

*The Accusing Silence*

**Isabel Ecclestone  
Mackay**

**Illustrated by**

**Stockton Mulford**

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*Title:* The Accusing Silence

*Date of first publication:* 1924

*Author:* Isabel Ecclestone Mackay (1875-1928)

*Illustrator:* Stockton Mulford (1886-1960)

*Date first posted:* July 16, 2023

*Date last updated:* July 16, 2023

Faded Page eBook #20230724

This eBook was produced by: John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

# The Accusing Silence

*The Strange Revenge of a Curious, Taciturn, Mysterious  
Old Woman Who Brought Tragedy to Her Brother's House*

By Isabel Ecclestone Mackay

Illustrations by Stockton Mulford

*Note:* In giving to the public the facts concerning the remarkable case of Miss Anne Crawford, it has been decided to adopt in part the method made familiar by Wilkie Collins in his novel "The Moonstone." Although the work referred to is purely fictional in character, the method used for assembling the supposed facts is excellent and loses nothing of its value when applied to actual happenings. In the present case, it is particularly useful, since Sergeant Detective Wiggan, officer in charge, had, for his own guidance, already obtained written statements from those directly concerned.

The first statement is that of Roberta Marshall, youngest child of Robert Marshall, in whose home Miss Crawford's death took place.

## ROBERTA MARSHALL'S STATEMENT

Sergeant Wiggan has asked me to make a written statement. That means to write down all I remember of what happened after Aunt Anne came to visit. I know by the way he looked that he doesn't think I can do it properly. So I am going to show him that I jolly well can. He isn't a real sergeant anyway, only a detective one.

We never knew any detectives before. Father is a literary man and he says most detectives are too busy to visit literary people. But when Aunt Anne died so suddenly, and no one knew why, some one had to spare the time to find out. So they sent Detective Wiggan. I could write down what he looks like, but perhaps he'd just as soon I wouldn't.

I should begin, I suppose, by saying that I am Roberta Marshall and I am the youngest in our family. The other one is William and he is a lot older. Not that I am exactly young, either. It won't be any time before I begin to put my hair up.

My school-teachers think me very advanced for my age. I could write down several things which would be most interesting but they aren't about Aunt Anne.

The very first thing I remember about Aunt Anne happened at the breakfast table when the letter came. Cousin Fanny, who came to live with us when mother died, always passes father's letters over to him, one by one. Of course, she can't help seeing the envelopes. And she is terribly clever with envelopes. She can guess them nearly all. Usually she says something, just to draw father's attention, such as, "Your insurance again, James," or "A letter from your lawyer, I think." So it is almost as if everybody at the table were getting a letter. William says he wouldn't stand for it. But I think it's nice.

On the morning when *the* letter came there had been several uninteresting ones. One big envelope, which Cousin Fanny thought was from an editor, turned out to be only a subscription due and the blue one, which looked like a letter from our minister, was nothing but pew rent. The third one was just a note from a man who owes father money and would like to pay it but can't. Father put the man's letter in his pocket to read later and looked at Cousin Fanny with his nice blue twinkle. Cousin Fanny was holding the last letter tight and her forehead was all puckered up like it is when she is deciding something.

"Is it a hard one?" asked father. "Better let me look inside."

Cousin Fanny handed the letter over.

"I may be mistaken," she said, "but I think—"

She didn't say what it was she thought. I don't like people to break off like that.

Father opened the letter. It took him a long time to read it, so long that Cousin Fanny couldn't wait.

"*Is* it from Anne?" she said.

"Yes, it is," said father.

There was one of those funny pauses which mean something that you don't understand and then William whistled, and Cousin Fanny said in a very polite voice, "I hope she is well."

"She is not very well," said father, looking at the letter. "Her doctors advise a change of air."

"Oh!" said Cousin Fanny, adding with a kind of gulp, "Here?"

Father nodded. "Read it for yourself." He handed her the letter.

"Couldn't you—" began Cousin Fanny, and, though she didn't ask him what it was he couldn't do, he seemed to know, for he shook his head. "How could I?" he said.

“ ‘I would if I could, if I couldn’t how could I? I couldn’t, could you?’ ” said William and then, as no one paid any attention, he went on. “Is it possible that I notice a certain lack of warmth with reference to a visit from our only rich aunt?”

**T**hat was the first I knew about Aunt Anne being rich. You see, William remembered her from last time, but I had been only two years old then and couldn’t.

“If she wants to come we must make her welcome,” said father. “Roberta, if you’ve finished your breakfast we will excuse you.”

So of course I had to be excused. But I did not move very fast and before I had quite left the room I heard William say: “Buck up, dad. I’ll take auntie off your hands. I can do with a rich relative very nicely.” And father said, “You will oblige me by adopting a different tone, William.” Which showed that he was rattled, for father almost never talks like that.

Perhaps I had better tell now who Aunt Anne is—was, I mean. It is easy to get mixed about her because she wasn’t father’s real sister. She and father did not have the same father and mother until their father and mother got married and then they were only steps. What I mean is that Anne’s father was father’s stepfather and father’s mother was Anne’s stepmother; so, in a way, they weren’t relatives at all. At least William says they weren’t. I hope I make it clear.

All the same, I felt rather pleased that she was coming, for even a kind of steppaunt is a change. I tried hard to remember the last time she visited us but I could only remember what I had been told. And, while I was thinking of that, I suddenly saw why father and Cousin Fanny had acted so strangely. I remembered that Cousin Fanny had said that Aunt Anne was here at the time the ponies ran away with mother. That was ages ago, ten years anyway, and father never speaks about it; but Cousin Fanny told me that if the ponies hadn’t got frightened that day I might have had a mother and a baby sister. She said father had “never got over it,” and I must never mention it to him because he couldn’t bear to be reminded. Perhaps they were afraid that seeing Aunt Anne again would remind him.

I hope I have made that clear?

It was a week after the letter that Aunt Anne came. I offered to drive with father to the station, which was nice of me as I was busy that morning, but father didn’t appreciate it and said, “Better not.” William offered, too. He said something about it being a “delicate attention” and about “moneyed members of the family,” but father didn’t laugh as he usually does at William’s jokes. Instead, he said quite sharply, “That’s enough, William!” and drove away. William looked so surprised that I giggled, but Cousin Fanny said something about him being “singularly lacking in perception.” (I remember the words because they are such

nice, big ones.) And he looked cross and muttered that it was all “deuced queer.” William says “deuced” often but he says it isn’t a swear—not after you’re twenty-one.

I love meeting people. The first minute of them is always different from any other minute. I was waiting on the steps when the car came back and the first minute of Aunt Anne was worth the trouble. She was a real surprise. I don’t know what I had expected but I hadn’t expected *her*. When she looked at me I felt pins and needles in my hands. Detective Wiggan says “Why?” But I don’t know why. For she wasn’t at all ugly—at least not at first. Her face was smooth and white like paper and although she must have been frightfully old (even fifty, perhaps) she didn’t look as old as Cousin Fanny. She had none of the little wrinkles Cousin Fanny has; her skin was all ironed out. And her eyes were the blackest things I ever saw.

Father introduced us. “This is Roberta,” he said.



*The expression of her eyes was different. If it didn't sound silly, I would say that she looked triumphant.*

**H**ow do you do, Roberta?" said Aunt Anne. She had the kind of voice that gives you a pain in your teeth. "Delicate, I see," she said, just as if I weren't there. "Two years old, was she not, when the—er—sad event happened? A critical age to be left motherless."

I knew right then that I was going to hate her. For I am not delicate, and she reminded father about mother on purpose. I know she did. So if Detective Wiggan wants to accuse me of having put stuff in her milk he is quite welcome to. For I did hate her. I hope I make that clear?

It was because I felt like that that I haven't as much to tell as I might have had. I kept out of her way. I wish now that I had hung around. But, at the time, it seemed hard enough to be polite at meals. Especially as what we had to eat never suited her. She had the indigestion. Luckily she couldn't stick me, either, although she called me "Dear child" all the time. Besides, whenever I was anywhere near, she used me to *remind* father. She would say: "You are too much with older people, dear child. Ah, if your baby sister had lived!" or "Why so abrupt in manner, my dear? If your dear mother had been spared—" and things like that. Every time she did it father's face would get white. No wonder I kept away!

I think it was to liven things up that Cousin Fanny invited Gwen. Gwen is going to marry William some day when he can support her. She is a nice person to invite because she doesn't fuss. William is going to get a really good job next month. He is going to be a subeditor to father's friend, Mr. Banks. They may get married then. Father says it's a wonderful chance for William's age, but father thinks William wonderful anyway. So do Cousin Fanny and Gwen—only Gwen thinks he needs some one to steady him. I'm not supposed to know, but I think he was rather unsteady for a while—nothing much.

I like Gwen. She's not too dreadfully pretty and she has a nice laugh. When she's in the house everything is jolly. I think that's why Cousin Fanny invited her, although the reason given was "to introduce William's fiancée to Aunt Anne."

All I have to say about the introduction is that Gwen did not disappoint me. She had absolutely no use for Aunt Anne from the first. William tried to jolly her out of it but she kept on being just fearfully polite and nothing more.

For the funny thing about it was that William and Aunt Anne got on splendidly. She was different to him. And he couldn't see what it was we didn't like. I am perfectly sure she tried to make him like her and, if Detective Wiggan wants to detect anything, he ought to detect why. It wasn't because she liked *him*! More than once, when he wasn't looking, I have seen her look at him just like she looked at me—and I could feel the prickles in my hands.

Luckily, it was fine weather and I could stay outdoors. Even with Gwen there, it wasn't pleasant. Aunt Fanny was flustered and father was grave and Mary and Nora (our "help") were cross because of extra work and because they didn't take to Aunt Anne.

"As tiresome a missus as I ever did for," said Mary. "And with an eye like a gimlet, boring holes!" Nora said. "'Tis an evil eye, for sure." She wouldn't tell



me what an “evil eye” was, but I looked it up in the encyclopedia. And I quite agree with Nora.

Sergeant Wiggan says I’m to write down all I remember about a conversation I heard between William and Gwen on the terrace. I don’t think it’s any of his business. It was a private conversation and the reason I heard it was not because I was listening but because I happened to be there. They didn’t see me, but that wasn’t my fault. Besides, I never would have said a word about it only that Detective Wiggan asked me if I knew why William had quarreled with Aunt Anne and I said I could give a good guess. And then rather said I must tell. The truth, he said, never hurt any innocent person, but to try to hide anything would look as if we thought William wasn’t innocent, which was being as silly as Sergeant Wiggan. I hope I make that dear?

It wasn’t much, anyway. William and Gwen came out of the French window and sat down on the terrace seat. I was behind the oleander. I did say “Ahem!” but they didn’t pay any attention. Besides, they looked so cross I thought they might be going to break their engagement, and I wanted to see how it was done. William was asking Gwen to “For heaven’s sake be reasonable!” and Gwen said she’d rather be right than reasonable any day and she knew she was right. William kind of groaned and wanted to know if she didn’t think he had any common sense, and Gwen said he might have common sense but he hadn’t any instinct and that she had an instinct and that she didn’t like Aunt Anne’s eyes. William laughed. I didn’t blame Gwen for being mad at the way he laughed.

“Very well,” she said, very stiff. “We’ll leave it at that.”

“But, darling!” said William. “Fancy talking about eyes! And even if there were more than eyes, don’t you think I am able to look after myself?”

“No, I don’t,” said Gwen. “That’s why I’m taking on the job.”

They made it up then. I know they did because—well, I know they did, anyway. And when they were quite comfortable William began all over again. (Men do that.) He said he knew that women have prejudices.

“Instincts,” said Gwen.

“Prejudices,” said William.

“When Aunt Anne lends me the money I need, you’ll admit that I am right,” said William.

“If she does, I may; but she never will,” said Gwen.

I can’t remember all that William said, but it was something about that if he couldn’t get the money he hoped for from aunt, he would lose the chance of being subeditor to Mr. Banks. There had been money in the bank which he had

been going to put into the business, but he had used it all. He hadn't told father because he knew father couldn't help and it would only worry him. William said: "I know I've played the fool in the past, but it's hard lines if our future has to pay for it."

Gwen said, "Well get through somehow." And William brightened up again. He said he knew Aunt Anne would help. He had told her he was in a hole and she hadn't been surprised. She had promised to see what she could do and she was to let him know about it tomorrow night. "It's my last chance," he said; "and it's simply got to happen."

"Poor old Billy!" said Gwen and then she hooked her arm in his and they moved away. I was terribly interested but of course I did not follow. That would have been playing Miss Pry.

All the same, I was naturally curious to know what Aunt Anne would do for William and next night, after he'd gone into her room with her milk, I waited around for him to come out. I intended to ask him right out if she had done the decent thing. But when I saw how frightfully upset he was I didn't ask him anything. Besides, Cousin Fanny was in the hallway and I couldn't. Detective Wiggan wants to know what I mean by "upset," but if he doesn't know what "upset" means I can't tell him. He wants to know if I heard any loud voices while William was in aunt's room and I had to admit that I am not deaf.

It was the next night that Aunt Anne, who, as I said before, had had an indigestion ever since she came, was taken with a very bad spell and died in the night. She must have eaten something which disagreed with her. But the doctor says it was poison and we have been having dreadful trouble ever since—but Detective Wiggan says some one else will tell about that.

*(Signed)* ROBERTA MARSHALL.

## COUSIN FANNY'S STATEMENT

I am afraid I cannot see just how a statement from me can help to explain the strange and terrible thing which has come so suddenly upon us. But Sergeant Wiggan, a most polite man though greatly mistaken in his opinions, considers that a sensitive disposition such as mine may find a written statement less confusing than questioning. And I confess that questions, especially if uttered in too brisk a manner, tend to have an agitating effect.

The sergeant also says that feelings are not evidence. But in this I do not agree with him. Feelings, when properly understood, are the very best of evidence. Did I not feel very strongly that Anne should never have paid us this visit? And have not events abundantly justified me?

I do not blame Robert for inviting her, of course. It was enough that he felt it an obligation. Family ties carry certain duties and as Anne and Robert, though no blood relation, were brought up as brother and sister, Robert naturally felt her claim upon him. He felt this all the more strongly, possibly, since, for so long a period, she had made no claim whatever. Her only other visit had taken place some ten years previously.

Detective Wiggan wishes me to make a few notes regarding this first visit, seeing that, as a guest in the house at the time, I am able to speak of it at first hand. It was a tragic visit and as such is engraven on my memory, for before it ended the fatality had happened which left my cousin a widower and his children motherless. At that time Robert had been married to our dear Claire for thirteen happy years. William was twelve, Roberta barely two and a new addition to the family was shortly expected. I may note that I am not superstitious, yet I felt it unfortunate that the year should have been the thirteenth of their union and I remember feeling relieved when Robert informed me that Miss Anne Crawford, his stepsister whom I had never met, proposed to be with us for a short visit.

Robert himself, I remember, seemed more surprised than pleased. I gathered that, when they were both much younger, there had been a certain unpleasantness between his stepsister and himself. In fulfilling a duty which he believed to devolve upon him, Robert had laid himself open to her violent resentment and for years there had been no intercourse between them. However, since the initiative came from her, he and Claire were too happy to harbor ill feeling. They determined to make her visit a pleasant one.

Why it was, from the first, so much the reverse of what they hoped, I do not know. Was it the shadow of the coming calamity? Perhaps. I am not superstitious but there are such things as presentiments, I believe. At any rate, it is true that, with the coming of the expected visitor, the atmosphere of that happy and contented home changed to one of discomfort and unrest. I am sensitive to impressions and felt the change at once without being at all able to account for it. It was something which tainted the air like an evil fog or mist. Our dear Claire felt it even more strongly than I and became nervous and apprehensive. It was plain to see that she shrank from her husband's sister, and this in spite of the fact that Anne seemed to take a great fancy to her and made her more than one generous gift. This state of things reacted on Robert, who became more anxious than the occasion seemed to warrant. We were all most uncomfortable.

Among the presents which Anne (who was a rich woman in her own right) had given my cousin Claire was one in which she took much pleasure—a pair of well broken driving ponies for her own use. Since she had given up riding, Claire found her greatest recreation in driving and, as the ponies seemed quiet and well trained, there seemed no reason why she should not indulge this desire to her heart's content. Also, although she preferred walking herself, the one pleasant

and human thing about Anne was the interest she took in these health-giving drives. If the day proved too bad for Claire to venture out, Anne seemed almost as disappointed as Claire herself.

All the same, none of us felt sorry when, after a ten-day stay, our visitor announced her intention of leaving us next day. I think we all felt rather ashamed of the lightening of our spirits. Robert was quite his old self at luncheon and Claire had lost her worried look. It was a beautiful day. I shall never forget it, for its beauty had become dreadful to us before it ended.

Claire set out for her drive earlier than usual. And an hour later she was brought home unconscious. She and her new-born baby died that night. The ponies had suddenly taken fright—I do not need to go into details; indeed, I am confused about them. I was alone in the house when they brought her back—Robert was in town and Anne had gone out for a farewell walk—I have always been uncertain as to how I got through that dreadful time. Looking back, it seems like an impossible nightmare. Robert was beside himself, making the wildest accusations, and William was, of course, too young to be of much assistance.

Under the circumstances, Anne offered to prolong her stay, but Robert—well, Robert was hardly responsible for what he did or said. I suppose it was only natural that he should remember that if Anne had not given Claire the ponies, the accident would not have happened. Nor was I myself quite free from a sort of bitterness against her for the same reason. It was an immense relief to us all when she left.

I have given this short account of that first visit because it explains, quite satisfactorily, I think, why dear Robert did not welcome the idea of Anne coming again. It speaks well for his fairness of mind that he did not allow this disinclination to affect his action. For myself—I might have acted differently had the decision lain with me. For, while disliking anything which savors of superstition, I have always held that there is something fatal about certain people. Their presence seems to bring misfortune.

Following Robert's admirable example, I endeavored to reason myself out of this feeling. It seemed absurd to suppose that anything bad could come of a casual visit from a relative and I determined to be cheerful and sensible. But no sooner had Anne arrived than I became aware of the same undefined dread which had disturbed me before. Even the fact that her appearance had not changed frightened me—the same colorless, smooth face, as if life could leave no mark upon it, the same veiled eyes, black and cold like water in a stagnant well, and the same nerve-rasping voice.

It was easy to see that Robert felt as I did, for although I knew that he had lately met with disappointment in his investments, it took more than money

troubles to bring that look of anxiety into his eyes. Anne knew it was there and I believe she knew why. I have seen her looking at him with a little, secret smile—a really horrible smile as if she would have liked to lick her lips with the enjoyment of something. And all the while there was absolutely nothing which one could put into words.

It is hardly necessary to say that nothing had ever been done to prejudice William and Roberta against their aunt; they were quite free to form their own opinions. Roberta at once took a violent dislike to her, a dislike which she allowed to be all too apparent. I have never believed in attaching too much importance to the likings of children, but I am now inclined to think that there may be something instructive in the apparently causeless aversions of the young. At any rate, I was not surprised at Roberta's feeling.

**W**hat did surprise me was the attitude of William. Sergeant Wiggan has asked me in what way the general family discomfort was reflected by my nephew. I say, in no way at all. Oddly enough, from the very first, Anne was nice with William. If she had ever shown signs of liking anybody I should say that she liked him. Roberta insists that she did not. But Roberta is, of course, a child. At any rate, she was consistently pleasant to him—listening to him in that impressed manner that young men find flattering, and carrying on discussions with him with an animation entirely absent from her general conversation.

Naturally the boy (for he is scarcely more) was attracted and very willingly placed himself at her disposal for the performance of the many small services which she constantly required of him. Anne was as fond of walking as ever. It helped her indigestion, she said, and William was always her chosen companion. She appeared to take great interest in his fad for photographing birds and insisted upon his teaching her how to develop and print the negatives. This made things easier for us all.

Sergeant Wiggan wishes to know whether William, at this time, was aware of his aunt's being a rich woman in her own right. I consider the question a reflection on William's motives, which is entirely unwarranted. But I will answer it frankly. Of course he knew it. He joked about it and about his own intention of "flim-flamming" his "only rich relative." I state this without reserve, for no one who knows William would ever confuse such jesting with the boy's real feeling for his aunt. He liked her because she made herself likable to him. Any thought of her money would be quite apart from that.

At the same time I think it only natural that he may have hoped that her liking for him would find expression in pleasantly substantial ways. It is a feeling natural within family bonds and perfectly justified. I am only a cousin myself but if I had money I should feel slighted and hurt if William and Roberta should not

look upon me as a possible means of auxiliary revenue. This giving and taking is natural and proper between relatives.

But, to return: Anne had been with us only two or three days when she began to be fussy about the food. She had stomach trouble, she said, and had to be very careful. She was continually sending messages to cook, although I am sure that everything was very nice indeed. Finally, she took nothing at dinner except the soup. She had, she said, some digestive biscuits with her and, if William would be so kind as to fetch her a glass of hot milk each night at about ten, she would manage very well. I suggested that Nora, the maid, could easily fetch the milk. But Nora, I am sorry to say, was sulky about it and Anne declared that the milk she brought was never hot; so William added this to his list of little services and, though I should have thought that anything taken at night would have been the very worst thing for stomach trouble, the arrangement did seem to make Anne more amiable.

**T**he indigestion, however, got worse. Robert was worried and anxious to call in a doctor but Anne absolutely refused to consider it. All that she needed, she said, was rest, and she took to staying in her room most of the day.

Sergeant Wiggan has asked me if William seemed at all upset by his aunt's indisposition. I cannot say that he did. He was attentive to her but his general spirits seemed unaffected. I remember, though, that Robert asked him to try to induce his aunt to see a doctor and William promised that he would. One thing I must insist upon, and that is that, until the very last, there was nothing in Anne's condition to alarm anybody. If there had been, if she had appeared to be really ill at all, I am sure that William would never have allowed himself to lose his temper with her as he did upon the night before she died.

Detective Wiggan says I must be very careful to tell exactly all I know about that night. And that is easy, for I know very little. We had had a peaceful evening, for Anne had desired to be left alone after dinner, and at ten, as usual, William prepared and carried up her milk. It was his habit to stay awhile and chat with her while she drank it, so he was still in her room when I went upstairs, about fifteen minutes later. I will admit that I was amazed to hear loud voices as I passed along the corridor. I may say that a raised voice is seldom heard in this house. I was both shocked and startled. It seemed incredible that William should so far forget himself as to argue heatedly with a guest; yet when I remembered who the guest was, I cannot say that surprise was my strongest emotion. Perhaps what I chiefly felt during those moments was a thrill of satisfaction that the friendship between those two had come to a natural end. I had never felt easy about it and that's the truth. *I did not* hear anything that was said.

While I hesitated in the corridor, Anne's door flung open and William came out. He did not seem to see me and brushed past without a word. The dear boy

was certainly not like himself—he was visibly disturbed.

“What is it, William?” I said. “Have you been trying to persuade Anne to see a doctor?” It may sound foolish but the doctor was the only thing I could think of at the moment over which they might have quarreled.

“A doctor?” he said as if he did not know what I meant, and then, in a more natural voice: “It’s not a doctor she needs. Oh, I say, what a fool I’ve been!” Then he went into his room and banged the door.

Detective Wiggan seems to think that I should have questioned William further but I knew that if there was anything he wished me to know he would tell me in his own time. The episode, though unusual, might have been quite unimportant, and was, in any case, his private affair. The same reflection kept me from demanding an explanation from Anne.

The next morning Anne sent word that she had suffered from distress in the night and would remain in bed. Gwen and I both hurried up to see her, but, beyond the fact that she had not felt like rising, neither of us could see that she looked any worse than the day before. Robert, however, was troubled and declared definitely his intention of calling in a doctor whether she wished it or not. She, on her part, declared that she would refuse to see him, but, finding Robert still determined, she gave in and agreed to a compromise—if she were not considerably better by the next morning she would then admit the need of a physician and see one at once. This sounded reasonable, for no one considered her condition serious, much less dangerous. Naturally, Robert blames himself greatly for not having persisted, but, in face of her opposition, there seemed nothing else to do.

**W**e spent a quiet day. Gwen was returning home and William accompanied her. They both seemed somewhat depressed in spirits and I thought that William was probably blaming himself for losing his temper the night before. I know that he called in to see his aunt before leaving, asking if there were anything he could do for her in the village. She told him that there was nothing. But, no sooner had he and Gwen driven off, than she called in Jimmy Stubbs, the chore boy, and gave him a letter and a parcel to post with instructions to lose no time in doing so. Now, as William drove directly past the post-office, this seemed odd. To me it showed plainly that she still harbored resentment from the night before.

In the afternoon Anne seemed better and sat up for a while at the window. I felt it my duty to keep her company and did so, Nora brought us tea at half-past four and Anne ate some thin toast without butter. I asked her if there were not something special which we might provide for her dinner—a little sago pudding for instance. But she was quite brusque about that, declaring that she would be

better with no dinner at all but that she would take her hot milk and digestive biscuits as usual later on. I am glad now that I told her then what had been on my conscience for some days; namely, that I considered hot milk at night very indigestible. But she did not thank me. She merely said, with a disagreeable smile, "It will take more than hot milk to kill *me*."

William was walking on the terrace when I went down. He still seemed moody but asked at once how his aunt seemed. I said she seemed somewhat better and, later, I proposed that, if he wished, I would take her milk up to her that night. I thought that, if there were strained relations between them, he might welcome the offer. But he didn't. He thanked me and said no, everything had better be as usual. In order that he might know what to expect, however, I told him about the parcel and letter which Anne had not given him to post; and he was so interested that he let his cigarette burn his finger and was compelled to say a word which I would rather not write, although he apologized immediately and I really think he may be excused, considering how painful a burn can be. Then he laughed oddly and said, "I think I can guess what was in that letter all right." Naturally I asked, "What?" But he did not seem to hear me.

In answer to Detective Wiggan's questions I may say that sometimes Nora heated the milk, though William always took it up. But this was Nora's day out. William heated the milk himself and was, I am sure, most careful. How there could possibly have been anything wrong with it I do not see. Certainly, Anne made no complaint when I called in to say good night—stay, though, I remember now that she had not yet taken the milk. It was standing on the little table by her bed and I remember thinking that if she left it much longer it would be quite cold.

So far as I know, I was the last person to see Anne alive. During the night she must have been taken suddenly and fatally ill, for when Nora took up her tea in the morning she found her dead.

It was a very great shock.

It seemed, in fact, unbelievable until I remembered certain other cases where acute indigestion had been followed by heart failure. I suggested heart failure to the doctor and he was almost rude. He was not, I may say, our family physician, Dr. McKinnon, but a young man who is his "locum-tenens." It would have been different, I am sure, had Dr. McKinnon been at home. Not that I have any criticism to make of the young man's abilities, only of his manners. If he says that Anne died of an overdose of arsenic, I am not able to contradict him. It may seem absurd to me, but I realize that I am not a medical man. All that I would like to ask the young man is: how can you possibly die of arsenic poisoning when all you have taken is hot milk and digestive biscuits? I don't suppose they put arsenic in biscuits, especially digestive ones? I pointed out this simple fact to Sergeant Wiggan and he agreed with me. "As a matter of fact, ma'am," he said, "they don't."



(Signed) FANNY M. HORTON.

P.S. I reopen this to say that I blame this young doctor entirely for the fact that an inquest was thought necessary. The unpleasant publicity has been most trying. And of course they couldn't tell us anything we didn't know before. "Person or persons unknown" is merely confusing, I think.

## STATEMENT OF MISS GWENDOLINE HERNEY

What I have to say will necessarily be very brief and is of interest only because I was a guest at Vincroft for the week preceding the death of Miss Anne Crawford. The reason for my visit at that time was the desire of the family that I should meet William's aunt.

Unfortunately, it was not a very successful visit. Miss Crawford and I were not attracted to each other. It is unpleasant to write seemingly ungracious things of the dead, but, if my impressions are to be of any value at all, the necessity for strict truth must be also its defense.

Upon my arrival at Vincroft I found there an atmosphere which was very foreign to its usual delightful ease. There was strain and discomfort in the very air. To say that Miss Fanny was nervous, Mr. Marshall gloomy and unsmiling, Roberta either impish or silent and the servants sulky is to give any one who knew the place some idea of the change. The cause of the unrest was obvious in the personality of the visitor. She must have been one of those people who bring a disturbing force with them. It was almost funny to feel the air change when she entered a room. I was both repelled and interested and tried to find out what it was which accounted for such a peculiar effect. But there seemed to be nothing tangible.

In appearance Miss Crawford was a fine-looking woman—at least one received that impression at first sight. But, later, her very good looks became repelling. For myself I came to quite dislike the white smoothness of her face. It came to seem like a mask, something that didn't belong—something abnormal. She had strange eyes, too, eyes which she kept half closed but which, when open, revealed a shallow glitter. Her voice was harsh, a croaking voice. Her manner, while punctilious, was cold and forbidding.

I have read this description over and fear that it fails to convey any real idea of Miss Crawford's personality. So, as I can think of nothing to add, it may be that natures such as hers do not yield themselves to description. The antagonism, even repulsion, which I and others undoubtedly felt was probably caused by

something too impalpable to capture in words. But it wasn't imagination, for the whole household, with one exception, was affected by it.

The exception was William and this surprised me, for usually he and I like and dislike the same people. However, the reason, when I found it, seemed simple enough—Miss Crawford was different with William. She could, and did, make herself very pleasant to him, and it is only human for any one to take a person as they show themselves and not as they may appear to other people. Perhaps there is even a subtle flattery in being the object of the agreeableness of a disagreeable person.

William was naturally anxious that his aunt and I should like each other, but even he could see that her attitude was not hopeful. She was polite but her politeness was the courtesy of complete indifference. Perhaps I did not do all that I might have done, either. I wish now that I had tried to know her better. I can't help feeling that somehow in her lay the explanation of this horrible mystery. If some one had only been clever enough to understand!

But there is no use in regretting now. At the time, I saw no reason for making any effort toward understanding any one so unattractive. Instead, I devoted myself to making things as pleasant as possible for my fellow sufferers. Of my own feeling I said little or nothing until I began to fear that William was laying himself open to a very heavy disappointment. I found that he had been placing extravagant hopes upon a kindness which he thought his Aunt Anne would do for him. This alarmed me out of my silence and I told him, as plainly as I could, how certain I was that she was not a philanthropist. Manlike, he demanded facts, and I had no facts—only instinct. We almost quarreled on the issue. But I had not long to wait for justification. The very next night, William put the matter to her squarely and received a final and definite refusal. This was the substance of the famous "quarrel" which Detective Wiggan makes so much of.

It is true that William was first incredulous and then angry. Any one would have been. Why had she allowed and even encouraged him to hope if there had been no foundation for hoping? Surely it was maddening to have her coldly say that if he had misunderstood her kindness it was entirely his own affair—and that she, on her part, was disappointed to find his attachment to her based upon so mercenary a motive! This humiliating change was so unexpected and so unfair that William could hardly find words to answer it. If she could really *think* such things, what was the use of protesting? And yet, when he saw how neatly she had played him for a fool, he—well, he did speak in a way for which he was afterward sorry.

Sergeant Wiggan wishes to know whether William was aware of his aunt having made a will in his favor. Yes, he was. She had herself told him of it and he had told me. He told it merely to prove to me that what he called my "prejudice"

against his aunt was unfair. However, he was thoroughly disillusioned. He had honestly believed in her affection for him but the belief did not survive their talk that night. After that, there would have been no thought of inheritance from her, even if she had not told him plainly that she intended to change her will.

In answer to Sergeant Wiggan's questions: I do not know the exact sum of money which William wished his aunt to lend him. Surely the obvious thing to do is to ask William himself. All I know is that it was to replace a sum which William was supposed to have but which he, unfortunately, had used in other ways.

I think there is nothing else that I can say. I have tried to keep all feeling out of this statement. Sergeant Wiggan's badly repressed suspicion that William may in some way be responsible for his aunt's sudden death is too absurd to admit of indignation. How she died I do not pretend to know, but, if there is a mystery about it, it is a scandal that the time which should be used in solving it should be wasted on such obvious foolishness.

(Signed) GWENDOLINE HERNEY.

*Letter and enclosure from McGregor & Stokes, Barristers and Solicitors, to Robert Marshall, Esq.:*

September 18, 1922.

Robert Marshall, Esq.,  
"Vinecroft,"  
Chesterton.

DEAR MR. MARSHALL:

We are greatly shocked to hear of the sudden death of our client Miss Anne Crawford at your home on the 17th instant. Under the circumstances we conceive it our duty to enclose you a copy of a communication from her, which reached our office on the morning of same date, and to inform you that we have placed the original of said communication in the hands of the proper authorities for investigation. The Will referred to is in our keeping. Feeling that you would have wished us to proceed in the manner indicated, we are,

Very sincerely yours,  
JOHN MCGREGOR.  
(For McGregor & Stokes)

*Copy of enclosed communication, being a letter from Miss Anne Crawford to John McGregor, written and mailed on September 16:*

DEAR MR. MCGREGOR:

You will think this letter strange—but I can't help that. The fact is that I shall feel more at ease if some one besides myself knows of a fear which is hourly growing upon me—a fear for my personal safety.

You will bear me out that I am not a woman inclined to idle fancies and you may safely conclude that I would not write to you in this manner without due cause. What the cause is, I will tell you at length when we meet. At present it is enough to say that I have passed through a very unpleasant experience owing to my having been compelled to refuse to advance a considerable sum of money to my nephew, William. The young man was dangerously disappointed and the fact that he is aware of his present position as my sole heir increases my nervousness. I shall rectify the matter of the Will immediately and for that purpose will ask you to visit me here upon the 18th, when I hope to be feeling somewhat recovered. Following that, it is my intention to leave my brother's house the moment my strength allows me.

My present apprehensions may be quite unnecessary but if, in the meantime, news of any alarming kind should reach you, I beg that you will act at once on my behalf, using this letter as authority.

Sincerely yours,  
ANNE CRAWFORD.

## ROBERT MARSHALL'S STATEMENT

I am glad that Sergeant Wiggan has asked for a written statement of conditions and events leading up to our present serious situation. (For that it is serious, I can no longer fail to see.) Perhaps the careful putting down of definite facts may help to subdue the confusion present in my own mind.

Anne is dead. She died while a guest in my house. The doctors say she died from poisoning—not accidental poisoning, but poisoning deliberate and premeditated—the poison having been administered, according to the coroner's jury, by "a person or persons unknown." The house is under surveillance. There is a police detective in charge.

These statements, as I write them down, seem fantastic to a degree. Let any one who reads this—any ordinary, normal man of middle age—imagine writing such absurdities with relation to himself, his household, his normal, sane everyday world. Murder or suicide in one's own family? Absurd! I have said "absurd" a thousand times, yet the facts remain. . . .

Where shall I begin? In this case I suppose the beginning dates back to my first knowledge of my stepsister, Anne. My life, before that, can have little

interest, so I will compress it into a few sentences. I was an only child. My father died when I was still in babyhood, leaving my mother an attractive young widow. For ten years she devoted herself to my upbringing and then, not unnaturally, married again. Her second husband was a widower with one daughter, two years older than myself. He was a wealthy man, by name Adam Crawford, and his daughter was his only tie. It seemed an ideal match and was, I think, a fairly happy one. My memory is of a good-natured stepfather, and of a mother cheerful and content. Her one disappointment was her stepdaughter, Anne. My mother had, I know, looked forward to Anne. She had always wanted a daughter—a girl who could be her companion in the home, whom she could dress daintily and over whom she could “fuss” without restraint. Before the marriage she was never tired of talking to me of the little sister I was to have and to whom she hoped I would devote myself in a properly chivalrous manner.

It was rather a shock to both of us when the “little sister” coldly rejected devotion of any kind. There was no childish rebellion or display of temper from which a happier understanding might have resulted, rather a hard, unsmiling acceptance which resisted all my mother’s warm advances. As for me, after the first hurt to my vanity was healed, Anne’s attitude was a relief. She was, at that age, a sullen, rather homely schoolgirl, all legs and arms, thin face and muddy complexion. Her one beauty was her hair, which she wore in long pigtails—a never failing temptation to the mischievous hands of an eleven-year-old boy.

When I was twelve and Anne fourteen both of us were sent away to school. We saw little of each other even in the holidays and I hardly realized how her appearance had changed until I saw her on her graduation day—a strikingly handsome young woman. The muddy complexion was no more, the arms and legs had become perfect proportions of an admirable whole—even the sullen expression was replaced by one of vivacity and eager interest. She was considered immensely clever, had graduated with highest honors and allowed it to be understood that she intended to devote herself to some serious work.

I congratulated her with a warmth which I had hardly expected to feel, but was brought up sharply by a look which reminded me all too vividly of the old Anne. Her eyes, I saw, had not changed, but were still of that dark, shining coldness which forbade advance. I hastily introduced my friend, Mark Summers, and left them together.

**P**erhaps the real story begins here, for if Anne had not met Summers on that graduation day everything might have been different. It was a case on her part of the much derided love at first sight. Anne became infatuated with Summers. I am no psychologist and shall not attempt to explain why the whole of this girl’s strange, cold nature should have melted and warmed into passionate devotion for this charming but ordinary young man. Mark Summers had

delightful manners, a splendid physique and a cheerful disposition. He never pretended to any depth of character and was at first more dismayed than flattered by my handsome sister's preference for himself. He accepted, however, my mother's invitation to visit us and youth and propinquity did the rest. As the visit drew to a close, Mark confessed himself very much in love. Mother was delighted and Anne was so changed by happiness that we hardly knew her.

Then the unexpected happened. Mr. Crawford quietly but definitely refused to sanction the engagement. He forbade the young people to see any more of each other and to all Mark's bewildered protests and questions returned only one answer, "Anne knows why." He intimated that it would please him if Mark were to terminate his visit at once, which, of course, he did. But not before he had sought my help, begging me to talk my unaccountable stepfather into something like reason.

This I felt fairly certain of doing. My stepfather and myself had always been on the best of terms and I had never found him lacking in either fairness or common sense. His attitude now I could only explain by some hitherto unexpected jealousy of Anne. So I began by saying that all parents must expect to lose their daughters some day. Rather to my annoyance he laughed indulgently.

"Barking up the wrong tree this time, son," he said.

So I refrained from more wisdom and asked him flatly why he was being absurd about Anne. "She's had dozens of admirers before," I said, "and you never said anything against her marrying them."

"Because I knew she hadn't the faintest intention of doing it," he said. "I hadn't realized that the Summers affair was serious or I would have spoken sooner."

"You mean you do not wish Anne to marry?" I asked in amazement.

He nodded.

"Not ever?"

"Never."

I asked him as politely as I could if he were crazy.

"No," he said very quietly, "but Anne's mother was."

When he had given me a moment or two to get over the shock of it, he explained.

"Anne knows all about it," he said. "And I hoped that a situation like this would never arise. But she seems to have lost her wits as well as her heart over this young Summers. She will listen to nothing—although I have seen to it that she is not ignorant of what marriage might mean. So there is nothing left but that I should do my duty. Of one thing I am thoroughly determined. No man shall ever

be allowed to marry my daughter as I was allowed to marry her unfortunate mother without a knowledge of the nature and menace of this hereditary horror.”

His cheerful, good-natured face had gone quite white as he said this, but there was implacable resolve in his voice. Besides, with right so plainly on his side, what could one say? I managed to falter out something to the effect that I didn't know what Anne would do.

He was silent for so long that I began to feel uncomfortable, and then: “Neither do I,” he said. “But what you and I must do is clear. If anything should happen to me, you must act for me; You are not a boy any longer. Tonight I shall give you a sealed envelope which, if I am not here to do it myself, you will hand to Mark Summers if ever the question of his marriage to Anne should be seriously entertained.”

It was a command rather than a request and I accepted it as such. Besides, it seemed a useless precaution as he was then in better health than I. I took the envelope and promptly forgot about it until, only six months later, the improbable became the actual, and my stepfather lost his life in a drowning accident. He had gone down to Rainbow Lake to spend the week-end with my mother and Anne, who were holidaying there. A canoe in which he and Anne were crossing the lake was upset in a sudden squall. Anne was saved. She was an excellent swimmer and very cool in an emergency. Her father, heavy and out of training, sank before help arrived.

**M**y mother was heartbroken. And Anne, too, was greatly affected. Always strange in her ways, it did not surprise us when she declared that she must “be alone for a while.” She was rich now by her father's will and could choose practically what life she wished, so that, occupied as I was with my mother's affairs, it was natural that I should give little thought to those of Anne. It was the merest chance that I heard through a casual acquaintance of Mark Summers's intended marriage. I remember that my tongue seemed to move slowly as I asked for the name of the bride. Mark was making rather a silly secret of that, my informant said, but every one guessed that the bride was a Miss Anne Crawford—“a regular stunner and rich at that.”

My personal reaction to this unwelcome news is not of particular interest. But what I did is important. I took the sealed envelope and went direct to Summers.

His reception of me was markedly sheepish, because, as he explained, it seemed “so dashed silly” that I had not been properly informed of the prospective wedding. It was only “one of Anne's queer ideas,” but she had made “rather a point” of my not knowing. It was borne in upon me from the tone of these remarks that Mark's devotion to Anne had waned, though I doubt if he were yet

conscious of its waning. In any case, his feelings had nothing to do with my duty toward Anne's dead father. I gave him the sealed letter.

Mark read the letter in silence. It seemed to take him a long time. I had been looking out of the window but, at last, slightly impatient and more anxious than I cared to show, I turned to him. He was not reading the letter at all. It had fallen on the floor and Mark was staring in front of him with such a face of shock and horror as I hope never to see again.

I do not know what the letter told him, but whatever it was, it was more than enough. Mark was not the man for desperate adventures.

I was leaving the room without a word when Summers's voice stopped me at the door.

"Do—do you suppose she *knew*?"

It was a most unpleasant situation.

"She may have known without understanding," I said at last. It was the best that I could do.

Three days later, Anne appeared suddenly at my mother's house and came directly to the room where I was reading. She seemed quite composed.

"Mark has had a letter," she said at once, "a letter telling him some incidents of family history. He refuses to say where it came from. Do you know?"

I hesitated and then: "It came from your father," I said.

I thought her eyes shifted for an instant but they steadied again.

"My father is dead," she replied impassively. "I gather, then, that it was you who gave the letter to Mark?"

There was something in her quietness which affected me as no ranting would have done. I felt most desperately sorry for her. And I also felt afraid.

"I had promised him," I said, "as your brother—"

I did not finish. Her eyes, which she had a trick of holding half shut, had suddenly opened, and the glare in them struck the words from my lips.

"I think you will be sorry—brother!" she said.

Her voice had not risen by a tone. She left the house as quietly as she had entered it. I heard my mother call her, but she did not turn nor answer.

**W**hen next we had word of her it was to learn, through a friend, that she was in a private nursing home recovering, it was understood, from a nervous breakdown. She was unable, the doctors said, to see anybody. Even my



mother was refused admission. She remained there for almost two years, her nervous condition being probably aggravated by news of the death of Mark Summers. This took place a year after the breaking of their engagement and sounds like an affecting end to a tragic love affair, but, as a matter of proven fact, poor old Mark died of pneumonia, caused by a characteristic neglect of ordinary precautions after a hotly contested Rugby match. Anne never believed this. To her, he had died of a broken heart, slain, as it were, out of hand by the fatal letter which had parted them.

It will be easily seen what place I, as the deliverer of the letter, must have held in Anne's regard. I had no illusions about it myself and expected indeed never to see my stepsister again. But once more this bewildering woman surprised me. One morning, shortly after Anne had left the nursing home, my mother informed me that she was coming "home."

A man is at a loss in a situation such as this. The only thing for him to do is to admit a large ignorance of women. That Anne should care to live under the roof that sheltered me seemed fantastic. Yet that was her deliberate choice. The reason given, my mother's failing health, was natural and generous in the extreme. Too natural and too generous, I thought, since Anne was neither the one nor the other. Besides, she had never cared for my mother. Why the sudden solicitude?

To have asked this question aloud would have seemed unforgivable. Especially in the face of my mother's pleasure in this belated display of daughterly devotion. She took it all at its face value, shaming my doubts into uneasy silence and finally disposing of them altogether. This happened all the more easily because, at the time, I was going through a tremendous experience of my own. I had fallen in love. No one knew it. I had scarcely realized it myself, but since I had met Claire Ottway, the old, old glamour had laid its spell upon me and I saw everything through its happy mists.

Then, one day, something—a mere trifle—awakened me. I saw what I had permitted. But it was too late. I cannot tell you even now just what had happened, for the hardest part of all was that I never knew. But suddenly I knew my mother changed. There had always been between us a delightful trust and affection. Not, perhaps, one of those nervously intense devotions of which one reads, but a normal, healthy love which we took as much for granted as the air we breathed. Well, it is possible for air to be poisoned, and something had poisoned my mother's love and trust. I could not find out what it was. Anne, now firmly installed in the sick room, saw to it that I had small opportunity. You can imagine my helpless rage—rage which I dared not display for fear of exciting the invalid. Anne had stolen my mother from me and I could do nothing. I could not even prove that I had a grievance. It was all intangible, a thing of instinct and secret knowledge. I knew—without being able to tell what I knew, nor why.

Even my new-found love was in eclipse during those weeks when I saw my mother die without a lifting of the cloud between us. In her last look lay a reproach to which I had no clue and which remained forever unanswered. The experience was a spiritual horror which, undeserved as I swear it to have been, was to haunt my life for years.

Immediately after my mother's death Anne went abroad. She knew nothing of Claire, and I, with a suddenly developed caution, took care that she heard nothing from me. Even Claire herself never knew why it was that our wedding was hurried and almost secret. But the fact is that I was afraid. When Claire was safely mine I breathed again, and very soon I was able to laugh at my former anxiety. Anne, when at last the news reached her, had, apparently, been well pleased. She sent Claire a sisterly letter and a very handsome gift, coupled with a hope of seeing us happily settled sometime in the future. From something in the letter, I gathered that she had been ill again, but was now recovered. This letter was suitably acknowledged and the correspondence dropped. Once in a long time some word of Anne came to us at second or third hand, but, from herself, we heard nothing more until time had had plentiful opportunity to smooth old scars.

A happy married life gives quick burial to unpleasant memories. A few years found me dismissing my suspicions of Anne as morbid and exaggerated. A few years more, and I scarcely thought of her at all. I had been married for thirteen years and was as happy as a man can be when, one day, a short but pleasant note from Anne informed me that she had returned from her latest wandering and, being in our part of the country for a time, would, if agreeable, pay us a short visit. . . .

I find it almost impossible to write about this visit, especially now that recent events have made it once more so terribly near and vivid. I am distracted by the difficulty of separating fact from fear, and suspicion from certainty. I realize that any evidence drawn from anything which I can tell would be utterly valueless in a court of law. If I say that all my old doubt of Anne sprang to life again at the first moment of her appearance in my home, I must also say that I can bring forward no fact to justify it. If I say that I was afraid, with a growing fear, during all her stay, I must add that, if acts alone are to be taken as evidence, every act of hers gave me the lie. What she *did* was generous and full of apparent good will. She showered gifts upon the children and upon Claire—to whom she seemed to be much attracted. So when I say that, through it all, I was conscious of a cold and deadly hatred—who will believe me? Only those who felt it, too.

I need not, indeed I cannot, go into the tragedy which brought that ill-omened visit to its close. Nor will the bare statement that my wife and prematurely born child came to their deaths through a fated gift from her mean anything to those

who demand facts. There was nothing to be said then. There is nothing to be said now.

Once more time was allowed to do his soothing work. My children were growing up. The world around was sane and healthy and commonplace. Once again, I came to see morbidity in myself as a ground for causeless suspicion. Fate, not Anne, had been the cause of my misfortunes. But a man must make the best of fate. I hoped that Anne and I would never meet again. Nor did we seem likely to. She traveled a great deal—a continual restlessness seemed to possess her. The promise of her youthful days never matured. Neither, so far as I know, did she ever again show interest in any man. Indeed, her enduring memory of her one lover was shown in the very beautifully sculptured monument which she imported from Italy and placed upon his grave. As I grew older I understood more clearly—or thought I did.

The letter announcing her intention to pay us a second visit was utterly unexpected—and very unwelcome. Although I had come to smile at the idea of fear in connection with an aging and unhappy woman, I had no desire to open up old wounds. But the note gave me small choice. She was in poor health; the doctors recommended quiet and country air. What could I do?

I bitterly regret that I did not heed the instinct which told me to do anything, no matter how outrageous, to prevent this visit. But so largely are we creatures of convention, so high are the barriers with which we bar out instinct, that I let things take their course—nay, worse, I opened my doors once more to that Evil Thing.

But I must control myself—ranting will not help.

I shall endeavor to answer Detective Wiggan's questions. Yes, it is true that I have been at a loss for ready money of late. A certain investment in oil stock has proved unsound. But I have not been unduly worried. It is also true (although I did not know of it until after the tragedy) that my son has not on hand the sum of money which we had set aside for his entry into the partnership which we hoped would secure his future. But this, too, is a minor evil. Had William confided in me, a way would certainly have been found to provide this money. No sacrifice would have been too great—he knew that.

In conclusion—I am not a fool. I see the trend of things here. I see William's danger. That Anne foresaw it, I am convinced. I believe she died happy in the knowledge of the dreadful legacy she left.

*(Signed)* ROBERT MARSHALL.

## WILLIAM MARSHALL'S STATEMENT

I can't help noticing that, though Sergeant Wiggan has asked every one else in the house to write down their impressions of what happened at the time of Aunt Anne's death, he has carefully refrained from asking me to write down mine. The inference is almost too obvious—it leaps to the eye. I must say nothing—lest what I say may “be used in evidence against me.” Nice idea to ponder over—that! Frankly, I believe the idiot thinks I did it!

All the same I am going to write down a few things for my own benefit. With all this questioning and conjecturing and general excitement, I find myself getting hazy on the main facts already. There aren't many of them and they seem clear enough—or did until this Wiggan chap began to stir things up. The trouble is that while I can state the facts, I can't explain them, and that is why this little policeman is getting on my nerves. It isn't a bit pleasant to have him poking around, expecting every minute to pounce upon some bit of evidence which will justify his official conscience in arresting me for the murder of my own aunt.

There! I've got it off my chest. This chap really does intend to arrest me. I can see it in his eye and feel it in the tone of his voice every time he speaks to me. It is a sort of mingled admiration and contempt—the kind of feeling I can fancy him having for a “slick one” who was doing rather well in “putting it over.” He isn't sure, though—that's the point. He doesn't want to come a cropper (and he knows I can't get away).

I suppose I ought to feel uneasy. I know dad does, and Gwen—although she's such a brick. Cousin Fanny, so far, is more annoyed than frightened and Roberta is much interested and rather enjoying the whole affair. My own chief feeling seems to be a kind of helpless rage alternating with a state of mind which refuses to see anything but a certain grim humor in everything. If it were a man I was suspected of killing, if there had been a row and I had punched some one's head a bit too hard, the case might be serious. Under those circumstances I might even suspect myself. But to be accused of slipping poison into the milk of an old lady with indigestion is just a little too thick.

Well, to get on with it! When I heard that our long absent aunt was coming to visit us, it seemed as if Providence were at last going to take an interest in my case. My memories of Aunt Anne's previous visit were mostly memories of gifts bestowed. There had been a rocking-horse with real hair, a football, a jointed fishing-rod and sundries. All these had lingered happily in my mind while Aunt Anne herself had faded out. But it was easy to take for granted that an aunt who understood the needs of a boy's higher nature so well was a jolly fine aunt to have.

Let me be quite brazen and admit that, from the very first, I intended to stick Aunt Anne for a loan. Why not? A loan is a perfectly legitimate transaction between—shall we say?—labor and capital. Aunt Anne was capital and I had

every intention of becoming labor. There was practically no risk about it. I took for granted that she would know I wouldn't ask her if there had been.

I am quite sure that Sergeant Wiggan would cough here and say, "How about a bank?" The answer is simple. A bank is not an aunt and requires more security than confidence in a beloved nephew. The natural person to approach would have been, of course, dad. If he had had the money, I should not have hesitated for a moment, and neither would he. There is no irate parent business about dad. He knew all about what might be called a rather thin crop of wild oats and he knew, too, that there was no fear of another one. But he did not know quite how expensive it had been and I did not want him to find out if I could help it. He would have insisted upon raising the wind somehow. So I had to sheer off dad.

**A**unt Anne was a very different case. She had money—oodles of it; more than she could ever use. No doubt, lending money was one of her recreations. And I was determined that she shouldn't lose a cent of any capital she invested in me.

Even now, with the unwinking eye of Wiggan upon me, I can't see anything wrong with that idea.

The first damper upon my satisfaction was the general attitude adopted by dad. Whenever I made a cheerful remark regarding our rich relative he looked at me as if I had gone off my head. And once he said, "I know you are joking, William, but just in case you aren't, remember this—there is nothing to expect from your Aunt Anne." There was a certain quiet emphasis on the "nothing" which worried me—until I remembered the horse with the real hair. You can't call a horse like that nothing.

A day or two of Aunt Anne's company sent my hopes soaring. It was evident that she liked me. And I liked her. I make this statement with no reservations. I had been prepared to like her with that sort of family liking which is really just tolerance but I found that I liked her much more than that. The others didn't. I often felt like smacking Roberta and I nearly quarreled with Gwen. As for father—I couldn't understand him at all. There seemed no reason for the general coolness. To me, with the exception of one little dust-up, Aunt Anne was always what one might expect an aunt to be—not gushing, but friendly and interested. She was fond of walks, too, and simply loved taking bird photographs. Most people have not the necessary patience. But she had, and we got some cracking good ones.

Was it any wonder that I thought she would help me? Or did my natural conceit lead me astray? No, I don't believe it did. I honestly believe that her attitude justified my expectation. In those cozy, semi-confidential chats which we had when I sat with her while she drank her milk at night, she must have got a

fairly good idea of the hole I was in. If she had not intended to pull me out, why did she not say so plainly and at once?

Gwen warned me that I was being “played.” But I couldn’t see how Gwen could know anything about it. I’ve noticed that when one woman doesn’t like another, she’s almost always prejudiced. I felt that Gwen wasn’t seeing straight.

And it was because I was so sure of it that my disillusion came with such a shock. My surprise and disappointment were so great that I certainly lost my temper badly. That was the night when aunt and I had what little Wiggan calls our “difference.” I admit that I was wholly in the wrong. Aunt had a perfect right to refuse to lend me anything and I had no right at all to resent it. It was the *surprise* of the thing! I have tried to impress this on Wiggan. But he doesn’t seem to value the psychological bearing of surprise.

Aunt did not make her refusal easy, either. I can feel myself grow hot even now when I remember her sneering voice and some of the things she said. It was as if she had turned into another person under my very eyes. Have you ever seen some bounder coax a friendly dog to him and then lash out at him with a cane? I felt like that friendly dog. I wanted to rush away and hide. There was a sense of humiliation which was worse than anything. In fact I had turned to leave the room without a word when a parting sneer from her brought back with a rush an understanding of the way she had led me on, and this loosened my tongue. I can’t remember what I said but I know that my voice was out of control—loud and high, as Cousin Fanny says.

Aunt let me make a fool of myself without interruption. I’ll swear there was even a look of satisfaction on her face. It was that look, I think, which brought me to. I begged her pardon and got out of the room. In the hall I ran against Cousin Fanny. I knew she must have heard but I simply couldn’t explain and she, like the good sport she is, pretended that nothing extraordinary had happened and that I had been trying to persuade Aunt Anne to have a doctor.

I went to my room, simply hating myself. It does jar a fellow to know that he has acted like an ill-bred child. All night I kept thinking of how I should have behaved, of the few dignified words I might have spoken, and so on. And it is true enough that I felt anything but kindly toward Aunt Anne—not because she had refused me the loan but because she made me wish so heartily that I had never asked for it. You simply can’t like people who smash up your self-respect like that.

**N**ext day I decided to act as if nothing had happened. I’m not sure that any one can ever do this, but I was determined to try. So, instead of giving in to my impulse to avoid Aunt Anne altogether, I called in at her room as usual before I went down to breakfast. I suppose I looked sheepish enough. She was

sitting up in bed, in her dressing jacket and cap, and seemed none the worse for last night's excitement.

"I am sorry about last night, aunt," I said, "I hope you will forget it if you can."

Her strange black eyes passed over me as if I were some unfamiliar creature.

"I have an unusually good memory, William," she said. "Still, it is always well to know the truth about people. It prevents mistakes—or at least, it allows one to rectify them. Save for last night, I might have remained unaware of your mercenary spirit. I intend to change my will immediately. I hope you thoroughly understand."

I did, of course. And the mistake she was making seemed more childish than ever. I hadn't thought or cared about the will at all—it was only my immediate needs which had bothered me. So, if she expected another outburst, she must have been disappointed. The news about the change of will left me quite cold. In fact, I think I smiled a little.

"I am glad," she said, "that it amuses you."

Now there is nothing in that sentence, is there, to send a chill of cold distaste up one's spine? Yet that is the effect it had on me.

When I told Gwen what had happened, she proved once and for all that she was the only girl. She never once either said or looked "I told you so."

The rest of the day was much as usual. In the afternoon I drove Gwen home and came back to moon around, wishing she had not gone. Cousin Fanny told me that Aunt Anne seemed better and also mentioned, in a stage whisper, that she had sent Jimmy the chore boy to the post with a letter and parcel which it was evident she had not cared to trust to the desperate hands of Gwen or me. The parcel might have been anything, but I guessed quickly enough that the letter would have contained instructions to her lawyer. The whole thing seemed like a page out of Ethel M. Dell. Cousin Fanny's attitude of intense yet restrained sympathy was rather funny, too.

At dinner we were all somewhat out of form. Dad was worrying about aunt's health and I was worrying about his and the probable effect upon him of the financial tangle which I would soon have to disclose. Cousin Fanny was probably worrying about us both. As I passed her chair she whispered that, if I liked, she would take up aunt's milk at ten.

Supposing I had let her do it—as I was jolly well tempted to do? Supposing I had never touched the dashed milk that night? Would Detective Wiggan have suspected Cousin Fanny? I believe he is capable of even that. However, I did not let her. It would have seemed too babyish. When the time came I prepared the milk myself, being careful to have it properly hot, and took it up to aunt's room.

She looked to me as if she had not stirred since the morning. She was still sitting up in her cap and jacket. Only the expression of her eyes was different. I wish I had understood and could interpret what the new expression meant. But it was beyond me. All I can say is that she looked excited. If it didn't sound silly, I would add that she looked triumphant. The impression was so strong that, as I set the milk down, I said, "Had any good news, aunt?"

Instantly she let her eyelids fall and her face became as expressionless as putty. She began to stir her milk without answering.

"Did Nora prepare this milk?" she asked.

I said that Nora was out, a fact which she must have known, and that I had heated it myself. At that she smiled—at least her lips smiled. She did not raise her eyes.

"You had better drink it while it's hot," I added. But she went on stirring.

I waited, hardly knowing what to do, for hitherto she had always asked me to sit with her while she drank it.

"Anything else, aunt?" I said.

I caught a glimpse of her eyes then—perhaps it was some reflection of light, but they seemed full of an odd glitter.

"I think that will be—quite all," she said. There was a stumble in her words as if she were short of breath.

I said good night, and went away. Next morning it was found that she had died in the night.

It was a very nasty shock. Dad blamed himself fiercely for not insisting upon a doctor, even against her will. And all our consciences were asking us uncomfortable questions as to whether or not we might have done more. But not one of us suspected anything out of the ordinary until we saw the doctor's face after he had made his examination. He was a thin, lank person with suspicious eyes (not our own family doctor), and he made no bones at all about refusing a certificate.

"But why?" asked dad, in complete bewilderment.

The doctor frowned importantly and was understood to say that he was not satisfied as to the cause of death.

"You suspect something unusual?" asked dad.

"Unusual—er—yes," said the doctor. "Such as—" I suggested.

"That I will not say—at present."



Of course no one but an idiot could have misunderstood. It brought us all up standing.

“Suicide?” asked dad in a peculiar voice.

“That—or something else,” said the doctor. He had a very dry manner.

It was only then that we began to realize what we were in for.

I have been trying, at intervals, to see things as the doctor or the detective or any one not biased by acquaintance with the family might see them. Here is a middle-aged lady, unattached, with a large independent fortune. She visits a half-brother whom she has not seen for years and while in his house dies suddenly of poison. Her death occurs just in time to prevent her changing a will which makes her nephew her heir. Upon investigation it is found that said nephew is in financial difficulties; that he knew of his coming disinheritance; that he had quarreled with his aunt over money; that it was his nightly custom to carry up his aunt’s bedtime drink of hot milk; that for some days the aunt had been unwell; that she had died suddenly upon the night after the quarrel.

It is all there, you see, the part of the villain as neatly mapped out as anything in fiction. Only one objection occurs to me—does it not presuppose that the villain was also simple-minded? Why quarrel, for instance? Why carry up the poisoned milk himself? Was the man a fool? I asked this question of Detective Wiggan but all he said was, “They mostly are.” Another consideration which ought to have weight, I think, is the past history and general disposition of the suspect (me). If the latter has been generally law-abiding, if he shows no secret vices or predisposition to deeds of violence, this ought to count. But Wiggan says no. “You can’t go by any of that,” he said. “Some of the worst is mild as milk.”

Take, then, the all-important question of motive. I need money, it is true, but I could rub along without it. When my difficulties became pressing, a mortgage arranged (with utmost cheerfulness) by my father would meet the case. I have admitted that I was extremely anxious to avoid this but it is what eventually would have been done and, perhaps, a mortgage which he is sincerely anxious to pay off may not be a bad thing for a young man who has taken life too easily. Certainly it would seem, even to a warped mind, to be preferable to murder. Looked at in this light, the police suspicions seem distinctly thin. But will people generally look at it in this light?

The most apparent alternative is that of suicide. Did Aunt Anne poison herself? It is possible. She may have taken the arsenic deliberately or in mistake for something else. I wish I could honestly say that this seems probable, but I must admit that what evidence there is seems to be against both suppositions. It appears that the only medicine which she was taking could not have been mistaken for arsenic—there being not the faintest resemblance between them.

Nor is there a trace of arsenic anywhere in her room or among her belongings. Had she taken a dose by mistake, the paper or bottle from which she had taken it would almost certainly have been found. Even in the case of deliberate self-poisoning, traces of such paper or bottle would have been expected. There were none. The only exterior trace of the arsenic was the slight trace found in the dregs of the milk.

However, in the case of deliberate suicide, she *might* have made away with all traces. But is there any evidence to suggest that Aunt Anne was tired of life? If my own life were dependent on it, I could not swear that there was, nor could any of the rest of us. All her conversations with me had the future for a theme. She was full of plans. Her mild indisposition, which she attributed to indigestion, seemed to bother her very little. Her last directions to Nora were directions for the packing of her trunks. Her last letter (the one to McGregor) shows that she expected to see him soon. Are these things natural in a woman determined on suicide? I don't have to ask Wiggan that question. My own common sense answers it.

**D**id, then, anything happen unexpectedly that night which suddenly changed her whole outlook and led her mind to self-destruction? If so—what? I put this to the sergeant and he told me that the idea did me credit. I am afraid that the sergeant is not suggestible. In fact it is plain that only one thing puzzles him now. Where did the arsenic come from? Who purchased it, and where? He can't help admitting that, even if the remaining portion were destroyed, there ought to be traces of the destruction. (There always are in books: burnt paper, broken glass, or something.) Also it should be possible to trace the purchase. If Detective Wiggan had the slightest clue to either of these problems, he would be much easier in his mind. If he could trace either clue to me, he would be satisfied. My present freedom rests upon the fact that no poison, nor trace of the purchase of any such, has been discovered anywhere. But Wiggan has confidence in his own ideas. He is sure that some such trace exists. He is still searching.

I have tried to reassure dad. I have explained that, as I never bought any poison anywhere, even Detective Wiggan cannot prove that I did. As for finding in my possession something which I do not possess, that also seems fairly impossible. But dad just looked at me in a gloomy way.

"Your aunt was a very clever woman," he said. But when I asked him to explain, he changed the subject.

He is brooding over something. He doesn't talk freely—dash it! Nobody talks freely! I am beginning to have a horrible sense of suppression everywhere. I feel as if I weren't getting enough air. I wish Tony Seldon were here—he would enjoy this. A puzzle didn't suppress him, it was his meat and drink. I wonder—Jove! It's a good idea. He'll be some one to talk to, anyway, and he'll come like a shot

if he scents a mystery. Besides, he and I were by way of being rather thick—he'd like to help. Yes—if this thing grows more serious I'll send for Tony!

*(Signed)* WILLIAM MARSHALL.

## LETTER FROM WILLIAM MARSHALL TO ANTHONY SELDON

DEAR TONY:

Have you forgotten that once I saved your life? It was the time you threatened to overeat on jam-filled crullers. You weren't grateful at the time, but you may have been since. How would you like to do me a similar service now?

Hang it, I can't take this thing seriously! But it looks serious enough—and the plot thickens. They have found the arsenic. (They always refer to it as "the", meaning, I suppose that there is no other.) And they have found it in my "possession"—or, to be exact, in one of my plate-holders. You know my fancy for using a plate camera.

How it got there is a complete mystery—to me, I mean. I have heard of evidence being "planted" by detectives, but, honestly, Wiggan doesn't strike me as a planter. He seems straight. All the same, I fancy that my arrest is perceptibly nearer. I am under surveillance, of course.

Is it possible to prove that a man did what he did not do? There are moments when I entertain a dreadful suspicion that it is.

Will you come? I had intended sending for you anyway and your letter of yesterday, written after you had digested the reports of our family mystery in the papers, has made me feel doubly free to do so. Dad wants a private detective—two, three private detectives! But, outside of books, I have small faith in such. They are usually bounders—the kind you read about simply doesn't exist. What I seem to want is some one who knows me and knows that I don't murder aunts in my off hours.

I'd better warn you, though, that dad refuses to take any stock in that "sixth sense" of yours. I told him how we all swore by it at college and some of the astonishing things which came of your "hunches," but dad is far too scientific to be reasonable. I had to get really serious before he would consent to let me base my hopes on you; so if he looks a bit grim don't mind. As for me—I'll back your hunch every time.

Yours (in the toils of the law),  
BILLY.

## STATEMENT OF ANTHONY SELDON

It is not every day that a man finds a perfectly good friend accused of murder. Murderers, real ones, have friends, I suppose. One sometimes reads in the public prints that “the prisoner’s friend appeared much moved.” But, usually, one thinks of a murderer as an unattached entity, solitary, marooned, as it were, on the desert island of his crime. To become aware of such suspicion attaching to a person one knows, is an experience. I can conceive of it being a tragedy. But, with Billy Marshall as the police “suspect,” the thing seemed to approach sheer farce.

You would have to know Billy to appreciate this, so I will not labor the point further than to say that the victim himself felt the same way. He seemed to have the idea that he was having a fantastic dream from which he would wake up soon. When I walked into his room at Vincroft, the day after receiving his invitation to come, he had the air of one who has received a blow in the dark and expects another. Otherwise, he was as usual. His good looks were still aggressively good and his tie and socks still matched. We looked at each other soberly for a moment and then:

“I say—funny, isn’t it?” said Billy.

“Very amusing,” I agreed.

“If only other people would see the fun!” said Billy plaintively.

I admitted that this was important.

“But I’m depending on you for that, you know,” said Billy. “Have you had a ‘hunch’ yet?”

He sounded so trustful that I hated to dash his hopes but it had to be done.

“If I have,” I said, “I’m afraid it is not a hunch which is going to help you much. Hunches aren’t evidence. To ask a question more to the point, is it true that they have really found arsenic in your plate-holder?”

Billy said that they really had. “A thin flat packet done up in yellow paper in the place where the plate ought to be.”

“Did you say yellow paper?”—in surprise.

“Why not?” asked Billy.

“Did you ever know a druggist to use yellow paper?”

Upon reflection, Billy wasn’t sure that he had, but, upon further reflection, couldn’t say that he hadn’t. “Although, as it probably wasn’t the druggist who put it in the plate-holder,” he added, “I don’t see that it matters much.”

“How did the sergeant come to find it?” I asked.

“Oh, he opened the holder. The slide was turned to ‘Exposed,’ but that didn’t stop him. In the pursuit of his business, that man would just as soon spoil a negative as not.”

“Was there a plate in the other side of the holder?”

“Yes.”

“Anything on it?”

“I don’t know. The boulder opened that side, too. But I think it was a blank plate. I have developed all the negatives I have taken lately. This plate-holder was an extra one which I seldom use, although I always keep plates in it.”

“Then you are sure that, until the arsenic packet took the place of one of them, there were two plates in the holder?”

“As sure as I can be of anything of which I have no definite memory. I certainly would not load a holder on one side only.”

“Any trace of the plate which must have been removed?”

“How could any one tell one plate from another? There is a box in the dark room half full of broken and cast-off plates—all light-spoiled of course.”

“Any fingerprints?”

“Yes—on the holder—mine, of course. But not a trace of anything on the packet itself.”

“That’s unfortunate.”

“Yes, it was quite a blow to Wiggan. If he had found my prints on that packet, I wouldn’t be sitting here now.”

“But if he had found some one else’s fingerprints—”

“That would have been a greater blow still. However, he didn’t.”

“Any success in tracing where the packet came from?”

“No, but the sergeant is hopeful. He is the most infernally hopeful man I ever met.”

“Well, you had better let me have the full tale.”

**M**y client sighed. (I like to call him my client, because he is the first client I’ve ever had. Things are very quiet in the law business.) He said that he had told that tale so often that he could hardly tell it straight any more—so great was the impulse toward introducing a little variety. However, he had written it all down with due regard to strict veracity and I could use the manuscript for reference. In the meantime he would do his best. I listened to what he had to say

in growing consternation. It was so evident that he was telling all he knew—and what he knew was so little. For a man facing a capital charge it practically amounted to nothing. He read my dismay in my face.

“It is rather meager, isn’t it?” he said. “But I was so hoping you would have a hunch.”

“I’m a full-fledged lawyer now,” I said pointedly. “And I don’t have hunches. I may have ‘psychic intuitions,’ sometimes—but I keep them dark. Nobody with any sense believes in such things. You and I may, because we haven’t any sense anyway—and besides, we’ve seen them work; but men like your father laugh at them because they know so much and men like Wiggan laugh even louder because they know so little. So there we are.”

“I don’t care where we are,” cried Billy, “as long as you’ve had a hunch. Let’s go and tell Wiggan.”

I restrained him. I had no desire to begin my investigation by adding to the gaiety of detective sergeants, for I had learned, through several humiliating experiences, that while the general attitude toward this harmless, and sometimes useful, eccentricity of mine may vary, it always includes amusement, and never includes respect—not until afterwards, anyway. I can’t blame people for this. I should feel the same, if the faculty belonged to some one else.

Even in myself I do not pretend to be on good terms with it. I know that I have it and that is about all. Put briefly, it appears to be a scent for puzzles and mysteries which sometimes dispenses with the usual conscious train of reasoning and gives me the solution of a problem which, as a problem, I may not understand at all. College boys are not afraid of making fools of themselves, so at college there was no need to seclude this outlawed faculty of mine. It became, in fact, locally famous under the pleasing name of “Seldon’s Hunch.”

Billy knew of this, of course. It explains why he sent for me and why I had come. For, in reading the story of the Vincroft mystery in the daily press, a feeling concerning the truth of the matter had come to me so strongly that I could do no less than write to Billy at once, offering my help should anything serious develop. I did not know what form my help could take.

**B**illy,” I said, “what is your own conclusion about your aunt’s death?”

“I don’t know,” said he miserably. “Since there is no one here to kill her, she *must* have killed herself. But how or why, I cannot even imagine. And the authorities simply refuse to entertain the idea of suicide.”

“Nevertheless,” I said soberly, “the authorities will have to entertain it, for it is true. Your aunt did kill herself. I am absolutely sure of it. I *know* it. But at present I can’t offer a scintilla of evidence to prove my knowledge.”

Billy's face fell. "If that's your hunch, Tony, they'll never believe it," he said wearily. "They've gone all over that—and all the evidence points the other way."

"We've got to find some evidence that doesn't."

Billy merely shrugged.

"All the same," I pointed out, "your own attitude shows how unwise it would be to say anything at present. You see, the peculiar thing about what you call a 'hunch' is that you've got to believe in it despite appearances. Do you remember the case of Judson Junior?"

My client's gloom lightened. But only for a moment.

"Yes," he said. "But Judson Junior was only suspected of sneaking the footer money—not of polishing off his aunt."

"What he was suspected of makes no difference. What I want you to remember is that the evidence was so strongly against him that practically no one had any doubt of his guilt."

Billy admitted that this was true. "And everybody said you were crazy," he added, "when you declared that the real thief was that mild little Soams chap. I don't understand yet how you found out."

"Well, that's the point: I didn't find out. I simply knew that Soams was guilty. I never did know how he managed it. But I could have proved it in time, if he hadn't grown panicky when I accused him and confessed. There is something about absolute knowledge which gives confidence and brings results. We've got to hang on to that and not be discouraged if everything doesn't clear up at once. As long as one is only guessing, one may be thrown off the track; but when one *knows*, it is different."

"And you don't think it is any use talking to Wiggan? That chap is getting on my nerves."

"Oh, I'm going to talk to Wiggan, all right. But I'm not going to tell him that your Aunt Anne killed herself until I can prove that she did. What I may or may not know is nothing in Wiggan's young life—the only knowledge which matters to him is knowledge which he can prove before a jury. It's up to us to give him that. Where is he now?"

Billy relaxed into a rueful grin. "Usually he's like Peter Pan's shadow, sewed on," he told me, "but at present he's in the dark room hunting more arsenic. But I want you to meet the family first."

They were, I think, waiting for us, and the meeting was uncomfortable enough. One glance at Mr. Marshall showed me that he, at least, was under no delusion as to his son's danger. It was also more than evident that he put not his faith in hunches. His manner to me was courteous but cold. Miss Fanny, a faded

little lady with guileless blue eyes, showed worry, but her faith in the ultimate triumph of the right and proper had not yet been seriously shaken. Roberta, a keen-eyed imp of twelve, was belligerent and unafraid. Miss Herney, who had driven over and who was made known to me as “Gwen,” was, I could see, a tower of strength to them all. Seeing them there in that pleasant drawing-room brought the sense of the strangeness of everything again uppermost. These were surely not the people to blunder into tragedy.

Yet tragedy was here and, after a few polite interchanges, Billy took me off to find it in the person of Sergeant Detective Wiggan.

He was busy, as had been surmised, in the dark room—a small, partitioned-off corner of the basement where the family developed its amateur negatives. Under the glow of its blood-red bulb any face might have taken on a sinister appearance; but no face could be really sinister which possessed cheeks so cheerfully round and eyes so mild and moonlike as Detective Wiggan’s. When he saw us he came out into the more kindly light of the basement window.

“This is my friend, Tony Seldon,” said Billy easily. (His manner as a suspect left much to be desired.) “He has come down to accelerate cerebration and his middle name is Holmes. In other words, he is going to help you hunt arsenic. No professional feeling, I hope?”

“You can run away now, child,” I said coldly.

**T**he sergeant grinned and sat down upon a bench, dusting his hands upon a handkerchief which was none the better for it. I watched him with inward trepidation. It was my first encounter with a minion of the law in action. And in books the “regulars” are frightfully uppish and hard to do with.

“Private?” asked the minion genially.

I said: “No. Oh, no—not at all!”

“Specialist, maybe”—with an eye which observed me pityingly. “Psychologist, perhaps?”

I denied the imputation with spirit. “I’m not anything,” I said, “except one of Billy Marshall’s friends.”

The sergeant sighed. “He’ll need ’em,” he said. “Better get down to a basis, though. What are you going to do?”

I said I didn’t know, adding, with a flash of inspiration, “What are you?”

“I don’t know, either,” said Detective Wiggan. “That is to say, I don’t *exactly* know.” He had a very cautious manner. And his moonlike eyes were not communicative.



“Look here,” I said suddenly. “I’ve got to help Billy. I don’t know a thing about detecting but I’ve got rather a nose for puzzles and I want to use it. You see, I know that it wasn’t Billy who did in his aunt. And the logical conclusion is —” I waited hopefully.

“The logical conclusion,” he filled in slowly, “might be that you don’t know Billy.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning that nobody knows anybody. I’ve found that out.” His tone was full of the weariness of much knowledge.

I admitted that this might be true but added immediately that I knew it wasn’t. I did know Billy and he was a nice boy in whom there was no guile. I related several instances of our college days to prove it. But the sergeant, though patient, was unimpressed.

“For myself,” he admitted when I had finished, “I like your friend—clear blue eyes, fine nose; broad in the shoulder—reminds me of that Rodney Blake who shot his wife and buried her under a large coal pile. Unfortunately it was a hard winter. Yes, I’ve quite taken to young Marshall; but I never let my likings prejudice me. It doesn’t do—not in our business.” He included me with a flattering wave.

“But,” I protested in dismay, “you can’t mean that a person’s obvious character should have no weight in considering a problem like this?”

The sergeant looked at me mournfully. “There isn’t,” he said, “any obvious character. I’ve found that out, too. Look at Tom Simmons, him that killed three fiancées at a go. Even the judge that sent him out couldn’t hardly believe he’d done it.”

I began to feel chilly. “Come out into the garden,” I said. “This place depresses your spirits. You’ll feel better presently. Do you mind if I ask a few questions?”

“Why should I?” asked Mr. Wiggan obligingly.

**I**n books,” I said, “the police force guards its knowledge like priceless pearls.” The moonlike eyes opened. “Does it?” inquired their owner, interested. “Fact is, I don’t get much time to read. As for questions, I’ve asked a good few in my time. Maybe it will be a change to answer some.”

“And you’re not jealous?” I persisted, unable to adjust my mind to this unexpected attitude.

“What of?” asked the sergeant placidly.

I hadn't thought of that. But, after all, it was a pertinent question.

"Well, anyway, I'm glad you're not," I went on hastily; "because, if I'm going to help Billy, I'll need a lot of information. The arsenic, for instance. Have you connected it up in any way with—er—well, with any one whatever?"

The sergeant shook his head.

"No," he said, "at present, it's what you might call an isolated fact. We don't know where it came from—that is to say, we haven't got the man who sold it. And we don't know how it came to be where it was—meaning that we can't find any one who saw him put it there. But we've got the stuff and we got it in the possession of the chief suspect—you don't mind me calling young Marshall the chief suspect, do you?"

"For purposes of argument—no. And I see that you feel pretty sure that Billy put the poison in the plate-holder. You have considered, I suppose, that the holder was a spare one, that it was not in use. That other people might have had access to it, and that there were no fingerprints on the packet."

"I have—as you might say—considered those points," said Wiggan mildly.

"Now, if Billy bought that poison," I went on, "he must have bought it during a comparatively short time—since the beginning of his aunt's visit, to be exact. It ought not to be hard, with your resources, to trace all his purchases since the moment he heard the letter read at the breakfast table."

"It isn't," said Wiggan, adding, with something very like a yawn: "We have."

"And you found that he had purchased nothing," I declared triumphantly; "which means that he was not the man who bought the poison. No one knew that his aunt intended to make this visit. She had not bothered herself about her relatives for ten years. No one could have been prepared for her sudden arrival. Granting that her nephew, knowing of her wealth, began instantly to plan her removal, the earliest possible moment he could have set about his nefarious work would have been after he knew of her intentions."

"That," said Mr. Wiggan appreciatively, "is a very nice way of putting it. Looks kind of as if he must have had the stuff by him for some time."

"But—oh, that's idiotic! Why would a young fellow like Billy have arsenic 'by him'?"

"Rats, perhaps," suggested Wiggan. His eye was vague.

"*Are* there any rats?" I asked patiently.

"There might have been once—common things, rats."

"Not good enough, sergeant. You'd have to show that there were rats and that attempts had been made to poison them. Besides, no one uses pure arsenic for

rats any more; therefore it looks—”

“As if he must have had it by him for something else,” finished the sergeant with a sigh.

“Good heavens, man!” I burst out. “Why? Why?”

“Because he had it,” said Wiggan slowly. “That’s why—because he had it.”

I abandoned the point and asked what kind of paper the arsenic had been wrapped in.

For answer my companion drew a scrap of paper from his pocketbook and handed it to me. “Same as that,” he announced laconically.

“It’s not drug-store paper—is it?” I asked.

“It might be.”

“Hardly. This coarse yellow paper is seldom made in anything but large sheets. It’s the kind of paper a dry-goods merchant would use. Druggists don’t use paper a yard wide. The obvious inference is that the arsenic was removed from the drug-store packet and the original paper destroyed. Why?”

“Because he didn’t want the arsenic traced,” said Wiggan. “That’s a very nice point.”

**N**onsense!” I said, appalled. “Don’t you see that there might be another inference?”

“Such as?”

“Well, if it was desired only to destroy trace of purchase, it would have been enough to destroy the label, but if it was the *kind of paper* which was revealing, don’t you see an inference there?”

“No,” said the sergeant. He watched me benevolently while I made a note. But he appeared somewhat tired.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he said in a burst of generosity. “I’ll put you on a basis. Every one should be on a basis. I’ll give you the written statements of all the family and you can go through them and point out all the inferences I’ve missed. Only you’ll want to do it in private, of course. I’ll go back and finish up the dark room.”

As a hint this could hardly have been bettered. I retired to my room and to a long meditation—from which emerged a conviction that Detective Wiggan, though a man and a brother, was not going to be conspicuously helpful in my private detecting. It was evident that, as a confrère, he considered me negligible, and, as an amusement, easily exhausted. To new ideas he appeared impervious.

He had made up his mind and would persevere in his way, searching, heaping up his little bits of evidence until—well, until he considered himself justified in “going to a jury.” He was as good-natured as a nice bulldog and as implacable. Yes, if anything were done it would have to be done without Wiggan.

It was with a feeling of deepest gloom that I settled down to a reading of the manuscripts which Wiggan had promptly sent me by the hands of Nora the maid. Billy’s case began to look perilous indeed.

I had not read far, however, before the sheer drama of the thing lifted me beyond reach of depression. The feeling of intuitive knowledge which had been so strongly with me as I studied the newspaper accounts returned with added intensity. Assurance became doubly, trebly sure; my brain tingled with it. And with assurance, as always, came hope. Man irresistibly inclines to the belief that truth will triumph. It was while reading Mr. Robert Marshall’s statement, I think, that I became conscious of yet another feeling—a sense of something abnormal which sent an unpleasant ripple up and down my spine. Horror as of something I had not yet faced and could not name shivered to the tips of my fingers. But, disturbing as it was, I welcomed it; for might it not be a clue in itself, a helpful indication that I must not expect to solve my problem along the usual simple and normal lines—that the root of the evil puzzle lay in deeper things?

It had not taken me long to read the statements and I immediately went back and read them all over again. This time I read, not for atmosphere, but for detail, making notes as I went, and bearing always in mind the solution of the problem offered by my inner consciousness. Billy came in before I had quite finished. The poor chap’s expression was positively hunted.

“Say, old man!” he began with a kind of gulp. “I’ve got to ask you! You don’t suppose I could have poisoned the aunt in my sleep, do you—or anything like that? Don’t laugh—but really you know I’ve been talking to Wiggan and the beggar is deuced convincing.” His tone was admirably light, but it wasn’t fun that was in his eyes.

**D**id you,” I said sternly, “did you say anything to Detective Wiggan about a hunch?”

“Certainly not. At least, not exactly. But I asked him if he didn’t think that people sometimes know things without being able to say why they know them.”

“And he said—”

“He said that most people knew things that way. But he had found out that it didn’t do—not in his business. You couldn’t get down to any basis.”

“Well, now perhaps you’ll follow my advice and leave him alone until we have proof of the belief that is in us. We had better begin with these statements. I

find various things here that strike me. They are all mixed up, at present, but each seems to have a significance which may be pieced together into some kind of theory.”

“If Aunt Anne poisoned herself—”

“Not ‘if,’ Billy. We shall never get anywhere if we start with ‘if.’ She *did* poison herself. Get that firmly into your head. We work back from that. Now let us take the statements. The first thing which struck me was a certain remark of your engaging sister. She says, speaking of your aunt: ‘I am perfectly sure she tried to make William like her and, if Detective Wiggan wants to detect anything, he ought to detect why.’ Precisely! Now can you yourself give any guess as to this matter?”

“No, I can’t,” said Billy gloomily. “That is what puzzled me all along. But, supposing that she really did cultivate me deliberately, did she need to have a reason? Maybe it was just caprice.”

“No, if she did it deliberately she did it with some purpose. Make a note of that and we’ll pass on. . . . Another thing which is very apparent is the general impression of ‘something wrong’ with your aunt herself. Even the maids feel it. Nora sums it up as ‘the evil eye’; Miss Herney, who, I fancy, is not given to exaggeration, uses such words as ‘repulsive’ and ‘abnormal’ to describe it and refers to an impalpable ‘something’ in your aunt’s atmosphere as singularly forbidding. She notes also the curious ‘glitter’ in her eye. Your Cousin Fanny makes a still broader statement when she says there was ‘*something which tainted the air* like an evil fog or mist.’ Now, of what known fact in your aunt’s history, as given by your father, do these remarks remind you?”

The bothered look in Billy’s eyes deepened but he answered at once: “I see what you mean. You are thinking of the streak of insanity in her mother’s family. But there never was any hint of Aunt Anne being otherwise than sane. She was a clever, capable woman. She looked after all her own affairs. Except for her unusual fondness for travel, she appears to have shown no eccentricity. Certainly there has been no trace of anything worse.”

“There hasn’t? How do you know? It would seem from these statements that none of you know anything about your aunt. There is no word of where she went nor of what she did during her long absence abroad. The inference is that she did not keep her relatives informed. Also, at the time of your father’s marriage, it is plain that she knew nothing about it. Why? Some correspondent would have been almost sure to have mentioned it. Was there no address? Or was your aunt not receiving mail at that time?”

“There are other significant things, also. Your father speaks of her brilliance at college and of the expectation that she would do ‘serious work.’ This expectation was never even partially fulfilled. Again, why? But there is

something far more definite than either of these references. We find that after the breaking of her engagement Miss Crawford suffered from a 'nervous breakdown,' during which she was treated in a 'nursing home'—a home to which even your father's mother was refused admittance. This breakdown extended over a considerable period. What does it sound like?"

**B**illy was visibly keen now. "By Jove, I believe you're right!" he exclaimed. "You mean that the nursing home was really a private asylum?"

"Perhaps not that, exactly. But some kind of mental hospital certainly. There are plenty of such retreats where patients, temporarily deranged, are restored to health."

"But if she were restored—"

"We must believe that she was—at least apparently so, for otherwise she could not have gone back to ordinary life. But there are many cases of relapse in cases like that. Whether her mania was of a recurrent kind, we do not know. But the continual trips abroad would lead one to suspect that it might be so. Where was she when your father was married? Somewhere where she received no news, evidently."

"It sounds reasonable."

"Well then, let us admit, just for purposes of argument, that your aunt has been at times the victim of a recurrent mental trouble inherited from her mother. It follows that there must have been long periods of apparent good health between. But it does not follow that this good health was as absolute as it appeared. I am not an alienist but I have heard some very learned arguments on this point. It is a point which seems to be by no means settled. One view which I believe is very definitely held argues that when, in such cases, the mental balance is disturbed by shock resulting in a 'fixed idea,' this fixed idea is liable to remain throughout the apparently normal periods as a more or less submerged, but occasionally powerful and often dangerous abnormality."

"You mean that she may have appeared quite sane and yet have been—anything but?"

"Something like that. She may have been sane in all ordinary matters, yet actuated, in some of her actions, by her fixed idea. That is to say, her conduct might have had every appearance of sanity, yet the motive directing it might have been quite insane. If this were so there must be traces of it. Let us examine the statements and see if we can find them. The first trace we have already tabulated. It is the effect she produced upon ordinary healthy people. To my mind there is no doubt that this was the direct reaction of her own abnormality. The masklike

face and glittering eyes are physical symptoms also. But besides this what do we find?

“The first thing is the peculiarity of her action after leaving the nursing home that first time. Your father admits that he fully expected her never to speak to him again. She blamed him for the destruction of her one romance. She thought she had every reason to hate him and he was convinced that she did hate him. Yet she came of her own accord to live in the same house with him, devoting herself to his invalid mother, for whom, until this, she had shown no fondness. What was the motive here? Follow your father’s statement carefully. He says, ‘*Suddenly I knew my mother changed,*’ and farther on, ‘*Anne had stolen my mother from me.*’ Are not these statements significant, taken in connection with our theory of the ‘fixed idea’?”

“Let us assume that the fixed idea was that of revenge or, as it would appear to her, of retribution—a sacred duty, perhaps. You must remember, here, that she never accepted the commonplace explanation of her lover’s death but considered it to be the result of a broken heart. Suppose her shocked and sick mind to have seized upon the idea of ‘a life for a life’ and even more than that—suppose her fixed idea prompted her to pay her debt not only in full but doubled and trebled. Suppose this prompting, and remember that behind it was a keen, clever and patient brain for which the ordinary interests of life had no longer any interest, and what a perfect instrument you have for every kind of horror!”

I was speaking now more to myself than to Billy, who sat, wide-eyed, listening; and, with every word, the conviction that I was on the right track grew stronger. This, reason and instinct both told me, might well be the explanation of that sense of things bizarre and dreadful which had accompanied my first reading of the statement. I felt that I had my hand on the thread which would lead us out of the maze. If my manner became somewhat excited I think I may be excused.

**T**he idea was fiendish in its simplicity,” I went on. “First of all she struck at the mother. What does your father say? ‘*There had always been between us a delightful trust and affection.*’ And yet before she died he had lost her as he never could have lost her by death alone. Anne had ‘stolen’ her—as he had stolen Anne’s lover!

“What next? One would have suspected some interference with the love affair which followed. Your father himself was afraid of that. But it happens that Anne did not know of the prospect of marriage. She was again ‘traveling.’ Had there been another acute attack? That is something that with time and proper facilities we may be able to find out. The next we hear of her, she is coming home and is proposing herself as a visitor at the home of her half-brother and his adored wife  
—”

“Oh—horrible!” burst from poor Billy, who now saw what was coming.

“Horrible—but perfectly in keeping with the fixed idea. Once more she is the benevolent sister and generous aunt. She lavishes gifts—especially upon the pretty and happy wife— Well, old man, I won’t stir up memories, for of course you know what happened. Undoubtedly your father had his suspicions then, suspicions so wild that in after days he was ashamed of them, even denied and forgot them. But at the time—read what Miss Fanny’s statement says: ‘*Robert was beside himself, making the wildest accusations.*’ We can imagine what those accusations were. But we must find out from him whether there was ever the slightest bit of evidence to give them ground.”

“Oh, poor dad! How can we?”

“We must—if we are to save him from a still greater sorrow.” (I said this meaningly.) “Anne Crawford’s work was not done when the curtain rang down on that past tragedy. For a time she disappeared, the cat letting the mouse believe itself free, forgetting or disbelieving that it had ever been in the grip of cruel claws. Then, when peace and happiness had once more settled down upon her victim, she—proposes another visit.”

“But that—oh, it’s too dreadful, too fantastic! Things like that don’t happen!”

“Not in a sane and normal world, perhaps—but in the world of an unbalanced brain they happen, logically and inevitably. That world knows no ruth and no remorse. Do you begin to see how things fit in now? The cloud which came over your home when this nemesis entered it—noticed and commented upon by all save you, the deliberately chosen and cleverly deceived victim?”

“But—why me?” asked Billy, heavily.

“You have only to look in your father’s face to answer that. And I think that now, when it is too late, he understands her purpose only too well. Read the concluding lines of his statement: ‘That Anne foresaw it, I am convinced. I believe she died happy in the knowledge of the dreadful legacy she left.’ Taken by itself, how extravagantly wild this statement sounds! Now let us see what evidence there is to bear out this theory. We know that she made a friend of you; expected you to fetch and carry; made the bringing of her prepared milk a nightly custom; was interested in your interests and in your fads—”

“By Jove—the camera!” cried Billy, springing up.

“Quite so. How often, under cover of her interest in photography, has she handled your camera, your plate-holders?”

“Often,” muttered Billy. “Dozens of times!”

“A plate-holder is a rather good hiding-place,” I suggested, “—but not *too* good. A trained detective might very well examine the plate-holders of a young



man addicted to amateur photography.”

“Well, but—after all, you know it was herself she poisoned. Why not have poisoned me and be done with it?”

Perhaps,” I said dryly, “anything as commonplace as mere poisoning would not appeal to your aunt. She seems to have had a nice taste in these things.

To have killed your father’s son out of hand would, no doubt, have been something, but to place him in the dock as the murderer of a helpless old woman—how much more? Besides, there may have been a contributory reason. You say that her health showed some signs of breakdown. The autopsy showed, according to the papers, that she had not long to live. What if she knew this—and wished to hasten things a little?”

“Two birds with one stone!” murmured Billy.

“Yes, and, having decided upon her final vengeance, how does she bring it about? First, she makes a will in your favor, then she invites your confidence and arouses in you an expectation which she does not intend to satisfy. A quarrel is the natural result. A quarrel with raised voices which some one in the household would be sure to hear. Meantime, she writes a letter expressing fears for her personal safety—a letter which, in the event of her death, would certainly lead to investigation. Meantime, she had carefully placed, with gloved fingers, the telltale packet of poison in a place where it will, in proper time, be found. She was clever, all right! It even occurred to her to change the paper in which the arsenic was wrapped. Undoubtedly she must have purchased the poison somewhere abroad and the finding of it wrapped in *foreign* paper might have turned a wise man’s thoughts to her.

“Lastly, we have the final scene where she takes the cup of milk from your hand and, with veiled eyes, asks if Nora prepared it. Receiving your assurance that you prepared it yourself, she is unable to restrain the look of triumph, which even you were able to see and wonder at. She *was* triumphant. I doubt if, anywhere on earth, there was a more triumphant woman than your Aunt Anne that night.”

Billy had turned his face away. “She—she wasn’t—she was crazy,” he stammered. (I liked Billy very much for that.)

I nodded and we sat silently for a moment. Then, with a long sigh, “What are we going to do about it?” asked Billy.

The question brought me down to brass tacks with a start. I had been so absorbed in tracing out what seemed to me so plain a trail that I had forgotten how profitless everything I had said would seem to—Sergeant Wiggan.

“I don’t know,” I admitted.

We looked at each other. There was an uncomfortable pause.

“If we can prove her to have been subject to fits of recurrent insanity,” I offered, “it may help.”

“Oh, yes! It may help to give me—what is it they call it?—‘the benefit of the doubt.’”

“It may save your neck, anyway.” I spoke sharply, for my nerves were frayed.

“Good heavens, man! What use would my neck be to me under those circumstances?” asked Billy mildly.

I felt ashamed of myself. “Oh, well,” I said, “there must be a solution somewhere. If it’s any consolation to you, I have a feeling that we’ll find it. I don’t see how, now. But I may see any moment. Or—I may not. I’m at the mercy of this curious extra sense of mine. But, thank Heaven, it seldom lets me down. In the meantime, we must just do what spade work we can. I’m going to have a talk with Miss Fanny and your father in the morning. And tonight, if I can have the car, I’m going to run over to interview this lawyer—what’s his name?—McGregor. I don’t suppose our friend Wiggan would let you go with me.”

Billy shook his head. He looked utterly and forlornly miserable. “It’s all so awful,” he muttered. “My mother—I can’t stop thinking about my mother.”

“Think about your father just now,” I advised. “He needs it more than she.” Hoping that this might act as a needed tonic, I left him and went to see about the car.

**A**t the offices of McGregor & Stokes, the senior partner was preparing to go home but he offered, willingly enough, to listen to what I had to say. I think he may even have been guilty of some curiosity, but, if so, it was a guilt which stopped short of betraying itself. Mr. McGregor was that embarrassing sort of person—a cautious Scot. One had only to look at his tight-lipped mouth to know that no information was likely to be lightly offered; on the other hand, his honest gray eye assured one of an incorruptible integrity.

I began by explaining that my sole purpose in seeing him was to secure any possible help which he might be able to offer for my friend Billy Marshall—of whose unenviable position he must be aware. He heard me with interest, and, I think, with a certain sympathy, but made no comment except an occasional nod and a cautious “There may be something in that.”

“As things stand,” I concluded, “I don’t see that I can do anything except to ask you to take my word that, in spite of appearances to the contrary, I have certain strong reasons for believing that your late client killed herself. What is wanted is proof—facts which a jury will accept.”

“Yes, you will be wanting that,” said he. And, with a not unkindly smile, he sat back in his tip-tilted chair and waited patiently for me to go on.

“There are certain questions which I thought you might be willing to answer—with this object in view,” I proceeded.

“There might,” he admitted, and then, hurriedly, as one who has gone too far, “and there might not.”

Finesse is useless with a man of this temperament. I saw that I should have to put my questions bluntly and trust to his good sense and justice for my information.

“Well, then,” I began, “have you any reason to suppose, through your dealings with your client, that she was mentally unsound?”

Mr. McGregor pursed his lips. He seemed to take the question up and to turn it over critically. If it surprised him he gave no sign. Finally he said: “In all her dealings with me, it is my duty to say that my client gave every evidence of sound business judgment. Her affairs, which she managed largely by herself, are in the best of order.”

“Yes,” I said, “I can believe that. I should have worded my question differently. I should have asked you if at any time and for any reason you have had cause to suspect that Miss Crawford suffered from spells of mental abnormality.”

“Yes,” he said calmly, “I have reason to suppose that she did.”

“Can you tell me on what you base your supposition?”

“I can,” said Mr. McGregor, “and,” with a burst of generosity, “I will. My supposition is based upon the fact that at various times since Miss Crawford has been our client, there have been various moneys paid from her estate for—er—treatment in—er—various homes where, as I could scarcely help ascertaining, cases of temporary mental trouble are specialized.”

I felt a little flicker of satisfaction.

“Did you inform Detective Wiggan of this?” I asked.

“I did not. So far as my dealings with the authorities have progressed I have received no hint as to the question of Miss Crawford’s mental health having been raised. It was considered sufficient, I gathered, that at the time of her death she was perfectly normal.”

“Would you say it was normal for her to express fear for her personal safety while a guest in her brother’s home?”

“Not knowing her brother nor the inmates of his home, I would say nothing at all.”

“Oh, look here, Mr. McGregor,” I said. “Be a little human! You know of these people even if you don’t know them personally. Better, straighter folk do not live. Why, you might be the center of just such a family yourself. How would you feel if your son were suspected of a dastardly murder?”

“Being a bachelor, that would take some imagination.” There was the beginning of a twinkle in the shrewd Scottish eyes. “But I take your point. The police, perhaps, are not as sympathetic as you could wish. Very low opinion of human nature, the police.”

“Well, then,” I proceeded, somewhat heartened, “what did you *think* when you read your client’s letter expressing herself as being in actual fear of her life?”

**W**hat I thought has no value as evidence. But if you mean, ‘Would the receipt of such a letter give me grounds for swearing against the probability of my client’s sanity?’—I cannot say that it would. There *may* have been reasons which dictated that letter. In view of what followed it would logically seem that there had been reasons. You see that? Besides, I would have to bear in mind that I saw and spoke with Miss Crawford the day before she went upon that visit to her brother. The directions which she gave me upon that day, her admirable disposal of intricate matters of business, her general lucidity and calm would not lend such a supposition a leg to stand upon.

“And yet”—he suddenly abandoned his precise manner—“I did think the thing devilish queer! But the suggestion I got was not one of irrationality; quite the contrary. There was nothing irrational about that letter. It was a letter of purpose if ever there was one.”

“You’ve got it!” I exclaimed excitedly. “But what purpose?”

“Well”—slowly—“she might have been really in danger and wishful to take precautions.”

“She wasn’t in danger. And, if she had fancied so, there was nothing on earth to prevent her leaving the house on the instant. She was quite well enough to travel, had there been reason. As for precaution—of what use to her would any action be *afterward*? No, she wrote that letter telling of a danger which threatened, yet she makes no movement for escape or protection, only for retribution. Why?”

“I don’t know,” said McGregor flatly. Then, after a silence and in a much less legal voice, “Do you?”

Now, up until this moment, I had not intended to tell this hard-bitten son of the law anything at all. I had thought such a course quite useless. But suddenly, as his voice changed in cadence, I remembered that he was Celt and that, with a true Celt, anything is possible. So, on the impulse, and not caring whether or not I

should be called a fool for my pains, I told him the whole story, “hunch” and all—only I called the hunch “subconscious prompting.”

When I had finished, he untilted his chair and solemnly opened a lower drawer in his desk from which he extracted a silver-tipped box hollowed from a small black horn.

“In business hours,” said he, “I do not indulge. But upon occasion—” Even more solemnly he took a pinch of snuff. When the sneeze had subsided, he drew a long sigh. “Clears the brain,” he said. “Wonderful thing, snuff.”

He tilted his chair again but his eyes were no longer lawyer’s eyes; they were the eyes of a Highlander whose forbears have looked long at distant hills.

“I have known of such things,” he said slowly. “Yes, I have known of them. But not in the way of business, no.”

“You believe me, then?”—eagerly.

“I would be neither believing nor disbelieving—but it may be there are such things.” His chair came suddenly down with an ear-splitting rasp, and the dreamy light in his eyes went out. “Havers, man, havers! What nonsense is this for grown men?”

“I know,” I said, somewhat shamefaced. “I know it’s all no use without proof. But I’m out to get the proof. I came to you to help me.”

He got up and took a turn or two around the room, a heavy concentration knitting his brows, and when he sat down again he put his finger unerringly upon the vital point.

**Y**ou are out to get proof,” he repeated. “But what proof can you hope to get? Only one person in the world could provide that proof—and that person is dead.”

I shook my head. “There is proof somewhere. I know it,” I declared stubbornly. “I don’t believe that this woman schemed vengeance all these years and left no record of it, anywhere. An enlarged ego is one of the characteristics of a mania such as hers. She would have been proud of her fine revenge, insanely proud of it. Cunning enough to force herself to silence while boasting would have threatened her plans, I am certain that there must have been an outlet somewhere, a confidant, a safety-valve—”

“Her diary!”

The words seemed to spring from the lawyer’s lips involuntarily. But they were succeeded by a peculiar stiffening of his whole face, as if some sudden memory or inhibition had closed him up like a spring trap.

But the words were out! They ran through me like the wine of new life. A diary! Why had I not thought of that? Of course there would be a diary—the perfect confidant, the silent, ever-present safety-valve, the keeper of secrets. I fairly shook McGregor in my excitement.

“Man! Where is it?” I pleaded. But the illuminating moment had passed. The lawyer was all a lawyer once more.

“Where is what?” asked McGregor stolidly.

“The diary.”

“You presume that there was a diary?” he asked politely.

“Haven’t you just said there was?”

“To my knowledge I did not say it. An exclamation is not a statement, young man. It had occurred to me that there might have been a diary. That is all.”

We looked at each other.

“It is not all—not by a long way,” I said slowly.

He did not take offense. “If there is more, it is not within my knowledge,” he said. “I have never seen a diary of Miss Crawford’s, nor do I know that she ever kept one.”

“And yet you were suddenly inspired for some reason to believe that she had kept one.”

“Perhaps,” said the Scot with a twinkle, “it was a subconscious prompting.”

I thought quickly. To question further would only antagonize him. Whatever the reason was which lay behind his undeniable change of front, it could not be reached in that way. He had been sympathetic, disposed to help—was so still, probably. But it was plain that the significance of something had suddenly dawned upon him, and of that something he would not speak. Why? There could be but one reason. It must concern something about which he had given his word to be silent. My spirits rose at once. I felt more than ever assured that I was not following a blind trail. For if Miss Crawford’s lawyer had something concerning Miss Crawford to conceal, that something must be the thing which we most needed to know.

“You mean that you have sworn an oath, I suppose,” I said slowly.

“If I have, I am not likely to break it.”

“Not even to save an innocent man from death?”

“I know of no innocent man in danger of death.”

“That,” I pointed out, “is a quibble, Mr. McGregor, and you know it. If Billy is committed for trial you will simply have to speak. But he isn’t up for trial. I am

as certain as you are that a diary exists. And if it exists I shall find it.”

Was there a glint of pity in his grim eyes? I hoped not—pity from him would bode ill for my unaided chances.

“You’ll understand,” said the Scotsman, carefully, as I said good-by, “you’ll understand that, speaking officially, I have no interest whatever in the havers we’ve been talking, but personally, and to the extent my conscience will permit, I wish you well.”

“You couldn’t be more guarded than that,” I told him ruefully; “but you have already helped me a great deal and I thank you.”

**T**hat night I had a brief but vivid dream. Dreams, I may explain, are not an unusual thing for me when working on a puzzle. It is as if my subconscious self has a very perfect knowledge of what I need to know but finds some difficulty in passing the knowledge on. It takes advantage, therefore, of every chance to push some tiny clue into my conscious mind. This is most easily accomplished during sleep, but though it may often happen, it is only once in many times that I retain any memory of it when I wake.

This time the memory was vivid. I was walking through a street in a foreign town—in Italy, I thought. Everywhere was blazing sunshine and dark blue shadow. Down a street, which sloped steeply, I caught a flashing glimpse of sea. Toward me, up the slope, a man was walking. He wore a smock, powdered with what appeared to be fine sand or dust, and a white cap covered his head. As he passed me, he said in a conversational tone, and as if answering a question: “Yes, it was made here. Within the hand of sorrow is the key.”

The man passed on. The brilliant vision dissolved like smoke. For one instant I was aware of a great exultation—the next instant I was awake. The memory of the dream remained, but the interpretation, which had been almost mine, was already beyond my reach. I grasped at it frantically only to find it irretrievably gone.

Whether the dream itself would prove of any use it was impossible to say. But I went over it carefully, fixing it in my mind: a town in Italy; a man in a powdered smock; the words, “Yes, it was made here. Within the hand of sorrow is the key.” Gibberish, at present, but, in the future—who could say?

I dropped off to sleep again, wondering what our canny Scot would have made of it.

**I**n the morning the chief duty seemed to be a talk, first with Cousin Fanny, then with Mr. Marshall. The lady I discovered on the side terrace inducing her

Persian cat to take more cream than was good for it. At the prospect of being questioned she was immediately in a flutter. So, instead of talking about her nephew, I began to talk about her cat. A beautiful animal, I said, but were not Persians very difficult to raise? Not at all difficult, declared Miss Fanny; it was merely a question of common sense and diet, exactly as with humans. How much better we would all be, for instance, if we could be brought to regard as barbarous the eating of veal and pork! "And beef?" I inquired. But it appeared that Miss Fanny was rather fond of a good steak and didn't see how a little beef could hurt anybody. She made a point of ordering it at least twice a week and I could see for myself how perfectly healthy every one at Vinecroft was.

"Except your brother," I offered cautiously.

Miss Fanny fell beautifully. "Oh, that is worry," she said, and was soon talking quite freely of the menace which her mind had never yet fully comprehended. It needed but a little direction to lead her back to that other tragic time of which I wished to question her.

"I suppose," I said, "that, being, as you say, highly strung, your brother has never been quite the same since his wife's sudden death."

Miss Fanny would hardly like to go so far as to say that. Robert was too sensible a man and too fond of the children to let an old sorrow shadow his life. But in a sense, perhaps, I was right. The shock had certainly left him more nervously sensitive. "You see, he almost went out of his head at the time," she added.

"Yes, I remember your saying, in that admirable statement of yours, that he seemed very extravagant in his grief and made some wild accusations. I don't suppose you can remember just what those accusations were?"

"Oh, but I can!" declared Miss Fanny instantly. "I have a most excellent memory. I can almost remember his very words. He insisted that Anne had killed dear Claire—accused her to her face even—but I must say Anne had sense enough to ignore it."

"Was there ever anything at all, any fact or hint upon which he could base such suspicions?"

Miss Fanny's eyes opened very widely.

"Why, whatever could there be?" she asked. "It was a driving accident, you know. The ponies took fright and ran away."

It was evident that I would have to go to Mr. Marshall himself for anything more definite, so, with a few commonplaces, I departed.

My host I found in the library. He was writing, but looked up eagerly as I entered. I would have given much to have been able to answer the question in his



eyes. But instead of that I must question in my turn, bringing up intolerable memories.

“I am afraid I have no good news—as yet,” I told him. “Only my own conviction—I suppose Billy has told you of that?”

“Yes.” He wanted to be courteous, but there was no ring of comfort in his tone. I did not blame him. “I think it likely you are right,” he went on. “Anne may very well have killed herself with the purpose of bringing death and worse than death into this fated house. And if she did, she foresaw that I, at least, would guess her purpose and her motive—otherwise her revenge would not have been complete. But she was a clever woman. She would leave no loophole through which I could prove my suspicions or even make them seem tenable to another mind.”

No criminal ever intends to leave a loophole,” I said; “but nearly all of them do. In the case of criminal insanity this is even more likely. The victim of the malady is diabolically cunning at most points, but curiously shortsighted at others.”

“We have not yet found the point at upon which Anne was shortsighted,” said my host dryly.

“Well,” I answered, “I do not want to be unduly optimistic, but you must see that if we can prove her to have been liable to periods of insanity we will be helping your son’s cause considerably. If we can prove *more* than that—” I paused sympathetically.

“What do you mean?”

“We might,” I said slowly, “be able to prove criminal intention by reference to former actions.”

He grew very white and his voice was a mere whisper.

“You mean—my wife?”

I nodded and waited until he had regained his poise.

“I have never dared to face my fears with regard to that,” he said at last heavily; “but lately, since William has been in danger, they have come crowding back upon me. But no—it is madness.”

“There was your mother, too,” I said quietly.

He stared at me, and his lips moved. “And Anne’s father!” I could hardly hear the words.

I started. “Her father? How was that? I had not thought of him.”

Mr. Marshall sighed heavily.

“If we are right, if we are not the victims of a horrible delusion, he was the first. Consider the circumstances—a man who could not swim, an expert canoeist, an overturned canoe. But to what end is this? In no case was there any proof.”

“Are you certain? Think again.”

He shook his head.

“Then was it absolutely without reason that you accused Anne of planning your wife’s death?”

“I had suspicions, but no proof. She had given Claire the ponies. They were apparently well broken and docile. I tried them out myself and found them so. But, as I discovered afterward, they had one bad fault. They were liable to shy and became unmanageable at the sight of anything suddenly flapping in front of them or at paper blown across the road. The dealer from whom Anne had bought them swore to me that he had told her of this fault, adding that, once this eccentricity was known, they were perfectly safe for any one with a firm hand. Anne, of course, declared that they had been sold to her under an absolute guarantee and that she knew nothing of any bad habit.”

“Did no one see what startled the ponies?”

“No one on whose evidence any reliance could be placed. A little girl, who was gathering flowers in a bush near, said that she had seen the ponies coming down the road and that suddenly something white had risen up from the ditch by the roadside, making them swerve violently and break away. The white thing had frightened her, too, but when she looked again it was gone. It was generally thought that a cow, lying in the ditch, had suddenly risen right under the ponies’ heads. But no cow could be found to have been straying on the road at the time.”

“Where was Miss Crawford that morning?”

“She had gone out walking.”

“In an opposite direction?”

“Yes.”

We were silent for an appreciable time.

“I am afraid you are right,” I said presently. “Whatever might have been discovered at the time, there is no hope of proving anything now. But I feel as certain as you do, in your heart, that it was no white cow that frightened the shying ponies.”

He covered his face with a shaking hand.

“She was insane, you know,” I added hastily.

“Is hatred insanity, then?” he asked. And in the face of this ultimate triumph of hating I felt I could only answer “Yes.”

## A LEAF FROM JOHN MCGREGOR'S DIARY

To a man of my years, indecision is a vexatious thing and indecision which hangs upon a matter of conscience the most vexatious of all. Nevertheless, a sworn oath is a sworn oath. There is no way of getting away from that. Crazy or not, yon woman was a clever one! She knew well John McGregor would bide by his sworn word!

At the same time, this looks as if it might be a ticklish business for the son of Robert Marshall. It is well he has friends like the lad who came to see me today. Faith in friendship is not come by easily. Query—has the lad the Sight, or was it a fairy tale he asked me to waste my time upon? My weighed opinion is for the Sight. But I would not like Stokes to know it. He'd swear me in my dotage, and who could blame him? But I have known strange things. And this lad has a seer's eyes, cold blue with a light behind them.

I would help him if I could. But even here, on these private pages, my conscience will not allow me to speak of what I have sworn to keep secret. “Not if it were a matter of life and death?” said he. But my oath took no cognizance of life or death. And forbye there is as yet no question of any such choice. Query: Is there a way I could help without in any way encroaching upon the nature of my oath? There may be one way. It is a small way, but I will chance it. . . . If the young lad has the Sight, indeed, he may see what a duller eye would miss.

## EXTRACTS FROM ANTHONY SELDON'S NOTEBOOK

This affair goes badly. The diary is not to be found. That there was a diary is fairly certain. Mr. Marshall remembers that it was Miss Crawford's custom to keep one when she was a girl. He remembers chafing her about it and about the precaution she took to keep it secret; the book being fitted with a leather case which was always kept locked. He had not seen this case in her possession on either of her visits, but Roberta, the sharp-eyed, remembers having seen something which might very well have been the book. She says that one morning, having been sent upstairs with a message from Miss Fanny, she saw a green leather book, with writing in it, fall out from under her aunt's pillow. Naturally she stooped to pick it up but was told, sharply, to let it lie. She never saw it again, although, being curious, she kept her eyes open for it.

This green book has disappeared. I think it takes but little reflection to guess what became of it. No one took it away from the house, therefore it must have been sent away; and the "small parcel" which Jimmy, the chore boy, posted for Aunt Anne leaps to the mind. Jimmy is anything but bright. He remembers the parcel, but, asked if the parcel might have been a book, he remarked sagely, "It would depend on what like was the book." Personally I feel sure that the parcel was the book; that the book was the diary and that the person who received the parcel was Miss Crawford's lawyer, John McGregor.

Admitting this for purposes of argument, it would seem, from his sudden exclamation "A diary!" that he had not opened the parcel and did not know, until that moment, what the parcel contained. This, without doubt, points to his having received implicit instructions beforehand with reference to some parcel which he was to receive by post. The instructions must have been given him by Miss Crawford herself during the last interview which she had with him. Also, his stubborn refusal to speak, after he had realized what the parcel may have contained, proves that she had not neglected to swear him to secrecy regarding those instructions. This oath he will certainly not break. It looks as if we had run into a blind alley.

*Later.*

Unless something illuminating occurs, Billy will be formally arrested by Wiggan tomorrow.

Our moon-eyed friend has decided that he need not wait to discover the original source of the arsenic. He has a sublime faith that this will "come out later." In the meantime his poking and probing has unearthed (literally) a bit of fresh evidence which he finds very satisfying. He has, in fact, unearthed "Winkle," Roberta's pup. (I thought the child would scratch his eyes out when she heard of the sacrilege.) And he has discovered that Winkle died, not of colic as diagnosed by Billy, but of arsenic poisoning. "Trying it on the dog," was the way Wiggan put it. Of course it also transpires that upon observing signs of distress in Winkle, Roberta had appealed to her big brother, who had himself put the patient on a milk diet. The diet had not agreed with Winkle.

Now, in dealing with facts like these, one's basic idea is everything. Having my own idea in mind, further inquiry brought out the following facts: that Aunt Anne had more than once called Winkle "a horrid pup"; that, nevertheless, on hearing of Winkle's indisposition, she had become abruptly sympathetic, and, to Roberta's endless amazement, had visited the invalid in person. These incidents, so full of meaning to me, mean nothing at all to Detective Wiggan. He says, "Why not?"

Mr. Marshall and Billy and I held a council this afternoon. We were fairly gloomy. If Billy is arrested, Mr. Marshall will have a try at old McGregor, but, frankly, I don't believe it will do any good.

"Fact is, dad, I'm regularly up against it," said Billy.

They looked each other in the face and I could see them promise themselves to see it through as pluckily as possible. I'd have given all I possess to have been able to reassure them. But I had nothing to say. I knew that Wiggan had come to the end of his indecision.

*Later.*

Something has happened! It may not be worth much and yet—well, I'll set it down as coolly as possible. All along I have felt that McGregor wanted to help. But he had done nothing except to send me a sheaf of receipts (with addresses) from the various nursing homes and sanitariums which had taken care of Miss Anne Crawford during her various "indispositions." These records did not help much. They showed, first, that she had never gone to the same home twice and, second, that she had been discharged from each one as cured. Our next step would be to collect the evidence from all of them, evidence which ought certainly to be sufficient to prove that Aunt Anne had never been "cured" at all. This evidence would be invaluable at a trial. It would confuse issues and open up speculation. But would it, of itself, prove Billy's innocence? I was afraid to face the question.

Nevertheless, in the meantime, I had set Billy to work upon a list of all available details and, when he had finished it, he brought it to me.

"There is precious little beyond names and dates and addresses," he said despondently.

I looked at the list. "Does this list include all of McGregor's material?"

"All, except this odd sheet which has nothing to do with anything and must have slipped in by mistake."

I sprang out of my chair.

"Mistake!" I yelled. "McGregor never made a mistake in his life!"

I snatched the extra sheet from Billy—but my enthusiasm received a cold douche when I saw what it was. It was merely an old, receipted bill for a piece of memorial sculpture shipped to Miss Anne Crawford, in care of John McGregor, by one Anthony Morelli.

Billy was looking over my shoulder. "That will be the monument Aunt Anne erected to the memory of her fiancé," he informed me. "I remember dad saying it

must have cost some cool thousands. It was imported. She chose it somewhere in Italy—”

“Italy!”

The word seemed to ring a tiny bell in my brain. I looked at the bill again. Anthony Morelli—yes, Italian, certainly. Instantly, as if waiting only for this stimulus, a memory flashed before me—a narrow street, hot with sun, a glimpse of sea, a man in a powdered smock—Anthony Morelli! I remembered that, in the dream, I had known his name!

“What’s the matter?” asked Billy sharply. “You look as if something had hit you.”

“An idea has hit me,” I said. “Billy, old scout, I don’t want to raise false hopes but—yes, an idea has certainly hit me.”

*Evening.*

I have been thinking it out. And the longer I think the more certain I am that the dream contained a clue of sorts. I felt this at the time but could not fit it in. The enigmatic words, for instance: “It was made here. Within the hand of sorrow is the key.” What was “it,” and where was “here”? The remembrance of the dream picture, as I held Morelli’s bill in my hands, and my sudden recognition of his name as the name of the man in the dream, seemed to answer both these questions. “It” could only be the memorial erected by Aunt Anne to her dead lover, and “here” was plainly the Italian town where the monument had been made. In that case the facts that there was such a monument and that it had been made in a foreign country were, in some way, important clues. The rest of the cryptic words, “Within the hand of sorrow is the key,” seemed to have no meaning by itself, but referred, presumably, to Aunt Anne’s mad sorrow for the dead and expressed what I had always believed, that in this grief lay the key to the whole tragic sequence.

To return to the clue of the monument—McGregor evidently knew or suspected its importance. Otherwise, why had he enclosed this particular bill? (To think that it had come by chance, would be to stretch coincidence too far.) Had he hoped that I would guess its importance, too? It seemed probable. But to ask for further light and leading would, I felt sure, be useless. The canny Scot had done his utmost. If anything were to be done I must do it. I decided to interview Detective Wiggan.

Wiggan, I am sure, thinks me crazy. But he is willing to humor me to a certain extent. He has human moments. He has quite determined to arrest Billy,

but he is willing to give him a bit more rope, feeling that he will thereby hang himself more thoroughly.

“When a thing is so, it’s so,” said Detective Wiggan, “and every new fact that is a fact, is bound to prove it.”

“You couldn’t have stated my own belief better,” I told him, with emphasis on the words *‘if it is a fact’*. “Now, some of your facts simply aren’t! But we won’t argue. Do I gather that you are willing to allow Billy, accompanied by yourself, to make one of a party to visit the Mark Summers memorial, in the hope that we may find a few facts waiting for us there?”

Wiggan observed me with a certain pity.

“It is only fair to say that this is quite the farthest I can go. Afterward—”

“Afterward you must do as you think wise. If nothing comes of this, I am done—for the present. Mr. Marshall and his son thoroughly understand.”

“And who else will be of the party?” asked Wiggan resignedly.

“Me!” shrilled the voice of Miss Roberta behind him. I am afraid she had been listening.

“Certainly not,” I told her promptly. But the sergeant, for some obscure reason, murmured his unanswerable “Why not?” And I remembered that, as it was Roberta who had seen the “green book with writing in it,” she might be useful after all. For that the book in McGregor’s mysterious parcel and the clue of the memorial sculpture had something in common, I felt sure.

“The others,” I said, “will be Mr. John McGregor and Mr. Marshall, making six in all.”

**A** cemetery is not a cheery place. When one of a party stands in danger of a capital sentence it is even less cheerful than usual. Yet the cemetery where Mark Summers lay buried was a peaceful spot and even beautiful. Mr. McGregor, tight-lipped, escorted the party. He had been there before.

It struck me, in fact, that he had been there very recently. There was one remark of his, for instance, to the effect that “even a week makes a great change in the foliage at this time of year,” which appeared, from the direction of his gaze, to have special reference to a Virginia creeper at the cemetery gate. This indication, small as it was, gave me a thrill of hope.

We walked on, talking commonplaces, until our guide said, pointing with his cane, “There it is—the white stone on the left. It is a verra fine piece of sculpture,” he added judicially, and, with that, set his lips with the resolution of one who has had his say and on no account will say more.

We ranged ourselves in front of the monument. Detective Wiggan observed that he, himself, was not a judge of sculpture. Mr. Marshall murmured something about this particular piece being quite “out of the common,” and Roberta sagely observed, “I suppose that’s why aunt went to Italy for it.” She looked at Mr. McGregor as she said it but that figure of repression did not flicker an eyelash.

I turned from him to the stone itself. It was indeed an uncommon thing, beautiful, distinctive. Delicate, fluted columns supported a graceful dome, under whose light shadow stood a sculptured form. Morelli, it seemed, must have been a notable artist, for the figure almost lived. It was a life-size statue of a draped woman, standing. Her shrouded head was bowed, the eyes covered by one raised arm. The other arm hung supine by her side, the beautiful, curved fingers partly closed. There was in the whole posture a wonderful suggestion of the abandon of grief. All this was apparent on the instant, and an instant was all that I devoted to its contemplation.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “you all know, more or less, why we are here. It is because I believe that before she died, Miss Anne Crawford concealed, or caused to be concealed, certain papers which may hold the true explanation of her death. This is the grave of the man she idolized and to whom, if my theory is correct, she dedicated a unique vengeance. The idea of concealing the record of that vengeance here is wild and bizarre, but, to a mind disordered as we know hers was, the wild and bizarre becomes the natural. I will welcome your help in examining this monument.”

“Right!” said Wiggan cheerfully. His manner implied, “And then I hope we’ll have no more nonsense.” He set to work at once. Mr. Marshall and Billy looked on helplessly enough. McGregor, to whom I directed a last despairing glance, was careful to be looking elsewhere. He even withdrew a few steps, taking Roberta with him.

“We must not be in the way, young lady,” was the only observation he made.

Then I, too, began my search. Wiggan, I saw at once, was the better searcher. He was an old hand. Together we went over the memorial from the top of its curving dome to its base in the close-clipped grass. We prodded and sounded and measured. We tested the slender columns, explored each tiniest crevice. No slightest sign of any hiding-place rewarded our efforts. Wiggan, I think, made sure of this long before I did. But I liked him for the fact that he did not hasten to proclaim failure.

I had reached the base of the great stone and my hope was almost dead. Under my lowered lids I glanced once more at my enigmatic Scot. He was looking at Roberta and Roberta, who has a distinct artistic bent, was absorbed in the beauty of the statue.



“Look how her shoulders sag!” she was saying in an awed voice. “I didn’t know that stone *could* sag. Who is she supposed to be, Mr. McGregor?”

“What her heathen name may be, if any, I do not know,” said McGregor, in his legal voice; “but in English you might call her ‘Sorrow.’ ”

Sorrow!

The grass on which I knelt seemed to sway under me. Once again I saw a hot, bright street, a man in a dusty smock and heard the words, “Within the hand of sorrow is the key.”

What a blind bat I had been!

Very cool now, I raised myself and dusted the grass from my trousers knees. I looked up. The down-flung hand of Sorrow was just within my reach. My own hand slipped into its gently curving fingers. Was there something there—a slight roughness, a tiny crevice? No, nothing. Yet, with the confidence of revelation upon me, I pressed and pressed again that smooth, cold palm.



*Slowly and almost without sound, the figure moved, turned gently upon its base and stopped. But where its feet had stood was now a cavity.*

Slowly and almost without sound, the figure moved, turned gently upon its base, and stopped. But where its feet had stood was now a shallow cavity. The sun shone brightly upon its contents—an ordinary postal packet, stamped, sealed and addressed. The address was that of John McGregor, Barrister and Solicitor.

There was a pregnant pause. Then Wiggan spoke.

“Unless you can assure us that this packet contains nothing which may in any way concern your client’s death, Mr. McGregor, we shall be compelled in common justice to break this seal.”

Mr. McGregor took snuff.

“I have nothing to say,” he remarked stolidly.

Wiggan lifted out the packet. I cut the string and removed the wrapper.

“The green book! The green book with the writing!” cried Roberta, dancing with excitement.

I handed the precious thing to Wiggan—and I hope my voice was steady. “I think this finishes your case, sergeant.”

His round eyes, more moonlike than ever, passed mournfully over our excited faces and slowly fell to the betraying volume in his hand. He sighed.

“With a woman, you never know. . . . I’ve found out,” said Detective Wiggan.

**W**hat follows is by way of anticlimax, I suppose. With the finding of the diary in the monument, the Crawford case was practically closed. Duly identified by Roberta, certified by experts to be in the handwriting of the deceased, and fully proved, on the admission of John McGregor, to have been placed in its strangely prepared hiding-place by the direct instructions of Miss Crawford herself, the diary, as a piece of direct evidence, met the most exigent demands. The cloud over Vinecroft passed on as swiftly as it had gathered.

As for the record itself—to a student of pathology or a lover of the morbid, the contents of that green book would greatly appeal, but for those who prefer sunlight and sanity its revelations had better remain unread. Sufficient to say that there was enough, and more than enough, to prove to the utmost, the patiently matured scheme by which, knowing that she must shortly die in any case, Anne Crawford had plotted to make her death her crowning vengeance upon the man she hated. There was evidence, too, though mostly by allusion (since earlier diaries had been destroyed) to suggest that our worst suspicions as to those other deaths were only too accurate. But, to complete this present record, it is necessary to give only one entry—the last.

## LAST ENTRY IN THE DIARY OF MISS ANNE CRAWFORD

*September 15.*

All goes well—excellently well! We quarreled last night. The boy has never been taught self-control. He was easily goaded, and let his temper flare. I heard the step of that white cat, Fanny, in the hall. Her evidence will help to hang him—a satisfying touch.

Have I neglected anything? I have thought of it so long—oh, so long! I have been very careful. I have been cool, unmoved. I have not dared to think how near I am to triumph. It might show so plainly in my face that even these fools might see it. . . .

I can think of nothing more. . . . The poison is where it will be found. . . . I dared not put it in a simpler place. . . . Better if he had purchased it himself, but the risk of a suggestion was too great. As it is they can never trace it. It was bought long ago, abroad. It has not degenerated, though—the pup died quickly.

Is there a weak link anywhere? His pride will make him bring the milk as usual. . . . He will prepare it himself. . . . The maid is out. . . . Yes, I have thought of everything.

The black feeling at the base of my brain is spreading. I know what that means . . . but I can hold it back now until the end. . . . Oh, how I long to scream in their sheeps' faces! to laugh and laugh again, to dangle my vengeance before their silly eyes, to see *his* heart break as Mark's was broken—

I must not!—only a little longer. . . . This book goes tomorrow and McGregor is sworn. . . .

Mark, beloved, is it enough? I lay my triumph at your feet.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

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

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Accusing Silence* by Isabel Ecclestone Mackay]