispered suddenly. “You hide and let them take me.”

“What do you think I am?” cried Weir.

“You have done nothing.”

“I helped you bury him!”

“Listen!” she whispered urgently. “If they put me in jail, I will need a friend outside, won’t I?”

“By God, that’s right!” said the startled Weir. “You have a head on you! All right!”

“Back through the little larder where you got in last night,” she whispered. “There’s no cellar under the kitchen part of the house. You can creep right under the house until they go.”

Weir pressed her hand and ran back into the pantry.

VIII

He listened behind the pantry door until he heard Frank Baker's voice in the front hall, then made his way softly back through the kitchen, the back hall, the larder, and out through the window. He did not hide because he wanted the Sheriff to find him standing at the door of the printing shop when he drove back into Kentville. Weir figured that Frank would take time to search the house for evidence before starting.

Outside the house Weir hid himself amongst the new growth, and making a detour around the open space, regained the beach, and in due course came to his car. As he passed the Ford over the stream he had the satisfaction of seeing that Frank had not yet returned that way.

He had been home for upwards of half an hour before Frank showed up. Weir had some minutes warning of the Sheriff's coming through the excitement that suddenly spread through the village. Tasker Teeple ran out of his house banging the door, and set off up the road as fast as his rheumatic legs would carry him. Tom Horsfall stopped at Giddy Withers' gate and hollered something that Weir could not hear. The two of them ran towards the courthouse.

At the same time cars from the nearby farms began to come in until the road was almost as busy as upon court day. Weir guessed that somebody up the county had telephoned down that the Sheriff was coming, and telephone central was spreading the news. Weir was familiar with this phenomenon.

Finally Frank drove past at a high rate of speed, eyes ahead. His hard good-humoured face was grim. Black Saul sat beside him; George Case and Leila were in the back. Weir got only a fleeting glimpse of her pale face. She was looking at him. Children and dogs springing from nowhere took after the car yelling and barking.

When they had gone Weir hid himself in the printing shop. He could picture the scenes that were taking place around the courthouse, and it made him feel desperate. He felt that if he went up there he would do something foolish. He was hoping that Frank might send for him to come to his office.

Time passed and no message came. Weir, pacing up and down the printing shop like a caged animal, began to wonder uneasily if Frank could have entrapped the girl into an admission that Weir had been her

accomplice. Finally, unable to bear the suspense, he started for the courthouse.

The sight of the crowd around the jail, pushing and stretching their necks to look in the windows, made him feel a little sick. The jail was a small square brick building immediately behind the courthouse, and joined to it by a short corridor. There was no wall around it, but only a makeshift barbed wire entanglement to prevent friends of the prisoners from coming too close to the windows. No regular jailer was employed, and the prisoners had the freedom of the little building during the day.

Weir pushed and stretched his neck with the others. Four cells or cages occupied the middle of the little building with a passage all around them. Consequently there was not a vestige of privacy. It did not seem to have occurred to the builders that a woman might have to be locked up there. Leila was visible sitting in a corner of her cell with her head down and her arms up over her face. The sight seemed to squeeze all the blood out of Weir's heart. He ground his teeth together to keep from bursting into cries of rage and pain.

Each window of the jail had its separate crowd. All recognised that Weir had a special interest in this case and he was hailed with jeers.

"Where you been, editor? . . . Here's your advertiser! . . . Here's the wench that advertised for her fly-by-night fellow! . . . She's a hard one all right! . . . None of our folks, thank God! . . . Didn't stop with carrying on with fellows, she up and shot her Pap dead. . . . Cut him up into small pieces. That's the story. . . . She had a whole arsenal of guns up there. . . . Tried to stand off the Sheriff and his deputy with a gun in each hand!"

Close beside Weir old Tasker Teeple was grinning through the bars with a cruel pleasure that it seemed nothing could ever glut. "Them Cowdins always was a bad-blooded lot," he said. "Right from the start."

"They never was rightly Kent County folks nohow," added Gid Withers over his shoulder.

"No, only for a hundred and fifty years," said Weir bitterly.

Both men turned on him, showing their teeth. "Yah! what do you know about it, Yankee?"

Even the ladies of Kentville who prided themselves on their niceness could not keep away from the jail windows. They kept happening by. Little plump Miss Nannie Bellhouse darted back and forth behind the men,

bleating plaintively because she could not see. They gallantly opened up to let her through.

Miss Nannie licked her lips and took a long look. “So that’s the hussy!” she said with satisfaction. “She’s just where she ought to be . . . I can’t see her face.”

Gid Wither’s called out: “Hey you, girl! Hold up your head so we can get a look at you!”

Weir went away from there quickly. He felt murder in his heart.

In the Sheriff’s office he found Frank Baker in consultation with Peter Birkett, State’s Attorney for Kent County. Frank hailed Weir with his customary open, friendly glance—so all was right there: “Just the man we wanted to see.”

“What can Weir do for us?” said Birkett sourly. He was a blonde young man who was already beginning to dry up. In fact he gave the impression that he had started to dry up as soon as he was born. As the public prosecutor in this big case, he was already blown up with the sense of his own importance.

“Weir’s a college man,” said Frank simply. “He’s lived in the city. He knows how they do things.”

“We don’t want any outside help,” muttered Birkett.

“Frank, this is damnable!” cried Weir brokenly.

“What is?” demanded Birkett, staring.

“I’ve looked inside the jail. To exhibit that poor girl like a wild beast in a cage! To let all the common trash in the county stand there and make a mock of her!”

“I don’t understand you,” said Birkett.

“You wouldn’t!” retorted Weir—and was immediately sorry that he had said it. Somehow he had to placate these men. Leila’s fate was in their hands. He went on: “I appeal to your humanity, men! Seventeen years old! It’s cruel and barbarous to make a show of her like that.”

“Look here!” threatened Birkett. “We’re not going to take this from the likes of you!”

“You’ll get it from the whole world,” retorted Weir. “This case will fetch down reporters from the city papers. You can’t prevent them from telling the

truth."

As Birkett was about to make an angry answer, Frank put out a big hand to silence him. "Weir is right," he said gloomily. "But what in hell can I do? I didn't build the jail."

"Get a room in the hotel for her," urged Weir.

"She'd climb out of the window."

"Put a guard over her; a woman guard."

"Who's to pay for the hotel room and the guard?" said Frank. "The County Commissioners wouldn't okay the bill."

This was unanswerable. Weir ground his teeth together impotently.

"Ridiculous!" said Birkett. "Pampering a murderer like that."

"You haven't convicted her yet," said Weir. ". . . Look, Frank. Why don't you get some sheets and hang them inside the bars of her cell so the mob can't spy on her."

"I'm against it," said Birkett.

"It's not up to you," said Weir. "The Sheriff's in charge of the jail."

"I'll do it," said Frank, striking the desk. "It's a good idea."

"How much of a case have you got against her?" asked Weir anxiously.

"Don't tell him," said Birkett.

"In God's name why not?" demanded Frank.

"He's the press," said Birkett pompously. "It would be fatal to the people's case to divulge it prematurely."

"Rats!" said Frank. "I've already heard you tell it to four different men. . . . We got a strong case against her," he went on to Weir, "and I wish I was out of it! The negro Saul is prepared to go on the stand and swear that Lee Cowdin told him he feared harm at the hands of his daughter. Then there's the business of her hiding the crime and secretly burying the body. And finally there's the gun."

"Where did you find the gun?"

"In the little satchel she was carrying."

"Whose gun was it."

"Saul says it was her father's gun."

“Can you prove it was the gun that shot him?”

“It’s the same calibre. It has one discharged chamber.”

“There will be plenty more evidence forthcoming when I get to work,” said Birkett.

“I don’t doubt it,” said Weir. “. . . Frank, what does *she* say?”

“Says she didn’t do it. Further than that we can’t get a word out of her. Neither me nor Birkett.”

“Naturally,” said Weir, “she looks on you as her enemies; her instinct warns her to keep her mouth shut. . . . She must have a lawyer.”

“Got no money,” said Frank. “The court must assign one. Luckily next week is court week, and the whole damn business can be cleaned up quick.”

“She couldn’t get a fair trial here,” said Weir desperately. “She must apply for a change in venue.”

Birkett seeing his case threatened was right up in arms. “Why should she?” he demanded. “There’s no feeling against her here.”

“No feeling against her!” cried Weir, flinging up his hands. “Oh, my God! how can I talk to a man like you?”

“What are you so excited about?” snarled Birkett. “Got a hankering for the girl? . . . Why should there be any feeling against her?

“Because she’s a stranger. That’s enough in Kent.”

“Well, if she was tried in another county she’d be a stranger there, too, wouldn’t she?”

Weir felt that it was useless to answer.

“Peter is right, Weir,” put in Frank. “They would never give her a change of venue under the circumstances.”

“Then she must be tried by a jury chosen from amongst that mob around the jail,” cried Weir bitterly. “God help her!”

“Judge Comerford is sitting over in Belvoir County this week,” said Frank. “I could telephone him about assigning a lawyer to her. Who would you suggest?”

“Between the four lawyers here in Kentville there’s not a penny to choose,” said Weir bitterly. “There isn’t one of them with guts enough to go against public feeling. . . . I’ll have to try to get her a man from the city.”

Birkett looked uneasy.

"I doubt if that would be doing the girl a service," said Frank gloomily. "A city lawyer would create a prejudice in the minds of the jury right from the start."

"Then whichever way she turns she's blocked!" cried Weir. "Your justice is a farce!" He took a turn around the room, trying to think. "Anyhow I'll try to get her a city lawyer," he said at last. "It's the lesser of two evils. At any rate the man from the city will have ability."

Birkett threw him a spiteful glance.

"Can I have an interview with the girl, Frank," asked Weir bluntly.

"Certainly not," said Birkett quickly.

Weir turned on him with a hard smile. "It happens to be up to the Sheriff, not to you."

"Anyhow Frank would have to be present."

"That's just as he says, of course. If he is present I couldn't get anything more out of her than he could by himself."

Frank thought the matter through in his slow way. "Yes, I'll let you see her," he said at last. "I don't give a damn if it is irregular. She's got to have one friend. I'll wait outside the door while you're talking to her."

During the day the keys to the jail hung from a hook over Frank's desk. There were three of them on a ring. Frank took them down and went out through the door leading to the jail corridor. Peter Birkett sat on in the room, scowling and biting his fingers.

"Here's your hat," said Weir dryly. "Sorry you have to go."

Birkett went out, slamming the door after him.

A moment later Frank came in by the other door bringing Leila. Frank had procured her a neat dress from somewhere or another, but she was still wearing the broken old sneakers. She was breathing fast and had a cowering air as if she expected a beating. What she had been through seemed almost to have driven her witless. Her face showed no change at the sight of Weir.

"This young fellow's name is Weir Lambert," said Frank with the grim air which masked a real kindness. "He wants to be your friend. To hire a lawyer for you, and do all that ought to be done for your defence. He has nothing to do with the law, so you can talk to him as you have a mind to."

Leila said nothing. Frank went out into the main corridor, closing the door after him.

Leila dropped into a chair as if all the strength had run out of her legs. She did not look at Weir, but when he came to her, putting out his hand, she seized it and pressed it hard as if to gather strength from the contact. A big lump rose in Weir's throat. He was warned by instinct that a businesslike manner would be the greatest kindness to her.

"Well, Jack," he said calmly, "we've got several things to decide. You must try to give me some leads so that I can dig up evidence on your side. Then I'm going to town to get a lawyer for you."

"There is no money for a lawyer," she whispered.

"You leave that to me. I'll find a way."

She moistened her dry lips. "Do you believe I killed my father, Weir?" Her voice was scarcely audible.

Experience warned him how to answer. "I do not," he said stoutly.

"Why do they hate me so?" she whispered. "I never harmed them."

"Never mind that now," said Weir. "We've got to stick to business. Tell me what happened on the night your father disappeared."

"I don't know what happened," she murmured. "In the morning he just wasn't there. It was Sunday morning of last week. When I looked in his room I saw that the bed had not been slept in. I knew right away that something had happened. He had a good suit, and he had not taken that.

"When Saul came up with the food I told him my father had gone away. I could see that he doubted it. I was afraid of Saul, and always I had to make-believe I wasn't afraid of him. As soon as he had gone I started looking for my father. He wasn't anywhere along the paths. As for the woods, I scarcely knew where to begin to look.

"I had a dollar that I had kept ever since I came here. I had hidden it. On Monday I gave that to Saul to buy stamps and gasoline. I gave him the note for the newspaper. I told him it was for my father. Saul can't read. I explained how he was to buy the stamps in one post-office, put them in the letter and carry it on to Kentville to be posted."

Weir interrupted her. "Jack, can't you tell me now who you were trying to communicate with? How can I help you if I don't know everything?"

She shook her head. “Somebody who came to our place,” she whispered. “Somebody who was kind to me. He was young. I can’t tell you any more. There isn’t any more to tell.”

“Describe him to me.”

She persistently shook her head.

“Well, go ahead.”

“Every day I looked for my father. A week passed before I found him. It was the—the smell which finally led me to the place. It was near the path which comes up from the beach. He was lying on his back. He had the pistol clutched so tightly in his hand that I could scarcely get it out. One bullet had been shot off. I thought he had shot himself.”

“That is impossible,” said Weir.

“So you say.”

“Tell me exactly where you found the body,” said Weir. “So I can visit the spot. I suppose Frank Baker and Peter Birkett will comb the place to-morrow, but I’ll be there before them.”

“What for?” she asked with an anxious glance.

“I may be able to find some indication, some bit of evidence that will help you.”

She passed a hand wearily over her face. “I was so upset,” she murmured, “that I didn’t notice things very closely. . . . It was down near the beach. I could hear the lapping of the water, but I couldn’t see it. The undergrowth is very thick around there. I found the body on the left side of the path going down. Not far from the path, fifty feet perhaps, but completely hidden.”

“If the undergrowth was so thick he wasn’t shot on the spot where you found him,” suggested Weir. “The killer couldn’t have seen him. He was dragged there afterwards.”

Leila gave him a sharp, painful glance, and once more Weir had the tormenting thought that she didn’t want the truth to come out. He shook his head to drive it away. He was bound to work for her anyhow.

“When did you see your father for the last time?” he asked.

“When I gave him his supper the night before. Right afterwards he went out. He never came back.”

“Did he always carry the gun?”

“Yes, he had been carrying it lately.”

“Then he must have expected to have trouble.”

She bit her lip.

“What kind of trouble was he expecting?” Weir asked softly.

She would only shake her head.

Weir tried another line. “Had he ever fired the gun before?”

She hesitated before answering. “No.”

“Have you ever handled it or fired it, Jack?”

“No. I never fired any gun. I would be afraid.”

Weir eyed her gloomily. He had come to the end of his questioning. Useless to try to force the answers she didn’t want to give.

“Jack,” he said suddenly, “shouldn’t you write to your aunt now?”

This roused her sharply. “No! No! No!” she protested. “It would be useless. She would only say: I told you so!”

“Maybe she’d put up the money for your defence.”

“I wouldn’t take it from her!” cried Leila passionately.

Weir shrugged. “After stopping at Ancaster I’ll go on to the city to-morrow morning,” he said. “Shan’t see you until night. Is there anything you want me to get you in the city?”

“Sell the brooch I sent you,” she said. “So I can pay for this dress that the Sheriff borrowed for me.”

Weir went to the door and admitted Frank from the corridor. Frank looked keenly from one face to another, and said nothing. He took his keys from the hook over his desk, and conducted Leila back to the jail. Weir watched her go with a sore heart. He waited, scowling at the floor, and studying hard.

Frank returned and hung up his keys. Weir regarded the keys speculatively. Something was cooking inside his skull. “Walk down the road with me,” said Frank. “I’m going home to get sheets to hang up in the girl’s cell.”

“Well, I’ll go as far as my place with you,” said Weir.

Alone in the printing shop, Weir searched about until he found a can of putty that he had used for repairs to the windows. He worked it up soft and smooth with a few drops of machine oil, and spread it in the bottom of a little pasteboard box. Slipping the box in his pocket, he started back for the courthouse.

As he went in he glanced back down the road, and saw Frank Baker coming a few hundred yards away, with the bundle of sheets under his arm. Frank's progress was slow, because everybody wanted to stop him and ask questions about the prisoner. Weir figured that he would have a good three or four minutes before the Sheriff arrived in his office.

Standing at Frank's desk with his back to the door, Weir took down the keys. There was a middle size key for the door into the jail corridor, a big key for the door into the jail proper, and a yale key that opened any one of the cells.

Weir had already decided that if an escape was decided on, it must be pulled off through the rear window of the jail which overlooked an unfrequented gully. Consequently he was only interested in the key that opened the cell door. He took an impression of it in the soft putty; hung up the keys again, and slipped the box in his pocket.

A moment or two later Frank came in. "What! back already?" he said.

Weir scowled in an abstracted manner. "There are things about this case that I want to talk over with you," he said. "I've got to talk to somebody or I'll go balmy."

"Sure!" said Frank understandingly. "I'll be with you as soon as I hang these sheets. Sit down and smoke up." He took his keys and went into the little corridor.

IX

It was just coming full day next morning when Weir reached the end of the side road leading to Ancaster. Across the Sound one narrow, gleaming, rosy cloud announced the rising of the sun. Not caring to risk an encounter with Saul, Weir left his car hidden behind the bank, back of the beach as on his previous visit, and set off on foot along the shore.

For several days past a persistent south wind had been backing up the waters of the Sound, and now, being high tide, the beach was all awash. Weir hung his shoes around his neck, and rolled up his trousers. Even so he was obliged to make his way along by the base of the great earthen cliffs over the masses of clay which had fallen from above during the last storm.

Presently he became aware that another barefooted man had gone and come that way during some other high tide. The tracks were moderately fresh, perhaps a week old. Weir studied them keenly; half a foot here; a heel pressed into the clay here; toes that had slipped in another place.

When he came to the first complete print he squatted down to examine it. There was no suggestion of the broad square African foot. It had certainly been made by a white man. This was a right foot rather well shaped. The impress of the little toe was missing. Weir searched further and found other prints. On the right foot the little toe was always missing.

The great question was, had Lee Cowdin made these tracks? They showed both going and coming, and Weir was presently able to establish that the coming tracks were superimposed upon the going tracks in places, blotting the latter out. Thus they could not have been made by Lee Cowdin's feet.

There had been a visitor to Ancaster who had come away again; a white man with the little toe missing on his right foot. Moreoever, he had come back faster than he went. Whenever the nature of the ground permitted, the coming tracks lengthened out indicating that the man had broken into a run. Weir's heart beat fast with hope. Here was the beginning of a real case.

He came to the path from the beach up to the house. On his previous trip he had been in too much of a hurry to see anything. Now he searched the way, foot by foot. The path was beaten hard for the most part, but there were tell-tale soft spots. He found his own tracks going and coming, and also the

tracks of another pair of shod feet going and coming back. Evidently the barefooted man had stopped at the foot of the path to put on his shoes. Weir took careful measurements of the different tracks.

With the information that he now possessed he had little difficulty in finding the spot where Lee Cowdin had apparently been dragged into the undergrowth by his killer, and dragged out again by his daughter. Weir located the spot where the dead body had lain for a week, and searched back and forth between it and the path perhaps half a dozen times.

He was rewarded by finding a little bone button half an inch in diameter, green in colour. It had the look of a shirt button. Green shirt buttons are decidedly uncommon. It was not Lee Cowdin's button, because he had worn a blue denim shirt with white buttons. Weir pocketed his prize, feeling that he had forged another link in the chain.

He sat down on a fallen log beside the path and patiently set about piecing together what had happened there on Saturday night ten days before. A third pair of male shod feet (these in badly worn shoes) had come down the path to this point, and had never gone back again. Obviously Lee Cowdin. Whereas the barefooted man, now wearing shoes, had come up to this point and had turned back without venturing farther.

Lee Cowdin had without doubt met his death on this spot, for it would be natural for his killer to drag him into the thicket just where he had fallen. Lee had expected to meet an enemy. Suppose he had been laying for him just here. Why should he choose this particular spot? There was a bend in the path. That was the answer. He could lie here and look down the path without showing himself.

Weir stretched out and took a slant around the end of the log on which he had been sitting. If a man lay watching for an enemy he would see him as he appeared around the bend below. Suppose Lee had shot at him and missed, where would the bullet go? An immense pine tree blocked the path just beyond. After a search Weir found a bullet embedded in the bark about eight feet above the ground. He grinned thus to find his course of reasoning born out by the physical fact. He left the bullet where it was.

Further search revealed no additional evidence. He went on up to the house. It was still something short of six o'clock and there was no sign of life about the place. The front door was locked, and he climbed through the rear window as before. He found nothing in the kitchen to interest him, and went upstairs.

There were two big bedrooms in the front of the house with a smaller one between. One of the big rooms had been Leila's, one her father's. Like the rest of the rooms they were pitifully bare. There was something touching in their orderliness. Beds neatly made; floors scrubbed; everything put away.

Weir went direct to Lee Cowdin's bureau and found a box of shells. Judging from the faded paper label, it had been in Lee's possession for a long time. Seven shells were missing. Well, five were still in Lee's gun, and one was embedded in the pine tree. What had become of the seventh? Weir put the question away in his mind for future reference.

Still searching through Lee's meagre belongings, his heart leaped into his mouth upon hearing the key turn in the lock of the front door. A moment later he heard Frank Baker's resonant voice in the hall below and Peter Birkett's ready answer.

Weir took off his shoes and ran as softly as a shadow back into the rear extension of the house. On his previous visit he had seen a service stairway there. He went down and slipping through the window by which he had entered, lost himself in the woods. Half an hour later he regained his car and set off for the city.

Newcastle was an old city as cities go in our country. Smoke-grimed buildings, showy stores, thronging traffic and noise. It was a different world from Kentville. Weir's knowledge of the place was limited to his occasional shopping excursions. He had no friends there. According to his custom he put up his car in the Jefferson garage because parking places were hard to find in the streets, and set out to do his business.

Entering the first locksmith's shop he came to, he produced his little box of putty. "Can you make me a key from this impression?" he asked.

The locksmith, a little withered bald man with cunning eyes, gave him a sharp look. "What are you up to, Jack?"

Weir laughed heartily. "Do I look like a housebreaker?"

"I don't go by the looks of a customer," retorted the locksmith. "I only want to keep out of trouble. This is an unusual key."

"The explanation is perfectly simple," said Weir. "We lost one of the keys to our front door. Only got one left. I couldn't bring you that because my mother's got to use it every time she goes out. So I took an impression of it."

“You sure have some lock on the door,” said the locksmith dryly. “What’s the address?”

“329 Jackson Street,” said Weir off-hand. Every town in the south has a Jackson Street, he reflected. “How much to make a key?”

“Five dollars,” answered the other with a look of cupidity.

“Nothing doing,” said Weir, reaching for the box.

The man quickly changed his tune. “Oh well, if it’s on the level half a dollar.”

“Okay,” said Weir, “I’ll call for it this afternoon.”

At a pawnbroker’s Weir pledged Leila’s brooch, thus adding to their slender store of money. In a hardware store he bought a package of strong hacksaw blades.

Then to his main business. An amiable hotel clerk furnished him with the names of some of the best legal firms and he made a round of them. The first brief account of the murder in Kent County was in the morning newspaper, and he carried a copy of it to show.

He was completely unsuccessful. He interviewed all kinds of lawyers. Not one of the men he liked would take such a long chance on being paid for his services. None seemed to be able to understand just what Weir had to do with it. One or two promised to think it over. Certain of the rat-faced breed of lawyers toyed with the idea of taking the case, but Weir didn’t want them. He kept it up until all the offices had closed for the day.

When he picked up his key and returned to the garage sore and discouraged, he was astonished to find a young man sitting in his car reading a newspaper. A handsome and well-dressed young fellow a year or two older than himself with that indefinable air of knowing what was what.

“Hello there!” he said with a friendly smile. “You’re Weir Lambert. I’m waiting for you. My name is Ralph Manners. A junior in the firm of Ruddy, Weston and Miller.”

It was one of the firms Weir had called on. To one in Weir’s low state the friendly grin was as heartening as a dram. He gave the young lawyer grin for grin. “I didn’t see you in the office,” he said.

“I didn’t see you either, but I heard the old man talking about your case after you’d gone, and it interested me. You see I had already read the story in the newspaper.”

Manners had the smooth, cagey face that you would expect in a smart young lawyer. There could be no doubt of his ability, not with that strong and confident eye. Weir liked him better every minute. “How did you get on my track?” he asked.

“Telephoned down to Kentville. Talked with the State’s Attorney. . . .”

“You wouldn’t hear any good of me from him,” put in Weir.

“Why not?” asked Manners curiously.

“Oh, we don’t gee, that’s all.”

“Well, he’ll be my opponent if I get the case,” said Manners. “I talked to the Sheriff too. It was he who told me that you put up your car in the Jefferson garage and here I am. Been waiting half an hour.”

“Certainly was decent of you,” said Weir. He experienced such a rush of friendliness towards this stranger that it made him shy.

“Oh hell,” said Manners, “I’m interested . . . From what I heard the old man say I judged that this girl wasn’t anything to you, but just because she was poor and hadn’t any folks you felt that something ought to be done for her.”

“That’s it,” said Weir.

“I was sure of it!” cried Manners. “And that’s what got me. Damn it all, a man can’t be on the make all the time. I wanted to help too. And I wanted to be your friend.”

They shook hands. “Damn decent of you,” muttered Weir. Words seemed inadequate.

“Oh, at that I’m no philanthropist,” said Manners laughing. “I’ve got to be honest with you. Everything points to the fact that this is going to be a big case. All the circumstances are so darn romantic. And win or lose little Ralph will get his share of the publicity, see?”

“We *can’t* lose!” said Weir quickly.

“Sure we can’t lose. There’s no evidence.”

“Mr. Ruddy turned me down,” said Weir, scowling.

“That’s the conservatism of age. Don’t worry. Of course I couldn’t take it without his okay. But if you can tell me the case I promise you I’ll talk him over. I’m a favourite of his.”

Weir felt a little chilled. He had taken it for granted that Manners was asking for the case. Now it appeared he had to be persuaded. The painful question in Weir's mind was, how much would it be safe to tell a man who was not yet definitely on his side?

"Let's go somewhere and talk it out," said Manners. "It's too early to eat, but we can have a couple of drinks to pass the time until we get hungry. My treat."

"I couldn't allow that," said Weir.

"Oh hell, we won't argue about it. Leave your car here. Mine's outside in the street."

They entered a long rakish black runabout and set off. Weir watched his new friend out of the corner of his eye, fascinated. Manners knew exactly how to wear his clothes, but there was nothing foppish about him; more like a sport; a high-class sport. He steered the wicked car through the traffic with a wave of his hand as you might say.

They stopped before a shabby little bar restaurant in a side street. As soon as they got inside, Weir realised that the shabbiness was deliberate, and that this was one of those choice places known and prized by a select clientèle. Manners was not known there, but he had the sort of good-natured assurance that calls for the best service anywhere.

"Fellow just told me about this place to-day," he remarked.

He chose a table in a corner out of earshot of the other customers. Weir was still sizing him up. Without his hat he looked older and shrewder. He had fine black hair lying close to his head and blue eyes set rather near together. Usually considered a sign of a foxy disposition, thought Weir, but it doesn't always work out that way. Strongly marked lines between Manners' nose and mouth gave him an attractively carnal look. A fellow who didn't set up to be any better than he was.

He ordered dry martinis and told Weir a couple of stories that made him laugh. When they had downed their drinks he said:

"Well, give me the dope, Weir."

X

WEIR started his story. His object was to win Manners' sympathy for Leila, and he suppressed his own part in the affair. Oddly enough Manners seemed to be chiefly interested in Weir, and asked him some pointed questions as to how he had been drawn into the mess. Weir scarcely knew how to answer them. He didn't want to lie to the man he was trying to win for a friend. He finally said:

"Leila is the one who is charged, and whom you'll have to defend. Leave me out of it."

"Fair enough," said Manners. "Have another drink. I'm for you, Weir."

Time passed. They ordered their dinner and ate it, and Weir was still talking. Manners listened with eager sympathy. Weir could scarcely believe that he had found such friendliness in a world where every man is out for himself. So far Manners had not committed himself to anything, though he had said more than once that money had nothing to do with it. Finally Weir asked him point blank:

"Do you want the case, Manners?"

"Sure, I want it!" was the enthusiastic reply. "Call me Ralph. But you understand, I can't engage myself without the boss's approval."

Weir's face fell.

"If you're not in a hurry to get home," suggested Manners, "let's go up to Mr. Ruddy's house now and talk to him together."

Weir's spirits leaped up again. "In a hurry!" he cried. "The only object I have in the world at this moment is to get you!"

"Good fellow!" said Manners. "I'll go call up the old man and find out if he'll see us."

Weir waited in keen anxiety while Manners disappeared into a telephone booth. When he returned to the table he said:

"Mr. Ruddy says there's no use our coming to his house, because he's getting ready to sail on his yacht for a week-end cruise down the Sound."

Weir was sunk once more.

“But,” Manners went on, “he said if we came aboard the yacht he could give us half an hour before sailing.”

Instantly Weir was up again—these changes in altitude were nerve-racking. “Gee! that’s swell!” he cried. “Come on, let’s go!”

Manners smiled.

It was now about half-past seven and perfectly dark. They drove for a long distance south through streets of mean houses, and finally came out on the water in a lonely spot. Weir knew enough about the town to realise that this was not the main harbour, but an inlet serving various manufacturing plants in the south end.

Manners left the car in an open shed off a yard at the water’s edge. It seemed to be part of a dilapidated boathouse where skiffs were repaired and hired. There was no one about the place. It struck Weir as odd that a gentleman should choose such a spot for his yacht landing, but he was too keen set on his errand to stop and think it out.

In front of the shanty was a lop-sided floating stage and alongside lay a smart dinghy with an outboard engine. Two sailors were sitting in it. At Manners’ approach they rose and saluted.

“Has Mr. Ruddy gone aboard?” he asked.

“Not yet, sir.”

“Well, we don’t want to hang around here waiting for him. Take us out to the yacht and come back for him.”

“Yes sir.”

They started away. The shores of the inlet were lined with factories. In the shallows dozens of humble little craft were anchored. No lights showed anywhere near. Half a mile behind them a highway bridge swung across the inlet with automobiles and trolley cars passing back and forth.

The yacht lay out in deep water with no other vessel near. Weir felt reassured when he saw her. A handsome new craft, not very big but spelling luxury in every line. Her name was not visible anywhere. They stepped aboard. Manners was evidently a frequent visitor. Indeed he had almost the air of being the owner. He led the way into a beautiful little saloon, and a steward without waiting for orders set a tray on the table with Scotch, soda, ice and glasses.

“High-ball?” said Manners.

“No, thanks,” said Weir. “I can’t drink with any satisfaction until this business is settled.”

Manners mixed himself a drink and they settled into deep easy chairs. They smoked; Weir a pipe, and Manners a cigarette. Weir was fidgety; Manners was very quiet. His face had become masklike, his eyes seemed to have drawn closer together. He looked at Weir steadily. Yet his voice when he spoke had the same, frank, friendly ring.

“I’ve been thinking this matter over on the way down. I think you’re making a mistake, old fellow.”

Weir stiffened. For some reason he resented “old fellow.” “How do you mean?” he asked quietly.

“That’s a foul mess down in Kent County. That father and daughter living in such a way. In hiding. Either they must be crazy or there is some nasty story behind it.”

Weir’s pipe began to taste bad in his mouth, and he quietly put it away.

“Nobody can help such people,” said Manners.

“You haven’t seen the girl yet.”

“Oh, I can understand she must have a kind of attractiveness. That explains everything.”

“Well, here’s a change of tune!” said Weir bitterly.

“Not at all,” said Manners quickly. “I haven’t changed towards you. Your feelings do you credit. I mean your decency in standing up for the girl, in wanting to help her. As soon as I read about that I wanted to know you; I wanted to be your friend.”

A sickening feeling of depression stole over Weir. He had counted so much on this man. He felt inclined to say: To hell with your friendship! But he held his tongue.

“You have nothing to gain from this,” said Manners.

“Wasn’t expecting to gain anything,” muttered Weir.

“But you’ve a hell of a lot to lose! A young fellow like you with your way to make. God knows what dirt will be turned up during this trial. You know what people say about a young man who tries to rescue a girl, particularly a poor girl. You’ll never be able to rid yourself of the dirt that will stick to you.”

Such a storm of feelings gripped Weir, disappointment, anger, and the sense of having been cheated, that he could not trust himself to speak.

Manners glanced at him and went on: “My advice to you as a friend is to chuck the whole business.”

“It’s no good taking that line with me,” said Weir savagely. “You’re older than me. You must know that there are certain times in a man’s life when only one course of action is possible. It’s a waste of breath to talk about it or even to think about it. A man can only do what he has to do.”

“That’s just stubbornness,” said Manners. “As a friend it’s my duty to point that out to you.”

“Oh, drop the friendship!” cried Weir. “I can’t be your friend when you take that line. You talk too much about friendship.”

“Well, I’m sorry you’re taking it this way,” said Manners, looking at his cigarette.

“Now that I’m here I suppose I’d better wait and talk to Mr. Ruddy,” said Weir gloomily. “I can’t neglect any chance.”

“I couldn’t conscientiously recommend now that we take the case,” said Manners.

“Well, for God’s sake!” cried Weir, staring. “Did you bring me all the way here to tell me that? Why didn’t you say so in the beginning?”

“I hadn’t thought it through,” said Manners.

“Then I’ll go,” said Weir, rising.

“The dinghy’s gone ashore. You’ll have to wait until it comes back.”

Weir sat down again.

“Have a drink,” said Manners.

Weir shook his head impatiently.

There was a considerable silence in the yacht’s saloon.

“According to what you told me there’s another man ahead of you with the girl,” said Manners at length.

“I suppose you can’t understand why I should still want to befriend her,” said Weir bitterly. “Well, I’ve done talking.”

“You beat the Dutch!” said Manners humorously. “But you’re a fine fellow.”

Weir twisted uneasily. “Leave me out of it,” he muttered.

“Try to think of yourself as you were a week ago,” said Manners. “You were normal then. And soon you’ll be normal again. That’s the state in which you’ve got to live your life. If you were normal now you would see that the only thing to do is quietly to get out of Kentville until this business is over.”

“I couldn’t leave Kentville even if I wanted to,” said Weir sullenly. “Every cent I have is tied up in that newspaper.”

“How much would you take for it?”

“The price is six hundred dollars.”

“I could easily sell it for you,” said Manners. “In fact, I’m so sure of it that I would advance you the money now.”

Weir looked at him eagerly. “God! I’d like to get it off my hands! . . . But I wouldn’t leave Kentville until after the trial,” he added.

“Then my offer doesn’t hold,” said Manners coolly. “It’s you that I want to help.”

Weir scowled blackly.

Manners glanced at him and went on: “All kinds of business passes through our office. As it happens I’m in a position to put a darn good thing in your way right now. Three years ago we bought a newspaper in Argent City, New Mexico, for a client of ours who had been ordered out there for his health. He has recovered now and he wants to sell. Five thousand dollars.”

Manners paused. Weir said nothing.

“My firm would be glad to take your notes for that amount,” Manners went on. “It would be worth it to us to get a live wire on the job. Even now the property nets four thousand a year, and the editor is an old man. You could double that and sell the paper for three or four times what you paid. And buy a bigger paper. That’s the way to get on.”

All at once Weir became aware of the false and wheedling tone in the other man’s voice. He flushed red with anger. “What’s this?” he asked quietly, “a bribe?”

Manners’ face turned mean. He stood up, glancing apprehensively from side to side. “What sort of talk is that?” he asked with assumed indignation.

Weir rose up with his hot eyes fixed on the other man's face. He did not speak right away. Vista after vista was opening in his mind and he was putting things together. He stepped out on deck and glancing over the rail, saw the dinghy alongside. It had never returned to the shore. "You damned Judas!" he said, returning to the saloon. "With your talk of friendship! You took me in nicely! Friendship! *you!* Do you know what an honest man feels when he is taken in by a lying friend? I could kill you with my hands!"

Manners backed away, breathing quickly.

"You're no partner of Mr. Ruddy's!" Weir went on. "You're no lawyer at all. You're only a blackleg. And all your smooth talk was just to take me in. Who are you anyhow? . . . I know who you are! You are the enemy I have been aware of for weeks past and could not put my hand on. What do you want of me anyhow? If you call yourself a man have it out with me here and now!"

Instead of answering him, Manners put his hand out and pressed a bell button in the wall. Weir reflected that he was alone and unarmed on a vessel full of men. He went out on deck. The dinghy was floating alongside with a sailor sitting in it.

"Will you carry me ashore?" asked Weir.

With a boat-hook the man shoved his little craft farther away from the yacht, and grinned insolently in Weir's face. "Try and make me!" he said.

Weir glanced towards the shore. The nearest point was perhaps a third of a mile away. The water was cold, but it could be swum. . . . Useless! He would be helpless in the water. The man in the dinghy had only to crack him over the head with his boat-hook and he'd sink like a stone.

A slight sound made Weir look behind him. Four men were slowly closing in on him from the bow. He backed away from them into the stern of the little vessel where at least they could not take him from behind. Instinctively searching around him for a weapon, he snatched up a folding stool.

Holding the stool aloft, he waited for them with his back against the stern rail. They ranged in front of him at a distance of ten feet or so and stooped, intimidated by the look in his eye; two sailors, an engineer in greasy overalls and a steward. Their hands were empty; apparently they feared the noise of a shot. Each pair of eyes was fastened on Weir's face like an animal's, wary and a little afraid.

Manners was behind them. “Rush him! Rush him!” he commanded. “Rush him simultaneously and he can’t hurt any of you! When I give the word. Now!”

The four men sprang forward. Weir brought his stool down on one head and the engineer dropped to the deck. The other three seized him. Weir flung them off, and with a straight-arm blow in the face sent one of the sailors spinning and staggering back to fall at Manners’ feet. The remaining two grappled with him. They stamped and swayed all over the after deck.

The fallen sailor picked himself up and rushed in. A moment later the engineer got up and added his weight. Weir was slowly borne down to the deck. They dragged him to his feet again. Each of his arms was pinioned by a man and another had an elbow hooked around his neck from behind. Weir cursed them helplessly.

Manners was in front of him. “You fool!” he snarled at Weir. “I was willing to do something for you!”

“Oh yes!” said Weir. “You reckoned it would be safer to bribe me than to kill me! All right! If you were to repeat the offer I’d still tell you to go to hell, you swine!”

“Take him down below,” said Manners.

They ran Weir forward to a door in the deckhouse. There was a stairway inside it. They flung him down headlong and jumped on him before he could get up. They thrust him into a cabin below, and pulling the door shut, turned the key.

Lying on the floor, Weir heard Manners call down to them: “You, Joe and Henry, watch the door in case he breaks it down. Mike, get a duffle bag and fill it with ballast. Tie that to his wrists and you can let him up on deck again. If he should happen to fall overboard with it, it wouldn’t be our fault.” There was a general laugh.

Inside the little cabin Weir went crazy. He snatched up a chair and smashed it with all his force against the door. All to no purpose. Since the door opened inward he was left with the broken back of the chair loose in his hands. He flung it away.

He tried to think things out. If he did succeed in smashing out they would only overpower him again. What was behind it all anyhow? What could there be in his life which threatened Manners. He had never seen the man before. Why was he so bent on separating him from Leila? What

connection could there be between Leila's life and his own. There were no answers to these questions.

He was recalled to actuality by a screeching sound from on deck. They were noising the dinghy on the davits. At the same time a clanking from up forward advised him that the anchor was being hoisted. The vessel gave a little shake as the engines were started.

A moment or two later the clutch was let in and the yacht commenced to move through the water. Weir thought: It will take them about half an hour to run out into the Sound. Half an hour to live! A sense of the sweetness of life overcame him. Sunny morning, starry nights and being young! Life and Leila! He couldn't bear to leave the world where she was.

He looked around him. There was no way out of his prison but the door and the portholes. Portholes! Little round windows rimmed with brass and fastened shut with big brass turn screws. Ordinarily one would never think of escaping through such an opening. They say that a man can get out of any hole that his head will go through, thought Weir. He quickly unscrewed one of the ports and tried his head in the hole. It passed in and out easily enough.

There was a sofa beneath the porthole, and he put a chair on it. Must go through backwards, he thought, or my legs will break at the knees. Head or feet first? Head is safest.

Shoulders were the most difficult. He wriggled them through sideways. When he got his hands through he clung to the top of the frame while he worked his hips through by slow degrees. If anybody looks over the rail above my head I'm lost, he thought. When his hips were through he let himself fall back and hung head downwards from his knees in the hole; then by his toes caught in the top of the frame, the water hissing along a few inches under his head. Letting go, he dropped into the water, striking out blindly to escape the propeller.

A few yards away he paused and looked back. The yacht was continuing on her smooth way. His escape had not been seen. He struck out for the shore with a thankful heart. The water was icy cold, but what of it?

XI

It was still some minutes short of eleven o'clock when Weir got back to Kentville. He had driven from town like a madman. When he passed Frank Baker's house at the corner he saw lights burning on the lower floor and his heart lifted up a little. Above all he wanted to talk to Frank. Frank was the antidote he needed after the discovery that there were such swine as Manners in the world. Frank! there was a man you could depend on.

After hastily changing his clothes and hiding the precious key and saw-blades under some letters in a drawer of his desk, he returned to the house at the corner and tapped on the kitchen door. Frank himself let him in. Weir perceived no change in his grim smile. The rest of the family had gone to bed long since.

They sat down in the kitchen and Weir in a low voice poured out the story of what had happened to him that night. Frank smoking, listened impassively without any interruption. When Weir came to the end the Sheriff merely glanced at him, saying:

"Your clothes don't look as if they had had a bath."

"I have changed them," said Weir.

"Did you tell your story to the city police?"

"No. What would have been the use? They would only have kept me there while they investigated. And Manners has already made his getaway. Besides I have no proof. I don't even know the name of the yacht."

"Oh, you don't know the name of the yacht!"

"I never thought about it until I got suspicious, then it was too late."

"Well, it's a good story," said Frank.

Weir stared at him, unable to believe his ears. "Do you mean . . . Do you mean," he stammered, "that you don't believe it?"

Frank coldly faced him out. "Well, since you ask me, no!"

Weir felt as if he was falling through space. "Oh, my God! Frank, have I ever given you any reason to think I was a liar?"

"Up until now, no!" said Frank quickly. "Never met a squarer kid."

“Then what has happened now?”

Frank looked at him, grimly clamping the stem of his pipe. “The kindest thing I can say is that you are not yourself.”

“What do you mean?”

“A little girl like that with big eyes is like a poison in the blood of young men?”

“But Frank, you are wrong! I swear she’s innocent!”

“Oh yes?” said Frank. “If she was forty years old and had a harelip you wouldn’t be so sure.”

“But listen, I discovered new evidence to-day.”

“So did I. Plenty.”

“There was another visitor to Ancaster. I found his tracks in the clay at the base of the cliff.”

“More unsupported evidence. Listen!”

For the first time Weir became aware that a south-east gale had blown up within the last two hours. The branches were thrashing outside.

“Every vestige of tracks under the cliffs will be washed out before morning,” said Frank dryly.

Weir groaned. “What new evidence did you discover?” he asked.

“I can’t tell you that. It’s in the hands of the State’s Attorney.”

“Ha!” cried Weir. “That’s where it comes from! It is Birkett who has turned you against me!”

“I am not so easily influenced,” said Frank calmly.

“I told you long before this happened that Birkett had it in for me!”

“Why should he?” said Frank. “Birkett is no particular friend of mine. Give me some reason why he should have it in for you and I’ll consider it.”

Weir was silenced. After a while he said despairingly. “Then you believe the girl is guilty?”

“I do.”

“Oh, my God!” cried Weir. “I depended on you, Frank. This is the worst blow of all. I looked on you as my friend. I have no other!”

“I was your friend,” said Frank.

All Weir’s hopes and plans fell like a house of cards. “What’s the use of going on,” he muttered.

There was a silence. Then Weir tried once more. “Frank, I’ve *got* to convince you you’re wrong. If it was she who killed her father, why in God’s name should she have waited a week before burying him?”

“How do you know she waited a week?”

“One look at the body was enough.”

“When did *you* see the body?” asked Frank quietly.

A chill struck through Weir when he perceived the slip he had made. Useless to try to repair it. He said nothing.

“You helped her to bury him?” said Frank.

Weir lowered his head. “Yes.”

“Birkett told me you did, but I wanted to ask you.”

“How did Birkett know?”

“It’s his business to find things out.” Bitterness broke through Frank’s grim mask. “And you talk about being friends,” he said. “God! it makes a man feel savage to find a friend deceiving him!”

“I know that feeling,” said Weir quietly. “But this is not the same thing,” he suddenly cried out. “I didn’t lie to you to injure you, Frank.”

“A friend’s lie is hard to forgive,” said Frank.

“I couldn’t have acted any differently,” muttered Weir.

“All right. Only don’t let’s talk about being friends. . . . You understand that this constitutes you an accessory after the fact.”

“I know it,” said Weir apathetically. “Lock me up.”

“Sure. That’s what I waited up for. Stand up and let me search you.”

Weir submitted in silence. How thankful he was that he had changed his clothes before coming to Frank’s house.

They walked up the dark village street. Kentville did not boast of electric lights. When they came to the printing shop Weir asked:

“Can I get my razor and a few things?”

“All right,” said Frank.

They passed through the shop into Weir’s bedroom. Frank watched him sharply while he gathered together what he needed. Back again in the shop the book that Weir was reading lay on his desk. It was a treatise on typesetting.

“Can I take this?” asked Weir.

Frank looked it over. “Sure.”

“I suppose Birkett will have the right to search through my effects,” said Weir.

“I don’t know what the law is,” answered Frank, “but I reckon he will. This is a serious charge.”

“There are some letters in my drawer that I wouldn’t like to have anybody read. They haven’t anything to do with this business. Just letters from my college friends. You can read them if you want.”

He started handing the letters to Frank. While Frank skimmed over the pages, Weir contrived to slip the saw-blades and the key between the pages of the book. Frank was no longer his friend; what did it matter if he deceived him further? Weir had come to that point of desperation that a man reaches when he is convinced that the whole world is leagued against him.

“Will you burn them for me?” he asked when Frank had finished looking over the letters.

“Sure!”

They went on to the courthouse and through the Sheriff’s office into the jail. Weir was locked in a cell.

XII

THERE were no lights in the jail. The cell that Weir occupied in the block of four was cater-cornered with that of Leila. When the doors closed behind the retreating Frank, Weir spoke her name softly:

"Jack!"

She answered with a gasp of dismay. "Weir! What are you doing there?"

"I'm locked up too, pal."

"Oh, Weir! All because of me. Oh, Weir!" Her voice failed her.

"Buck up, Jack!" he said. "We're in this together. There's no use regretting what's past. Anyhow I'm not sorry to be sharing with you. We've got to stick by each other. There is nobody in the world that we can depend upon but ourselves."

"Oh, Weir . . .!"

"I'm coming in there directly and we'll talk things over."

"How can you?"

"I have a key to the cell doors."

"Oh, Weir . . .!"

Weir heard a sound outside the jail. "Quiet!" he whispered swiftly.

The news must have gone about the village by telephone. Some of the people had got out of their beds to see the fun. Several voices came through the outer windows.

"Ah there, Yankee! how you like our county hotel? . . . That's just where you ought to be, certain! . . . I knew I'd live to see you in there. You got a jail face. . . . Maybe this'll teach you not to meddle in other folks' business! . . ." And so on.

Presently a beam of light was thrown through the south window, and the croaking voice of Tasker Teeple followed it. "There he is! Look how the shadows of the bars makes stripes on him! That's a sign of what he'll be wearing soon!" Tasker whinnied with laughter.

A woman's voice put in sourly. "They can talk together. It ought to be stopped!"

Another woman added, "It's disgraceful to lock them up together!"

Tasker whinnied again, "Well, the cell bars are thick. They can't do no more than talk."

The first woman said: "Well, I'm going to make it my business to see that their cells are not unlocked in the daytime."

"No, indeed," agreed her friend. "Not with them curtains hanging up and all."

"Hey you, Weir!" called Tasker. "Want me to get out the *Witness* for you next week? You hadn't ought to miss any numbers or you'll lose your trade."

Weir remained silent.

"Look, you! I'll give you a hundred dollars for the outfit cash down. You won't get no more. You need that money for your defence."

"You can go plumb to hell, Tasker Teeple!" said Weir levelly.

"Shame!" cried the women.

Weir laughed, and turned his back on the light.

Another white beam flashed through the opposite window. In the reflected light Weir could make out the heavy features of Gid Withers grinning in delight. Yet Giddy, he knew, was not a bad sort of fellow as men go. A kind of infection of cruelty seemed to have seized on them all.

After getting off a few witticisms of the usual sort, Giddy handed his light to another to hold, and lifted up one of his little boys. "Look, sonny, there's the bad man. That's what they do with them. Put them behind iron bars so they can't get out. So you want to watch yourself!"

There was a loud laugh from Gid's friends. "Ain't Gid the limit!"

However, it was late and bed called them. One by one they drifted away promising themselves further sport in the morning.

Weir waited awhile. When he felt sure that he would not be disturbed again, he thrust an arm through the door of his cell, feeling for the keyhole. He inserted his key. It stuck, and all his courage collapsed like a pricked balloon. He had staked everything on that key. However, after patiently working it back and forth, it finally turned and the cell door swung out. His

spirits soared again. There is no joy quite the same as that which a man experiences on leaving his cell.

Before going out he arranged his bed in such a manner that in case anybody should throw in a beam of light it would appear as if he was lying there with the blanket drawn up over his head. He then closed the door of his cell behind him, and let himself through the door of Leila's cell around the corner. She was waiting just within it, breathing fast. How hard it was to refrain from flinging his arms around her.

They sat down side by side on her bed. He held her hand in his. His voice was shaking. "Oh, Leila! how great it would be if you felt the same as I do! We wouldn't care then what happened to us. We would be glad that we stood alone."

She gently drew her hand out of his.

"I wish I could see you," he murmured. "You make my eyes glad."

"I can't feel like that," she faltered.

He pulled himself together. "You're all right, Jack. My fault. I shouldn't have brought that up again."

"You wouldn't be doing all this for me," she whispered, "unless . . . well, you know . . . unless you were in love with me. I let you do it . . ."

"Like to see you stop me!" muttered Weir.

"I let you do everything for me yet I can't return the feeling. . . ."

"Aw, forget it! It isn't anybody's fault. You've always been on the square with me, Jack."

He told her briefly what had happened to him that night. "So you see," he said when he had come to the end, "we have powerful enemies."

"But why?" she asked pitifully. "I can't understand it. Why should anybody be my enemy?"

"I don't know," he said grimly. "They have set Frank Baker against us now. It's a fact that I lied to Frank. I had to do it. I think he would have understood that if his mind hadn't been poisoned against us. Now we haven't got a friend. And the State's Attorney is in the plot against us. We will certainly be railroaded to the penitentiary if we sit here and wait for them to do it."

"Are we going to escape?" she whispered with a tremor of eagerness.

"We are. . . . Mind, I'm not saying it wasn't foolish to try to cover the thing up the way we did in the beginning. But now we're in so bad we've got to go on the way we started."

"To-night?" she asked breathlessly.

"No, to-morrow night."

"Oh!" she breathed with a falling inflection like a disappointed child.

"I reckon it will be too late to start when I get the window bars sawed through. We must be out of the state before morning breaks."

"Where are we going, Weir?"

"God knows!" he said with a laugh. "One thing at a time, Jack. I have plenty of good friends outside the county."

"This will spoil your whole life!" she said tremulously.

Weir had his own misgivings on this score, but he wasn't going to let her see them. "Spoil nothing! I haven't got anywhere. It won't cost me anything to begin all over. . . . And what an adventure, Jack! Think of the excitement!"

"I don't care for excitement," she said sadly. "I wouldn't mind the risk for myself, but you . . ."

"Come on! Let's tackle the window bars."

They went outside the cell. Weir picked the west, or rear window of the jail to operate on because of the gully it overlooked. Once through the window they could slip down into the gully and be safe from observation.

"If you cut the bars to-night won't they see it in the morning?" objected Leila.

"I'll cut the bottoms of two bars and leave them as is. There's a stove in the corridor. I can get soot out of the pipe to rub on the bars and hide the fresh cuts. To-morrow night we'll press the bars out and beat it. The car is waiting in my garage."

He posted her at the south window of the jail. "Anybody coming around the courthouse can be seen through this window," he said. "If you see any suspicious movement just come and lay a hand on my shoulder and slip into your cell."

Out of his shoelaces Weir contrived a pair of grips to pull the saw-blade back and forth. He set to work at his slow job and Leila watched through the

window around the corner. His task went easier than he expected. The builders of the jail, trusting to the solid inch-thick bars of the cells, had been satisfied with half-inch bars over the windows. In little more than half an hour Weir was through the first one.

He took a rest and a cigarette, concealing the spark behind his hand. "This is going to be a cinch, Jack," he whispered. "I'll be through in a little while. Why put in another day in hell. What say we make a break for it to-night?"

"Oh, yes," she breathed.

"Have you got your breeches with you?"

"In the satchel in my cell."

"Better put them on, and stick the dress in the satchel. We've got to climb over the wire entanglements outside the window."

Finally the thin blade of the saw parted the second window bar. It was then one-forty by Weir's watch. "Three hours of darkness," he muttered.

They moved around the corridor from window to window anxiously peering outside and listening. The waning moon was shining much too brightly for their peace of mind, but they could not help that. Nothing stirred that they could see; no sound was to be heard but the usual sounds of a spring night; frogs peeping in the hollows and the distant song of a mocking bird. Yet they hesitated from moment to moment, afraid to put their fate to the final test.

On the north side of the jail the ground was very broken. It was not likely any one would approach from that side by night. On the west side was the gully; on the south a broad open space with the village garage on the right, and a line of traded-in cars on the far side. It was the cars which bothered the prisoners, because they could not see what might be lurking behind them. The bare space in front was flooded with moonlight.

"Come on," said Weir at last. "We can't see anything. We might as well chance it."

He pressed the cut bars out, and slipped over the sill. He threw his coat over the barbed wire, and climbed cautiously after it. Leaning back over the fence, he caught hold of Leila under the arms and lifted her clear of the wire. Next moment they were hidden in the gully and could breathe again. Nothing had stirred.

The gully was Tom Horsfall's pasture, and there was no undergrowth. Scattered cedar trees afforded more or less cover. The back yards of the houses fronting on the village street came part way down into the gully. By creeping along close under the back fences, they avoided possible observation from the windows above. Weir went ahead, and Leila followed, clinging to his coat. The air was heavy with the scent of locust bloom.

When they came to Weir's property they climbed the fence. This was the way Frank had come on his nightly visits to Weir. They inched up the steep slope almost flat on their bellies, and gained the shadow of the printing shop with relieved breasts. Weir had left the key to the back door under the step. It was still there. He went in to gather up his gun and several small objects of value. Afterwards he opened the garage doors.

They got in the car. This was the dangerous moment. So quiet was the night that the mere whirring of the starter sounded as loud as machine gun fire. The engine exploded immediately, and they moved out of the garage. But the damage was done. In the turretted house opposite a window was thrown up and Tasker Teeple stuck his head out.

A second later the quiet of night was shattered by a shrill police whistle. Tasker Teeple began bawling out at the top of his lungs: "Help! help! The prisoners are escaping! . . . Frank Baker! Sheriff! Help! the prisoners are escaping!" Between shouts he blew on his whistle. Heads began to stick out of the windows everywhere. Frank Baker came to his window as they flew by.

Weir pressed his accelerator down to the floor and cursed savagely and helplessly. "Damn them! Damn them! They'll telephone up the county and cut us off!"

Leila said nothing.

XIII

THE STATE road through Kent County was an old hard-surfaced road with a high crown in the middle. It followed the course of the original cart track and the curves were numerous and abrupt. Fast driving on such a road was highly dangerous, but Weir was beyond considering that now. He kept his accelerator pressed to the floor.

As they flung themselves around a left-hand turn, teetering dangerously on two wheels, he muttered: "Might as well smash as to let them take us."

Leila caught her breath and gripped the door, but she was game. "All right with me," she murmured steadily.

"Watch through the back window," said Weir, "and tell me if you see any lights coming."

They tore over the level mile north of Kentville, rounded Bentley's corner, and twisted among the hillocks beyond. The fields were flooded with misty moonlight. The whole world was asleep. The road was so crooked they could rarely see far behind them, but on the long rise to the coloured M.E. church they got a wide prospect. No automobile lights showed anywhere.

"If we can keep this up they'll never catch us," said Weir with a hard laugh. "There are better cars in Kentville, but no men who will drive faster than this. Not even Frank Baker. . . ."

After a while Weir put out the lights of his car and drove blind.

"Why do you do that?" asked Leila.

"I can see well enough by the moonlight. The lights give warning of our coming, sometimes a couple of miles ahead. If they're watching for us I want to see them first."

At Mabbitt's corner they left the road altogether and scraped along the guard rail, smashing a fender. The rail held them. At Standish's they skidded into the ditch, but did not capsize. After banging all over the place they regained the road somehow and went on as fast as ever.

Weir laughed. "Good car!" he said.

St. Barnabas' hill; Cook's Run; Mt. Melody; they were travelling a mile a minute and the Neck was drawing near. There was no sign of pursuit from behind.

"Frank Baker would keep his head about him," muttered Weir. "He wouldn't jump in his car and take after us without thinking things out. He would stop to telephone the farmers around the Neck . . . Oh, God! if this old lard tin would only sprout wings!"

As they approached the brow of the last hill above the Neck, Weir slackened speed; stopped. A cut bank rose on each side of the road. "I've got to see what we're up against before we run smack into it," he said.

He scrambled up the cut bank and went forward, in two minutes he reappeared over the top of the back and slid down in a cascade of loose earth. "The road is blocked all right," he said grimly. "Four cars stretched from fence to fence. They're sitting there not saying a word."

"Oh-h!" whispered Leila shakily.

Weir jumped into the car, threw it savagely into reverse and started turning around.

"What's the use of going back?" she faltered. "We'll only meet the others coming."

"We've got to make a side road and run down to the water," said Weir. "We can't get out of Kent County by road. We must find a boat."

"The first side road is the one that leads to Ancaster," said Leila.

"Well," said Weir, "that would be about the last place where they would expect to find us."

He drove back recklessly.

"We will never make it," whispered Leila.

She was right. Presently a growing radiance appeared over the brow of a hill ahead, and a moment later the twin lights of a car appeared. It was something less than a mile away, and travelling at great speed. The lights dipped down and disappeared.

They were caught fairly between two fenced fields; no place to turn in; no time to turn around. Weir jammed on his brakes and brought the car to a stop in the ditch. "We've got to unload!" he muttered.

In a second they were out of the car, and in another over the wire fence on the left side of the road, and running for their lives downhill through a newly planted corn field. A dark wall of woods stretched across below. The ground was soft.

"We are leaving tracks that a blind man could follow!" groaned Weir.

Looking back they saw the lights of the car stop beside their abandoned car. Over the hills to the south other cars were appearing one after another. They climbed another fence. Below them ran a small stream; the woods began on the other side. Turning to the right in the stream they splashed on through the water to cover their tracks.

Looking back in a place where the bank flattened down, they could see a cluster of lights following their tracks across the field like fireflies. In the road above cars were arriving every second or two. They could hear the occupants shouting to each other, fired with the excitement of the chase.

In a few moments they came to an immense dead tree fallen down from the left-hand bank, and lying partly across the stream. They clambered up the trunk of it, and gained the shelter of the woods without leaving any tell-tale tracks.

"They won't find us here right away," whispered Weir. "Stop and get your breath."

Squatting down at the edge of the trees, they watched their pursuers. When the cluster of lights reached the stream they paused as if to consult. More were continually joining them across the field. Finally the lights divided into two clusters. Apparently every man had a flashlight which he carried along trained on the ground. One party went up the stream, and one began to work down. Weir took Leila's hand and drew her deeper into the woods.

Glimpses of the moon through the trees gave them their direction. They made their way east. Over there lay the Sound. It was hard, slow going. The sounds of pursuit never came any closer, and finally died away altogether. Weir then took out his flashlight to help him pick a way through the tangle.

After a long struggle they came to an abandoned wood road running roughly north and south across their course, and turned to the right in it. After a mile or so it brought them to a travelled road which Weir identified as the road running down to the Sound at Ancaster. They dared not venture out into it, and indeed while they watched it from amongst the trees a car came by. Some of their hunters were patrolling the road.

They turned back into the woods, still heading east. Leila was beginning to lag now. It was growing light, and they soon had no further need to the pocket flash.

The sun came up. By staying out of the bottoms they avoided the worst tangles of vines and briars. But Leila was terribly weary. She tried to step out every time she felt Weir's eyes on her, but the pale face and big eyes made his heart ache. Finally, upon coming to a grove of pine trees, he insisted on her lying down to rest.

"It's just a chance, anyhow, whether they find us or not," he said. "We might as well stop as to keep going."

Leila lay down on the pine needles, pillowing her cheek on her hand, and was soon asleep. Weir lay nearby, smoking, watching her and wishing that the curly black head lay on his arm. In the end he slept also.

He awoke with a jump, and scrambled to his feet before he was fully conscious. He found himself panting and sweating with fear without knowing what he was afraid of. Everything looked the same; the brown carpet of needles, the dingy jackpines with the sunshine in their tops. Nothing was to be heard except the familiar little sounds of life in the woods. Yet danger threatened.

"Jack! Wake up!" he said sharply. "Let's get out of this!"

She sat up rubbing her eyes like a sleepy baby. "What's the matter, Weir?"

Listening with all his senses on the alert, he heard the sound that had alarmed his subconsciousness; a long-drawn wailing sound, something between a bark and a howl. There were two of them giving tongue to each other. Weir felt a little sick.

"What's that?" gasped Leila.

He made out to speak carelessly: "A pair of hounds, it seems. Bloodhounds, I reckon."

She snatched up the little satchel. "Oh! Are they after us?"

"Maybe so. We will soon know. I never heard of any in the County. Brought from town at Birkett's order," he thought.

"Oh, run! run!" she gasped, pulling at him.

Weir held back. "Where to?" he said grimly. "We got to dope this thing out."

“They will tear us to pieces.”

“No danger of that. They are held on a leash. . . . I would sooner trust the dogs than their masters,” he added bitterly.

They started walking swiftly towards the Sound. Weir refused to run even when the way was clear. “Once a man starts to run, he’s a goner,” he said. “Let them take us if they must, but don’t let’s lose our grip on ourselves.”

They kept on. As long as they were among the pines, the going was easy. At intervals the baying of the hounds trembled on the air. Then silence for awhile. For quite a bit the sound came no closer.

“Maybe they’re not after us,” said Leila hopefully.

“I wouldn’t count on it,” said Weir with a hard smile.

After a considerable silence the sound was heard again, now unmistakably nearer. “Oh, they’re coming,” moaned Leila.

Weir turned sharp to the right.

“What’s this for?” she asked anxiously.

“The water is too far away,” he said, “we couldn’t make it. But the last time we crossed the stream it was flowing this way. It’s somewhere over here.”

Now, every time they heard the hounds the sound was distinctly nearer. “Oh, run! run!” begged Leila, pulling at Weir.

“I’ll run with you if you don’t get in a panic,” he said with his hard grin. “Give me your hand. Make out we’re playing a game!”

Hand in hand they ran over the pine needles. The dogs were near now. Before they reached water they came to the road running down to the Sound. They plunged across. As they were striking into the woods on the other side they heard a car coming from the direction of the State road. Weir pulled up.

“Squat down,” he said. “Let’s see who this is.”

They dropped behind a clump of laurel. In this place the road ran in a sort of winding corridor between the thickly growing trees. It was full of deep ruts. In a moment they saw the car coming slowly. A few yards more and Weir recognised it was Tasker Teeple’s car. George Case who usually served as Frank Baker’s deputy was driving, and Tasker sat beside him. The back seat was empty.

Weir grinned. “Our case is pretty near hopeless anyhow,” he whispered, “let’s take a chance . . .!”

“What are you going to do?” gasped Leila.

He laid a finger on her lips. “Wait here and you’ll see.”

When the car was almost abreast of them Weir sprang out from behind the bush, gun in hand. “Stop!” he cried.

George Case’s reaction was to jam on his brakes and stall his engine. At sight of the gun, Tasker Teeple became a jelly of fear and Weir saw that he would have no trouble with him. Case was probably armed, but Weir had the draw on him. “Stick up your hands!” he ordered. “Slide out this side!”

Tasker, who was nearer Weir, obeyed so quickly he almost fell in the road. His false teeth rattled like castanets. “Don’t shoot! Don’t shoot!” he moaned.

“Turn your back on me!” ordered Weir. “Keep your hands up. Walk back up the road.”

George Case followed, scowling and deliberate. His eyes were fixed on Weir’s eyes. Weir watched his hands. “Keep ’em up!” ordered Weir. “Follow Tasker up the road!”

The deputy sheriff obeyed.

“Come on, Jack,” said Weir softly. “Slide under the wheel and start her.” Weir moved around the car, so that he could stand on the running board, clinging to the door with his left hand and still cover George Case. Tasker he disregarded. Leila got in.

When Case heard the engine start he turned around. “Eyes front!” ordered Weir. Case obeyed. “Run her slow until I give the word,” Weir muttered to Leila. “Then step on her!”

Weir watched the two men until a slight bend in the road concealed them. “Now!” he said. “And to hell with the springs!” He climbed over the door and they banged down the road. Case sent a shot after them, but it was only a gesture. They were out of his sight.

Leila said: “The dogs will be out in the road directly. Those men will tell the others where we’ve gone.”

“The dogs can’t catch a car,” said Weir.

“The road ends at the water.”

“We’ll have a long start of them when we get there.”

“Where can we go?”

“To Ancaster.”

“There’s no boat there.”

Weir was near to despairing himself, but he was not showing it. “There is food,” he said grinning. “As long as we can eat all is not lost.”

They passed only one white man’s house on the road, Dick Bowers’. It showed no sign of life about it. “All out on the chase,” said Weir.

Half a mile or so beyond Bowers’ Weir drove the car out on the beach and they abandoned it there. They left some tracks indicating that they were heading south along the beach, and then came back through the water. They ascended the stream to the point where the ford leading to Ancaster crossed it, and struck up hill. Weir pointed out the tracks of two cars which had gone up to Ancaster that morning. One had returned; one was still there. “Visitors ahead of us,” he said. “We’ll have to keep our eyes peeled.”

XIV

FEARFUL of showing themselves in the open they made their way up the hill under cover of the trees that lined the old road, Weir in advance. Thorns and creepers made the way difficult and slow. They saw nothing of those who had gone up before them.

Upon coming to the old wood road that he had used on his first visit to the big house, Weir struck into it, meaning to lead Leila on up by the path he had forced through the undergrowth. This road was a mere track through the woods. Nobody had gone this way lately and their hearts felt lighter. The branches of the thick second-growth timber met overhead and a cool greenish light filtered through.

Just as they were about to turn into Weir's path through the briars, the sound of a cracking twig behind them brought their hearts into their mouths. They instinctively ducked for cover. To the left of the road lay an immense whitened hardwood trunk where it had fallen years before. Vaulting over it, they lay down on the ground.

At one end of the fallen tree Weir contrived to make a peephole in the low growing stuff through which he could survey part of the road they had come over. Nothing showed in it. They lay listening with strained ears. There were little sounds all around them; a rustling here, a creeping there, a knocking behind them. The woods seemed suddenly to have come alive.

"Perhaps we imagined it," whispered Weir.

Leila shook her head. "We couldn't *both* have imagined it."

"It may have been an animal."

"There are no wild animals in these woods heavy enough to snap a twig."

"Well, we can't stay here," said Weir. "We've got to eat. We have only to get across the road and we'll be in cover again. Come on."

They got across the road all right, but as they started up through the briars they heard someone above them. These were clear and unmistakable sounds. Somebody was coming down the hill. Weir and Leila ran like deer back across the road and scrambled over the fallen tree.

Through his peephole Weir watched the hillside. He saw the approaching figure some seconds before he could identify it; a tall man with his head down, thrusting back the branches and the briars with his arms. When he raised his head Weir groaned softly.

"Oh God! it's Frank!"

Leila lying beside him buried her face in her arms.

When Frank came out into the road he took off his hat and wiped his forehead. His mind was easy. His grim face somewhat softened in repose made Weir's heart ache, for that was the man he had been proud to call his friend. Frank looked all around him and cocked a glance at the leaves overhead with the pleasure that a man of keen observation feels in exercising his faculties.

He took out his pipe, knocked out the dottle against the heel of his boot, and filled it unhurriedly. When he got it drawing well he sauntered on along the road.

The woods road which never got the sun was soft in places, and Frank had not taken a dozen steps before he discovered Weir's and Leila's tracks. He whirled around. There was no doubt but that he had identified the footprints; Weir's well-shod feet and Leila's sneakers. And in wet ground he could see that they were only a few minutes old. He followed them back with his eyes as far as he could, and then he perceived the fallen tree. He guessed what was hidden behind it and grinned hardily.

"So that's where you are! I figured you'd come this way to-day and 'pears I wasn't far out. Well, come on, show yourselves. The game is up." He took out his gun.

Weir glanced at his little partner lying beside him. Her face was hidden. Her whole body was shaking. She made a move as if to rise, and he pressed her back again, squeezing her shoulder for a moment.

Frank grinning, came a little nearer. "Come out!" he said. "I wouldn't want to have to drag you."

Weir drew his gun. Leila, without looking, comprehended what that movement meant and laid a trembling hand on his arm. "No, Weir, no!" she whispered.

Frank took another step forward. Weir said quietly:

"I've got you covered. If you come any nearer I'll shoot."

Frank standing stiff-backed and scornful in the open, laughed out, “Hell! don’t be a fool, Weir. You’re in bad enough already.”

Weir made no answer. Frank, scowling, came on. Weir’s gun arm dropped helplessly. “I can’t! I can’t!” he groaned. “Not Frank!”

At that moment a shot rang out from the thicket behind them. Frank, with a look of clownish surprise, dropped his gun and clapped a hand over his arm. Weir looked over his shoulder. There were sounds of some one softly making away, but he could not follow, because Frank had snatched up his gun again, and Weir knew that he could shoot as well with one hand as the other. And there was Leila. If he had jumped up she would have followed.

“You fool! what good will that do you?” cried Frank strongly. “Only double your years in prison!”

Suddenly the Sheriff realised that he was dangerously wounded. The sleeve of his jacket was already crimson and drenched. Still standing coolly in the face of Weir’s fire as he thought, he threw off his coat, and unfastening the button at his cuff threw back his shirt sleeve. The blood was spurting from his arm in a little fountain. Evidently the bullet had ploughed into the artery.

Frank coolly tore out the sleeve of his shirt from the shoulder and twisting it around his arm knotted it with teeth and fingers, and inserting the barrel of his gun in the knot for a tourniquet, twisted it to stop the flow of blood. Before he could finish the operation, his face paled, he sank to his knees and toppled over on his side.

Weir ran out from his hiding-place with a broken cry: “Frank!” Leila was at his heels. Weir twisted the tourniquet until the blood ceased flowing. He straightened his friend’s limbs and put his coat under his head.

“Quick!” he said to Leila. “While I hold this, find me a strong stick to replace the gun.”

She fetched him a suitable stick. He inserted it in the knot, twisted it afresh, and bound the stick in place with his handkerchief. Frank’s gun he dropped in his pocket. Without being aware of it he was murmuring his friend’s name over and over: “Frank! . . . Frank!” Meanwhile Leila was bringing a hatful of water from a hollow in the wood.

She bathed Frank’s temples and presently he came back to himself. But the old hardy grin did not return. His blue eyes fixed on Weir’s like points of ice. “You mad fool!” he said.

As soon as Frank opened his eyes Weir turned hard; for he knew he would not be believed, and he could not humble himself before an enemy. “It was not I who shot you,” he said stiffly.

“No?” said Frank ironically. “Maybe it was a bolt from heaven then.”

“The shot came from behind us.”

“You don’t say!”

“It’s true! It’s true!” Leila added tremulously. “From behind us! We heard somebody running away.”

“Remarkable, Miss!”

In spite of himself Weir got hot. “You can examine the magazine of my gun. It’s still full.”

Frank turned his eyes away contemptuously. “You had plenty of time to reload while I was out.”

“There have been others here to-day,” said Weir.

“Sure, Peter Birkett. I met him driving away as I came.”

“Who did he bring here? Who did he leave here when he left?”

“You can search me. I didn’t ask him. . . . Why in heaven’s name should Peter Birkett or any man of his shoot me?”

“To get me in wrong,” said Weir.

“Maybe you didn’t threaten to shoot me,” said Frank.

“I was only bluffing,” said Weir very low. “When it came to the point . . . I couldn’t!”

“Pretty good!” said Frank, laughing. “Put that in one of your stories. . . . Go up to the big house and fetch Giddy Withers here and my car,” he went on peremptorily. “You’ll find him hid amongst the trees watching on your right as you face the house. He’s watching there. Give him a call and he’ll come out.”

Weir stood up. “I can’t do that, Frank.”

“Why not?”

“I haven’t given myself up.”

“You fool!” snarled Frank. He rolled partly on one side and reached for his hip pocket with his left hand.

“I took your gun,” said Weir. “Naturally I had to.”

Frank fell back cursing him. “So you think you have me dead to rights, eh? You’re satisfied to leave me here to die.”

“You’re not going to die,” said Weir. “I stopped the flow of blood. The men and the dogs will be along here soon.”

Leila laid a hand on Weir’s arm. “What’s the use? What’s the use?” she whispered. “We might as well go with him.”

“Leave this to me,” said Weir grimly.

“So you prefer to be tracked down by the dogs,” said Frank.

“Who brought those dogs into the County?” asked Weir.

“None of your damned business.”

Weir shrugged. “You may curse me,” he said, “but just the same this isn’t easy for me. . . . However, she comes first.”

Frank laughed. “This is wasted,” he said.

“We’ll help you as far as the old road if you want,” said Weir.

“Get the hell out of here. I’d sooner crawl.”

Weir caught Leila’s hand to lead her away—but hesitated, looking at his friend. Frank turned away his head. He sat up somewhat shakily and fished in the pocket of his coat for his pipe.

“Come on,” Weir said to Leila.

XV

ALL the way up to the house they kept within shelter of the woods. Giddy Withers, according to Frank, was hidden over on the other side of the terraces, and they did not have to pass anywhere near the spot. Through the trees they had just a glimpse of the ancient mansion basking in the sun, graceful and disreputable like a lady who had aged and come down in the world. They made a detour and approached it from the rear through the thick growth of young locust.

Now from far-off they began to hear the excited baying of the hounds again. Judging from the sounds they were at the ford, and had picked up the fresh scent.

"They'll be delayed for a few moments when they find Frank," said Weir.

Leila's face became tragic on hearing those sounds, but she remained quiet and self-controlled.

"We'll get our grub and go on down the hill to the north," added Weir. "According to the map there's an inlet from the Sound on that side, and a swamp reaching inland."

"I know the place," said Leila.

"Well, dogs are of no use in a swamp."

He went through the window into the larder of the big house, and ran into the kitchen. The food was still on the shelf where they had left it. Weir swept everything pell-mell into the grass bag he had brought it in, and was out of the house again in two minutes. The baying of the dogs was appreciably nearer. Leila's eyes were blank with fear.

They headed away from the house straight north through the thick growth of young locust. They came to the edge of a long steep declivity where the trees were old with little undergrowth. Plunging and sliding downhill they came out on the swamp, narrow here, perhaps two hundred yards, with a stream of clear water winding through it back and forth between bank and bank. Weir seized Leila's hand.

"Come on," he said, "out in the middle. Running water always has a hard bottom."

Through the ooze of the swamp were scattered hard round lumps of coarse turf called nigger-heads locally. Jumping from one to another of these, often slipping off into the soft stuff, they finally reached the running water which had a firm sandy bottom. The water was about a foot deep. They splashed up-stream and a projecting point of firm ground cut them off from the view of the place where they had gone in.

In a few minutes they heard the dogs and the men come tearing down the hill, hounds baying, men shouting. They stopped at the edge of the swamp at a loss. There was a lot of running about. From the sounds it was evident that they crossed the swamp, and finding no scent on the other side came back again.

"We've got to get out of this," muttered Weir. "It winds too much. If they run along the bank they can cut us off."

They came to a place where an ancient chestnut oak, leaning out from the bank, stretched a horizontal branch low over the running water. The whole tree made a dense green screen of leaves.

"Could we climb into it?" muttered Leila.

Weir shook his head. "Too obvious. They would think of that as soon as they laid eyes on it."

They pressed forward. In this part the swamp was filled from bank to bank with last year's dead rushes growing almost man high. The passing breezes rattled them like little castanets. The new green growth was pressing up between. Judging from the voices of the men behind them, the pursuing party was coming up the left bank. The dogs were quiet. They had no scent.

Close ahead a small island of firm ground rose from the swamp, covered with ancient trees. A tall black gum leaned out over the rushes. Around its branches crawled an old wild grape-vine, hanging down over the water in fantastic loops. Weir stopped.

"If we climbed into that loop and grasped that piece hanging down, we could swing into the tree without touching foot to the ground. Think you could make it?"

"I can if you can," said Leila from between tight lips.

"Then watch me and do what I do."

Weir twisted the neck of his grass bag and took it between his teeth. He drew himself up into the vine. A moment later he was in the fork of the gum

tree, where he braced himself and received Leila as she swung over. She had the handle of her little satchel between her teeth.

They climbed on up the outermost fork until they were completely enveloped in a screen of the star-pointed leaves. Weir took a seat on a lateral arm, holding on to the main branch, with Leila sitting opposite and a little lower. There were plenty of interstices where they could look through, but only a patient study of the tree would have revealed them to anybody on the outside.

The grape-vine had not much more than finished swaying when their pursuers appeared on the dry ground across the swamp; five men and the two heavy-bodied, short-legged dogs, black, verging into rust colour, with pendulous dewlaps and flapping ears. They had slipped the dogs' leashes so they could range more freely. They ran about with their noses to the ground, whining occasionally.

When the men caught sight of the island they stopped to consult, and presently the whole party came splashing across through the rushes. Leila turned white to the lips.

"Buck up, Jack!" whispered Weir, grinning. "We have left no scent."

Men and dogs ranged all over the island which was no more than an acre in extent. Weir and Leila could only see a small space immediately at the foot of the gum tree which sheltered them. Once the whole party streamed across at the foot of the tree and the hearts of the two perched above stopped beating.

However, men hunting with dogs watch the dogs. In that particular spot, at any rate, none of the men looked up and the dogs found nothing. Weir recognised George Case, Gid Withers and Jim Means. The other two were unknown to him. A minute later they splashed back across the swamp. A little colour returned to Leila's face.

They watched their pursuers out of sight. A short distance farther on but in plain view from the gum tree, one of the little streams which fed the swamp came in on the left. Men and dogs turned away here. The dogs ran back and forth across the rivulet, searching both banks. The whole party disappeared in the forest.

Weir snorted with relief and stretched himself on the branch. "Now we can call our souls our own!" he said. "They imagine that they've searched this island and they won't trouble it again. We can climb down and build a fire and have a good lunch."

“Not a fire,” said Leila nervously.

“Oh well, there’s plenty of cold food in the sack. . . . I vote we stay right here until night. We’ll take a good sleep so we can keep going all night.”

Under the gum tree they lunched on soda crackers and cold baked beans. In front of them the tangled grape vines hung down to the tops of the rushes like a pierced curtain. When the leaves parted in the breeze shafts of sunlight struck into their retreat like gold bars. Weir lit his pipe and stretched out on his back.

Leila was not inclined to sleep. She sat up, nursing her knees, looking far away. Occasionally she glanced over at Weir with a new shy feeling in her eyes.

“What’s on your mind, old fellow?” he asked.

“Nothing,” she said quickly, then, woman-like, instantly began to tell him. “I never knew anybody like you, Weir,” she began confusedly. “I wanted to tell you. . . . Of course I have known very few people. . . . I mean somebody who thinks of others; somebody who does things for others. It’s very unusual.”

Weir tried to make a joke of it, but his grin was painful. “How do you know?” he asked.

“Well, it’s true I don’t know anything. I haven’t had any experience. Just a girl’s school and an old aunt who scarcely ever saw anybody. I was only fifteen when I . . . when my father brought me down here.”

“And you went into seclusion,” put in Weir bitterly.

“Well, my father didn’t know what he was doing. Even then. I can realise it now. He could fool anybody because he looked all right and he spoke all right, but he was gone inside. . . . But never mind that now. I wanted to tell you that I wasn’t taking all this for granted like a child. I understand what you are doing for me.”

“Hell! I don’t want your gratitude,” muttered Weir.

“I must tell you,” she said wistfully.

Weir jerked his hat down over his eyes. “I’m not good at all,” he said crossly.

“Oh, but you are,” she breathed.

“I’m not, I tell you. I happen to be in love with you, that’s all.”

She blushed painfully. “I’m so sorry,” she murmured.

“Don’t mention it,” said Weir dryly.

There was a considerable silence.

“Do you feel like telling me the whole story now?” he asked, looking somewhere else.

“What story?”

“You know. About the fellow you were trying to get in touch with.”

She shook her head. “I can’t, Weir,” she said very low.

“Why not?”

“You would hate him so much.”

“Reckon I would,” said Weir grimly. “I have a pretty shrewd idea that he’s an out and out rotter.”

“Oh no!” she whispered.

“Then why doesn’t he show himself now when you need him?”

“He may be far away and know nothing about it.”

“Must be far away indeed,” said Weir bitterly. “If there are no newspapers.”

Leila said nothing.

“Haven’t I a certain right to hear the story now?” asked Weir doggedly. “It would help me to understand the situation.”

“Oh, that one had nothing to do with the death of my father,” said Leila quickly. “At least I don’t think he had.”

“I wonder!”

“I haven’t seen him for weeks.”

“Somebody killed your father.”

“It was probably just some prowler. My father was insane on the subject of keeping people off the place. And he had shot first.”

“Well, if your father’s death was due to an accident,” Weir said bitterly, “certainly the consequences are not accidental. Your prowler must have had money and power behind him. Somebody, somewhere, is moving heaven

and earth to prevent the truth from being revealed, and you and I are like pawns in the game."

"It couldn't be my friend . . . I mean the one who came to see me," murmured Leila. "He was just a simple young fellow."

Weir endured the pangs of jealousy in silence.

They slept. Towards the end of the afternoon they were awakened by the return of the men and the dogs. Weir climbed the gum tree so that he could observe their movements from above the screen of vines. The party proceeded along the bank of the swamp without pausing. Men and dogs alike had a weary and disgruntled air and were not saying anything. They went on out of sight.

Weir slid down the tree and reported. "Gone back to Ancaster. They can't do any more to-day. Either they'll go back to Kentville for the night, in Frank's car, or camp out in the old house in order to get an early start.

"Either way our course is clear. We'll go up that little stream they explored this afternoon. They won't trouble it again. When it ends we'll strike straight across the county from east to west. We'll be over the State road long before daylight and find a hiding-place. They'll never guess we're on that side. On the following night we'll go on to the river and pick up a boat somewhere. Then we'll be away from the damned county altogether. Things are looking up, pal!"

Leila squared her shoulders in the old boyish way. "I'm ready."

XVI

WEIR built a fire behind a screen of leaves, and cooked a hot supper. Afterwards in the failing light they set off across the swamp and struck up the little side stream. When the light failed altogether the pocket flash helped them on their way.

All the streams in Kent County were short. This one became smaller and smaller as they ascended it, until it was no more than a trickle of water creeping through the grass or falling from stone to stone. Finally they reached its source at a deep spring in the bottom of a grassy hollow.

After drinking and bathing their faces in the dark, they climbed to higher ground and struck due east across cultivated land, field after field, climbing each fence as they came to it. The stars gave them their direction, and later the moon came up. They gave all buildings a wide berth.

Some time after midnight they crossed the State road, and continued east towards the estuary of the Coquatank river which bounded Kent County on this side. Coming to a side road which headed generally in the right direction, they followed it. The going was easier in the road, and they could save the precious flashlight. If any car had come along its headlights would have given them ample warning, but they saw none.

"At this rate if we have luck we'll get a skiff and be out of sight of Kent by daylight," said Weir hopefully.

As the small hours wore on, Leila began to lag behind. She insisted that she was all right, but her voice had an unnatural thickness, and when Weir reached for her hand he found that it was burning hot. Strain, over-fatigue, wet feet were exacting their price.

"You have fever!" he said with a sinking heart. This was something that no amount of nerve and quick-wittedness could beat.

"I feel a little sick," Leila confessed. "My head aches and my throat is sore. But it's just as easy to keep on walking as to stop."

"You must have shelter," groaned Weir, "and where am I going to find it?"

They came to a hamlet of three or four houses rising dark-windowed and solemn beside the road. "We might as well stop," said Weir. "We've got to

have help."

"No!" she protested. "That would be the end of everything."

As they went on, Weir had to slow down more and more to enable her to keep up. He wanted to carry her, but she protested so vigorously he had to put her down again.

"Just let me sit down beside the road a little," she pleaded, "and I'll be all right."

"No!" he cried. "If we once stop we'll never get going again. You must have shelter."

They plodded on in a kind of daze of hopelessness. Leila began to stagger on her feet. Weir drew one of her arms across his shoulders and throwing his free arm around her body went on, half carrying her. He had the grass bag pinned under his elbow.

"I'm so sorry!" Leila kept murmuring. "I'm no good at all."

"For God's sake," said Weir, "we're pals, aren't we? No apologies are called for."

They passed other houses, but when Weir wanted to stop she passionately protested. "That means prison again. I would sooner die in the road."

Later, when the sky was lightening behind them, they came to a little ancient brick chapel standing in its yard beside the road. Tall old trees shaded the graves old and new, and in the rear there was a thick grove.

Weir said: "This looks promising." He made Leila sit down with her back against the palings while he went in to investigate.

The front door of the church was locked, but the first window he tried yielded to pressure. He raised it and went back for Leila. He lifted her over the window sill, and setting her down on the floor inside, climbed after. A smell of fresh varnish and dying lilies filled his nostrils. The colours of the memorial window behind the altar were brightening in the dawn.

Gathering up an armful of the pew cushions, he made a bed for her in the aisle. She sighed like a child when he laid her upon it. He took off her damp shoes and stockings, and after chafing her feet, wrapped them in his jacket. She immediately fell into a broken feverish sleep.

Weir closed the window and, taking one of the altar vessels, went out to look for water. It couldn't be used for a better purpose, he told himself. In

the rear the vestry door was fastened on the inside with a bolt. Thus he could pass freely in and out without showing himself to the road. A path from the vestry door led him to a spring in the grove of trees behind the churchyard.

Back in the church again, Leila awoke every few minutes, looked around her vaguely and fell asleep again. It was more like a torpor than healthy sleep. She refused to eat, but drank greedily when he put the cup to her lips.

Weir ate some cold food, and sat down, watching his patient with a heavy face. What was he to do? No expedient presented itself. There was nothing he could think of but to keep her warm and dry and safely bedded in the church in the hope that Nature might effect a cure. Then it suddenly came to him that this was Saturday morning and the church would be used next day. He ground his teeth helplessly.

He lay down to sleep, rising often to give Leila a swallow of water. When he finally got up it was afternoon. A glance at Leila told him that she was worse. Her breath was coming fast, and the unwholesome flush in her face had heightened. Her head rolled from side to side on the cushions, and her lips moved continuously. Weir with a heavy heart decided that he could no longer put off asking for help.

He went out into the road and looked up and down. About half a mile towards the west he saw a plain, comfortable old farmhouse standing on a rise shaded by maple trees. He turned towards it.

Before he had gone far he heard a car coming from the direction of the State road. He instinctively vaulted over the fence and crouched down behind the border of weeds that lined it. Though he was searching for help, he wanted to have some choice in applying for it.

In the car that drove past he saw the comely self-indulgent face of young Earl Souter. Weir was thankful then that he had hidden himself. Earl was about the last man in the county of whom he would have wished to ask assistance.

He went on through the field holding himself ready to duck if anybody else came by in the road. Coming to the edge of a descent he saw a new house alongside the road in the bottom of the hollow. The green sedan that had lately passed him was standing in the yard. So this would be Earl Souter's house.

Weir recollected having been told that old Adam Souter, on the occasion of his youngest son's marriage, had built him a house on the old home place. Consequently the plain foursquare house on the hill behind must be Adam

Souter's. Adam was one of the best known farmers in Kent, a man held in general respect and affection. Weir instantly decided that since he had to go to somebody for help, he could not find a better man.

Old Adam had had a lot of sorrow, they said. His wife had died; his eldest son had been killed in an automobile accident; the next one had run away from home as a lad; and his youngest was a thorn in his side. Weir hoped that his acquaintance with trouble might incline him to listen sympathetically to the troubles of others.

He made a wide detour to avoid the new house in the hollow. He approached the old farmstead from the rear, working up on it slowly, taking advantage of every bit of cover. He finally came to a stand behind a cornhouse at the edge of the stable yard. This was a small building with open slatted sides, built up on posts about two feet high as a protection from rats. It was almost empty of corn, and by peering through it between the slats Weir could more or less see what was going on in the yard.

A lame horse was led out of the stable by a negro boy, and the farmer approached to look him over. He was a short man, broad in the beam, with a very red face, the bluest of eyes and a fussy manner. A second negro boy was carrying medicaments for the horse. The farmer dressed the hurt leg with noticeable gentleness. He was continually bawling out the niggers. They grinned at him affectionately.

Weir who had no desire to identify himself to the negroes, awaited his opportunity. It came when the horse was led back into the stable, and the farmer, picking up a box, came to the cornhouse to get a feed for the beast. When he was inside the house Weir spoke his name:

"Mr. Souter."

The stout man looked down through the slats in astonishment. "God bless my soul!" he stuttered, "Who are you?"

"Weir Lambert. Let me talk to you for a moment before you raise an alarm!"

The farmer was so overcome he had to put his box down on the floor and sit on it. "God bless my soul! God bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "What are you doing here?"

"I need help," said Weir.

"You have a nerve, asking for help," said the old man indignantly, "after shooting the Sheriff!"

“I didn’t shoot him.”

“Don’t lie to me. Every decent man in the county is roused against you for mistreating that young girl!”

“Mistreating her!” said Weir indignantly. “That’s a dirty lie! They only say that to turn fair-minded men against me. I took that girl out of jail because the same men who are spreading that lie stood at the windows and mocked her. I couldn’t stand it, and you couldn’t have stood it either. She’s as safe with me as if she was my sister.”

Souter wagged his head, puffed out his cheeks, pursed up his mouth. “Maybe so! Maybe so! I’m never the one to deny a man the benefit of the doubt. Get out of here . . . get out of here quick and I’ll say nothing to nobody.”

“She’s sick,” said Weir simply.

“Hey? What? Where is she?”

“In the church.”

“What she’s sick of?”

“I don’t know. Fever; sore throat.”

“That’s bad! bad! What do you come to me for?”

“You have the reputation of being a neighbourly man.”

“It’s a lie!” cried Mr. Souter with comic indignation. “Get away from here! And get the girl away.”

Weir thought of the sick horse. “Do you know anything about sickness?” he asked cunningly.

“Well, of course, I’ve doctored horses and cattle and children ever since I had any. I had to do it.”

“Won’t you come to see her?”

“Certainly not,” said the farmer. “Get away from here.”

Though he spoke so positively, Weir could see that there was a struggle going on in his mind. Weir said: “It’s terrible to see a young person sick like that, and not know what to do.”

“You broke out of jail, you shot the Sheriff, now you’ve got to take your medicine,” said Adam Souter.

“She didn’t do any of that.”

“She killed her father, didn’t she?”

“She did not!” said Weir. “That’s another lie. . . . I can’t tell you the rights of it here. If you stay in the cornhouse any longer the niggers will be coming to see what’s the matter. Come to the church and I’ll tell you. Or you can hear it from her.”

“You’d better let me take my car over to the church and drive you straight into Kentville,” said Adam. “You’ll be safe there. The girl can go to the hospital under guard. If they catch you anywhere outside the young men are just in the mood to string you up without trial.”

“If they want to string me up do you think the rotten little jail is going to save me? If you take me there you’ll just be handing me over to the mob. The only man who could protect me from the mob is Frank Baker, and he’s lying sick.”

Adam was visibly weakening. “They’re bound to take you in the end,” he said.

“Not if I can get to the river and find a boat.”

The old man scratched his head and made impatient noises. Suddenly he said: “Squat down! The boy is coming.”

Weir whispered swiftly: “Come up to the church through the woods at the back and in by the vestry door.” He dropped down below the sill of the cornhouse.

From outside the door on the other side a voice asked: “What’s the matter, Master Adam?”

“Nothing! nothing!” answered the old man innocently. “I was just thinking.” He hastily threw some corn into his box and went out, slamming the door behind him and turning the wooden catch. He walked across the stable yard whistling loudly and unmelodiously. Weir felt pretty sure that he was coming to the church. His heart warmed towards the old fellow, so fussy, so loud-mouthed, and so kind.

Half an hour after Weir got back to the church the bulky figure of Adam Souter darkened the vestry door. He had a comical guilty air like a conspirator, and greeted them by saying with a kind of desperation:

“Oughtn’t to have come here! Oughtn’t to have come here! I’m not doing my duty by the law.”

He produced a loaf of bread from under his jacket and took butter, eggs, cold meat, a bottle of milk from various pockets. He also had a medicine for Leila's fever and a tincture to paint her throat.

"Didn't know if you had anything to eat," he grumbled.

"We have food," said Weir. "Certainly was kind of you to bring it."

"I'm not kind," said Adam peevishly. "I'm a fool! . . . Where's the sick girl?"

Weir led him to where Leila lay on her bed of pew-cushions. She was asleep. There was something about the fever flushed young face with its halo of black curls, the swollen lips, the slender throat rising out of the boy's shirt that would have touched a harder heart than Adam Souter's. The old man blinked and made pitiful noises.

"Sho! that's not the face of a bad girl!" he murmured.

Dropping to his knees beside her, he felt her pulse. Leila opened her eyes and gazed up at him in terror.

"Who are you?"

"Your friend," said Adam.

"Are you . . . are you going to take me back?"

"Not on your life, my girl," he said loudly.

"She hasn't eaten anything all day," said Weir. "I've been giving her water."

"Best thing for her."

Adam made her swallow the medicine he had brought, and painted her throat. After this painful operation Leila dropped into her uneasy sleep again. Adam and Weir moved away towards a window.

"What is it?" asked Weir anxiously.

"Your doctor would give it a name of four syllables, I reckon," said Adam. "It is the sore throat that comes of wet feet. She has it real bad."

"We've had a hard time these two days," muttered Weir.

"I reckon . . . Well, she's young. A couple of days' rest will bring her around all right."

"I told you I'd tell you the truth about this matter," said Weir. "You're entitled to know it."

He told his story. Adam, puffing out his cheeks and snorting in a pretended fit of temper, was much affected.

"Damn it all," he cried, when Weir had finished. "They say that anybody can put over a hard luck story with Adam Souter. I'm an easy mark, but I don't care! I believe you. What you going to do now?" he went on. "To-morrow morning they'll be opening the church for service."

Weir shrugged. "We'll have to move into the woods back of the churchyard."

"It would be right dangerous if she was to get a chill now."

"What else can I do?"

Adam hemmed and hawed and muttered curses under his breath. Weir guessed what was passing through his mind and took care to keep his mouth shut. Finally it came blurting out:

"Damn it all! you'll have to bring her over to my house."

"Some day I hope I may get a chance to make this up to you," said Weir very low.

"Nothing of the sort," cried Adam in a seeming passion. "I'm not doing it for you, nor for her neither. I'm just being my usual foolish self. Soon as I laid eyes on her I knew I was going to be a fool. I felt it coming on."

Weir said nothing. It seemed to be the best way to handle the inconsistent old fellow.

"As soon as the supper dishes are washed up the cook goes home," Adam continued, "and I'm alone in the house. There's not much risk. I have a room that has been locked up for some years. It was my son's room. We'll put her in there. You can stay in the garret."

"I'll carry her over when it gets dark," said Weir.

"Shut up!" cried Adam. "I'll tell you what's to be done. . . . I often drive over to Nick Witter's store after supper for a little talk. I'll show myself there to-night in order to establish an alibi, and on my way home I'll stop in front of the church and pick up you and the girl. We'll have her in bed in my house in three minutes. My young son, when he sees me driving out past his house and coming back again, will think nothing of it."

The moment Weir started to speak, Adam began waving his hands. "Don't thank me! Don't thank me! I'm not a thankable man! You just do what I tell you and let it go at that." He stormed out.

XVII

ALL day Weir was forced to remain a prisoner in the garret of the old farmhouse. On three sides of the irregular space under the roof there were small dusty windows close to the floor, and by extending himself along the boards he could look down and see something of what was going on outside. It was his only amusement. The window at the back overlooked the stable-yard.

Always present in his mind was the danger that Adam Souter might betray his own secret. The old man was too honest to make a good conspirator. He went around with a heavy, self-conscious air that would have warned anybody that he had something on his mind. It didn't matter about the negroes, because whatever Master Adam might do was right in their eyes, but Earl Souter was a different matter. Earl was with his father off and on during the day, working in the fields or in the stable-yard.

After nightfall Adam would unlock the door at the foot of the garret stairs and Weir was free to come down and move around a little. He never ventured to the lower floor because Earl was likely to drop in at any time.

Leila's sickness was pursuing a normal course. Whenever he could get a chance Adam visited her, and it was clear from Leila's account that he cared for her as efficiently and tenderly as a woman. "I always wanted a daughter to make a fuss over," he would say. "Never had nothing but sons."

On Monday afternoon when the mail arrived, Adam found an opportunity to bring the city newspapers up to the garret. Weir, who had given no thought to this side of the matter, was astonished to discover what a noise he was making in the world. The lurid heads and sub-heads were spread right across the page.

NEWSPAPER EDITOR AND GIRL PURSUED BY BLOODHOUNDS

It is now believed that the girl was forcibly abducted from Kent County jail. The worst is feared for her. Whole country is aroused by Weir Lambert's series of crimes. Every avenue of escape from the swamp is watched. Capture only a matter of hours. Is the girl still alive? Wounded Sheriff progressing favourably.

Weir paced the floor of his prison cursing helplessly. Lies! Lies! Lies! Is that the sort of stuff the public swallows?

When night came and he went down to see Leila he said nothing of all this. To his joy he discovered that the fever had left her. She was weak but smiling. “To-night we can travel,” she said.

They were careful to show no light in this room. As Weir sat talking quietly to her in the dark they heard Earl Souter enter the house downstairs. Weir stole across the room and turned the key in the door.

Presently they were startled to hear Earl and his father coming up the stairs. A moment later the handle of the door was sharply turned. Weir’s heart stood still. Outside he heard Earl say:

“Why do you keep this room locked up if you’re all alone in the house?”

“It is just my way,” answered Adam.

“How long are you going to keep up this foolishness about my brother?”

“As long as I am here.”

“There’s furniture in there that Flossie and I could use.”

“It will all be yours when I am gone.”

“Do you know what the niggers are saying about this room? That it’s haunted. Liza Jane told me she heard somebody walking around in it yesterday.”

“I reckon that was me,” said Adam. “I go in there sometimes.”

“Where’s the key?” asked Earl. “I’d like to have a look at it.”

“Some other time.”

“If you ask me I think you’re coocoo about that room.”

They passed down the hall.

Later they heard Earl jump in his car outside and start down the hill. Weir watched his lights. He did not stop at his own house, but turned into the road and went on out of sight in the direction of the State road.

When Adam came into the room Weir said: “We’ll be pulling out to-morrow night. Leila is better.”

“Not fit to travel yet,” said Adam.

“Perhaps not, but it’s dangerous to stay longer.”

“No more dangerous than when you came,” said Adam, blinking.

“Earl is suspicious.”

“What makes you think so?”

“I could tell by the sound of his voice. . . . You had a light?”

“Yes, I was carrying a lamp.”

“And do you mean to tell me when Earl was questioning you about this room you didn’t look guilty?”

The old man puffed out his cheeks and moved his shoulders impatiently. “Well, anyhow, I guess I can do what I like in my own house,” he said irrelevantly. “Earl may be a bit wild, but he would never dare to go against me openly.”

“I wish I knew what Earl was up to right now,” muttered Weir.

“If you think you’ve got to go I’ll carry you down to the river to-morrow night,” said Adam. “Tom Culver down there has got a skiff that I borrow when I go fishing. I know where he keep his oars.”

Tuesday was the hardest day of all to put in in the garret. Weir moved from one window to another trying to see what was going on around the farm. A hundred times in an hour he looked at his watch. There seemed to be weights attached to the hands, holding them back.

After the midday dinner Adam Souter drove away in his car. From the fact that he had put on his Sunday suit Weir deduced that he had gone to Kentville on business. After his departure all was quiet around the place. Earl Souter was out in one of the fields cultivating the new corn, and Weir felt pretty safe. He stretched out on the boards of the garret floor to sleep.

When he awoke it was to find Earl Souter squatting on his heels a few paces away, smoking a cigarette and grinning at him devilishly. Earl was a good-looking, fresh-faced lad, younger than Weir, though he had been married for several years and had two children. Earl was reputed to be “wild” but he had such a disarming manner he was generally regarded with indulgence.

“So this is where you’re keeping yourself!” he said coolly.

Weir drew a mask over his face and asked with a grin as cool as Earl’s own: “How did you find me out?”

“Easy,” said Earl. “My old man has been looking so damn mysterious the last three days I knew something was up. I also knew that he was the softest-hearted old woman in Kent. So I been keeping my eyes open. Yesterday I noticed that the key to the garret door was gone from the lock. It’s been there as long as I can remember. So, to-day, when he went to the bank I looked through his working pants, and there it was, and here I am.”

“Pretty smart,” said Weir.

“Where’s the girl?” asked Earl.

“I don’t know. We parted company.”

Earl laughed. “She’s not a thousand miles away from here,” he said. “She’s locked up in the room downstairs that used to be my brother’s. How do I know? I just looked through the keyhole and saw that the key is in the inside of the door.”

“You ought to be a detective.”

“Sure!” said Earl. “. . . What for did you want to lie to me about the girl? I’m your friend.”

“In the past you never gave me any reason to think you were,” said Weir.

“Aw, shucks, I was just having a bit of fun with you,” said Earl. “What the hell! I’m not a bad-hearted fellow. I wouldn’t jump on a man when he’s down.”

Weir thought: He is lying like Judas!

“Why, if I meant bad to you,” Earl went on, “all I’d have to do would be to say a word in the ear of certain fellows around the county, and they’d come here and drag you out of the house and string you up to the nearest tree. What with all this talk about your carrying the girl into the woods and afterwards shooting the Sheriff, they’re wild.”

Weir said nothing.

“I want to help you,” said Earl. “And I want to keep my old man from getting into trouble on your account. How are you going to get away from here?”

“We can’t move for a couple of days yet,” said Weir cautiously. “The girl has been sick. We’ve got to wait until she’s fit to travel.”

“Then what are you going to do?”

Weir made up his lie as he went on. “Well, there’s a fellow I know who’s got a schooner down at Bethany. He says he’ll take us up to town in the hold.”

“The city police will search his vessel when he gets there.”

“He’ll put us off somewhere in a small boat before he ties up to the wharf.”

“Sounds pretty good,” said Earl with a serious air. “I’ll drive you down to Bethany when you’re ready to start. I could get away with it better than the old man.”

“Certainly is decent of you,” said Weir.

“Well, I must get back to work,” said Earl, rising. “I’ll be seeing you again. Do you want me to get you anything, or carry any message for you?”

“No thanks.”

“I believe you’re still suspicious of me,” said Earl with the frank manner that many people found so attractive. “I’ll prove to you that I’m on the square and a good friend of yours. There’s my hand on it!”

Weir crushed down the feeling of repulsion that surged up in him, and took the offered hand. “I never yet refused a hand that was offered in friendship,” he said, looking at him full. Earl’s eyes shifted away.

When darkness fell Weir was sitting on the bottom step of the garret stairs. As soon as Adam unlocked the door, he ran out and seized the old man’s arm; “Has Earl said anything to you?” he demanded.

“Earl? No! What do you mean?” said Adam blankly. “I haven’t seen Earl. He had already knocked off work when I got back from Kentville.”

“He knows I’m in the house,” said Weir.

“What!”

“He got the key out of your old pants and came up and found me there while I was sleeping.”

“Damn!” said Adam.

“He means mischief,” said Weir.

“I can’t believe it,” said the old man brokenly. “After all he’s my boy. He’s not a bad-hearted lad.”

“I can’t take a chance on that,” said Weir harshly. “We’ve got to get out of here.”

“Wait till I see if he’s home,” said Adam. “I won’t let anything on.”

He went to the telephone. The answer came back that Earl had gone out in his car leaving word with his wife that he wouldn’t be home until late. Adam hung up slowly. He looked very old.

“Maybe you’re right,” he said heavily. “Earl has been asking questions. . . . Sometimes . . . a man feels sorry . . . that he ever had any sons!” He roused himself with a shake. “I’ll go out and start my car. You fetch Leila down. Wait in the kitchen in the dark until I drive up to the back door.”

Weir went into Leila’s room. They had few preparations to make. Weir still had the bag of food, and Leila her little satchel. They descended to the kitchen. Outside in the garage they could hear the starter whirring, but the engine did not start. After a long wait Adam appeared in the kitchen with an agitated manner.

“My battery is all right,” he said, “but I can’t get a spark in the engine.”

“Somebody has been tampering with the distributor, I reckon,” said Weir.

“Well, there are plenty of horses in the stable. We’ll ride down to the river.”

Weir shook his head. “Leila and I must walk. If we meet cars in the road we can go over the fence and hide. Horses would only give us away.”

“I’ll ride,” said Adam. “I’ll go on ahead to make sure that the road is clear, and to get the boat ready for you. You’ll meet me coming back. I’ll hang a stable lantern over my arm so you’ll know it’s me.”

“Make sure you’re not followed,” warned Weir.

In a few moments Adam set off, carrying the unlighted lantern. He went by road while Weir and Leila cut across the fields in order to avoid passing Earl’s house. By the time they struck into the road Adam’s horse was out of hearing.

It was a clear starry night. The moon was not due to rise until near morning. The distance to the river was three miles. This part of the road was but little used, and had never been improved. They alternately stumbled over

dried ruts or ploughed through sand. On account of Leila's weakness they could travel but slowly.

They met nobody until they saw Adam's lantern jogging towards them in the distance. The spot where they met was within half a mile of the river. Adam blew out his light.

"All seems to be clear," he said. "I saw nothing."

"Did you hear anything?" asked Weir.

"Only a bunch of horses running in a field. Loose horses at pasture."

"Did you get a boat?"

"Sure! . . . Listen! This road ends at an old steamboat wharf on the river that isn't used any more, and it's all caved in. Tom Culver's house is on the shore on your right-hand side. Don't go into the yard, but pass along the beach below the fence until you come to a cove making in. Tom has a little wharf there and his skiff is tied up to it. I got the oars and laid them in the bottom of her."

There was a silence. None of them felt like speaking.

"Well, good-bye and good luck to you!" said old Adam with an effort.

"How can we ever thank you for what you've done?" muttered Weir.

"Don't try! Don't try!" said Adam in distress. "Here, lad. Here's something for the journey." He pressed a roll of bills into Weir's hand.

"I have money," protested Weir.

"You can't have too much at a time like this. Damn it! I went to the bank special to-day to get this for you."

"I can't say anything . . ." mumbled Weir.

The old man suddenly clapped heels to his horse. "Good-bye! Good-bye!" he said, and rode away.

XVIII

WEIR and Leila went on slowly. In a few minutes the broad estuary opened up before them faintly shining under the stars. There was the ruined wharf just as Adam had described it, and on the right Tom Culver's house within its picket fence, an ancient farmhouse with low eaves, shaded by a pair of towering tulip poplars.

The river bank was only two or three feet high in this place. Below it stretched a wide beach of firm sand. They started along it. Weir stopped.

"There have been horses along here," he whispered. "I don't like the look of it."

"Mr. Souter's horse," suggested Leila.

"Many horses."

"There is nothing for us to do but go on," she faltered.

"You're right."

Beyond the house the beach ran out in a spit of sand, and curving around inside, formed the cove of which Adam had spoken. In this sheltered spot they found Tom Culver's little wharf. To it was tied his skiff. All around the cove the beach was backed by a thick screen of trees hiding everything behind. They could no longer see the house.

Weir paused by the wharf, listening and watching. His breast was heavy with foreboding. There was no sign nor sound of life anywhere. Stepping out on the rickety structure, he threw the beam of his flashlight into the bottom of the boat.

"There are no oars," he said.

A low cry broke from Leila.

At the same moment the dark, still trees behind her seemed suddenly to come to life. A low-voiced order was heard, and a number of mounted figures rode out on the sand and, spreading out, cut off their retreat on both sides. Weir sprang to Leila's side and flung an arm around her. He did not draw his gun. The odds were too great.

A strong beam of light was thrown on them, and a harsh voice said: "Put up your hands, Lambert! There are twenty of us and we have you covered!"

Weir did not instantly obey and the voice repeated more sharply: “Better stick ’em up—for the girl’s sake.”

Weir’s hands went slowly above his head. Two men slipped out of their saddles and seized him. They took his gun from him, and bound his arms to his sides. Their faces were concealed by black masks. There was light enough for Weir to see that all the men were masked. The one who appeared to be leader was quite a dandified fellow in his well-cut breeches and boots. Weir had never seen such fine garments in the county.

The men were extraordinarily quiet for so many. Their horses’ hoofs made scarcely any sound in the soft sand. The men spoke seldom and then in undertones. They seemed to be moving according to a well-rehearsed plan.

Weir knew well enough what was coming, and steeled himself to face it. He could not bear the sight of Leila’s face lifted towards his, silent with imploring eyes and trembling lips. He turned his back on her and on the lights, and looked out over the starlit water. It was so calm there was scarcely a ripple falling on the sand. Some of the stars were bright enough to make little paths of light on the water.

Meanwhile the leader’s flashlight was searching back and forth among the trees lining the beach. It came to rest on a stout old locust that leaned out slightly from amongst its fellows, and had a horizontal branch reaching over the sand.

“There’s the tree,” he said in a disguised voice, deep and harsh. “Throw your rope over the lower limb.”

Leila understood then. She screamed out and threw her arms around Weir. “No! No! No! He has done no wrong! Let him go and take me! Take me!”

Several voices growled in protest. “Take her away! Take her away! This is no fit sight for a woman.”

Leila was seized and dragged away along the sand struggling and crying out: “Murderers! Murderers!” Her cries ceased.

By this time all the masked men had dismounted except the unknown leader. He continued to sit his horse, issuing orders in the croaking voice he had assumed. Of the others some stood about holding the horses while others busied themselves with the rope. They were very quiet.

In the light of half a dozen electric torches thrown on the old locust tree, the rope was cast over the horizontal branch and pulled down. One tied a noose in the end of it, and stepping back left the ominous circlet slowly swinging in the light.

"There's your necktie, Yankee!" jeered one from the crowd.

Weir recognised the voice of Earl Souter.

Two men seized him by the elbows and shoved him under the tree. The noose was placed round his neck, and men on the other end of the rope pulled it until it lifted his chin a little.

Somebody growled. "Let him talk if he wants. It's every man's right to have his say."

"If you've got anything to say, say it, Yankee!" jeered Souter.

Weir was conscious of nothing but a blinding anger. He cursed the men who held him. "Take your hands off me! I can't help myself!"

They stepped back from him. Weir looked around. The light of several torches was in his eyes and he could see nothing but a semicircle of dim still figures.

"To hell with all of you! If you think you're going to hear me begging for my life you've got another guess. There's one of you I know. A treacherous, lying rat; that's you, Souter!

"Men, Souter came to me to-day, offering to be my friend. Said he was going to help me out of the county. Gave me his hand in friendship and ran away to betray me to you. That's the sort of dirty hand you're playing. Earl Souter was paid well for his part in it. What are *you* getting?

"Who is this fellow who is leading you and giving his orders? He's no county man. Somebody from the outside who has an interest in getting me out of the way. Do *you* know who he is? Better lift his mask and take a look at him before you pull his chestnuts out of the fire! He'll take the profits and you'll face arrest."

"Ah, shut your mouth!" yelled Earl, beside himself with rage. "Men, how much of this are we going to stand for? String him up!"

"Earl knows who he is?" shouted Weir.

His voice was lost in the chorus of yells that rose. "Yah! string him up! String him up! What the hell are we waiting for?"

A horse was led up, laying back his ears and pawing nervously, and the bound figure of Weir lifted by many hands and placed astride him. Two men held the horse. The rope was pulled taut and the bight of it tied around the trunk of another tree.

"Let go!" ordered the leader gruffly.

"Wait!" yelled one of the men at the horse's head. "Let him say his prayers. Give him until you count ten and we'll lick the horse."

The leader counted slowly: "One! . . . Two! . . . Three! . . ."

Every man who possessed an electric torch had it trained on Weir, sitting stiffly upright with his arms bound to his sides. Weir, looking straight ahead of him, was thinking: Only ten seconds to keep a grip on myself then it will be out of my hands.

"Ten!" cried the leader.

The whip lashed the horse's rump. The beast sprang forward. Weir toppled over backwards. But, instead of being launched into eternity, he found himself lying in a heap on the sand with the rope on top of him. He moved cautiously, scarcely daring to believe that he was still present. The sense of life coming back was as keen as pain.

For a moment the surrounding men stared at him in a stupefied silence. Then a new actor entered the scene. Frank Baker came forward into the circle of light that enveloped Weir. His right arm was supported in a sling; he had a knife in his other hand. Bending over Weir he cut his bonds. Weir scrambled shakily to his feet.

A yell of rage broke from the leader. He clapped heels to his horse to ride the two men down. Frank dragged Weir back out of his path. As the man wheeled his horse to return, Frank dropped his knife and pulled a gun. He fired and the horse plunged to its knees, flinging the masked man over its head and almost at Frank's feet.

He scrambled out of the way on all fours. "They're only two," he shouted, hoarse with rage. "Circle around and take them from behind."

Frank and Weir pressed back against the trunk of the big locust. Frank handed his gun to the other and produced a second gun. They exchanged no speech. The rope was still hanging around Weir's neck. With his free hand he loosened the noose and cast it off.

The men shifted uneasily before them, snarling, but not quite worked up to the point of attacking. They kept torches playing on Frank and Weir,

themselves remaining more or less in shadow. Some had guns in their hands.

"Shoot the Yankee! Shoot him!" yelled Earl. "Sheriff can't do nothing! He can't see you with the light in his eyes!"

Frank raised his hand with the gun in it. "Just a minute, fellows," he said calmly. "Bear in mind I can shoot you in the pursuance of my duty and get a medal for it, whereas if you shoot me or my prisoner you will surely swing! Is it worth it?"

"He's bluffing!" yelled Earl.

"Bluffing, am I? . . . I know every man amongst you. I put a list of your names in a safe place before I started out. Where did I get it? There is always a traitor. One or two men whom you expected to-night never turned up. Want me to call off your names? Earl Souter; Gideon Withers; Thomas Horsfall; Frank Caslon; James Means . . ." He went through the list.

After pausing to let this sink in, Frank went on more good-humoredly: "A necktie party is like a big drink, hellish exciting. But there's an awful price to pay. You know me. You can't take this man from me without killing me. And God! what a stink *that* would raise. In years and years Kent County couldn't live it down. It ain't worth it, boys. You've had your fun. Go on home. To-morrow you'll be thankful that I stepped in before you blackened your souls."

When Frank came to an end, Weir, looking over the crowd, suddenly cried out: "Where's the guy with the fancy boots?"

Lights were cast all around and it was soon clear that the erstwhile leader of the party had quietly slipped away.

"I knew it?" cried Weir. "He went while the going was good."

A man suddenly vaulted into the saddle and set off along the beach at a gallop. It was like a signal. Those who were holding horses mounted one and let the others go. Instantly the beach was full of loose horses pursued by cursing men. And then all at once they were gone. One horse lay dead in the sand, consequently there was a man left over. It was Earl Souter. He pursued the last mounted man along the beach, begging to be taken up, cursing, almost weeping in rage and panic.

Weir was already running along by the edge of the trees, searching with his flashlight. A muffled groaning led him to the spot where Leila had been dropped. She was bound and gagged, but otherwise unharmed. When they freed her she clung to Weir, weeping.

“Oh, thank God you’re safe! I was praying they would kill me too!”

“Frank cut the rope,” said Weir simply. “I reckon there never was a man so near hanging who lived to tell of it.” He felt of his neck instinctively.

“The Sheriff saved your life!” she murmured.

“There’s no call for gratitude,” said Frank coolly. “I didn’t do it for love, but because it was my job.”

All Weir’s warm rush of feeling towards his friend was checked. “Now he has us dead to rights,” he said sullenly. “We’ll have to go with him.”

“Oh, what does it matter if you are safe!” murmured Leila.

Weir was not comforted any because he missed the note of personal rapture in her voice that he longed to hear.

“Not because I saved you from the rope,” said Frank grimly, “but because I have the power to take you.” He raised his voice. “George! Ellick! This way!”

George Case and Ellick Patton came running along the beach. “My deputies,” said Frank. “I kept them under cover because I thought one man might be able to put the fear of God into that party whereas three would only start the shooting.”

They returned to the spot where Frank had left his car in a farm road back of the screen of trees. George Case drove with Leila beside him. Weir sat between Frank and Ellick in the rear. Frank said casually:

“You can take me back to the hospital, George.”

XIX

THE events that followed passed for Weir like a series of pictures with blanks between. A man can only feel so much; after that if things are still heaped upon him he becomes apathetic.

By this time the circuit court was sitting in Kentville, and as the docket was short, word went around that the prisoners would be tried immediately. On the very day following their re-arrest the grand jury returned two indictments; the first, charging Leila Cowdin and Weir Lambert jointly with homicide; the second against Weir, solus, for assault with intent to kill upon an officer in the pursuance of his duty.

They were arraigned the same day and pleaded not guilty. The first picture etched on Weir's brain was of the village street as glimpsed through the courthouse windows. No such crowd had ever been seen there. Though it was in the middle of the planting season all farm work in Kent County must have ceased. There were special constables to handle the traffic and to keep a lane open between the parked cars.

The next picture was of the crowd around the jail windows which had now increased to hundreds of persons. All day long they stood gaping and shouting crude imprecations at the prisoners. It was strange to find oneself the object of so much hatred; so strange that Weir no longer minded it very much. It made him feel as if he were a sojourner from some other planet.

Finally, George Case, their jailer of his own accord, put up blinds inside the jail windows and kept them pulled down. Judging from the sounds outside this occasioned a deal of hard feeling. Taxpayers protested that they were paying for this show, and had a right to see it. However, the blinds remained down. Weir guessed that George Case had Frank Baker's support in this matter. The Sheriff was still in hospital.

Either George Case or Ellick Patton was now on duty at all hours in the corridor surrounding the cells. Weir was drawn to George and they talked together during the night hours. George, a young fellow in the early thirties, was built on a grand scale that is rare nowadays; chest that swelled like a barrel and cheeks the colour of wine-sap apples. In manner he was slow, but he had humour.

“George,” said Weir, “tell me something about these judges who will be trying us. What sort of men are they?”

“There are three of them,” said George; “Judge Comerford, Judge Hughes and Judge Olin, but only Judge Comerford counts. He’s been chief judge for near twenty years, and the other two just look wise and let him talk. Judge Comerford, he’s so old he don’t give a damn. Says whatever comes into his head. He’s considered a great wit, but if you ask me he’s a little dotty. They say that all this fuss that is being kicked up over your case has made him as peevish as an old woman in tight shoes.”

Weir shrugged gloomily. “Who’s on the jury panel?”

“It ain’t been given out yet. All I can tell you is that every man who has been trying to evade jury duty for years is now pulling every wire he can lay hold of to get on.”

“Naturally, the jury is sure of the best seats,” said Weir.

The next picture that remained in Weir’s mind belonged to the morning before the trial. This was a heartening picture that roused him from his apathy.

Ellick Patton came to his cell door to say that he was wanted, and conducted him through the corridor into the Sheriff’s office in the courthouse. There Weir found three of his fraternity brothers, his best friends; Ned Powell, Jinks Matheson and D’Arcy Hooker; otherwise Athos, Porthos and Aramis. There was a fourth fellow a year or two older, a stranger to Weir, who looked on with a grin at the hilarious greetings that took place. Jail passed out of Weir’s mind. It was like old times before any of them had assumed the white man’s burden.

When they had quieted down a little Weir said: “Well, we never thought we’d have our next reunion in jail!”

“What the hell!” cried D’Arcy, “the original D’Artagnan was locked up in the calaboose more than once, and all for a lady too! This is right in our line.”

“And if they’d had newspapers in those days they would have lied about him, too,” added Jinks. “We didn’t believe what we read.”

“Look,” said Ned, who, like his original, had the longest head in the party, “as soon as I read of your arrest I sent telegrams to the brethren levying an assessment. Nearly all of them came across. We took the money

and hired this guy in Newcastle to defend you. His name is Carter Canby. He lets on that he's a pretty good lawyer."

Weir took to his lawyer at sight. They shook hands.

Suddenly a silence fell on the crowd. Everybody was searching his mind for some crack that would relieve the situation, but nothing came. Weir abruptly turned his back on his friends and looked out of the window.

"I can't tell you fellows what this means to me," he said in a smothered voice. "Not the assessment, nor the lawyer, though that is pretty swell too. But . . . but . . . well the kid and I had come to think that there wasn't a soul in the world who wished us well."

This made matters worse. Nobody knew which way to look until Jinks said in his silly style:

"Say, Weir, this burg reminds me of Old Folks at Home. Looks like something run up on the lot at Hollywood and forgotten."

They laughed as if he had got off something really good, and the strain was eased.

"Sorry we can't see you through the show," said Ned Powell. "The original musketeers seemed to be able to get off when there was any fun going, but we're poor creatures, wage slaves. We could only get one day off. We drove all night to get here and will have to drive all night again to get back."

"Six hundred miles!" said Weir. "It's more than the musketeers ever did."

"We'll be down again Sunday if it lasts that long."

When the musketeers had gone, Ellick Patton conducted Weir and Carter Canby into the jail where they could talk over the case. Weir liked Canby, but had not yet made up his mind about him. A brisk fellow, well-turned-out, who could put up a good bluff when it was necessary and could also be quite human and natural. They entered Leila's cell while Ellick remained outside the door. Weir watched Canby close as he was presented to Leila. When he saw the young lawyer's face soften he was satisfied. He thought: This man can do as much for us as anybody could.

When Weir had finished telling him their story, Canby sprang up and agitatedly paced the cell. "Man! if the angel Gabriel came down to plead for you he couldn't get you off in this court."

Weir approved of his honesty. “We don’t expect to get off,” he said doggedly. “Though we are both innocent.”

“How much of a case have they got against her?”

“We don’t know. They can’t have much.”

“Of course the State’s Attorney is only bluffing when he charges you with homicide,” Canby went on. “He’s only trying to lay a foundation for the other charge. At the worst you were only an accessory after the fact. But he will try to sow a suspicion in the jury’s mind that you and Leila were acquainted beforehand. . . . As to the second charge, I don’t see how I can save you unless we can find the man who fired the shot.”

“You can give up the case if you want,” said Weir. “We would never blame you.”

Canby had a quick smile that changed his whole face. “Not on your life,” he said. “A real lawyer never turns down a lost cause. It stimulates him to do his damnedest. . . . But you should get another lawyer if you feel that he could do more for you.”

Weir and Leila exchanged a glance, “No,” said Weir shortly. “We want you.” And Leila nodded.

While they were talking, somebody outside the jail stuck his head as close to the window as he could get and let out a vicious howl. “You hear that?” said Weir. “Our jury must be chosen from these people. Do you think we ought to apply for a change of venue?”

“No,” said Canby. “In another county we have no assurance that we would fare any better. And if we can show unfairness at the trial it will provide a basis for an appeal. That’s the most we can hope for.”

As Canby left he said: “I’ll bring my wife with me to-morrow to sit with Leila in the courtroom. It has a psychological effect on the jury.”

In the morning when Ellick Patton came on duty he brought reports of the excitement outside. An unexpected horde of visitors was descending on the village. The county people were sore about it and proud too. They couldn’t understand why a local happening should excite the outside world to such a degree. Besides hundreds of mere curiosity-seekers from the city with time and gasoline to spare, it seemed that every prominent newspaper in the east was sending a special writer to report the trial.

The hotel's six rooms had been engaged ahead, and a hot house to house canvass for beds was going on. Fancy prices were being asked and obtained. Some of the cannier reporters were bringing tents with them, and many expected to sleep in their cars. There wasn't anywhere near enough food in the village to feed the mob. Everybody was telephoning to town for fresh supplies.

The clerk of the court had got panicky and announced that admission to the courtroom would be by ticket only. His office was being mobbed at that moment. The courtroom would seat only about three hundred and the local people were indignant that reporters from cities as far distant as New York should be given the preference over Kent County taxpayers.

It was like carnival time in Kentville. Booths and tents were springing up in every vacant spot with hot dogs, games of chance, shooting galleries, a merry-go-round and side-shows of every description. A local man, Sam Liptrott, was going to make the best thing out of it. Smart fellow, Sam. He was getting ready to barbecue a young steer in the hollow, and had ordered eight hundred loaves of bread from town.

The last hour passed like a dream to Weir. All sorts of strangers came and went in front of his cell door. They talked to him and he answered them, but his real self was far away. Canby gave his endless instructions which he instantly forgot—but they came back later. All the time he wanted to talk to Leila, to buck her up for the ordeal, but she was busy in her cell with Mrs. Canby.

Finally the courtroom flashing on his brain like a picture on the screen. He could never have told how he got there. A wide shallow room on the second floor of the courthouse with windows looking towards the rear. Stairs going down in the corner. It had the common look of all structures which are neither new nor old. Packed to suffocation; the entire panel of forty-eight men standing in the aisles waiting to be called.

The two front rows were occupied by newspaper men and women with their pads and pencils. Weir ought to have been interested in them but he was not. Too many other things on his mind. The judges! Judge Comerford, who looked like an old-fashioned dominie when he hears a squeaking slate pencil, flanked on either hand by a respectable dummy, all three in black silk gowns. The chief judge looked at the reporters with frank dislike and Weir heard him say:

"Sensation-mongers!"

Judge Olin plucked at his sleeve and whispered a caution.

"Well, let them print it! Let them print it!" said Judge Comerford testily. "Let them understand that there is one place on earth where their vulgar rags are not bowed down to!" He gave a vicious rap with his gavel and the proceedings opened.

Weir's attention soon strayed away from the business of choosing a jury. All the candidates looked alike to him. Kent County farmers in their Sunday suits who, conscious that the eyes of their neighbours were upon them, looked wise and virtuous, and modestly put up a hand before shifting a quid of tobacco.

Instead, Weir looked at Leila. She sat across the table from him with her back to the spectators. Canby sat between them at the head of the table, and Mrs. Canby, a smart, pretty young woman with bright eyes, was on the other side of Leila. Leila herself looked like a different person dressed in the cleverly-thought-out brown outfit that Mrs. Canby had brought her. Very plain and very expensive. The moment she put it on Leila looked as if she had never in her life worn anything but the best.

The opening speeches were only half-heeded by Weir. Birkett, the prematurely aged young man with his mean face, said what he might have been expected to say. It made Weir hot, and he looked away and tried to close his ears. Canby had already told him what he was going to say. It was a good speech. He set out to charm the jury with his attractive personality. But the twelve listened to him with faces like wood.

"They're not human!" he complained bitterly to Weir afterwards. "It takes all the heart out of a man."

"It's their usual attitude towards a stranger," said Weir. "I know it well."

"Then we ought to have a local man to deal with them."

"He'd be worse. He'd conduct the case with a wink to the jury."

The Sheriff was the first witness for the prosecution. When he entered with his arm in a sling and his tanned face looking pale and washed out, he got a big hand from the spectators. He took his seat on the stand, ignoring it. He pointedly avoided looking at Weir.

He told an absolutely straightforward story of what had happened from his point of view. It contained no surprises for Weir. No reference as to what had happened in the woods when he received his wound was permitted by

the court, nor any hint about the attempted lynching party. As Frank approached the end of his testimony, Canby whispered to Weir:

"This man is so honest that it would react against us if I tried to trip him up. I'm only going to ask him a couple of questions."

"You're the doctor," said Weir.

"Sheriff," said Canby, "before all this happened you and the defendant, Weir Lambert, were good friends, I understand."

"Yes sir," said Frank.

"How do you feel towards him now?"

"I bear him no ill will."

"You have been Sheriff of Kent County for a long time, haven't you?"

"This is the start of my third term, sir."

"You have had a wide experience of criminals then?"

"Well, considerable. Though Kent is law-abiding on the whole."

"As a result of your experience," said Canby pointedly, "would you say that these two defendants belonged to criminal types?"

Birkett sprang up. "I object!" he shouted. "Your Honours, the Sheriff's opinion of the character of these two defendants has nothing to do with the facts of the case."

"Objection sustained," said Judge Comerford.

"I thank your Honours," said Canby ironically. He sat down.

"One moment, Sheriff!" said Birkett. "Since my learned friend has raised the question, I would be glad if you made the answer quite clear to the jury. How is it, after all the trouble he has caused you, that you bear no ill will towards the defendant, Weir Lambert?"

"Well," said Frank slowly. "I got to make allowance for him because he, like many a young fellow before him, is in the grip of feelings that have warped his nature."

"I move to strike that answer from the record," said Canby.

"Strike it out," said Judge Comerford.

However, Birkett sat down with a grin.

XX

ANOTHER vivid picture imprinted on Weir's mind was of the hulking negro, Saul Cowdin, taking the stand. Terrified by the necessity of facing a whole courtroom of white men, and sullenly determined to see it through. How strange it was to see the look of animal hatred that he bent on Leila as he passed her. Why should anybody hate Leila?

When he began to tell his story the reason for it became apparent. Saul and Lee Cowdin had been foster brothers, and the negro had conceived a kind of slavish adoration for his white playmate that had lasted into middle age. When Lee married, Saul had been jealous of his wife, now he was jealous of his daughter. Weir glanced at the jury. All this ought to be clear to them. But it was only too apparent that they were in the mood of men who would see only what they wished to see.

Saul's evidence was very damaging to Leila. Carefully led along by Birkett, Saul made it appear that Lee Cowdin had been a good master to him, and a conscientious father to Leila. Leila was represented as a wild and headstrong girl who had to be disciplined for her own good.

Birkett reserved the right to call Saul again later.

When the negro was turned over to him for cross-examination, Canby consulted with Weir and Leila. "You can see the trap that Birkett has laid for us. It will be easy for me to show out of Saul's mouth that Leila's position at Ancaster was unbearable. But in doing so I will only be supplying a motive for murder."

"I say bring out the truth anyhow," said Weir. Leila nodded.

"My idea, too," said Canby.

He began his cross-examination. "Saul, how long ago is it that Lee Cowdin brought his daughter to Ancaster?"

"Three years come September," rumbled the negro.

"How did they arrive?"

"In Ford car."

"The same car that is still on the place?"

"Yes, boss."

“Did Miss Leila have any baggage when she came?”

Saul scowled. “I not know baggage.”

“Well, did she bring a trunk?”

“Yes. She got trunk.”

“Full of pretty dresses and so on?”

“I not know what inside that trunk.”

“But you saw her wearing the dresses; one dress one day; another dress another day.”

“Yes, I see her.”

“What became of that trunk, Saul?”

“I not know.”

“Did your master tell you to burn it?”

Saul answered very reluctantly. “Yes, I burn.”

Canby’s finger shot out at him. “Be careful, man! You are under oath here! First you say you don’t know what became of the trunk; then you say you burned it!”

Saul scowled at the lawyer murderously. “You talk city talk,” he muttered. “I not understand.”

Birkett led the laughter in court.

“I talk the same talk as Mr. Birkett,” said Canby dryly. “You understand him better, don’t you?”

“Yes,” said the negro.

Canby laughed, but he was alone. “Were the dresses in the trunk when you burned it?” he asked.

“Trunk locked,” said Saul.

“You watched it burn?”

“Yes, boss.”

“And when it had burned a little while it fell open?”

“Yes, boss?”

“What was inside?”

“Dresses.”

“All the dresses?”

“I not know all dresses.”

“After the trunk was burned did you ever see Miss Leila wearing a dress?”

“No, boss.”

“Did she ever wear anything except her riding breeches and a boy’s sweater?”

“No, boss.”

“It is a pretty safe assumption then that all the dresses were burned, isn’t it?”

The negro merely scowled.

Birkett jumped up. “Your Honours,” he said with pumped-up indignation, “Counsel has no right to put his assumptions before the jury!”

“The point is well taken,” said Judge Comerford with a sniff. “Please confine yourself to your examination, Mr. Canby.”

“Did Lee Cowdin give any reason for burning up his daughter’s dresses?” asked Canby.

“No, boss.”

“Didn’t you think that was a funny thing to do?”

“No, boss. Master say: ‘Burn trunk!’ I burn.”

“If he had said: ‘Burn house!’ would you have burned that?”

“Yes, boss.”

“Wasn’t it the act of a crazy man to burn his daughter’s clothes?”

“Master not crazy,” said Saul, scowling.

“Then why should he destroy his daughter’s clothes.”

“To keep girl home,” growled Saul.

Birkett smiled as if he considered this answer a boomerang to Canby’s case.

“During the three years that Lee Cowdin and his daughter lived at Ancaster did they have any visitors?” asked Canby.

“No, boss.”

“Not one visitor in all that time?”

“No, boss.”

“Did they go out visiting?”

“No, boss.”

“Did they never leave the place.”

“Master go to town sometimes; get money.”

“Did he take Miss Leila with him?”

“No, boss.”

“Then she never left the place.”

“No, boss.”

“She could drive the car?”

“Yes. She driving car when they come.”

“In two years and a half she had never talked to a white person of her own age, male or female?”

“No, boss.”

Canby’s finger shot out again. “Answer me! Wasn’t it the act of a crazy man to keep his daughter a prisoner like that?”

“Master not crazy,” insisted the scowling negro.

“How did your master occupy himself at Ancaster?” asked Canby.

Saul merely looked blank.

“I mean, did he work around the place?”

“No, boss.”

“What did he do then?”

“Do nothing.”

“He must have done something.”

“Master walk around, sit down, think.”

“Did he talk to you?”

“Sure!”

“What was the last talk you had with him?”

“Master come my place after dinner——” rumbled Saul.

“One moment. What day was this?”

“The last day he there. Master say: ‘Load your gun, Saul! Load you gun! I got enemies around here! If anybody come, shoot on sight, Saul!’ ”

The jury stirred in their seats and glanced at each other. A murmur travelled around the court.

“And didn’t that strike you as the talk of a crazy man?” demanded Canby.

“No,” said Saul stubbornly. “Master not crazy!”

“That’s all,” said Canby.

Birkett then glanced at the jury with a grin of triumph as much as to say: Now for my really important evidence: and put his clerk Henry Peet on the stand. Canby bit his lip. He had not been informed that Peet was to be a witness and he had no idea of what was coming.

Peet was a sharp-faced pimply youth who was supposed to be studying law in Birkett’s office. “Like master like man,” whispered Canby to Weir.

Birkett began briskly: “Mr. Peet, did you accompany me up to Ancaster on Thursday, April 22nd?”

“Yes sir. We made two trips to Ancaster that day.”

“For what purpose?”

“To search for evidence that might apply to this case.”

“In the morning the Sheriff accompanied us?”

“Yes, sir.”

“In the afternoon you and I drove up there alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

“On the afternoon trip did you overhear a conversation that I had with the last witness, Saul Cowdin?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I don’t want you to tell the jury what he said, but merely to describe what we did as a result of what Saul Cowdin told us.”

“We went into the big room on the left side of the hall—it has been referred to as the drawing-room during this trial—and by your instructions I felt with my hand under the mantelshelf. I felt a small, loose piece of wood there, and when I pressed it, a section of the panelling over the shelf slid back, revealing an opening, a kind of wall safe behind.”

“And what did you find in that secret opening?”

“It was empty, sir, except for a single piece of paper with writing on it.”

Birkett passed a paper up to the witness. “Is this the paper?”

“It is.”

Canby arose. “Your Honours, I must object to the introduction of this piece of paper as evidence.”

“On what grounds, Mr. Canby?” asked Judge Comerford in a bored voice.

“On the grounds that it would be grossly prejudicial to the interest of my client or clients. I have never seen that piece of paper, sirs; never heard of it before. By all the rules of fair play I ought to have had the opportunity to read it, sir.”

“Let him read it before it is put into evidence,” said Judge Comerford to Birkett.

Canby read the paper and changed colour.

“Well, have you any objection to introducing it now?” demanded Judge Comerford.

“I certainly have, your Honours!” said Canby indignantly. “Judge for yourselves!” He handed the paper up to the bench.

The three judges put their heads together over it, and rubbed their chins. The secret had been well kept and nobody in the courtroom knew what the paper contained. Curiosity rose to the boiling point. Judge Comerford spoke:

“Mr. Birkett, has Counsel for the defence had no opportunity to see this paper.”

“He certainly has, your Honours. If he did not take advantage of it it is scarcely my fault.”

“When did I have an opportunity to see it? demanded Canby.

“As soon as I was informed that you had been retained in this case I wrote to you.”

“Strange that I should never have received such a letter!”

“I can show you a copy of it in my office.”

“Didn’t it strike you as odd that I should never have acknowledged your letter or should never have referred to it when we met?”

“I didn’t think anything about it,” said Birkett with a disagreeable smile. “I don’t know how you conduct your cases.”

“Your Honours,” said Canby, “you will know how much credence to give this claim that a letter was mailed to me and never delivered!”

“Well, what do you want me to do?” demanded Judge Comerford testily.

“To refuse to receive this paper as evidence until I have had an opportunity to study it and to meet it.”

“That would mean an adjournment,” said Judge Comerford, “because the people have finished their case. We are not prepared to grant an adjournment. We have to sit in Belvoir County next week. What difference does it make when this paper is introduced? Evidence is evidence. You haven’t started to present your case yet. You can call all the witnesses you want to refute his evidence. Proceed, Mr. Birkett.

“I take exception,” said Canby politely.

Judge Comerford shrugged testily.

“And before the paper is read in court I must make another objection,” Canby went on. “There is no proof that this paper was actually written by the man whose name is appended to it.”

“If your Honours please,” said Birkett, “I shall prove authorship of the paper by Saul Cowdin.”

“He says he can prove it,” said Canby, “but how do we know it?”

“Well, put Cowdin back on the stand,” said Judge Comerford, “and prove authorship of the paper before you put it in evidence.”

Henry Peet was temporarily excused from the stand and Saul Cowdin recalled.

“Saul,” said Birkett, handing him the paper, “did you ever see that piece of paper before?”

"Yes, boss."

"Can you read?"

"No, boss."

"Then how do you know that it is the same paper you saw before?"

"I watch Master write this paper," rumbled Saul. "When he done he make mark in corner so I always know it."

"When was it written?"

"One day . . . two, three weeks . . ."

"Never mind the exact date; it's on the paper. Tell how it came to be written."

"At evening I bring Master supper," Saul began. "He say, come Saul, I want you be my witness. We go in big room. He say, 'Watch me write!' I watch. He say, 'Watch where I put it.' He open little door over fireplace and shut up what he write. He say, 'Saul, if something bad come to me; Saul, if I die, show the State's Attorney where I put that."

"Did he tell you what he had written on that paper?"

"No, boss."

"Do you know what that paper says?"

"No, boss."

"All right. Your witness, Mr. Canby."

Canby arose. "Saul, at the time your master wrote this paper, he said many things that you couldn't understand, didn't he?"

Saul merely stared at him suspiciously and uncomprehendingly.

"Well, he was talking wildly, wasn't he?"

"He feel bad. He not wild."

"He thought everybody was against him, didn't he?"

Saul considered long. "Not everybody. Some people."

"You testified that he told you he had enemies, and ordered you to shoot on sight."

"Yes, boss."

"Who were those enemies?"

"I not know."

"Were you going to shoot anybody who came along?"

"I shoot anybody do Master bad," growled Saul.

"Saul, I put it to you that he was mad, crazy, when he wrote that paper."

The negro scowled savagely. "Master not crazy!"

Canby shrugged. "That's all," he said.

Henry Peet was put back on the stand. "Read that paper," said Birkett.

The unwholesome-looking youth grinned slightly, and looked around the courtroom to prolong his moment of importance. All the spectators seemed to sit forward and hold their breath. Peet read slowly:

"To Whom It May Concern:

"If I am found dead it will be my daughter Leila's doing. She has it in for me.

"Lee Cowdin."

To Weir it was like something in a dream; a thing too terrible to be quite grasped. Suddenly he heard a tense voice shouting, and realised with faint surprise that it was his own.

"The man was mad! He was mad! No sane person would leave a charge like that against his child!"

Then complete confusion. Canby was pressing him back into his seat, the gavel pounded. When his head cleared Ellick Patton had a hand on his shoulder. Court had adjourned.

XXI

AFTER the adjournment the defence side gathered in Weir's cell for a conference. They were glum. Weir, sitting on his bed, holding his head between his hands, muttered:

"Sorry I flew off the handle. The thing took me by surprise."

Canby paced up and down three steps back and forth. "Didn't do any harm," he said. "If we had had a normal jury it might have done good. But these lunkheads weren't impressed one way or the other. . . . Could that paper have been a forgery?" he asked Leila.

She sat beside Weir with her hand in Mrs. Canby's. "No," she murmured. "The handwriting was his. And it was just the sort of thing he would do. Towards the end he looked on me as his enemy. For weeks he refused to speak to me. And of course Saul was just his shadow."

Weir looked up sharply. The quiet way in which she spoke of these things made them seem infinitely more terrible. "Good God, Leila, what have you been through?" he muttered.

"Well, never mind it now," she said quickly.

"Just the same the people's case smells of conspiracy," growled Canby. "Birkett's dirty grin suggests that he knows he's got it sewed up. Whichever way I turn I'm blocked. What you folks want is not a lawyer, but a detective to ferret out what is back of it all."

"Speaking of a conspiracy, here's something," put in Mrs. Canby. "Before the case was called I spent an hour trying to get a phone call through to town. The operator was quite friendly. She didn't know who I was. She volunteered the information that she only had three direct wires to town because the fourth one had been engaged by Mr. Birkett and disconnected from her switchboard."

Canby pulled up in his pacing. He glanced towards the cell door. Ellick had gone. "By God! if we could tap that wire!" whispered Canby.

"*Would* you do it?" asked Weir with a queer smile.

"Sure!"

"You'd be taking an awful risk. Unprofessional conduct and all that."

“Yes, if we were mistaken. But I’m certain Birkett is a crook.”

“It could easily be tapped,” said Weir quietly.

“We have no apparatus.”

“Don’t need anything but a pair of pliers.”

“Explain yourself.”

Canby squatted on the floor at the feet of the other three, and they put their heads together. “Listen,” said Weir; “all the wires run by my printing shop under the big sycamore. The tree makes a complete shade at night. There are no street lights.”

“How would I know which wires?” asked Canby.

“Listen. Birkett must have two phones now. Could you fake up some excuse to call on him at his office when you leave here?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, while you are in his office let Mrs. Canby call up from the hotel. She doesn’t have to talk to him. Just let the phone ring and you’ll know that the other phone is the one you want.”

“I get you.”

“You must follow the right wires out of his office with your eye, and from the outside of the building to the pole and along from pole to pole past my shop. You’ll see the wires of my phone coming out of the shop to the pole in front where they join a party wire. All you’ve got to do is to climb the pole, untwist my wires from the party line, and twist them around Birkett’s line to town. After you have done that whenever Birkett calls up the city, or vice-versa, my phone will ring.”

A slow grin spread across Canby’s face. “Sounds simple,” he said. “I’ll have a try at it.”

“What’s the plan for to-morrow?” asked Weir.

“You first on the stand,” said Canby, “then Leila, then Professor Bracker, our ballistics expert.”

“The jury knows nothing about ballistics,” said Weir. “I doubt if they ever heard the word.”

“Maybe not,” said Canby. “But Bracker has standing. If they go against his evidence it will provide the basis of an appeal.”

Weir looked at Leila. “Can you face going on the stand, Jack?”

“Certainly,” she said quietly. “A week ago I suppose I would almost have died at the idea. But now that I have friends I can face it. . . . I shall simply answer every question that is asked me as well as I can without thinking about it.”

“As good a rule as any,” said Canby. “But when Birkett gets after you . . .”

“I shall have to do the same,” she said quickly. “Give him plain answers. If I stopped to consider the effect of what I was saying I’d go all to pieces.”

“She’s right,” said Weir. “Let her alone. . . . But, oh God!” he groaned, “when Birkett starts in with his dirty insinuations how will I be able to sit through it?”

“Why bother about Birkett?” said Leila quietly. “Think of what he is.”

“I shall have to question you about the young man who came to see you at Ancaster,” said Canby. “You’d rather have me bring it out than let Birkett do it, wouldn’t you?”

“Certainly. I shall answer any question you ask me.”

“Leila would make a grand witness if we had an open-minded jury,” said Canby. “But as it is . . .!” He shrugged. “If you could holler and cry and carry on like a crazy woman they might understand that.”

“Oh, but I couldn’t!” she murmured. “When I feel anything very much I always get quiet.”

Canby put a hand over hers. “Sure! like any other right-minded person!”

In the morning, Weir had to ask to have the blind outside his cell door pulled up so he could see to shave. A crowd began to gather outside the window, watching every move he made, while they idly discussed the case, indifferent as to whether Weir heard them.

“They’re going to put the girl on the stand to-day. That’ll be the best part. . . . Yeah, now we’ll hear the truth about them ads she put in the paper. . . . The truth, did you say? I bet that girl can lie faster than a horse can trot. You can see she’s a deep one. Much too quiet for an honest woman. . . .”

“She may try to lie, but Peter Birkett will be laying for her. Peter will give her rats. Peter will drag the truth out of her however she may wriggle and squirm. Gentlemen, I wouldn’t miss any of that part if they was to run in and tell me my house was burning down.”

“Do you reckon they’ll hang the girl? . . . I doubt it. Nobody likes to see a woman strung up. . . . They have hung women in this state in the past. . . . I know, but there’s a feeling against it. . . . Well, nowadays women aim to be our equals, don’t they? If a woman kills why oughtn’t she to hang the same as a man? A bad woman is worse than a bad man because she ought to be better than a man.”

“Well, you can count on Judge Comerford to give her the most he can. Comerford is a sentencing judge, he is. She’ll be an old woman before she gets out in the free air of heaven again—if she ever gets out. She’ll be too old then to try any of her tricks and wiles on men.”

Weir gritted his teeth together while he plied the razor. This is nothing, he told himself. You must be prepared to stand worse than this in court to-day.

Weir saw Canby for the first time in court. “I have done it,” Canby whispered to him behind his hand. “Afterwards I stayed in your shop until it was time to come to court. But the phone didn’t ring.”

Weir told his story on the stand with an entire absence of emotion. He had an odd feeling that his real self was perched up under the ceiling somewhere, watching his body go through the motions of testifying. He felt numb inside; the whole business seemed supremely unimportant.

Peter Birkett sat back in his chair grinning. He allowed Canby to lead Weir on as he would without bothering to raise objections. It was as if he were saying: I don’t have to work in this case. The other side is handing it to me on a platter.

But when Weir began to tell of the tracks he had found in the clay along the beach, Birkett’s chair thumped to the floor and he became sharply interested.

“The tracks of a white man who had gone the same way I had,” said Weir, “and had come back again. He was in his bare feet. When he came back he was running.”

Birkett jumped up with an objection. “Your Honours, I visited this beach on the following day and there were no tracks of any sort visible in the clay.”

Canby remarked mildly: “That was owing to the storm on Thursday night which washed them all out.”

“Precisely!” snapped Birkett. “Consequently there can be no corroboration of the defendant’s story. If this evidence is admissable he can say whatever he pleases on the stand without check.”

“That’s what he’s going to do anyhow,” said Judge Comerford with a sniff. “Leave it to the jury to decide whether he’s telling the truth or not.”

“Weir,” asked Canby softly, “did you observe any peculiarity in these barefooted tracks in the clay?”

“There was no print of the little toe on the right foot.”

Canby went on to ask Weir about his investigations on the spot where the body had been found.

“How could you tell that that was the place?” asked Canby.

“The thorns were thick all about. I could see where the body had been dragged out of the path. And another place where Leila had dragged it back again. I found threads of Lee Cowdin’s clothes on the thorns. I found the depression amongst the leaves where the body had lain for a week. There were spots of dried blood on the leaves.”

“Did you find anything else?”

“Yes.”

“What was it?”

“A small green button.”

Canby produced it. “Is this the button?”

“It is.”

“Grass green,” remarked Canby. “Very unusual colour for an undershirt.”

Birkett was on his feet again. “I object, your Honours! There is no proof. What’s to prevent the defendant from claiming that he found a whole notion counter of assorted buttons?”

“The button can be marked for identification,” said Judge Comerford, “but it is up to defendant’s counsel to prove that it is evidence.”

“After that what did you do?” asked Canby.

“I searched the whole vicinity very carefully for tracks,” said Weir. “There were two sets. One left by the man who had come along the beach; the other Lee Cowdin’s. I could identify his because the shoes he was wearing were run over at the heel in a peculiar manner, and had holes in the soles. I had seen such shoes on Cowdin’s feet. From a study of the tracks and other indications I doped out what had happened.”

“Go on.”

“Lee Cowdin had evidently been watching for an enemy. He had lain down under cover of a log to watch a bend in the path. I figured that when his enemy appeared he had shot at him and missed. The other man had then fired and killed Cowdin.”

“Fairy tale!” murmured Birkett loud enough for the jury to hear.

“What proof can you offer that the affair happened in this manner?”

“Well, I lay down in the spot where I supposed Cowdin had lain, and took a sight at the bend in the path. I figured that if Cowdin had missed, his bullet would have lodged in a certain tree, and I looked in that tree and I found the bullet lodged there. It was subsequently recovered from the tree by a Sheriff’s deputy and is in evidence.”

“The witness is yours, Mr. Birkett,” said Canby.

Birkett advanced to the cross-examination with an evil glitter in his eye. He shot a forefinger at Weir in the manner of the prosecutor in a melodrama. “You had to produce somebody else who could have shot Lee Cowdin, didn’t you?” he barked.

“Well,” said Weir, “it seemed to me that is the best defence a man could offer.”

“Not at all!” said Birkett. “It is the favourite ruse of an accused person who has no defence.”

Canby arose. “Your Honours,” he protested good-humouredly, “I suggest that that is not a question, but a statement of my esteemed friend’s made to impress the jury.”

“Stick to questions, Mr. Birkett,” growled Judge Comerford.

Soon came the line of questioning that Canby had dreaded from the first. “When you saw the dead body were there any powder marks showing?”

It had to be faced out. Weir drew a long breath and answered: “Not that I could see.”

“Then you knew the man had not committed suicide.”

“I suspected it.”

“You *knew* it!”

“Just as you like.”

Birkett brandished the forefinger again. “If you knew that the man had not committed suicide,” he shouted, “what induced you to help the other defendant to bury the body in secrecy.”

“She was so young,” said Weir simply, “and she looked at me with such a clear glance I knew she couldn’t have done it. Furthermore, from her story it was clear that her father was insane. Considering all she had been through it seemed to me that an investigation would punish her more than the real criminals, if any, and so I agreed to help her.”

“In other words: The woman tempted me and I did eat!” quoted Birkett with a sneer.

He was rebuked by the court, but he cared nothing for that so long as the jury heard him.

During the rest of his cross-examination Birkett, by the form in which he cast his questions, endeavoured to instil in the jury’s mind a belief that Weir and Leila had been acquainted before the murder and that Weir had had a hand in the actual killing. Nothing in Weir’s answers could have been construed by fair-minded men as admitting such a thing, but it was impossible to tell how the wooden-faced jury was taking it.

The clerk of the court droned: “Leila Cowdin to the stand.”

An excited murmuring filled the courtroom. Since Leila habitually sat with her back to the spectators this was the first good look they had had at her. When she had seated herself Weir stole a glance at her. Her face was so pale it made her blue eyes look enormous. She lowered her long lashes and made her face as expressionless as paper.

Weir did not look at her again. He suffered with her too keenly. Instead he watched the faces of the people across the rail, trying to judge how they were reacting. He saw with a sinking heart that they were hostile. Leila's young face was hiding too much. Being simple souls they had decided that if she had something to hide it must be evil.

In a low, clear voice she began to tell the story that Weir knew so well. Though they had heard it before from different angles the spectators listened in breathless attention. It was only occasionally necessary for Canby to prompt her with a question. He left the most difficult part until the last.

"Leila, the negro Saul has testified that during the whole time you lived at Ancaster with your father you never saw anybody but Saul himself, Saul's family and your father. Is that true?"

"No," she whispered.

"Speak louder, please," cautioned Judge Comerford.

"Who else did you see?"

She hesitated before replying and Weir was aware without looking at her that she was squaring her shoulders for the ordeal. "One day in March," she began, "I was visiting some snares I had set for rabbits alongside the path to the beach when I heard a little sound. I stepped out into the open and I saw a rowboat passing. A man was rowing it and a young white man was sitting in the stern. I quickly stepped back out of sight, but the young man saw me.

"A few days later in the same place I met the young man. He had come along the beach, he said, hoping to find me. He was very friendly and . . . and things were so bad at the time . . . I mean my father was acting so strangely . . . I had nobody to go to . . . and I was very glad to find a friend. I told him how things were, and he said he would help me."

"What was this young man's name?"

"I don't know. He never told me."

"Didn't you ask him?"

"Yes. He said it would be more . . . more romantic if we didn't know each other's names."

A titter travelled over the courtroom. Weir grew hot. Such people couldn't understand innocence.

"Go on," prompted Canby

“I didn’t stay very long because I was afraid my father might come to look for me. The young man said he would come again. He asked me what would be the best time to come, and I said we had our supper early and if he would come about six, just before it got dark, I would be able to get out for a little while without being missed.

“He said he wouldn’t make a date when he would come again because he’d have to seize his chance when he saw it. He said he would come to the edge of the woods below the house and whistle like the whip-poor-will. He showed me how he would whistle. He asked me if I could recognise his call amongst the real whip-poor-wills and I said I could if I was listening for it. So I left him.”

Weir glanced at the judges. All three were leaning forward to listen like the ordinary spectators in court.

“And did the young man come again?” asked Canby.

“Yes. A few days later at evening I distinguished his call amongst all the real whip-poor-wills, and I slipped out of the house and met him. I used to meet him below the terraces where the path to the beach started. I was hoping he would tell me he had arranged for a doctor to come and see my father, but he never spoke of it. He was very kind and friendly to me. He gave me a little pearl pin for a keepsake.”

Another half-embarrassed laugh from the spectators.

“Did he come again?”

“Yes, I saw him three times.”

“And did your father find out about him?”

There was a pause. “Yes,” she whispered.

“Louder, please,” said Judge Comerford.

Weir stole a look at her. Her head was pluckily erect; the long lashes veiled her eyes.

“Yes, he found out,” she went on in a low distinct voice. “I don’t know how. Perhaps it was because I was so happy in finding a friend that I couldn’t conceal it. My father never said anything, but I guessed from his terrible look that something new was wrong. I couldn’t bring myself to say anything to him about it.”

“Why not?” asked Canby.

The steady voice shook a little. “He wasn’t himself. The slightest word was likely to throw him into an uncontrollable rage. I never knew. He believed that the whole world was leagued against him. It was pitiful to see him brooding . . . brooding. But anything I tried to do for him only made him worse.”

Birkett arose with an objection and was overruled.

Leila continued: “One day when I went to my little box to look at the pearl pin I found it on the floor smashed to pieces. He had ground it under his heel. It was his way of letting me know that he had found out about the young man. I didn’t know what to do. I was afraid.”

“And then what happened?”

“One evening I heard the whip-poor-will call again, the special one, I mean. I slipped out of the house, but before I got to the place where we used to meet I heard a shot . . .” Leila’s voice failed her. A moment or two passed before she was able to go on.

“Then I saw my father returning. He had his revolver in his hand. I hid from him. After he had passed me I ran to the place where I was accustomed to find the young man. He wasn’t there. I looked everywhere. I couldn’t find him.

“Next morning as soon as it became light I looked again. He wasn’t anywhere. There wasn’t any blood. So I began to be sure that he was all right. But I knew I should never see him again. My father was as angry and wild as ever. From that moment he never spoke to me again. He used to leave written messages where I would find them. When I visited his room to clean it I found that he still had the pistol on him. He always carried it after that.”

“And you never have seen the young man again?”

“I never have. Every day for awhile I looked for some doctor to come and see my father, but none came.”

“How long after this was it that your father disappeared?”

“Three weeks.”

“What did you do when he failed to return?”

“Half the time I didn’t know what I was doing,” Leila answered very low. “I was so afraid to stay there, but there was no place where I could go. The negro was acting in an ugly way. He believed that I had killed my

father. I put an advertisement in the paper, hoping that the young man would see it and come. He had told me that he belonged to this county."

"But he didn't come?"

"He didn't come."

"Is he in this courtroom now?"

The spectators drew their breath sharply and looked around them furtively. But Leila answered steadily: "He is not here. I have looked."

"What happened after that?" asked Canby.

"After I had found my father's body I put another advertisement in the paper. I needed help so badly."

"But nothing came of it."

"Nothing came of it."

"Is it your idea that this young man was responsible for your father's death?"

"No," said Leila quickly. "Why should he be?"

"Well, your father had tried to kill him?"

"But he knew my father was insane. If he had wanted to come again he would have sent a doctor to see my father so that he could be restrained."

"I see," said Canby gently. "That is all, thank you."

Birkett arose with an evil grin.

Weir sat through the long cross-examination in a fog of pain and helpless anger. He could not look at Leila. For the most part her voice remained steady. Birkett could get his foul insinuations before the jury, but he never succeeded in shaking her original story. Weir was astonished by her courage and endurance.

Birkett, Weir could understand. Birkett was getting paid for this. But the spectators filled him with a kind of horror. How could people be like that? The newspaper reporters were merely businesslike, but the others were enjoying the show. Their eyes glistened; they giggled shamefacedly. To them Leila's courage was nothing more than brazenness. There was neither pity nor sense in them.

The jury was enjoying it too. While Birkett was dominating the scene they relaxed somewhat from their woodenness. They showed that they were

with him to a man.

Local boy makes good! Weir thought with searing bitterness. I reckon they'll make him State's Attorney-General for this!

Birkett's parting shot at Leila, delivered with one eye on the jury, was: "I put it to you that when you advertised in the newspaper you discovered that it was the editor himself who had been visiting you!"

"That is not so," said Leila. "I had never seen Weir until the night I took the second advertisement to the printing office."

"Will you swear to that?"

"I have already sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

"Oh, you have sworn it," said Birkett with an inimitable sneer. "That's all."

XXII

WHEN court reconvened after the noon recess, Canby leaned over to Weir, and with a perfectly straight face—because Birkett was sitting at the other end of the table—whispered: "I ate my lunch in your shop. The phone works all right. It appears to be connected with one of the exchanges in Newcastle so that people in town can call up Birkett. Some man called him up—he gave no clue to his identity, and asked what had happened at the trial this morning. Birkett started to tell him but was interrupted by the entrance of somebody into his private office. He rang off. I'll get him later."

The three justices stalked into court in a row from their chambers with their silk gowns floating behind them, and the proceedings were resumed.

"August Bracker to the stand."

This was Weir's first glimpse of Canby's imported witness. He saw a keen, bespectacled young professor of the modern type who was perfectly at home in the witness chair.

"Professor, what is your specialty?" asked Canby.

"Ballistics, sir."

"Will you please recite to the court and jury your qualifications as an expert in ballistics."

The witness did so at some length. Weir made no attempt to follow it, but looked at Leila across the table.

When he had finished Canby said: "Now please tell the jury what ballistics have to do with this case."

Said Bracker: "As a result of modern research, sir, it has been discovered that every gun leaves certain marks on the bullet that it discharges, and that no two guns ever mark their bullets in precisely the same manner. These marks can only be perceived through the microscope, and the closest study is necessary to differentiate them."

"Professor, I hand you a gun which is in evidence as having belonged to the late Lee Cowdin. It is the contention of the people that Miss Leila Cowdin secured this gun and shot her father with it. Do you recognise this gun as the one you experimented with?"

"Yes, sir, I marked it." The witness pointed out his mark.

"I now hand you the bullet which is in evidence as having been recovered from the dead man's skull. You have examined this bullet under your microscope?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you please illustrate to the court and the jury the distinguishing marks that you found upon it."

The Professor unrolled a sheet of paper to which were affixed greatly magnified photographs of the bullet in question taken from various angles. Accompanying this was a large diagram drawn by the professor for the purpose of illustrating the marks on the bullet. A court attendant held up the two sheets so that the judges and the jury could see them, and the witness explained them, using a pencil for a pointer.

The explanation was highly technical and Weir's attention wandered. If Canby said the witness could be depended on that was enough for him. He studied the jury. They listened with slightly hostile stares; it was doubtful if they understood a single word.

When the witness came to an end Canby said: "Now Professor, as a result of your experiments, can you state whether or not the bullet that killed Lee Cowdin was fired from Lee Cowdin's gun?"

"Yes, sir. I can state positively that it was not."

Canby looked around him with a satisfied smile. The room was perfectly silent. Weir and Leila exchanged a shaky smile across the table. This was the first real ray of hope striking through that dark case.

Canby resumed: "Now here is another bullet properly marked and attested as having been recovered by George Case acting as a deputy Sheriff from a tree near the beach on the Ancaster property. You have also examined this bullet?"

"Yes, sir." The professor unrolled another sheet of photographs and a diagram and proceeded to give the jury a similar demonstration.

When it was over, Canby said: "Are you prepared to say whether *this* bullet was shot out of Lee Cowdin's gun?"

"One moment, please," interrupted Judge Comerford. "What are you seeking to show by this question, Mr. Canby?"

"Your Honour, it is in evidence that Lee Cowdin possessed a box of twenty-four shells for his pistol. There were only two missing at the time of his death. If he fired one at the young man who came to see his daughter and the other into the tree, he could not have been killed by a bullet from his own gun."

"Unless the defendant procured a shell elsewhere," remarked Judge Comerford with a sniff.

"There is no evidence that she could have done so, your Honour."

"Humph! Proceed."

The professor answered Canby's question. "Yes, sir, I can state that the bullet found embedded in the tree *was* discharged from Lee Cowdin's pistol."

Weir's breast felt a hundred per cent. lighter. This was positive evidence. Unless the jury chose to throw it out altogether, it destroyed the people's case.

"That is all, thank you," said Canby. "The witness is yours, Mr. Birkett."

Birkett did not get up. "No questions," he said, adding with heavy sarcasm, "I fear that my knowledge of the so-called science of ballistics is not sufficient to enable me to question the 'Professor' intelligently. However, I shall have evidence to offer in rebuttal concerning the bullet found in the tree."

The spectators laughed, and Weir's new-risen hopes dropped to earth again. What dirty trick was Birkett preparing to play now?

"The defence rests, your Honours," said Canby.

"Proceed in rebuttal, Mr. Birkett," said Judge Comerford.

Birkett handed a slip to the clerk of the court and the latter read out: "Earl Souter to the stand!"

Weir glanced at Leila and was met by a look as blank as his own. What could Earl Souter know about the death of Lee Cowdin? What would he claim that he knew? How natural it would be for Birkett to call on Earl if he required a little perjury to bolster up his case.

Earl came through the gate in the rail smiling and confident, dressed in a dandified style according to Kent County notions. Young and good-looking, his healthy red face and light-hearted manner recommended him to most people at sight. They overlooked the loose mouth and shifty blue eye. He

carefully avoided meeting Weir's eye now and the latter thought with gloomy certainty: All set to lie!

Earl took the oath carelessly, and grinned around at his many friends in court. Birkett said:

"Earl, what were you doing on the morning of April eleventh?"

"Pardon me," interrupted Judge Comerford. He was searching through his notes. "I want to know what relation this date bears to the death of Lee Cowdin. I have it here somewhere."

"Lee Cowdin was last seen by Saul on the afternoon of April twelfth," answered Birkett readily. "It is conceded by both sides that he came to his death some time during the evening of the same day."

"Thank you. Proceed."

Earl appeared to be casting back in his mind. "April eleventh? I got up early that morning and drove over to the Sound, looking for a strayed cow."

"How can you fix the date in your mind?"

"Because that was my eldest kid's birthday. April eleventh. A man wouldn't forget that." Earl grinned with assurance.

"What road did you take to reach the Sound?"

"What they call the Old Ferry road. Runs down to Dick Bowers' place and ends on the beach about half a mile beyond."

"How far did you go down that road?"

"Right to the end of it."

"Then what did you do?"

"Well, I seen some cattle tracks along the edge of the stream there, so I took off my shoes and socks and waded across and walked up the beach a piece, looking for the cow. There was a flood tide and a southerly wind, and the water was clean over the beach. I had to walk over the clay where it had fallen from the cliffs behind."

"I see," said Birkett with a triumphant glance at the defence end of the table. "So that's how the barefooted tracks got there."

"I certainly must have left tracks," said Earl, "because the clay was wet and slippery."

Weir whispered anxiously to Canby: "What's he aiming to show?"

Canby could only shake his head.

Birkett continued: “It has been testified that these tracks showed a certain peculiarity in the right foot. The little toe was missing.”

“That’s me,” said Earl grinning. “The toe ain’t missing, but it’s bent up, like, so it don’t leave no track.”

“Will you show the jury, please?”

“Sure!” Earl removed his shoe and peeled off his sock. The whole courtroom was able to see the malformed toe.

Canby looked at Weir, baffled. “If it was he who shot Cowdin how has he the nerve to come here and testify with a grin? He’s no superman.”

Weir shrugged helplessly.

“At any rate I’ll have him to cross-examine,” said Canby grimly.

“How far up the beach did you go?” asked Birkett.

“Clear up to the point where the inlet makes in. I could see for a long ways beyond that, and as there was no sign of any cattle I come back again. When I come back I see a path coming out of the woods on to the beach and I goes up that aways. I come out of the woods and see a heck of a big house above me, which surprised me because I had forgot there was a house in that quarter. But I knew it must be Ancaster big house that I had heard the old folks talking about.”

“Did you go up to the house?”

“No sir, I didn’t like the look of it. It was supposed to be deserted for years back, but the front door was standing open. I went right back the way I come.”

“What did you do on the way back?”

“Well, sir, I see a cotton-mouth crossing the path down near the beach. Some calls them moccasin snakes. First of the season. It had been warm, you recollect. And I outs with my gun and lets fly at him. And missed. That made me sore because I pride myself on being a good shot. I thought the gun was at fault—it was the first time I had occasion to shoot it, so I takes careful aim at a big tree that blocked the path and let fly at that. Then I go down to measure the error. Six inches too high at twenty paces!”

“Oh God! can’t they all see that he’s lying!” murmured Weir.

“They don’t want to see it,” said Canby.

“So that’s how the bullet came to be embedded in the big tree!” cried Birkett.

Professor Bracker who had been listening to this testimony, turned red with anger. The spectators and the jury laughed openly. Weir gritted his teeth. “The ignorant fools love to get a chance to score off a man who knows his job,” he muttered.

“The witness is yours, Mr. Canby,” said Birkett with an ironical bow.

Canby began with deceitful mildness. “What started you off down the Old Ferry road looking for your cow?”

“Fellow told me he seen a stray cow down there.”

“What fellow?”

“Well now, I couldn’t rightly tell you, Mister,” answered Earl plausibly. “When you lose a beast you tell everybody about it; some says one thing; some another.”

“Is Dick Bowers a friend of yours?”

“Sure!”

“Did you stop and ask him about the cow?”

“No. Too early.”

“Did you meet anybody on the way there or back?”

“Not as I recollect.”

“I suppose you told your family where you’d been.”

“I don’t think so.”

“What! You drove away for a couple of hours before breakfast and never told anybody where you’d been?”

“Wasn’t no call to tell anybody.”

Canby took a new line. “Is it your custom to go armed?”

“Sure. I got in the habit, driving late and so on.”

“This was a new gun that you carried that morning?”

“It was.”

“Where did you get it?”

“I bought it off a salesman for nursery stock that come by.”

“What nursery did he represent?”

“I never asked him. I didn’t buy any stock.”

“What was his name?”

“Let me see now . . . Patterson, I think.”

“Oh, Patterson, you think! Perhaps he sold stock to your neighbours?”

“I don’t know. He isn’t a regular traveller in this territory.”

“Can you produce the gun?”

“No. I made him take it back on his second visit. It wouldn’t shoot straight.”

“Does your wife know about this transaction of the gun?”

“No.”

“I suppose you talked about it amongst your friends?”

“Not as I recollect. I don’t tell my business to everybody.”

“This is truly remarkable!” said Canby.

“Are you trying to make me out a liar?” demanded Earl truculently.

“Impossible!” said Canby dryly. “I am inviting you to supply some corroboration of the story you told here.”

Earl was silent.

Canby dropped that line for the moment. “What did you do after you got back from Ancaster that day?” he asked.

“Took the Missus to town in the car to buy an outfit for the kid.”

“And the following day, the twelfth, can you describe your movements on that day?” he asked carelessly.

“Sure!” said Earl with an insolent grin that signified as clearly as if the words had been spoken: “You can’t hang no murder on me. Mister!”

“What were you doing on the evening of the twelfth?”

“I worked with my father up to five o’clock . . .”

“Why five o’clock?”

“Well, my wife asked me to come home early to help her. She was giving a little family party in honour of the kid.”

"Who was at the party?"

"My father, her father and mother and her sister from Cumberland."

"What time did the party break up?"

"Eleven o'clock . . . and I didn't go out afterwards neither. You can ask my wife. Is that corroboration enough for you?"

"Ample, for the twelfth. But we lack corroboration of your trip to Ancaster the day before, and your use of the gun there."

"Well, I've told you all I know."

"Then there is no corroboration?"

Birkett jumped up with an objection. "Counsel has no right to impugn the veracity of my witness in this manner!"

Canby laughed in his face. "When a witness tells a story on the stand that cannot be checked up at any point you know what a lawyer thinks of it!"

"Are you calling him a liar?" shouted Birkett.

"I am," said Canby calmly.

There was a rap from the gavel overhead. "Enough of this, gentlemen. The jury will decide whether the witness is speaking the truth. Proceed, Mr. Canby."

Canby returned to the witness. "Can you furnish the name of any person who knows that you went to Ancaster on April eleventh, who saw you on the way there or on the way back; or the name of any person who knows that you had a gun in your possession such as you have described."

"No," said Earl defiantly.

"That is all," said Canby. "The defence has no further witnesses to call, your Honours."

"The people rest," said Birkett.

Upon reading reports of trials Weir had often wondered what were the sensations of the defendants while listening to the summing-up speeches of opposing counsel. Now he found out. Unbearable suspense. After the speeches the verdict. His mind was fixed on that. He could not believe that the speeches, however good—or bad, could change the result. The jury had

already made up their minds. Meanwhile it was awful to wait, wait, wait, praying that each sentence of the speaker's would be his last.

His limbs jerked uncontrollably. He seemed to be filled inside with a howling vacancy. He felt as if he would fly clean off the bat unless he could find something to distract his mind from the contemplation of waiting. He sat with his head down, studying the oaken grain of the table because he could not bear to meet Leila's strained, patient gaze opposite.

He was unable to interest himself in the speeches because he was too familiar with the content. Birkett's jibes and innuendoes had become an old story, and Weir wondered that the spectators could still grin at them. Canby made a first-rate speech. A game fight in the face of a hostile court and jury. But Weir could not cheat himself into believing that it would do any good.

The speeches were over at last and Judge Comerford began his charge to the jury. His speech was brief. He was not actually unfair, but the very brevity of his remarks suggested that he looked on the matter as a foregone conclusion, scarcely worth taking up his time. His final words conveyed a stunning surprise to Weir.

"My associates and myself in consultation have agreed that it is our duty to instruct you to acquit the defendant, Weir Lambert, of the charge of homicide. Nothing has been adduced during the trial to show that he was anything more than an accessory after the fact. It is up to the State's Attorney to ask for a new indictment if he sees fit to do so. In the meantime I might remind you that this defendant still has a very serious charge to face in connection with the affair."

Weir could not feel any gladness because of his escape under the first charge. The fact that the judge was instructing the jury to acquit one defendant seemed to imply that he expected them to convict the other. Leila convicted! Weir had had the possibility in mind from the beginning, but as the actual thing drew close it filled him with a blind horror. Leila in the grey prison dress, looking out between bars! How could a judge be so tragically wrong?

The jury retired to their deliberations. The judges stalked out in their black gowns like three crows in a line. Nobody else in the court changed position. There was a feeling in the air that the verdict would be a speedy one. Weir and Leila sat waiting with their heads down. Weir thought: It would make it easier if I had the right to nestle her in my arm. A numbness began to steal over him.

Within half an hour the jury sent out word that they had reached a verdict. The three judges marched back to the bench. The jury filed into the box, looking very self-conscious. Weir heard a voice asking as from a considerable distance:

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon a verdict?"

"We have, your honours."

"The defendants will rise and face the jury."

The foreman of the jury was a little farmer named Wat Cuppage, with the face of an old ape and the trim figure of a boy. He spoke in a thin, tenor voice:

"We find the defendant, Leila Cowdin, guilty of manslaughter first degree. We find the defendant, Weir Lambert, not guilty."

An agony of pity filled Weir. He leaned on the table murmuring: "Leila . . . Leila! . . ."

"Not before all these people!" she whispered in terror. "Please, Weir . . . Don't look at me! . . . Don't speak to me!"

He dropped dully in his chair.

The rest of the courtroom scene passed as in a mist. He heard Leila being sentenced. Fifteen years! It was like a stab in his breast. After that hurt he could feel nothing.

She was led away. When he automatically started to follow a hand pressed him back into his chair. Later somebody told him to stand up. He understood that he was being remanded for trial during the following week but one. Afterwards he heard Canby applying for bail. A sum was named; twenty-five hundred dollars. Adam Souter was putting up his farm as security for the amount. Finally, Canby told him he was free, but it meant nothing to him.

XXIII

WEIR sat in the printing shop with his elbows on the desk and his head pressed between his hands. A dumb craving to be alone had led him there after the trial, and Canby, partly understanding how it was with him, had let him go. The door was locked and the blinds pulled down.

He was trying to pick up his life again. The verdict doesn't end anything, he was telling himself. It's up to you to go to work and discover what is behind this persecution. You will have ten days liberty anyhow. There is not an hour to lose.

It was all very well for him to tell himself to get busy, but nothing would start inside. Inertia was crushing him down like an enormous weight. After all he had been through the thought of activity of any sort was like a nightmare. What's the use? What's the use? an inner voice was crying.

Yet he struggled against it. You'll go balmy if you sit here brooding, he told himself. You've got to occupy yourself somehow. Here's the paper waiting to be got out. You've only missed one number. They'll be eager enough to read what you've got to say in the next. You've got plenty to put in the paper! . . . But when he went and picked up a stick to begin setting type his hand relaxed and he dropped it in disgust.

The telephone sounded on his desk. The first time it rang he cursed it; when it rang again he remembered what it signified and, running to his desk, took down the receiver and put it to his ear. He heard two voices over the wire and his face became hard and keen. He was coming to himself again. He drew pencil and paper towards him to take the conversation down.

First, Birkett's voice: "Well, it's all over."

Then the second quiet voice, rendered metallic by the instrument: "What was the verdict?"

"Leila was found guilty of manslaughter, first degree. Weir was acquitted."

"Acquitted!" The man at the town end of the wire broke into a savage cursing. "I told you you couldn't make a charge of homicide stick."

"I didn't expect to make it stick," retorted Birkett. "If he hadn't been on trial he would have been out, and God knows what he would be ferretting."

"Who would go bail for the——!" said the man in town scornfully.

"He's out on bail right now," said Birkett dryly.

"Damnation! Who put up for him?"

"Adam Souter."

"Ah, he *would*!" said the stranger bitterly.

Birkett proceeded to give his friend the details of the day's proceedings. Afterwards he said: "What do you want me to do?"

The other answered: "Well, of course the sale will have to be put off until we get Weir safe behind the bars."

"Sure! Anyhow, to make it legal it's got to be advertised in the county paper first."

Said the man in town: "Let Tasker Teeple buy that paper without any more fooling. He can offer Weir his price."

"Weir despises Tasker so much he would probably boot him out of his shop without waiting to hear his offer."

"Then get somebody else to offer for it. Some solid man."

"I'll take care of that."

"And look! Keep a close watch on Weir. If he shows any disposition to nose into our affairs . . ."

"Well?"

"Just let me know. It would seem natural enough if he jumped his bail, eh? But it must be done quietly. . . . When will they be bringing the girl to town?"

"They're starting right after supper, seven o'clock."

"Well, I want to know if Weir follows the party so I can have him trailed when he gets here."

"Shall I call you up?"

"No, I'll call you. It's safer. I call up from a different phone each time, and always a dial phone. Be in your office at seven-thirty."

"Okay."

"And look, Pete. You'd better give up this wire to-morrow. Now that Weir is free to snoop around he might hear of it. We can communicate by

messenger as we did before."

"All right."

They hung up, leaving Weir slightly dazed, baffled, but grinning, too. No more inertia. He snatched up his hat and went in search of Canby.

There were a number of men standing about in the road in front of the printing shop, including Henry Peet, Birkett's scrofulous clerk, and Weir was reminded of the necessity of hiding his new hopes. It was impossible for him to look as glum as he had felt when he had gone in an hour before, but he could show a poker face to the world.

Peet followed him up to the hotel in a casual sort of way. Weir found Canby and his wife about to enter the dining-room for supper.

"Come and eat with us," said the former.

Weir shook his head. "Too public," he murmured in Canby's ear—Peet had come into the lobby. "We are surrounded by spies. I've got something important to tell you."

"Well, we haven't given up our room yet," said Canby. "Come on upstairs."

"Let's have our supper sent up," put in Mrs. Canby. "It would seem perfectly natural that Weir shouldn't want to eat in public to-night."

Canby gave the order.

As soon as the bedroom door closed behind them, Weir's grin released itself. Canby was delighted.

"Things are looking up!" he cried.

Weir put a finger on his lips. "This old rookery has walls like paper," he whispered. "I was followed here."

They went to the front of the room and drew close together. "I just took down a conversation over the tapped wire," said Weir. He handed Canby the paper on which it was written.

Canby smote his thigh in satisfaction. "Great!" he whispered. "This proves conspiracy. . . . But it raises some puzzling questions. What do you take it they mean by: 'The sale must be put off until Weir is safe behind the bars.' What sale?"

Weir shook his head.

“And Birkett replies that it’s got to be advertised in the county paper first. What sort of sales have to be advertised in the paper?”

“All sorts of sales; trustees’ sales; executors’ sales; foreclosure sales, and so on.”

“Looks to me as if Lee Cowdin had left some kind of assets that these scoundrels were trying to alienate from Leila.”

“If he had anything he couldn’t have known it himself. His whole life was a struggle to raise a little coin.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Canby. “Will you come up to town and try to run down Birkett’s mysterious partner?”

Weir shook his head. “I’d rather leave that to you. I doubt if you’ll have any success as things stand now. I’ll do better to stay and try to obtain a line on him from here.”

“But if all your movements are watched?”

“I’ll accept their offer for the paper and leave. Then return secretly and watch from under cover.”

“Who would give you cover here?

“I don’t know. I’ll have to feel my way along.”

“Pretty dangerous, Weir! These fellows would think nothing of quietly putting you out of the way. That is what is meant by this reference to your jumping your bail.”

“Well, I have nosed out of the danger a couple of times already,” said Weir grinning.

When they had finished their supper they went across the road to the courthouse. A crowd was gathering outside waiting to see Leila start for the penitentiary. Weir and his friends were admitted to the Sheriff’s office through which the prisoner would be brought. There was almost as great a crowd there as outside. Birkett was present, grinning slyly. In the absence of the Sheriff, George Case was in charge.

When Leila entered from the jail corridor in her trim, smart outfit, she looked like a little princess starting on a progress. Her head was up and her face composed and pale. Weir was proud of her. She was accompanied by a warder and a wardress. Weir was thankful that they had spared her the humiliation of handcuffs. Her smile on perceiving her friends was stiff, but

they understood that that was because there were so many strangers gaping at her.

Weir stepped forward and took her hand. She comprehended instantly that something had happened and raised her quiet eyes to his inquiringly. He put his lips to her ear.

"Good news, pal. Don't let anything on. There is evidence in Canby's hands proving that there was a conspiracy against us. We'll soon have you out!"

The caution was unnecessary, for Leila's face remained masklike.

Weir went on—only his lips moved: "Leila, dearest, I love you with all my heart. To hell with these fools around us! I've got to tell you if I was to be shot for it. I've got to love you till I die!"

Her face remained unchanged, but he thought he felt the ghost of a pressure from her hand. Or perhaps he imagined it. Leila went on to Mrs. Canby who embraced her and whispered:

"Carter and I will be right behind you on the way to town. They won't let me see you to-night, but I'll come the first moment that it is permitted."

Then they had taken her.

Weir saw the Canbys off in their car, and returned to his shop. He went directly to his case and started setting up local items. It steadied him now to be working. When he paused and allowed his mind to glance over the situation, he would get a new slant on things.

By-and-by there was a knock at the back door. Weir scowled and remained silent. Only Frank had been accustomed to come that way. He had not locked the door, and presently the lanky Sheriff entered through the bedroom with his arm in a sling.

Weir put down the stick in a hurry. He felt his face growing red. He was afraid to believe what he wanted to believe. Frank's face was deeply troubled. Weir could not be sure whether he was sore or sorry.

"Sit down!" cried Weir, trying to recapture the tone of former days. "Smoke up!"

Frank shook his head glumly and remained standing. "Reckon you want to know what I've come for," he growled.

"I wish I could believe it was because you wanted to be friends again," said Weir with a red face.

Frank looked at him heavily and did not answer. “I’m not satisfied with the way the trial went!” he blurted out. “By all the signs that I know, Earl Souter was lying on the stand.”

“Sure, he was lying,” said Weir.

“Well, Earl was Birkett’s witness. If Earl was lying Birkett certainly put him up to it. Well, if Birkett put that over it suggests that the whole case may have been a frame-up.”

Weir said nothing.

“By God! I could never forgive myself if I had a share in sending an innocent girl to prison!” cried Frank in a tormented voice. “I want the truth.”

“Well, you know now that I was speaking the truth when I told you about finding the tracks in the clay. They had to explain those away.”

“Was it Earl Souter who killed Lee Cowdin?”

“No. He has a watertight alibi. We haven’t got to the bottom of this case yet. But I can throw some light on it. . . . Can I speak to you as a man instead of a Sheriff?” he asked with a grin.

“What are you getting at?” growled Frank.

“Well, I want to confess to a little wrongdoing, and I don’t want to have it used against me.”

“Shoot!”

“Have you heard that Birkett hired a private telephone wire to town during the trial?”

“Yes.”

“Pretty expensive luxury. Canby and I couldn’t figure out what he wanted it for so we tapped it to find out.”

“Tapped it!”

“Sure! Right in front of my shop here. My wires run into it. An hour ago I picked up a conversation between Birkett and an unknown man in Newcastle. Read it.” He passed over the paper.

When he had read it, Frank’s face was a study. “By God! Kid,” he groaned, “if I have wronged you all the way through how can I ever make it up?”

“Oh hell!” said Weir embarrassed, “if you want to be friends again what do I care about any making up. It makes me happy enough to hear you call me Kid again. . . . Stick around awhile. I want you to hear for yourself.”

Weir glanced at his watch and grinned delightedly. Twenty-five minutes past seven! How satisfying it is to justify oneself to a friend!

When the bell rang, Weir took down the receiver and held it so both he and Frank could hear. Birkett was saying:

“Weir had supper with the Canbys in their room at the hotel. I had a man planted in the adjoining room listening with his ear against the wall, but he couldn’t hear what they said. They are cagey. Afterwards they came over to the Sheriff’s office to say good-bye to the girl. I was present. There was a good bit of whispering amongst them. Weir didn’t look so down as he did after hearing the verdict. He didn’t go to town with them.”

“Where is he now?”

“Working in his shop.”

“That lad is dangerous!” growled the voice at the town end of the wire. “Watch him close, and report his movements to me twice a day by the method you know of. I shan’t call you again.”

“Okay.”

They hung up.

“Weir, will you shake hands with me?” muttered Frank with a hangdog air.

“Will I shake hands with you?” cried Weir. “You damned old crab! I’ll wring your remaining hand right off at the wrist.”

“Strange,” said Frank when the handshaking ceremony had been performed, “the voice of that man in town had a good Kent County twang to it. You can’t mistake it.”

“Well,” said Weir, “Leila testified that the young man who came to see her said he was a county man.”

“Do you think he did it?”

“I have never doubted it.”

“*What are they after?*” said Frank.

“Canby thinks Lee Cowdin must have had some property that he was himself unaware of.”

“You can take it from me Lee had nothing but that old place, and that’s years and years in arrears of taxes.”

“Taxes?” said Weir with rising excitement. “Didn’t you tell me that Ancaster was about to be sold for taxes?”

“It has been talked of.”

“Do they advertise tax sales in the county newspaper?”

“They’re obliged to do it by law.”

“Good! The puzzle is beginning to fit together. It is Ancaster that they’re after.”

“But why in heaven’s name should anybody kill that poor lunatic to get his worthless land?”

“It wasn’t part of the plan to kill Lee Cowdin. Lee laid for the man and he shot him in self-defence.”

“Even so, was it worth committing a couple of felonies, railroading an innocent girl to the penitentiary, and spending God knows how much money to get Ancaster? Lee would have sold it to anybody for a few hundred dollars.”

Weir scowled in perplexity.

“Furthermore,” Frank continued, “what did Ancaster have to do with you? Apparently they started after you before you knew there was an Ancaster.”

“That’s true,” muttered Weir. “Birkett has been trying to run me out of the county almost from the time I came.”

“Has he ever given you a hint of what he had against you?”

“No. Birkett never shows his hand. . . . Could there be minerals on the Ancaster property, Frank?”

“No minerals anywhere along this coast that I ever heard of.”

“Let’s look at the map,” suggested Weir.

He spread it on his desk and they pored over it. “This is an old survey,” remarked Frank, “but the county don’t change much. The best part of the Ancaster property is this wide flat that lies to the north of the swamp. Before

the war it grew the best tobacco in the State. That was what made the original Cowdins rich. Now it's all grown up in worthless black pine. 'Twould cost more to clear it than it's worth."

"This property isn't wanted for farming," said Weir dryly.

After all the map told them nothing, and Weir rolled it up. "I'll go up to see Adam Souter to-morrow," he said. "Even if I am followed that couldn't excite suspicion, for I would naturally want to thank the old man for putting up my bail. Maybe he can give me a clue. If he believes that Earl was lying he won't stand by him."

XXIV

On the following morning while it was still early, Weir, setting up type in his shop, was visited by Gus Riordan, the principal storekeeper of Kentville. Riordan was a heavy man with a hearty, back-slapping manner and a practical eye. He displayed no inclination to slap Weir on the back, and came directly to the point.

Half an hour later he departed, leaving Weir staring in a slightly dazed fashion at a cheque for six hundred dollars that lay on his desk. It was hard to believe that one's whole circumstances could be altered so quickly.

A condition of the sale was that Weir should walk out, leaving everything as it stood. He went into his bedroom and started packing his things, still haunted by that sense of unreality. In an hour he was locking the door of the shop for the last time. He had telephoned a brief message to Frank. It seemed wiser not to attempt to see the Sheriff.

Weir delivered the key to Riordan in his store, cashed the cheque at the bank, and headed north in his car. A few idlers gaped at him as he set off. Nobody wished him good luck.

It was about eleven when he drove into the stable yard at Adam Souter's. Father and son were there together, and it was evident from their expressions that Weir's coming had interrupted an angry dispute. Earl, walling his eyes at Weir, turned his back. He was listening with stretched ears. Adam came to Weir with out-thrust hand and a somewhat piteous attempt to assume his ordinary bluff, fussy manner.

"Well, Weir! Well, Weir! Glad to see you, boy!"

Weir dreaded the interview that was before him. How could he hurt the square old fellow who had been so good to him? He said loud enough to carry to Earl's ears:

"I called to thank you for what you did for me yesterday, Mr. Souter. I'm leaving the county until my trial comes on."

"Sho! Don't speak of it!" fussed the old man. "I would do the same for anybody . . . for anybody! Come into the house."

He led the way into the dining-room which served as his living-room also. The windows were open and Weir had no doubt but that there would be

a listener outside. He did not like to look out of the window while the old man was watching him. Adam's rosy face had turned grey with a network of little purple veins showing on it. His kind eyes were full of pain.

They exchanged a few commonplace remarks and fell awkwardly silent. They heard the sounds of a car driving into the yard and Adam went to the window.

"Not for me," he said. "It's Henry Peet. He's a friend of Earl's."

"And a spy on my movements," said Weir.

Adam gave him a distracted look and said: "Come into the parlour."

The windows in this room were closed. They looked out on the front yard which was never visited. It was like a room out of the past with a parlour organ in the corner and crayon portraits on the walls. There was a dank chill on the air, and dust lay on everything undisturbed.

Adam dropped heavily in a chair. Without looking at Weir he murmured, "I reckon you know why I went bail for you yesterday."

"I'm sorry we have to talk about it," said Weir.

"If one of mine had injured you I felt that it was up to me to make it up to you as far as I could."

"I can't tell you what it meant to me," said Weir. "I mean a chance to try to discover the truth before they locked me up too."

"What is the truth?" cried the old man brokenly. "What is behind it all? I can't understand it!"

"I don't know," said Weir. "We think that somebody is trying to get possession of the Ancaster property."

"Why? Why?"

"I was hoping that perhaps you could give me some idea."

The old man shook his head. "I'm not mixed up in it," he said bitterly.

"I never thought you were," said Weir in distress.

There was another miserable silence.

"I suspected that my son was not telling the truth on the stand yesterday," said Adam, lowering his head as if the guilt were his own.

"Yet the tracks in the clay were certainly his," said Weir.

“You are referring to the peculiarity of his right foot,” said Adam distractedly. “It is a family characteristic. I have the same peculiarity and so had another of my sons, my second boy Jack.”

It took a second or two for this to register on Weir’s consciousness. Then his heart began to rise slowly in his throat and to beat thickly. He had to wait before he could speak.

“He ran away from home, didn’t he? Somebody told me.”

“Yes, ten years ago. A boy of seventeen.”

“You’ve never seen him since?”

“No.”

“You don’t know where he is?”

“No. He is like one dead to me.”

Weir looked around the walls. “Have you got a picture of him?”

“Only a cabinet photograph.”

Weir hesitated in order to steady his voice. “May I see it?”

“Why surely,” said Adam with an innocent glance of surprise. “If you care to. Jack was the handsomest of the brood. It brought him no good.”

Weir felt like a criminal. The old man went to a glass-fronted bookcase and brought back the family album with its brass clasp and thick gilt-edged pages. He turned the pages until he found the photograph he was in search of, and then passed the book for Weir to see.

Weir was almost afraid to look. Yes, there was the face he expected to see; handsome, vivid, dark, with the close-lying fine black hair, and the carnal lines between nose and mouth. At seventeen they were just beginning to show. It was the man whom Weir knew as Ralph Manners.

“He was a handsome lad all right,” murmured Weir. And wondered what he was going to say next.

Adam carried the book back and put it away. A moment later the door opened and Earl Souter came in with an air of bravado, overdone. He glanced sharply from Weir to his father and back.

“What are you doing in here for God’s sake?” he asked blustering. “It smells like the grave.”

Adam made no answer.

“Henry Peet wants to speak to you,” Earl went on to his father. “Peter Birkett sent him. It’s some technicality about the bail bond.”

The old man excused himself and went out followed by Earl. The moment he was left alone a sharp struggle began in Weir. There was the photograph that meant so much to him almost within reach of his hand. Adam would never miss it, or anyhow not for years. But Weir made no move to get it. He could not bring himself to play such a trick on the man who had befriended him. Though it was to save Leila he could not do it. A fine sweat broke out on his face. He sat paralysed in his chair.

He was still struggling with himself when Adam’s return to the room took the matter out of his hands. “Just a trick to try to find out what we were talking about,” he muttered.

Weir hardened himself to face the most difficult thing that had ever been put up to him. “Mr. Souter, will you lend me that picture of your son Jack?” he asked.

“Why . . . what is it to you?” asked the old man in pure surprise.

To save his life Weir could not answer. He could only look at the harassed, kindly old face in compassion. And then Adam began to comprehend. He started witlessly. “Oh, my God!” he whispered, “you think that he . . . Jack, too! . . . Oh, my God!”

“I’m so sorry that this had to come on you,” muttered Weir. The words sounded miserably inadequate in his own ears.

The old man suddenly rapped the table. “No!” he said sharply. “My family pictures are my own! They are no concern of any outsider’s. I’m a father. What do you think? Do you think I’m going to help you to . . . my son! No! It is too much to ask of flesh and blood. You can’t have it! I will tear it up!” He started for the bookcase.

“The girl is in prison,” said Weir. Adam stopped. “You said you would do anything to try to make it up. . . .”

“Oh God!” cried Adam brokenly. “I wish they had died while they were innocent children!”

He got the album out of the bookcase, tore the photograph roughly out of its page and threw it on the table without looking at Weir. “Take it,” he said hoarsely.

Weir found himself babbling feeble words of comfort. “I’m so sorry, Mr. Souter. You deserve better than this. You’re a splendid man. The whole

county says so. . . .”

Adam interrupted him. “Put it in your pocket, lad. It’s not your fault that I have graceless sons. . . . Come on, we’ll have to compose our faces before we can show ourselves to the sharp eyes outside. Talk about something else.” He went to the window and looked out at his neglected yard.

XXV

WEIR drove hard for town. He was not followed on the State road, but of course they could guess where he was going, and word would be telephoned ahead. Everybody driving up from Kent County entered town over the Kirkman's Creek bridge. That would be the likeliest spot for a spy to be posted. Ten miles before coming to the bridge, Weir turned to the left and, making a wide detour over little frequented roads, entered the city from the west. So far as he could tell nobody picked him up.

From a booth in a drugstore he telephoned Carter Canby at his office. "Weir!" cried Canby, recognising his voice. "Any news?"

"Plenty," said Weir dryly. "I'm just on the verge of blowing the whole plot. But I must see Leila. Will they let me see her?"

"This is not a visiting day, but I reckon under the circumstances if I was with you I could wangle it."

"Can you start right now and meet me at the main gate of the prison?"

"Surely!"

"And Carter, if you can get me in there, you won't mind, will you, if I have to speak to her alone at first?"

"Certainly not! I understand."

They met at the prison gate. It was a modern prison with a great central rotunda having cell blocks running out from it all around like the spokes of a wheel. Weir shivered internally as one gate after another opened before them and clanged behind. So many iron bars to keep in little Leila!

The custom was to allow the prisoners to talk to their visitors in the rotunda. A wooden bench ran all the way around it, broken only by the doors leading to the cell blocks. Canby left Weir sitting on the bench while he went to interview the warden. Here and there around the big hall sat prisoners who had been granted a dispensation to receive a visitor. Opposite Weir were a pair of young parents pressed close together on the bench, not saying a word. The youthful father's head was bent. He was offering a forefinger to his baby to grasp.

Canby came back to say that all sails were drawing. In a few minutes Leila was brought in by a wardress. Weir tried not to see the hideous grey dress. He searched her eyes to find out how she was bearing it. Anyhow she was not broken.

"I have been through worse," she said in answer to his unspoken question.

Canby said he had business in another part of the prison and left them. They sat down on the bench. Weir wished that she would press close to him like the young wife across the way, but she did not. The wardress remained standing a few paces away. She looked like a good sort.

Weir's feelings overflowed. His eyes could not get enough of Leila. "Dearest, dearest Leila," he whispered. "Let me say it. It eases me and it doesn't commit you to anything."

"You'll make me cry," she said resentfully.

This surprised him. "Well . . . I'll be hard-boiled," he stammered.

"I suppose you had some special reason for coming," she said.

"Yes. Good news. But I have to administer a shock. So brace yourself."

"I've been braced for a long time past," she said bitterly. "Don't keep me in suspense."

Weir took the photograph out of his pocket and showed it to her. "Is this he?" he asked.

Leila with apprehensive eyes took a swift glance at it and looked away. "Yes," she whispered. Her head fell back against the wall and she closed her eyes. Weir looked around wildly for help. The wardress hastened forward.

But Leila sat up straight with a little shake. "I'm all right," she muttered. "I don't want anything."

"They're often like this at first," said the wardress with businesslike sympathy. "But they soon shake down. They soon shake down!"

"She's not going to shake down here," said Weir.

The woman retired to her former place.

"Was it he who . . . who shot my father?" whispered Leila.

"So it seems," said Weir. "That was why he couldn't show himself, you see. His right name is John Souter."

“Right name?”

“Oh, he passes under many names. He’s Ralph Manners also.”

“He let them send me to prison,” whispered Leila.

Weir kept his mouth shut. This was like the beginning of a dream and he was afraid of waking.

Leila hung her head. “Oh, what a sickly fool I have been!”

Weir started to put his hand over hers and drew it back, deciding that this was not the right moment. Not with Leila! After a moment or two he said in a matter-of-fact voice:

“Are you willing to answer some questions about him?”

“Of course,” said Leila with a faint air of surprise.

Weir grinned to himself. Women were funny! The moment they began to change their minds they made believe they had never been of any other mind.

“Have you found him?” she asked.

“Not yet.”

“You’re after him?”

“Certainly. I’ve got to bring it home to him before I can get you out.”

“What is it that you want to know?”

“Principally what he was doing around Ancaster in the first place. Did you ever ask him how he happened by in a boat?”

“No. It never occurred to me to do so.”

“How was he dressed that day?”

“In rough working clothes. Boots that laced to the knee, khaki breeches, a sort of lumberman’s jacket. The other young man the same. I can’t give you a description of him because I didn’t see his face.”

“What was Souter doing? Just sitting in the stern of the skiff?”

“No. He was standing up. He had something in his hand that looked like the lead sinker on a fishing line but bigger. It was attached to a long cord and he was swinging it.”

“Ha!” said Weir. “Taking soundings. Looks as if he wanted to build a pier or something at Ancaster. . . . Can you tell me anything else? Anything

about him or about the boat."

"There were some tools in the boat," said Leila. "You could see the handles sticking up. I mean such as an axe, a briar-hook, a hoe. And a great long thing like a gigantic auger."

"Earth auger," said Weir. "So they had been working on shore, too."

"And back of the man who was rowing there was a funny little table standing in the boat. About three feet high and a foot square. On it was mounted a brass instrument something like a telescope."

"I get it," said Weir. "A plane table with an alidade."

"That's all I can tell you."

"Surveying on shore and taking soundings off the beach," muttered Weir. Suddenly a light broke on him. "By God! I have it! Now I know what they wanted Ancaster for! The tide-water terminal of the new railway from the coal fields. See, that's why they had to get rid of me! Everything falls into place."

"Why did they have to get rid of you?"

"Because I was the first one who thought of Kent County as a possible tide-water terminal for the railway. I urged it in my paper when I first went down there. It was very likely I who put the idea into the heads of the railway people. The Kent County folks saw nothing in it. They were so short-sighted as to oppose it, and it died for lack of support.

"But the railway people were just biding their time. They gave out that Newcastle was to be the terminus until they could make sure of the land they wanted. I was in their way because I was aware of the advantages of Kent's waterfront, and I was there to see that they paid a fair price for what they needed."

"Why was it necessary to shoot my poor father?"

"That was no part of their plans. His death must nearly have spoiled everything for them."

"But they did deliberately try to kill you on two occasions."

"That was because they had got into a jam and had to fight their way out at any cost."

"Do railway companies commit such crimes?" she asked, aghast.

“Not directly,” said Weir with a dry smile. “In a situation of this kind a corporation would hire a broker to act for them. Well, if the broker happened to be a scoundrel it would be quite on the cards for him to try to swindle his employers in order to turn a trick on his own account. The stakes in this case are so great. Think of that big flat that lies to the north of the swamp. Imagine the value of it if a new town was started there and it was cut up into building lots.”

“I can’t imagine it,” she said simply.

“Millions!” he said. “And all yours!”

She looked with adorable anxiety full into his eyes. “Ah, be careful how you act,” she breathed. “If they had reason before to kill you, they have twice as much now.”

“Do you care?” he asked grinning.

“Don’t be silly!” she said impatiently turning away her head.

XXVI

"WELL, what's the plan of campaign?" said Canby. He and Weir were having a belated lunch in his office.

"Useless to turn the case over to the police at this stage," said Weir. "If an alarm was raised for John Souter he would quietly fade. We would save Ancaster for Leila but we'd never catch him."

"And we want him!"

"By God we do!" said Weir, clenching his fist.

"But how the hell are we to set about finding him without assistance? We have no clue to his whereabouts except that he was in this town yesterday."

"We know that he's connected in some way with the officials of the new railway. Couldn't we work some scheme to get knowledge of him through them?"

"I doubt it. Those fellows are very chary of letting anybody know who their agents are. They prefer, too, not to know too much about what their agents are doing. It enables them to express a pious astonishment when there is any trouble."

Weir lit his pipe and studied for awhile. Finally he began to grin. "A plan is taking shape in my mind," he said. "I will need your help as a lawyer to work it out. It calls for the use of Frank Baker as a kind of decoy."

"Frank Baker!" said Canby staring.

"Oh, I forgot. You haven't heard yet that Frank is my friend again. A reconciliation took place after you left Kentville."

"How does Frank come into your plan?"

"Well, Frank in some innocent-seeming way must convey a piece of information to Birkett about me that will throw a scare into them, see? Make them think I am becoming dangerous to them. And afterwards Frank in the same wide-eyed manner—I can depend on Frank for that!—must drop a lead as to where I am to be had. Then when they come to get me we'll be laying for them!"

"Souter may send somebody else after you."

"Not likely. He does me the honour to consider me his number one risk."

Canby grinned. "Dangerous," he remarked.

"We'll take every precaution," said Weir.

"You might let them know that you have secured that photograph."

"No!" said Weir. "They must only be scared just so much. If Souter learned that I had shown the photograph to Leila he would know that the jig was up. He'd beat it."

"Boy," said Canby, "you don't need any lawyer."

Weir puffed out his chest. "Of course if Birkett has learned that Frank and I have shaken hands this is no good," he said. "I'll find out. I don't think Birkett can know, because Frank entered my shop and left by the back door."

"Will you call him up?"

"Lord, no! The operator down in Kentville is a real nice girl; the soul of friendliness. If I called up Frank Baker everybody in the village, including Birkett and his cohorts, would know it within a half hour. I'll have to drive down after dark to-night. I can drive right into Frank's yard without being seen. I'll borrow a car which is not known in Kentville."

"You ought not to go alone."

"Why not come with me?"

"I will."

"Good! Then we'll settle all the details on the way down. Our plot must be absolutely fool-proof. We must go over it a hundred times to make sure there is no hole in it."

"We'd better wait until we see Frank before we settle on anything finally."

They drew into their plan a friend of Canby's who had never been in Kentville. He supplied the car and acted as chauffeur. They started after nightfall, leaving the city by a circuitous route and making sure on the straight stretches of the State road below that they were not being followed.

A mile or so short of Kentville, no cars being in sight at the moment, their chauffeur stopped to let them out. They concealed themselves in a patch of pine woods while he went on to the village. In a quarter of an hour

he returned with Frank. Weir and Canby got in and the three of them sat in the back seat talking over their plans while their chauffeur drove them up and down the county.

"I know that Birkett doesn't suspect that Weir and I are friendly," said Frank, "because he says to me to-day, 'Damn shame, Frank, that old Adam Souter should have to lose his farm along of that worthless young scoundrel Weir Lambert!'

" 'Well, he ain't lost it yet,' I says, giving nothing away.

" 'He will lose it,' says Pete Birkett. 'It stands to reason with a good car under him and six hundred dollars in his pocket he ain't coming back to stand trial when he knows he'll be convicted sure as fate. But he's already out of the State with a pair of new licence tags on his car.'

" 'By God! it is a shame!' I says, all heated up. 'He ought to be watched and prevented.' "

Weir chuckled at the scene this called up.

"Well, we're agreed on everything now," Frank went on. "This is my part. There's three petty thieves to be carried up to town to the House of Correction to-morrow. I was going to let George and Ellick take them, but I'll go myself now in place of Ellick. I get back about twelve o'clock. I go to Birkett and I say: 'Pete, the State's Attorney-General heard I was coming to town to-day, and he telephoned to the House of Correction and asked me to call at his office.

" 'Seems that that son-of-a-hoozis, Weir Lambert, and his lawyer had been to him,' I say, 'and lodged a complaint that Leila Cowdin didn't get a fair trial. They said that the State's Attorney of Kent County had suborned a perjury—meaning Earl Souter, in order to destroy the girl's defence, and they was afraid the same trick would be worked when Weir's trial come up. Wanted the Attorney-General to have a watcher at the trial to see that all was fair.'

"The Attorney-General said, I tell Pete, that he wasn't going to say anything about it to you, until he was satisfied there was something in it. He swore me to secrecy, but as between one Kent county man and another, I made up my mind I ought to tell you. He asked me what I thought of it, and I said it was as fair a trial as I ever saw. So he said he wouldn't take no notice of it unless they brought evidence.

"Well, when Pete finishes blowing up about it, and begins to ask me questions, I'll say: 'The Attorney-General said that Carter Canby had asked

him to dinner at his house on Friday. Weir was going to be there to dinner that night, Canby said, and the three of them could talk it over after. But the Attorney-General told me that he couldn't accept no hospitality from them under the circumstances, and that they'd have to bring their evidence to his office on Saturday morning.' . . . Is that all smooth and fair?"

"Great!" cried Weir. "It can't fail."

"Should I put in anything about where Canby lives?"

"No. That's too direct a lead. John Souter might smell a rat. Let them look it up. It's in the telephone book. They're certain to prospect the ground beforehand. They'll see that the house is in a lonely part of the suburbs, not near any other house. If they think they're likely to get into trouble Saturday morning they'll never pass up such an opportunity to get me Friday night."

"I don't like it," said Frank, scowling. "Too risky. If Souter is going to carry Weir off, he'll stick a gun in his ribs, won't he? Well, then, if you surprise Souter that gun is bound to go off."

"I'll be mindful of it," said Weir.

"How can you tell in advance what Souter will do anyhow?"

"We'll be prepared for anything he can do. As I see it now there are three courses open to him. Firstly, to meet me in the yard as I come out of Canby's, and conduct me to my car with a gun as you suggest. That's a bad plan because Canby would be likely to come out with me and walk as far as my car. Secondly, he might count on the fact that a man never looks in the back of his car when he starts off, and plant a couple of men on the floor who would rise up and stick their guns in my back as I drove out of the gate. That's risky too, because there's always one chance in a hundred that I *might* look in the back of the car before I get in in front. The third and best way would be for him to have a car parked somewhere in the dark, follow me when I left Canby's and crowd me to the curb as soon as I was out of hearing of the house. That's what he'll probably do."

"Suppose you've figured right," said Frank, "you don't know just at what point he'll stop you."

"I'll choose my own point for stopping," said Weir with a grin.

The Canbys lived on the northerly edge of Newcastle in a suburban development called Haledon. They had gone far out in order to secure land enough for a garden, a tennis court, and plenty of shrubbery. Here on a side

street off Jefferson Avenue, a main road, they built their little hip-roofed house snug and inviting with its gable end to the street. It was the only house in the block though others were building. They called it "Rus In Urbe" which Canby translated as "Hicks in the City."

The porch of the little house was on the right-hand side as you faced it from the street. It overlooked the garden. On Friday night after dinner, Canby, his wife and Weir sat out here smoking and chatting. The children had been put to bed and a deep silence held the whole neighbourhood in a spell, broken occasionally by the passage of a car on Jefferson Avenue, quarter of a mile away.

Mrs. Canby had been told what was expected. She was game. A sharp inner excitement possessed the outwardly quiet three. It enabled them to find plenty to say to each other—talk suitable for listeners if there were any; about Leila, about Weir's coming trial, about their visit to the Attorney-General next morning. This last bit of comedy Weir insisted on bringing in because it afforded him a grim amusement.

It was dark out on the porch. While they rocked or swung their eyes continually searched among the shadows. The shrubbery afforded any number of possible hiding-places. They saw nothing, yet they had the feeling of being watched. The house stood back about three hundred feet from the street. This block had never been lighted by the city, but Canby had established a bulb on a pole at his gate.

Eleven had been agreed upon as the zero hour. When the grandfather's clock in the hall chimed quarter to, Weir got up. "Well, I know you folks keep early hours," he said. "I'm off."

"Have a drink," said Canby.

"Well, just a spot."

The French windows stood open. Anybody prowling around the house could have had a clear view of the interior. It was a very natural scene; Mrs. Canby mixing highballs at the sideboard and the two friends standing by the table toasting each other with smiles. All three were good actors. Well, they had to be.

Canby murmured as he was about to open the front door: "I hate to let you go out alone. The next few minutes will be hellish, waiting."

"It would spoil everything if you came," said Weir. "Say good-night to me and close the door immediately. If you hear anything you can come as quick as you like, but don't stir out until you do."

Canby opened the door. “Well, good-night, old fellow. See you to-morrow morning.”

“Right!” said Weir. The door closed.

Weir had parked his car about fifty feet down the drive in order not to block the front door in case there were other visitors. Canby, from indoors, switched out the light over the entrance. Weir looked from side to side without appearing to, but could see nothing. Half-way to the car he stopped to light his pipe, and thus give any possible watcher a good look at him. He had no fear of a shot there. It would have spoiled their game to shoot him down in Canby’s yard.

He took a glance in the back of his car as he got in. Empty. All the windows of the car were closed except the one at his left hand. He had loosened a tyre valve on his arrival, and knew that he had a flat in the rear. As he turned into the street he glanced the other way and saw a dark shadow a hundred yards off beside the curb. A parked car.

As soon as he gathered speed in the street the bumping of his wheel announced to the world that he had a flat tyre. He drew up alongside a spot where a dense row of shrubbery masked the back premises of one of the handsome estates fronting on Jefferson Avenue. The police were supposed to be hidden behind this shrubbery. Before getting out he ran up the driver’s window and jammed a wedge that he had for the purpose under the handle of the door so that it could not be opened. He got out the other side, jack in hand.

Meanwhile the car behind him had turned on its lights and was slowly approaching. It stopped about a hundred feet in the rear of Weir, throwing a strong light on his operations. A man got out and approached him. Dazzled by the lights, Weir could not see if there were others in the car, but he knew there were. Its engine remained running.

“What’s the matter, fellow?” asked the man. Weir, as far as he could tell had never seen him before. His hands were empty.

“Flat,” said Weir.

“Hard luck! Got a spare?”

“Sure.”

“Oh well, you’re all right then.”

There was a pause. Weir, standing with the jack in his hand, apparently looking down at the wheel, kept the tail of his eye on the man’s hands.

Suddenly the headlights of the car behind were switched off.

"Hey!" cried Weir. "I could use that light if you don't mind."

"Sorry," said a voice out of the dark. "I seem to have a short in my lights. I'm looking for it."

Weir saw three more men coming.

"Why don't you jack her up?" the first man was asking.

Weir had no intention of presenting his back to him. He sidled around to the left of the car where the spare rim rode on the running-board. "I don't know if there's any air in my spare," he said.

The first man moved after him, then the other three, silently. In the dark Weir could not see their hands. There was still another hovering in the rear. This would be Souter. Without giving them time to surround him, Weir went on around the front of the car. "Got to get my pump out," he said.

He opened the rear door as if to reach for his pump, then climbed in as if he couldn't find it. But he kept a hand on the door and, when he was in, pulled it after him with a slam and pressed the spring that locked it. Reaching forward over the seat, he locked the remaining door in front.

Somebody threw a flashlight through the glass. Weir thumbed his nose in the direction of it. Through the glass he heard them cursing. They ran around the car trying the doors. Somebody said: "Smash the glass!" Weir dropped on the floor in the rear.

The glass was never broken, for at that moment five detectives ran out of hiding. Weir could not follow what happened in the dark. He heard cries, blows, a shot on one side of the car, answered from the other. He scrambled over into the front seat with the idea of getting into it, and knocked the wedge out of the door handle.

But the thought came to him: Souter won't mix it up with them. He'll try to do a fade-out as he did before. Automatically Weir turned his switch and stepped on the starter. The engine fired on the first turn. Looking through the back window he saw the other car starting without lights.

The street had a dead end and Souter must pass him in order to escape. Weir let his clutch in and turned out into the middle of the street. There was a crash as the heavy car struck the light one, and the latter quietly turned over on its side. Weir already had a grip of the door handle, and was out as soon as it rested. Souter had backed clear of the wreck and was coming ahead around it. As he passed, Weir caught a hand in the rear door frame and

swung himself on the running-board. He crouched down so his head wouldn't show.

Two men had disengaged themselves from the melee on the sidewalk and were pursuing with shouts. They started firing presumably at the tyres. Weir heard the bullets ping into the car body. Nice if they got me instead of Souter, he thought. The shots ceased. Running without lights the car was merely a darker shadow in the night. Apparently the men turned back to get their own car which Weir knew was parked in a service driveway behind the shrubbery.

Weir heard Souter cursing savagely to himself. It seemed that the collision had put his lights out of service. So much the better for Weir. No driver could get far without lights.

Souter made no attempt to turn into Jefferson Avenue, but crossed it, and making every turn that showed itself beyond, attempted to lose himself in the winding "crescents," "ways" and "places" of another suburban development. He was driving a silent, powerful car. Weir, looking back, saw the police car come out. It followed them across the avenue, but ran past one of the turns Souter made and was soon lost to view.

Souter finally ran his car into the driveway of an unfinished house and stopped. Weir, watching through the windows, saw him get out and start back. The freedom of his movements suggested that he had no suspicion he carried a passenger. Weir crouched at the back of the car, and when the man had passed him, leaped on his back and bore him down with a grunt.

"Got you!" said Weir.

Souter threshed violently on the ground, but Weir's 170 pounds planted in the small of his back held him. Under his shin, Weir felt Souter's gun. He got it out and, clubbing it, brought it down on the man's head. Souter went limp under him.

Weir took off his belt and with it lashed his prisoner's arms behind his back. Rolling him over, he discovered that Souter too, wore a belt and took that to bind his ankles together. During this, Souter began first to groan, then to curse Weir savagely. "What's this for?" he demanded. "Who are you?"

Weir laughed. "Oh, an old acquaintance," he said.

Souter recognised the voice and shut his mouth.

Weir dragged him back to the car and bundled him in behind. He then backed out of the driveway and began to retrace their route as well as he was

able. After making two or three guesswork turns he suddenly saw the double row of lights that marked Jefferson Avenue on the side opposite to where he had expected it. Souter had described a complete circle.

The rest was easy. Without stopping to look for the little street where Canby lived, Weir started into town with his prisoner. He had not gone far before he was hailed from the sidewalk.

“Hey! where’s your lights?”

Weir saw a patrolman and stopped. “The car’s been in an accident,” he said. “You’re just the man I want to see. I’ve got a prisoner in back here. Help me to take him in.”

The officer glanced through the rear window. “What’s he wanted for?”

“Murder,” said Weir coolly, “and other things. His name is John Souter. Five men were sent out from headquarters to-night to get him. He slipped through their fingers and I nabbed him.”

“Who are you?”

Weir forgot for the moment how famous he had become. “Weir Lambert.”

“Good God!” said the patrolman.

“No fooling,” said Weir. “I’m out on bail. Take me to the nearest telephone and call up headquarters. You can get your instructions from them.”

“Fair enough!”

“Get in behind with him,” said Weir. “He’s a desperate man, and he’s none too well tied up. But I took his gun.”

“There’s a drugstore in two blocks,” said the officer.

XXVII

THE patrolman received orders over the telephone to escort Weir and his captive to the local police station where men would be sent to bring them down town. It appeared that headquarters was in touch with the men who had been assigned earlier to take John Souter.

The strap was unfastened from Souter's legs to enable him to walk into the station house. He had not opened his mouth since he had first heard Weir's voice. Under the lights Weir had his first good look at him. Little trace was left of the smooth man of the world. The desperation in his white face made him look like a boy. After all, he was only a couple of years older than Weir.

Now that he was safely taken, Weir's feeling of enmity towards him began to cool. He thought: Under other circumstances I might have made a friend of this man. He got some twist years ago that has spoiled everything.

Soon the five detectives arrived in two cars with the four prisoners they had taken and Carter Canby. The detectives looked decidedly sheepish at having to accept their man from an amateur sleuth like Weir.

Canby flung an arm around Weir's shoulders. "You're all right?" he asked, anxiously.

"Not a scratch!" said Weir, grinning.

"So you did it!" said Canby, divided between admiration and envy.

"Sure!" said Weir. "I dared myself to do it. I couldn't take water on that."

After borrowing an additional car the whole party set off for headquarters. There Weir, Canby, John Souter and the two detectives guarding the latter were ushered into the Commissioner's office. Instantly Souter burst out with assumed indignation:

"What does this mean, Mr. Commissioner? I have been brutally assaulted and dragged here without a word of explanation."

The Commissioner leaned back in his chair and put the tips of his fingers together. The type was not new to him. "One moment, please."

Weir gave a brief account of what had happened and laid the gun he had taken from Souter on the Commissioner's desk.

"What's your name?" asked the Commissioner of the prisoner.

"Gilbert Snowdon."

"This man," pointing to Weir, "says that your real name is John Souter."

"He lies! I have been in business for years under the name of Snowdon."

"He charges," the Commissioner went on, "that under the name of Ralph Manners you—or men acting under your orders, assaulted him and forcibly detained him on board a yacht in Kirkman's Creek.

"He can't bring any proof of it!"

"How do you know he can't?"

"Because it never happened."

"That may be. Anyhow he has made the charge and I am forced to hold you until it can be investigated. He also charges you with the killing of Lee Cowdin in Kent County."

"I've never been in Kent County in my life! It's all lies!"

"Not all lies," said the Commissioner with a hard smile. "This gentleman came to me this afternoon with his attorney. He said he had reason to believe that he would be waylaid as he left Mr. Canby's house to-night and asked for protection. I furnished protection, and he was waylaid just as he said he would be. How do you account for that, Mr. Snowdon or Manners or Souter?"

"I wasn't there," said Souter hardily.

Weir laughed.

"Well, I'm going to hold you anyhow," said the Commissioner, "until this Kent County business can be looked into. By the way, gentlemen, shall I notify the State's Attorney for Kent County?"

"I suggest that you notify the Sheriff," said Weir dryly. "The evidence is in his hands."

Souter glanced at Weir with a fresh, keen anxiety. He would have given something to know what lay behind his words.

"Very well," said the Commissioner. "To-morrow morning I will have this man taken to the penitentiary and confronted with Miss Cowdin. If she

can identify him . . .”

He never finished his sentence. Souter, flanked by the two detectives assigned to guard him, was standing in front of the Commissioner’s desk. Weir and Canby were a little to the right. When Souter heard what awaited him next day, quicker almost than the eye could follow, he took a step forward and snatched up the gun from the desk. One of the detectives seized him by the collar and jerked him back, but not quick enough. Souter had pointed the gun at his own breast. Weir flung himself upon him. As he struck at his right arm the gun discharged with a roar. Souter sank to his knees with the detective hauling at his collar. His head fell forward. He coughed blood.

“Oh God! he mustn’t die! he mustn’t die!” cried Weir, half beside himself, “or it all goes for nothing!”

Souter raised his ghastly face and grinned at Weir. “Fooled you!” he whispered huskily—and fainted.

They stretched him on the floor. One of the men had gone for the police doctor and presently brought him running. He dropped to his knees beside the unconscious man and cut away the clothes from his wound.

“Missed the heart,” he said. “Through the left lung. We must get him to the hospital quick.”

There was an ambulance on the premises. A stretcher appeared and Souter was whisked away under guard. The Commissioner addressed the two men who had been assigned to watch the prisoner with extreme bitterness. Weir and Canby did not wait to hear it.

At the hospital they were told that Souter had been rushed to the operating table. There was nothing to do but wait for the result. Weir called up Adam Souter in Kent County. He had to wait a while before the operator succeeded in raising the old farmer from his sleep. When Weir heard his voice on the wire it seemed useless to try to soften such a blow. He told him, plainly and briefly, what had happened. All Adam said was:

“I’ll come immediately.”

After an endless wait the house surgeon came to Weir and Canby in the waiting-room. He said with an impatient shrug: “Young men recover from such wounds every day, but this one will die, I reckon, because he’s set on it. When he came out of ether we had to put him in a strait-jacket to keep him from pulling at his bandages.”

"If he's going to die I must see him," said Weir.

"He has already refused to make a statement to the police."

"Just the same I must see him."

"Well, it can't do any harm if you get permission."

This was obtained over the telephone, and Weir was conducted to Souter's room. Canby remained in the corridor outside. A uniformed officer sat beside the bed. Souter lay there on his back, bandaged and bound in the strait-jacket. He was conscious. When he saw Weir he asked with a sneer:

"What did *you* come for?"

Weir sat down at the other side of the bed from the policeman. It was difficult to find the right words. Blunt honesty seemed to be the best line. "I can't believe that you're willing to die and leave Leila in State's prison," he said.

Souter's upper lip rolled back in an agonised sneer. "You can't believe it, eh? You wouldn't do such a thing, would you?" He hadn't much voice. The husky sounds seemed to distil venom. "Oh God! I hate you! You make me sick with your Christly words of advice. Think you're a hell of a fellow, don't you? Sort of combination of all the heroes of fiction in one!"

Weir attempted to speak, but Souter would not stop. "Sure, I'm going to hell! And I'm going with my mouth shut, see? Won't be any worse than what I've been through already. I've only got one wish. And that is that I could drag you down with me. Christ! it would be sweet to burn if I could watch you squirming and shrivelling beside me! Get the hell out of here or I'll die just of hating you!"

"For God's sake, what's this for?" said Weir, staring.

Souter rolled his head over on the other side and refused to answer. Slowly it came to Weir what was back of it. Souter was jealous of him.

"Oh, you fool!" said Weir softly. "You came first with her, always. And you threw it away! She never cared about me."

Souter's head rolled quickly back. His hot eyes searched Weir's eyes to find out if he was telling the truth. He then resumed his sneer and gazed up at the ceiling. He said nothing.

Weir, knowing it to be useless, nevertheless tried again. "A brief statement from you would force the Governor to pardon her immediately."

Souter addressed the policeman: “Say, your instructions were to keep me from harming myself, weren’t they? Well, I swear I’ll die just to spite this —— if you don’t get him out of the room!”

The policeman looked at Weir deprecatingly. Weir shrugged and went out. Out in the corridor Canby looked at him anxiously. “Nothing doing,” said Weir.

Shortly before three o’clock Adam Souter arrived. Grief had the effect of dignifying the old man; his fussy absurdities had dropped away. The good-looking loutish Earl had driven him up. Earl’s ruddy face was bleached with terror and his truculent manner towards Weir became cringing. Weir thought: Both bad actors, but the older one at least has guts.

Weir and Adam Souter entered the room together, but Weir did not show himself to the injured man. There was a screen between the door and the bed, and he remained behind that. He heard Adam say quietly:

“Well, son?”

John Souter replied with crude bravado: “I don’t know you.”

Adam paid no attention to it. Weir heard him draw up a chair.

John gave over the attempt to deny his father.

He broke out violently: “It was that —— Weir Lambert sicked you on to me! He got you up here to work on me! Well, it won’t do him any good!”

“You are hysterical,” said Adam quietly. “What difference does it make who told me you were hurt? I was bound to come anyhow.”

“Why?” sneered John.

“I don’t know. I reckon it is instinct.”

“Well, get the heavy father stuff off your chest.”

“I have never played the heavy father with you boys,” said Adam very low.

“Better for us if you had, maybe.”

“Maybe so. I have no answer to that.”

There was a silence.

“Well, say it! Say it!” croaked John.

“I don’t know how,” answered his father helplessly. “I have no feeling of blame for you. I’m only sorry.”

“Oh, for God’s sake why didn’t you forget me years ago? I’ve been a bad son to you from the beginning. I’m no good! I’ve always served the devil, as you would say. A death-bed repentance from me would make a pig laugh! Anyhow, I’m no quitter.”

“What difference does it make to you?” said the old man. He spoke with an odd remoteness as if the question hardly concerned him personally. “You won’t be here any more. But I have to live on. I’m a very healthy man. It would lighten the load I have to bear if you came clean. Because, you see, if the matter was cleaned up people would forget about it. But if you die without undoing this wrong it would make a great tale. I would be reminded of it every time a man looked at me.”

“For God’s sake let me alone!” cried John. “I can’t change myself! I hate everybody and myself most of all! I’ll be glad to get out of it!”

“Nobody knows these wild feelings better than me,” murmured Adam. “Feelings that tear a young man’s breast. That’s the way I was.”

“What changed you?” sneered John.

“It was your mother, I reckon.”

“Lucky for her she died. With a son like me!”

There was another silence, then John cried out huskily: “Let me be!” Weir supposed that Adam had taken his hand. Adam said:

“You’re my son. Nothing can change that. Of course you can’t understand how a father feels.”

“Why can’t you let me die in peace!” muttered John.

“Peace!” said Adam.

“Well, in my own way. Alone! I’m no quitter.”

“That’s the second time you’ve said that,” said Adam quietly. “You are a quitter. You won’t stand up to this thing that faces you. You are deceiving yourself with schoolboy words.”

No answer from John.

“You could cut out this canker that is driving you crazy with pain,” Adam went on in his gentle, remorseless manner. “You could be at peace even now. It only needs the will!”

“No!” muttered John. “I hate him too much. I’m not going to save my soul to serve his happiness.”

"He'll be happy anyhow."

"Well, I'm not going to send him a wedding present."

"Why do you hate him so much?"

"If you were ever a fellow like me you ought to know."

"Yes . . . I reckon I know."

"Well, don't say it. . . . He ought to have been your son."

"You are my son!"

A silence followed, longer than any that had gone before. When John Souter spoke again some of the bitterness had gone out of his voice, but it was weaker, and a sharp apprehension attacked Weir. Had Adam come too late, after all? John said:

"Look, they say I'm going to die, but suppose I was to fool them and get better? I'd cut a pretty figure, wouldn't I if they brought up my so-called death-bed confession and made me swing for it later. Wouldn't Weir Lambert laugh himself sick?"

"Weir testified at Leila's trial that whoever shot Lee Cowdin shot in self-defence," said Adam.

"Oh, that isn't the half of it," said John wearily.

"It's up to you, son," said Adam. "I can say no more."

"Well, I'll chance it," said John, sneering still, though the sting had gone out of it. "I'll try your recipe for peace everlasting. I'm doing this for you, see? Not for that —— Weir Lambert!"

"Why not for the girl, son?"

"Oh, I reckon she and Weir are one by this time, or will be. I reckon I'm done with girls. They'll never hang me. To hell with them both! I'm doing this for you, old Adam, because you're such a good old scout. I wish I'd known you better!" He raised his voice. "Hey, you!" Apparently he was addressing the policeman. "Have you pen and paper?"

"Sure!"

"Well come and take down the last testament of John Souter, Esquire, Gentleman Blackleg!"

When he began to dictate all the irony went out of his voice. He began his story abruptly and told it swiftly.

“I was hired by the Appalachian and Eastern Railway to buy the Ancaster property on Cumberland Sound at a reasonable price, for the tide-water terminals of the new line. One hundred and fifty thousand was the price they set. They aimed to keep the profits of the town-site in the family. When I learned that the property was shortly to be sold for fifteen hundred dollars taxes I arranged with a friend to buy it in for that. He was to sell it to the railway for the hundred and fifty thousand and we were to split.

“One day in March, when I was looking over the property secretly with a surveyor, I saw Leila Cowdin. I fell for her on the spot. Private feelings and business won’t mix and my business pretty near went to hell. I kept going back to see her secretly, though I knew it was risky. I used to whistle her out of the house with the call of the whip-poor-will. The girl was in an ugly jam living there alone with her crazy father. I wanted to help her, but I didn’t see any way I could without showing my hand about the property.

“One night, while I was waiting for her, her father took a shot at me in the half dark. He missed me and I beat it. I made up my mind to stay away from there. But after three weeks I couldn’t stand it, and I went back again. This was April twelfth. This time the poor lunatic was lying in wait for me down near the beach. I suppose he had laid for me every afternoon since I was there before. He fired at me and missed, and I whipped out my gun without thinking and let him have it. I got him. It was a fool thing to do. I dragged him fifty yards into the undergrowth and left him. He didn’t bleed much. I was wearing a green polo shirt at the time, and when I got home I saw that I had busted a button off while dragging him. I burned the shirt.

“This accident was almost fatal to the business I had in hand. But I had to go ahead and try to pull it off because of the fellow who was in it with me, who had risked a lot. So-called justice took its course and they locked the girl up. I helped to convict her in order to clear the thing up as quick as possible. I wasn’t going to let her stay in prison. Once we had the land I could have exerted influence that would have got her a pardon.

“Then Weir Lambert butted in and tried to play the hero by befriending the girl, by going to jail for her sake, and by staging a melodramatic jail break. I went haywire then. I made three attempts to get Weir, not counting the trap he set for me to-night. The yacht I took him on I borrowed from a friend. The owner is not implicated in my affairs. The man who shot Sheriff Baker was a man hired by me to get Weir. I won’t tell his name. The Sheriff just happened to come along and my man smoked him, knowing that Weir would be blamed for it. That suited me all right.

“I was also in the party that tried to lynch Weir Lambert on Culver’s beach. I egged the men on. I won’t tell who else was there.”

Souter paused. The policeman spoke: “Is that all?”

“That’s all, I reckon.”

“You should put in something about confessing this in the fear of death. It’s customary.”

“To hell with it! I’m not afraid to die. Put it down this way: I am dictating this in the expectation of death and without compulsion. Now loosen this damn corset and I’ll sign it. . . . Wait a minute. I can move my hand enough to write my name.”

There was a silence while the paper was signed, then a sigh and Souter’s voice infinitely relieved and faintly ironical. “Say, officer, can’t you get the hell out of here now and leave me with my old man? I have spoken my piece.”

“Sorry, I can’t do it, John.”

“Oh well, sit over there and look out into the night.” A silence; the voice was growing fainter. “You’re not going to leave me, dad?”

“I calculate not, son.”

Weir went out quietly.

John Souter died at six o’clock.

XXVIII

LEILA'S face was wearing an expression of faint surprise when the wardress brought her to Weir in the rotunda of the prison. Another visit during prohibited hours! Weir had not allowed any hint of his purpose in coming to reach her. He wanted to see her face when she got the news. As for his own face it was wearing its poker look. He made believe to be disappointed at the sight of her.

"Why didn't you change your dress?" he said. "I hate that grey rag."

"I have no other," she said, staring. "You know that."

"I thought we might take a walk," he said airily. "You may not know it but the sun is shining like all get out."

"Is this supposed to be funny?" she asked sorely.

"And while you're changing you might as well pick up anything you have around your cell that you value. I've found other quarters for you."

She merely stared at him resentfully. Like a boy, she hated to be made fun of.

Weir burst out laughing. The sound echoed strangely in that place. His eyes blazed up. He couldn't keep it in. "Leila, you're free! you're free!" he cried breathlessly.

"Free?" she echoed stupidly.

He seized her hands and wagged them up and down foolishly. "Free, I tell you! The Governor has pardoned you and has issued an order for your immediate release. It's already in the warden's hands."

She looked frightened. "Oh, Weir, I can't take it in."

"Wake up!" he cried. "You're free as air!"

She began to laugh and to cry together, and while Weir laughed the tears ran down his cheeks also. "What a pair of idiots we are!" he said shakily. "We ought to be whooping instead of standing under a salt shower!"

"Let's sit down until I get my breath," said Leila.

Weir drew her arm through his. He could only look at her.

“Tell me what happened,” begged Leila.

“Wait a minute, girl! . . . Lord! it’s hard to get out a connected story when your pulse is hitting up 500 r.p.m. . . . Listen! John Souter died at six this morning. He shot himself when he saw that the game was up. He left a confession. We have Adam Souter to thank for that. By nine o’clock already I had carried it down to Belvoir County where the court is sitting this week. The judges looked pretty sour; however they addressed a letter to the Governor stating that a miscarriage of justice had occurred, and petitioned for your release. They couldn’t do less.

“The State’s Attorney of Kent County didn’t join in it for a good reason. The judges issued a warrant for his arrest. This was sent by special messenger to Frank Baker to execute, but the bird had flown the coop. Frank telephoned me half an hour ago. At that Birkett will get what’s coming to him. Down in Kent he was their white-headed boy, headed for the Attorney-General’s chair; out in the world he’s headed for the beach!”

“Poor Mr. Souter!” murmured Leila. “I’m thinking of him.”

“Well,” said Weir, “he’s had a terrible blow, yet he’s been going around with me all morning perfectly quiet and composed, and with his kind old eyes shining like stars because, you see, according to his belief, he snatched his son from the jaws of hell!”

“What will they do to the other one, Earl?”

“They could prosecute him for perjury, of course, but I think the case will be dropped for the old man’s sake. Maybe the fright he had will make a man of Earl, but I doubt it.”

“Well, then, what did you do?”

“By one o’clock I was back in the capital. Canby and Adam Souter were with me. We caught the Governor on his way to lunch. Judge Comerford had telephoned him. The Governor kept his lunch waiting while he issued your pardon and signed an order for your release. I asked him not to give out the news for two hours so that I would have time to get here. And here I am; three-thirty.”

“You haven’t had any lunch!” said Leila.

Weir laughed. “Is that your principal reaction!”

“And do you mean to say all I have to do is change my dress and walk out with you?”

“Oh, I suppose we’ll have to have a pow-wow in the Warden’s office. Nothing can stop him from making a speech. You tell him I haven’t had any lunch. Get a move on you now!”

“You’ll wait here for me?”

“Will I wait? Say, girl, I’ll be sitting here gloating over the prison bars because they can’t hold us!”

They issued out of the prison arm in arm. Leila looked up at the beaming sky and said nothing. But her arm tightened on Weir’s. Weir turned around, took off his hat and made an elaborate bow to the grim portal. The men on guard did not appreciate the joke.

“Egoists!” said Weir.

His car was parked nearby. As they climbed in, Leila asked:

“Where are we going?”

“Away from here!”

After they had gone a little distance he said: “I’m not fit to drive this car. Still too fluttery. You don’t want to see anybody yet, do you?”

“Oh, no!” said Leila quickly.

“I expect the reporters are camping on our trail by now.”

“Oh, that is terrible!”

Weir laughed at her tragic tone. “Well, we’ll sidestep them as long as we can. Let’s go sit in a park somewhere.”

“You must eat.”

“My stomach can wait.”

The unfrequented park that they found on the outskirts of the city was almost like open country. They sat on a bench with the car parked behind them and a green meadow before. Robins, thrushes and mocking-birds hopped in the grass intent on their own business, and an impudent cat-bird came and cocked a derisive eye in their faces, wondering if this couple had brought lunch. Their arms were still intertwined. Weir was too happy to speak.

After a while he said: “Well, now that we have recovered possession of ourselves, so to speak, what shall we do with them?”

“The outlook isn’t very bright for me,” said Leila.

“Why, you’re a rich woman! The railway company has got to have your property. You can obtain a fair price now. You can hold out for a share in the profits of the town-site.”

“But it will take a good while, I suppose, to realise on that. In the meantime I have nothing and I know nothing. Who would give me a job?”

“Oh, you could get plenty of jobs after the publicity you’ve had. But you’d hate that; having to exhibit yourself to the slack-jawed gapers, I mean. I’d like to save you from that.”

Leila said nothing.

“How about marrying me?” asked Weir very off-hand.

She gently withdrew her arm from under Weir’s. She continued to say nothing.

“Well, what about it?” he asked with a ridiculously sinking heart.

“I wouldn’t marry you just because there was nothing else to do,” she said with an affronted air.

“I suppose not,” said Weir dejectedly. After a moment he went on: “I didn’t mean to ask you so soon. I knew after the shocks you’ve had that you wouldn’t be inclined to think of . . . well . . . any other man. Certainly not of marriage. . . . Only there is something I would like to explain . . . but I can’t.”

“Why can’t you say *anything* to me?” demanded Leila with a stout air like a boy’s.

“Oh, you make out to be so up and down,” he said with a rueful grin, “but after all you’re a girl. And girl’s are so explosive. You never know when they’re going to let go.”

Leila did not smile. “Well, if you had made up your mind not to ask me to-day, why did you?” she wanted to know.

“I just weakened,” he said simply. “Now that I have got you back again it seems as if it would kill me if we were parted for a single day.”

“Oh!” she said with a peculiar intonation. Presently she went on, lowering her head: “I am so ashamed by what has happened it is almost more than I can bear. To think I should have been such a sickly kind of fool. To fall for *that*! I shouldn’t think you’d want to marry me.”

“That’s for me to decide, isn’t it?” he said, beginning to grin again. “What’s happened hasn’t any more weight with me than air! I don’t see how you could help falling for the first one who held out a friendly hand to you —or appeared to do so. It is just my hard luck that I wasn’t the first.”

Silence.

“I wouldn’t expect you to love me right away,” he went on. “Not that way. That’s what I wanted to say. But I could be patient as long as we were not separated. I think it would come. We are such good pals.”

But again she rocked her shoulder impatiently and turned away from him.

“What’s the matter now?” he asked blankly.

“You!” she said sorely. “If you keep insisting that I *oughtn’t* to love you, how am I going to tell you that I *do*?”

Weir burst into surprised laughter. “You do?”

“Of course I do! Anybody but you could see it!”

“What are you quarrelling about, then?”

“I’m not quarrelling. I’m a little frightened.” Suddenly she turned to him warmly. “Oh, Weir, this is the real thing. Because I know you, I trust you. This is grown-up love. That’s why I’m so ashamed of the other.”

“Leila! Forget the other!” he cried, seizing her in his arms.

She struggled with a will. “No, no, Weir! Not here! Not out in the open. There are people looking . . .”

He hung on to her, laughing. “What of it? What could be more suitable? Look at the birds? It’s nesting time in Newcastle! Kiss me instantly!”

THE END

What will you read next?

May we make some suggestions ☛

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

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[The end of *The New Made Grave* by Hulbert Footner]