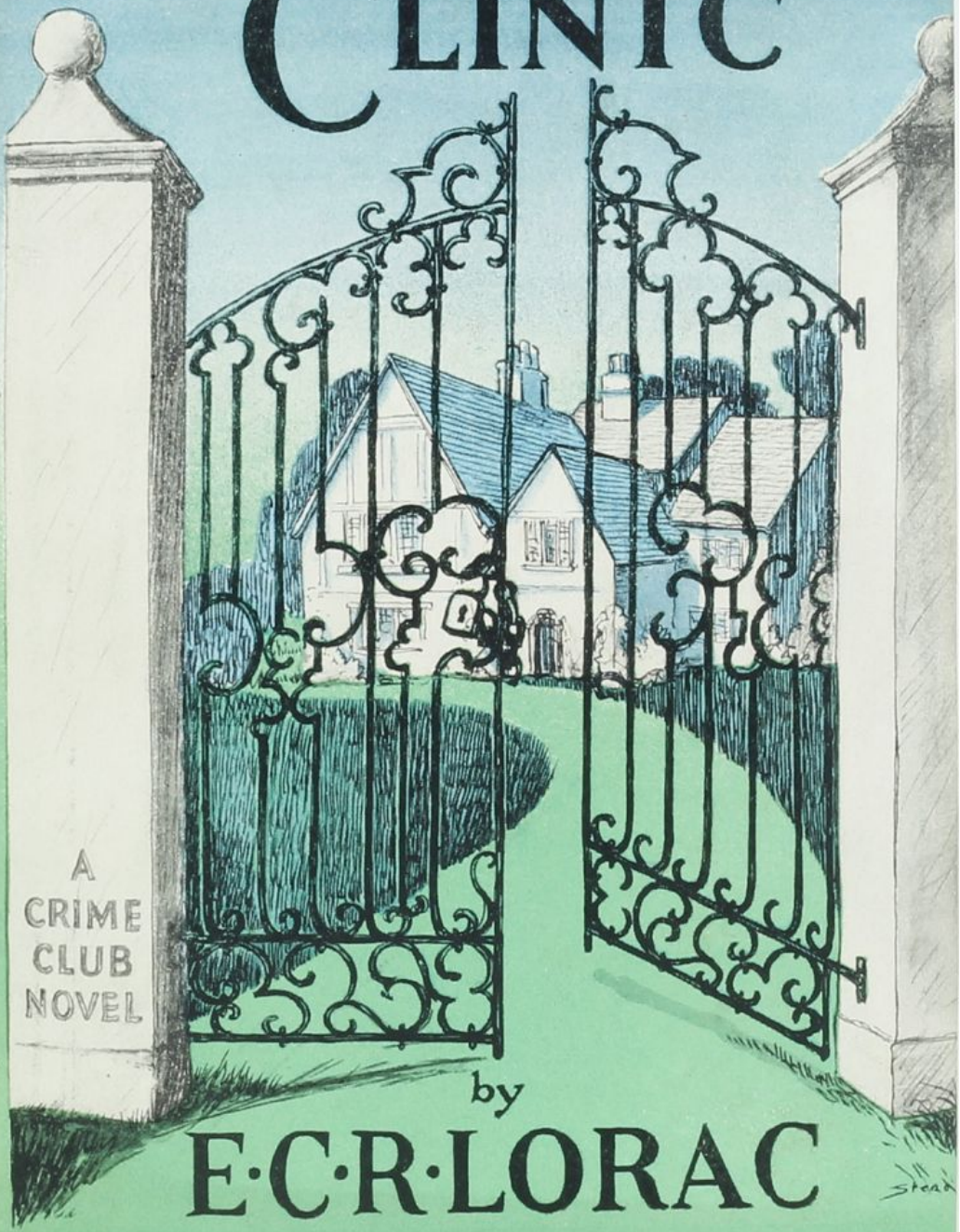
CASE IN THE CLINIC



A CRIME CLUB NOVEL

by

E·C·R·LORAC

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CASE IN THE CLINIC

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All characters in this story are fictitious. If the name of any real person has been used, it has been used inadvertently, and no reference to such person is intended.

CHAPTER ONE

"A most extraordinary thing, Falkland. He went down as though he'd been poleaxed. Never a cry or a struggle. Just dropped down dead."

Robert Falkland lighted another cigarette and put his paper down on the grass beside him. He was not particularly interested in Major Grendon's story. Grendon was a bore and most men avoided him—and his anecdotes—if they could, but on this occasion he was obviously determined to tell his story, and the story had at least the merit of being at first hand—not one of those intolerable "so the fella told me" variety.

Falkland and Grendon were fellow patients in a clinic run by Max Brook, the osteopath —"a damned quack" Grendon called the latter practitioner but, quack or not, Brook succeeded in curing or alleviating many disorders for which orthodox practitioners were unable to find a remedy.

Falkland stretched his game knee cautiously in the sunshine and turned to old Grendon with a courteous answer. Bore he might be, but Grendon was over seventy, and frail at that, and it must have shaken him up a bit to see a fellow-being pass out so suddenly under his very eyes.

"It must have been a shock for you," replied Falkland. "Heart failure, I suppose. Not a bad way of passing out, Grendon. He'd have known nothing about it. Hope I'm as lucky when my turn comes."

"Umps. All nice and easy to be philosophic about it," rumbled Grendon. "You're a young 'un still, Falkland. Fifty, you say? What's that? At fifty I was still on the active list. When you're a bit nearer the other world you won't be quite so enthusiastic. Heart failure, you say? Well, maybe. Most deaths are due to heart failure in the ultimate resort—but this particular case of heart failure, well, it struck me as odd. Damned odd. Did you ever meet poor Anderby?"

"Yes. I just met him, but only very casually. I was strolling on the links one day and I happened to talk to him. He was a keen botanist, and he was intent on grubbing up some of those little creeping plants which grow in the sand by the bunkers. Nice old chap. About seventy, wasn't he? He was vicar of Oasthampstead at one time, he told me. Gave up on account of his health."

"That's right. He had a breakdown through overwork. Nerves. Not heart. He'd recently married again. Perhaps he told you. Never could talk to anyone for five minutes without bringing in his dear wife."

"Married again at seventy, did he? Bold man. I didn't know the marriage was a recent one, though I saw him with his wife when they were out in a car. A pleasant-looking gray-haired woman."

" 'Dear Emma,' " grunted Grendon. "Very pleasant looking. Yes."

He hitched his chair a little closer to Falkland's, and glanced around to make certain that he had no other auditors before he continued in a lower voice.

"Personally I consider there's something a spot queer about dear Emma. As it happens I'd met her before. She once lived at Oasthampstead. A cousin of mine's got a place there, an ex-major of Pathans—know it at all? Not far from here. Nice spot."

"Oasthampstead? I just know it in passing," replied Falkland, wondering if the time had come when he could, with decency, pick up his *Times* and return to his crossword, but Grendon hurried on.

" 'Dear Emma,'—this Mrs. Anderby—lived in Oasthampstead some years ago, before she married Anderby. She was a nurse, you know. As a younger woman she practised midwifery, but as she grew older she gave that up and retired, more or less. She used to do odd nursing jobs—'obliging' so to speak, for she'd had a general hospital training as well as that of midwife."

Falkland yawned—and didn't bother to conceal it. Any interest he had felt in Grendon's narrative had petered out by now. He picked up his paper and glanced at his watch, but Grendon went on persistently.

"One week when I was staying with Roger there was a lot of talk about the sudden death of an old doctor, a fellow named Chenner. Dr. William Chenner. Died in his sleep. The last person who saw him was Nurse Pewsey—she'd been nursing him through a bout of flu and pneumonia. Heart failure, of course. Always is heart failure. He was an old chap, and he'd had a bad bout of flu. Just faded out. He left a legacy to the nurse—known her for years. Nurse Pewsey became Mrs. Anderby two years later. Very much respected woman. People told Anderby he was lucky to get her. Comfort to him, and all that. He's dead now. Heart failure, of course. Always is."

Grendon's rumbling voice ceased and Falkland looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"Look here, you know, I should be rather careful whom I repeated all that to. The inference is plain—and if uttered in the presence of witnesses, that inference is criminal slander."

Grendon snorted.

"I know all that—and there aren't any witnesses. Took care of that before I started talking—and I didn't draw any inference. Left it to you. It's plain enough. Hits you in the face. Wonder how much Anderby's left her. These parsons are provident fellows. Come to think of it, she must have been left a spot earlier on by grateful patients because she'd retired in the main before the Chenner episode. Just nursed him to oblige. Dear Emma. Sweet woman. Pleasant looking, as you say."

Falkland laughed. He couldn't help it. Grendon's convictions on the subject of "dear Emma" were so very obvious, and his voice held such a wealth of disgust.

"Steady on," protested Falkland. "I think you're prejudging the case, and without any evidence at that. It'll be damned hard luck on Mrs. Anderby if many people take your view of the matter. There's sure to be gossip, and a woman is defenceless against the insidious suggestions you're making. It isn't as though you'd a grain of evidence——"

"Not so sure," retorted Grendon. "You listen to this. Nurse Pewsey sucked up to old Chenner, made him fond of her, silly old ass, and he put her down for a thousand in his will. That was just before he had flu. She nursed him through that. Who keeps the temperature chart and respirations and what nots? The nurse, doesn't she? Temperature, 103 last night. Pulse, 130, maybe. 'Normal this morning?' 'Oh, yes, doctor, but his temperature always goes up at night and his pulse is *very* erratic.' Doctor signs the certificate cheerfully. Heart failure, of course. Old chap, arteries hardening and all that. Just died in his sleep. Dozens of 'em do. Inquest? Rubbish! Natural death. Might have happened any minute. Wreaths and obituary notices. Money for jam! Tell me it was difficult, when the woman's a qualified nurse? Difficult, my eye!"

"Yes. I see what you mean," replied Falkland soberly, though inwardly he was still disposed to chuckle at Grendon's rash assumptions. (How the old chap did dislike 'dear Emma'!) "That's all very well, as a hypothetical case, but this business about Mr. Anderby's a very different matter. You say he fell down and died while he was hosing the garden? You can't suggest any indications of foul play there. Say if you tell me about it again, in detail this time, and let's get it quite clear."

"Delighted," grunted Grendon. "Just what I've been wanting to do ever since it happened, but people won't listen. Just say 'Indeed, very sad—can you tell me a synonym for outrageous in ten letters,' and go back to their damned crosswords."

He settled himself more comfortably in his chair and began his discourse. "You've heard of Lee Gordon? He's the chap who's taken a tenancy of White Gables, Ingleby's place, down at the end of the common, on the way to No Man's Land. White Gables has a fine garden. Very fine. When Ingleby let it he made a point of having the garden kept up properly, and Lee Gordon's very keen on gardens, for all that he's a Yankee—or if he isn't a Yank, he's been over there for so many years that he sounds like one. Wealthy chap, of course, simply rolling. Believe he's related to young Dowerby, who's just come into the Merstham Bois estate—Trant's place in the Midlands——"

"Quite—but about the Reverend Anderby," put in Falkland, and Grendon went on—

"All right, all right—I'm coming to it. Want you to get a line on the personnel and so forth. The Anderbys have been living here in Penharden for a couple of months—they've been looking for a house, and 'dear Emma' was very particular. As soon as Lee Gordon settled in White Gables, Mrs. Anderby contrived to make his acquaintance. Said her husband doted on gardens——"

"So he does—or did," put in Falkland reasonably. "He mentioned the White Gables gardens to me—azaleas and rhododendrons, or something in the shrubbery line. Amazing he said it was."

"So it is. Never saw such a sight in my life as those azaleas. Got Kew beaten hollow. However, to get on with the story. Mrs. Anderby trotted her husband round to see Lee Gordon and the old parson was in his element. Knew a lot about gardens—much more than Lee Gordon does. Anyway, Lee Gordon liked Anderby and was glad to have him about and ask his advice. Anderby took to doing a bit of work in the greenhouses—seedlings or cuttings, or some rot of that kind. Can't stand gardening myself. 'Dear Emma' always went to White Gables when her husband went. Never let the poor old chap out of her sight. Told people his heart was a bit shaky and he needed watching. 'Pon my soul, Falkland, can you beat it?" Major Grendon's face was almost purple with excitement. "Think of the nerve the woman had got! Actually *told* people his heart was shaky and he might pop off any moment, or words to that effect!"

"Dash it all, she was quite right!" protested Falkland. "That's just what he did do—popped off!"

"You bet he did," replied Grendon darkly, "and no one was surprised. 'Ah, it might have happened any moment' they're all saying. Well, to get on with it. Lee Gordon asked me to lunch today. He's a hospitable chap. Told me the parson was coming, too, and 'dear Emma.' 'I like the old boy,' he confided to me, 'but his wife's a dame I don't take much stock in. Come and help me out. I've got some nice young Aylesbury ducklings just ready for the oven.' They were too. Prime. Never tasted better roast duck in my life, and peas from the garden, and apple sauce the Ritz couldn't touch. We all enjoyed that lunch. It's a pity because I shall never

relish roast duck again. After lunch we sat on the terrace and had coffee and a liqueur brandy —1870, a lovely vintage. Mrs. Anderby kept on saying her bit. 'Do you think you ought to have coffee, dear? Coffee brings on your palpitations.' Makes me just about fed-up, that woman does."

"But aren't you being a bit unreasonable?" protested Falkland. "According to your own showing, the poor old chap had eaten a hearty lunch, and duck is rich enough to give any dyspeptic palpitations——"

"Dyspeptic my eye!" grunted Grendon. "Nothing dyspeptic about the padre. He enjoyed his food. Did me good to see him tucking in, and no nonsense about it. Lovely duck it was, too. Where'd I got to? I know. We were on the terrace, just had coffee. Good French coffee, a bit bitter, with that suggestion of something akin to garlic you always get in continental coffee, and Lee Gordon was chatting about his seedlings. Zinnias, or something of the kind. Said they'd wilted and the whole lot'd die, and he was fed up about it because he prized those zinnias. The padre told him he'd let the ground get too dry, and though you mustn't water plants while the sun was on them, there was nothing to prevent you soaking the soil behind them and letting the water percolate through. Never heard such a song and dance as those two made over their blessed seedlings. The upshot was that Anderby went and got hold of the hose and started his watering, leaving Mrs. Anderby and Lee Gordon and me on the terrace. Lee Gordon says to me, 'Come and cast an eye over my peach house. There's a crop worth seeing.' He winked at me and excused himself to Mrs. Anderby. 'I know you like to keep an eye on your husband,' he said to her. 'Just see he doesn't overdo it. Grendon, I want your opinion about those peaches—and take another cigar while you're about it.' Very good cigars, too. 'The poor old chap thinks he's hosing the soil scientifically, when all he's doing is to douse the wood of those shrubs,' chuckled Lee Gordon, 'but he's not doing any harm, and I'd hate to spoil his fun.' We went along to the peach house—and mark you, we could see Anderby all the time. He wasn't a hundred yards away across the lawn. I'd just lighted my cigar and was stepping outside the glass house—it was damned hot in there—when I saw Anderby fall. Just as though he were shot. Amazing thing. 'Good God, he's had a fit!' yelled Lee Gordon—he was just inside the peach house, fiddling with the shades, and he could see Anderby through the door. We sprinted back to the lawn, but Mrs. Anderby got to him first. I knew he was dead. Felt it in my bones. Lee Gordon ran for brandy and shouted to me to phone the doctor—old Tracey. He'd been attending Anderby."

"What for?" asked Falkland, and Grendon glared.

"What for? Heart, of course! The palpitations his dear wife always made such a fuss about. He never had palpitations before he married. Told me so himself. I told him he was an old fool to go and marry again. He didn't like that. There you are—and there he is. Dead. Heart failure. 'Dear Emma's' being wonderful. She would. Rough luck on Lee Gordon, you know. He was quite upset. Kept on saying, 'It must have been the duck'."

"And he's quite probably right—a hearty meal of roast duck, coffee, liqueur brandy and cigar to follow, and then standing in the hot sun with a hose in his hand, after bending about and looking at seedlings—enough to account for a sudden seizure," replied Falkland. "At any rate, that's a much more likely explanation than your suspicions, Major. I can see that you dislike Mrs. Anderby, but I think you need to be very careful of what you say about her—very careful indeed."

Grendon nodded his bald head and blew out his cheeks mournfully. He was rather a grotesque-looking old man, having been stout when in his prime. Now he had lost weight and

his heavily jowled face hung in folds. He suffered from chronic sciatica and was staying at the clinic for treatment. Brook's manipulative treatment had done him a great deal of good, but Falkland suspected that an occasional lunch, such as Grendon had indulged in at Lee Gordon's, would not assist the treatment.

Grendon tugged at his fierce-looking little white moustache and nodded his head in melancholy agreement.

"Of course, you're right, Falkland. I see all that clearly enough, but it's a damnable position! How long's the woman going to be allowed to get away with it? That's what makes me see red! You say to me, 'Don't say anything. Don't make a stink. You've no evidence and it'll only land you in trouble.' True enough. Everyone else who's got any suspicions says the same—they did at Oasthampstead. Talk buzzed—but all in confidence. 'Don't mention it to anyone. Very unsafe. Slanderous and all that.' So it is, but I'll tell you this. By keeping quiet and being discreet we're putting a premium on murder."

Falkland moved uneasily in his place. Murder. The word had an extraordinarily unpleasant sound. Here in the garden the sun was shining; roses and lime trees in flower made the air fragrant: bees hummed among the blossoms and thrushes hopped about the daisied lawns. Murder. Falkland found himself repeating the word to himself.

"She's so damnably safe," went on Grendon's querulous voice. "Everyone's so occupied in sympathizing with her and saying she's wonderful that they don't begin to think. The doctor, old Tracey—he's an old fool. Past his work. What did he do? Signed the certificate and bleated a few technical terms about valves and lesions and long-established thingummys. Did he investigate? Did he do a blasted thing except take it for granted? Heart failure—like old Chenner. Covers a multitude of omissions, does heart failure. You see, the woman *knows* she's safe. No question of post mortems, no awkward inquiries. She's cute enough to have her subject vetted before she brings off her *coup*. Chooses an old doctor and bleats at him about the patient's heart symptoms, and just gets away with it—and mops up the legacy. I tell you, Falkland," and here Major Grendon leant forward and wagged a finger in his earnestness, "the damned woman made eyes at me and began to sympathize over my symptoms and offer me professional advice. What do you bet she's looking round for another subject? By gad, sir, it makes my blood boil. Don't say anything. Slander . . . yes, yes. Let her get away with it."

"Well, well!" Falkland moved uneasily in his chair. Grendon was so emphatic that he had succeeded in making an impression even on Falkland's cool, balanced mind. Moreover, the situation was interesting. *Could* there be anything in it, he wondered?

"Look here, Grendon. You're making out a case based almost entirely on motive——"

"Motive, opportunity, means," growled Grendon. "That's the police triad. Motive—you've passed that. Opportunity—lots of it, in both cases. Means. That's the question."

"Quite. Take this case alone—Anderby's death. On your own showing, he was perfectly fit during lunch. He enjoyed his meal and seemed perfectly well after it. No symptoms of nausea, or giddiness, or pain, or any of the usual accompaniments of poisoning. I take it it's poison you're suggesting in this case?"

"Umps . . . well, I suppose so."

"Very good. You say Anderby left the terrace while you and Lee Gordon were still sitting there with Mrs. Anderby. He went onto the lawn, examined the seedlings, picked up the hose and stayed on the lawn until he dropped dead. As you described it he went down as though he were shot, without a cry, without a struggle. Was Mrs. Anderby near him at the time? You say you had him in view all the time you were in the peach house."

"No, she wasn't near him. She was on the terrace. She ran when he fell—she reached him first and, as I told you, Lee Gordon and I rushed into the house for brandy, and to phone for a doctor. We left her with him."

"Very good. You also said that you were certain he was dead when you saw him on the ground. Now examine the possibilities. There is no known poison—so far as I am aware—which kills in the manner you have described, without preliminary symptoms. The cyanides are the swiftest known poisons in their action, and with cyanides you get convulsions and some struggle before death, also some frothing at the mouth, and corrosion of the lips and tongue——"

"Here, damn it—I don't fancy all these pathological details," grumbled Grendon, who had turned pasty coloured as Falkland enumerated symptoms.

"Oh, don't you? You're ready enough to shout 'murder,' Grendon. You've got to be ready to think out the consequences of your suggestion," retorted Falkland crisply. "As I see it, no poison on earth would have acted in quite the way you suggested. A man will fall dead, as you described, if he's shot through the heart or the brain—but shooting's obviously ruled out. Stabbing through the heart causes instantaneous death—but you say no one was near at hand to stab him, and however neatly it's done, with a bodkin or skewer or what not, stabbing causes hemorrhage. I don't think you've a leg to stand on in the case you've made out so far as Anderby's concerned."

Grendon sat with his shoulders hunched up, very thoughtful. "There are other means known to experts," he argued. "This stuff insulin. If you inject a full dose into a normal person ——"

"Yes, yes, I know. Death would result—but your subject wouldn't drop down dead as though he'd been shot. He'd pass into a coma and die slowly. In order to follow up your suspicions, you'd have to get an autopsy ordered and, with the evidence you've set out, no medical man would consider such a course justified. The evidence about Anderby's death points to one of two causes—what is known as a stroke, or lesion of the brain, or heart failure—and the latter is the more probable explanation."

Falkland had forgotten his crossword now: he was genuinely interested in the discussion, though he regarded it as mainly academic, and not likely to result in action of any kind.

"I do find a very definite interest in your 'motivization' theory," he went on. "You make out an exceedingly interesting hypothetical case. I believe that murders of the type you have suggested in Dr. Chenner's case may be not uncommon—and are totally unsuspected. An old man, weakened by fever, needs very little assistance in his exit from the world. A pillow held over his head, an injection of morphia—or insulin—and he will die very quietly. The average general practitioner signs a death certificate pretty casually. I've known cases where a doctor signed the certificate without even troubling to inspect the corpse—when death was expected, of course. But this business of Anderby's death—no, I can't see any room for foul play."

"Nevertheless, I'm willing to lay all I've got on the fact that Anderby was murdered," said Grendon obstinately. "I don't pretend to know how it was done, but done it was, under my very eyes, and 'dear Emma' is going to inherit all he had and live in clover—unless she's so puffed up by her success that she has another shot at the same game—and then perhaps someone will sit up and take notice."

Falkland chuckled. "If you believe that, Grendon, you'd better look out. Logically you ought to be the third—because you're the chap who is disposed to make trouble."

"Me? Good Gad! I tell you I shall give the woman a wide berth. Look here, Falkland. You're a sane, well-balanced fellow. Give me your advice for what it's worth. What ought I to do? Just leave it alone? I tell you I'm *convinced*, absolutely convinced, that woman's murdered two men for her own profit—and got away with it."

"My dear chap, you may be convinced, but with the evidence at your disposal you've no sort of case to put before the police. The only thing you can do—and I'm not pretending I think it an advisable course—is to write a clear detailed statement about both deaths, putting in no hearsay and no opinions—just a terse, objective statement. You can take it to a magistrate and swear to its accuracy. Then take it yourself to the chief constable of the county. See him, and ask him to regard your statement as confidential and made in the public interest. If he sees anything in it which he considers should be investigated, he'll investigate all right. By so acting, you'll safeguard yourself, and you'll also be doing what you conceive to be your civic duty. But *don't* go round uttering suspicions, and don't write anonymous letters to the police. If you've got anything to say, say it to the proper authorities and accept the onus of it."

Grendon nodded.

"Yes. I'd say that's good advice. I'm not much of a hand with a pen, but I'll do my best to make the statement you suggest. I could have another talk with Lee Gordon—he's a better memory than I have."

"Well then, be careful you don't let him see what's in your mind. The minute it begins to be said that you've made charges of murder against Mrs. Anderby you'll be in trouble—and you'll queer your pitch with the police. They're out to protect the public from slander and libel—and quite rightly so."

Grendon nodded like a mandarin.

"I follow you, Falkland. I follow you. Damned good advice. I'll take it. You mark my words—there's something in it."

CHAPTER TWO

After his long conversation with Major Grendon, Falkland did his best to dismiss the matter of "dear Emma" and her husband's death from his mind, but the story kept on recurring to him. He woke up in the night and thought about it; the topic came between him and his crossword puzzle and he could not settle to his letters after breakfast.

Robert Falkland was an architect with a good private practice: he was a very able man in his profession and, in addition, he had been a fine athlete in his time. He was still a first-class tennis player, and when he had slipped on the turf one day and damaged a ligament in his knee he had been exceedingly disgusted at being deprived of his game. The injury—like so many knee injuries—did not yield to treatment. After months of pain and discomfort, during which he had spent a large amount of money on doctoring, massage, violet rays and so forth, he still found himself totally incapacitated so far as active exercise was concerned, and it was in desperation that he had come to Max Brook's Clinic at Penharden. Brook was an osteopath, but like many other similar practitioners he was up against the orthodox medical profession, being unqualified in the legal sense. Whatever his position might be in the eyes of the orthodox, Falkland found Brook's ability most remarkable. Under the manipulation of the osteopath's big skilful hands, the damage to the complex ligaments of the knee was set right, and Falkland was released from the persistent pain which had been making an irritable man of him. In short, Max Brook was successful where the *élite* of Harley Street had been impotent and Falkland was duly grateful to him.

On the morning after Mr. Anderby's death, Falkland had his usual treatment with the osteopath. Brook was a thin, dark fellow, with an ugly sardonic face redeemed by fine dark eyes. That Brook was an astute observer of human nature—and a good psychologist too—Falkland was well aware. During his treatments the osteopath seldom talked, but he sometimes visited his patients in their rooms in the evenings, and Falkland, himself an unusually intelligent and well-informed man, always enjoyed talking to Brook, even when he disagreed with him.

On the morning in question, Brook's treatment was very brief. He examined the knee carefully and said at length,

"Well, your bit of trouble's over. You need to take things easy for a bit and exercise in moderation—walk a bit every day, working up to a decent tramp in a fortnight's time. The knee is sound again. It'll be tender for a bit, but you needn't anticipate any further trouble. You should be able to do what you like in a month's time, giving yourself a chance to get fit by degrees."

"That's good news. I'm grateful, Brook. I was getting disheartened over the damned thing before I came to you. You said in the first case it'd take a month to get it right. I've been here three weeks. It seems to me it'd be sensible if I stayed on here for another week to make sure the trouble's cleared up."

"As you will. Now you can get about a bit, you'll find the country round here quite pleasant for walking in a mild way. I'm afraid you haven't had a very exhilarating set of fellow patients. Mostly antiques. Sometimes we have a quite varied menagerie here."

"Yes. I can well believe it—not that I've been bored. I can do with a bit of my own company occasionally. Incidentally, I was having a good chin-wag with old Grendon

yesterday—and found him more interesting than I expected to."

"Ah! He was probably discoursing on an interesting topic. Any man who believes he has spotted a murder is intensely interesting to his fellow beings."

Brook's voice was dry and a little sardonic, and Falkland chuckled.

"Quite true. Murder is a very absorbing theme——"

"It is—particularly when you have been suspected of committing it," replied Brook, still more dryly, and Falkland was a little nonplussed. Curiosity got the better of his diffidence and he asked quite coolly,

"Has that ever happened to you?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact it has. The whole business was excessively stupid. If I wanted to murder anyone I have skill enough to do so in such a manner that it would defy detection. However, the average English policeman does not study psychology, and facts can be very misleading. If it is of interest to you, I might add that the suspicions were definitely proved to be without foundation—but the experience was an interesting one."

"I'm quite sure it was," agreed Falkland. "Incidentally, don't you think old Grendon will be making trouble for himself if he airs his opinions too freely just now?"

"Undoubtedly—but I think he has sense enough to choose his confidants with some degree of discretion. Actually he did not confide in me—but I gathered the trend easily enough. He's at the transparent age."

"What was your own opinion of his notion?" inquired Falkland. "You heard the facts about Anderby's death, I take it?"

"Yes." The osteopath shrugged his shoulders and seemed indisposed to make any further comment. He took a few steps up and down the room and then turned to Falkland and said,

"As you know, if the medical profession finds a chance to get its knife into me it won't be slow to avail itself of the opportunity. It's common sense for me to avoid providing that opportunity. I'm not a medical practitioner and I don't treat medically; moreover my opinion on medical matters is not that of an expert. I don't mind giving you an opinion in confidence, provided you don't quote me. Mr. Anderby consulted me shortly after he came here. He was slightly arthritic. I gathered that his wife dissuaded him from coming to me for further treatment. In common with the majority of trained nurses she trusts the medical practitioner and distrusts the osteopath. In examining Mr. Anderby I had an opportunity to assess his physical state. In my judgment he had no disease of the heart. I can see no reason why he should have dropped dead of heart failure."

Brook spoke abruptly, in staccato phrases, and Falkland was oddly impressed. He had found Brook reliable and honest, and he had a high notion of his ability.

"Oh, Lord!" said Falkland. "I wish now I hadn't asked you; I've been trying to dismiss the whole story as moonshine—something Grendon invented because he disliked Mrs. Anderby to an unreasonable extent."

"I take it the matter is only of academic interest to you, so to speak," said Brook. "That is to say, you have no particular interest in the persons involved? That being so, the 'academic' problem is of interest. It involves the possibility of 'murder by confidence' so to speak. It often occurs to me that such a proceeding is less uncommon than most of us choose to think. If I were not fully occupied with my own job I should be quite interested in studying this particular human problem—because I believe it to be a problem. I'm not so much interested in the ethical side of it as the manipulative, if you follow me. Not that I'm proposing to put my

own finger in the pie. I'm not. A qualified medical man has given his opinion, and that's that. The case is closed—without becoming a case at all."

"Good Lord! I'm awfully interested in what you say," said Falkland, but Brook gave that rather impatient shrug of his shoulders.

"I've said a little more already than discretion should have allowed," he said. "However, I'm pretty certain you won't quote me. If you want to ponder over the matter as a possible example of the failure of orthodoxy to achieve its own ends, the data provided make a very pretty little problem—on purely academic lines."

He smiled, his ugly face becoming suddenly pleasant as his eyes lit up. "You had a long talk with Grendon. Think it out, while you're taking a bit of exercise on the common. If ever you choose to write up the result of your cogitations I shall be interested to see your notes and to know if you've hit on the same points which interested me"—and with that, he left Falkland alone.

Shortly after Brook had left him, Falkland was told that a visitor had called to see him, and he went down to the reception room to find a cousin awaiting him, a married woman of his own age, named Elsa Barry.

"Hallo, Robert! It's good to see you! How's the knee?"

"Better. Definitely better, thank God!" replied Falkland. "If ever you damage a knee or an ankle or any other bony portion of your anatomy, give Harley Street a miss and come to Brook. He's a marvel. It's good of you to come over, Elsa. How's Derick?"

"Pretty fit. Developing an underwaist and a bit worried about it, but not enough to keep to a diet. I'm glad your knee's better, Robert. It did seem such rough luck! This seems rather a pleasant place."

"It is, very pleasant indeed. Come into the garden; it's too good a day to stay indoors. Have some coffee. You get good coffee here—a very rare phenomenon. I'll just order some."

A moment later they walked out into the sunny garden. The house was a modern one and the garden but recently established. There were some good rose beds and flourishing herbaceous borders, but the charm of the garden lay in the fine trees which bordered it. Sweet chestnut and horse chestnut, oak and elm, all fine old trees, had been planted around an old farmhouse which lay to the north of Brook's property, and their shade was a delight on hot summer days.

Falkland and his cousin settled down in long chairs, and coffee was brought to them by a white-coated man servant. Mrs. Barry, duly enjoying the excellent coffee, chattered on about her own family and Robert Falkland's friends, and he listened lazily, putting in an occasional inquiry, until Elsa Barry said suddenly,

"I was so sorry to hear about poor Mrs. Anderby's loss. It's really tragic for her. She was so devoted to him. I suppose you remember her?"

"I?" Falkland was taken aback. "No. I never knew her. I heard about Mr. Anderby's death, but I barely knew him."

"Oh, Robert, of course you knew her. Nurse Pewsey. She nursed Aunt Mary. She was so good to her, she used to come in morning and evening for a long time to help her, and then, when the poor old aunt got pneumonia, Nurse Pewsey got her through it. She nursed her devotedly, and I know it was a real blow to nurse when auntie died so suddenly. Her heart gave out at last and she died in her sleep."

"Good Lord! I'd forgotten . . ." Falkland spoke abstractedly, as well he might, for his head was whirling.

"I never knew her name, Elsa. She was just 'Nurse.' A woman in a cap and apron. One doesn't notice . . . Nurse Pewsey! Good Lord!"

"Yes. Isn't it strange? Nurse lived at Oasthampstead, not far from here, and Auntie used to live there before she moved to Bedford. I lost sight of nurse for quite a long time. I was always so glad that Auntie left her that nice little legacy. Oh, Robert, you're spilling your coffee! My dear, what a mess!"

"Yes. Awful mess," groaned Falkland, as he mopped his gray flannels ruefully with his handkerchief. "Never mind, Elsa, the coffee doesn't matter. So *that* was Nurse Pewsey."

"Yes, my dear, the very same. She wrote and told me when she got married. Such a sweet letter! She was as thrilled as a young girl. Derick and I gave her some old silver spoons—she always loved nice things. It's so desolating to think of this happening. As a matter of fact I came over today to see her, as well as to see you. I know sympathy can't help very much in a loss like that, but I felt I had to come and see the poor dear, and just hold her hand."

"Very kind of you," murmured Falkland, and Mrs. Barry babbled on,

"I was really shocked when I heard about Mr. Anderby's death. Elinor James rang me up and told me about it. It was so appallingly sudden. Poor nurse! When she wrote last she told me how carefully she was looking after her husband. I gathered he was rather frail, but she was so certain that his health would improve when he was properly looked after. Elinor tells me that his heart had been causing anxiety lately, and that he had been under a doctor. That's a blessing, at any rate. At least the poor dear's saved the misery of an inquest."

"Yes. Quite," said Falkland abstractedly, and then added, "Tell me a little more about Mrs. Anderby, Elsa. I don't really remember her."

"It was about eight years ago that she first nursed Aunt Emma—in Oasthampstead—that was. Nurse had given up her maternity work: she found it too heavy and her health wasn't good. She lived with a friend and took occasional cases. Then, when auntie moved to Bedford and was really too frail to look after herself, nurse took a room there and came in to help auntie morning and evening, and did some other occasional nursing as well. Her friend had died and left nurse her furniture, and she got on quite nicely. Later, when auntie had pneumonia nurse lived in the house for weeks. She pulled her round from that, but the poor dear's heart never recovered. She died in the April, you remember—you came to the funeral."

"Yes. I did—but I left immediately after. I didn't hear the will read."

"Oh, didn't you? I told you auntie left nurse two hundred pounds and, heaven knows, she deserved it. Afterwards nurse moved elsewhere, where all her friends were, and I lost sight of her for awhile. The next thing I heard was about her marriage. Poor dear! She's really had a very sad life!"

"Yes," murmured Falkland. "It does seem to be rather a record of sudden deaths."

Mrs. Barry looked rather hurt. "Robert, don't sound so cynical! We all have to get old sometime—and when my time comes, I only hope I shall have somebody kind and patient and understanding to help me through. All nurses must come into contact with death a great deal more than people like ourselves. I think Nurse Pewsey has done an immense amount of real Christian work because she has always been ready to take on the sad, rather thankless, hopeless cases of old people who have no chance of making a real recovery. It takes far more real charity to go on being patient and kind with an old querulous invalid than it does to nurse a young attractive one, who will get quite better and give the nurse a chance of feeling superior."

"Yes. I suppose you're right," replied Falkland.

Mrs. Barry shortly took her leave—with another adjuration to her cousin not to become a prey to cynicism, and Falkland himself went for a walk, strolling thoughtfully along the pleasant shady roads.

He did not notice particularly what route he took, and he could not be certain whether it were chance or subconscious intent which led him into that branch of the Oasthampstead road in which White Gables was situated—the house in whose garden Mr. Anderby had fallen dead. He walked slowly along a fine hedge of clipped holly—a substantial barrier, six feet high and four wide, of impenetrable prickly growth, and came at last to the tall gateposts and wrought-iron gate which gave onto the drive. Here Falkland stood staring towards the house, which he could just see between the trees, feeling rather ashamed of himself. On the lawn, not very far away, old Mr. Anderby had fallen dead in full view of his wife and he, Robert Falkland, was standing staring, as any Cockney errand boy might stare at the scene of a crime. He was just about to turn away when a voice spoke just behind him.

"Can I help you, sir? You seem mightily interested in my drive."

Falkland turned quickly to face the speaker: this voice with the transatlantic accent must be that of Mr. Lee Gordon, the tenant of White Gables—and he had surprised Falkland in the act of staring up a private drive in no well-bred way. The architect felt bound to justify himself, or at least reestablish his own dignity.

"Mr. Lee Gordon? I apologize for staring, but someone was talking to me about this garden recently and told me that there was a notable collection of azaleas and rhododendrons. I believe that the owner—Mr. Ingleby, isn't it?—did not discourage visits from those interested in gardens."

"There's a swell collection of shrubs here, sir, and some fine roses and bedding plants. If you'd care to walk round, do so. I'm no sort of expert at your English gardens, but I'm genuinely interested. You're a gardener yourself?"

"I've designed the layout of some landscape gardens—my name's Falkland, by the way. I'm very much indebted to you for your courtesy in giving me the opportunity of seeing this garden."

"Delighted," returned the other cheerfully. "If it's azaleas and such like you're interested in, I'm afraid you've left it too late to see them at their best. Three weeks ago they made a show I've never seen beaten, not for the size of the place."

He fell into step with Falkland as they turned up the drive. Falkland was a tall fellow, lean and well built, looking younger than his fifty years, for his dark hair was hardly touched with gray, his face healthily tanned. Lee Gordon was short, rotund and dapper. His skin was a healthy pink, his face round and unlined, and he had very blue eyes, bright and benevolent. Falkland put his age at about sixty and credited him with a contented disposition and considerable curiosity. The little man had a beaky face, with a prominent nose which had a comical habit of twitching. He was dressed in a light gray suit, well cut and well pressed, a wide gray tie with white spots, and he wore a Panama hat. When he lifted the latter to mop his brow he displayed a completely bald head which gave him the look of an elderly cherub, at once benevolent and inquisitive.

"Rum little bird, but amiable enough, and fundamentally cheerful," thought Falkland, as they walked between beautifully kept lawns towards the dignified Georgian house.

"What's your opinion of the house, sir?" inquired Lee Gordon, and Falkland replied appreciatively,

"A good example of a fine period. The porch and fanlight are beautiful designs, and those white Doric pillars rather unusual."

"I like it. I like it a lot," said the other happily. "I'm a Britisher by birth, but I've spent most of my life across the herring pond. That porch now, it looks homey to me. I've seen something like it in some of the early homesteads down in Virginia. You can't beat that classical touch. Something good about it. I'll show you the house later, if you'd care to see it. It's not my property, but I feel a sort of pride in it. It's just what I'd like for myself when I come to settle. The shrubberies are away to the south there. Still a few azaleas out—but the show's over for this year. It was a marvel, sir, a plum marvel!"

Even now, when most of the azaleas and rhododendrons had shed their blossoms, there was enough colour left to tell Falkland what the massed shrubs must have looked like at the zenith of their blossoming period. The azaleas lingered in patches of salmon and gold and rose and purest yellow, drifts of exquisite colour giving off their characteristic perfume in the hot sun. They were expertly arranged and banked, the walks between them cleverly designed to give the best chance of exhibiting the massed shrubs. Falkland knew enough about the layout of gardens to be able to express his enthusiasms intelligently, and Mr. Lee Gordon beamed benevolence. He led his visitor from the shrubbery, through the rose garden—now a small paradise of colour and perfume—along a wide "blue border" gay with delphinium, anchusa, linum and catmint, to the back of the house. Beyond another smaller shrubbery a path led direct from the lawns by the house to the walled kitchen garden: here Falkland could see the whitened panes of glass houses, and he said,

"Ah, you've got a lot of glass here. Very nice—but expensive to keep up—I expect you have the new electric heating."

"That's so—but I'd like you to see the peach house, sir. A fine crop, well set. I have a weakness for peaches."

Falkland followed the little man to the door of the peach house and then turned and glanced towards the house. Through the wide archway which led into the walled garden the full extent of lawn and bedding in front of the house was visible. The architect was startled by a voice at his side.

"Yes, sir. It was just there on those lawns. You see the small azaleas? It was in front of them I'd put the zinnias. I've rooted them all up. Gave me the hump somehow. Just there it was he fell. A very, very sad thing, sir. I'll never forget it. Never."

Falkland was distinctly taken aback and conscious that he gaped rather foolishly. His embarrassment was increased by the fact that, despite his melancholy tones, there was a distinct gleam of amusement in Mr. Lee Gordon's blue eyes. The latter continued in a solemn voice, which was yet contradicted by the humorous gleam in his eyes.

"Yes, sir. A *vurry* sad thing, but human nature being what it is I opine most of us take a melancholy interest in such tragedies. You, sir—Mr. Falkland, you'll have met my good friend, Major Grendon? Just so. Just so."

Falkland gave a shamefaced chuckle. He had been properly bowled out—and he realized it. He felt that frankness was his only possible policy.

"Yes, Mr. Lee Gordon. Major Grendon is a fellow patient of mine at Brook's clinic. He told me of Mr. Anderby's death, and I admit that I was very much interested——"

"Interested in friend Grendon's deductions, I take it, sir?"

Falkland hesitated. "Well, so far as his deductions were concerned, I failed to see that he had a leg to stand on."

"That so?" The rubicund little man tilted his head back thoughtfully and looked up at the tall Falkland.

"See here, sir, I'd prize *your* opinion on this matter. It's a very dullicate business and I'd hate to be barking up the wrong tree. Now just consider our location. We stand here as the major and I stood yesterday. You can figure it all out. The good lady, she sat on the terrace there, just where that basket chair is now. The reverend gentleman was on the lawn, where the sprinkler is standing. That's the exact spot. He stood with his back to us, facing that flower bed there. I rooted up those darned flowers he was so keen on. Gave me the proper hump to see 'em. Well, there he was—you can picture him, a dark figure in the sunshine, with his white head all shining. One second he was standing there—and then he crumpled at the knees and went down. A tragedy, sir. Yes. Now, see here. You come into the house with me and honour me by taking a highball while we talk this over. I'd be grateful to have your opinion. You come right in."

Putting his Panama hat firmly on his head again, and flourishing his bandanna handkerchief, the little man trotted ahead, leading the way to the terrace, and Falkland followed him, half amused, half embarrassed. They crossed the lawns and Falkland stopped by the sprinkler. It was here that Mr. Anderby had stood. To the right of the house was a bed where some azaleas made a background for some bedding, but the soil in front of them was now bare, neatly raked over. Falkland was long-sighted. He noticed a label in front of the azaleas—a metal rectangle on a peg, such as is used in gardens like Kew for identifying notable trees, and he observed,

"Your labels have gone astray, Mr. Lee Gordon. That one there mentions Cupressus. It's got in the wrong place."

"That so? The head gardener's on holiday. Reckon my makeshift fellow's been making hay with the labels. That'll never do. You put it right for me. Cupressus. That's a tree, isn't it? Cypress, in plain English."

"Yes. That's it. Probably that big conifer over there."

"That so? Well, never mind about that now. Labels don't worry me any, and the sun's hot. Come along inside and have a long drink."

Falkland followed the hospitable little man up onto the terrace, and again he turned and looked across the lawns to the arch of the walled garden and the entrance to the peach house. Again Lee Gordon read his thoughts.

"Yes, she could see us all the time and knew we could see her. No mistake about that."

Falkland walked after him into the cool dimness of a long drawing room. His trained architect's sense applauded the proportions of the fine room and of its furnishing. This was the home of a man who understood period furniture, and who had the money to gratify his taste.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Lee Gordon. "Just the sort of home I fancy when I settle down. A highball, sir? I enjoy the quality of the whisky this side after some of the stuff I've put down in prohibitionist States. Your very good health, sir!"

He took a long draught of his drink and then said, "Now you just tell me right away what you think of the major's notion. He's confided in you, I opine—and I'd say he couldn't have chosen a better man to spill the beans to. I'm quick at summing folks up, and I soon know if I'd trust a man with my own little notions."

Falkland studied the shrewd, round face, and then said,

"Well—I don't know how much Major Grendon told you of what was in his mind."

Lee Gordon stroked his well-shaved cheeks thoughtfully.

“I’d say he told me just what he thought—that that sanctified dame had worked out a scheme for reinforcing the old gentleman’s cardiac troubles. Not to put too fine a point on it, that she murdered him.”

“All I can say is that I don’t see how she could have done it,” replied Falkland, and he reiterated the arguments he had already set forth to Major Grendon himself.

Lee Gordon nodded like an amiable mandarin.

“That’s what I’ve been saying to myself, by and large. I don’t see how she worked it, but there’s this: Years gone by I had friends in Oasthampstead—I was staying there a year or so back—and I’ve been to look them up. They said a thing or two about Mrs. Anderby. Said it pretty plain. Seems she’s a bit of a genius for inheriting, if you take me.”

“So I gathered,” replied Falkland dryly. “While I’m willing to admit that a trained nurse could evolve a useful technique for helping bedridden patients to a better world than this, I don’t see how anybody could have evolved a scheme for yesterday’s fatality.”

“Neither do I, neither do I!” agreed Lee Gordon—“but all the same, I’ve a hunch that’s what was done. Not that we shall ever be able to prove it. In this country you can’t go round uttering aspersions about respectable widows—and I’m not fool enough to start.”

Falkland became very thoughtful.

“It’s a curious thing,” he said. “You and Grendon—and myself as an outsider, so to speak, feel very strong suspicions of foul play—and that not in one instance only—and yet the three of us can’t suggest anything on which to base our suspicions. The only thing I can do is to suggest to you what I did to Grendon—that you should put down on paper a statement of your ideas and submit that statement to the authorities. Write down every detail which either of you noticed yesterday, omitting nothing——”

“Gee! That sure seems a dangerous course to me,” protested the other. “Isn’t there a law of libel in this country?”

“Of course there is, but the police are willing to consider a statement made to them without prejudice in the public interest, provided you don’t spread rumours elsewhere.”

“And Grendon’s doing what you suggest?”

“Yes. I think he’s taking a lot of trouble to get it into shape.”

“Then, by jag, I won’t be beaten by the major!” declared Lee Gordon. “I’ll do the same and we’ll compare notes. When we’ve got both statements into shape we’ll ask your advice about submitting them to some police wallah. That’s a fine notion of yours!”

“At least it’s wiser than talking,” replied Falkland—and Lee Gordon nodded over his highball.

“It sure is,” he said affably.

CHAPTER THREE

The following morning, Friday, Falkland set out in his car for Oasthampstead. He had given up pretending that the matter of Mr. Anderby's death was of no interest to him, and that the possibility of "Nurse Pewsey's" being involved was ridiculous.

Curiously enough, Elsa Barry's information about the legacy left to her nurse by Aunt Mary Falkland had stiffened Robert's suspicion of the widow in a perhaps unjustifiable way. If Nurse Pewsey had been operating at the expense of his family, so to speak, it was time somebody "did something." As to what he intended to do, he was a bit vague. "Collect further data," he said to himself.

There were quite a number of cases to consider. First, the anonymous friend of nurse's. (Query, did she die of heart failure?) Next on the list (so far as Falkland knew) came Aunt Mary, who had left nurse a mere £200, then Dr. William Chenner, who had provided a larger legacy, finally Mr. Anderby, who had probably left "money for jam," to use Major Grendon's phrase.

At one stage on his drive, Falkland pulled up by the roadside and told himself he was being an idiot. Given an elderly nurse, who specialized in cases of elderly patients, it was only natural to find in her record a number of deaths—and deaths from heart failure at that. Was he being an idiot—a meddlesome busybody and mischief-maker? Then he recollected Brook's words. "I see no reason why he should have dropped dead of heart failure." The osteopath was not given to careless statements, and it seemed clear to Falkland that Brook suspected foul play. He let in his clutch and drove on. After all, a few cautious inquiries could not do any harm.

After racking his brains, Falkland had remembered the name of one of Aunt Mary's friends who had lived in Oasthampstead. This was a Mrs. Dellaton, whom Falkland had met once or twice in his youth. She was a woman of about his own age and had married a solicitor who had practised in Bedford. The telephone book had supplied the information that Mrs. Dellaton still lived in Oasthampstead, and Falkland had decided to renew his acquaintance with her.

Oasthampstead was not much larger than a village, though various large modern houses had been built on the outskirts; a stream with a comely old bridge crossed the main street, and a fine old church added to the charm of the village. Falkland managed to stop a postman and ask him the way to Mrs. Dellaton's house. He also contrived to learn that the lady was now a widow—a fact which did not displease him, as he knew the cautiousness of a legal mind. It would be easier to talk to Mrs. Dellaton without a husband in the offing, wondering what was the reason of the inquiries.

"Glebelands," the house in which Mrs. Dellaton lived, was a pleasant building of warm hued brick. At first sight it looked genuine Tudor for the architect had used old bricks and old tiles—even the beams were old, so that the roof-tree sagged irregularly in a most convincing manner. A well-kept garden surrounded it, and the front door (a good old door of weather-beaten oak) was opened by a charmingly uniformed parlour maid. The room into which Falkland was shown was a pretty, sunshiny drawing room, whose glazed chintz, old china and bowls of roses made a most attractive picture. When Mrs. Dellaton entered the room, Falkland remembered her well enough to sound convincingly natural in his greeting.

"I'm afraid it's almost too much to expect you to remember me after all these years, Mrs. Dellaton," he began, but she replied,

"Of course I remember you. You're old Mary Falkland's nephew. My dear man, how many years ago is it?—but don't answer that. I've given up enumerating the years long ago. How nice to see you again! Come and sit down and tell me how it happens that you're in Oasthampstead."

Falkland sat down, meditating that he was in luck. Mrs. Dellaton was an alert, lively looking, well-preserved woman, with a good figure and youthful carriage. At first glance she looked years younger than her age, and Falkland was shrewd enough to know that a modish widow of fifty was not likely to be averse from renewing acquaintance with a man of his own type. Sitting down on the roomy chesterfield, he talked easily enough, telling her about the accident to his knee, and his good fortune in discovering Brook's skill to set him right. Mrs. Dellaton nodded.

"Oh, yes. He's very clever. Too clever, some people say. Now while you're here, do stay to lunch. Pot-luck, of course, but I shall be delighted to have you if you'll stay."

Falkland was a well-bred fellow, and he felt a little guilty; his present errand seemed an abuse of hospitality.

"That's extraordinarily nice of you," he replied, "but honestly I didn't come with the intention of burdening you with an uninvited guest to lunch."

"Oh, nonsense," she retorted. "It's a genuine pleasure to see you. It isn't every day that a friend of my girlhood comes in. I should be really hurt if you refused to stay. Just have a cigarette while I go and put cook on her mettle."

A few minutes later Mrs. Dellaton reappeared, followed by the parlour maid, with a tray bearing a good variety of drinks, and Falkland found himself raising his glass to a smiling hostess, obviously pleased with her unexpected caller.

"Happy days," she said with a smile and half a sigh. "You bring back so many memories. Those were good days, nearly thirty years ago. How peaceful and prosperous the world was then. . . . Oh, dear. I do hate growing old."

Falkland would have made the inevitable and foolish rejoinder, but she cut him short.

"My dear man, don't bother. We both know exactly how old the other is. We've both worn well and I'm not disputing it. Incidentally, I've seen some of your work—Lord Hayes's place in Surrey, and that church at Wallby, and I was proud to think I'd known the architect. Now do tell me, what do you make of Max Brook—apart from his skill as an osteopath?"

"Brook? Oh, I like him. He's intelligent and well-informed and I've enjoyed talking to him."

"Some people loathe him. I'm told he can be quite the world's rudest when he likes—and I've always been a bit intrigued about him since I stayed in Belfort—you know, the spa in Derbyshire where one takes those ghastly waters for rheumatism. It was in Belfort that that story happened."

"Was there a story?" inquired Falkland, and she nodded vigorously.

"Goodness, yes. Didn't you know? A doctor was murdered there—a perfectly ghastly business. He was strangled in his own consulting room, without a sound being heard in the rest of the house. There's nothing indiscreet in my saying that Max Brook was suspected because the police actually detained him. Personally, I've always believed that Brook did it."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Falkland, and Mrs. Dellaton went on.

"Brook had had an awful row with the doctor—Glaxton was the latter's name; Brook had treated one of Glaxton's patients and the doctor was livid. You know how all the qualified men hate these osteopaths. Anyway Glaxton threatened to bring an action against Brook, and it was known that the two men had had a howling row in Brook's consulting rooms."

"Yet since Brook was only detained, and not arrested or charged, it was obvious that the police did not believe him guilty," rejoined Falkland, and Mrs. Dellaton replied airily,

"Oh, he proved an alibi. I always suspect an alibi. Any really clever man would organize a good convincing alibi before committing a murder."

Falkland laughed aloud; the airiness of his companion's statements had its humorous side, and she joined in his laughter quite good-humouredly.

"Jimmy—my husband—always said that I should end up in prison for making irresponsible accusations. I haven't been run in yet, although I don't think I've grown markedly more discreet with years. Max Brook was dismissed without a stain on his character, and the police arrested a drug addict and put him in Broadmoor, and everyone was satisfied. All the same, I've never wavered in my conviction that Brook really did the job—although I'm careful not to say so in a general way, because if Brook got to hear of it he'd bring an action as sure as God made little fishes."

"I'm quite sure he would," rejoined Falkland, "though incidentally he made no bones about telling me that he'd once been suspected of murder. I must get him to talk about it sometime. It'd be interesting." He paused for a moment, while Mrs. Dellaton watched him with bright, amused eyes, and then he went on,

"I saw Elsa Barry yesterday. Do you remember her by any chance?"

"Of course I do. You don't credit me with much of a memory for old friends. I always liked Elsa. She was a real good sort. How unkind of her not to come in and see me if she was in Oasthampstead."

"I think her time was limited. She'd got two calls to make, one on me, and one on Mrs. Anderby. I expect you've heard——"

"I should say I *did* hear. Poor old vicar! He was incumbent here in Oasthampstead, you know, for years. In fact, it was here that Nurse Pewsey originally met him. She was always given to good works—Waifs and Strays, and Infant Clinics, and Mothers' Meetings, and all the rest. She really worked very hard—though I admit in her case, virtue hasn't gone entirely unrewarded, as is so often the case."

Falkland allowed himself a chuckle. "It seems to me that there's a touch of cynicism in your estimate of Nurse Pewsey," he murmured, and Mrs. Dellaton laughed as she settled herself comfortably back in her deep armchair.

"One of the advantages of increasing years is that one can say what one likes, without caring a hoot what other people think of one," she replied. "My youth was spent in an anxious desire to please my amiable but ambitious parents. My best years were spent in a desire to please a cautious and reticent husband, myself straining after discretion as it were. Jimmy—God bless him—was one of the most cautious souls ever made. 'But you mustn't say so, my dear,' was his constant cry. Well, now I'm fifty. I'm independent and at times a bit lonely, but I've only myself to please. I was born a gossip. I'm going to lighten my old age by gossiping as much as I like."

"You raise my hopes sky-high," replied Falkland blithely. "I also am a gossip. I have an unregenerate delight in probing the weaknesses of my neighbours and hearing them pointed out. Indulge your foible. I am the perfect listener."

"Really, you know, this sounds almost too good to be true," murmured Mrs. Dellaton. "Where were we before we started these dissertations on character?"

She smiled across at Falkland. "Nurse Pewsey," she murmured. "Now surely you don't want to gossip about Nurse Pewsey?"

Falkland studied her face for a moment before replying, and then he fenced a little, saying,

"I couldn't help being interested when Elsa Barry reminded me that I had once known Nurse Pewsey when she was nursing Aunt Mary. I had barely met Mr. Anderby, though one of my fellow patients at the clinic told me about his death. Major Grendon happened to be lunching at White Gables with the Anderby's, and he was considerably upset, as you may imagine, being quite an old buffer himself. It was rather a nasty shock for him."

"Of course, it must have been," replied Mrs. Dellaton, "but do tell me. What was his opinion about it?"

Again Falkland fenced. "I don't think there was any room for two opinions," he answered. "Mr. Anderby fell dead from heart failure. He was in the middle of the lawn when he fell and, incidentally, he had been perfectly well previously."

"Perfectly well? I was told that he had had a lot of heart trouble recently."

"Oh, yes, quite. *What* I meant was he had seemed quite well at lunch—no preliminary symptoms immediately before his death."

Mrs. Dellaton took a cigarette, and Falkland got up and lighted it for her. She smoked a moment or two in silence, then challenged him with a glance.

"And so what?" she inquired, and Falkland laughed a little.

"Well—and so the one-time Nurse Pewsey is presumably left in comfortable security—and Mrs. Anderby loses a husband with quite tragic suddenness."

"Very nicely put." Mrs. Dellaton sat up and looked at Falkland pensively. "Do tell me, what are people saying in Penharden? Don't tell me they aren't saying anything—because I shan't believe it."

Falkland chuckled. "I'm not up in Penharden gossip because I don't know anyone in the place, outside the clinic: Elsa Barry said, 'Poor nurse. How dreadful for her'—and variations on the theme. Major Grendon, who disliked Mrs. Anderby rather unreasonably, was less sympathetic in his attitude, and Mr. Lee Gordon, the tenant of White Gables, is considerably put about."

"How discreet you are." Mrs. Dellaton studied him thoughtfully. "It's no use pretending that you're not interested because you have obviously discussed 'this sad fatality' at first hand with those who witnessed it. Come, Robert Falkland! Play fair. If I indulge my passion for gossip, I do expect a sporting return. If you insist on emulating the oyster, I shall fall back on the international situation."

"That'd be just too bad," replied Falkland. "If there's one thing I hate more than another, it's the international situation. I'll play fair, but I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. I have absolutely nothing sensational to report."

"That doesn't matter. Provided you've an open mind and don't just say, 'but it's very dangerous to make such allegations,' like my poor Jimmy, we shall get on beautifully. Now you listen to me. I've known Nurse Pewsey—or known of her—for years, and quite a lot of interesting things have happened in that period. When I first knew her, she was a maternity nurse, very competent, always booked-up, and a great success at her work generally. She was about thirty-five then, but an old thirty-five if you know what I mean. I believe there had been a bit of a romance, as is so often the case, but the man didn't come up to scratch, and I think

the experience left her rather embittered. She nursed Mrs. Copley when the Copley twins arrived, and I remember she unburdened her heart to me one day, saying how hard she worked, and how difficult it was for a nurse to make enough money to put by for her old age, and so forth. Then, a little later—about 1925, it'd have been, Mrs. Copley's mother got ill; there was a shortage of nurses, owing to a flu epidemic, and Mrs. Copley persuaded 'old Pewsey' to take the job on, and nurse looked after her 'right up to the end' as she put it. The old lady got very fond of nurse and left her £50, having made a codicil to her will shortly before she died."

"Cause of death being——?" murmured Falkland softly.

"Oh, heart failure, of course," replied Mrs. Dellaton. "After that I lost sight of Nurse Pewsey for a bit. I was told that she went abroad for a really good holiday on the proceeds of her legacy, and when she came back she decided to give up her maternity work, as she really wasn't strong enough for it any longer, and devote herself to general nursing—particularly among the aged, for whom she felt particular sympathy. She was with old Mrs. Gladman for a year—or perhaps longer—and she was left a really good legacy, but the will wasn't properly witnessed, and the family disputed it, and nurse only got £10 out of that. Then came your Aunt Mary—you know all about that. I remember Mr. Anderby was so much touched because nurse presented a banner to his church in memory of Miss Mary Falkland. She paid for it out of the legacy and the vicar said it was so noble of her. . . . Of course, I don't know all nurse's cases, but when Dr. Chenner died and left her £1,000 there was a lot of gossip. He died in his sleep—she had settled him for the night—he was getting stronger and no longer needed a night nurse, and he was found dead in the morning. . . . Heart failure, of course. When the will was read, one of the family, Roderick Chenner, a real irascible old customer, was really nasty about nurse's legacy and said he was going to dispute the will, but the other members of the family told him he ought to be ashamed of himself and he was persuaded to do nothing. All the same, there was a lot of talk—I know that Nurse Pewsey heard about it and went to Mr. Anderby and told a sorrowful story. He was so angry about it—he thought the world of her."

"You know, it's an amazing story," said Falkland. "It depends entirely which way you look at it. On the one hand, you can say, 'Here is a hard-working, good-hearted nurse wrapped up in her work, being a comfort to the old and helpless, and doing a great deal of tiresome irritating work out of sheer love of service'."

"Quite," responded Mrs. Dellaton. "You can also say, 'Here is a very disappointed woman, sick of hard work and the prospect of a hard-up old age, who sees that there is an opportunity of making money by just helping the aged a little faster along the inevitable road.' The story simply fascinates me because it's impossible to know which is the right interpretation. You see, Nurse Pewsey is one of those people whom you either like very much or dislike very much. There doesn't seem to be any happy medium. Personally, I couldn't stand her. She's one of those pious women whose conversation is all *clichés* and texts, like 'Count your blessings,' and 'the world is so full of a number of things,' and 'guidance is there for those who seek it. . . .' She once said that to me and I upped and said, 'One thing about you, nurse, you do practise what you preach.' She gave me the oddest look—I'd have given worlds to know what she was really thinking."

Falkland chuckled. "She might well have given you an odd look—if her 'guidance' led her along the path you suspect."

"Well, you may tell me that I'm a morbid, suspicious, malicious hag, but I can't see how anybody with a grain of worldly common sense could help seeing that there was something a

bit apropos in the manner of the deaths of Nurse Pewsey's patients. She was a good nurse, of course—knew her stuff, and all that. Curiously enough the elderly patients who took a dislike to her all got better. It was the doting ones who left the legacies who died."

At that moment the gong sounded and Mrs. Dellaton got up saying,

"Come and see what cook's contrived for us—and a truce to local crimes for the moment."

Falkland was given a very good lunch, with some excellent claret, and his hostess entertained him with cheerful chatter about their one-time acquaintances. It was not until they were having coffee, and the maid had left them, that she returned to the topic of Nurse Pewsey.

"You know, there *was* some official inquiry made when old Dr. Chenner died. Jimmy nearly bit my head off when I tried to talk about it. He was always horrified at what he called my indiscretions and he really frightened me into avoiding the subject at the time, but I was awfully intrigued about it. There was an old servant of Dr. Chenner's, named Ellen Jones. She'd been with him for years and she hated Nurse Pewsey, incidentally. She was jealous of her really, in the way old servants are jealous of trained nurses. Ellen told me that a gentleman connected with the police had called to see Dr. Chenner and asked Ellen a lot of questions about Nurse Pewsey. He had cautioned Ellen not to tell anybody about his questions, and I only got it out of her because she said to me, 'You'll see that there'll be something done about it. . . . She's not going to get off scot-free this time'."

"Do you think Ellen invented it?" inquired Falkland, but Mrs. Dellaton shook her head.

"No. I'm quite sure she didn't; her account was much too circumstantial. She wouldn't have had the wits to make it up."

"Then in that case, if the police really made inquiries, I think you can be pretty certain that there was nothing suspicious about Dr. Chenner's death," replied Falkland. "If there had been, an autopsy would have been ordered, and then the fat would have been in the fire."

"I don't know about that," replied Mrs. Dellaton.

"There are lots of cases when the police have suspicions but are unable to prove anything which would make a case. Personally, I think that they were suspicious then, but they couldn't find anything to act upon and decided to leave it alone. It was rather queer because old Ellen said that the first inquiries were made *before* the doctor's death. Ellen hoped that nurse was going to be run in for theft, or something like that. Ellen would have believed anything about her. It's so sickening—old Ellen's dead now, so we can never really find out exactly what did happen about those inquiries. Satisfactory for nurse, of course."

"Very," replied Falkland, "but I still feel disposed to maintain my point—that if the police did make inquiries and took no subsequent action, you can be pretty sure that there was no ground for suspicion. What often happens is this—some member of the public lays information, or sends an anonymous letter to the police, and such communications are nearly always investigated—though generally there's nothing in it."

Mrs. Dellaton looked at her visitor pensively.

"And are you going to tell me . . . honestly, hand on heart, thumbs crossed, that you don't think there was something fishy about Mr. Anderby's death?"

Falkland rumpled his hair thoughtfully.

"It's awfully difficult for me to produce an unbiased answer," he replied. "You see, you've admitted that Mrs. Anderby is the type of woman to whom some people take a strong dislike. . . . You dislike her: so does Major Grendon, and I think your personal aversion colours your judgment. It's bound to. I don't remember much about Nurse Pewsey personally.

She was just a trained nurse in immaculate cap and apron, who had a tired, patient expression but spoke with the usual professional brightness, and always disclaimed weariness in a martyred sort of way."

"That expresses her beautifully," said Mrs. Dellaton. "I can remember her saying, 'I'm never tired when it's a question of my duty.' Silly ass. She'd much better have said, 'I'm dog-tired and fed up, and I wish one of you would take my duty while I have a good nap'."

"But to go back to your main question," said Falkland. "Do I believe that there was anything fishy about Mr. Anderby's death? Judging from the evidence put before me, I don't see how there could have been. I can't think of any agent which would have brought about his death in exactly the way it happened. Of course, my opinion is not that of an expert, in any sense. I am just relying on common sense and very general information, in hazarding an opinion at all—but I just don't see that there's any room for foul play over that particular incident."

"No—but then you're not as clever as Nurse Pewsey when it comes to criminology, or whatever you call it," replied Mrs. Dellaton, and Falkland chuckled.

"Look here—you'll be accusing me of being supercautious like your husband, but I do beg you to be careful what you say—and whom you say it to—about Mrs. Anderby. It's really very dangerous to risk categorical accusations in a case of this kind."

"Then I can assure you that half the women in Oasthampstead are in very real danger," she retorted laughingly. "What I've said is mild in comparison to what a lot of people are saying. They're not asking, 'Could she have done it?' but 'How did she do it?' "

"Then I can only advise them to be more careful," rejoined Falkland, and Mrs. Dellaton laughed.

"She can't take out an indefinite number of writs for slander—and if she did, I fancy she would end up the sorriest. The number of things which will be quoted will make her famous the world over. Now haven't we had a perfectly lovely gossip?"

Falkland shouted with laughter. "We've taken away at least two characters and invented all sorts of blood-curdling possibilities. Also I've had a delicious lunch, which I greatly enjoyed, and fear I've considerably outstayed my welcome."

"Rubbish. I've thoroughly enjoyed having you—and do come in again before you leave Penharden. Take a sporting bet. I'll bet you a pound sterling, to be paid to any charity that you like to name, that we shall hear more about Mr. Anderby's death before the week is out."

"I won't bet on the topic," replied Falkland soberly, "but I've a hunch that you're probably right—although I admit quite frankly that I hope you're quite wrong."

"Time will show—to use one of those *clichés* beloved by Nurse Pewsey," replied Mrs. Dellaton, with her whimsical smile.

CHAPTER FOUR

Falkland was in a very thoughtful frame of mind as he drove away from Mrs. Dellaton's. In common with other men, problems interested him: he enjoyed crosswords, chess problems, ciphers, mild mathematical problems and intelligence tests. In short, he had the puzzle mind, and his architect's and draughtsman's training had developed his mental dexterity along practical lines. With such a make-up, detective problems inevitably appealed to him. He found himself now with a week's leisure before him, and the opportunity of collecting data in a case whose human attributes interested him. His only regret was that the central figure in this case was a woman. Mrs. Dellaton's words concerning Nurse Pewsey recurred to him—that it was difficult for a nurse to save enough money to insure against poverty in her old age, and Falkland was aware that the words had a touch of pathos about them. But there was no pathos at all in the thought of one woman hastening several old people out of the world in order that she might benefit from their legacies. A sordid business, in short, thought Falkland, as he drove his car rather aimlessly through Oasthampstead before heading for home.

He was preoccupied with his own thoughts, and possibly driving with less care and attention than usual, but as he approached the gates of White Gables he realized a split second too late that a horn had sounded somewhere near at hand—and the next second he performed a wide swerve, jammed on his brakes and swore fervidly. A big open tourer had just come out of Lee Gordon's gates and, despite his skill (and Falkland was a very good driver), he found himself with the bumpers and wings of his own Armstrong involved with those of a Daimler which had just emerged from the gates. There was a clang and a bump, and Falkland found himself glaring at the other driver—a young man with a sunburned face and a lively grin.

"Now that's just too bad," said the latter. "My fault. I'm sorrier than I can say."

He jumped out of the driver's seat and came round to inspect the damage. Falkland followed suit, meditating that it was unusual for another driver to acknowledge guilt in a collision quite so disarmingly.

"Fact is, that I'm used to driving overseas, and I haven't quite cottoned on to the keep-to-the-left idea," went on the driver of the Daimler. "I'm all right once I'm on the open road, but taking a turn like that I'm often biased—in the wrong direction. See here, it might have been worse; I've dented your wing a little, but it's nothing vital."

"When it comes to that, you've come off considerably worse than I have," replied Falkland.

While he was not prepared to admit it, he knew that this collision could have been avoided if he himself had not been wool-gathering over possibilities of detection.

"What about this for a proposition?" continued the young man cheerfully. "The damage isn't more than a few dollars' worth—and I'll pay the lot cheerfully, if you'd care to leave it at that. I know you've a rule about reporting all collisions to the cops, but if you're prepared to waive the formalities, I'd gladly avoid all the song and dance your local hayseeds at the station will perform."

Falkland inspected the locked wings and his own damaged bumpers.

"Let's see the extent of the damage before we decide that," he replied. "I should think we could heave these two outfits apart without any further assistance if we try."

Without any great effort they hauled the two cars clear, and Falkland inspected his wing. A bad dent, and some damage to the coach-work, together with a slightly bent bumper, was the sum total of the Armstrong's injuries, but the Daimler had its offside wing practically destroyed, and its beautiful gleaming enamel was badly spoilt.

"You're in a bit of a mess," said Falkland. "I should think you'd be advised to cash in on your insurance company for that."

The young man grinned. "Oh, I'd hate to destroy their confidence in me so soon," he replied. "I've only had this outfit a week, and I don't want to admit that I can't drive along English lanes without hitting something. If you'll let me pay up for your bit of damage, I'd be really obliged."

He drew a card case from his pocket as he spoke, and offered Falkland a card. The name on it was Lord Trant, and the address Merstham Bois, Bedfordshire. The owner of the card grinned disarmingly at Falkland.

"It's not a leg-pull," he said, "although it still looks a bit of a joke to me. I never expected to be an English lord, and it makes me feel a mutt of sorts handing out a card like that, but it's my name, seemingly, so I've got to get used to it."

The young man's grin was very disarming, as was his diffident voice, and Falkland grinned back as he pocketed the card.

"I think someone told me that the Trant estate had just been inherited. Most fellows wouldn't feel it made them any sort of mutt to hand out Trant's card. You're an American I take it?"

"No . . . not within the meaning of the act. I'm an honest to God Britisher. I was raised hereabouts in the long ago, but my folks went overseas when I was a baby, and I've lived in the States more than anywhere else—not the sort of life to prepare me for being a lord, and I feel darned foolish over it. Look here, I'm no end sorry to have messed up your auto like that. Darned clumsy of me."

"Oh, when it comes to that, I might have been a bit more on the spot myself," replied Falkland cheerfully, "so we needn't shed tears over my damages. If you're willing to pay up, I'm quite willing to agree to your suggestion. If you want to think better of it, now's your last chance. I'm quite willing to put it in the hands of my insurance company——"

"No. Don't do that," replied young Trant. "Just you get your garage folk on the go and send the bill along to me. You can carry on all right, can't you? Steering's not touched?"

"I'll just make sure," replied Falkland. "I don't think there's anything in it but a coat of paint, so to speak."

He got into the driving seat and reversed the car carefully, finding, as he expected, that no damage had been done beyond the dents from the impact. Just as he turned to speak to the young man again, he saw that Mr. Lee Gordon had come out of the drive and was standing talking to Lord Trant, and Falkland got out of his car again to speak to him.

"I say, I call that a bit thick," exclaimed Lee Gordon. "This young blackguard's been ramming you on my doorstep. A low-down, dirty trick, that. I always tell him I wouldn't risk my valuable life in his car, for all that he's got such a superior turn-out. Look here, while you're here, come in and have a drink—just to show there's no ill feeling over this little *contretemps*. I am responsible for loosing this young fellow on the neighbourhood, in a manner of speaking."

"Oh, that's awfully nice of you," replied Falkland cheerfully. "It wasn't entirely his fault, as a matter of fact, speaking without prejudice. I wasn't so wide awake as I might have been—

although I was on the right side of the road, and thereby of the law."

"Well, however it was—and knowing Philip, I'd say that it was ninety-nine per cent his racket—come you in and have a quick one," went on Lee Gordon, and Falkland replied,

"Oh, that's awfully good of you. Thanks very much."

Lee Gordon turned to the young man. "And as for you, young fella-me-lad, you're not included in this invitation, and that's flat. If you can't avoid collisions when you're sober, the good Lord alone knows what you're capable of when you're drunk."

Trant laughed. "No one's ever seen me drunk," he retorted; "not that I don't like a good drink as much as the next fellow, but it just doesn't affect me that way. Right-o, Uncle. I'll be along again soon."

He turned again to Falkland.

"And, look here, sir. I'm genuinely sorry about the biff I gave you. I know it was my fault. It's just the rule of the road got me mixed a bit."

"That's all right," replied Falkland cheerfully. "I'll send you in a bonny bill for damages, and if one of our bobbies stops you and asks if you've been in a collision you'd better tell him that you hit your uncle's gate post."

Trant got into the now rather battered-looking Daimler and drove off, and Lee Gordon turned to Falkland in his impulsive way and said,

"He's a nice lad, white all through—sorry he caused you this little spot of bother. It always makes me mad to have my machine knocked about by careless drivers. Not that Philip's a bad driver as a rule, but it's true that it's confusing to drive on the wrong side of the road at first. The boy's so proud of the first decent car he's ever had that I can't be too down on him."

"I didn't realize that young Trant was your nephew," said Falkland, as he walked up the drive beside Lee Gordon, and the latter replied,

"He isn't. No relation in the world. Just a matter of speaking. I've known him all my life, and his father was my best friend. We went through some rough times together, Nick and me. It'd just have tickled Nick to death if he'd known that his boy would ever inherit the title. He was poor enough during his lifetime, poor old chap. I think he'd forgotten that he'd ever had wealthy kin way back in the old country. Sure, the last thing he'd ever had thought of doing was to ask help of any of them. Funny the way things happen. Nick's been dead for years, and this boy was training as a commercial pilot in the States—and then finds that the Dowerbys over here have been advertising for him all over New Zealand, which was just where he didn't happen to be."

They had arrived at the house by this time, and Lee Gordon led the way into the hall, saying,

"There's a snug little room I'm rather fond of at the side here. One of the reasons why I took this place was to be near Philip, but not so near as to give him the feeling that I was watching him all the time. The boy's got to find his own level."

They entered a comfortably furnished little study, and Lee Gordon said,

"Whisky and soda? I find it's a drink that never comes amiss."

"Thanks—but plenty of soda and steady with the whisky," rejoined Falkland. "I don't generally drink in the afternoon."

Lee Gordon nodded in agreement. "Very wise rule. Wise to break it occasionally, too. Never become a slave to rules." He beamed at Falkland, and went on as he passed the drink,

"Thought any more of our little problem we were discussing the other day?"

"Yes. I've thought quite a bit about it," answered Falkland, "and the more I think about it, the more disposed I am to leave it alone, although the possibilities of it fascinate me. If I hadn't been thinking about that very topic I might have been a little snappier in avoiding young Trant's onset just now."

"Wal, I'm real glad to hear you say what you do," said Lee Gordon, with an appreciative glance. "Fact is, I've been feeling bad over it. When all's said and done, the major's likely to have a bee in his bonnet over his dislike of that lady. It'd be a bit of a dirty trick to go and get her talked about when, quite likely, she's in genuine distress."

"As to that, she's being talked about, all right," said Falkland, "but there's something unpalatable about men like you and me taking a hand in the chatter."

"You're quite right, there is," agreed Lee Gordon heartily, "and I'm going to try to put the major right off his present notion. After all, it lacks dullicacy, in a way. It isn't as though the lady had ever done him any harm. Rancorous, he was. Yes, sir. Rancorous. What do you think he's got into his head to do now? Talked about going to see the lady, to ask her a few straight questions as he put it. I don't like it. No, sir. I don't like it at all."

"I don't like it either," replied Falkland gravely. "You know, he'll be finding himself in trouble if he isn't more careful. One thing, I don't blame myself over that. I did my best to warn him to be careful."

"I reckon he's behaving unreasonably over this," said Lee Gordon. "Whichever way you look at it, he hasn't a leg to stand on. Either the dame's innocent—in which case he'll be insulting and paining a bereaved lady—or else she's guilty, in which case he's just asking for trouble."

Falkland nodded.

"Yes. You're quite right. I'll have a word with him when I get in, and see if I can make him see sense—and for myself, I shall try to think no more about it."

"O.K.," replied Lee Gordon. "I'm real sorry it happened here though. I'd taken a fancy to this spot, and it's plumb put me off the place. I shall never forget the sight of the poor old reverend lying on that lawn. Not that I haven't seen some sudden deaths before. Gee, sir, in Mexico, I've seen men shot for no other reason than that a guy didn't like the colour of their faces—but here, in this domestic environment, it don't seem decent to think about murder. I'd an option on this property—paid for it, too—but I reckon I'll let it go. Reckon I'll never settle happily here after what's happened—if you follow me."

"Yes, I follow you all right," replied Falkland sympathetically. "You feel that your thoughts of the place will always be tinged by the recollection of old Anderby's death, and by the uncomfortable feeling that you couldn't be quite certain exactly what happened. In my place I should always wonder, too, if I'd done what I ought to have done."

"That's just it," agreed Lee Gordon unhappily. "If I don't do anything, I shall sure wake up and sweat at night over it—and wonder if some other helpless old soul is being hustled out of the world for that dame's benefit. By heck! I just want to forget about it, and that's flat." He mopped his brow unhappily. "Reckon I'm through with this place," he said. "Problems of this kind get me down. I'll clear out and forget all about it, including the dame, and all these swell shrubs I liked so much, and those darned plants the gardening wallahs are so nuts on. Yes, sir. Zinnias won't be my favourite bedding plants in future. Give me nice, low-down, commonplace geraniums. None of these high-hat varieties you get here."

For the life of him Falkland couldn't help having a hearty laugh. Lee Gordon sounded so depressed and childlike in his disappointment.

"Rough luck," said Falkland, "especially when you took so much pleasure in it all to begin with. Never mind. It all comes out in the wash, as they say. This time next year you'll have forgotten all about it."

"Maybe I shall," said Lee Gordon hopefully. He was very much like a child in his reactions, Falkland decided, his mood changing with every fresh thought.

"One thing I shan't forget is the pleasure I've had in talking things over with you, sir," went on the rubicund little man. "It's been a privilege, if I may say so. I'm a plain business man myself, but I enjoy contact with a cultured mind. Yes, sir. I appreciate the compliment you've paid me in giving me the benefit of your cool and balanced judgment. I've held it an honour to have you talk to me as you have—and I hope we meet again, when I've settled in some less dramatic environment and we can talk on happier subjects."

"Thanks very much," replied Falkland cordially. His companion was so transparently friendly that Falkland couldn't help being rather touched by his naïve sincerity. "I hope we do meet again. Everybody comes through London sometime or other; may I give you a card—my office will always put you in touch with me—and meantime, put all this out of your mind. It's over and done with—and nothing to do with us."

"I thank you," beamed Lee Gordon happily. "I shall sure look forward to meeting you again—it'll be a very real pleasure."

"Well, good-bye for the moment—and I'll do my best to see that our gallant major doesn't go putting his foot in it by making unwarrantable aspersions."

When Falkland returned to the clinic it was after tea. He saw Max Brook in the hall, and the latter looked at him rather sardonically.

"Been making a day of it?" he inquired. "I hope you haven't been crocking yourself up, like that old fool Grendon."

Falkland felt apprehensive for a moment. "What's Grendon been doing?" he inquired.

"Oh, just overdoing things generally, and working himself up over affairs of other people's. I hope he's satisfied—he's brought back his sciatica with interest—and of course blames me because he's beside himself with pain again."

"Oh, that all?" said Falkland unfeelingly. "I thought you meant he'd had a smash of sorts. By the way, can I go and have a word with him?"

"No. You certainly cannot," replied Brook. "I've had him put to bed like a two-year-old—and there he can stay, on slops and the rest, until he's learnt a little sense."

Falkland spent a rather satisfactory evening over a particularly interesting chess problem, which had the merit of keeping his mind off all other topics, and he went early to bed. It was some time in the middle of the night that he was awakened by a voice at his side and felt a hand shaking his shoulder.

"Falkland, wake up! Wake up, I say!"

Roused from the depths of sleep by the peremptory voice, Falkland's first reaction was of indignation. He was heavy with sleep, and he wanted to turn over on his side and go to sleep again, but Brook's voice persisted,

"Wake up! Pull yourself together and get up!"

A hand underneath his shoulder—and no gentle hand at that—reinforced the words, and Falkland muttered sleepily,

"What the devil's the matter with you? Is the house on fire?"

"No, but your room's chock full of gas."

Falkland woke up at that, and let Brook drag him out of bed.

"Why the devil? I turned it off all right."

He staggered a little when Brook's strong hand ceased supporting him, and he heard a voice say,

"It's not in here, sir—must be downstairs. The major's room."

Comprehension dawned on Falkland.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "She's had another go after all!"

He heard Brook say, "Don't go to sleep again, for God's sake—come down into the hall; this room's fairly poisonous."

Falkland needed no second bidding. Grabbing his dressing gown, he staggered out of the door onto the landing and followed Brook down the stairs. The latter, with the masseur who had been with him, raced down the stairs and opened the door of Major Grendon's room. Falkland heard Brook's curt voice say,

"Go right in and smash the window and hold your breath until you've done it."

Falkland crossed the hall after them, still staggering a little. He realized that gas was pouring out from the ground-floor room where Grendon slept—just below his own. He heard Brook's voice again, calling to him,

"You all right? Can you get the front door open, and the other windows on this floor? We don't want to let the whole house in on this unless we've got to."

"Yes. I'm all right," replied Falkland, "but what about the other people?"

"The only room immediately above this is your bedroom and the massage room," replied Brook's voice. "Go and get those windows open; there's a good chap."

Falkland did as he was bid; when he had opened the front door he went outside for a moment and breathed in great draughts of the night air, realizing that he felt more than a little sick. His lungs seemed to be full of the noxious smell of coal gas. As he went round the ground-floor rooms, opening all the windows, he began to feel more normal, and a long drink of soda water with a splash of whisky, which he found in the dining room, helped to steady him. He went back to Grendon's room, where the smell of gas was less overpowering now, and looked in. The lights were all on; an electric fan was whirring beside Grendon's bed and Brook was working at artificial respiration. Falkland saw the colour of Grendon's face—it was a vivid pink, and he asked in a low voice,

"What's the chances, Brook?"

"Nil," returned the other grimly. "He's as dead as mutton. Got to carry on at this fool game for hours—to satisfy the coroner. Watts has phoned for that old ass, Tracey. If I try to treat him, there'll be hell to pay. I know these doctors."

It was an hour later that Falkland had a chance to speak further to Brook. The qualified medical man had come, had pronounced life extinct, and had informed the police. Brook was now in his own consulting room, and Falkland went in to him there. The windows were wide open; outside the dawn was gilding the elms with the unearthly beauty of early morning, and the blackbirds and thrushes were shouting a pæon of praise to the morning sun.

Brook was dressed, his dark face sallower than usual, and he looked up at Falkland with a little twisted smile.

"A damned business," he observed. "Thanks for all the help you've given. I'm afraid the police will be bothering you before long. You'd better make up your mind just what you're going to say."

"Yes," said Falkland. "I suppose it does need a bit of thought. I'm sorry for you, Brook. It's a sickening thing to have happened."

"Thanks. It's certainly a mess-up."

"What do you make of it?"

Brook gave an irritable shrug of his shoulders and then replied, "What can anybody make of it? All Grendon's windows were closed—and you know the sort of fresh-air fiend he was. The gas fire was full on, the room chock-full of gas—and that was that."

"Could anyone have come in from outside and have turned the gas on?" asked Falkland, and again Brook gave that characteristic shrug.

"With the French windows of his room opening wide onto the garden—and with himself particularly fast asleep with the draught I'd given him? Could they? What could be easier? He chose a room on the ground floor because stairs were difficult for him, on account of his sciatica, and he preferred to sleep with the windows all wide open. I know they were all open just before midnight because I went in to have a look at him, to see if he had settled down comfortably. As I think I told you, he was feeling very sorry for himself when he came in this evening."

Falkland paused a moment before he replied, and said at last, "You probably know what was the outstanding theme in Grendon's mind these last few days, Brook."

The osteopath raised his eyebrows. "Meaning his preoccupation with the notion that old Anderby had been murdered? I haven't discussed it with him and, in any case, I don't consider it's my business to bring that point to the notice of the police. I have no information about it—no direct information to put the matter more precisely, and I don't see the point of repeating hearsay evidence."

"Quite," replied Falkland, "but all the same, I think I shall state what I know about the matter, so far as my conversation with Grendon and Lee Gordon is concerned."

"That's for you to decide," replied Brook dryly. "You quite probably know that the police are not enthusiastic about amateur theories on the subject of crime."

"Yes, I'm aware of that," replied Falkland, "but hang it all, Brook, it seems pretty plain to me that Grendon was murdered. There's no room for two opinions about that; the point is—who had a reason for murdering him? The method chosen was simple enough. Anyone could have turned that gas tap on. All that was needed was a knowledge of where his room was situated, and his habit of sleeping with the window open, making it easy for anyone to walk in and turn the gas tap on."

"Oh, I'm not suggesting that it was difficult," replied Brook wearily. "Obviously, anyone could have done it, as you say—you or me, or Watts, or any of us. Look here, don't take me amiss, but I honestly think it would be better if we didn't discuss it any further. There's bound to be the hell of a stink, anyway, and we'd better keep any ideas we've got for the police—if they want to hear them."

"Right you are," replied Falkland. "I can understand well enough how fed up you must be, Brook. It's damned hard lines. If there's anything I can do to be of service, let me know."

An hour later, Falkland was interrogated by Inspector Lynch of the county police. The inspector was a big, heavily built man, who looked oddly less impressive without his uniform cap because he was nearly bald. Falkland, who was still feeling the results of his broken night and of the coal gas he had swallowed, kept on looking in a fascinated way at Lynch's cranium, wondering in a disconnected sort of way if he'd ever seen a bald policeman before, and if many of the force were bald beneath their helmets. Lynch was competent and courteous enough, however. He greeted Falkland with a word of sympathy with regard to his own trying experience and then set to work with straightforward questions concerning the events of the

night. Falkland answered easily enough, and described being awakened by Brook, and coming downstairs.

"I was pretty dopey," he said, "and not particularly observant, as you may imagine."

"Quite so, sir," replied the inspector. "I gather you had slept rather heavily. Are you a heavy sleeper as a rule?"

"Oh, so so," replied Falkland. "On this occasion, as you remember, I'd swallowed a fair dose of gas. My room still reeks of it, as you've doubtless observed. It was lucky that Mr. Brook didn't sleep as heavily as I did—otherwise you wouldn't be interrogating me now."

"But you heard no disturbance earlier in the night, sir? The gas must have been turned on in deceased's bedroom some hours before you were wakened up by Mr. Brook at three o'clock —was it three o'clock you said, sir?"

"I said, 'about three,' Inspector, as you can ascertain by looking back at your own notes," replied Falkland rather tartly. "I didn't look at my watch when I woke up—or rather when I was shaken awake by Mr. Brook. I noticed the grandfather clock strike the quarter when I staggered into the dining room and scrounged a drink. Later I discovered it was getting on for four o'clock."

"Thank you, sir," replied the inspector quite imperturbably, "I think that's quite explicit. It's probable that the gas was turned on shortly after midnight."

"Been doing some calculations about diffusion of gases, Inspector?" inquired Falkland rather sharply, but the big man replied mildly,

"More a matter of going on the probabilities at this stage, sir. We shall get an expert opinion later and fix the time with more certainty. As an architect you would probably know more about cubic contents, and so forth, than I do, but we've had a bit of experience of this sort of thing to go on, and I don't expect my estimate will be very far out. Call it midnight for purposes of argument—you would have been asleep by that time, sir?"

"Oh, Lord, yes," replied Falkland. "I went to bed at half-past ten, and I was asleep a quarter of an hour later. In any case I didn't hear a sound after I went to bed. I remember thinking how quiet this house was. I'm a bit of a fidget over small noises at night. Hate to be worried with the sound of other people when I want to go to sleep myself."

The inspector studied his notebook and then asked the questions which Falkland had been expecting.

"I understand that you have had a certain amount of conversation with deceased since you've been resident here, sir. Would you give it as your opinion that he had any suicidal tendencies?"

"Not that I had observed," replied Falkland. "He was a chronic grouser, one of the type who holds onto life with a sort of grim determination to get the worst out of it, if you know what I mean. My opinion's worth no more than your own on this subject, but I'd have said that Major Grendon was the type to hold onto his life like grim death—if you'll allow an Irishism."

"Quite so, sir. I follow just what you mean," replied Lynch placidly. "You see, sir, if suicide is ruled out—and we can see no evidence giving a pointer in that direction—then it means that deceased was murdered."

"Yes. I'd already grasped that for myself, Inspector," replied Falkland. "It seems abundantly clear to me that he was murdered—and that the murderer would have had no difficulty in gaining access to his bedroom from outside."

“That is so,” replied the inspector, “though, at the present state of the case, we cannot afford to take it for granted that this was an outside job. So far as easiness goes, it would have been equally easy for a person inside the house to have gained access. I understand that the major never locked his door.”

“I don’t suppose he did,” said Falkland. “If a man sleeps with a French window open in his room, it would be hardly logical of him to lock the door into the rest of the house. Obviously he was not nervous of intruders.”

“Quite so,” said the inspector, and Falkland began to find that particular phrase irritating.

“Assuming that murder was the cause of death, can you suggest any person who might have had a motive for killing the major?” went on Lynch.

“I’ve not got any precise evidence to give you on that subject,” said Falkland, “but I do happen to know that Major Grendon suspected someone else of murder—and was doing his best to find enough evidence to justify him in bringing the case to your notice. It does seem to me that the facts of that case should be put before you, though I’ve no desire to get myself involved in an action over the matter. I’ll give you the evidence for what it’s worth—but understand that I’m making no accusation of any kind, and I only know the facts at second-hand.”

“Just so, sir,” replied Lynch, pencil ready-poised above his notebook. “I’ll bear what you say in mind, sir.”

And Falkland began the narrative of Nurse Pewsey, as told to him by Grendon, with references to “general allegations,” while Inspector Lynch scrawled industriously in his notebook and nodded his bald head at intervals.

CHAPTER FIVE

It was on Monday, June 2nd, that the Rev. Mr. Anderby had fallen dead on the lawn at White Gables. It was just a week later that Chief-Inspector Macdonald was given a file containing the copious notes collected by the painstaking Inspector Lynch of the county police. Colonel Wragley, the assistant commissioner, entrusted Macdonald with the "Penharden Case" with the comment,

"They've waited until everything has happened that could happen—deaths, funerals and disappearance of probable delinquent. Then they ask us to come in and tidy the mess up. Here you are—if you feel like expressing yourself forcibly about it, don't mind me, Macdonald."

The assistant commissioner held his Chief Inspector in high esteem: it was true that Macdonald had exasperated him to the point of using "forcible language" himself, on occasion, but Macdonald usually succeeded in "delivering the goods," and he was a likeable person by and large. His independence of mind, or "damned obstinacy," was regarded by Wragley as a national characteristic. All Scots were pig-headed and self-opinionated in the assistant commissioner's opinion, but they also had a native shrewdness and pertinacity which made them valuable in police work. Moreover, long association with Macdonald—they had known one another for ten years—had resulted in something like affection on Wragley's part for a man who often exasperated him, but for whom he held a very warm regard.

"It's a change to be called in after the obsequies," rejoined Macdonald, who had given a quick glance through the neatly typewritten sheets of Lynch's report, "but as some of the fatalities are apparently several years old, we couldn't have expected all the subjects to have been kept as exhibits."

Wragley glanced up at the lean, tanned face of the Chief Inspector to see if there were a smile lurking round the close-shut lips. Even after ten years' experience of him, Wragley was never sure if Macdonald were enjoying one of his own private jokes, or was making one of those humourlessly obvious statements in which his nation excelled.

"No. I suppose not—but this latest effort—oh, well, see what you can make of it, and then go and collect the woman, wherever she's got to," he said breezily, and Macdonald returned a sedate "Very good, sir," before he retired to his own room to study Lynch's report.

The said report was a very able production, Macdonald considered, after expending considerable attention on it. It began with a terse description of Mr. Anderby's death and dossiers of the persons concerned. Mr. Anderby himself was obviously a man of worth and natural goodness, who had had a successful, if not actually distinguished career as parish priest. He had been possessed of private means inherited from his parents, and at his death had been in possession of an income of about £600 a year, which was left to his widow. As though to keep the *bonne bouche* to the end, Lynch had then gone on to give chapter and verse about the two men who had been present at Mr. Anderby's death. Major Grendon had been in the Indian Army and had retired ten years ago. There was nothing remarkable about his army career, but he had been a respected and competent officer. He had had about £200 a year in addition to his pension, had lived mainly at his club in London with occasional long visits to a widowed sister in Cheltenham, and had left his property to a nephew in the Rifle Brigade. A note was interpolated in the report stating that his death was dealt with in a further section. Mr. James Knight Lee Gordon had been born in the Dutch East Indies of an American father

and a Dutch mother. He had been brought up in Porto Bondo, had travelled considerably, and eventually worked in a rubber plantation in the Federated Malay States. At the age of thirty-five he had forsaken the production of rubber for financial dealings in that commodity on Wall Street, with varying success, and had lived in London for awhile at the age of forty, studying the London markets. He had speculated and lost the greater part of his substance, and had then gone to South America and joined in a ranching venture with Nicholas Dowerby—the father of young Philip Trant, who had lately inherited the title and estates of Lord Trant of Merstham Bois. In recent years Lee Gordon had retrieved his earlier failures on the stock market and again stood in a sound financial position. He had taken White Gables on a quarterly tenancy, with an option to purchase, in order to be near Philip Trant in the adjoining county.

Finally, Lynch came to Mrs. Anderby. The county inspector had been at pains to investigate and to verify the various cases and legacies which Falkland had mentioned, and it seemed clear that ex-Nurse Pewsey had been fortunate, to put the matter at its face value, in receiving legacies from her elderly patients. Then followed, in the report, statements taken from Falkland and Lee Gordon concerning Grendon's general accusations about Nurse Pewsey. There was a brief dossier describing Falkland, a bachelor of fifty, resident in London, whose career as architect and consultant put him near the front rank of his profession—and a declaration made by him concerning his advice to Major Grendon to make a clear and detailed statement of his ideas concerning Mrs. Anderby. This was borne out by another statement from Lee Gordon, affirming that Major Grendon had repeated Falkland's advice to him, and stating that he (Lee Gordon) and Grendon had consulted together in order to get mutual corroboration of their recollections of Mr. Anderby's death and of the events leading up to it. Lee Gordon further stated that Major Grendon had shown him the statement he (Grendon) had made, and Lee Gordon gave it as his opinion that the account was rambling and incoherent and laden with trivial and irrelevant detail. Lee Gordon had last seen Major Grendon on the Wednesday afternoon before his death (which occurred on Wednesday night). Grendon had then stated his intention of going to see Mrs. Anderby herself in order to question her as to various details of the events of Wednesday afternoon. Grendon had left Lee Gordon's at three o'clock, and had returned to Brook's house at four-thirty, about half an hour before Falkland himself had arrived back there.

The next portion of the report dealt with Grendon's death, statements having been taken from Max Brook, Watts (the masseur) and Falkland himself. In his careful painstaking way, Lynch had set forth a full account of Brook's career. He had done two years' medical training at St. Joseph's Hospital, Whitechapel, and had then thrown up his training in favour of osteopathy, working first with an English practitioner and later in an American college of osteopathy. He had graduated at the latter establishment as Doctor of Osteopathy—a title which he did not attempt to use in England. He had practised in the United States and in Paris and worked for some time in Belfort, the Derbyshire spa. Lynch included the police report on Dr. Glaxton's death, including the conclusion arrived at by the Belfort police that Brook was innocent of any hand in the murder. After the Belfort affair Brook had gone back to the States for three years: on his return to England—a year before Anderby's death—he had opened his clinic in Penharden and had been very successful.

In his own statement Brook said that Major Grendon had returned to the clinic at four-thirty on Wednesday, in considerable pain from his sciatica, and much too full of his own complaints to wish to give any account of how he had spent his day. Brook said that he had ordered him to bed, had given him a brief treatment after tea, and before he left him for the

night had given him another treatment and a concoction of herbs with known soporific effects. Cross-examination had evoked that the final treatment was to some extent hypnotic in character, though Brook had had a lively passage with the coroner concerning hypnosis, its practice and possibilities.

Macdonald relaxed over his study of the report at this stage, and lighted his pipe, chuckling a little. He guessed what the orthodox and rural coroner (a qualified medical man) would think of "hypnotic treatment" by an osteopath. Macdonald was a fair-minded and well-informed man. He knew that osteopaths were occasionally successful in cases where orthodox practitioners failed, and he knew that the sensitive skill of an osteopath's hand could lull pain in some cases, and thereby induce sleep. To some extent this gift depended on ascendancy of personality—the control of a harassed mind by a calm and controlling one, but in the main it was the actual "manipulation" that was the soporific, and in this sense the treatment was not "hypnotic" in the general use of the word. It induced sleep truly, but not mainly by what is recognized as hypnosis. Macdonald looked forward to meeting Max Brook: judging by the verbatim report of his evidence, he was worth talking to.

Then followed the evidence of Watts, the masseur, who had been woken by Brook when the latter first realized the smell of gas. Together they had gone to Falkland's room and succeeded in waking him out of a heavy sleep, and they had then hurried down to Grendon's room. Here they had found the French window and side sash window closed, and the room so full of gas that Watts attested he had had difficulty in getting doors and windows opened fast enough to prevent him growing dizzy from the fumes. Grendon was in bed, lying peacefully on his side, his face only six feet away from the gas fire. Because he disliked facing the light, he slept with his head at the foot of his bed. He had refused to have the position of his bed altered because he had some theory about sleeping in a position lying due north and south.

Falkland gave corroborative evidence about the gas fumes in Grendon's bedroom when the door was opened, and of Grendon's fad for sleeping with all the windows opened.

Medical evidence gave the time of death as about two a.m., and the cause of it as coal-gas poisoning. Although there was no evidence to show that his papers had been disturbed, the sheets mentioned by Lee Gordon containing the "statement" about Anderby's death could not be found. Lee Gordon said that Grendon had used foolscap paper, and though some plain sheets of this paper were found in a drawer, of the statement there was no sign. The verdict at the coroner's inquest was murder by person or persons unknown. The inquest on Major Grendon had been held on Thursday afternoon; on Friday morning Mr. Anderby's body had been interred, and Inspector Lynch had spent the day in inquiring into the "allegations" about Nurse Pewsey's career which had been put forward with due reservations and caution by Falkland.

It was evident to Macdonald, as he studied the evidence, that Lynch had entirely disbelieved the suggestion of her guilt, and that he had an eye on Max Brook as the more probable culprit. Brook had had a very poor time at the coroner's inquest. He had been asked —very unfairly, Macdonald thought—why he had had gas fires fitted in his patients' bedrooms, and had replied that in his own experience electric fires were dangerous, both from the point of view of the possibility of causing a fire, and also through inflicting electric shock if they were faulty in any particular. Asked sarcastically by the coroner if he had ever known of a case in which an electric fire had caused death by shock, Brook replied in the affirmative, but refused to give any further information on the point. It seemed that this quite irrelevant issue prejudiced the official mind against him.

The sum total of the whole affair was that Lynch had made no attempt to interrogate Mrs. Anderby immediately. He was a kind-hearted man, and since he did not believe in the possibility of her guilt he had not wished to intrude his questions on the widow on the very day of her husband's funeral. He had put off calling on her until the next day—with deplorable results. Timing his call for eleven o'clock in the morning, Lynch had found that Mrs. Anderby had gone out. She was still staying at the guest house where she and her husband had been living since they first came to Penharden. She had gone out "for a walk" on the Saturday morning and had not returned. In short, Mrs. Anderby had vanished.

It was at this juncture that the Chief Constable of the county had seen fit to call in Scotland Yard—and Macdonald was rather in agreement with the assistant commissioner's views. Mr. Anderby was dead—and buried. Major Grendon was dead—and had been buried today—the Monday on which Macdonald received the files of the report and a request for assistance. Mrs. Anderby had gone, no one knew where. There remained Max Brook—and Macdonald chuckled when he read that Inspector Lynch was keeping the osteopath "under observation." Falkland had returned to town; Lee Gordon was shutting up White Gables, and Max Brook's other patients had left the clinic. The case was, as Colonel Wragley had said, "in a mess"—and Scotland Yard was expected to clear it up.

It was late afternoon by the time Macdonald had digested the copious report, and it seemed to him that the best thing he could do was to defer his journey to Penharden until the following morning and spend the evening interviewing the one witness who was on the spot in London—Robert Falkland.

A telephone call to the latter's office evoked the information that Falkland was to be found at his flat in a big block overlooking the Thames, not far away from Macdonald's own chambers in the Grosvenor Road. The Chief Inspector put through another call and was answered by the architect himself: when Macdonald gave his name and status Falkland gave a short laugh, expressing disgust rather than amusement.

"All right," he said resignedly. "If you want to talk to me, you'll find me if you come along now—not that it's any more than a waste of your time and mine."

When he was admitted to the architect's flat and greeted Falkland, Macdonald was careful in his line of approach.

"I'm sorry to bother you again, sir. I realize how irritating it is to be asked questions all over again, and I expect you've had more than enough of police inquiries at the hands of the county men."

Falkland, who had been disposed to be terse with the author of yet another inquisition, was mollified by Macdonald's words and a bit surprised by his voice and bearing. The quiet voice with its pleasant Scots accent was that of an educated man, and the Chief Inspector was a man with a definite presence. He was far more like a fellow-professional than a policeman, and Falkland felt his initial annoyance die down.

"Oh, well—if you realize that it is irritating, I'll endeavour not to show symptoms of that sentiment," replied the architect. "Sit down—and smoke if you'd care to. I admit I'm sick of the police manner and procedure as exemplified by the Penharden detectives. They've asked questions, mainly idiotic ones, until I was in the state of mind when 'Go to hell and stay there!' seemed the most desirable rejoinder."

"Asking questions—and being conscious that they're mainly idiotic ones—can be irritating to the questioner as well as to the questioned," returned Macdonald, as he sat down in the comfortable chair indicated by Falkland and studied his companion thoughtfully.

"I've just had the case handed over to me, complete with copious notes from the inspector in charge. I expect that in the course of your career as architect you have on occasion been commissioned to alter premises which were originally badly planned, badly built, badly lighted, and totally unsuitable for the purpose to which you were asked to adapt them——"

Falkland broke out laughing. "Not a bad analogy," he replied. "I've coped with such jobs often enough and sworn heartily in the coping. In other words you are being asked to elucidate a problem which might have been straightforward if you'd had the planning of it from the beginning, but which is deuced difficult when someone else has messed it up."

"I'm not suggesting that it was easy," rejoined Macdonald, "but it's certainly less easy now, and one of the chief additional difficulties is that a witness like yourself is fed up with answering questions, and consequently disposed to answer in the set form already repeated *ad nauseam*—and consequently learnt by heart. In other words, all freshness of recollection of possibly essential points is blurred by recollection of what you have already said." He looked inquiringly at Falkland and then inquired, "Are you in a hurry to get this over—or have you time to spare? If you have, it's probable you can help me a lot—and frankly I need help."

"Oh, I've plenty of time, and I've not the least objection to discussing the business in a general way," replied Falkland. "I might even become interested again since you've got the wits to forsake the 'routine' method. It is interesting—*damned* interesting," he said. "Not that I imagine there's any answer but one to the conundrum 'Who did it?' The interesting point to me is 'How did she do it?' I've a fairly ingenious mind but I'm damned if I see how old Anderby was killed. You'll dig him up again, I suppose, poor old chap?"

"Possibly," rejoined Macdonald, "but I don't expect his remains to be—vocal—in any sense."

He pulled out his pipe and began to fill it from the pouch which Falkland proffered. "Thanks," he said, and settled himself more comfortably in his chair. "Since you've admitted that you're sick of the 'routine' method, let's try a general discussion instead. You have assumed that there's only one answer to the problem. That's prejudging the case. Far better look at it all round."

"Right. I'm only too anxious to get a fresh viewpoint," replied Falkland, and Macdonald went on,

"Then consider every single contact in the case, as far as you have been able to observe them, and tell me their names in order of their appearance, as it were."

"All right. Of necessity I state them from the angle of my own observation. Concerning Anderby's death, the 'contacts' in order of appearance are: first, Grendon, who told me the story; second, myself, because I went round asking questions; third, Lee Gordon, who witnessed the death; fourth, Mrs. Anderby, ditto; fifth, Brook, who discussed it quite intelligently; finally Watts, who assisted in locating the origin of the gas."

He paused and Macdonald said,

"Very well. That'll do for a beginning. What do you know of Grendon? You first met at the clinic—and probably considered him an infernal bore."

"Quite right. I did."

"What was his main preoccupation? Judging from your evidence, it was a rooted dislike of Mrs. Anderby. He had no feeling about her husband, but he disliked her excessively—and gave you no reason for his dislike."

"Oh yes, he did. He believed she was in the habit of murdering her elderly patients—and it appears that he was right. Unfortunately for himself, he let her see that he suspected her and

was murdered himself. Obviously Mrs. Anderby was the only person with a motive for murdering him."

"Not of necessity the only person," replied Macdonald. "Grendon was obviously of an irascible, suspicious temperament, and it's conceivable he had something to conceal."

"Maybe he had—but unless Mrs. Anderby murdered him, why did she do a bolt?" He leaned forward, full of eagerness. "Besides, she *knew* which room Grendon slept in, and that he was a maniac on the point of sleeping with his windows open. Grendon had described his room and all the rest of it over the roast duck at the lunch party. Lee Gordon told the inspector all about that."

"He did—but that doesn't prove that it was Mrs. Anderby who turned the gas on," said Macdonald. "It merely makes it possible for her to have done it. According to the evidence, Mrs. Anderby was asleep in her own room all that night."

"But dash it all, you can't *prove* that!" interrupted Falkland. "No one else was sleeping in the same room as herself."

"Nor as yourself, nor as Brook, nor as Watts, nor as any of them," said Macdonald. "However, having examined Major Grendon impartially, take another contact."

Falkland looked at him with quizzical eyes.

"Myself, for instance."

"If you care to regard yourself objectively."

"Why not?" Falkland pondered. "It's damned odd," he said. "I was going to say that I'd never had any contact with any of them—but I have. I came in touch with Nurse Pewsey because she nursed my aunt—and I talked to her husband on the golf links."

"Exactly," said Macdonald cheerfully, "and continuing the objective method, what were you doing at the time Mr. Anderby died?"

"I was asleep in a deck chair in the garden." Falkland looked at the other thoughtfully. "I couldn't prove that," he said. "No one was about. You could state that I went along to White Gables and killed Anderby. Dash it all, how was he killed?"

"He died of heart failure," rejoined Macdonald.

"Oh, for the Lord's sake don't repeat that gag—it reminds me of poor old Grendon," said Falkland. "Of course I *could* have gone downstairs and turned the gas on in his room," he continued. "It would have been as easy as say so—but why?"

"Obviously, because you'd given yourself away to him over the previous murder," rejoined Macdonald equably. "One can always supply a motive once the ball is rolling. You see suspicions are easy to utter and often difficult to disprove. Let us take another contact—Brook."

"I say, are you getting any additional data from this?" inquired Falkland, and Macdonald nodded.

"Oh, yes. Here a little and there a little. I am a picker-up of unconsidered trifles. What about Brook?"

Falkland mused awhile. "I like Brook, you know. I think he's straight. I should hate to say anything which might make matters worse for him. He's had a poor deal over this show."

"Admittedly—but that's not objective on your part."

Falkland laughed. "No, confound you, but no human being is ever really impartial. We have our likes and dislikes—and prejudice makes liars of us all, to parody an immortal saying. Brook . . . well, he once treated Anderby, and Mrs. A butted in and warned her husband

against osteopaths, *but* Brook told me he'd examined Anderby and that there was no reason why he should have dropped dead of heart failure."

"Thanks for that item. It may be valuable," said Macdonald tranquilly.

"I just don't believe Brook did it any more than I believe Lee Gordon did it," said Falkland. "It doesn't make sense."

"In Brook's case you could argue that Mrs. Anderby knew something to his discredit professionally and told her husband about it," said Macdonald. "Quite frankly, Brook couldn't afford to have suspicions mooted against him. He'd only just lived down one—incident."

"Quite—and I'm not helping to provide another," said Falkland. "I think he's straight—and I think Grendon's death was the damnedest bad luck on him."

"It was certainly undesirable for him," said Macdonald, and Falkland glanced at the clock.

"Lord! I'd no idea how long we'd been talking!" he exclaimed. "I've got a dinner appointment."

Macdonald promptly got up.

"I won't keep you then—and many thanks for talking things over in an impartial manner."

Falkland chuckled. "*Touché!*" he said. "All the same—I've been interested. Talking to you is a different matter from answering Lynch's tomfool questions. The humorous part of it is that I've probably told you a lot more than I told Lynch—in a quite different way."

"Lynch did a lot of the spade work—and it's generally a thankless task," rejoined Macdonald.

Falkland smiled at him. "Dog does not eat dog—and one practitioner upholds another," he said. "If, in thinking things over, I remember any other irrelevant points, I'll let you know. Come and see me again and tell me how things go."

"Thanks," said Macdonald. He got up, and just as he turned to the door Falkland said,

"Oh, by the way—one point we omitted to mention concerning Mrs. Anderby. The police *did* suspect something fishy in the matter of Dr. Chenner's death at Oasthampstead because they made inquiries of the doctor's servant about her. It's no use pretending there wasn't something suspicious there—even though it was impossible to prove anything."

"And who told you that the police made inquiries?"

Falkland laughed. "Oh—information received, to use your own phrase. I just happened to hear about it in the course of conversation."

"There seems to have been quite a lot of conversation about Nurse Pewsey," replied Macdonald, "and the general conclusions are mainly identical."

"Mainly's a good word," laughed Falkland, and he held out his hand in farewell.

Macdonald left him feeling that the time he had spent in talking had not been wasted.

CHAPTER SIX

Macdonald set out for Penharden early on the following (Tuesday) morning. It was but a thirty-mile drive northwestwards from London, and he enjoyed the easy run along the Watford by-pass, that pleasantest of exits from London, and one which always appealed to the homing sense in the Scots detective, who was not above a childlike sense of pleasure when he read the terse legend "To the North" at the junction of the by-pass road. Londoner though he was by adoption, "the North" held Macdonald's imagination.

The approach to Penharden lay over a fine sweep of common, and the little town looked attractive in the June sunshine, with its wide main street bordered by fine old elms, the pavements set back behind broad grass verges after the manner of the old "rope walks." There were some good Georgian houses, and a spacious "Church Green" with smooth turf lay in front of the old parish church, with its comely stone tower. A nice little town, open and unspoilt by the speculative builder, thought Macdonald, as he turned his car off the wide high street to the narrow road which held the police headquarters.

Inspector Lynch greeted the C.I.D. man formally, with a sort of cautious reticence which was familiar to Macdonald in his dealings with his provincial colleagues. He knew exactly how Lynch was feeling—worried, uncertain, and a little resentful. Lynch was out of his depth in the present case: he had made more than a bit of a mess of it, and knew it, but he was disposed to resent the intrusion of Scotland Yard into his own domain. A short conversation with Macdonald did a lot to decrease his resentment: Lynch found the C.I.D. man sympathetic and friendly, and presently Lynch gave up being on his guard and relieved his feelings by a lengthy grouse, mainly at the cussedness of things in the present case.

"All this flap about Mrs. Anderby having murdered people by the dozen—damned rot it seemed to me—and still does," he proclaimed indignantly. "Take the business of the Rev. Anderby's death—heart failure plain and simple, and yet that old ass Grendon got suggesting all the most improbable things. I tell you Mr. Anderby had been examined half a dozen times for heart trouble; he was always having palpitations. I've helped him into a taxi myself when he was taken queer in the High Street one day, and precious bad he looked."

He paused a moment and then added sheepishly, "I know it looks queer Mrs. Anderby having done a bolt like that. I reckon she realized the sort of things that were being said about her and lost her nerve, if you take me. What with the things people were saying—and I tell you they talk enough in these small towns to shrivel the skin off an elephant—and then Grendon's death coming on top of it—well, it was enough to make any woman get the jitters. Then the folk at the boarding house where she was staying wouldn't have helped matters. Human nature, you know," said Lynch profoundly. "If you know anything more inhuman than a jealous spinster of fifty, who runs a boarding house into the bargain, lead me to it!"

"That seems a sidelight which didn't illuminate the official report," said Macdonald, his sympathetic grin melting the last resentment from Lynch's worried mind. "The great thing about having an informal talk like this is that we can consider the oddments which aren't important enough for a report to C.O. Tell me about the boarding-house lady."

"The Rev. Anderby and his missis were house hunting," said Lynch, "and until they found the home, they stayed at The Rowan Tree, a boarding house kept by Miss Driver. Some men are born stupid," added the inspector in parenthesis. "It was the reverend gentleman who

chose The Rowan Tree as a temporary home because Miss Driver had been a shining light as parish worker when he was vicar of Oasthampstead. You can guess the situation for yourself," he added with a wink. "Other parties in the parish had put their shirt on the probability of Miss D. bringing the thing off and becoming Mrs. Vicar—only it didn't come off. Then Mr. Anderby marries Nurse Pewsey, whom Miss Driver hated like poison, and brings her to the boarding house which Miss D. had opened when she left Oasthampstead after her 'disappointment.' My hat! If Mrs. A. had been poisoned with weed killer in the coffee I could have understood it easily enough. Takes a really saintly man to be as stupid as that."

Macdonald chuckled. "A certain denseness seems indicated," he agreed, "but I'm surprised that Mrs. Anderby tolerated staying in such an atmosphere."

"Bless you, you've got that bit all wrong," grinned Lynch. "Mrs. A. had a glorious chance of administering pin pricks to Miss Driver by alternately talking about married bliss and complaining about the cooking and querying the weekly accounts! I don't expect you have to take notice of silly little domestic squabbles when you're investigating crime on the grand scale—and I tell you I've watched some of your cases!—but here, it's all pettiness. Precious little crime and a lot of back-biting. Anyway, Mrs. Anderby made no bones about staying at The Rowan Tree—and telling other people in confidence that the food was not too good, and the cleaning questionable. You see, in times past, Nurse Pewsey had a maternity case in a previous boarding house of Miss Driver's, and the latter lady gave the nurse a poor time. Tit for tat's a sound motto."

Macdonald nodded. "Yes. I think you've got that situation very nicely observed. Meantime, what was Miss Driver's attitude when questioned after Mrs. Anderby's disappearance?"

"She was uncommonly careful. Looked volumes and said as little as possible," replied Lynch. "For one thing, she's very indignant that her house is being talked about, and the police have been calling on her. Told me to my face that the fact of me being seen on the doorstep meant a definite loss of prestige—profit, to put it plainly. No help from Miss Driver, anyway. She'd got sense enough not to repeat any gossip, and I could get nothing out of her at all. Mrs. Anderby had gone for a walk—that was all Miss Driver knew. She also told me exactly what she herself was doing during the entire morning of the day Mrs. Anderby disappeared, and as she was making strawberry jam in the kitchen with the cook, it's pretty plain that Miss Driver had nothing to do with the disappearance—so far as practical politics are concerned—but I reckon her tongue may have had quite a lot to do with it."

"You think, then, that Mrs. Anderby ran away on account of the gossip that was raging about her?"

"That's it. Lost her nerve and lost her head. After all, she'd had a pretty trying time, losing her husband like that."

Macdonald nodded. "Quite—but how do you account for Major Grendon's death?"

Lynch sighed. "The Lord knows," he said despondently. "Might have been suicide. You never know. He was old and his sciatica had been giving him hell. Damned depressing business, sciatica. He's raised all this song about Anderby's death, and he'd been to see Mrs. Anderby. Maybe he got more than he counted on from her. Likely she told him she'd take him into court for criminal slander, and he realized what a fool he'd made of himself. That—and the sudden new attack of sciatica may have been too much for him, and he just destroyed the silly statement he'd written out and turned the gas on. I know it doesn't sound convincing—but that seems to me to be a likelier thing than to imagine that Mrs. Anderby walked into

Grendon's room at midnight and did the trick. How was she to know that Brook had put Grendon to sleep with his herbs, or his monkey tricks, or both."

Macdonald studied his companion. "And Brook?" he inquired. "I gather you don't like him?"

Lynch screwed his face into a grimace. "That's an understatement," he said. "I can't stand the chap. I suspect he's crooked, and I'm quite willing to believe he finished Grendon off for his own purposes—but I can't see any motive, and there's nothing to make a case of. If I were going on with this case—which, thank the Lord, I'm not—I'd concentrate on Brook. I think the whole business about Anderby is just ballyhoo, but Grendon's death may be a different story. After all, Grendon *was* a nosy old cuss: if he wasn't suspecting someone of murder he was suspecting them of thieving, or spying, or treason, or some such rot. He *may* have found out something inconvenient about Brook. When you come to think of it, the Anderby story made a very convenient cover if anyone did want to get Grendon out of the way—and Brook knew the old idiot had been blethering about Mrs. Anderby and all the rest of it. You go along and see Brook. I'd be interested to know what you make of him. I call him a nasty bit of work myself."

"Getting back to Mrs. Anderby," said Macdonald. "According to Grendon's statement, there was a lot of gossip when Dr. Chenner died. You made some inquiry into that, I gather?"

Lynch shook his head. "No. Nothing of that kind. It's true there was a lot of gossip, but it never reached us officially. People just talked at their tea parties, or over their knitting, but took care not to let it reach us. It wasn't Chenner's death that caused the gossip—it was the fact that he left Nurse Pewsey a spot of money!"

When Macdonald left Lynch, he did not make his way to Brook's clinic. He drove instead to The Rowan Tree. Miss Driver's house was a medium-sized modern building, very prettily situated on a road running off the common towards the fertile farm lands beyond. The Rowan Tree was a modern house, standing in its own garden, with a lane at the back which offered a short cut to the town.

When Macdonald came face to face with Miss Driver, he guessed that he was up against a difficult job. She was a tall, thin, gray-haired woman, dressed in a well-tailored suit, and her face had a mouth which seemed to justify the old description of "rat trap." Thin lips met in a hard uncurving line, and her light gray eyes held a merciless look. Macdonald had never seen a harder or more uncompromising face.

Having introduced himself and apologized for troubling her again—a preamble on which she made no comment—he continued by saying that he hoped Miss Driver might be willing to help by answering a few further questions. She looked him straight in the face with an unwavering stare.

"I have already answered all the questions which the police put to me to the best of my ability," she retorted, "and I have signed a statement which embodies all the information I had to give. I have nothing to add and nothing to withdraw."

"I have read your statement and thought it admirably clear," replied Macdonald, and she cut in tartly,

"Then why waste your time asking further questions when I have told you that I have no other information? I am not a fool, nor a gossip—and I have no intention of inventing further information, or of denying the facts I previously stated. I have been put to inconvenience enough already."

"I quite realize that," said Macdonald quietly. "Sudden deaths—and disappearances—*do* inconvenience people, but they have to be investigated. Apart from facts, I should be grateful for your opinion on certain matters: for instance, do you consider that Mrs. Anderby was aware that there was a lot of gossip concerning her, and that she was worried on that account?"

"I am the owner of a boarding house, Chief Inspector, not a general confidante. I make a habit of not gossiping with my clients. I do not know whether Mrs. Anderby was aware that her affairs had given rise to gossip, and I do not know if she was worried about it."

Miss Driver spoke with hardly a movement of her thin lips, and she held her head very erect, her bony hands hanging clenched at her sides.

"I gather that you must have had some conversation with her regarding her husband's death?" asked Macdonald, and she replied,

"I condoled with her to the best of my ability—a Christian could not well do less. I also made the most suitable arrangements I could, though it would have been more suitable had Mr. Anderby's body been taken to the mortuary chapel. I have other residents to consider, and it is useless to deny that the visits of undertakers and the movements of their men are disturbing. Mrs. Anderby's loss was a very sad one—but people do not wish to have tragedies inflicted on them unnecessarily. It did not help Mrs. Anderby—and it caused a great deal of disturbance here."

"Yes. As I have said before, death is inconvenient—but it is an inconvenience we are all bound to inflict on our fellows sometime," replied Macdonald. "However—I see your point quite clearly."

"You don't," she suddenly broke in tartly. "You see your own. Have you any further questions to ask?"

"I should like to see Mrs. Anderby's room—the one she was occupying after her husband's death. I have the keys from the inspector."

For answer, Miss Driver led the way to the door, and they crossed a wide, sunny hall to a small passage where she indicated a doorway at the farther end.

"Since you have the key, I can leave you to make any further investigations you think fit," she said, and Macdonald replied,

"Thank you. Just one more question. Did Mrs. Anderby move into this room immediately after her husband's death?"

"No. I gave her a small bedroom upstairs, but she complained that she could hear someone snoring in the adjoining bedroom. Since this was the only other room available, I offered it to her—and have much regretted it. I used this room as my own sitting room, and it seems that I am to be deprived of it indefinitely."

"Not indefinitely," replied Macdonald placidly. "I will see that you have possession of it again shortly."

He moved forward towards the locked door and heard Miss Driver walk in the other direction, her footsteps quick and very light. He pondered over her a little as he examined and removed the seal which the punctilious Lynch had fastened across the door. Miss Driver had hated Mrs. Anderby—Lynch was right there—but she was much too wise to admit it.

Opening the door, Macdonald crossed the little room and pulled back the curtains which covered the windows—French windows, opening onto a little square of lawn shut in with rose pergolas. It was a charming little room, gay in the sunshine which streamed in now the curtains had been pulled back—cream walls, brown carpet, dark oak furniture, and a divan

bed covered with golden taffeta and piled with cushions. There were some good etchings on the walls, and books in built-in shelves: with the privacy of the small rose garden beyond, it was as pleasant a sitting room as anyone could have wished for.

Two large suitcases and a hat box were piled up beside the divan, and numerous small personal properties lay on them—knitting, a hot-water bottle, a pipe and a man's walking stick, a handkerchief and some books and magazines, and a copy of the *Church Times*—evidently Miss Driver had collected all the small possessions left by the Anderbys and put them together.

Macdonald opened the suitcases and glanced through them, had a look at the books, then opened the French window and went outside onto the little lawn. He observed that there was a concealed archway in the rose pergola, carefully screened, which gave access to a path running between hedges towards the lane at the back of the house—an ideally easy exit for anyone who did not want to be observed. As he glanced towards the archway he saw a woman's figure beyond—not Miss Driver in her severe tailored suit, but a shorter stouter figure in a cheerful shade of blue. He advanced a step, saying pleasantly,

"Please don't let me disturb you. You were admiring the roses, perhaps?"

The figure came into view from behind the ramblers—a stout, cheerful-looking old lady with benevolent blue eyes. She smiled cheerfully at Macdonald.

"Yes. I have a great affection for roses. You are a detective, are you not? Are you looking for Mrs. Anderby? You won't find her here, you know. She has passed over."

Macdonald smiled at the apple-faced old lady, noting her many necklaces and the charms which hung from them. Before he had time to reply she went on:

"She spoke to me last night. I felt her presence quite close. She was trying to tell me about something she wanted done. I wonder if you could help?"

"If you will tell me about it, I will do my best," replied Macdonald gravely, and the old lady went on,

"It was about her husband's Bible. She wanted it to be given to his sister. It was a very special Bible, a most beautiful one. Dear Mr. Anderby showed it to me once. Some of his parish workers presented it to him when he retired. His eyesight was failing a little, and the Bible was chosen for its beautiful print. It had a red cover."

Macdonald considered the gentle old face upturned to his own: neither face nor speech was that of a weak-minded person, despite the eccentricity of what she said, and he decided to continue the conversation—more especially because, on looking through the Anderbys' possessions, he had noticed the Bible which he might have expected to find was not there. He replied,

"Perhaps Mrs. Anderby had already given the Bible to her husband's sister."

"Oh, no!" The reply was most emphatic. "His sister is an invalid—bedridden, poor soul! She lives in a London nursing home. She was not even able to come to the funeral. Only Mr. Anderby's solicitor and a few of his oldest friends came. Besides, I know that Mrs. Anderby would not have parted from the Bible during her lifetime."

"But how can you be sure that she is no longer alive?" queried Macdonald, and the confiding blue eyes looked up at him candidly.

"I told you. She spoke to me—in a dream. It was so clear, not distressful at all. She is happy. She told me so." With her hands clasped before her, the old lady went on,

"People are so wilfully misunderstanding. There is nothing to fear in death. I know. I have often heard their spirits speak to me. I do not always speak to other people about these things

—but you look kind and I thought you might help."

"Perhaps you could help me, too," replied Macdonald. "I want to know where Mrs. Anderby went when she left this house—if she did leave it."

"Oh, dear me, yes. She left here. She went for a walk . . . I saw her go—with the bunch of roses. Such beautiful flowers. They were sent to her by post that morning. Now surely you can tell where she went—with a bunch of beautiful roses, sent in memory of her husband?"

"You mean that she would have gone to the cemetery to put the flowers on her husband's grave?" asked Macdonald, and the blue eyes beamed at him.

"Of course. I knew you would understand. She loved her husband although she was a hard woman in some ways, but then she had had a hard life. She was conventionally minded, too. She would not have thought it in keeping for a newly widowed woman like herself to go out shopping, or on some trivial errand, the day after her husband had been buried. She would have taken the roses to his grave."

Macdonald looked down at the cheerful old face and decided that it was a sensible face: spiritualist or not, his companion showed a certain shrewdness in what she had said. He glanced round the garden and then at the open window of Miss Driver's sitting room.

"I'm very much interested in what you say," he replied. "Shall we go inside the house? We should be able to talk more easily there."

She beamed at him. "And without fear of eavesdroppers. Let us go inside. There are so many of us old women in this house and we are all inquisitive. Don't be too hard on us. Our life's work is over and we are but onlookers. We live on the interests of others because we have so little interest in our own lives."

Macdonald stood by the window as his companion entered the room and seated herself sedately on a straight-backed chair.

"My name is Macdonald," he said, and she bowed.

"And mine is Austin. Jane Austin. A conceit of my dear parents. About Mrs. Anderby, however. I must not waste your time. She set out for the cemetery—but she never reached it."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"The roses, Mr. Macdonald, the roses. They were very fine blooms—I saw them in her hands. There were six white ones—the old Frau Karl Druschki—and six red ones, Queen Elizabeth—a newer variety. It was shown at Chelsea last year. In addition, there was a cluster of Irish Elegance—the single rose, copper-coloured in bud, faint pink when in full bloom. I went to the cemetery on the evening after Mrs. Anderby had left us. I looked at the flowers on her husband's grave. There were bunches of roses lying there—poor withered things!—like some withered lives, dried up and sad. But the roses which Mrs. Anderby had taken out with her were not among them. I think I knew the truth then. She had passed over. She was no longer on our plane."

"I don't think that you can be certain of that," said Macdonald gently, but she replied,

"It is natural that you should be skeptical: you work on material evidence, do you not? I have spiritual evidence, and it is as real to me as your fingerprints are to you." She smiled across at him, tranquil and undisturbed. "I must not argue—that would be foolish—but I see your eyes studying the roses outside. There *are* Frau Karl Druschkis and Irish Elegance and Queen Elizabeth, but I do not think that Mrs. Anderby's roses were cut from this garden—but it is difficult to be sure. I do not generally trespass into this part of the garden." She paused and then added, "It was quite certain—it could be counted upon—that Mrs. Anderby would

take those roses to the cemetery. I fear, I very much fear—that someone did count upon it." She sighed, and Macdonald asked.

"Are you quite sure that you are not concealing something, Miss Austin?"

She looked at him with that intent smiling gaze, perfectly happy and self-possessed.

"I have nothing to conceal. I have talked to you very candidly because you have a friendly face. I like you. If you talk to other people in this house about me they will tell you I am a little mad. Quite harmless—senile perhaps."

She smiled quite happily and then added briskly, "Now you must find that Bible. It is bound in red morocco—an unusual and beautiful binding, and there is a flap inside the cover—a little compartment for holding letters. It had a sheet in it with the signatures of the subscribers on it."

She got up to go and Macdonald rose and held out his hand: he was quite sure that her mind was sound, and that there was plenty of shrewd common sense among the whimsies in her mind. She took his hand in her own, and Macdonald was surprised at the touch of her fingers. They were cool and silken smooth, having a vitality and elasticity in their softness unlike the hands of old age. Again she smiled at him.

"I have a young spirit. My earthly years do not count," she said. "You also have a young spirit. I wish you well."

After a moment or two, Macdonald went out into the passage, found his way to the hall and rang a bell. Miss Driver appeared from a doorway at the back.

"Can you tell me if Mrs. Anderby had any parcel sent to her on the last morning she was here?" he asked, and Miss Driver nodded brusquely.

"Yes. A parcel came by the post."

"Could I have the wrapping paper it came in—and the box."

"I have no idea where the wrapping paper is. Destroyed, possibly. I do not hoard such things."

"Could I ask the maid who did the room if she remembers it?"

"I did the room myself. It is *my* room—and I remember nothing about wrapping paper or a box."

Macdonald paused: then, still in the same conversational tone, he said, "And would you let me have Mr. Anderby's presentation Bible—the one bound in red morocco?"

That question got home. A dull red suffused the thin, colourless face, a flush which Miss Driver could not conceal. Her hands clenched and unclenched at her sides, and she looked at Macdonald with hatred in her eyes. Before she answered, he spoke again, still quite gently.

"I think that you should let me have it. I expect that you took it to safeguard it."

Without a word, she turned and went upstairs and presently returned with a paper-covered book. This she thrust into Macdonald's hands and turned quickly away, but not before he had seen the tears running down her face.

Macdonald took the Bible back into the little sitting room. Removing the paper which covered it, he found that it was bound in beautiful rose-coloured morocco, as Miss Austin had said.

There was a flap inside the cover, but inside the flap was no list of subscribers' signatures. There was a folded piece of paper—it was an invalid's temperature chart, carefully filled in. The name "Dr. Chenner" was written clearly upon it, and the date—December 29th, 193-. A word was written across the chart in clear block capitals. The word was HYOSCINE.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Macdonald considered the document spread out before him for some time. Its dramatic quality was of small interest to him, though his first thought had been, “Is this a confession—or an accusation?” His main preoccupation was, “How did this paper get here?”

He found a book which was signed “Emma Pewsey,” with a few lines of verse beneath the signature, and another which had the name “Emma Anderby” in the same handwriting, and compared the scripts with the writing of the patient’s name on the chart. The handwritings were identical in Macdonald’s judgment, though the angular old-fashioned letters were common enough among women of Mrs. Anderby’s age. The block capitals of the word “Hyoscine” might, or might not, have been written by the same hand.

After some little consideration, Macdonald went out into the hall again and rang the bell once more. Miss Driver reappeared, her face composed again now, set in its usual hard lines, and he asked her to come into the sitting room.

“Will you tell me how this Bible came into your possession, please?” he asked, and she replied with her former hard abruptness,

“I took it from this room when I tidied up after Mrs. Anderby had gone away. I knew that Mr. Anderby had prized the book. He read it daily and I did not like to see it lying neglected.”

“Did you examine the paper inside the flap of the front cover?”

“No. I do not pry into other people’s papers. I simply took the book and put it with my own Bible upstairs.”

Despite her self-control, Macdonald could see that she was shaken: her breathing was uneven, her limbs rigid with the effort of keeping still. There was a moment of dead silence, and then he took a sheet of notepaper from the writing table and said:

“Would you kindly write two names on this—Emma Pewsey and Emma Anderby.”

“Why?” She shot out the word furiously, and he replied,

“In order to compare your handwriting with Mrs. Anderby’s and avoid confusion over a certain document I have found. There is a pen on the writing table.”

She got up and went and seated herself at the writing table. The pen shook in her hand as she wrote, and the writing on the sheet she handed to Macdonald was so shaky as to be almost illegible.

“Thank you,” he replied. “Perhaps you would let me have another specimen of your handwriting as well—written when you were feeling more like yourself.”

For answer, she unlocked a drawer below the writing desk and took out an account book.

“That is filled with my own handwriting,” she said.

“Thank you.” Macdonald glanced at a few neatly written sheets—the writing had nothing in common with Mrs. Anderby’s—and then he said, “I am investigating a very difficult problem, Miss Driver. I should be very glad of your help, if you would be willing to give it.”

She sat silent, her mouth tight shut, her eyes staring beyond him into the garden.

“I wish you would give me your opinion of Mrs. Anderby,” he went on. “You had her living in this house for some weeks, and you knew her previously in Oasthampstead. What opinion had you of her?”

“I don’t indulge in opinions,” she retorted. “I leave them to the gossips of the neighbourhood. I earn my living by keeping a boarding house. Mr. and Mrs. Anderby were

good customers. They paid their bills. They were not unreasonable in their complaints. Naturally they grumbled occasionally. Everybody grumbles. I have no further opinion to give about either of them."

"Yet your opinion of—or respect for—Mr. Anderby was strong enough to make you take his Bible to your own room because you did not like to see it neglected."

"Certainly—I respected him. He was a very good man."

"Well—that's an admission of opinion, isn't it?" said Macdonald, a half-smile on his face. "Would you say the same of Mrs. Anderby?"

"I know very little about her. She was a good nurse, according to the doctors she worked for. She was generous to charities. She was tidy and methodical in the house."

"Those are statements, not opinions," he said. "When you found that she did not return here what did you think?"

"I hoped she would not come back."

The terse sentence had a concentrated venom behind it, but Macdonald went on placidly: "You have already made a statement that you know nothing relevant to Mrs. Anderby's disappearance, so we need not go into that, but I should like to know this: since you hoped that she would not come back, to what did you attribute her absence—accident or design?"

"To neither. She had gone—that was all which concerned me. For the rest, I am only too anxious to be rid of all this bother. You police—you don't care anything about the trouble you cause. I have worked hard to make this place pay. It's my living. My clients don't leave *me* legacies when they go away—because they don't like living in a house infested with police."

Macdonald could have laughed had her voice been less bitter. The idea of "infesting" a place amused him, but there was nothing amusing about the harsh bitterness of the woman who faced him. Her vindictiveness was tragic—he realized that. Here was no trivial resentment but a burning hatred which nearly consumed her. He went on,

"I am very sorry that you are suffering on account of this inquiry—but it has to go on. I must ask you if you are the person who takes in letters and parcels from the postman in the mornings?"

"Yes. As a general rule. The letters go in the box, of which I keep the key. I am generally about before breakfast, and I answer the postman's knock—if he does knock."

"So it was you who took in a parcel for Mrs. Anderby on the last morning she was here?"

"Yes. There was a parcel for her."

"Do you remember the writing in which it was addressed?"

"No. I have no recollection of it."

"Not even if it was written in ordinary handwriting or addressed in block capitals?"

"I don't remember."

"Was the parcel tied up in brown paper or other coloured paper?"

"I don't remember. I have looked in the kitchen—there is no paper with Mrs. Anderby's name on it."

"Did Mrs. Anderby have breakfast in her own room that morning?"

"No. I charge extra for meals served in bedrooms."

Macdonald was almost amazed at the vindictiveness which underlay that simple statement. Miss Driver continued: "Breakfast is served from eight till nine. There is an extra charge for meals served later than the scheduled times. Mrs. Anderby appeared for her breakfast at five minutes to nine."

"Were her letters and parcel sent into her room?"

"No. They were put on her table in the dining room."

"If she left paper and string on the table, what would have been done with them?"

"They would have been burnt in the kitchen stove. I have told you—I do not believe in hoarding. You can see the kitchen. I do the cooking myself—and I am a tidy person."

"I can tell that. This house is admirably tidy," returned Macdonald. "Once again, I am sorry to bother you, but I must ask to see any of your residents who might have noticed Mrs. Anderby's parcel while it was on her table in the dining room." He allowed himself a smile at that. "People are inquisitive all the world over," he said. "It will be odd if nobody remembers that parcel."

She darted him a quick look.

"You can see who you like. You know that. The police always do what they like—irrespective of trouble caused to other people."

"I am sorry that you should think so badly of us," rejoined Macdonald. "Inspector Lynch struck me as a very considerate man. Had he been less considerate, the results might have been better. Meantime, will you tell me what visitors are in the house at the present moment?"

"Miss Austin and Mrs. Grace. Both old women. Both given to imagining things. Do you want to see them here?"

"No. In the dining room, please."

Miss Driver got up and walked out of the room without further comment. Macdonald followed her, locking the door of the room as they left. He followed Miss Driver across the hall and into a white-walled dining room. It had blue curtains, a blue carpet, and blue and white mats on the little dark oak tables. Big earthenware pots of Barnstaple pottery stood on the mantel and the wide windowsills, filled with delphiniums and Canterbury bells, and there were bowls of Mrs. Sinkins Pinks on each table, so that the room was fragrant with their scent. An unusually nice dining room, thought Macdonald, and unusually well kept.

Miss Driver waited until he was inside the room: then, saying abruptly, "I will send them to you," she left him.

Macdonald strolled to the window and stood with his back to it surveying the room. One table, at the farther end, had no flowers upon it. Was that Mrs. Anderby's table, he wondered?

A moment later a small white-haired lady entered the room: she looked so frightened that Macdonald said promptly, "Please don't be frightened! I've got nothing alarming or distressing to ask you. Just very ordinary little questions about very ordinary things."

She looked up at him and smiled back. "Oh, thank you! I'm afraid I'm very silly, but I've never had to answer police questions before, and I'm so afraid I shall get muddled up and answer all wrong, and get sent to prison for perjury. You see, I've such a *dreadfully* bad memory, and I know I do contradict myself, so you'll make allowances, won't you?"

Her words came tumbling out breathlessly, and Macdonald pulled forward a chair and moved it towards her. "Now don't get worried and don't bother about perjury. It's a point which doesn't arise here because you're not on oath. I only want you to try to help me about a very small point. You remember Saturday morning—the day after Mr. Anderby's funeral?"

"To be sure. I shall always remember that." The little old face puckered and Macdonald was afraid that she was going to cry, and he hurried on:

"Will you tell me what time you have breakfast?"

"Breakfast?" she repeated wonderingly. "I come down at half-past eight. The dining room is nice and quiet then. All the energetic young people with work to do have their breakfasts at

eight and are out of the house at half-past. My table is there in the window. So nice and sunny—and I can see the birds on the lawn."

"Very nice—I think this is a delightful dining room," said Macdonald, and she beamed at him.

"Is it not? Miss Driver is such a wonderful manager!—and such good taste!"

"Excellent," agreed Macdonald. "Now about Saturday morning: do you remember coming into the dining room? Was anyone else there when you came in?"

"No . . . no. I remember quite well—Miss Austin had just finished her breakfast. I met her in the hall. The younger people had gone and poor Mrs. Anderby was not down. I said to myself, 'She will have breakfast in bed; perhaps I might take up her letters.' There were a lot of letters. So trying! People are very kind over a bereavement, but answering all those letters is so *very* wearing . . . and then I said to myself that I must not be intrusive and interfering, and I decided not to do anything."

From Macdonald's point of view the conversation had taken an excellent turn, and he replied: "It was very kind of you to think of taking up the letters. Now I wonder if you can remember whether there was a parcel for Mrs. Anderby that day?"

"Indeed I can! A box of roses, such beautiful flowers, as fresh as though they had just been cut! I saw her unpack them. Poor thing! She cried a little as she read the note which came with them. Not that I was staring, but from where I sit, just here, I face Mrs. Anderby's table, and as it happened I had finished my own breakfast and I just caught sight of her face."

"Can you tell me anything about the look of the parcel? What sort of paper it was wrapped up in, for instance?"

"Oh, yes. I did notice. It was a long box, very neatly packed, wrapped in green wrapping paper like Selfridges use, and the address was very neat, on a white label, typed." She looked a little confused and became rather pink in the face. "I hope you won't think I'm *inquisitive*. I would not dream of prying, but I just happened to notice. An old woman *does* notice things—quite little things like that. When I saw the parcel, I know I thought 'Selfridges,' and wondered if it was some of the veils Mrs. Anderby had been trying to get down here quite unsuccessfully, and then of course I saw that the label was not Selfridges. It said 'Flowers, with care,' but no name of any firm."

"I'm so glad that you remembered all that. It's most helpful to me," said Macdonald. "You have told me about it so clearly. Now I have not asked your name. You are Mrs. Grace, are you not?"

She nodded like a bird, and Macdonald went on,

"I wonder if you can remember what happened to the wrapping paper when Mrs. Anderby had unpacked the box of flowers. Did she leave it on the table or on the floor?"

"Oh, no, indeed not. Mrs. Anderby was a very tidy person. She never left things about like I do. I am always leaving things about, and then forgetting where I left them—my glasses and knitting and newspaper; it is *so* stupid and so very tiresome. I remember Mrs. Anderby folded up the wrapping paper and tied the string round it, and she took the box and tissue paper and wrapping paper with her when she went back to her room. I know because I came back to look," she continued naïvely. "It was a nice useful box, like a strong cardboard shoe box, and I thought of asking if I might have it if she did not want it—but I saw her in the hall, carrying the box away, and of course I did not like to ask for it. That was the last time I saw her. Poor Mrs. Anderby! I fear she must have lost her memory. People *do* lose their memories, do they not, if they suffer from a severe shock? Miss Austin says she has 'passed over'—she means

died—but I have no belief in spiritualism, and I think it very unwise to seek to penetrate such mysteries—unwise and dangerous."

Macdonald smiled at her as he got up: she was a very nice old lady, he thought, and he said,

"Thank you so much for all the help you have given me. I am very grateful. I hope that I haven't worried you with all my questions."

"Indeed, no! You have been so kind and considerate. I can hardly believe that you are really a policeman."

After Mrs. Grace had twittered her way out of the room, Macdonald waited for Miss Austin to come to be interviewed. When she came in, smiling and unperturbed as ever, he wondered if such a candid, happy face could conceal a tortuous and evil mind. Miss Austin spoke to him as soon as she had closed the door.

"You need not exercise your mind as to whether I am a deceitful and untruthful old woman, Mr. Macdonald. I know you must be considering that possibility."

He met her smiling eyes, thinking that she was, at any rate, a very good thought reader. Macdonald was skeptical about spiritualism and the results produced by spiritualist seances, but he was Scotsman enough to be aware that certain people had an extra "awareness," a telepathic sense perhaps, which he could not explain rationally, but which he could not entirely disregard. He replied:

"In my job, Miss Austin, I have to consider as suspect all statements whose truth I cannot prove. You have made two statements—the first being that Mrs. Anderby has passed over—or died, to use the usual expression, the second that she conveyed a message to you concerning her husband's Bible."

"Yes—and both are quite true."

"I don't want to discuss the first, but I think the second needs a little clearing up," he went on. "Now you knew that Mr. Anderby possessed this presentation Bible, and that he had it with him here because he had shown it to you."

"Quite right," she replied.

"I think you also knew that it had been removed from the Anderbys' room," he went on, "and you knew that, not through the medium of a spirit message alone, but on account of your own observation."

"That is right in part," she said, her voice quite tranquil. "After Mrs. Anderby went out on Saturday, I was walking in the garden by the rose pergola, where I saw you a short while ago. I saw the Bible then, lying on the bedside table. The sun was shining into the room, right across the table, and it gleamed on the red binding. Later in the day, in the evening when we were all worried about Mrs. Anderby, I saw Miss Driver come out of the room with something under her arm, wrapped in paper. I went into the garden again—it was still quite light—and the Bible was no longer on the table. That same night I knew that Mrs. Anderby had passed on. Her spirit spoke to me. She came again to me last night and gave me the message about the Bible. I understood at once. I had been thinking of her."

She spoke very simply, with an apparent sincerity which Macdonald found it hard to disbelieve. He was sure of one thing—that Miss Austin believed Mrs. Anderby to be dead. Her whole statement was a simple enough thought sequence, deprived of its esoteric dressing. Mrs. Anderby had disappeared, therefore some accident had befallen her. The incident about the Bible was a synthesis of Miss Austin's knowledge of Miss Driver, and of her observation of the latter's actions—easily enough translated into a "dream message."

"Did you know Mrs. Anderby before she came here?" he inquired, but Miss Austin shook her head.

"Only very slightly. I have only lived in Penharden a few months. I used to live with my sister in Welwyn. I was very happy here until Mr. and Mrs. Anderby came. I liked him—we all did. He was a kind and gentle man. She was hard. She disliked Miss Driver—we all felt it—and there was friction in the house."

"Miss Austin, have you any idea who sent those roses to Mrs. Anderby?"

She shook her head.

"No. I have no idea. I don't want to know. I fear they were sent with evil intent."

Before he left the house, Macdonald asked a lot more questions and, when he left, he felt that more constructions than one could be placed on the action of some of its inhabitants. Mrs. Anderby, for instance, had asked for her bedroom to be changed again, probably knowing that the only alternative bed was the divan in Miss Driver's room on the ground floor. Miss Driver had taken Mr. Anderby's Bible from his room: it was conceivable that she had placed the temperature chart in it for Macdonald to find—but she had certainly not gone out on the morning of Mrs. Anderby's disappearance. Miss Austin had directed Macdonald to inquire about the Bible and had told him about the arrival of the bunch of roses: her suggestion that Mrs. Anderby had taken these roses to the cemetery to place on her husband's grave was a sound one, in Macdonald's opinion, but her insistence on "spirit" messages he viewed with mistrust, even though he had met perfectly rational people with the same belief.

Before he left he packed up certain things, including the Bible and the chart, and a few of Mrs. Anderby's papers and magazines, and locked them in his car. He had discovered that Mrs. Anderby had a banking account, but her cheque book and note case and purse were presumably taken in her handbag. Inquiries had already been set on foot to discover if Mrs. Anderby had changed any cheques since her disappearance, but no reports had come in.

When he left The Rowan Tree (watched furtively by Mrs. Grace from behind a window, openly by Miss Austin from the lawn), Macdonald drove his car a short distance to a convenient parking place and then left the car and walked back to the boarding house, to the lane at the end of the garden. He wanted to walk to the cemetery and observe the road he traversed. His way took him along a footpath, turning between hedges, and a little later he turned down a sloping lane which led under a railway arch to the common on the farther side of the railway line. The lane was very quiet, running between rather tall hedges, which kept secluded the gardens of prosperous house owners. The lane did not lead to the town, but to the common, and hence by a footpath over the golf course, to the cemetery. Macdonald strolled up and down the lane for about a quarter of an hour, smoking his pipe and considering the hedges and garden gates. Nobody came by all the time he lingered, and he was justified in concluding that there was but little traffic that way. He continued his walk all the way to the cemetery, but the remainder of it, once past the railway arch, ran either by small houses close to the road or else over the open common, the path being used by a considerable number of people and in view of golfers. At one point users of the footpath had to cross the main London road: here Green Line and local buses ran frequently, and it was possible to reach Bedford, Luton, Welwyn, Watford and other busy centres of population very easily. In the event of Mrs. Anderby having "done a bolt"—to use Lynch's expression—she would probably have avoided the direct bus routes to London (by which she could the more easily be traced, since the time of her departure was known and the buses ran at half-hourly intervals) and have taken one of

the more frequent local services. Penharden, though a small town, had a network of communications with other places, and was very easy to get away from unobtrusively.

Retracing his steps, Macdonald made his way to the back of The Rowan Tree and walked along the lane to which Miss Driver's sitting room gave such easy access, and walked to Brook's clinic, which lay nearer to the Oasthampstead road. It took him fifteen minutes to walk, his way lying along quiet little roads. He guessed from the nature of the small houses that their owners or tenants were mainly workingfolk—probably toilers who travelled daily to London—and who probably went to bed early. Police patrols were few and far between in Penharden—the town was remarkably free from crime—and anyone could have counted on walking unnoticed from The Rowan Tree to the clinic at midnight.

Macdonald, who was always willing to use his imagination, pictured Mrs. Anderby thus walking, in her mind the description of Major Grendon's room, given by his garrulous self, determined to carry out her grim purpose. If she had done the things attributed to her, this final effort would not be out of keeping.

Macdonald emerged at last from the narrow Thorn Tree Way and turned into the wide country road where the clinic was situated. Houses here were at ever-decreasing intervals as he approached the open country.

Brook's grounds were surrounded by a tall hedge of macrocarpa, the garden well screened from the road. Macdonald went straight in at the wooden gate and, seeing no one about, he turned at the angle of the house to see the French window of the room where Major Grendon had slept. A man in a linen coat was digging in the garden, and he straightened himself up and stared at Macdonald with inimical dark eyes.

"Do you want the front door?" he inquired.

"Not particularly," responded Macdonald dryly. "I want to see Mr. Brook—I gather that I am speaking to him?"

"You are."

"Could you spare me half an hour's talk?" He proffered a card, and as Brook studied it the Chief Inspector asked,

"Have you taken a dislike to those rose trees—or do you believe in moving them at this time of year?"

"I believe in doing what I like with what is my own," replied Brook, as he led the way to the house.

CHAPTER EIGHT

While he talked to Brook, Macdonald found it easy enough to understand why it was that Lynch suspected the osteopath so strongly. The man was on the defensive—and aggressively so. He took a leaf out of Miss Driver's book by being obstinately uninformative. Watching the ugly, sardonic, yet interesting face, Macdonald realized just what effect Brook would have on an average jury—he would be mistrusted immediately.

After ten minutes spent in courteous questions, to which he obtained useless and very non-committal answers, Macdonald changed his tactics.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "I don't quite know what your intentions are, but I think you're mistaken in the attitude you're adopting. A man has been killed while he was under your roof, living here as your patient. It's the reverse of good sense on your part to behave in a manner which gives the impression you've something to conceal. At least, let each of us regard the other as intelligent persons in their own calling."

Brook did not reply. He sat and stared at Macdonald with frowning dark eyes, as though he were studying him as an obscure pathological specimen. The Chief Inspector went on:

"I gather that your opinion of police and police methods is not high. You have suffered in the past from errors on the part of the police. Other people may have suffered from errors on the part of osteopaths, but that does not cause me to assume that all osteopaths are prone to error. I have enough knowledge of men to assume that you are an observant and intelligent person. Why not behave like one? It's to your interest to have this mess cleared up. Why not try to co-operate in the clearing up?"

Brook smiled—an ironical grin which deepened the clefts running from his long nose to his finely cut mouth.

"Quite frankly, it's all the same to me personally whether the mess is cleared up or not. For an osteopath to be accused of one murder was pretty damning. Bone setters are famous as quacks and charlatans, as you doubtless know. To be involved in a second murder case is a bit too steep. It's not likely to be forgotten."

"Possibly not, but if you were to use your ability in helping to solve the problem the thing might eventually turn out to your advantage. By behaving as you are doing now, you give the impression that you're on the defensive."

"Returning the compliment that you paid me just now, I should say that you are an observant and intelligent person," said Brook, his voice ironical as ever. "I don't make the mistake of assuming that you are only another edition of Lynch. You've got all the data—far more than I have. It's your job to draw the conclusion, not mine."

"So you've already drawn one?"

"I made no such admission. In any case, it's obvious that more conclusions than one can be drawn from the data, but it's not up to me to make suggestions." Again he studied Macdonald with his brooding eyes. "Say if I ask a question for a change, since you're so anxious to be conversational. You asked me when you first appeared why I was digging up rose trees. Did you suppose I was digging a grave—and if so, for whose corpse?"

"No. I didn't suppose you were digging a grave. If you were in need of such a receptacle you wouldn't excavate it in your own garden. That would be too much like digging your own," replied Macdonald, "but I'm quite willing to answer your original query—why did I

ask you why you were digging up rose trees? Because Mrs. Anderby had a fine bunch of garden roses sent to her on the morning she disappeared, and the probability is that she set out to take them to the cemetery, to put them on her husband's grave. That was the deduction made by an elderly lady, and I think it's a sound one. I want to know where Mrs. Anderby's roses came from."

Brook grinned, and his grin was appreciative this time. "I see. That's rather a nice sequence of thought. Did I send her the roses—and then dig up my rose trees some days later in order to conceal my guilt? Do I look as incompetent as that? Incidentally, couldn't Mrs. Anderby have sent the roses to herself?"

"Not very well. Her husband was buried on the previous day. For her to have cut roses in the garden and to have asked someone to post them to herself would have been so unexpected an episode that I doubt if she would have risked it. She might have asked someone else to obtain them and post them to her, of course."

Brook looked less sardonic now: he was interested—as even irritated people become interested when they are given a fresh line of thought.

"Ingenious," he observed. "Like the other events in this sequence you're investigating, it's susceptible to various constructions."

"It is. I find it rather a nice point. If Mrs. Anderby lost her nerve and ran away, she showed great coolness and foresight in organizing that little incident of the roses. She was in a house where she was being observed by very inquisitive people—quite innocently. Those roses got her out of the house without any but the most sympathetic comment being made. She was visiting her husband's grave. What more natural?"

"Neat," observed Brook. "Query, were the roses deposited at their supposed destination?"

"No. Not if my informants were speaking the truth."

"So Mrs. Anderby set out on foot with a bunch of roses and was no more seen. It's hardly what you would call a profitable move on her part. Her credit is 'frozen,' as the bankers would say, and she'll be on the rocks unless she managed to make other arrangements for liquidating reserves. At any rate, she can't profit from her husband's estate."

"Exactly. If Mrs. Anderby is responsible for the events for which Major Grendon—and a good many others apparently—held her responsible for, it's difficult to understand her running away at this juncture. After having juggled skilfully for a long time, she throws in her hand just when she appears to have achieved success. Again, there could be more explanations than one. Assuming that she removed Grendon's statement at the same time that she turned the gas on in his room, she may have found something in that statement that was damning from her own point of view."

"But since she'd destroyed the statement, why worry?"

"Because Grendon had shown it to Lee Gordon. It's true that he doesn't remember any important points in it—but realization of the crucial point might dawn on him—or on you, or on Falkland."

Brook did not reply, and Macdonald went on:

"I should be very glad if you could bear to go over the events preceding the finding of Grendon's body again. I know that reiteration is wearisome, but it might bring out some new point."

"I've got nothing to add to what I previously said," replied Brook wearily. "In short—I went in to have a look at Grendon just after midnight. He was asleep, lying in the same position in which I found him three hours later. His windows were all wide open."

"Did you switch the lights on in his room?"

"No. I used a shaded torch."

"Were there any lights on in the house?"

"None. I'd turned them all off."

"You move quietly, I expect? You can go into a room and be sure of not waking the occupant?"

"Obviously. I told you I went into Grendon's room, and he didn't stir. If it's of any interest to you, I often go round the patients' rooms at night—not that they know it. A lot of people complain of insomnia and tell me they haven't slept a wink all night. It's generally a gross exaggeration of what happens. They lie awake for an hour or two and then sleep for an hour or two. I've found the most chronic complainers about insomnia sleeping like infants in the small hours."

"Did you ever go into Falkland's room?"

"Yes—but again, he didn't know it. Insomnia didn't trouble him—although he talked in his sleep a bit, and I've a suspicion he sleep-walked."

"Any evidence for that?"

"I've heard him move in his room when he's said he'd slept like a dormouse all night. Nothing much in that. When he came here he was suffering from nervous strain, due to excessive office work, lack of exercise and chronic pain."

"When you went to his room the night Grendon died, was Falkland really fast asleep?"

Brook stared and then shrugged his shoulders.

"To the best of my knowledge and belief, yes. Moreover, his room was foul with gas. Had he been awake, he wouldn't have dared to risk staying in it. It was obvious he'd have become comatose pretty rapidly."

"When you left Grendon's room shortly after midnight, did you go straight to your own bedroom?"

"Yes, but I was awake for another hour at least. I was reading—I didn't hear a sound of any kind, although I've got ears like a cat. I hear far more than most people do."

"Could you hear the front gate open from your room?"

"I should have heard it if it *had* opened. It was a very quiet night, and all my windows were open wide. No one came in by the front gate. If anyone came into the garden, he—or she—came in by the tradesman's gate in the farther side and walked round the house on the grass without making a sound."

"Not of necessity. Someone could have come in at the front gate while you were going upstairs, after you'd been into Grendon's room. Your room is a considerable distance from his, on the other side of the house. With your own windows open and the door shut, you would not have smelt the gas for some time—at least, I imagine so. We might do an experiment on that."

"I've done it. I have a good nose. I don't smoke, and I'm very alert to notice a smell. I was awoken that night by the smell of gas—that and nothing else. If you turn on the gas in Grendon's room, with the house doors and windows as they were that night, it's just perceptible in my bedroom, with all the windows open, twenty minutes after the gas has been turned on. In forty minutes my bedroom would be reeking—judging by my own reactions. You probably wouldn't notice it so soon because you're a chronic smoker. The gas was not turned on until at least forty minutes after midnight—else I'd have smelt it before I went to sleep. I sleep well—and my bed is under the window. When I woke up, the smell was very strong, though nothing like lethal. Watts sleeps on the top floor: he woke up just before I did. I

met him on the landing when I went outside, and we both thought it came from Falkland's room. I thought he had been sleep-walking again, but I was mistaken."

"So you'd give it as your opinion that the gas in Grendon's room was turned on by someone who came into the house from the outside, not very long before one o'clock?"

"Yes. That's my opinion—but it's no use to you. It depends entirely on whether I'm speaking the truth, and you've no means of telling that."

Macdonald replied: "I've got the main facts of the case, from the police point of view, and now I'm trying to get individual reactions."

"Meaning you're inspecting the *dramatis personae* and forming your own opinions?"

"If you like to put it that way. Now for another point. Mr. Anderby came to you to consult you about his arthritis. What was your opinion of his state of health? Don't tell me you're not a qualified medical man. Give me your opinion for my own benefit."

Brook shrugged his shoulders irritably. "I have my own ways of sizing up a man's vital resources independently of stethoscopes and all the rest. Anderby was an old man, and his heart was an old man's heart, but he had plenty of vitality and resilience. When I examined him—and by examination I don't mean by the usual practitioner's methods but by my own, his heart was good enough to last several years. He made no complaint of palpitations and the like, and his pulse was reasonably strong, his vitality marked."

"Again, in your own opinion, do you think the palpitations, or other symptoms he complained of, could have been induced by treatment?"

Brook's eyebrows shot up. "Why not ask the practitioner who examined him?"

"I'm asking you. I think it probable you have the more open mind. Dr. Tracey has given his opinion as an expert, and I think it's improbable he'll admit the possibility of any conclusions but the ones he has stated."

Again Brook shrugged his shoulders. "Tracey's an old fool," he said, "and he returns the compliment by calling me a quack. He held forth for about half an hour about valves and lesions and palpitations. If he'd thought for five minutes he could have realized that occasional doses of thyroid, or of a heart stimulant, could have produced the palpitations. In short, any person with a small knowledge of drugs used in treating different kinds of cardiac affections could have used this knowledge to bring on palpitations in an old man."

"That's a very interesting point," mused Macdonald, and Brook said in his irritable way,

"Anderby ought not to have been buried until after a comprehensive post mortem—but everybody was so busy chasing their own tails that common sense was notably omitted from proceedings. They did a P.M. on Grendon, although the cause of his death was plain at the outset." He stared at Macdonald again and then added, "Incidentally, if you dig up Anderby you may find cardiasol or some other cardiac excitant in his remains, but it won't be a lethal dose. If he was murdered—and it's still an open question—the method used was pretty subtle. Falkland was right there. It isn't easy to make a man fall down dead in the presence of witnesses without any preliminary symptoms at all."

"Falkland seems to have stressed that point considerably."

Brook snorted. "That's right. Suspect the lot of us! What earthly motive could Falkland have had for doing old Anderby in? It's silly."

Macdonald's voice sounded mild by contrast when he replied: "What earthly motive could anybody else have had—save Mrs. Anderby—and she, by her own action of running away, has made it impossible for herself to benefit. As you say, it's silly. Falkland certainly took a considerable interest in the case."

"He'd every right to. As Grendon stated it, in the first case, the problem was a very intriguing one. When Falkland found that the one-time Nurse Pewsey had operated at the expense of his own family, his own sense of property gingered him on to go making inquiries, and his chat with the Dellaton lady convinced him that there was something in it—although he said he was going to forget all about it and leave it alone. When Watts and I were in Falkland's room that night, shaking him awake, Watts tumbled to it that it was in Grendon's room downstairs that the gas was turned on, and when he said so Falkland burst out, 'She's had another shot after all then'—which shows which way *his* mind was working."

"Yes. Falkland's quite certain of his conclusions and at this stage I wouldn't state that he's wrong. One thing alone seems certain to me—Major Grendon was killed because he'd noticed something and put it on record. The point is, what did he notice? Nobody has tumbled to it, though he did enough talking apparently."

Brook was silent, sitting thinking, with his black brows knitted in a harsh line straight across his face. When he replied, the answer was at a tangent.

"Grendon talked to Falkland, to Lee Gordon, to me—and finally to Mrs. Anderby. Now Grendon is dead and Mrs. Anderby's off the map. I tell you I was glad when Falkland packed up his belongings and took himself home."

"Why?"

"Why? You don't want *me* to answer that one for you—or you're no detective. Because it's possible that that woman is unhinged. If she has succeeded in putting half a dozen people quietly out of the world she won't jib at a few more. Falkland said, 'So she's had another shot.' She may try again. If so, she can try on me. I'm sleeping in this house by myself and advertising the fact. I shall be interested to see if there's any—reaction."

"So shall I." Macdonald's voice was dry. "If there is a—reaction, as you call it, it will mean one of two things, one being that you have knowledge, whether you're aware of it or not, that makes you dangerous. Incidentally, you still have not answered my original question. Why were you digging up your rose trees?"

Brook started and then laughed. "It seems a pity to spoil your pleasure in that incident. The answer I gave you is the correct one—because I like doing as I like with that which is my own. I've got to find some means of entertaining myself while I'm here, and gardening serves me well as anything else. I hate a lawn cut up by flower beds. I'm going to level it and turf the whole thing over. If you want to dig for corpses, for goodness' sake do it before I've got busy with a spirit level. I hate wasting labour." He paused and looked at Macdonald with a flash of humour in his irritable dark eyes.

"Can't you remove that oaf who haunts the road? He's a silly fool anyway. If I wanted to emulate Mrs. Anderby and do a bolt, he would be neither let nor hindrance—but he may spoil my other plan completely. If someone wants to have a shot at doing me in, that flat-footed specimen would be in the way."

"Yes. I see your point there. I'll see what can be done about it," said Macdonald, and for the first time in their interview Brook laughed, a laugh which changed his sardonic face surprisingly.

"I was so fed-up with Lynch and his plain-clothes bumpkins that I felt disposed to do a leg-pull. I know that chap watches me over the hedge. I've got a skeleton upstairs—a remnant from days when I knew less bones than I do now. I'd thought of putting it in a sack and burying it in the garden at dusk. My lord, I could have made Lynch look pretty foolish after

he'd had the thing dug up—and run me in for murder. He would have, you know. That's just the sort of thing he'd fall for."

"On the whole, I advise you not to," replied Macdonald. "I can see that you might have a bit of fun—but it wouldn't be worth while." He got up, adding, "Well, thanks for talking. You've given me some valuable ideas—and if any efforts are made at eliminating you, you might let me know as soon as possible. I'll let you have a phone number when I've found a room. Incidentally, I don't think you'd be an easy person to eliminate once you're forewarned—else I might have suggested police protection. There's something in what you say."

Brook shrugged his shoulders in that irritable, spasmodic way of his.

"Police protection, as you call it, is the last thing I want. When you were handed over this case didn't you swear at the utter futility of the police work before you took over? If I'd been in your shoes I should have sworn like hell at the sheer stupidity shown over the sequence of events down here. If that's police work, heaven defend me from police protection! Lynch's main piece of work has been to put a couple of dunderheads on my doorstep. I can hear them move every time they take a step. I tell you I can smell them yards away—they reek of tobacco. One of them has a defect in his left foot and doesn't walk evenly. The other has chronic catarrh and snorts like a pig. I suppose you call their job 'shadowing.' Anything less like a shadow I never experienced."

"Watching of that kind is expert work, and the provincial police in rural areas don't run to experts," replied Macdonald. "If you had done a bolt, too, Lynch would have been reprimanded for not keeping you under observation. He's done his best."

"Well, if you can see about getting 'his best' removed, we might get a little forwarder along one line," retorted Brook.

Macdonald left the clinic to walk back to his car, pondering deeply. This was an interesting case, and he felt a considerable satisfaction in musing over its complexities, as he decided upon steps for which he would need to obtain sanction from the pundits of the Home Office.

CHAPTER NINE

"Hallo, Brook. How's things? I'm doing a job of work not far away, and I thought I'd look in and exchange 'depressions'."

Falkland walked into the garden of Brook's house and found the osteopath sitting in the shadow of the trees at the end. The golden evening light fell full on the richly foliaged trees, elm and sweet chestnut, ilex and oak, their leaves in all their summer fullness making a brave show against a clear-blue sky. Brook motioned his visitor to a deck-chair beside his own.

"How's things?" he echoed. "Moving a bit, I fancy. Have you seen the highlight from the Mecca of fiction?"

"Meaning the Chief Inspector? Yes, I've been inspected. An able chap, I thought, and interesting. I liked him—though I had a feeling he was summing me up in a manner not altogether agreeable. He's a knack of talking on, and getting one to say rather more than one intended. However, I believe they've a maxim concerning cautioning a suspect if they've good grounds for suspicion."

"You've got that bit wrong," said Brook. "An officer is supposed to caution you if he has any intention of arresting you—a very different matter. This chap Macdonald is setting to work in the only reasonable way—by suspecting all and sundry. By force of circumstances you and I are involved as much as anyone else—in Grendon's death, anyway."

Falkland produced his cigarette case and lighted up before replying.

"Sounds as though things are getting you down, Brook," he replied. "It's a damned odd business. I wake up in a sweat at night over it all, quite unreasonably. Because I once gossiped to old Anderby in a bunker, and listened to Grendon blowing off steam, and made an excuse to go and see Lee Gordon's garden, and went round asking questions about Nurse Pewsey, and finally nearly got gassed myself in company with Grendon, I work out some devilish chain of circumstantial reasoning which I can't disprove. Why the hell did I go getting myself mixed up in it and, likewise, what the hell did I tell Lynch about the Pewsey business for? I'd have done better to have kept my mouth shut."

Brook studied him in his customary brooding manner.

"Something's happened to rattle you up," he said. "You weren't feeling like this last time I saw you."

"Quite true. Something *has* happened. I don't often behave like the poor cat in the adage."

" 'Letting I dare not wait upon I will'," quoted Brook with his sardonic grin. "So you came to consult me about it—and put the onus on somebody else."

Falkland laughed. "I felt you were the one person I *could* consult about it, Brook. You know the facts, and you're capable of keeping your own counsel. Also, apart from anything else, I trust you."

"Don't trust anybody," retorted Brook. "At least, don't think I'm asking for confidences. I'm not."

"If you'd rather I left them unuttered, say so," retorted Falkland, but Brook answered,

"I've the usual share of human curiosity. Man would never have developed into the thinking animal he is if he hadn't been inquisitive. If you want to talk I'm game to listen, but let's go indoors first."

He got up and led the way to the French windows of the room which had been Grendon's, and pushed them back.

"Good Lord," said Falkland. "I never knew I possessed nerves before—but I hate the thought of going through that room."

"Don't be a fool," said Brook. "If you start on that tack your nerves will certainly get the better of you. If you jib at going through a room because a man has died in it, there'll be a good many rooms in a good many houses which will affect the pit of your stomach."

He stood aside for Falkland to enter, and then drew the folding doors together and bolted them.

"Life is rather a humorous business for me just at present," he said. "Lynch put on some ex-plough-boy to shadow me, and I asked the Chief Inspector to put an end to the farce by calling the dog off. He's done so—but I have a feeling that there's another much more competent exponent of the art somewhere around. Not that I've seen him—he's much too efficient. But he's there, somewhere."

They entered the hall and Falkland laughed.

"Look here—talk about *me* giving way to nerves! What about you?"

Brook stood still in the sunlit entrance hall. He closed his eyes and then stood with one foot lifted clear of the ground, his right arm outstretched at full length. He stood thus for about ten seconds, with never a tremor, his outstretched hand perfectly steady. Then he opened his eyes and turned to Falkland.

"That's a good test of the steadiness of your nervous system," he said. "Nerves affect a man's physique. If you can shut your eyes and yet retain your balance without swaying and without letting your hands quiver, your nerves are in good trim. There's nothing wrong with mine, and I'm not using my imagination either when I tell you I'm being watched. I'm using the faculties I've got which are in better training than yours, my senses—eyes, ears, nose. It depends on your own alertness. I could follow you without your being aware of it, just as I could enter your room at night without waking you. If *you* followed *me*, I should know it. If you came into my room at night, I should wake up."

He led the way to his own study and Falkland followed him—Brook went on: "Not only do I believe I'm being watched. I'm also waiting with some confidence for someone to have a shot at murdering me. It's an interesting feeling."

Falkland stood stock still by the door.

"You're not expecting me to oblige, are you?" he asked abruptly, and Brook laughed.

"No. Not you. At least, I should be very much surprised if it turned out to be you. Pull yourself together, man. What are you frightened of?"

"Good Lord! I believe I was frightened of *you* for a minute, Brook. You've got a nasty knack of developing atmospherics. When I remember the way you pummelled me when you were treating me, I begin to realize you might be a nasty fellow to come up against, even though I weigh three stone more than you do and have twice your physical strength."

"Oh, no, you haven't. Beef, I grant you, but I could put you down as easily as I could put a child—because I know how. I could do it even as I shook hands with you. Sit down. Would you like a drink? Now you're no longer my patient and your health's no affair of mine, I'll produce the whisky and soda you're yearning for."

Falkland broke out laughing, but he mopped his forehead as he sat down.

"You're the damnedest odd fellow I ever met, Brook. Without offence, I can understand why Lynch put a shadower on to you. You probably frightened him—and he didn't enjoy the

sensation. Look here, won't you drink too?"

"Not whisky. I've too much respect for my own perceptions to blunt them as you do. You smoke, and thereby destroy your sense of smell and taste. You drink alcohol, and dull your powers of observation. Every man to his own pleasures. You don't miss what you've no power to experience—the real scent of mown hay and lime blossom, fresh-cut grass and fallen rose leaves, the soil after rain—you only think you can smell them. You can't. Now you've got some Dutch courage inside you, take heart and say your bit."

Falkland put down his glass and replied, "Well, it's easily said. I've had an anonymous letter."

"What about?"

"You can read it—and see what you make of it. It's a damned queer epistle."

Falkland produced an envelope from his pocket and handed it to Brook. It was addressed in pencilled block capitals and had been sent by post to Falkland's office in Chelsea. Drawing out the sheet it contained, Brook read:

"I saw her in my dream, lying in the stream below the weir. Her coat was caught in one of the wooden piles by the bank, and I could see her face with the water washing over it. Her gray hair was loose and floated in the stream, mingling with the water weed. . . . I spoke to her in my dream and asked her how she came to lie in her watery grave, and she answered me." The careful pencilled capitals broke off here and there was a rough pencil scrawl, as though the lead had nearly scored a hole through the paper, then the lettering continued again. "Who knows why Mrs. Anderby was drowned? Who left her under the weir by the River Pen? You know. You saw her. You left her there."

"Well, that's a jolly sort of message," said Brook. "What are you doing about it? Giving it to the police?"

"I suppose so—and yet, damn it all, Brook, what does it look like? Say if the woman's body is found under the weir, won't it look exactly as though I might have written this letter to myself—and then took it to the police to put them off the scent. If that letter prompts the police to search the river banks, and they find the woman's body there, the authorities won't forget that I was the one who told them where her body was to be found. The more I think about it, the less I like it. I feel disposed to burn the damned thing and done with it."

"Better not. It's evidence—unless you want to destroy evidence."

"I don't even know that it *is* evidence. It may be the vapourings of a disordered mind ____"

"—or the workings of a malicious one," said Brook. "However, I know the thing that's in your mind. You're possessed of a wild desire to go and look by the river bank, below the weir on the River Pen. All I can say is—don't! That *would* queer your pitch."

Falkland nodded. "I know it would—and yet there's a queer, grim fascination about it. When I got this letter this morning, I tried to get Macdonald on the phone, but he was away somewhere. Ever since then I've been thinking about it—and the more I think, the less I like it. Why the devil was *I* singled out for this form of humour? It makes me savage."

Brook laughed. "Don't get so agitated. You weren't singled out. You're coupled with me. I was also made a present of the same information."

"You? Good Lord! You mean *you* have a letter like this one?"

"No. My enlightenment was brought about in a still more macabre fashion. It was whispered to me—over the telephone."

"Good God! By whom—a man or a woman?"

"I don't know. The voice was a husky whisper, audible enough—but it might have been either a man's voice or a woman's. I couldn't tell. When I lifted the receiver I heard a voice gasping, 'Mr. Brook, Mr. Brook, is that you?' When I had given my identity the voice went on, 'She's still there, under the weir above Oasthampstead. I saw her in my dream. She's still there.' I thought some lunatic was talking to me and I asked, 'Who is there? Who's speaking?' and the voice replied 'Mrs. Anderby. You know. She's there.' Then they rang off."

Falkland's laugh was one of relief this time.

"It's some lunatic or exhibitionist, Brook. This gives it away completely. I've often heard that in every murder case the police get lashings of messages making the wildest accusations, in addition to the inevitable fake confessions. Do you know, I believe I can spot the author of this. My cousin, Elsa Barry, went to see Mrs. Anderby at her boarding house, and Elsa tells me that there is a queer old girl living there who is a spiritualist and thinks she gets spirit messages. I bet she's at the back of all this—and if she *knows* that Mrs. Anderby is dead, well, it'll be up to Macdonald to find out just *how* she knows."

"I wonder," said Brook. "Where was your letter posted?"

"In Oasthampstead. You can see the cancellation stamp. Where did your call come from?"

"I don't know."

"Don't *know*? Do you mean to say you didn't ask?"

"This is an automatic exchange. The call would be registered all right, but if it were a local call—and I'd say it was—the number of the person called isn't registered. I doubt if the fact of my phone having been connected with another local one could ever be proved."

"But, good Lord, Brook! If you'd only acted quickly the police might have got their hands on the person who phoned!"

"Did *you* act quickly? Haven't you been walking about with that letter in your pocket all day?—and you haven't even been accused of murder. I have. What proof had I got that that message was ever spoken to me? No, thank you. I was being invite to get myself further involved in the mess. I think not. I left it alone."

At that moment an electric bell shrilled its summons somewhere at the back of the house and Falkland jumped as though he had been stung. Brook laughed.

"Your nerves are in a fine old twitter!" he mocked. "You can't even hear the front-door bell without jumping. It's a damned good thing you're not a front-rank suspect. Anyone would think you were expecting to be arrested any moment, the way you're behaving!"

He got up and went to the door, and Falkland said,

"Shall I come too?"

"Lord, no. Why should you? I'm capable of answering my own door bell, thanks."

Falkland sat down again. Describing the incident later, he said that Brook had a queer effect on him. Something about the tenseness of the osteopath's attitude, and his remarks that he himself was expecting attack had made Falkland himself susceptible to a nervous irritation which was not generally characteristic of him. He said that he felt that the whole atmosphere of the house was sinister—possibly because he was still vividly remembering the circumstances of Grendon's death in the room nearby.

When the door opened again Brook held it wide, saying,

"Here he is if you want to see him."

Falkland turned to the door and gave an exclamation of surprise. Lee Gordon was standing there, looking pink and embarrassed but as cherubic as ever.

"I must apologize for this intrusion," he said. "I feel badly over interrupting you two gentlemen, but the fact was, sir," (turning to Falkland) "I saw your auto standing outside, and I couldn't resist the impulse to come and have a word with you. I waited outside for awhile, thinking you might emerge, and then I took the liberty of ringing to inquire."

"Just to make sure you were still alive and hadn't had an accident with the gas supply," said Brook, sounding more sardonic than usual.

"Now I think that's a very unkind thing to say, sir," protested Lee Gordon, but he looked so embarrassed and the pink in his cheeks deepened so noticeably that Falkland suddenly realized that Brook's suggestion might actually have had a place in the rotund little man's mind.

"Oh, for heaven's sake let's get our minds away from murders and corpses," broke out Falkland. "Never again will I say that criminology interests me. Damn it, I shall never enjoy a detective story again. The real stuff's too disturbing."

"I'm with you there, sir," said Lee Gordon dejectedly. "I've been so upset that I can't even enjoy my food. A most distressing experience."

"It looks as though you're not the only one who's got the hump, Falkland," said Brook. "Mr. Lee Gordon's all in a twitter too. You'd better ask him if *he* has been receiving spirit messages too."

Lee Gordon mopped his bald head with a fine, gaudy bandanna. "I'll trouble you to say that bit again, sir," he demanded of Brook, his nose twitching agitatedly.

"I said 'spirit messages'," replied Brook deliberately, and Lee Gordon sighed.

"I've never taken any stock in spooks up to date," he said. "Reckoned they were dyspepsia—but something's been happening. Oh, yes, something odd's been happening, undoubtedly. I'm not so sure of myself as I was. I tell you this. I'm afraid to lift my own telephone receiver. Maybe it's baloney, maybe it's nervous dyspepsia, and I'm imagining things, but I tell you I'm not happy in my mind."

Brook chuckled, and Falkland felt suddenly exasperated with him. Lee Gordon said with some dignity,

"This isn't a joke, sir. It's a very real and disturbing experience I've had."

Brook nodded. "I know it is—rattled you up properly, didn't it? What did the whisperer say to you—or are you keeping the message private?"

"The whisperer?" Lee Gordon looked more disturbed than ever, then tilted his head back indignantly. "If it's *you* that's been pulling a joke on me, sir, I'd tell you that the joke's in mighty poor taste."

Falkland interrupted here. "For goodness' sake, let's get down to brass tacks and stop talking in riddles. Mr. Lee Gordon, have you had a phone message telling you of Mrs. Anderby's death?"

The little man's eyes became protuberant as he turned to Falkland, and he looked so startled that he resembled a frightened frog as he blew out his cheeks and stared with bulging eyes.

"A message? I'd say I have had a message—from Mrs. Anderby herself. Yes, sir. She spoke to me on the phone—and I shan't forget it in a hurry."

"Thoughtful of her to speak herself," said Brook. "Did she tell you about the river, or liken herself to Ophelia?"

Falkland cut in again.

"Cheer up, Lee Gordon! We've all been having these messages. It's a frame-up, or else we've got a lunatic being humorous at our expense."

Lee Gordon's rosy face puckered up like a child's.

"A lunatic?" he queried. "How do you figure that out? I tell you a voice whispered to me over the phone. 'I'm Emma Anderby,' it said, and I'd have you know it gave me the blue willies, something in that voice did. I asked her where she was speaking from and she said, 'The other side. Search for me by the river below the weir. You know. I left my body there . . . .' " His voice broke off and he mopped his forehead again. "See here, Doctor Brook, I don't cadge other men's drinks most days, but if that's whisky I won't say no. The thought of that voice gets me just here." He placed his hand in the region of the pit of his stomach, and suddenly Falkland felt disposed to laugh, seeing the ridiculous side of the situation.

"Help yourself," said Brook scornfully, waving his hand towards the whisky, and Falkland broke out:

"Look here, say if Lee Gordon's right and it was Mrs. Anderby herself who sent these messages? Perhaps she thinks she can influence opinion all round and make people imagine she's dead, when she's really very much alive."

Brook turned to Lee Gordon. "Did she oblige with any other information—saying that it was *you* who put her in the river for instance?"

Lee Gordon nodded above his whisky. "You've got it in one, Doc. That's just what she did say. Of all the durned indullicate remarks . . . *Me*, put her there indeed!"

Falkland really laughed at last, the combination of Lee Gordon's cherubic face, his woebegone voice, and the manner in which he clasped his glass of whisky and soda were so comic that the architect forgot his own apprehensions of a few minutes ago and fairly shouted with laughter. Brook, however, seemed to have got over his own inclination to chuckle. He sat brooding, his dark eyes staring out unseeingly at the garden. Falkland pulled himself together, ignored Lee Gordon's look of rebuke and turned to Brook.

"What's your opinion, Brook? Do you think it's likely that Mrs. Anderby's doing the spirit-message business herself?"

Brook frowned. "If she is, the end of it may not be as funny as you seem to think. Since she's so insistent on the fact that there's a corpse below the weir I think it's quite probable that there is one—but if Mrs. Anderby sent those messages the corpse won't be hers."

"Great snakes and scorpions! Are you opining there's *another* corpse in this act?" demanded Lee Gordon, and Brook nodded.

"Quite likely. Either those messages were sent by somebody who knows that Mrs. Anderby is dead and her body's in the river below the weir, or else she sent the messages herself because she's provided another corpse—probably unrecognizable—to play the part of her own."

Falkland nodded. "That makes sense to me, Brook. You've probably hit the nail on the head. Lord, what a mess-up!"

He turned to Lee Gordon.

"Let's get all this straight. Where were you when you got your phone message, and when did it come through?"

"I was in my suite in the Savoy Chambers in town. I went up a couple of days ago. I told you I was through with this property down here. Couldn't fancy it any longer, nohow. I went up to town, where I kept a little *pied-à-terre* for when I want to stay in the metropolis. Just a bedroom and sitting room, service provided. I was in bed, fast asleep, when the phone rang. I

just grabbed the receiver and said 'Lee Gordon speaking'—and then she gave voice. Spoilt my breakfast."

"What time was it exactly?"

"Nine o'clock to the tick this morning."

"What time was your call, Brook?"

"Eight o'clock this morning."

"And I got my letter at 8.30, posted in Oasthampstead last night. Nicely synchronized. Did you think of asking exchange where your call came from, Lee Gordon?"

"I sure did. Oasthampstead 97. That's a public call box on the outskirts of the town, nearest to Penharden. I've been to see it to make sure."

"And Brook's was a local call, put through an hour earlier. Well, if Mrs. Anderby's had the nerve to stay in the locality and put telephone calls through she's got nerve enough for anything."

"Seems she's never lacked sand. To walk into old man Grendon's room and turn the gas on now—wasn't what you'd call ladylike," said Lee Gordon indignantly, and Falkland choked down another fit of laughter.

"What does all this amount to?" he went on, controlling his voice firmly. "There's a crumb of comfort in it for Lee Gordon and me, because we can prove we were in London and therefore unable to put through calls from Oasthampstead. Well, one thing's quite plain. We've got to hand all this over to the Chief Inspector and let him see what he makes of it."

"You won't have long to wait," said Brook, his voice with its cutting incisive quality curiously impressive. "He's outside. Probably talking to the bloke I haven't caught sight of."

"Good Lord! You can't see the road from here," protested Falkland, but Brook answered,

"He sounded his horn as he came round the corner. It's rather a curious note—I must ask him if he's aware of its peculiarities, but he probably is. He's pulled up his car just behind Lee Gordon's. With Falkland's car there, too, it must look as though I'm having a party."

Falkland chuckled, but also looked a little perturbed.

"I rather wish it hadn't happened just this way," he said. "It will look rather as though the three of us had met deliberately for a counsel of war, to make up our minds exactly what to say."

"As an interpretation, not far removed from fact, is it?", inquired Brook in his sardonic way, but Lee Gordon sat up and swelled out his chest like a pouter pigeon.

"I don't just care for the way you put it, Dr. Brook. Sounds phoney to me. I'm not aware that I've done anything of a hole-and-corner nature, and I've no reason to think that anyone need regard me with suspicion. I'm accustomed to having my word accepted, sir, and I'm not afraid of policemen in any country in this world. No, sir. I've no reason to be apprehensive about any construction that's put on *my* actions."

"Now isn't that nice for you?" said Brook. "I'd be obliged if you wouldn't address me as 'doctor,' all the same. It's a title to which I don't hold the deeds in this country and I could be prosecuted for using it. The medical faculty in England has its own rulings."

"Now I call that just too bad," said Lee Gordon. "In the States, osteopathy is recognized as a legitimate branch of remedials. . . . Ah. That will be the Chief Inspector."

Brook got up as the bell rang again outside, and Falkland had a moment of nervous exasperation. It was true enough that this conference of the three of them looked "phoney," to use Lee Gordon's expression. The architect could have kicked himself for a fool: he ought to

have gone direct to the police with his anonymous letter and he knew it. He was in no doubts about the impression that the present meeting would make on the Chief Inspector.

Macdonald, when he appeared at the door, greeted the men imperturbably. He had seen the two cars outside the house and he knew to whom they belonged. Brook had made no comment when he opened the front door beyond a civil "Good evening. Will you come in?" and Macdonald could not help being a little amused at the manner in which he had tumbled into this counsel of three. Brook looked his usual sardonic self; Falkland spoke a little more heartily than was his wont, and Lee Gordon looked pink and pompous. Macdonald had seen the little man before, after his first interview with Brook, and guessed rightly that the added conscious look of dignity on the pink face was the result of embarrassment.

"You've come just at the right moment, Chief Inspector," said Falkland. "I tried to phone you this morning, but you were out. However, you can now kill three birds with one stone and hear all our songs of woe."

"Excellent," replied Macdonald, and seated himself in the seat indicated by Brook. "If you've anything to tell me, I shall be only too glad to hear it."

"See here, Mr. Inspector," put in Lee Gordon's voice "I should hate you to get away with a wrong impression. This wasn't a prearranged meeting. I just happened to be passing and, seeing Mr. Falkland's car outside the door, I took the liberty of ringing Dr. Brook's bell. I should say Mr. Brook's bell," he added carefully. ("Damn the man! What does he want to butt in for like that. Makes it look worse than ever, going and excusing himself like a zaney," said Falkland furiously to himself.)

"Quite," said Macdonald. "I'm rather in the same position myself. I saw the two cars and thought it might be an opportunity for further discussion with you all."

Falkland caught the expression on Brook's face—as near a smile of genuine amusement as the osteopath ever achieved. Falkland drew an envelope from his pocket and passed it to Macdonald.

"I received that this morning. It explains itself," he said curtly.

Macdonald took the envelope and read the letter enclosed.

"I see. Very interesting. Have you had any other communications of this nature?"

"None," replied Falkland.

"Would you tell me to whom you have shown it?" inquired Macdonald, and Falkland replied,

"To Brook and Lee Gordon here. As they have both received similar intimations we have found it interesting to compare notes."

Macdonald turned to Brook with raised eyebrows, and the latter replied to the tacit question with a clear, terse statement concerning his telephone call, what was said, and the time at which it occurred.

"You did not report this to the police?" inquired Macdonald, and Brook shook his head.

"No, I did not," he replied.

Falkland expected the inevitable, "Why not?" but it did not come. Macdonald turned to Lee Gordon, and the little man plunged into his tale with more verbosity and also more incoherence than the others. A few questions helped to clarify his statement, and then Macdonald said,

"You say that Mrs. Anderby herself spoke to you. Did you recognize her voice?"

"I couldn't swear to that, but I had a very strong feeling it *was* her voice," said Lee Gordon unhappily. "I've told you—she whispered the whole time but the accent was hers—

that sort of refined, finicky manner of speaking. What you call ‘naice’,” mimicked the perturbed speaker.

Macdonald turned to Falkland.

“You remember Mrs. Anderby’s voice?” he asked, and Falkland said,

“No,” speaking rather too quickly, because he had to correct himself and add lamely, “I did hear her talk to my aunt when she was Nurse Pewsey—but I don’t really remember her voice.”

Macdonald turned to Brook.

“Did you know her voice?”

“She once spoke to me over the telephone,” said Brook, “when informing me that her husband did not wish to continue his treatment with me. I agree with Mr. Lee Gordon that her accent was of the type one might describe as refined.”

“Was it a similar type of voice which whispered to you over the phone this morning?”

“I can’t tell you. The voice seemed quite characterless. It didn’t remind me of any voice known to me.”

Macdonald closed his notebook. “Thank you all very much for your assistance,” he said evenly. “I shall have to investigate some of the points you have mentioned so I won’t keep you any longer now.”

“Say, Chief!” Lee Gordon’s face was puckered up like that of an infant about to cry. “Won’t you tell us what you’ve made of things up to date? Is that dame alive and playing tricks—or is she below the weir at Oasthampstead—because if she is, it’s me for a mental home.”

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you the answer to either question at the moment,” returned Macdonald, as he got up.

It was Brook who made the final comment after Macdonald had said a formal good evening.

“Thank you for removing the oaf from my door, Chief Inspector. I find his successor a more competent exponent of your craft.”

“I’m so glad you’re pleased,” replied Macdonald—and at that moment there was not much to choose between the ironic expressions on the faces of the two men.

CHAPTER TEN

When Macdonald left the three men at Brook's house, he was in a very thoughtful frame of mind. The case he was working on was developing swiftly, but he still could see no way out of the maze, no path which led to a clear conclusion. As in a maze, side turnings presented themselves in every direction, making confusion yet worse confounded.

After his first inquiries into Mrs. Anderby's disappearance, Macdonald had considered the different factors which might account for it. First, of necessity, came the possibility that she had been overcome by fear and had run away. Coupled to that possibility was the chance that fear had undermined her nerves to such an extent that she had committed suicide rather than face the logical result of her own actions, now that suspicion was focused on her. It seemed plain enough that Major Grendon had let her see, not only that he suspected her, but also that he was doing his best to put his suspicions into a form which would cause the police to make a move. Indeed, it seemed probable that Grendon had grasped certain evidence, or was able to suggest some line which would make a possible police case into a certainty. That supposition seemed to be the only explanation which accounted for Grendon's own death.

Yet to arrive at a conclusion concerning Grendon's death was certainly not easy. It was obvious enough that Mrs. Anderby could have walked from her boarding house at midnight to Brook's house without being observed. By her own wish she had changed her bedroom from one on the second floor to one on the ground floor so that she could leave the house and return to it unobserved and unsuspected. She knew also that Grendon's room was on the ground floor, and that he slept with his windows open. As a trained nurse, Mrs. Anderby might have relied on her own ability to kill Grendon in a variety of ways. She would have known how to administer chloroform, how to use a hypodermic—and she might well have realized that the gas fire, if she could get at it, coupled to the closing of the windows, would do the job for her with a minimum of risk to herself. She could have done it easily enough—there was no doubt on that point.

It was at this point in the chain of reasoning that other "side walks" began to branch out from the main path in the maze. Certainly Mrs. Anderby could have been responsible for Grendon's death—but Max Brook could have achieved the same end even more easily. Macdonald had noted certain points in the evidence which did not look too well for Brook. It was the osteopath who had prevented Falkland from talking to Grendon on the afternoon before the latter's death. Falkland had wanted to go and talk to Grendon but had been refused permission by Brook.

After that followed the incident of the "hypnotic" treatment and the infusion of sedative herbs. Brook had seen to it that Grendon was very fast asleep. True, the osteopath had admitted this fact at the inquest—and admitted it with a brusqueness which seemed to have no fear behind it, but even that admission might be regarded as one with a hidden implication. The question would have arisen, "How could anyone have crossed Grendon's room and reached a gas fire close by the head of his bed without waking him?" The answer was that Brook could have done it. His capacity to enter a room without waking the occupant was well known.

Yet again another path branched out. Could Brook and Mrs. Anderby have worked in collusion? At first this seemed a wild and unprofitable surmise, but the combination was

suggestive. Macdonald (in agreement with Falkland here) could not think out any method by which Mr. Anderby was killed which would have been within "Nurse Pewsey's" power to bring about. But Brook was an exceedingly clever man, with an exceedingly subtle mind. Conceivably he could have worked out some scheme which would have had the desired results. Brook was a skilled herbalist as well as a brilliant anatomist. Macdonald did not underestimate his capacity. But where was the profit to be found in such a collusion? How could Brook profit? Blackmail seemed an improbable answer to that question, for an accomplice in murder cannot levy blackmail because exposure would result in his own undoing.

Yet once again Brook was involved in the story with this new evidence about the "whispering" telephone messages. Brook, Falkland and Lee Gordon had all received these messages—or said that they had. Falkland was the only one who had anything tangible to show for his story—and Macdonald was exceedingly interested in the slip of paper which Falkland had handed over. The block capitals in which the lettering was done were remarkably neat and regular. Each capital was upright, each well proportioned. Macdonald knew quite well that the average person is exceedingly bad at lettering. He knew the sloping N's, the squiggly S's, the dotted I's, and the minuscule form of U's which the unskilled form when asked to letter out a sentence in block capitals. Yet here was a sheet of neat, well-proportioned capitals which would not have disgraced a skilled draughtsman. That Mrs. Anderby, or Miss Jane Austin, could have produced such a sheet Macdonald did not believe. He seldom risked generalizations as to the relative capacity of men and of women, but he would have expected that very workmanlike sheet to have been the work of a man, not of a woman—unless the woman had had some training in draughtsmanship. Even in the filling in of a crossword puzzle, a man generally achieves greater legibility and consistency in his capitals than does a woman.

The message itself interested Macdonald, too, with its insistence on the weir below Oasthampstead. The Chief Inspector had not omitted the possibility of murder to account for Mrs. Anderby's disappearance. Why anybody should have murdered her he did not know, but the possibility could not be ruled out—and if she had been murdered, Macdonald argued, it was probable that the murder would be contrived to have the appearance of suicide. Suicide is not easy to fake: the self-inflicted gunshot is seldom faked successfully: poison is not always easy to administer—and if either of those methods had been followed the body would surely have come to light fairly soon. A fall over a cliff can be easily engineered—but there were no cliffs or deep quarries within easy reach of Penharden. There remained drowning—and Macdonald had not overlooked the rivers in the district. Truth to tell, he had had his own men co-operating with the local police since the day he took over the case: the sandy wastes of "no man's land," that wild stretch of gorse and bramble, of hillock and rabbit warren and tussock, had been very carefully searched, as had the banks of the River Pen. Even the cemetery, with its newly dug graves, had been inspected.

It was not until four days after the search had begun—the same day on which the three men had received their "messages," that Emma Anderby's body had come to light. At the very time that Macdonald had called at Brook's house, he had just come away from the mortuary where her remains lay—if the evidence of clothes and documents and personal possessions were to be trusted. Her body had not been found in the River Pen, but in a backwater of the Avon, ten miles from Penharden.

It was a gamekeeper who had made the discovery—a man named Thomas Lett, whose local knowledge had been enlisted by the police to assist them in their ever-widening search. He had found the body in a deep pool in the backwater, wedged beneath a fallen branch. It was a lonely spot, the haunt of much wild life. Fish, water rats, water fowl, stoats—all these flourished in the quiet backwater, whose bottom was too treacherous and waters too choked with weed and fallen timber to be practicable for boating. The wild creatures had done their part in rendering Emma Anderby's face unrecognizable, but the clothes were neatly marked—her clothes, undoubtedly. Her handbag, too, still hung over her arm, containing sodden letters, a post office savings bank book, a cheque book, a note case with ten pound notes in it, and a sheet covered with her own writing, still decipherable in parts.

"I feel my life is over. I can't bear to go on living. . . . All . . . is taken . . . afraid . . ." So ran some of the phrases which were still decipherable.

Emma Anderby had drowned. A very slight examination determined that, for her lungs were full of water. All these facts Macdonald had known when he sat talking to Falkland and Brook and Lee Gordon. While he listened to their stories, he had been trying to decide what was the motive of the message sender. Was it merely to mislead the police? Had the sender of those whispered messages been so simple as to assume that the police, after searching the weir on the River Pen, would give up the search and assume that it was Emma Anderby herself who had sent those messages?

Macdonald had felt a contraction of his own scalp as he pondered. What if that simple explanation was the right one? What if "dear Emma" had indeed risked another desperate move in the hideous quagmire wherein she had plunged?

Was he being fooled by a mind more astute than his own?

There might be motive within motive in this last queer development. Macdonald knew enough about human nature to realize the folly that sensible men are capable of. It would have taken very little more suggestion to have made Falkland go and search beneath the weir—and had he been observed there, the report of his fellow recipients of messages might have made his presence by the river bank look very questionable.

Brook was much too astute to be caught that way—always assuming that he knew no more about those messages than he admitted.

Lee Gordon was obviously frightened. He said that he had believed that it was Mrs. Anderby's voice which had spoken to him—and the appalling thing was that he might be right.

"Hell's bells!" said Macdonald. "If I don't get that body identified I shall be receiving spirit messages myself soon!"

Again he turned to the meagre facts about Mrs. Anderby's disappearance. At half-past ten on the Saturday morning she had walked out of the garden of The Rowan Tree with a bunch of roses in her hand.

At half-past ten on that same morning, Brook had been working in his garden—but not within sight of Lynch's futile shadowers. Brook had been working in the coppice at the back of his garden, clearing away dead wood, clipping shrubs, cutting grass—but not in sight! At midday he had reappeared in the front of the garden and come to the gate and spoken sardonically to the watcher. "Asked me what time I made it," reported "Detective" Smith, "but he didn't come out by either of the gates, nor use his car, and there's a tidy hedge at the back there."

At half-past ten on Saturday morning Falkland had been out in his car, driving leisurely to Ashridge Common. He had designed a house for a client there and had run out to see if the builders were doing their job to his liking. Ashridge was within twelve miles of Penharden—and a little more speeding than he had owned to would have given him plenty of time to include Penharden in his route. Moreover, Falkland owned a very good car, in tip-top condition, capable of doing seventy miles an hour—and somehow he did not look to Macdonald the type to drive at thirty on good roads.

Lee Gordon, like Brook, had been working in his garden at the hour in question, though—again like Brook—he had no corroboration of the fact to offer.

One person's actions at least were beyond question—the owner of The Rowan Tree had been in her own kitchen, making jam with her assistant cook; she had been seen by tradesmen, charwoman and guests. There was no getting over it. Miss Driver, who (if hatred could be counted as a motive) had a real motive in disposing of Mrs. Anderby, was the one person whose actions were not in question at the time of Mrs. Anderby's disappearance. Miss Austin had admittedly seen Mrs. Anderby leave the house—and it was Miss Austin who first informed Macdonald that Mrs. Anderby was dead—but violence seemed so far beyond the capacity of the little old lady that Macdonald found it difficult to include her in the general suspicion.

His most immediate problem was to settle the identity of the dead woman found in the River Avon—and that was not going to be so easy as it should have been. The most obvious method was through the medium of fingerprints, but these were not so easy to come by as might have been anticipated. The voles and the fishes had attacked the body as it lay in the water, pinned down by the fallen trunk of a tree, and neither face nor hands were left in any state for identification.

Even if a set of fingerprints could be obtained from the body—which was very doubtful—there was nothing satisfactory to compare them with among Mrs. Anderby's possessions, a fact which Macdonald considered very curious. Mrs. Anderby had slept in Miss Driver's room, but after the former had gone out on her Saturday morning walk the room had been very well cleaned—unreasonably well cleaned, Macdonald thought. There were no fingerprints but Miss Driver's own on the polished surfaces of the furniture, crockery and fingerplates. Mrs. Anderby had not possessed the vanity which induces most modern women to carry a battery of pots and bottles about with them. Face cream was apparently unknown to her, as was face powder and lotions. Her belongings were the eminently sensible possessions of a middle-aged woman, including plenty of woollen underwear, woollen stockings, wraps and cardigans. She was evidently a meticulously neat woman, not given to unnecessary possessions: she either did not believe in keeping letters—or her letters had been destroyed before she left The Rowan Tree. Neither was she a reader—the books left in her bedroom were her husband's, and the magazines had been through many hands besides her own. Devotional books there were, as Macdonald had expected—but not Mrs. Anderby's. She had had a prayer book—it had been found in her handbag, a mass of sodden pulp after several days' immersion. Apparently she had not taken photographs away with her when she had come to stay with her husband in Penharden: her possessions had filled only one suitcase. Improbable though it seemed, there was nothing among them which yielded a good, foolproof set of fingerprints. Even her tooth brush—generally a safe guide for such prints, had been wrapped up in a wet face flannel and thrust inside a sponge bag. No help forthcoming there. Small wonder that Macdonald pondered. He was by no means certain that Miss Driver had not

made her own arrangements about Mrs. Anderby's possessions. That Miss Driver had been through them he was certain—she had examined everything left in the bedroom and had repacked the suitcases, explaining tartly that she did not care to have things left about in her own room. If Mrs. Anderby had chosen to go off like that, there was no sense in leaving her things "cluttering up the place."

Later, when the police had been called in because Mrs. Anderby did not return or send word, Miss Driver had told Lynch curtly that all the Anderbys' possessions were there, safely put together in the bedroom—and the sooner they were taken away, the better.

Obviously Macdonald's next job was to trace Mrs. Anderby back to her last residence. Lynch had done some preliminary work here, but with very negative results. Mrs. Anderby—then Miss Pewsey—had had rooms in a quiet house in a quiet street in Bedford. Number fifteen, Wells Avenue, Lynch had discovered, was let out as "flats for ladies," each flat self-contained in a small way, with a tiny bathroom and kitchenette. Miss Pewsey was a careful and economical soul. When her marriage was decided on, she had taken the opportunity of subletting her "flat" furnished by the month, and she herself had moved into a private hotel, from whence she was married. All her personal possessions, Lynch was told, had been packed up in trunks and packing cases and had been stored. He asked where they had been stored, but the tenant of her flat was unable to give any information. She simply did not know. Lynch had returned to Miss Driver's house and sought for further information on the point—but had found none. Mrs. Anderby appeared to have disposed of all personal papers.

It was at this juncture that Macdonald had been handed the case, and he had lost no time in instituting a search for Nurse Pewsey's property, by advertisement, and through the usual police channels. He had had his answer that day—the same day on which Mrs. Anderby's body had been found. She had stored her trunks and cases with a small firm in Oasthampstead. A furniture dealer, from whom she had at one time or another bought various small pieces, had an out-building behind his premises in which he stored goods at a very cheap rate. His shop was old, his "repository" not much better than a wooden shack with a corrugated iron roof. During the week-end in which Mrs. Anderby had disappeared, Brown's "repository" had been burnt to the ground and his shop premises almost entirely destroyed. Brown was only a small tradesman and the fire, while disastrous for him, had not been an impressive affair. No one lived on the premises, no life was lost—but the trunks and cases which had contained Mrs. Anderby's private possessions were completely destroyed. Brown had been so much upset by the disaster to his business—he was not adequately covered by insurance—that it was some time before he reported to the police concerning the property they were inquiring about. In any case, the destruction was complete so far as Mrs. Anderby's belongings were concerned.

Inevitably, Macdonald began inquiries as to the cause of the fire, but he could get very little satisfaction. The so-called "repository" was a very ramshackle shed, with weatherboarding walls on three sides, and window apertures, nominally boarded-up, which would have presented no difficulty to a determined person seeking entrance. The place had been stacked with old furniture and other inflammable rubbish, and since there was no lighting in it, Brown and his assistant carpenter were in the habit of using candles or a lantern when they penetrated its obscure recesses. The fire occurred on the Saturday night, but it might well have been smouldering for hours before it broke out into active flame and was observed. Brown's premises stood in an old builder's yard, well away from neighbouring premises. On one side was a garage, open only in the daytime, on the other a monumental

mason, who also retired from his working premises at one o'clock on Saturdays. There was no one about to notice any activities in connection with Brown's premises. Whether the fire were due to arson or to accident it was not possible to prove—though Macdonald himself was in no doubt about the matter. Somebody had wanted to destroy "Nurse Pewsey's" possessions—and they had been eminently successful.

When he left Brook's house, Macdonald went to the nearest telephone box and put through an order to one of his own men. He then parked his car and went for a walk on the common, smoking his pipe and thinking hard. He then went to The Rowan Tree. He knew that by this time Miss Driver and her assistant cook would be out—summoned to the police station for the purpose of identifying some of the garments found on the body of the drowned woman. They would be detained there until Macdonald himself arrived.

When he arrived at the boarding house, he went in by the gate in the lane at the back of the house. He hoped—and expected—to see Miss Austin in the private part of the garden outside Miss Driver's room on the ground floor and he was not disappointed. She was there—endeavouring, as far as Macdonald could determine, to see through the chinks in the drawn curtains. Old she certainly was—but not at all deaf. She was aware of Macdonald's presence as soon as he entered the gate, and she turned towards him without a sign of embarrassment, a welcoming smile on her wrinkled old face.

"I thought you might come, Mr. Inspector," she said. "You are probably thinking that inquisitiveness is not becoming to a woman of my age."

"Not at all," replied Macdonald cheerfully. "It's my business in life to ask questions, and if nobody was inquisitive I should be the loser."

"That's very nicely put," she rejoined, smiling back at him serenely, "but I should like to explain a little. I realize that you are investigating very terrible happenings, and I feel that you are working for what is right and just. I should like to help you. I know that you are not a believer in my other world: you do not think that spirit messages are authentic, and you do not believe in the powers which are real to me. I know that matter and spirit influence one another. Because we are in a material world we are influenced by the emanations of matter—if I may put it that way. If I touch something belonging to one who recently passed over I feel that I am nearer to them."

She looked sadly at the drawn curtains. "Perhaps if I could sit in that room, among Mrs. Anderby's possessions, I might get into communication with her, and so help you in your quest."

"Perhaps you could," rejoined Macdonald gravely, "but spirit messages are not accepted as evidence by my superior officers. I have to produce concrete evidence—but I think that you can help me all the same. Shall we sit down on the seat over there? I do not think we shall be overheard."

She turned towards the garden seat, saying in her placid, sensible way: "Oh, no, we shall not be overlooked or overheard. There is no one in the house. I expect that you know that Miss Driver and Agnes are out. The parlour maid has her half-day today, and the only ones left in were Mrs. Grace and myself. Poor Mrs. Grace was nervous, and she has gone out to tea with some friends—so I am all alone. I am never nervous. I know that I am safe."

She smiled again, with an expression so benignant that her old face looked almost other-worldly. She patted Macdonald's arm as she sat beside him.

"I am an old woman, and age has its privileges. I like you, Mr. Inspector. I know that you are kind. Now what do you want to ask me?"

"I want to know where Mrs. Anderby kept her letters and papers while she was here. Miss Driver said that she did not know."

"How foolish of her," said Miss Austin placidly. "Surely she must remember. Mrs. Anderby had a leather attaché case—a *very* nice one, fitted with writing materials. Her dear husband gave it to her, with a fountain pen and a gold pencil and a little travelling ink pot. So practical and useful. I quite envied it. Mrs. Anderby always kept it locked up: she was a very tidy, methodical woman. I often saw her writing her letters, and she always used the blotting pad in that case, and always locked the case up when she had finished her correspondence. She used to put the case underneath the eiderdown at the foot of her bed when she was not in her room, and at night she put it on the bedside table."

"Had she got the case with her when she left the house?"

"Indeed not. She had her handbag on her arm—rather a bulky one, which she always carried. Her husband gave her that, too. A *very* nice bag, of excellent quality leather."

"When Mrs. Anderby went out that morning, how long after was it that you went out?" inquired Macdonald.

"About a quarter of an hour. I walked into the town and went to Woolworth's to buy some writing paper. A wonderful place, Woolworth's! I always feel that a visit to Woolworth's is rich in human experience—and *so* economical to the pocket. I have only a very small income and I have to practice economies in every way. I think that Mr. Woolworth is a real benefactor to the owner of a slender purse."

"I quite agree with you," said Macdonald cheerfully, omitting to say that his last visit to Woolworth's (in Oxford Street) had been when he was following a notorious jewel thief: the recollection of that expert gazing in a fascinated way at Woolworth jewellery still made Macdonald smile.

"Can you remember who was left in the house that morning?" he went on.

"Certainly. Miss Driver and Agnes were making jam. Her jam is so delicious! Mary was busy with the silver—or should I say plate? I think silver sounds more courteous. Mrs. Briggs, the charwoman, was doing the passages and the stairs with the Hoover—an excellent invention, but so *very* noisy. I always go out on Saturday morning when the Hoover is operating. Mrs. Grace was doing the flowers in church with Mrs. Rose and Miss Summers: they do the flowers for every second Sunday, and they polish the lectern and the brass jug by the font, and that tiresome pulpit rail. Vine leaves. I advise you, never choose brass with vine leaves if you undertake to help in church work. So fiddling. I did it myself at one time and found it *most* irritating. So you see there was nobody left in the house but the domestic staff that morning. Our other residents, Miss Fellows, Miss Brace, Miss Dance, Mrs. Paine and Miss Deeley are all 'working women,' as they say nowadays. They return for luncheon at half-past one to two on Saturdays. It makes it very late for the midday meal, and I always fall back on a cup of Oxo and a biscuit at half-past twelve. Woolworth's cheese biscuits. So savoury!"

The gentle voice ceased at last and Miss Austin smiled at Macdonald, her blue eyes as confiding as a child's.

"So *any* one could have got into the house, what with the Hoover, and the silver in Mary's pantry, and the jam-making in the kitchen, could they not?" she ended up.

"I'm afraid they could," rejoined Macdonald, his voice as courteous and even as ever, as he got up and said good-bye, after thanking Miss Austin for her assistance.

Some ten minutes after leaving The Rowan Tree, Macdonald arrived again at the mortuary. Here, by arrangement, he met Miss Driver, who had been conducted thither by Inspector Lynch. Macdonald explained to her, with all the considerateness at his command, that it was necessary for her to view Mrs. Anderby's body with the intention of identifying it. He admitted that it would be a grim, unhappy experience, but asked Miss Driver to do her best to assist the law. She looked at him resentfully.

"Why hit on me?" she demanded. "Can't you get her next of kin to do it?"

"If you know who her next of kin are, I should be very glad if you would tell me," replied Macdonald. "We have not succeeded in finding any of Mrs. Anderby's relatives. Apparently she was alone in the world—so far as kith and kin are concerned. Neither had she any intimate friends in Bedford, where she lived previous to her marriage."

Miss Driver's expression was eloquent, though she made no comment—but Macdonald knew what was the thought behind that bitter expression.

"Friends? A woman like that has no friends."

When the sheet was turned back from the tragic remnant of mortality on the mortuary slab, Miss Driver stared down with a set face, a little grayer now—the thin lips drawn into a hard line—but she did not flinch or protest. After a long steady stare, she turned away and made her way to the door and drew in a long breath when she was clear of the ghastly atmosphere of disinfectants which could not quite overcome the sickening odour of mortality.

She turned to Macdonald angrily: "I don't know. How could anyone know? It's horrible . . . It might be any old woman . . . I don't know. Let me get outside before I'm sick."

What she said was true enough. How could anyone know? It seemed stalemate.

When Macdonald got back to headquarters, he found his other behest had been faithfully carried out. The river banks below Oasthampstead weir had been searched, and Mrs. Anderby's writing case had been recovered from the stream—apparently after some days' immersion.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"It's not what I'd call a tidy case myself, Chief."

It was Inspector Jenkins speaking. He was Macdonald's favourite colleague at the Yard and had worked with him on many cases: the two men, perhaps because they were a foil to one another, made a very strong combination in the detecting line. Jenkins was a typical member of London's middle classes: he might have passed as a tradesman—a prosperous grocer or licensed victualler, a hotel keeper, or a wholesaler in men's clothing—something cheerful, bonhomous and sociable. Although he had a very able brain, an excellent memory, and a natural shrewdness which was invaluable in his job, Jenkins contented himself with what he called "low-brow" jobs. He knew exactly what were his own limitations—and intellectual conversations he put outside his own capacity. Not that Jenkins was averse from talking: he was an excellent gossip and a good raconteur, a great success in the saloon bar, and he had a capacity for getting himself liked and trusted by the most diverse people because he had a sympathetic way with him and was honestly, enormously interested in human nature. "He was a real treat to talk to," he had said of more than one notorious criminal. "If only he'd had the sense to keep on the rails there's no end to what he mightn't have done."

Jenkins was getting stout now and distinctly bald—he was well over fifty, but he moved lightly and easily, with a swiftness surprising in a man of his weight, and his muscular powers had never been greater, though he said sadly that his wind wasn't what it was when he did his morning exercises. Jenkins was a married man, with a wife as plump and sensible as himself, and a son who had just achieved a degree in engineering at Glasgow University. Jenkins was always telling Macdonald to get married before he got "too set in his ways"—advice to which Macdonald responded with a cheerful grin and the retort that it takes all sorts to make a world, and he didn't want the additional worry of what would happen to his widow when he was out on some wild-cat job when anything might happen.

"Not what I'd call a tidy case in my own mind, Chief—though you've got enough to satisfy any jury," said Jenkins. "A jury wouldn't hesitate, I'd lay my money on that—and I've had a bit of experience with juries," he added with his deep, whole-hearted chuckle.

"Damn the jury!" responded Macdonald cheerfully, scraping away carefully at an old and much-prized briar. (His addiction to a pipe had led Jenkins to nickname the Chief Inspector "Stanley B."—an appellation which Macdonald, as a lifelong Liberal with left-ish tendencies, duly resented.) "Twelve fools are twelve times as foolish as one fool," went on the Chief Inspector thoughtfully, and Jenkins pulled his large ear.

"Are they? What about twelve wise men?" he inquired, and Macdonald retorted,

"No one alive has ever seen twelve wise men in agreement—because you never get twelve in company. Twelve fools are a commonplace. Twelve wise men would be a phenomenon."

Jenkins chuckled again. "Well, whether any jury'd ever agree that you and I are wise men, I'm not so sure—but putting our heads together, what do we make of it? This Mrs. Anderby—there'd been a lot of talk about her. I don't reckon the gossip was what you'd call manufactured: that's to say, it wasn't worked up by a single person, going round being malicious. It was fairly general. I know. I've been in every saloon bar in Oasthampstead, and for a small town it's got a very pretty variety of pubs. I've been to a bun fight with the congregationalists and to a church social. I've palled up with the district nurse and got matey

with most of the chemists. I've even had my missis down for the week-end and got her to go to a mothers' meeting and the Pre-Natal Welfare Clinic, where I couldn't very well go myself."

Macdonald's gravity broke at last but he only signified it by asking, "Why not? I'd say you'd got a splendid bedside manner—however, all a man *could* do, you've done."

"Yes," replied Jenkins. "What's that bit out of Shakespeare? 'I dare do all that may become a man. Who dares do more, is none'."

"Admitted," said Macdonald. "Assuming that attendance at the clinic would have been unbecoming in you, what did your missis report?"

"There you are," said Jenkins. "Now you see the point of being married. My missis says the gossip's all right. Every old cat in the town with a tongue to wag wagged it good and hard after old Chenner's will was read. Alice passed the gossip as the real thing. It beats me why it didn't get to the constabulary at the time. That chap Lynch is a widower, that's the trouble. Never gets the spicy bits. Now about this story that there *was* a police inquiry—which there wasn't. Some bloke went round pumping Chenner's old servant *before* he died—not afterwards. Funny thing that—unless it was the old chap who wanted to dispute the will afterwards. I can't get any description of him, except that he had black hair and was quite the gentleman."

"That's an odd business," mused Macdonald, and Jenkins went on in his cheerful way,

"There's a lot that's odd. The person who scotched the gossip was old Anderby himself. Funny, when you think it out. The reverend told his mothers' meeting he'd advise Nurse Pewsey to bring an action. That pulled them up. They didn't fancy lawsuits. The gossip died down—until Mr. Anderby died and then, by heck, it started again. I reckon Mrs. Anderby got a few anonymous letters—a few more than that one you found under Oasthampstead weir. Enough to give her the jitters. Well, there you are. They've dug up poor old Chenner and found it was hyoscine sent him off. Hyoscine . . . That's the stuff they use in some of this twilight sleep business, isn't it? Just the ticket for a maternity nurse. Yes. She must have lost a few night's sleep while Oasthampstead was yapping its head off about her."

Macdonald was sitting frowning over his pipe, and Jenkins went on in his best official manner,

"Now how do we stand? Here was Mrs. Anderby who'd been talked about a tidy lot, one of whose profitable patients died of hyoscine poisoning—though no one knew that until you made the H.O. dig the poor old chap up—and her husband just died of a heart attack. Did he, Chief?"

"Yes. He did, confound you," said Macdonald. "If you think old Parston's likely to make a mistake in one of his fulldress P.M.s, you out-Thomas me, and that's saying a lot. I know all the jibes about liars and damned liars and scientific experts, but I still believe in Parston. If he says Anderby died of heart failure, then he did die of it. It's true he'd been dosed with a new heart stimulant called cardiasol, but he did *not* die of cardiasol. He died of heart failure."

Again Jenkins chuckled. "Funny world, isn't it?" he said. "The reverend died of heart failure—and all this stink and that nosey chap Grendon being bumped off—all unnecessary. Just heart failure! Where were we? Mrs. Anderby gets anonymous letters: Major Grendon goes and sees her. Like his nerve, and she a newly bereaved widow too—and then Grendon dies, so he can't up and say his bit, whatever it was, and then Mrs. Anderby throws her hand in."

"Yes. After all that—she throws her hand in," burst out Macdonald indignantly. "That's what *I* can't swallow. Why did she—if she did . . ."

Jenkins groaned. "Oh, my hat!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say you *still* believe that deceased isn't Mrs. Anderby? What about the missing molars and the stopped canines, and the way her shoes fit and her clothes fit? Honestly, Chief, I think you're being obstinate. Admitted, we haven't got absolutely conclusive evidence, but we've got almost overpowering probability."

"All right. We've got Mrs. Anderby drowned in the Avon, and Mrs. Anderby's attaché case with threatening anonymous letters in it from under Oasthampstead weir, and Dr. Chenner with hyoscine in his remains, and Mr. Anderby with traces of cardiasol in *his* remains —where are we?"

"Suicide, Chief. She'd murdered three men and she'd got an anonymous letter telling her more or less that a statement was being laid before the police which would cause them to exhume her last two victims. Ask any jury. They'd tell you pretty soon—especially with that letter you found in her bag."

"Letter, my eye!" said Macdonald. "That was the sort of letter any bereaved person might write—with apologies to bereaved persons. If I were on your jury, I should still argue. What did she go and set fire to that repository for if she was going to commit suicide and leave a confession in her husband's Bible? Doesn't make sense. The only point in burning up Mrs. Anderby's possessions was to make it more difficult to identify Mrs. Anderby and to trace her old friends who might have known something about her. If Mrs. Anderby is alive, I can see the sense of a lot of things which have been happening. If she committed suicide, I can't. You see, she'd got away with it to all intents and purposes. Grendon was the menace: Grendon knew something—and Grendon's dead. What were the chances of a verdict against Mrs. Anderby in the matter of Grendon's death? Absolutely nil because we had no concrete evidence to prove that Mrs. Anderby ever went near Brook's house that night. As you and I know, it's not enough to prove that she had the opportunity to go there: it's essential to prove that she *did* go there, and the proof doesn't exist. And, in spite of all that, you want me to believe that she walked out of the boarding house at ten-thirty on Saturday morning, went about ten miles cross-country to a very little known backwater, and chucked herself in under an overhanging tree. It's a most eccentric way of behaving, to my mind."

Jenkins nodded. "Yes. As I said to start with, it's not a tidy case. You've got some damned odd exhibits too. That temperature chart."

"Yes. That temperature chart," agreed Macdonald thoughtfully. "We have found the firm who supplied it—Bardon & Welling's. They supplied all Nurse Pewsey's professional stuff. That chart was one of a lot sold two years ago—there was a flaw in the printing and they can place it. No one could have obtained a similar one today. Our chart is one similar to charts sold to Nurse Pewsey when she was nursing Dr. Chenner. The handwriting on it is hers, so far as the experts can say. The temperature markings are consistent with those in a pneumonia case. In fact, the overpowering probability is that the sheet is just what it pretends to be—the chart filled in by Nurse Pewsey when she was nursing Dr. Chenner. Owing to the passing of time, and general smearing, it is impossible to get a clear set of fingerprints from it. Well—taking the thing at its probability value, can you produce any reason why Nurse Pewsey should have kept that sheet for two years, written 'Hyoscine' on it, and then have left it for us to find in her husband's Bible?"

"Search me," said Jenkins ruefully, and then brightened up a bit, adding, "but you've got to admit that murderers do some of the most unreasonable things: inconsistent things. That's how we catch them. Human nature's got a lot to say in the matter—and human nature works queer tricks, especially among folk who're given to religion."

Macdonald's eyebrows went up: "Come, come! I'm surprised to hear you say that, Jenkins, and you a churchwarden."

"I know what I'm talking about, you see," said Jenkins. "I've known more than one criminal who'd 'got religion,' as they say, and thought God was guiding them in what they did. Seems to me, Mrs. Anderby may have been one of that sort: imagined her course of action was suggested to her by 'divine guidance'—and she kept that temperature chart as a reminder of the day revelation broke on her and she saw her way clear. Nothing impossible in that, as we both know. You can't judge a murderer by the same standard you judge other people—not one of these calculating murderers, anyway. Their minds have taken a wrong turning."

There was silence between the two men—they were talking in the Chief Inspector's room in New Scotland Yard, and Macdonald gazed out over London's river at full tide, a view he never tired of. Perhaps he had had a greater affection for it than ever since the night he had plunged into the river from St. Thomas's Embankment and been very nearly drowned. He felt that in measuring his strength against Thames, he had got on to special terms with it.

"What does the A.C. say?" put in Jenkins. "Is he satisfied with the obvious explanation?"

"Of course he is. Delighted. Reckons we've got a true bill and the case is settled. Talked a lot about 'the incidence of probability,' and said there was hardly a chance in a thousand that the body in the river wasn't Mrs. Anderby's, in spite of the way the fishes and voles had done their best to destroy the evidence."

"Nasty carnivorous things, fishes," said Jenkins. "I was saying so to my missis—and she told me to shut up. Quite upset her. Of course the A.C.'s right in his assessment of the probables as far as Mrs. A. is concerned. The wish is father to the thought in one way. He wants you to get busy on that job with the 'Special' branch and leave this Penharden business as settled. As I told you, any jury would lap it up if the facts were put straight before them. First, the gossip about Nurse Pewsey, and the list of her patients who had died and left her legacies. Second, the results of the P.M. on old Chenner after exhumation. Third, Anderby's death of heart failure—probably hastened by nicely calculated doses of cardiasol to bring on palpitations. Fourth, Grendon's nosey-Parker conduct and his death. Finally—anonymous letters and Mrs. Anderby dropping her bundle—and choosing the river. Nice and straightforward."

"Very nice," agreed Macdonald. "Now for a few discrepancies. Who sent those 'spirit' messages—and why?"

"The old girl at The Rowan Tree," replied Jenkins promptly. "She's bats, anyway. She may know a bit more than she'd any business to know—but no jury'd convict her of anything more than noseyness. She probably knows quite a lot she hasn't told you. If you went the right way to work she'd probably admit that she *did* see Mrs. Anderby going out at midnight when Grendon was popped off. As for the attaché case under Oasthampstead weir, it's quite likely Miss Austin put it there herself—especially if she'd been writing anonymous letters to Mrs. Anderby. She couldn't get the case open because she hadn't the keys, and it was a good, strong case. She put it in the river instead and then went a bit exhibitionist and sent those 'spirit' messages. What's the matter with that?"

"Really, Jenkins, for a man with a really philanthropic temperament, you have got the very lowest estimate of human nature of any man I know. Youth and innocence or old age and innocence, they're all the same to you—matter for a study in the pathological."

"Maybe. I've seen too many rum happenings in our calling to take anybody at their face value," said Jenkins. "You can't deny we've struck a rum lot of people just in this little town of Penharden. Your Miss Driver, now—if she *hadn't* been making jam in the kitchen that morning, I'd have been suspicious of her. Very suspicious indeed. Miss Austin strikes me as more than a bit fishy, and that man Brook is a fair study. Beats me how any man has the courage to go to him for treatment."

"You might suggest to the jury that Brook had a doctor-complex, and made it his mission in life to bump-off as many orthodox practitioners as possible. He'd got away with two—and then realized that when Grendon and the Anderbys got into the habit of calling on Lee Gordon some evidence popped up which wasn't to Brook's liking—so exit a trio."

"Yes. I'm not denying you could work up something on those lines—but it isn't as sound as the line we've worked out," said Jenkins. "Anyway, what's the final decision? You've had one adjournment of the Anderby inquest. You can't hold the thing up indefinitely unless fresh evidence comes in."

"I've got a week," said Macdonald. "If I don't get my facts before then I'm stymied. We can't hold witnesses up indefinitely for one thing, and Max Brook is going back to the States. He's had a very good job offered to him in the College of Osteopathy where he graduated, and I can't keep him hanging about indefinitely. Lee Gordon has had a cable from his firm in the East Indies. He wants to get a move on—and Falkland's been invited to go as consultant to some chap in Virginia who's launching an important building scheme. Again, I'm not justified in holding him up."

"By heck! All three of them! That's funny," cogitated Jenkins, and Macdonald nodded.

"Very funny—but in each case the reason for going abroad is open and aboveboard."

"Still—I call it damned funny," said Jenkins, and Macdonald nodded.

"Damned inconvenient, from one point of view. In Brook's case, it's natural enough. He felt his business was ruined by Grendon's death—and he's not far wrong. He won't be getting any patients in that house in a hurry. Falkland says frankly that he's so fed-up with this Anderby business that he's only too glad to accept a chance to get out of the country for a bit and have a complete change of thought. Lee Gordon is an inveterate globe-trotter. He's always travelling around somewhere. He came over here to see young Trant settled in, and now he's anxious to get back to his own business. His anxiety on that account is accentuated by the fact that he believes that he heard Mrs. Anderby's voice talking to him over the telephone, and he doesn't like the idea. I can't make out if he believes that it was a spirit message which he heard, or that he believes Mrs. Anderby is still alive and will have a shot at him next."

Jenkins studied Macdonald's face. "Do you really believe that she's still alive, Chief—and that she shoved someone else into the river, dressed in her own clothes?"

"I can only say that the hypothesis is not impossible," rejoined Macdonald. "It's no use saying that we have got the body identified beyond doubt because we haven't. One of the curious things about this case is the difficulty of getting hold of anybody who knew Mrs. Anderby intimately. For the last few years previous to her marriage she had been living by herself, a lonely sort of life apparently, because she was generally disliked. A surprising number of people seem to have disliked her and she had no intimate friends. Her

acquaintances say that it was her loneliness which appealed to Mr. Anderby. He was sorry for her and his sympathy eventually led him into matrimony."

"That's another point in favour of the suicide theory," said Jenkins, but Macdonald retorted,

"There, I don't agree with you. On the assumption that Mrs. Anderby is responsible for three murders for her own profit, it's foolish to argue that fear of loneliness led her to suicide. Fear of the hangman may have done so—but fear of the hangman has led murderers to fresh excesses to avoid the result of past ones. In which connection I might point out that the only intimate friend Nurse Pewsey ever had, so far as we can make out, cannot be found. She was a woman named Anne Salcombe—a nurse, of Mrs. Anderby's own age, and resembling her in build and general appearance. Anne Salcombe once lived in London, but we have failed to trace her since she left her lodgings in Hampstead a year ago."

Jenkins was silent, his rubicund face creased in frowns.

"It's a possibility," he said slowly, "a very nasty possibility. You'll have to get that inquest adjourned again—but if you'll ever prove anything, I very much doubt."

"I don't," said Macdonald with, "but it may take a long time to do it. If Mrs. Anderby *is* alive, we'll get her somehow."

"Look here: on the assumption that she's alive, why did she send those 'spirit' messages? —and if she sent them, why didn't she put the right place into her message? Why mention Oasthampstead weir at all?"

"You can get a variety of explanations along those lines," replied Macdonald. "The right place wasn't mentioned because it wasn't desirable to have the body found too soon. The sender of the message hoped for two things: one, to keep the police busy dragging the River Pen. Two, to incriminate Falkland, Brook or Lee Gordon by instigating one of them to go poking around under Oasthampstead weir and being discovered in the process. On the other hand, it's possible to adopt your argument that Miss Austin sent the messages, having previously thrown the attaché case in the river. The phone messages were both sent between eight o'clock and nine o'clock in the morning. Miss Austin has recently taken to fruitarianism and sometimes breakfasts off an orange in her room, going for walks to commune with her spirits 'while the dew is fresh upon the grass'."

"I don't wonder she sees spooks then," said Jenkins. "I'm all for a good breakfast myself. For how long has she shown the fruitarian tendency?"

"Oh, for some time, intermittently. Anyone could have known of her habits in that direction. I learnt about it from the invaluable Agnes—the assistant cook. Like you, Agnes thinks Miss Austin is 'batty,' to use her own expression."

"Batty or not, I'd lay a lot of money that she both sent the messages and chucked the attaché case in the river," said Jenkins. "Also, it's an odd thing that Miss Austin is the only witness to prove that Mrs. Anderby left The Rowan Tree at the time stated that Saturday morning."

"Query, is kind Miss Austin helping Mrs. Anderby out?" mused Macdonald. "Now look here, Jenkins. You've done your part of the job well: you've collected all the data about the Oasthampstead gossips: you've got chapter and verse, so far as it goes, concerning the 'police inquiry'—which wasn't a police inquiry—about Nurse Pewsey and Dr. Chenner before he died, and you're soaked in local colour, so to speak. You've got the evidence about P.M.s on Chenner, Anderby and Mrs. Anderby, and the report of the inquest on the body found in the Avon. Now I have made a report for my own use. I've put down everything that I've been told

by Falkland, Brook, Lee Gordon, Lynch, and the people at The Rowan Tree, and I've put it down in detail. It's a formidable manuscript, but I want you to read it through and consider every detail, and when you've read it we will compare notes again and see if we can draw any conclusions. Up till now, the whole inquiry has been coloured by either Grendon's assumptions, or Lynch's. Try to bring a fresh mind to it and disbelieve every previous assumption."

"I'm all in favour of an open mind," said Jenkins, "though it's going to be a bit hard in this case because every bit of evidence seems to point to the obvious. The queer and seemingly idiotic parts, like the spirit messages, seem to point unmistakably to Miss Austin."

"Who is admittedly queer, but by no means idiotic, so far as I can judge her," replied Macdonald. "I have a feeling that she knows more than she admits, but that she won't part with all her information. When she told me, in the first case, that Mrs. Anderby had 'passed over,' I got the impression that a shrewd mind was expressing itself in terms of spiritualism. Having pondered over the matter, she was convinced that the only logical explanation of Mrs. Anderby's disappearance was that she was dead—and she stated her conclusions in the form of a spirit message. Have you ever been to a spiritualist séance, Jenkins?"

"Me? Good Lord, no! Not in my line at all. Can you see me being 'levitated,' Chief, or whatever they call it?"

"It'd be an impressive sight," chuckled Macdonald. "Apart from such extremes as levitation, I don't see why you shouldn't acquire a bit of the jargon and go and call on Miss Austin yourself. I've a feeling that you might win her confidence. Perhaps she'd oblige with a few more recollections if you made friends with her."

Jenkins looked dubious. "I've done some funny things in my time," he said, "and I've assumed the mantle of some queer personages, but I've never dealt in spooks, or pretended to have dealings with the supernatural. For one thing, I don't look the part, and I couldn't produce the patter without looking out of character. However, I'll think about it."

"Do the line of honest inquirer, then," said Macdonald. "No one can beat you at looking puzzled. I've seen you dig out quite a lot of information by simply looking bewildered—the world's best-meaning mug."

"People do react to that," said Jenkins. "If you only look ignorant and puzzled and kind-hearted, folk do try to enlighten you in the kindest way. I'll bear the point in mind and see if I can make contact with the old lady—but I'll have a go at your notes first and see if I get any enlightenment. Meantime, what's your next move?"

"I'm going to trot around like an inverted Autolycus," replied Macdonald.

"I suppose you know what you mean," said Jenkins resignedly. "Autolycus—wasn't he a picker up of unconsidered trifles?"

" 'Snapper up,' according to one of the Folios. Instead of picking up, I'm going to scatter: in other words, I'm offering free information to intelligent inquirers. People always ask questions—and I'm going to answer a few of the questions which I hope to provoke."

"Yes. I've known that work wonders," beamed Jenkins. "Tell 'em some spicy bits in confidence—hope for results."

"That's it," said Macdonald with a grin, as he handed a pile of typescript to Jenkins.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"So I thought you wouldn't mind my coming to talk things over with you, Mr. Falkland. I'm just plumb worried about the old boy."

It was young Lord Trant who spoke, sitting opposite Falkland in the latter's office, and the architect smiled back at him as he proffered his cigarette case.

"I'm very glad to see you and talk things over," he replied. "If any advice of mine is of any use to you, I shall be only too glad to give it. Say, if you start at the beginning and tell me your whole tale of woe—but get it out of your head that I have any influence with the police. I haven't. To put the matter in a more personal way, I'm by no means certain that the police don't suspect *me* of being involved in the tangle, and I hesitate to butt in with suggestions. 'Let sleeping dogs lie' seems to me quite good policy concerning the inspector in charge of the case. However, get your story off your chest and I'll give you what advice I'm capable of."

"It seems such a darned shame that my old uncle should have got into the middle of such a mess-up," said Trant, his sunburnt, boyish face puckered into a frown. "Incidentally, Lee Gordon isn't my uncle, as you probably know, but I've called him that since I was a small kid, so it comes natural. He's always been jolly good to me, as he was to my father. I was born over here, you know. My father was abroad, prospecting rubber at the time, and my mother was pretty hard-up, and Lee Gordon came along and financed her over a difficult time, just because he was friends with my father. Luck turned a little later, and father made a small packet and mother and I went out to join him in South America—a month after I was born, that was, and Lee Gordon saw my *mater* through the journey and looked after her when she got blackwater fever. She died—and he was left with a three months' infant on his hands, being me—and he got me settled with a nurse and went and collected my *pater* and fixed us up."

The diffident grin on the young man's face was very likeable as he continued apologetically, "I'm only boring you with all this because I want you to understand how badly I feel when I see the old man going to bits like this. He did everything for me when I was a squalling brat, and he's stuck by me all his life. He only came over here to see me fixed up, and save me being lonely in this country when the lawyers made me come over and show my papers and all the racket connected with the estate." A shamefaced grin lightened the keen young face. "Seems I'm going to have a dandy time now. I can pilot my own plane and do research on engines, and hop across the Atlantic—all the things I've most wanted to do—but I can't get down to it and enjoy life when I see uncle going queer in the top storey worrying over all this crazy business connected with the Anderbys. I can't think why he worries about it so much."

"Can't you? I can—but then I'm caught in the toils too," said Falkland, rather grimly. "I've never been under police supervision in my life, and I tell you I don't like it."

"Oh, that!" said Trant scornfully. "It isn't the cops who are worrying uncle. It's this dotty business of spooks and spirit messages. He's taking it seriously. That's what worries me. He's begun going to spirit seances. However, I want to tell you the story right from the beginning."

Taking the cigarette Falkland offered, Trant went on: "You know how this 'spiritist' racket started: you and Brook and Lee Gordon all got those dotty messages, one way or another. Now tell me—what did you make of yours?"

"I came to the conclusion that some kind friend and well-wisher was inviting me to make a fool of myself by going and fishing for trouble," said Falkland dryly.

"But you never imagined that you'd received a spirit message from Mrs. Anderby?"

"No. I don't think that even in my wildest moment I thought that—though there was something uncanny about that message, all the same," said Falkland. "It did go three parts of the way towards making me make a fool of myself because, in some idiotic way, I was averse from showing it to the police. When I finally did show it to Macdonald, it wasn't hard to guess that he looked at me with even more concentrated interest than he'd shown before."

"The devil of it is that it's taken uncle an odd way," said Trant. "He swears now that it was Mrs. Anderby's voice he heard. He believed at first that she was still alive and was just spoofing him. Now he believes she's dead, he's worse off than he was before because he believes that it was her spirit talking."

"That's pure unadulterated rubbish," said Falkland with energy. "Even if I could bring myself to believe in spirit voices—which I don't—I can't square up the idea of a disembodied spirit manipulating the dial of an automatic telephone."

"Oh, sure, I'm with you there all right," replied Trant, "and so's uncle, up to a point, but he's getting in with this crank crowd of spook merchants, and he rationalizes it out that a spirit can speak through a human medium and the medium can cope with the telephone."

"That's grand," said Falkland dryly, "lead me to the medium, and I'd say you'd done a good deed for the day."

Trant grinned, but his greenish eyes had an odd flicker in them, which Falkland noted as the young man's rather nasal voice went on,

"Sure, it'd be a dandy deed—that medium's got me guessing some! But to get on with the story: it doesn't stop there by a long chalk. The old man's had three more of those messages."

"Has he, by jove!" exclaimed Falkland. "I hope to the deuce he's told the Chief Inspector about them."

"That's just what he hasn't done," said Trant. "He's gone just damned unreasonable. Says if a spirit is going to communicate with him the police aren't the guys to understand. I only got it out of him today. The phone rang when I was there, and he sort of wilted and looked green, and made a grab for the receiver, all worked up in a sweat over it. I just went in bald-headed and made him tell me what had given him the jitters. He told me she'd spoken to him three times—twice while he was down at White Gables, clearing his junk out of the house, and once while he was in his own apartment at Savoy Chambers. The result is that he can't hear the phone go without getting in a fair twitter over it."

"What was the message sent to him?" inquired Falkland, and Trant replied,

"As far as I can get it out of him, the message consisted in telling him that he was to stay in England until 'guidance' came to him—that he'd be told what to do all in good time, and that he was the only person who could help Mrs. Anderby. It's obviously a plant, unless the old boy's imagining things. I'm worried stiff about him. He'll go off his rocker if he just stays put, waiting for spirit messages over the phone. He's had a lot to bother him lately because his rubber company's struck trouble, and his shares are dropping in an ugly way, and just when he ought to be out East pulling things together, he's tied by the leg here, waiting for another adjourned inquest on a dame he hardly knew."

"Yes. It's pretty sickening," said Falkland. "I'm in the same position myself. I suppose I *could* clear out, but I hesitate to do so because if I insist on leaving England the police may

interpret it as running away and stop me. That would just about put the lid on it. It's an exasperating business."

"I'd say it is. I want to get uncle clear away, out of all this spookery business, especially since he said he saw Mrs. A.—or her ghost—wandering round the garden at White Gables."

"Good Lord! It isn't as bad as that, is it?" asked Falkland, and Trant nodded.

"It is—just as bad as that. He was down at the house last Wednesday and he stayed until late in the evening. He was fond of that garden, you know, and he went wandering round by himself, having a last look at things, and he says he saw her on the lawn just where the old parson pipped off, and she was wailing like a banshee. He was properly rattled, and when he tried to run after her he tripped himself up over a branch or something and came a header. By the time he got up she'd disappeared."

"Nervous dyspepsia or imagination?" queried Falkland, but Trant shook his head.

"That's what I said, but it wasn't. He *did* see something. He's got a caretaker in the house, a cheerful beer-drinking old fellow named Wilkins. This chap had been down to the village and he was just coming back to the house, and he said he saw a woman in black disappearing up the road just after she turned out of the drive. Uncle told him quite solemnly it was Mrs. Anderby's ghost he'd seen, and Wilkins was frightened stiff. He's a countryman, and he doesn't like the idea of spooks, and he refused to sleep in the house another night. I know the whole business sounds plumb crazy," added Trant apologetically, "but I'm telling it to you just as I got it out of the old man. I didn't like it. He seems simply possessed by this spook business, and to talk to him you might think he was plain bats."

"And didn't he tell the police about his 'ghost,' either?" queried Falkland, and Trant replied,

"No. Never said a word. Says it's got beyond the realm of police procedure."

"I don't agree with him there," said Falkland decisively. "The police ought to be told."

"Well, I'm not so sure," said Trant meditatively. "I told you I thought the whole business had got the old boy down. He felt Anderby's death very much, just hated to see him go plonk down on the grass under his very eyes. Then Major Grendon died and uncle felt more shaken up than ever. When they fished Mrs. Anderby out of the river and asked him to try to identify her, he was just horrified. He's a kind-hearted old boy, and the sight of her upset him so much he can't get it out of his mind. Well—I ask you—" and the young man spread out his hands, "is it surprising he's seeing things? He's just getting to be a fair nerve case."

"Then you believe he has only imagined that he's getting these messages?"

Trant's greenish eyes flickered again.

"The Lord knows what I believe. He got the first message all right—the same as you and Brook did. You all got the same dope so you couldn't all have imagined it, could you?"

"There was nothing imaginary about my communication," replied Falkland tersely. "It's now in the hands of the police, to be shown to the jury as Exhibit A—one day."

"One day," echoed young Trant. "I don't pretend to know who's pulling the funny business, but I do know the old man's letting it get him down, imagination or not. Now see here. I want to get him away out of the country. There's no earthly object in his being badgered out of his wits between the police and this spook business. It's just silly. He won't make any effort to move himself, and he says the police want him for the adjourned inquest. I want to get him away—and I thought maybe you could help me by putting in a word with your swell cop. You're pretty well in with him, I'd say."

Falkland laughed. “You’d say wrong then. It’s true I’ve seen a lot of him, but that was all because he was interrogating me—talking things over and turning my mind inside out to the best of his not inconsiderable ability. It’s no use my going to him and suggesting that Mr. Lee Gordon’s state of health requires a foreign cruise. If you want to move on those lines you’ll have to get a doctor’s certificate.”

Trant shook his head. “No go. He wouldn’t consult a doctor—and he’d be just flaming mad if he knew I’d come to you about all this.”

Falkland studied the young man with shrewd, thoughtful eyes.

“You asked my advice, you know, so you can’t complain if I rub it in. The police ought to be told about this spirit message campaign. I can’t see the point of it, but it seems to me very essential evidence.”

Trant frowned. “Now, see here, Mr. Falkland. I’ve told you that my notion is to get the old boy away out of the country. If he goes to the police and tells them that he’s receiving spirit messages d’you think it’ll make them keener to let him go? Not on my life! They’ll hold him for further evidence.”

“Quite rightly,” said Falkland incisively. “They would make it their business to find out who could—and who could not—have sent those messages. I can make a fair guess myself. Why she’s doing it, I don’t know. It may be exhibitionism, or it may be malicious intent, but it ought to be investigated.”

There was silence between the two men for awhile, and Falkland pondered over the expression in young Trant’s bright eyes. After a moment the architect spoke again.

“You don’t think that *I* have been sending those messages by any chance, do you?” he inquired, “because if you do, you’re barking up the wrong tree.”

The young man flushed, and his eyes flickered with the same light which Falkland had noted before.

“No, sir. I don’t. If I did, I tell you I shouldn’t be sitting here talking to you like this. You say it’s a woman has sent those messages—meaning the old lady at the boarding house?”

“Well, isn’t that the common-sense explanation?” asked Falkland. “She’s a queer old party, always given to producing messages she says she’s received in her dreams, or through her planchette board. It seems to me more than probable that she’s revelling in a new game, and that your uncle’s the victim.”

Trant lighted another cigarette and hurled the match violently out of the window.

“No. I don’t agree with you,” he replied. “It’s one of two things: either uncle’s going batty—and to hear him talk you might imagine he was pretty far gone—or else someone’s pulling a deep game on him. If that’s the case, the person who is doing it is most probably Mrs. Anderby’s murderer, trying to prove that Mrs. Anderby is still alive, and that it’s not her corpse at all they fished out of the river. I’ve been going into the evidence myself as far as I’ve been able, and I know there’s something to support that view. When Mrs. Anderby’s belongings were burnt up in that shack somebody took a lot of trouble to make it hard to find out anything about her or her past life. It’s an almighty queer business.”

“There’s lots that’s queer about the whole show,” said Falkland, “but assuming Mrs. Anderby was murdered—and there’s no evidence to that effect——”

“Oh, isn’t there?” interrupted the young man. “Have you been to see the place they found her? I have. It’s supposed to be *verboten* and all that—shut off by the police—but graft’s graft in every country in this world, and gamekeepers aren’t averse to pocketing fivers. Well, I tell you they found her wedged underneath a fallen tree trunk which had fouled the stream. D’you

think any suicide would choose that way to drown—crawling under a tree trunk to get firmly held down?"

"Not being well up in suicides, I can't tell you," said Falkland, "but isn't it conceivable that her body floated downstream until it got wedged under the tree?"

"D'you have a good stream in backwaters in this country?" asked Trant scornfully. "That stream's so sluggish it hardly carries a straw along a foot an hour."

"It varies," said Falkland. "It's not a dead end. The backwater rejoins the main stream half a mile farther down, though the exit's very small. Anyway, there is a stream of sorts running through it. I know. I fished there when I was a boy."

Again Trant regarded the older man with his bright-eyed stare, and Falkland went on impatiently,

"Well, never mind that. Accept your hypothesis for argument's sake. Mrs. Anderby was murdered. Go on."

"O.K. Then I'd say her murderer is sending those messages for two reasons—and one is to try to get my old boy to swear he's heard her voice over the phone. The other's to get him in such a state of jitters that he'll go dotty and get himself involved by confessing he murdered her himself."

"That's rather far-fetched," said Falkland. "From what I've seen of Mr. Lee Gordon, he's not the man to be stampeded into nonsense of that kind."

"He seems just a plain, matter-of-fact old josser to you, doesn't he?" replied Trant, "but I know him better than you do. He's had fits of getting religion when he's been in contact with some of the Fundamentalists and Amy Macpherson crowd. Believe me or not, he's capable of saying the rummest things when he's had an orgy of revivalism. He gets over it and becomes himself again—but the streak's there."

He left off his vigorous speech for a moment and stared at Falkland in his intent way.

"You never guessed that side of him, did you? Wal, I know you're a first-rate architect, but maybe you're no psychologist. Now in this racket, taking the folks who're involved in the inquiry, who would you say was the best psychologist?"

"I don't quite follow your line of thought," said Falkland, and Trant retorted,

"It's plain enough. In the first case a message was sent to the three of you—Brook, Lee Gordon and yourself. Which of the three reacted most to the message? Not Brook. It'd take a lot to rattle that chap. Not you. You're a hundred per cent skeptical over spirit messages. Lee Gordon was the only one who took the thing in the spirit in which it was sent. He believed he'd heard Mrs. Anderby's voice—her spirit voice—and it's Lee Gordon who's been singled out for a continuation of the racket. Now I ask—who was a good enough psychologist to observe that he was the most likely subject to get rattled—and to do something silly?"

Falkland shrugged his shoulders. "I think I see your line of thought," he replied. "You're suggesting that one of the three of us who received messages—or said that we received them—is the actual sender. In other words that Brook or I have been doing it."

"And isn't Brook a good psychologist?" burst out Trant. "You know him. You've talked to him—far more than I have. Isn't he just the type of merchant to cash in on the results of his own observations? You think it out. It makes sense."

Falkland lighted another cigarette and puffed away thoughtfully at it before he replied.

"Just what are you implying?" he asked at length. "You do a bit of thinking, too. Why should Brook have murdered Mrs. Anderby?"

"Because he had connived at other murders for their mutual profit, and when she began to get rattled he got rid of her for his own safety."

Falkland shook his head. "It's an ingenious idea, but it won't wash," he replied. "Quite apart from my own liking for Brook—and I *do* like him, I can't believe there's the remotest possibility of your idea being within miles of the truth. If Brook had been accessory for Mrs. Anderby's profit, he would only have done it for his own advantage—pecuniary advantage, presumably."

"Well, where did he get the dollars from to equip that swell clinic of his? It must have cost him a pretty packet."

"I don't know—but I'm quite sure the police do. It's one of the things they'd have looked into. Also—a much simpler matter—they would have examined Mrs. Anderby's banking account and all her past financial transactions. Any transfer of money from her account to Brook's would have been noted at once."

"Oh, come! You don't imagine he was such a mutt as to allow any of those transactions to appear on paper! Not he. He's not so simple as that. There's ways and means of conveying profits for services rendered. Besides, maybe the transaction wasn't a financial one. A mutual advancement alliance for the benefit of both parties may have been aimed at. After all, Brook came pretty near the dock once for liquidating one medical practitioner. Maybe he's got a few skeletons tucked away in his cupboard which he doesn't want exhibited. The police don't find out everything, not by a long chalk! If it hadn't been for Major Grendon's death none of this racket would have materialized. The police never guessed there was anything phoney about Mrs. Anderby until it was fairly shoved under their noses by you, Mr. Falkland."

The architect rumpled up his thick hair. "That's rather illuminating, isn't it?" he said. "If I had held my tongue, poor old Grendon might have got a verdict of suicide, and Mrs. Anderby might still be making pious pilgrimages to her husband's grave—but that doesn't get us any forrarder over your problem, which is—what's the right thing to do about Mr. Lee Gordon and his spirit messages?"

"I know the answer to that one," replied Trant. "Get him clear of the whole show. It's nothing to do with him, nor he with it! Just because a poor old josser fell dead on uncle's lawn he's being driven bats and crackers by a racketeer who'll end by murdering him, as sure as nuts is nuts. Grendon was murdered, wasn't he? Why? Because he knew something—without realizing that he did know it. Maybe uncle knows it, too."

"Well, if you're so convinced on that point why not go to the police and tell them so?" argued Falkland. "Set out all suspicions against Brook; give the exact times when the messages occurred, and when the woman in black was seen on the lawn at White Gables, and let them check up on Brook. Ask for police protection for him—anything rather than just waiting for trouble, expecting him to be murdered."

"I've told you why I don't want to go to the police. They can't prove anything. That's obvious. If they'd been able to make out a case against Brook they'd have got him in jug by now. If I supply them with a little extra chapter and verse about spirit messages they'll just badger poor old uncle again and see to it that he doesn't get away from this god-darned country. I won't do it—and I trust you not to do it either."

His green eyes met Falkland's with that queer aggressive light in them, as he got to his feet.

"I reckon I've wasted a lot of your time, Mr. Falkland," he added, more placidly this time. "I just felt I wanted to talk things over with you, to see if you could help."

“So far as getting permission for your uncle to leave the country is concerned, I can’t do anything,” said Falkland. “I want to go to the States myself: so does Brook. If Macdonald let any one of us go he’d have to let the others. Brook and I are witnesses in the matter of Grendon’s death: Lee Gordon is witness in the matter of Anderby’s—and the idea is that the two cases hang together. Murder is taken seriously in this country, you know.”

“And it’ll be taken more seriously if my old uncle’s the subject of the next inquest,” retorted Trant.

Falkland got up, his voice suddenly impatient.

“It’s no use hectoring *me* about it, young fella-me-lad. I’ve told you what’s the sensible thing to do. If you can’t see it that’s your lookout.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"Don't apologize for bothering me, Chief Inspector. You don't bother me at all! I'm quite delighted to see you!"

It was Mrs. Dellaton who spoke, looking at Macdonald with her bright, birdlike glance, her eyes reflecting cheerful pleasure as she motioned him to a seat in her pretty drawing room. It was quite early in the case that Macdonald had found out for himself the source of Falkland's "information received"—the architect's source of gossip about Nurse Pewsey in other words. Falkland, with what Macdonald regarded as the native stupidity of many "chivalrous" Englishmen, had endeavoured to keep Mrs. Dellaton "out of the whole unsavoury business." Mrs. Dellaton herself, however, had had no wish to be kept "out of it." She was "all agog to be in it," to use her own phrase, and when Macdonald had called on her early in the case, shortly after his first interview with Falkland, she had talked to him with such cheerful aplomb, and such a total lack of caution, that Macdonald wondered if Robert Falkland's desire to "keep one's women folks out of it" had been inspired by something other than the usual convention of protecting a woman from the sordid details of a police inquiry. Certain it was that whatever items of news had ever come Mrs. Dellaton's way, she was delighted to pass them on.

"It shows my innocence, doesn't it?" she went on blithely, when Macdonald had seated himself, "no woman with a guilty secret could ever welcome you quite so wholeheartedly as I do!"

Macdonald laughed a little. "There is such a thing as an accomplished actress," he said, "but I'm not suggesting histrionic ability in your case this time."

"Bless you, I can't act a part to save my life," she retorted. "I once tried to act with the local amateurs, and I was utterly hopeless. I could never learn my lines and I was never anything except myself, utterly and hopelessly myself! You know, I'm quite disappointed about this case, Chief Inspector. I know Robert Falkland would tell me I had a morbid, sordid mind, being so desperately interested in nasty murders and suicides, but I had set my heart on being helpful! You've no idea the hours and hours I've spent doing research on that amazing old Pewsey for you. I even kidded myself that I might be the means of bringing a notorious criminal to justice, and that you would hand me a bouquet or a small salver with 'the gratitude of Scotland Yard' inscribed on it, and now the whole thing's petered out into a miserable suicide and those dreadful remains under a log in a stream. I suppose you've come to tell me it's all over and done with, and that I needn't go gadding round the countryside any more, looking up long-forgotten friends to chat Pewsey with them?"

Macdonald drew a deep breath, almost unconsciously—he felt that the speed of Mrs. Dellaton's conversation was a little breath-taking—and then he replied:

"I wouldn't say that it was all over and done with: a case is never over until we have docketed every possible item of information, and if your research is able to add any facts to Nurse Pewsey's history, I shall be only too glad to have them—and to put the thanks of Scotland Yard on record," he added with a bow.

"Now that's really nice of you! I *told* Robert Falkland you were a nice person," she said. "It would have been so humiliating to be told that my efforts were all wasted. *Do* tell me, you *are* quite sure she committed suicide, aren't you?"

"That's for the jury to say, not for me," replied Macdonald, and she went on,

"Oh, splendid! You're just fencing, and that means you're *not* quite sure! I've got my own ideas, you know—but I'll tell you them later on. Now do you want to hear Pewsey's life story, as reconstructed by me—and I assure you, you could never have got half so much information yourself, because the people who have talked to me just wouldn't have bleated a word to you. 'Not to the *police*, my dear!' they say."

"I know," said Macdonald, a twinkle in his gray eyes. "It takes a really intelligent woman to see the logic of helping a police officer."

"Thank you, Chief Inspector! I like your methods! Now see, I've got it all written down, and I've taken such a lot of trouble over it!"

"You certainly have," said Macdonald, considering the closely written sheets handed to him, "and I'll pay your work the compliment it deserves by reading it carefully."

He took out his cigarette case and held it out to his companion, who extracted a Players and then said,

"I'm going to put this away as a souvenir in my crime cupboard. 'Cigarette from the case of the Yard Ace.' I'll smoke one of my own instead and demonstrate the impossible—that I'm capable of keeping quiet indefinitely when someone else is concentrating."

Macdonald studied the sheets presented to him. Certain it was that Mrs. Dellaton had taken a lot of trouble and used method and common sense in putting down her results. She had written the sources of her information beside the facts, her statement beginning,

"Emma Alice Pewsey. Born, July 5th, 1880, at Nottingham. Went to school at Miss Macey's Academy 1888-96. (Told by Mrs. Bateman, who employed her in 1914.)

"E. A. Pewsey worked as mother's help in Nottingham 1896-1900. (Employer, Mrs. Walton, now dead.) She entered the Vanstone General Hospital in 1901, for general training, and specialized in maternity work, remaining as sister in charge until 1910. (Told by Mrs. Copley, who knew nurse very well.) From 1910-15 Nurse Pewsey did private maternity work. 1915-19 she worked in Vanstone Military Hospital. In 1919 she joined forces with Nurse Salcombe, and they opened a maternity home, but gave up after a year for lack of funds. From 1920-25 Nurse Pewsey did private maternity work again in Oasthampstead and district. She still worked with Nurse Salcombe and they shared rooms together until 1925, when Nurse Salcombe went to London to work with a charitable society, she being (like Nurse Pewsey) a very religious woman. After 1925, Nurse Pewsey did less maternity work and more general nursing. From 1930 until the year she retired (after Dr. Chenner's death) she nursed mainly elderly patients." (Here followed a list of cases, the patients' names conveying nothing to Macdonald for the most part.) Then was added a sheet headed "general comments," giving various opinions on Nurse Pewsey's professional ability and private character. Among a mass of irrelevant detail, most of which Macdonald could have reconstructed himself from previous information, one item interested him. Nurse Pewsey had had an exceedingly bad memory for her patients' names. She had lived and worked amongst an astonishing variety of persons and she remembered and had related to other patients many details of past cases, but names escaped her after a short period. Like many other professional nurses, she had kept an "address and case book," but her own memory was very eccentric. Mrs. Dellaton's statement ended up with a list of pathetic—and sometimes comic—information concerning details of Nurse Pewsey's cases which had been considered of sufficient interest to retail to other patients—infants still-born, infants born out of wedlock, infants born with abnormalities, such as a child with a club foot, another with a cloven palate and hare lip, another who was born

blind. Added to this pathetic list were set down comments (always anonymous) on the behaviour of patients, their exactingness, their parsimoniousness, their eccentricities.

Macdonald looked up from his perusal of the papers and met Mrs. Dellaton's bright eyes fixed on him.

"Thank you very much for all the trouble you have taken, and congratulations on the efficient way you have set down and docketed the information," he said. "It is an exceedingly useful document—and it will be quite safe with me," he added. "In fact, I'm just the safest person you could have handed it over to."

"Oh, safety!" she laughed. "You're like my husband—'but you mustn't *say* so, my dear.' Anyway, all that information is true, so why shouldn't I write it down? Who was it wrote 'Discretion is a dull old maid, wooed by incapacity?' And *now*, Chief Inspector! A quid for my quo! I'm still certain that man is at the bottom of everything!"

"Which man?" inquired Macdonald, and she retorted,

"Oh, don't be so densely official! Brook, of course."

"But why should Mr. Brook have committed several murders and driven Mrs. Anderby to suicide?"

Mrs. Dellaton spread out her hands: "But you must *surely* have guessed! What's the use of being a great detective if you can't see farther than the average idiot? I'm *certain* Brook did it! I expect he spotted old Pewsey at some of her little games, perhaps he lent a hand and then blackmailed her—and killed her when he realized she was getting frightened and would give him away. I expect if one could only connect up all those odds and ends of evidence I've written down there, the answer is clear enough—only I just can't see it! I've been just racking my brains about Pewsey and that man Brook!"

Macdonald glanced down at the sheets he held.

"Perhaps the answer *is* there—only it's no use trying guesswork to fill in the place of evidence. If you use your intelligence, Mrs. Dellaton—and you've got plenty of *that* quality, you must realize that mere guesswork and assumption could fabricate a case against anybody who has had any contact with the victims. Blackmail—and subsequent murder. It's a vague accusation in general terms: it could be used against other people besides Max Brook. There has to be definite evidence to back it up before guesswork is of any profit to a detective."

She looked him straight in the face. "Meaning that anyone could say, just offhand, 'Oh, it was Robert Falkland . . . she blackmailed him' . . . or 'it was that ghastly Dellaton woman who has been busy-bodying about Nurse Pewsey all this time.' Oh, I know!—and Robert would be *furious* with me if he knew I was talking like this, but it's no use saying that Brook *isn't* tied up in all this! What did he make friends with that old Miss Austin for? Did you know he deliberately bumped into her one day outside Woolworth's and picked up her parcels and scraped an acquaintance with her? And that he took her to tea at the Gorse Bush Café and talked spiritualism to her, and that he went to a séance held at that queer house in Grove Place? And then what about the ghost on the lawn at White Gables? *Do you* believe in ghosts? Of course you don't! Couldn't it have been Brook masquerading as a ghost to frighten poor Mr. Lee Gordon out of his life?"

"As a matter of fact, I *do* know something about some of the facts you have mentioned," said Macdonald mildly. "After all, the police must do something to earn their pay, and we do keep our eyes open to some extent. In order to be quite fair, I should like to state that it's a proven fact that Mr. Brook was in his own garden on the evening and at the time that a 'ghost' was seen by Mr. Lee Gordon and his caretaker. The latter has been talking rather unwisely, but

I can assure you of this. If anyone played at ghosts at White Gables that evening it was *not* Mr. Brook, and it was not Mr. Lee Gordon, neither was it Miss Austin—so it may be said that the 'ghost' was some other man or woman connected with the case. Perhaps they were fabricating evidence for their own purposes, and I have not been intelligent enough to read that purpose aright."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Dellaton ruefully. "Now you'll be suggesting that it was Robert Falkland—or myself! But why on earth you should think that *I* played at ghosts, I just can't imagine!"

"I didn't say that I did think so," replied Macdonald, "but working on your method, as applied to Mr. Brook, anyone might guess at anybody playing the part—and rationalize their guess with motives based on blackmail. Believe me, assumptions of that kind are dangerous to utter—they have a boomerang quality."

"Well, when you have arrested Brook, perhaps you'll come back and say, 'How right you were'!" she responded cheerfully. "Anyway, you must admit that Brook's behaving a bit oddly, making up to Miss Austin—obviously with the motive of insinuating himself into Miss Driver's house and removing some evidence which he and Nurse Pewsey overlooked!"

"Once again, I caution you against making rash statements," said Macdonald, but she replied quite irrepressibly,

"And anything I say may be taken down in writing and used as evidence against me! Shades of my sainted husband! But I *have* put my evidence in writing, haven't I?" she went on, pointing to the sheets which Macdonald was folding to put into his pocket, and he nodded:

"You have—and once again, many thanks for the trouble you have taken for me. I hope that next time we meet this whole problem may be solved."

Macdonald left Mrs. Dellaton's house in a very thoughtful frame of mind. There was a lot left to account for in this eccentric and ambiguous case he was working on. Macdonald's organization for observing "contacts" in the case was as thorough as he could make it, though not uniformly successful. The Chief Inspector knew that Mr. Lee Gordon was being harassed by "spirit" messages—that gentleman's conversations with his nephew had been overheard by one of the "service staff" (put in by Macdonald at his chambers), and it was exceedingly difficult to arrive at any conclusions about these communications. Lee Gordon tended more and more to convince himself that he had heard Mrs. Anderby's own voice speaking to him, and Macdonald had to admit that there was a remote possibility that Lee Gordon was right—but the thing did not make sense. Granted that Mrs. Anderby were alive, it had to be taken into consideration that she had gone to incredible lengths to make it appear that she was dead, and it was her body which had been discovered in the Avon. Why then haunt the locality most dangerous to her in order to send messages to Lee Gordon? Again, there was the problem of the "apparition" at White Gables. A black-robed woman had been seen by the caretaker there—seen more than once, and Macdonald had not been able to decide who was playing tricks. Since White Gables had been kept under supervision, the "apparition" had not obliged by putting in an appearance, but on neither occasion could it have been Brook playing tricks, because Brook's whereabouts at the times were known. Macdonald was very much interested in the osteopath and his behaviour. Detective Reeves had been detailed to keep Brook "under observation" and Reeves was one of Macdonald's ablest men. Walters, who relieved Reeves, was also an exceedingly competent shadower, but both men had been outwitted by the osteopath several times since their watch began. Brook had an almost uncanny capacity for eluding a follower, and for getting in and out of his own house unobserved and unheard. More

than once Reeves and Walters had despondently reported that their man "had cut and run—beaten them hollow," but Brook always came back. Had he wanted to have escaped and taken to hiding, he could have done so—but apparently he did not so want. Macdonald wondered whether it was sheer cussedness that inspired Brook's erratic behaviour: that he resented the police supervision, of which he was fully aware, and was intent on making fools of the police—but Macdonald did not class Brook as a man with a trivial or unreasonable mind: he was clever, and he was desperately serious, but matters were too involved to treat him with any degree of confidence. Macdonald took "the judge's rules" and the ethics of his own calling seriously. He would not question a man whom it was conceivable he might arrest without cautioning him—and either to caution or to detain Brook seemed to Macdonald likely to defeat its own end. To Macdonald's mind, events were moving, and he would rather see them move than have a case of checkmate.

Again he went over in his mind any possible connections between his different "contacts." With Mrs. Dellaton's useful statement—culled from casual gossip with those who had known Nurse Pewsey years ago—Macdonald had a fairly clear notion of the possibilities of when the threads of different careers might have crossed. He went back over their different careers, considering their ages. Brook was 41, Falkland 50, Lee Gordon 60, Mrs. Anderby 60, Mr. Anderby 70 years of age. Of this group Mr. and Mrs. Anderby had spent all their lives in England, apart from a few holidays. Falkland had practised in England all his life, though he had travelled extensively at intervals. Brook had been in the States from the age of 23 until a few years ago. Lee Gordon had been out of England nearly all his life, with occasional visits to the "old country." Macdonald reckoned that there was only one period when all those concerned had been in England simultaneously. Twenty-one years ago Brook was still an English medical student: Falkland was still a member of the architect firm to which he had been articled. Lee Gordon was a poor man, who had come to England after the crash of one of his financial ventures in the States. Mr. Anderby was vicar of Oasthampstead, and Nurse Pewsey had been running a maternity home with Anne Salcombe. Macdonald pondered. Twenty-one years. A long time ago. More than ever he wished that he could hasten the slow, patient work of tracing Anne Salcombe. A lot depended on her—if she could be found—but because he felt that a lot did depend on her, he had to be cautious in his methods of seeking her. To advertise his purpose was the last thing he wanted to do.

While Macdonald had been talking to Mrs. Dellaton, and seeking to argue his way through the maze of trivial facts which he had amassed, many activities set in motion by the Chief Inspector were going forward. Inspector Jenkins had come down to Penharden again and was making an intensive, if unobtrusive, study of a lady whose acquaintance he hoped to make—also unobtrusively. It had been easy to get to know Miss Jane Austin by sight, and very easy to observe her comings and goings from The Rowan Tree.

On this particular afternoon Jenkins had seen her set off for a walk on the common and had followed her at a discreet distance. He had had an unexpected reward for his walk for Miss Austin had gone to the Gorse Bush Café—a pleasant tea garden on the common, and there she had met Max Brook for tea. Jenkins did his best to get within hearing distance of the table at which the pair sat, but he did not want to make himself noticeable to them and contented himself by a seat in a corner, where he could observe them both, himself screened behind the sheets of *The Times*—a journal whose size commended itself to him, though Jenkins often told Macdonald that the news in *The Times* had no "human appeal." If the latter quality were lacking in the august journal in his hands, Jenkins felt there was no lack of it in

the pair of human beings he was covertly studying. An odd pair, certainly. Miss Austin, with her beaming blue eyes and serene rosy-cheeked old face, made an odd contrast with the osteopath, whose thin saturnine face, dark eyes and sallow skin made Jenkins think him a morose and unpersonable fellow—but there was strength and personality in the dark face. Seeing Brook lean across the table to talk to Miss Austin in that low, uncarrying voice of his, Jenkins was reminded, he knew not how, of a rabbit hypnotized by a stoat. Miss Austin was a little like a nice Angora rabbit and she watched Brook so intently, her eyes never leaving his. Although Brook's voice was inaudible, Miss Austin's clearer tones occasionally reached Jenkins's straining ears. She was talking to Brook about spiritualism, endeavouring to persuade him apparently of the validity of her own supra-normal experiences. Jenkins sighed. He liked the look of Miss Austin, but spiritualism as a subject of conversation or of research, was repugnant to him: also, he was a kindly man. He felt a little ashamed of listening to Miss Austin's gentle exposition. A glance at Brook brought the detective back to earth again. Here, if he was any judge, was a suitable subject for detection.

"I wonder if there's anything in this hypnotizing business," Jenkins asked himself. "This chap's an adept at it Query, how much ice does it cut . . . ?"

His own line of thought was brought to an abrupt conclusion by a few words uttered in Miss Austin's fluty tones.

". . . Nurse Pewsey . . . I only just knew her. Of course Dr. Chenner . . ." The wind blew the words away. A waitress came with his tea and Jenkins said that he thought a table in the sun might be pleasanter and moved up a little closer to the pair who interested him, keeping well behind Brook's back. The conversation was now a medley of Nurse Pewsey and spirit messages. Jenkins was still unable to hear Brook's irritatingly low voice, but he gathered quite a lot from Miss Austin's clearer tones. It seemed that Brook was urging her to recall all that she had ever known of Mrs. Anderby during her unmarried life, and of Dr. Chenner, for whom Miss Austin had had a great admiration. Jenkins heard one sentence tinged with much enthusiasm.

"Indeed, he was a guide, philosopher and friend to all, as the old saying has it," declared Miss Austin. "Everybody told the dear doctor their troubles and even their secrets! He was so absolutely trustworthy and so safe. Indeed, I always felt better for even talking to him. Not that I have ever needed a doctor's skill except in small matters—or only once, to be quite truthful, and Dr. Chenner was a tower of strength on that occasion."

Again came the low murmur of Brook's voice, and when she spoke again Miss Austin's voice was pitched in a much lower key. A few moments later Jenkins gathered that she was making some request of Brook. He again caught the word "messages" and, he thought, the word "séance." Before they rose from the table he heard Brook say quite clearly:

"I think it should be most interesting. I will see if it can be arranged."

"You will, will you," said Jenkins to himself. He got up and paid for his tea and walked out quite openly, stopping to chat to the waitress. He had his own notions of "shadowing," and to efface his very solid person was not easy. He preferred to be obvious when he could. He made some inquiries of the waitress about "hotel accommodation," and then went and waited round a nearby corner. He did not wish to lose sight of Miss Austin while Brook was with her —and he hoped that he or Macdonald would be at hand when the "interesting" idea was put into practice, but Brook was not Jenkins's "pigeon" at present. That was Reeves's job, and Reeves was undoubtedly somewhere close at hand.

Miss Austin parted from Brook at the door of the tea gardens and walked on alone, Jenkins following at a suitable distance. He had made up his mind to inquire about accommodation at The Rowan Tree, and decided that a little later on he could safely ask Miss Austin for its whereabouts.

Brook, meanwhile, turned in the other direction and set out across the common. It was a beautiful midsummer day. Overhead banks of white cumulus piled up in silvery glory. The sun was hot and the gorse on the common gave out its fragrance of honey and almonds. Brook walked slowly over the sun-baked grass, breathing in the scent of gorse and the cloying sweetness of scented bedstraw, his senses very alert to the scent of flowers, the song of larks overhead, and the boom and drone of the bees above the flowers. He was alert also to something else. He had not turned round, but he knew that somewhere, not very far away, a slim neatly built young fellow was on his tracks. It was useless to turn round and look for that very accomplished shadower had a faculty for melting into the landscape—but he was there. Brook was sure of it.

Pausing awhile in his walk, the osteopath looked overhead at the massing cumulus. A fine, hot summer's afternoon—but there was a storm not very far away. Brook sometimes said that he could smell thunder in the air. He smelt it now and a sardonic smile twisted his lips. A good afternoon for a walk—and if thunder came, so much the better. There was humour in the thought.

He began to walk at a good swinging pace, first over the parched grass of the common, along paths between the banks of gorse, then across the fairway of the golf course. A little later he left the turf and took a quiet road which ran in the direction of Oasthampstead. He followed this for three miles, never looking back, walking at a good pace along the pleasant road, shaded by elm and sweet chestnut, some gnarled holly trees and ancient hawthorn. He noticed that the clouds had crept towards the southwest, and that the sun was no longer shining. A little later he left the road for a lane which ran downhill towards the River Pen, and he gained the valley and chose a path by the river where the watercress beds lay. Half a mile farther on he reached the weir, and here he paused and looked down into the foaming waters for awhile.

The sky was overcast now and the faintest rumble of distant thunder reached his ears. Turning away from the river, he took a path which led across the fields to the sterile tract known as "No Man's Land." Local lore had it that the abbots of Oasthampstead and of Pen had quarreled over the boundaries of their manors and that the feud had been settled by leaving a neutral tract of valueless land between the monastic holdings. Thus had "No Man's Land" earned its name. It was a sandy waste, with many little hills and hollows, the latter often filled with a tangle of brambles and other rough shrubs. Brook knew it well. He plunged along a sandy gulley and bent his head a little as the storm broke. Thunder rolled merrily overhead; lightning flashed blindingly, and the rain came down with the wild fury of a midsummer storm. The osteopath chuckled to himself as he pursued his eccentric course between the hummocks. Somebody else was getting soaked as well as himself, and he felt that he was repaying some of the minor irritations he had suffered at the hands of his shadower. A few minutes later, bent almost double as he crawled along a little gulley, he found a spot he had noticed on a previous occasion. It was a tunnel beneath a dense thicket of bramble and stunted hawthorn. The thick matted branches held a mass of dead leaves and stems and they were supported by an old post which was rammed well into the sandy soil. Creeping below the matted branches, Brook found a dry spot up against a sandy burrow to one side, and here

he lay, chuckling silently to himself. He knew exactly where his pursuer was—quite a distance from the secret tunnel beneath the brambles, probably lost among the sand hills of “No Man’s Land.” Brook felt quite secure. He was in no hurry, and he had for once a feeling of comfortable superiority in having outwitted an exceedingly astute hound of the law.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"One feels that it's a case of pull devil, pull baker," said Falkland ruefully. "In normal circumstances, when a man tells you certain facts in confidence, there's only one course to pursue—keep a still tongue and honour his confidence. But in the circumstances of a criminal investigation one's conscience is at war—and it's not a happy feeling."

He was talking to Macdonald on the afternoon of the same day that the latter had been to see Mrs. Dellaton, and the two men were sitting on a carpenter's bench in a room of a new house which Falkland had designed at Ashridge, not many miles from Penharden. The architect had been inspecting the work of the carpenters who had been fitting panelling, and Macdonald had walked in unexpectedly when Falkland thought he was by himself, and had given the architect a considerable start. The Chief Inspector nodded in reply to Falkland's gambit.

"Yes. That's a quandary in which I see a good many people," he replied. "To my mind, a civic conscience should come before a private one. However—to get to your particular problem. Someone has been confiding their difficulties to you. It's my business to keep a watch on people in any case I'm working on—perhaps to observe their difficulties unknown to themselves. Very few people have any notion of the quiet, unobtrusive watching that goes on in police work."

Falkland laughed. "You needn't tell me that," he retorted. "I'm only too conscious of it. Never having been 'under supervision' before, I tell you frankly I don't take kindly to it. There's not much of my business and history you're not cognizant of—and much good may it do you."

"We inevitably amass a pile of irrelevant data," said Macdonald placidly. "What applies to you applies to others also—but to get to the immediate point. Perhaps your conscience will allow you to answer a question. Have you been consulted as to certain alleged 'spirit' messages?"

Falkland laughed again. "I like your word 'alleged'," he replied. "Thank the Lord you know about it! I hate the role of common informer. Well——" and he cast a shrewd, quizzical gaze on Macdonald. "What do you make of the spook stuff?"

"Spook stuff has no place in police procedure, nor in any other department concerned with logic," replied Macdonald. "In our view messages entail a human sender. The interest of them to us is who transmitted them, and for what purpose."

"Meaning that the whole racket is a performance of the criminal for his own purposes?"

"Not of necessity. Meaning that one human being is acting in order to influence another human being."

"Miss Austin included?"

"What do *you* know about Miss Austin? Hasn't the indulgence of your natural curiosity brought you bother enough—including my presence here?"

"You may well say so," chuckled Falkland, "but while I'm alive, I shall always retain a certain interest in my fellow beings, and Miss Austin is a focus of interest just at present, in Penharden, anyway."

"Miss Austin has been claiming to receive spirit messages for a good many years now. It's her main interest in life," replied Macdonald. "The only messages she has passed on to me

were rationalizations made by an observant and logical person under a cloak of whimsies. If she could be proved to be sending out messages the position would be very different—but she can't be proved to have done so. Someone is doing it—and covering their movement very skilfully."

"And that is why I am 'under observation'," said Falkland ruefully. "Damn it! I shall soon be as bad as Lee Gordon in my reactions to a telephone. I daren't stop at an A.A. box and phone for a table in a restaurant without feeling that I'm laying myself under more suspicions."

"That result being also probably calculated," replied Macdonald. "However, presumably you have your own suspicions on the matter—but as opinions aren't evidence I won't ask you for them."

"I never know how far it's politic to ask questions," said Falkland, "but I wish you'd tell me this. Brook says he's being 'shadowed.' Is the shadowing successful—from your point of view?"

"To some extent, even if the results are sometimes negative," replied Macdonald. "Brook, as you are doubtless aware, is a very subtle and skilful fellow, both mentally and physically. I have enjoyed pitting my wits against his."

Falkland gave a whistle. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed, but Macdonald cut in.

"Don't anticipate conclusions—but in the meanwhile let us survey some of the evidence again. Two years ago Dr. William Chenner died. He was poisoned by hyoscine. No. Don't interrupt," he added, as Falkland broke in with an exclamation. "A short while ago, Mr. Anderby died—from heart failure, his heart being previously upset by calculated doses of a heart stimulant. Still more recently, a woman, assumed to have been Mrs. Anderby, died from drowning—her death being assumed as due to suicide. It was very difficult to get any accurate information about her because all her possessions were destroyed previous to her death. Also, it is very difficult to identify the body beyond any shadow of doubt, as it was in a very bad state for identification. In addition, Major Grendon died, and it seems reasonable to assume that his death was due to some sort of observations he made—but unfortunately did not pass on to any reliable person at the time of Mr. Anderby's death. Those have been the main facts up till now. I, in the meantime, have been occupied in collecting data about all the persons connected with the case. It started, as you will remember, with Major Grendon telling you that he was convinced that Mrs. Anderby had found a way of hustling elderly patients out of the world—and it has been Mrs. Anderby who has been the focus point of interest throughout the inquiry. I have spent a great deal of time in investigating her past history and in tracing her old friends and acquaintances."

"Yes. I gathered from my own family—and my own friends—that you had been busy along those lines," said Falkland dryly. "I certainly wished that Nurse Pewsey had not been the devoted nurse attendant of my old aunt from every point of view."

"Well—at long last I have made some progress," said Macdonald. "I have just heard that my department has discovered the whereabouts of Miss Anne Salcombe, the only intimate friend Nurse Pewsey ever had so far as I can gather—barring the women who left nurse her furniture and other effects. It's my business to get into touch with the living and investigate *their* tales."

There was a moment of dead silence and then Falkland replied,

"I gather, from the tone of your voice, that all is over bar the shouting—but, since you have told me so much, won't you go on and tell me also what is the nature of the evidence

supplied by Miss Anne Salcombe?"

"No. I won't go so far as that," replied Macdonald. "I don't think you're lacking in a sense of logic, or of cause and effect, and the evidence to date is so suggestive that I think you can make your own interpretation."

Falkland paused, his eyes studying the other, intent and wary. "I wonder why you have told me as much as you have," he said slowly. "Is it your habit to supply information to suspects?"

"I have found in times past that the dissemination of a little information often has a very useful effect," replied Macdonald, his voice noncommittal, tranquil and thoughtful as ever, and Falkland stared at him, as though trying to read the mind concealed behind the gray eyes and expressionless face of the tall Scot.

"I'm quite certain that you don't pass on information without a motive," said Falkland at last. "You have told me as much as you have for purposes of your own, not to satisfy my own curiosity, nor yet to impress me with your own thoroughness—and you have not warned me not to pass the information on. Isn't that the essential point?" he asked, his expression suddenly changing. Then he laughed, throwing back his head as though in genuine amusement. "Have I got to the root of the whole matter?" he asked. "You tell me certain facts because you think I'm pretty certain to pass them on—and you want those facts passed on by someone other than yourself. Perhaps you are even counting on the possibility that the information will be passed on in the guise of a 'spirit message'—Mrs. Anderby's voice whispering over the telephone, perhaps?"

His voice was angry now and his eyes challenged Macdonald's. "Aren't you a bit of an optimist?" he inquired scornfully.

"The question is rhetorical, I take it," replied Macdonald, "but my answer to it is this—I'm not an optimist, but I have a conviction that cause and effect follow one another. I have not warned you against repeating what I have told you, and I shall not warn anyone else to whom I pass on the same information." A gleam of humour lit his deep-set gray eyes. "In one respect, every case I have worked on has one common factor: information spreads itself, it's very rare to find anyone who keeps news to himself—or herself—in a criminal case. The police act on 'information received'—and criminals do likewise. To stay put and do nothing when events move against you is contrary to human nature."

"And you are acting on the assumption that I shall make some move—if it's only to get in touch with Brook and repeat what you have told me."

"Why not?" replied Macdonald. "You have pooled information before, haven't you? If, on the other hand, you refrain from passing on the items I have told you, that fact in itself will be instructive."

Falkland studied him with a frowning face. "If I didn't know that you were classed as a man with a first-rate intelligence, I might make the mistake of putting you down as a bit of a fool," he said coolly. "It takes a bit of considering before one grasps the method you're pursuing. You broadcast information—and then wait to observe who passes it on to whom, and for what purpose, and you take the risk of informing your suspects of what you're driving at. It seems a new method to me. Co-operation with the suspect, or how to get your job done for you."

"It's an economical principle," chuckled Macdonald. "I'll leave you to think it over."

He got up and glanced round the room in which they had been talking. "I like your house," he said. "It's a good house and well planned. You have a constructive mind."

When he had gone Falkland strolled round and round the ground floor of the house, thinking so intently that he did not notice that the sunlight had faded out and that thunder clouds had gathered in the summer sky.

When Max Brook disappeared—or rather, went to earth—in No Man's Land, Detective Reeves was left standing in a sand burrow, while the thunder rolled overhead and the rain lashed his face. Reeves felt thoroughly disgruntled: in one sense he had been beaten for he had lost sight of his elusive quarry. In a few minutes which had elapsed since he had last set eyes on Brook's slim figure it was possible for Brook to have got clear away—and Reeves knew it. The detective was a Londoner and his skill had developed in London streets; this business of playing at Red Indians was not his long suit, and he had the wits to appreciate Brook's subtlety in leading the chase into this strip of wilderness where a cockney was at a disadvantage. With hunched shoulders, Reeves stood still in the rain and meditated. His quarry might have reached the road and be beating it back as fast as he could go to regions of buses and trains—but there was a chance that he was just "playing possum"—and if that was the case, Reeves's best policy was to play a waiting game. Mentally, Reeves "tossed for it." He knew that he could not be very useful in trying to get on the other's trail again on the roads and, as for other centres of interest, Reeves knew that Macdonald was in the neighbourhood, and Jenkins, too, with some of their men, "watching out." Reeves concluded that there was a sporting chance that Brook had simply taken cover, and if that were so it should be possible to "spoof him." Reeves had no notion of where Brook might lie hidden—but there was this advantage to the detective—his quarry did not know where the shadower was either. Reeves decided to play a waiting game. Cautiously and remarkably quietly, since he was by no means on his "native heath," the detective began to work his way upwards among the sandhills, crawling painfully over the sandy scrub until he at length attained the highest ridge available. Here he stretched himself on the ground, soaked to the skin, but quite oblivious of the fact, and settled down to a period of watching. With the dogged patience which is the essence of most detective work, Reeves took it for granted that since he had determined to wait it was quite probable that he might have to stay in his damp burrow until the long summer evening closed in to dusk. Reeves had not been shadowing Brook for nothing: the detective had a considerable respect both for the osteopath's skill and for his patience. Brook was an adept at eluding pursuit: he often performed the totally unexpected in a way that was exasperating to his shadower, and he also had the capacity to stay still for hours together.

For the first hour of Reeves's vigil the rain beat down on him steadily. The first torrential rain of the thunder shower gave place to a quiet persistent downfall which was gladdening the heart of every gardener in Penharden. Reeves was no gardener and he regarded the rain as a nuisance and nothing else, but he was stoical over personal discomforts and quite indifferent to being soaked to the skin. Occasionally he raised his head cautiously and peered around, well satisfied with his vantage point. He also listened intently, and was comfortably aware that he could hear footsteps on the road below when pedestrians had passed, and could hear every rustle in the brambles and scrub around him. Reeves longed for a cigarette: he had been deprived of smoking ever since he had been on his present case and he did not like it. Macdonald had told him of Brook's comment about the smell of tobacco, and Reeves had no intention of giving himself away in that manner—but the thought of a cigarette occurred to him again and again during his long vigil.

The rain gradually lessened and at length ceased, and after a period of grayness the world became tinged with the gold of approaching sundown: the gold gave place to rose colour, and a faint mist rose from the soaked fields as the rain-cooled air met the still warm soil, sun-baked after the weeks of midsummer heat.

It was while the rose was deepening to lilac that Reeves heard a rustle away below him that was something more than the movement of a rabbit or a stoat. His ears as acute as Brook's own, Reeves listened with a thrill of satisfaction. His long shot had come off and he had not waited in vain. Away below him his quarry was breaking cover.

Reeves wriggled his way cautiously down the sand hills. At one point he had the satisfaction of seeing Brook standing in a hollow, looking carefully around him, and the detective lay very still, aware that acute ears would be listening as well as sharp eyes peering. At last, as though satisfied, the osteopath made his way onto the road and set off at a good pace towards Penharden. Reeves chuckled soundlessly to himself. His own "long shot" had come off, and he had fooled the other into believing that the mug from Scotland Yard had given up the hunt and gone home.

The next hour was a considerable strain to the London detective. He had to keep at a fair distance and yet not lose contact: often he got behind the hedges and walked in the fields or coppices which edged the road. Sometimes he lay flat, sometimes crawled; sometimes, when it seemed safe, he ran, trying to keep a distance which was halfway between two points—the fear of being observed and the fear of losing touch. Reeves never drew a deeper breath of relief than when he at length saw Brook turn between the white gate posts which stood on either side of the drive at White Gables. In the gathering dusk the osteopath walked calmly up the drive and Reeves slouched along to the gates, keeping close into the shadow of the hedge. A bird shrilled an alarm call from somewhere in the shrubbery and Reeves replied with a single note. He had "made contact" again. Somewhere in the grounds Macdonald was watching too.

Reeves followed his own instinct and made his way between the shrubs to a point which gave him an unimpeded view of the lawn, and then he stopped dead as the sound of a voice reached his ears. He could not hear what words were spoken, but in the dusk he could see two figures on the grass: two men were walking slowly backwards and forwards, talking in lowered voices. Strain his ears as he might, Reeves could catch no word of their conversation, and he could not move forward himself without risking discovery.

While he waited, pondering on his next move, a sound broke the stillness of the summer evening which made the detective's skin suddenly prickle, his hair move on to his scalp. Somewhere in the gathering darkness a moan sounded across the garden, a low, faint wail of distress, infinitely mournful. Reeves saw the two men come suddenly to a halt, the one clutching the other, and then, scarcely seen against the darkness of the bushes, a black-clothed figure moved across the lawn, and another faint wail broke the silence. It was an eerie sight: the two men on the grass stood utterly still, as though petrified, the one clutching the other, and the woman's black figure moved forward over the lawn, its arms raised in a gesture of despair, until at length the figure sank down onto the grass and moaned again.

"Do you believe it now?"

Reeves caught a sentence at last. It was Brook's voice, low and insistent. "Nothing ever dies, no action is ever over, no tale is ever fully told. I know. You know—and there is the witness. . . ."

At that tense moment, in the dimness of the dusky garden, the cockney detective, hard-bitten, skeptical, materialist to his fingertips, had no thought of mockery or of derision in his mind. Here, on the grass before them, a man had fallen dead not very long since. Here another man was frightened to the verge of unreason as he saw and heard something which was a very real terror to him. Fear was in the quiet air—fear of death, fear of the unknown, fear of discovery—and the hunted's fear of the pursuer.

"I know, you see, for I have means of knowing," went on the osteopath's quiet voice. "Ask her—she knows. She can tell you. . . ."

In absolute anticlimax, a step sounded on the gravel of the drive, a resolute energetic step, and another man's figure strode onto the grass. His voice rang out, clear and normal, angry a little, in utter contrast to Brook's low-pitched, suggestive voice.

"What the devil do you think you're fooling at, you two, and who's that witchlike thing, playing at spooks . . . ?"

Another moan came across the grass and the newcomer laughed scornfully. "You can't fool *me* with tricks of that kind, Brook."

"Go and stop her—catch her, catch her. . . ." A hoarse urgent voice spoke, and Reeves knew the voice from the accent. "Catch her, I say!" It was Lee Gordon speaking now. They were all three there now, Brook, Lee Gordon and Falkland.

"This case has gone mad . . . they're crazy, all of them——" flashed through Reeves's mind, and then Falkland suddenly broke into a run, dashing across the level lawn in the dusk, towards the black figure which crouched where a bed of zinnias had once wilted in the sun. One second he was a dynamic figure, running full tilt, and the next he fell suddenly prone and lay still on the grass, as another man had once fallen in the same spot.

"Go and pick him up . . . he's hurt," said Lee Gordon's hoarse voice, "he's had a fit. . . . My God! Stop her! She's gone. . . ."

To add the last touch of the fantastic to a crazy situation, the white beam of a powerful torchlight flashed across the dusky lawn and the gaunt black figure of the wailing woman fled with amazing speed across the level. Reeves suddenly lost his sense of being an impotent onlooker at some lunatic exhibition and became galvanized into life again. He sprang forward and gripped Brook's arm—the osteopath was his man and he held him in no gentle grip. The torchlight was the signal for the police to move: another big man appeared from the shrubs and seized Lee Gordon by the arms, and yet another bent over Falkland as he lay on the grass.

Lee Gordon's nasal voice suddenly broke into speech.

"What the . . . hell?" he demanded, and his violent speech sounded curiously normal again. It was Macdonald's voice which answered.

"I've been in the greenhouse, Lee Gordon, switching off your electric power. You've tried it once too often. What was enough for a tired old heart like Mr. Anderby's was not strong enough to damage a hefty fellow like Falkland—but it was enough to give you away. I arrest you for the murder of Robert Anderby."

"You'll have a bit of a job figuring that out, Chief," retorted Lee Gordon, and again it struck Reeves that the man's voice was almost placid: fear had gone from it. "I don't know what all this racket's about, but I reckon our osteopath friend's been playing his tricks again. Why should I have killed the poor old reverend?"

"Because he was one of three witnesses," replied Macdonald. "He knew the truth about an infant who was born with a deformity twenty-one years ago."

"Reckon you may know what you're talking about, but it's Greek to me," replied Lee Gordon, though his voice was less certain now. "How did I kill him, Chief? Tell me that."

"You murdered him by seeing to it that he played a garden hose onto charged electric wires. The result was calculable in an old man of his frailty. You wanted to try the same game on Brook here because you guessed he was dangerous—and in trying you have given your game away."

"Sure, Chief, you're a cute practitioner, but tell me this—that apparition there and my spirit voices . . . ?"

Brook's laugh broke in here. "I organized your apparition, Lee Gordon—that's good old Watts! You made a mistake when you tried to rattle me in the first case with a spirit message! It gave me your measure. If you thought I could be frightened that way I guessed *you* could be frightened much more. I hoist you with your own petard! If there hadn't been so much damned interference this evening I'd have frightened you into writing a full confession to placate the spirits which have been haunting you!"

"And all that—all those god-darned messages telling me how I worked it—it was all you?" demanded Lee Gordon incredulously. "I'd say Maskelyne and Devant had nothing on you!"

He turned to Macdonald. "I've got plenty of sand, Chief. I'm game to joke with the hangman himself now I know that dame ain't haunting me. . . . It was that job got me down. I did my best for the boy. My boy—but 'dear Emma' queered my pitch. . . . Where I'm going, perhaps I can forget her. Take me away, boys. . . . It was dear Emma got me down. . . . I can't forget her."

"Well, I'm damned!"

It was Inspector Jenkins's voice speaking a few moments later. He looked at Brook resentfully. "I'd have laid any money *you* were the culprit, going worming yourself into the confidence of that poor old lady with your questions about spirit worlds. . . ."

"All eyewash, so far as I was concerned," replied Brook. "I wanted to find out if she *knew* anything. She didn't, incidentally, or she'd have told me. Pure self-hallucination—but she helped a lot. I bet it was Miss Austin's talk of 'spirit messages' which inspired the ones which were sent to Falkland and me and set the ball rolling. If this chap Lee Gordon hadn't given himself away in such a hurry, I might have got Miss Austin to lend a hand in frightening him a bit further than he was frightened already—but he was telling the truth when he said it was 'dear Emma' who got him down. He couldn't forget her. Hallo, here's Falkland. You got the dose of current that was meant for me, my lad."

"He didn't. He was winded when he fell over the wire," retorted a quiet voice, and Macdonald came forward. "I saw to it that the current was cut off when the wiring was refixed this evening."

"Well, if you know what you're talking about, it's more than I do," said Falkland indignantly. "The whole thing is just a lunatic muddle to me."

"Wait until I've got time and I'll expound," said Macdonald. "There's only one piece of evidence you haven't got. Brook saw through the maze for himself."

"And I did at last," said Jenkins ruefully, "though I thought this evening's little affair would have a different ending."

Brook laughed. "Your logic failed you then. The essence of the story was the three people who were removed—the doctor, being Chenner, the nurse, being Nurse Pewsey, and the

parson, being Anderby."

"I don't see . . ." protested Falkland, and Macdonald replied,

"You'll be enlightened—all in good time. We've seen enough for tonight."

"Shades of 'poor Emma'," said Brook, as they turned away from the lawn where Mr. Anderby had fallen dead before the eyes of his wife. Hearing Falkland's exasperated exclamation, Brook added:

"Still in the dark, Falkland? Have you forgotten young Trant, who recently inherited a title and a fortune? Lee Gordon was his sponsor, and Lee Gordon knew there were three people who could prove young Trant's undoing—the doctor, the nurse and the parson. You think out the possibilities for yourself."

And Falkland began to see daylight.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"The problem was complicated further by the fact that I had no means of telling what your behaviour indicated, Mr. Brook," said Macdonald, and his quiet voice made the osteopath smile.

Macdonald and Brook and Falkland were all sitting in the garden at White Gables, where they had met by Macdonald's invitation to hear the details of the story whose dramatic ending had come so suddenly on those very lawns two evenings ago.

"Yes. On that point I had the advantage of you, Chief Inspector," replied Brook. "I knew that I wasn't the culprit—and I guessed pretty early on that Lee Gordon was, as you probably did yourself. It seemed to me that he could be made to give himself away because he had a weak point in his make-up. Once he had indicated his own weakness, I just pegged away at him, being certain that he'd do something stupid eventually."

"Don't you think, from the point of view of mere common sense that you would have been better advised to confide your suspicions to the police?" inquired Macdonald, but Brook retorted with energy,

"I certainly do not. If I had started uttering suspicions about one of my fellow suspects you'd have been even more certain than you were already that I was the guilty party." He leaned forward, a light shining in his sombre dark eyes. "You don't know what it feels like to be suspected of murder by the police for the second time in your life," he said fiercely. "I'm not afraid of death, nor of being attacked by a murderer out after my own life; I'm not even afraid of being hanged, if you'd get it over quickly, without the long-drawn-out and horrible preambles to the hangman's office, but, by God, I *am* afraid of that slow process of question and suspicion and getting caught in invisible, intangible toils. You talk about common sense," he went on fiercely. "Common sense indicated that I should sit still and do nothing—except answer your questions! I tell you I couldn't do it. I had to *do* something—if it was only pitting my wits against that cunning fellow of yours who was forever on my heels. I didn't care if you suspected me when I knew that I was *doing* something, getting nearer to an end which I knew would come, even though I couldn't analyze every strand in the rope."

"Look here! Say if you let the Chief Inspector tell the story in short words of three letters," protested Falkland. "I'm still moithered over it, and I want the I's dotted and the T's crossed. Psychology isn't my long suit. I bid on ascertainable values every time."

"Yes. I think you do—unlike Brook," replied Macdonald, his eyes surveying the pair of them with quiet interest. "Well—to get down to brass tacks. You're both acquainted with the original facts so well that I needn't restate them. We can pick up the threads when my department was first called in. Presumably, according to the obvious reading, Mrs. Anderby had murdered several people, including her husband, and had then committed suicide. That made a straightforward case, with cause and effect neatly linked—but there was another way of looking at it—especially after Dr. Chenner's remains had been exhumed and the cause of his death proved."

"I don't follow that," said Falkland. "The fact that Chenner was poisoned by hyoscine would have indicated the ex-maternity nurse to my mind very clearly."

"So clearly that the method and explanation were suspect," replied Macdonald. "Remember this. Mr. Anderby died, and it was reasonable to suppose that his death was due to

murder, but the method used was so subtle that it was untraceable. He died of heart failure."

Falkland groaned. "Shades of poor old Grendon!" he said, and Macdonald went on,

"If Mrs. Anderby had been capable of thinking out a means to dispose of her husband so subtle that it defied detection I don't think she would have risked using such a traceable poison in the case of Dr. Chenner. She was his nurse, and a very weak, elderly patient is entirely at the mercy of a nurse. You have only got to use a very little imagination to envisage means of causing death quite safely. However, all that was arguable. One point which was not arguable, and which could be accepted as fact, was that some individual, representing himself as the police, had made inquiries at Dr. Chenner's house *previous* to the latter's death. No police inquiry was made—and those facts spoke volumes. Some fraudulent person was busying himself in the matter, and it was possible to risk the following hypothesis: the man who made those inquiries gained access to Dr. Chenner's rooms and poisoned him by a drug which, if it had been discovered immediately, would have brought certain suspicion on his nurse and conceivably ended by getting her hanged."

"Look here," put in Brook. "Wasn't it a bit odd that Nurse Pewsey didn't suspect that he had been poisoned?"

"I think it's quite probable that she *did* suspect it," replied Macdonald, "and that she was frightened out of her life. She knew that many people disliked her and realized that her chances looked pretty poor. Anyway, she kept quiet and nothing was suspected. Of course, I'm only giving an opinion, and I may be quite wrong, but that's my own reading. If Nurse Pewsey had had the courage to speak out after Dr. Chenner's death she would have chosen the wiser path in the long run."

Brook nodded. "I think you're probably right there," he mused. "It'd fit in with her character. She was a mean creature—however, get on to the next stage."

"As based on the foregoing assumptions," said Macdonald. "A doctor had been murdered in such a manner as to throw suspicion on a woman who had been a practising midwife at one stage in her career. Query—had the doctor and the midwife held between them some secret concerning the birth of a child and, if so, what would be the application of that hypothesis to the facts as first presented to me?"

"That's a good clear bit of thinking," nodded Brook. "I started from the other end, with young Trant and Lee Gordon, but I came to a similar conclusion.

"Now consider the facts as they were first presented to me," said Macdonald. "An old clergyman had been added to the victims: again, it fitted. A clergyman is told of many troubles, entrusted with many confidences. Assuming some secret connected with a new-born child, three people might well have had cognizance of it—'the three witnesses'—doctor, midwife, parson. Once they were all wiped out, it was going to be very difficult to prove a case based purely on hypothesis without any living witness to give testimony."

"Good Lord!" said Falkland. "It's incredibly interesting. . . ." He turned to Brook. "Do you remember saying to me, 'Think out the characters involved; it makes quite an interesting story. . . .' Did you tumble to it at once?"

"No. I only tumbled to the possibilities as suggested by the Chief Inspector's caption, 'the three witnesses'," replied Brook. "Like him, I applied the idea to those involved. Like him, I saw no chance of getting evidence."

"It was a tangled story," said Macdonald. "Any defending counsel could have laughed it out of court. While I got the whole police force of the British Isles on to hunting up any old friends of Nurse Pewsey's, I concentrated myself on the possibilities of the evidence presented

to me here, and a fine old muddle it made, especially when those whispering messages were sent and Mr. Brook here took to eluding the most skilful watchers from my department in order to play a lone hand and make things more difficult."

"I don't know if you expect me to say I'm sorry, but I assure you I'm not," retorted Brook. "It was an exhilarating business!"

Macdonald grinned. "Officially, you stand condemned of uncivic behaviour," he said. "However, to get on with unknotting the muddle handed to me by good old Lynch. The obvious first question was—how did Mr. Anderby die?—and I tell you the pathologists dealt me a facer when their verdict on the cadaver was heart failure. How was that heart failure induced? The answer was again guesswork. The voltage from the domestic current is not enough to kill a hefty fellow like Mr. Falkland here, but it is enough to stop a weak, tired old heart like Mr. Anderby's. The jet from a hose pipe conducts an electric current very competently, as many a London fireman could tell you to his cost. The electric current in the peach house could have been sent along wires in the shrubbery and connected with those neat metal labels which identify the rarities of this very beautiful garden. Once the jet from the hose touched the wires or the labels, the current would have run up the jet to the metal nozzle in Anderby's hands. I could see all that—as guesswork—but I couldn't prove it. No sign was left on the corpse by the time the P.M. took place. The only sign would have been immediately after death when the heart muscles would have been in a state of intense contraction or 'cardiac rigor' as they call it—but that didn't help me. Of course, it was obvious later that Lee Gordon could have given Mr. Anderby the doses of cardiasol which caused his earlier palpitations, but his actual death was a puzzle."

"And that old ass Grendon probably had the facts if he'd only had the intelligence to put two and two together," said Brook's sardonic voice. "I expect he saw Lee Gordon switch off his electric current in the greenhouse after it had done its stuff."

"Something of the kind, I expect," agreed Macdonald. "Grendon had noticed something which might have indicated the method—and Grendon was dead, too, by the time I heard of the case. Now to get on to my own doings. Detection at The Rowan Tree was very interesting—including Miss Austin, who is a shrewd old body, covering her own astuteness in a veil of whimsies—and the discovery of that remarkable temperature chart with its peculiar inscription. Now, going back to my first analysis of Chenner's death: if the fake police inquirer got into Chenner's room and poisoned him, he could also have taken away an old temperature chart for future use—namely to involve Nurse Pewsey further in the toils." Macdonald paused a moment here and then went on,

"I think the easiest way to explain from this point is by means of a direct narrative. You've had the deductive parts, as far as it went. Now I'll get on to hard facts. Lee Gordon did poison Chenner two years ago, and he did take the temperature chart and keep it—but his notion of getting Nurse Pewsey removed, too, did not come off. It had to be left till a later date. When Lee Gordon returned to England with young Lord Trant, he found that Nurse Pewsey had married Mr. Anderby—and he made his plans for disposing of the two remaining witnesses. Anderby was killed by the electric current—a neat job of work. Grendon was an easy victim for he had described his own foible for sleeping with the French doors open in the presence of both the Anderbys and Lee Gordon. There remained Mrs. Anderby—and the gossip and suspicions current about her were strong enough to suggest a motive for suicide. Lee Gordon was a very good psychologist. He had the bright idea of sending Mrs. Anderby a bunch of

roses from a sympathizer, hoping she would do just what Miss Austin assured us that she did —set out for the cemetery to put the roses on her husband's grave."

"Good Lord! What a devilish old brute the man was!" burst old Falkland, and Macdonald's quiet voice went on,

"Lee Gordon parked his car in the quiet road at the back of The Rowan Tree which leads down to the common. Nobody noticed him or the car. Nobody saw him offer Mrs. Anderby a lift. No one saw him knock her senseless. No one saw him put her helpless body in the backwater, wedged under a fallen tree——"

"No—but *he* saw her face when he did it. He was haunted by the memory of that black-clothed figure in the sluggish stream," cut in Brook. "That was what I counted on. He'd done a thing he couldn't forget, *seen* a thing he couldn't forget. He didn't see old Chenner die: he didn't see Grendon die. He saw old Anderby fall dead and that sight rattled him up a bit. He was never quite himself afterwards—but Anderby's death was easy. Impersonal, if you see what I mean. Lee Gordon didn't have to knock him about, or deal with his body. The business with Mrs. Anderby was quite different. It was horrible and Lee Gordon, murderer that he was, was a coward with a coward's imagination. I felt that—and I played on it. Lee Gordon suffered hell these last few days. He believed that Emma Anderby was haunting him."

"Applied psychology," said Macdonald, while Falkland gaped. "You might do well in the detecting line yourself, Mr. Brook," continued Macdonald, "though not in an orthodox police force. However, do I tell the rest of the story, or do you?"

"You do," said Brook, with an apologetic grin. "Sorry if I can't help butting in, but Lee Gordon interested me so much. Go on."

"I'd got to Mrs. Anderby's disappearance with the bunch of roses," went on Macdonald. "Lee Gordon's errand to the backwater didn't take him long—certainly not more than an hour. He went back to The Rowan Tree—the house was empty, except for Miss Driver and the cook making jam in the kitchen, and the charwoman with the Hoover on the stairs. Lee Gordon slipped the old temperature chart in the flap of the Bible, took Mrs. Anderby's writing case, and removed all other evidence he could think of. Then he went away—and tried to forget what he'd done. As Mr. Brook realized, he didn't succeed. The next stage was my own inquiry at The Rowan Tree and Miss Austin's evidence. I still have the same opinion of her. She is a shrewd, inquisitive, observant old lady. She notices things and she draws her own conclusions, and she dresses up her ideas in this spiritualist jargon. Everything she said was sensible. She was convinced that there was only one explanation of Mrs. Anderby's absence, and to make her conviction impressive both to herself and an audience she clothed her utterance in the medium dear to her—spirit messages. She said that Mrs. Anderby had 'passed over' and given her a message about the Bible. What really happened in the light of brutal common sense was that Miss Austin had concluded—quite correctly—that Miss Driver had appropriated the Bible, and Miss Austin did not intend Miss Driver to get away with it. Miss Jane Austin is a rationalist in mind, a romantic at heart, and her 'spirit' messages are only a dressing-up of her mental processes."

"Quite good," grinned Brook. "I've talked to the old dear. I agree with every word you've said. She's insatiably inquisitive and a born romantic—*and* an old maid in the best sense of the term."

"Well, confound it, because you're as skeptical as all the world's Thomases, and hard as stone into the bargain, I don't see why you should be so jolly cocksure you're right over the old lady's convictions," put in Falkland, and Brook laughed.

"Another romantic," he commented, and Macdonald was inwardly amused with the osteopath's acuteness. Falkland had a lot of the romantic in him, though he would never have admitted it.

"I'm not giving a dissertation on spiritualism in general, Mr. Falkland," said Macdonald, and his Scots accent was more marked than usual as he spoke. "I'm only talking about Miss Jane Austin's evidence, and the bit about the Bible was shrewd common sense dressed up to look other-worldly. It didn't matter much. Where Miss Austin was important was that her spirit chatter—reported by Mrs. Anderby to Lee Gordon over the roast duck in all probability —suggested to Lee Gordon the crazy line he took later—which Mr. Brook can tell you about."

Brook grinned. "Yes," he said. "That was *my* pigeon. Lee Gordon was frightened. His nerve was going because he couldn't forget what he'd done. He tried to involve you and me, Falkland, by sending those messages and getting us to go fishing under Oasthampstead weir, and finding the writing case he'd put there. Lee Gordon couldn't sit still and leave bad alone. He was a fussy little man. He wanted to *do* something."

"And he wasn't alone in that," said Macdonald with a chuckle, but Brook disregarded him and went on:

"Lee Gordon sent the first two messages, Falkland, one to you and one to me. That was the end of what peace of mind he had left. I cashed in on the idea. If Lee Gordon thought he could frighten *me* that way he was susceptible to fear himself. I retaliated—at once. I was always whispering messages to him over the phone after that. I kept his nerves aquiver and his imagination agog. I made him believe that *somebody* knew his secrets, and I counted on the fact his nerve would crack and he'd do something silly. I let him guess it was *I* who knew something at last. I reckoned he'd try to do for me as he did for Anderby." Brook smiled at Macdonald in his sardonic way. "That was where your smart Alec from the Yard came in useful. If ever Lee Gordon was silly enough to go for *me*, that chap Reeves would be smart enough to spot it. I told you the local hayseeds were no good—and I wondered at the time if you'd the brains to spot what I meant."

Macdonald laughed, a low rumbling bass laugh which at length forced Brook to join in.

"It's a pretty situation," said the Yard man at last. "I put two of the best men in the Department to shadow you, to watch you day and night—and you beat them both. I admit it, and Reeves admits it. You got away every time you wanted to, to send those spook messages."

"It took a bit of doing because they were competent fellows," said Brook calmly, "but I took jolly good care never to lose them when there was a chance Lee Gordon might be in the offing—except once, and then I was pretty certain you'd oblige by being on the spot yourself —at White Gables. You'd been going round offering information gratis, particularly about Miss Anne Salcombe, and I reckoned a break was coming. However, to enlighten Falkland a bit further, as he's still looking 'moithered' as he calls it. I kept on at Lee Gordon by sending him phone messages which kept his hair permanently on end, by haunting the garden at White Gables—my man Watts played the banshee for me, and jolly well he did it! I also told him I was studying spiritualism myself, and getting good results. I meant to have arranged a real séance for him, with Miss Austin in the chair and Detective Reeves off-stage, but the end came too quickly. Lee Gordon couldn't stand any more and he decided to liquidate *me* as he'd done old Anderby by fixing up his live wires again, poor goop! Shows how his brain went to seed."

He turned to Macdonald, "Well, that's my small contribution. Doubtless you'd have got the same results without my interference, but I told you, to start with, I wasn't risking leaving

you to make a mistake. Lee Gordon was your man, and I went on rattling him up until he was ready to tell you so to save himself from any more spirit messages."

"The end would have come all right, though perhaps in less dramatic manner," said Macdonald. "Lee Gordon had removed all the evidence that he could. He had killed his 'three witnesses,' he had removed his wiring from the garden, he had fired the repository where Nurse Pewsey's belongings and papers were stored, he had taken everything that he thought dangerous from Mrs. Anderby's room at The Rowan Tree—but he could not destroy all the past. While Mr. Brook was following his own peculiar psychological methods of bringing a murderer to book, I was working on the less spectacular job of getting information—hard facts which I could lay before a jury to give substance to an indictment which I could not prove. I wanted to find Anne Salcombe, the intimate friend of Nurse Pewsey's younger days. Searches of that kind aren't interesting or spectacular, but they are the essence of police work, talking to landladies and tradesmen and postmen and next-door neighbours, coming up against blank walls of forgetfulness and getting round a corner of them somehow. We found Anne Salcombe at last—in a sisterhood in Sussex. Sister Anne she is now, and she has since told me what I wanted. When the Dowerby baby was born, the baby who later became heir to the Trant title and estate, it was born with a clubfoot, a deformation which no surgery could correct. That was the reason why Lee Gordon killed the doctor, the midwife, and the parson who attended the mother. He intended to wipe out all the evidence concerning a deformed infant who died many years ago. The lad who came over here and claimed and obtained the title in all good faith was a natural son of Lee Gordon's. Lee Gordon laid his plans for the sharing of that inheritance—if ever it matured—years ago. When the possibility became a probability he began to act. He removed the old doctor. When the probability became an actual fact he acted again—he removed the midwife and the parson. The curious thing is that he probably need not have taken the final precautions which proved his own undoing. Mrs. Anderby—once Nurse Pewsey—had a very poor memory for names. According to Anne Salcombe, she could never remember her patients' names a month after she had left them. The name Dowerby would have conveyed nothing to her at all, and the baby with the club foot was forgotten by her—but not by the more retentive memory of Sister Anne."

"Lord, what a story!" said Falkland. "When you came and told me about finding Anne Salcombe the other day, were you trying to rattle me up or hoping that I should pass on 'information received'?"

"The latter mainly," replied Macdonald. "I have often found that the dissemination of a few facts has a surprisingly vitalizing effect in a case. You must remember that I was working on a theory which was not easy to prove. The weak part of a theory based mainly on mental reconstruction is that it can be countered by another opposing theory built up in the same way. In this case a good many plausible suppositions might be put forward: for example, there was the easy theory of Mrs. Anderby's guilt and subsequent suicide; there was the possibility of Mr. Brook being involved—and his behaviour throughout the inquiry certainly lent colour to suspicions. There was the possibility that people at The Rowan Tree were involved, and there was also a chance that Mr. Falkland here might have more to do with events than appeared on the surface."

"Lord, yes, I knew that!" said Falkland. "By chance I was involved with the whole lot. I'd known Nurse Pewsey, and I'd trotted round making inquiries about her; I'd chatted to old Anderby, I'd argued with Grendon, I'd had a 'spirit letter' sent to me, and I'd been devastatingly inquisitive over the whole show. When I came here to White Gables the other

evening, I intended to pass on your information to Lee Gordon just to see how he reacted—and I'd have passed it on to Brook in due time."

Macdonald chuckled. "I was pretty certain you would. You were all agog with nerves over the whole business. That was one of the characteristics of this case. You, Mr. Brook, and Lee Gordon himself were all in such a twitter that you might all three have been in collaboration to produce an effect."

"Final recapitulation," said Brook. "The three of us involved for our own evil ends—though what common motive could have inspired us, I fail to see."

"Motives can always be assumed," said Macdonald. "Lee Gordon's motive was an assumption on my part. I could produce convincing ones for you two as well if pushed to it, but it was Lee Gordon who seemed to have the strongest motive for removing the 'three witnesses'."

Brook had gone off into a brown study.

"There were once three witnesses," he said slowly, and Falkland laughed, stretching his long limbs as though in relief at the passing of tension.

"Try your hand at making a story of it, Brook. You've got a title—and the first line of the story."

"No. That's not my first line, nor my title," said Brook. "I shall make Grendon speak the first line, and call the story 'Dear Emma'."

"A rotten title," laughed Falkland, but Macdonald said quietly:

"Poor Emma."

And Brook nodded in meditative agreement.

THE END

[End of *Case in the Clinic* by E. C. R. Lorac]