

# *Heliotrope*

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Mackay

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# HELIOTROPE

BY ISABEL ECCLESTONE MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "UP THE HILL AND OVER"

## CHAPTER I.

**I**t went hard with me not to remind Gregory that I had discouraged the taking up of the case in the first place. It wasn't our sort of case at all. I had said, "If we don't look out, Gregory, people will begin to call us private detectives". Then we had both laughed and I had given in, as I usually do when my senior partner insists.

Gregory does not like me to call him "my senior partner" because our standing in the firm of Gregory and Hubbard is supposed to be equal, but I believe that when any two men are associated one of them naturally takes the lead, and Gregory happens to be that one. I don't mind. My position as chief of staff is quite as necessary as his. Indeed, the whole idea of our partnership has been that two heads are better than one, especially when the heads are utterly different. No one person, save a superman perhaps, can combine minute and painstaking observation with that instinctive, almost inspirational, selection of the essential which is the essence of all really useful detective work. A partnership is necessary, and it seems that my head combines beautifully, however useless it may be on its own. Gregory is quick and far-seeing, a born reasoner and a fine logician. I am a looker-on who sees most of the game. From boyhood I have been conscious of a power of minute observation which has helped me in some ways and hindered me in others. As a newspaper man, for instance, I always saw too much. I never seemed to learn what not to see. The news editor wore out his vocabulary and his blue pencil in vain; and then one day an unexpurgated report slipped through, and I slipped out of newspaperdom for good and all!

It was just at this time that Gregory, too, suffered a reverse of fortune which gave him a fellow feeling for other misfits and resulted in our embarking upon our present partnership for the study of those problems which society for its own sake dares not leave unsolved.

So far it has worked well. Several nice little problems have been handled by us in a satisfactory manner. We do not often do ordinary police work; our province rather is to prevent these guardians of the law from being troubled with delicate matters which do not clamour for the official spotlight. We do not call ourselves detectives. We are, in fact, by way of being somewhat highbrow; affecting an exclusive air and writing ourselves "Criminologists"—a fine sounding word better suited to the ear of that society which we still continue, at intervals, to adorn.

But this case was different. It was a police case, very much so, a murder in fact. Not at all in our best style. I had not wanted to take it up, and now that I had returned from a preliminary investigation with a book full of notes and a head quite empty of ideas I felt cross and discouraged and very much like saying, "I told you so".

"The kind of thing we should not attempt," I said. "Murder—ugh, there is nothing logical about murder. Murder is an accident of the emotions. Anyone may commit a murder any time."

"You think so?" asked Gregory placidly. "Well, that leaves us with a wide field in which to operate anyway. And as for taking the case, we simply had to oblige Chief Ridley. So now let us get to work. Where are your notes?"

With praiseworthy restraint I produced my papers, and as my notes were still in shorthand, I began to translate freely for Gregory's benefit:

"The affair isn't over romantic," I grumbled. "The person whose taking-off we are to investigate is, or rather was, the most ordinary person. She was a Mrs. Agatha Simmons, living quietly at No. 3 Richly Road. A widow, age about fifty-five; character respectable; habit, retiring; hobby, cats; lived alone; means of livelihood, an annuity bought by herself about six years ago, *i.e.*, just before coming to live in Richly Road; no known relatives; previous history unknown; previous address unknown; is remembered to have said that she came here direct from London, but was not in the habit of receiving any English mail; had a current account in the bank; paid for everything by cheque, and never kept money in the house. The alarm was given by her milkman. Deceased was in the habit of getting milk twice a day, presumably for the cats; she kept ten cats; had no maid, and always answered the milkman's knock herself, or, if absent, left the ticket outside the door. Last night when the milkman called at half-past five he found the side door open, a very unusual thing, and no one answered his repeated knocks nor the cry of 'Milk'. Being in a hurry, for it was raining hard and beginning to sleet, he

entered the kitchen and looked around for some place to set the milk out of reach of the cats. In crossing the room to the cupboard, he observed that the door into the sitting-room was open and, glancing in, saw Mrs. Simmons sitting in her chair beside the table. The lights were not lit, but he could see her by the light of the fire in the open grate of the stove. He called 'Milk!' again, but "had a feeling" at once that there was something wrong and went in. He got the start of his life when he saw her face, dropped his milk-bottle and fled for the nearest policeman. He didn't touch her or disturb anything. When he and the policeman returned they examined her sufficiently to see that life was extinct. She had been shot. The milkman stayed in the room while the officer searched the house. No sign of anyone in the house; nothing upset; no trace of any struggle; no sign of any weapon; apparently nothing missing! The dead woman was leaning back in her big rocking-chair; her eyes half-open, staring straight in front of her. Her hands were tightly clenched and in them was some white article, and they did not know what it was.

"Policeman Saunders's story corroborates this, but adds nothing new except that he couldn't hear himself think for the noises 'them blasted cats' were making. They were shut up in a room off the kitchen, which appears to have been used as a sort of cattery. They were probably hungry and smelled the spilt milk, anyway, they got on our policeman's nerves and he had no further investigations, but rang up headquarters from the nearest telephone. There was no telephone in the house. Ridley came down at once and brought Dr. Jones with him.

"Doctor's evidence shows that deceased had been dead only a short time, not more than half an hour. Shot had been fired at close range and passed directly through the heart. Death had been instantaneous. Expression of fear and horror on face quite marked. It is Dr. Jones's opinion that deceased had known that murder was intended, but had been unable through fear to give any alarm.

"So much for the onside evidence. Now for what Ridley and I noticed for ourselves. The most striking thing seemed to be the apparent fact that the woman had died sitting in her accustomed chair, facing her murderer, yet there had been no alarm (that anyone heard), and certainly no struggle. The expression on the face seemed to me almost more of surprise than fear or horror.

"Another strange thing was the nature of the article clasped in the dead woman's hand. It was a baby's hand-made flannelette night-slip. I inspected this very carefully and came to the following conclusions: The slip was old,

but had been carefully kept; the material was of the cheapest; the hand-work on it was beautiful; it was a very small slip, seemed almost too small for a baby—”

“How do you know that?” interrupted Gregory.

“I don’t. It’s just an impression. We’ll have to get a woman’s opinion.”

“Right.”

Then I continued reading the note:

“The slip had been washed and ironed, evidently with great care. But it showed no signs of wear. That cheap stuff would show wear quickly. Another odd thing: on the table stood a small tin tea-caddy; the top was off and some of the contents had spilled or been spilled upon the tablecloth. But the contents were not tea. The caddy was half-full of twenty-five-cent pieces, each carefully done up separately in tissue paper, and each labelled with a date. The dates were irregular and ranged back through the past four years. Sometimes there would be three or four very close together. Sometimes there were quite long intervals between. (I have a list of the dates here). The latest date was only a few days old. There was no other mark of any kind on the coins. The paper in which the coins were wrapped was ordinary white tissue. There was nothing else upon the table, save the afternoon mail, consisting of two or three tradesmen’s accounts. She always paid by cheque. But on the floor was an envelope with the end torn open and the contents gone. The envelope was not a business one, nor was the writing that of a tradesman. Here is the envelope—see for yourself. It looks like the writing of an educated woman—the envelope is good style and quality. From the date, it was delivered with the other afternoon letters, but its contents have disappeared. Not a trace of them.”

“Anything else?”

“One thing more. As I was coming out I searched the front yard—it’s very small—and found this—it’s a slip of paper, apparently the address torn off the top of a letter. The address is ‘No. 3 Richly Road’, and the writing is that of Mrs. Simmons. Probability is she dropped it herself and that it has nothing to do with the case.”

“I don’t know. Why should she tear her own address off a letter and drop it in her front yard! But no use theorizing yet. Is that all?”

“Not another thing. There wasn’t so much as a pin out of place. No sign of any weapon. The only fingerprints were those of the dead woman herself on the chair-arm and on the table. The carpet yielded nothing. There was no

trace of ash in the fire. The fire, by the way, must have been built up shortly before the murder. The kettle had been set on top, presumably in preparation for a cup of tea. But our search was not exhaustive. Ridley had O'Toole with him, and I think O'Toole is about the best searcher that ever happened. We left him to go over everything microscopically, and he will report any find to us. He is quite safe to be trusted with the routine. But I fancy he won't find much. Everything looked so undisturbed and normal. It was as if someone had called in for a chat and a cup of tea and decided on murder instead. There are only three things which bear the slightest emphasis—A-chew! Great Scott, I've got a cold—and the three things are: the dated coins, the baby's slip and the look on the woman's face. If you can make anything out of them, you're welcome. I can't."

"That's the proper state of mind," grinned Gregory. "When discouraged, remember that you're not the whole show. To my mind those three things look distinctly promising, and you're wrong about there being nothing else. There is a very interesting something else which will be this-half-of-the-firm's contribution. But I shan't tell you what it is until your case is all in. What outside evidence did you get?"

"Surprisingly little. The house is a corner one, unfortunately, and the room in which the shot was fired does not face another house, but faces a strip of lawn and the side street. The woman who lives in the next-door house on Richly Road thinks that she heard a noise about five o'clock when she went into the kitchen to brisk up the fire for supper, but she thought it was a bursting auto tire and did not even look out of the window. None of the other neighbours saw or heard anything. They are busy people and know very little about the tenant of No. 3. She never made herself popular in the neighbourhood, and the houses being rented, the occupants change quite often. No one has anything very definite to say for or against Mrs. Simmons, but on the whole I think I detected traces of a vague dislike of her. One woman said she had disagreeable eyes, and that her cats gave her the creeps. She kept herself to herself, they say, but seemed to have some fashionable friends, for smartly dressed ladies have been seen to visit her at different times. In fact, nearly all her few visitors appear to have been prosperous people. But they have never been known to make very lengthy stays, nor to return. It is the opinion of Richly Road that Mrs. Simmons had been some sort of upper servant whose former employers continue to take an interest in her."

"Not very likely. Former employers do not display such touching loyalty, as a rule—and certainly not in quantities. If her visitors had been the same

people coming at intervals there might be something in it, but I gather that all these prosperous people were different?"

"Yes. I questioned rather closely upon that point."

"Besides, if her former home was in England—"

"She gave out that she came from England, but Richly Road doesn't believe it."

"Does Richly Road give any reason for its disbelief?"

"None whatever. But every woman I questioned said that although Mrs. Simmons spoke 'kind of English' she didn't believe that the deceased had ever been in England in her life."

"That's odd. Strange how these popular beliefs form themselves without a trace of evidence, and stranger still how often they turn out to be correct. It is just possible that the lady was not fond of her past and therefore removed it across the ocean for safe keeping. Had she no regular visitors at all?"

"There is only one person who seems to have been at all intimate at No. 3. She, too, is by way of being rather a mystery. Richly Road thinks that she is not a friend exactly but perhaps dependent on Mrs. Simmons. The description I got is that of a little wisp of a woman, age from thirty-five to forty-five. No one knows much about her, even her outside appearance seems to have left everyone unimpressed. Perhaps this is because she is very deaf and almost impossible to talk to. No one ever cared to find out where she came from or where she went. All I can discover is that she came on a westbound car down Carroll Street, alighting at the corner of Carroll and Richly Road, which is three blocks down from No. 3. Ridley at once sent out a man to interview the car conductors on the western lines, but not one of them has any memory of her. She was an indefinite sort of person and she did not come to see Mrs. Simmons often. So it would have been miraculous if they had remembered her."

"Nothing to go on there, then. But if she were a friend of the murdered woman the accounts in the papers may bring her forward. Did no one see anyone enter the house on the day of the murder?"

"None of the women. But Ridley set Macrae to round up the children. He has a light hand with kiddies and is a good man all round. Ridley left orders for him to bring whatever he found right here—shouldn't be surprised if he were in the outer office now. I thought I heard the door close."



“Let’s have him in at once, then,” said Gregory, ringing the bell, which was a sign to Miss Emsley, our stenographer, that we were ready for visitors.

Macrae, for I was right in my guess, and it was he whom Miss Emsley admitted, is a big red-cheeked Scot with broad shoulders and, when he is excited, an accent almost as broad. But long chaffing in the service has rendered his ordinary conversation quite intelligible. To-day his cheeks were redder than usual, and he led a little girl by the hand. This was evidently a ‘find’ and Macrae was uplifted.

“Mak’ yer boo to the gentlemen, Jessie,” said Macrae with the air of a fond father presenting his offspring.

The child giggled. She was an intelligent looking little thing of about seven, with bright eyes and an utter lack of shyness peculiar to those who have long known the world.

“Here’s a bit lassie who has something to tell,” declared her conductor triumphantly. “Noo, Jessie, if ye tell your tale nicely you’ll be getting a bit sweetie and a ride home forby.”

Jessie was quite willing and responded instantly. “It was a lady I saw,” she said, “a lady that went into old mother—I mean into Mrs. Simmons’s house.”

“When did you see the lady!” prompted Macrae proudly.

“Yesterday afternoon when I was home from school and I was playing down the street with my dolly in a little cart. I saw a pretty lady in a blue dress go into Mrs. Simmons’s.”

“You’re tellin’ it fine,” encouraged Macrae. “Are you sure, noo, that the leddy went into Mrs. Simmons? Which house would Mrs. Simmons be living in!”

“The corner house,” answered the child instantly.

“And did old Mrs. Simmons come and let her in at the door!”

The child shook her head vigorously. “No, the lady didn’t knock at the door. She just opened it and went right in.”

“Kind of as if she was an old friend, like,” suggested Macrae cleverly.

The child looked doubtful. “She didn’t know the number,” she said, after a moment’s thought, “for she was looking at all the numbers as she went along and she stopped at Mrs. Simmons’s gate while she looked at a piece of paper that she had in a shiny purse.”

“The address, forby!” declared Macrae. “You’re a clever lassie and you’ll get your sweetie. And when she went in after making sure that the hoose was right, was that all that you saw of her?”

“No. She came out again. She came running out and she ran down past me round the corner and she was saying ‘Oh! Oh!’ just like that”—the ‘clever lassie’ gave a good imitation of someone gasping in fear or pain.

Gregory grinned.

“Where did she go?”

“I dunno. Mother called me in to get my face washed for tea.”

“Quite right too. My mother does the same by me. And what did you think when you saw the leddy run out so quick?”

The child’s eyes widened.

“I thought old Mother—Mrs. Simmons was a witch——”

“And you went in and told your mother all about it?” interrupted Gregory.

But apparently Jessie had not done that. Why, was not apparent. Probably her mother in the stress of tea-getting was not interested in witches.

“Well,” said Gregory, “can you tell us how long the lady was in the house?”

Jessie couldn’t tell us this either. Even Macrae could make nothing of her. “Was it a long time, think ye?” he asked ingratiatingly.

Jessie thought not.

“Wad it be a short time then?”

Jessie thought not so very short.

Then I had a bright idea.

“What were you doing while she was in?” I asked casually.

“I walked my dolly down to the corner and back.”

“Great head!” said Macrae without a trace of accent. “That would take from five to seven minutes, or thereabouts. Noo, Jessie, what else did you notice? Are you sure the leddy’s dress was blue?”

The child was quite sure of this.

“Did she have a parcel?”

Jessie had not seen a parcel, but the lady had a blue handbag and a shiny purse that she took the piece of paper out of. Had the lady spoken to her or smiled at her? No, the lady had not noticed her at all. She was a young lady. Her hair was black and she was pretty. Would she know her again? Jessie was very vague upon this point, but thought she might. She didn't know just what time her mother had called her in, but it was just beginning to rain—a few drops had fallen on her doll.

When Macrae and his charge had departed, Gregory ran his hand through his hair.

“I wish to goodness we could get the exact time when that woman next door heard what she thought was a bursting tire,” he said. “It would help a lot. I have little doubt in my own mind that it was the shot she heard. You are sure you did your best with her?”

“Yes. I'll read you my notes, exactly as they were taken in question and answer. Here they are:

“You thought you heard a tire burst? What time was that?”

“I don't know.”

“About what time was it?”

“About time to brisk up the fire for supper.”

“What time do you have supper?”

“As near six as possible.”

“About what time do you brisk up the kitchen fire?”

“It depends on what we have for tea.”

“What did you have for tea on Monday night?”

“Stew of the Sunday joint.”

“How long does stew take to cook?”

“It depends how the meat is——”

“Now, Mrs. Moore, please try to tell me what I want to know. Try to remember just what you did that afternoon and at that time?”

“I didn't look at the clock, except at half-past four. At that time I put the stew on the edge of the stove and went back into the sitting-room to sew. I was sewing at the machine all afternoon. After a little while, I don't know

what time it was, but it must have been about five, maybe five or five or ten minutes to five, or five or ten minutes after (I really can't say). I went to brisk up the fire and I heard the noise like an auto tire bursting."

"Had it begun to rain then?"

"I don't know. It was getting very dark. The storm had been coming up for some time and I had pulled down the blind in the sitting-room and turned on the light to see to sew. All I know is that it was raining quite hard when I got through what I had to do in the kitchen and went back to my work. It must have been about half-past five then."

"That's positively the nearest she could get to it." I told Gregory, "I believe she did the best she could."

"Then all we know is that the shot was fired between ten minutes to five and ten after. The rain began about five minutes after five. When the girl in blue came out of the house the first drops were just about to fall, according to Jessie's evidence. So the girl in blue was in the house during part of that twenty minutes. But that proves very little. Twenty minutes is a big latitude \_\_\_\_\_"

"But why did she go in without knocking and come out running?"

"And why did she continue to run so swiftly and so blindly that she ran into a young man and nearly knocked him off his feet——"

"Whatever are you talking about?" I asked in pure amazement.

Gregory grinned (he has an annoying grin) and handed me a small newspaper clipping which he took from his pocket with the greatest care. "Look at that," he said. "My contribution to the knowledge of the firm."

The clipping was from the personal column of my old paper *The Argus* and read as follows:

"If the lady who stumbled against an awkward young man on Stanley Street last evening will phone S. 1702 or call at 17 Wilson Arcade he will be pleased to return her lost property."

"What's the answer?" I asked thoroughly puzzled.

"Perhaps nothing, and perhaps a great deal. Can't you see! I clipped that out of the personal column this morning. I always clip out unusual personals. It's a useful habit. Besides the name 'Stanley Street' struck me. Do you know where Stanley Street runs?"

“Why—by Jove, yes, it is the street which crosses Richly Road at the corner next to No. 3. It’s the—”

“It’s the street that the girl in blue ran down when she came out of the Simmons house. Now I ask you—is it likely that there would be two young ladies running madly down Stanley Street and bunting into polite young men with such force that property of value is dropped during the impact? What do you think?”

I sprang up and reached for my coat.

“I think we can’t get to 17 Wilson Arcade too soon,” I said. I had quite forgotten that I did not favour the taking up of this case.

“Of course there is nothing *romantic* about this murder,” began Gregory slyly, “but——”

“Oh have a heart!” I adjured him, and we set out together with old scores forgotten.

## CHAPTER II.

**W**ilson Arcade, as everyone knows, is a hive of architects, and No. 17 is one of the cells. Its chipped glass door bore the name "T. Maddison, Architect," in very new gilding across its surface. T. Maddison was in, and delighted to see us.

He thought we were clients.

When he found we were not he tried to be delighted still, but when he had read our card and heard our business he was just plain mad. Most people, we find, are affected in that way. If all the world loves a lover, all the world fights shy of a—criminologist. And in this case there was a lady to be thought of.

T. Maddison, I am sure, was thinking of her while he icily prepared to baffle all our polite inquiries. Not a word would he tell us about the affair of the adventure. He had nothing to say about the lady, or about the lost property or about anything which might conceivably help us in our business. He was a most obstinate young man, and chuck full of chivalry. We couldn't help liking him.

But finally Gregory lost patience.

"Very well," he said calmly, "we cannot force you to speak. All that we can do is to turn this matter over to the regular police. You will be watched, your office, your home will be watched; your phone calls will be checked. If the lady has not already claimed her lost property—thanks, I see by your expression that she has not—she is certain to do so. You do not know where she lives or who she is, so you can't warn her. And when she does come she will walk right into the arms of the police. Not at all a pleasant thing for a young girl."

This gave our chivalrous architect pause. He settled his collar uneasily.

"By jove, what am I to do?" he pleaded. "Don't you see what a deuce of a fix I'm in?"

We did see it and were properly sympathetic. But we were very glad we had come right along, for it was plain that we had come in time. Though only just, for while T. Maddison was still fooling with his collar, the 'phone rang, and when he answered, the blindest bat could have told by his changing expression that it was the expected call which had come.

The one side of a telephone conversation is not very illuminating. All that our architect said was, “Yes”, and then “Yes”, “That’s all”, and then “Yes, certainly”, “Not at all”. “Much pleased to have the opportunity”.

He hung up the receiver gloomily.

“Well,” he said, “that was the girl. I dare say you gentlemen guessed. And a nice kind of beast I feel getting her into a peck of trouble like this.”

“You are more likely to keep her out of trouble if you are sensible,” declared Gregory. “Are you to return her property or is she coming here for it?”

“She is coming here. And say, you fellows have got to clear out. You’ve simply got to. She’ll think that it’s a trap. She’ll think that I——.”

“No, she won’t. But if you really insist, we will clear out. Only I’m warning you that it would be a foolish thing to do. If we stay and explain the matter to her, she will have a chance to do a little explaining, too, and probably everything will be put right inside five minutes. It is quite possible that the lady is not the lady-in-blue at all. In which case all the worry is over. If she is the blue lady she is certain to be found by the police—it’s an absolute necessity. She will be wanted as a witness. I for one have no idea that she will be wanted in any other capacity. And I give you my word that as long as I keep that point of view it will be the first care of myself and my partner to keep the lady from any annoyance. But if it is left to the regular police—well, you know.”

The young architect gave in. “I’ll tell you what I know,” he said. “I was walking down Stanley Street last night at about five o’clock. It was getting very dark, with a big storm coming. It was just beginning to spit rain and I was putting up my umbrella when a young girl came running down the street and collided with me—knocking the umbrella out of my hand. She was breathless and seemed terrified. I thought it was the storm. Some women hate storms. I wanted to reassure her, to offer the umbrella to—to do anything I could, but she didn’t give me the ghost of a chance—just kind of sobbed out, ‘Sorry, so stupid of me’, and rushed on. By the time I had recaptured the umbrella she was almost out of sight. It wasn’t until I reached home that I found a small bag of silver mesh which had caught on the button of one of my raincoat pockets.”

“The shiny purse!” exclaimed Gregory, nodding at me.

“There was no card or address in it, just some money and three rings done up in tissue paper. The rings are very valuable. Hence the

advertisement.”

“Rings,” said Gregory, thoughtfully. “Were the settings loose or anything? Did they need cleaning?”

“No, they are in perfect condition.”

“And the lady’s dress!”

“It might have been blue. I’m not sure.”

“But your impression is?”

“That it was blue.”

“Well, now, I think,” said Gregory, “that we ought to have this whole thing out in the open. With your permission we will tell the young lady all about it and how we come to be here. If she is a sensible girl she will help us instead of hindering.”

Personally, I think this was rather risky, but Gregory has a way with him which does wonders with nervous people. By the time the girl’s knock came, he had T. Maddison quite smoothed. Still, I kept thinking—what if the girl really were——.

After I saw her I didn’t think that any more. She was the kind of girl you couldn’t think evil of—not even if you are a criminologist. The Jessie child had been right. She was pretty. Her hair was black—soft black made especially to set off her creamy face and to match her candid dark eyes. She was about twenty, I should say, and the last thing in style, from her high-laced boots to the point of the flame-tipped quill in her close little brown hat. She was not wearing blue to-day. T. Maddison was plainly overpowered. He stuttered. He blushed, but finally he managed to return to her the silver mesh bag and to utter incoherent apologies for not knowing by instinct her name and address, so that he need not have had recourse to a newspaper.

The girl smiled, thanked him, opened the bag eagerly and looked inside. Then she grew very pale. “Is that all?” she asked in a kind of helpless way.

“The rings are there,” he assured her eagerly. “Three of them.”

“It was not the rings,” she faltered.

“It was an address, wasn’t it?” asked Gregory kindly. “I think I can assist you. Is this it?”



The girl turned to him. Her look expressed blank surprise. But her face turned a little paler.

“Did—did this gentleman have my purse?” she asked T. Maddison slowly.

“No, he did not,” spluttered that irate knight. “I assure you it has never been out of my hands.”

“This address was not found in the purse,” explained Gregory blandly. “It was picked up in the garden of No. 3 Richly Road—where you dropped it.”

The girl, still controlled, but very white, took the slip of paper from his hand and examined it. As she did so a certain tension seemed to relax. “This is not the paper which I lost,” she said firmly, handing it back.

“Excuse me, I think it is, although it may not be the one you are looking for.” Gregory’s tone was still kind, but had a hint of sternness in it.

“I do not know what you mean.”

“I am going to tell you. But before I begin, won’t you sit down? And please do not put yourself on the defensive. We do not suspect you of harming the old lady who lived in the house whose address is written here. All we want to know is, why you went there. Whether you knew her personally and what happened during your visit?”

“I didn’t——.”

“Come,” interrupted Gregory briefly, and with an assurance which could not but convince, “we know all about the visit. You were seen going in and coming out. We want to keep it out of the hands of the police, if we can.”

For a moment she glanced at the young architect, who was looking the picture of contrition, and then back to Gregory’s firm yet kindly face. She realized further evasion to be useless and undignified. The colour rushed into her face and ebbed away again.

“She was dead when I got there,” she said briefly.

We all started. At least T. Maddison and I did. Gregory nodded. “I thought it might be that,” he said. “But—you stayed a few moments—didn’t you?”

The girl looked ghastly, but she held herself well.

“Yes, I did. I was looking for something. I made myself stay until I found it. Then I lost control of myself. I ran out. I was horribly frightened—there was a strange noise——.”

“Cats,” said Gregory.

“Yes. I saw about the cats in the morning paper. But then I didn’t know. It terrified me.”

“Why,” said Gregory, “did you not knock at the door?”

“I thought she would not let me in.”

“She knew you then?”

“I think she knew me by sight.”

“You knew her?”

“No.”

“Hadn’t we better have the story?”

“You can’t have the story,” said the girl firmly.

“Well then, part of it. You see it is necessary.”

She was quiet for a moment, obviously thinking hard. Then, “I’ll tell you what I can,” she agreed. “This woman was a bad woman. She was a blackmailer. She was threatening someone—a friend of mine. This person had done nothing wrong. The woman’s story was a lie, but lies can do a lot of harm. My friend was ill. I got the address from the letter she—that woman—sent and went myself to do what I could to stop her wickedness.”

“And you took with you the three rings and some other jewellery, which you carried in your handbag—to bribe her with, if necessary?”

“Yes. I thought if I could see her and talk to her I might do something. She had said in her letter to my—friend, that there would be no further negotiations. That was why I did not knock. I was determined to see her. I went right in. The door into the hall was open and I could see the light of the fire. I went into that room—I saw her. She was dead. I was terribly shocked, but she was so wicked I didn’t care. After a moment I was glad she was dead. I stood for a moment wondering what to do. Then I saw some letters lying on the table and I remembered there ought to be a letter there somewhere written by my friend. I wanted to get it. I made myself go over to the table. I looked through the mail, and found the letter. I took it out of the envelope to see if it was the right one, and just then that—that cat—oh it

was horrible! I just turned and ran. I must have dropped the envelope then, but I did not miss it until I got home. I hoped it was in the silver bag—because it was in my friend’s writing. That is all that I can tell you.”

She was so obviously determined to say no more that Gregory did not attempt to press her. Instead, he rose and walked to the window. “Dear me!” he exclaimed after a moment’s keen survey of the street below, “dear me, this is most unfortunate.”

“What?” I asked.

The girl echoed the question in a startled tone. She had risen and was moving toward the door.

“Don’t go yet,” recommended Gregory gravely. “I am afraid we have underestimated the quickness of the police in this affair. I think I see the red head of Macrae——.”

“The police!” cried the girl, with a little catch in her voice.

T. Maddison doubled a muscular arm and made a move toward Gregory. “You infernal——” he began, but Gregory smiled at him blandly.

“None of that! If Macrae is there it is none of my doing. But Miss—the young lady—had better remain here until I make sure.”

He was gone before anyone could expostulate further. The girl sat down again, her lips pressed tightly together to keep them steady, I think.

We waited. Gregory’s “making sure” took a little time, but when he returned he was smiling. “A false alarm,” he told us. “Evidently other people besides Macrae have red hair,” he observed.

“May I go now?” asked the girl in a tired voice.

“Yes, any time. But I should like to ask you some questions first.”

“I cannot answer.”

“That’s as you see fit. But let me tell you a few things anyway. Now please! You make me feel very brutal when you look like that. And all I want to do, Miss Hampden, is to help you. You see I know your name. You are Miss Enid Hampden, daughter of John P. Hampden, owner of the Hampden Mills.”

“I do not deny it.”

“Why should you? And why need you make a secret of the fact that the ‘friend’ you mention in your story is Alice Hampden, your mother?”

The girl said nothing to this, but her hands locked themselves tightly in her lap. Gregory went on as if she had spoken.

“You see it is always foolish to complicate mystery with mystery in an affair like this. I like to straighten things out as I go along. For your own sake as well as mine, I must have your position clearly defined. You did not care to speak, so I was compelled to trace your telephone call and to make a few casual inquiries. Your mother is ill. I am right, am I not, in assuming that it is her you have been protecting?”

Gregory has a very pleasant voice and a manner which, quite apart from what he says, has a remarkable effect upon nervous people. Miss Hampden, who had looked like marble a moment ago, suddenly melted, perilously near tears. Her lip quivered and her eyes swam. She was really exceedingly pretty, and I don't wonder that T. Maddison wanted to shoot us both.

“Yes—it is mother,” admitted the girl. “I—it would kill her to be mixed up in a scandal like this.”

“Well, we must keep her out of it. I do not want to injure an innocent lady any more than you do. But you will have to tell me the whole story.”

Again the famous manner carried conviction. It was fortunate for little Miss Hampden that Gregory was really what he appeared to be.

“I suppose I must,” she said bravely.

“It is a sad little story, but not disgraceful. When my mother was very young she and my father fell in love, but they couldn't acknowledge it and be married publicly, because he was too poor to support her, and she was always so delicate. They decided to wait, but—well, they loved each other very much. My father was certain of success; my mother knew that he would claim her as soon as ever he could, and—and she didn't quite realize—anyway no one could have foretold the disaster which followed. My father was badly hurt in a railway wreck out west. He was ill for a long time, and mother did not know where he was. She was very frightened and alone. I do not need to give you any of the details, but after I was born there was a time when mother paid for me to be taken care of by a woman who looked after little babies—who—whose parents couldn't acknowledge them. The—Mrs. Simmons was the woman——.”

“A baby farmer, by Jove!”

“Yes, I suppose so. Anyway, she was a bad woman, but mother didn't know, and it wasn't long before things came right again, for father got better and returned, and the deal he had been putting through in the west was a

success, so he came to her at once and they went away, paying the woman, and taking me with them. At least," one big tear overflowed from the girl's wet eyes, "they thought they took me with them. Don't you see? Then, after all these years, the woman wrote to mother and told her that I was not her baby at all. Her real baby, she said, had died and she had not told her because of the regular pay. Another child had been substituted. But she promised that if mother gave her a large sum of money she would keep the truth from my father and from me, but if she did not pay she would see that everyone knew—wasn't it wicked? Wasn't it desperately *wicked*?"

"I cannot say that my respect for the late Mrs. Simmons increases!" said Gregory grimly. "What a fiendish trick!"

"Mother hasn't had a happy moment since. She says she is sure, quite sure, that the woman lied—but—there is the horrible doubt. She says she remembers seeing a little dead baby which the woman showed her who was about my size and dark like me. And she was so terrified of father or me knowing. The woman said she would write to father if mother did not pay the money. Father is very fond of me and this terrible thing would quite ruin his happiness. Mother didn't intend me to know, either, but she was so ill. I found the letter and made her tell me the rest. I went to the house with my jewels just on the chance of finding out the real truth. I didn't know what I should do—plead or bribe or threaten or all together—and you know what happened. We are safe from any scandal now unless my name is dragged into the murder case and father is safe—but for mother and me"—the girl broke down and cried in earnest.

"Oh come," cheered Gregory. "It is almost certain that there is not a particle of truth in her statement. It has blackmail on the face of it. Wouldn't a mother know her own baby?"

"She might not if she had not been able to see it for two months. Wee babies are so much alike and two months makes such a difference. And how would anyone suspect a thing like that?"

"But the resemblance. Do you not resemble your mother—or your father?"

"It is strange, but I don't—not enough to serve as evidence. Mother thinks I look like her grandmother. There is a miniature and there is a resemblance—but not at all a striking one. Mother herself is fair and father is dark, but not really like me."

“Well, that is no evidence either way. Plenty of children do not look at all like their immediate ancestors.”

The girl nodded. “Yes,” she agreed in a small voice.

“Don’t let it trouble you,” said Gregory. “And remember, when this case is cleared up, other things may be cleared up too. You have given me most valuable information. Sit tight and my partner and I will do our best to bring you good news. But do not wear a blue hat or a blue dress or carry a blue handbag for some time to come. Now before you go try to think of anything, anything at all which you noticed while you were in that house—it need not be facts, only, impressions, too, are valuable.”

The girl passed her hand over her eyes. “I—I can’t think,” she faltered. It was plain that she was tired out.

“Well, don’t try, then,” said Gregory kindly. “But when you feel more like yourself, if there is anything, however trivial, ring me up and let me know—a-chew! Hubbard, I am getting that confounded cold of yours!”

Miss Hampden thanked us quietly and went out, escorted to the elevator by T. Maddison.

“Did you really think you saw Macrae in the street?” I asked, the moment we were alone.

“No. I knew it wasn’t he. But I had to get away, and to keep her here while I made a few necessary inquiries—just to induce her to go on with her story. But Macrae might very well have been there just the same. He is a smart fellow, and is almost sure to connect that personal sooner or later with a possible lady-in-blue. When he does he’ll come straight here.”

“Then we shan’t be able to keep Miss Hampden out of it after all.”

“We can try. I have thought of a plan. Let us provide a substitute. Someone who cannot in any way be remotely connected with No. 3 Richly Road and whose whole walk and conversation is open to inspection. Miss Price would do. We’ll tell young Maddison to refer all inquiries to her as the lady who bumped into him and dropped her purse. We’ll provide her with the necessary details of the encounter, and with a silver purse to show as evidence of returned property. She is quite clever enough to carry it through, barring accidents, so that trail need not lead to Enid Hampden at all.”

Young Madison was delighted with this plan, and it was not necessary to ask him to be discreet, as he happened to be a person of quite normal

intelligence, as evidenced by the question, "But can't they trace her by the 'phone call, as you did?"

"They do not know, as I did, that she 'phoned. Say merely that she called for her bag and took it away. Then give them the address—Miss Price's address—and the trick is done. Be casual and quite open with them."

Maddison grinned. "I will that."

We walked back to the office in deep thought.

"Well," I said, when we were alone, "the puzzle begins to shape a little. One piece has fallen into place, at any rate."

"You mean the baby's night-slip?"

"Yes, a former baby farmer—a baby's garment—they hang together. Also, we know now that the woman was a bad one. Instead of narrowing, the field widens. Any one of the men or women she blackmailed may have taken the short way out. We know that she had visitors upon other days—why not upon this day? The fact of the child's not seeing anyone go in save the girl in blue is nothing. Other people passed along the street and may have slipped in when the child was not noticing. May have been in the house all afternoon, or more likely yet, the murderer may not have passed the child at all, but may have entered from Stanley Street by the side door. It is a quiet street and it was getting dark."

"It looks as if our most promising clue so far were the baby slip. Did you tell Ridley to send it around?"

"Yes, and the box with the coins. I expect they are here now. I'll ring and ask Miss Emsley if a parcel came and will let her see what she can make of the slip."

Gregory has a great belief in women's intuition. He is fond of saying that if a woman could be found with sufficient nerve she would make the ideal detective. It was natural, then, that he often sought the help of women in cases where the masculine mind seemed to lose itself, and our new typist, Miss Emsley, had already proved herself to be a young person of alert and capable mind.

Before we had time to call her, however, Macrae's well known knock interrupted us and that canny Scot breezed in with fire in his eye.

"Here's to the mon who said that genius is just takin' pains," said he triumphantly. "Every bit of anything in yon house gone over with a

microscope by that million-eyed Irishman O'Toole, and at long last we've got it."

"Got what?"

"The deil by the tail. Look you!" He spread before us a single sheet of writing paper, written in rather thick black ink with a pen that spluttered.

"A pairfectly graun clue!" said the Scot fervently, "fine, fine!"

Gregory and I bent over the paper and read:

"'You are a wicked, wicked woman. I haven't got the money and I can't get it. But I tell you this, if you tell my husband and spoil everything, I'll kill myself, but I'll kill you first, and you had better believe it, for I don't want to live, if he knows.'"

"This is something new," said Gregory slowly. "For, of course, this is not the letter missing from the empty envelope found upon the floor, paper, ink, writing, everything are different."

"You're no sae blate," said Macrae admiringly. "I saw that mysel' and forby this letter has an envelope of its own—here it is."

There was no doubt about the two matching. The envelope was exactly like the paper, cheap and ordinary. The writing and ink were identical. It was addressed to Mrs. Simmons, and the stamp showed that it had been posted at the Grand Central station.

"Where did O'Toole find it, Mac?"

"In the bottom of the coal scuttle."

"Anything else there?"

"Just torn up bills and circulars. It looked as if the old leddy used it for a waste-paper basket."

"Any other letters anywhere?"

"No, and that's a queer thing. Bills and receipts and documents of various sorts, but not a scrap of correspondence, and her postie says she got her fair share of letters, too."

"Perhaps she burned them."

"D'ye think it likely?"



“No, I don’t. We’ve got enough to suspect her as a blackmailer and blackmailers must have ammunition. There are other letters somewhere—or the letters have been stolen.”

“You can take the word of a Macrae that there’s nae letter in the hoose.”

Knowing something of the thoroughness of O’Toole’s methods of search, we nodded our agreement.

“We found a hidie hole, though,” Macrae told us modestly. “It was nicely hid in the seat of the chair she sat in. But it was bare as your very hand.”

“Was the opening on the upper or the lower surface?”

“You could get at it both ways, from down below or from above, under the cushion.”

“Any finger prints?”

“Not a print. And nae sign o’ any tamperin’.”

“Either she took them out herself then, or they were taken out by someone who knew where they were and how to get them. Someone who wore gloves.”

“I had come to that conclusion mysel’. But it’s the letter, mon, what do you make o’ the letter?”

“Not very much. It is a woman’s writing,—public school writing—the writing of one who does not write often and who has never developed a style of her own. The writer had little to do with letters, literally or figuratively—see there is no punctuation, and ‘husband’ is spelled with a ‘t’. Hurry might partly account for the lack of punctuation, but with a person accustomed to writing, punctuation is instinctive. The paper and envelopes are probably part of a ‘box’—and not a fresh box either—see, it has slightly yellowed at the edges, as cheap paper will. The postmark may mean one of two things. The writer may live in the city and may have chosen her posting place to hide traces, or she may live in one of the nearby villages or towns and posted it while up for a day’s shopping trip to the city. What do you think, Hubbard?”

“I should be inclined to favour the latter. It was certainly written in a big hurry and under stress. I doubt if the writer would ever think of the possibility of tracing by means of a postmark. She would just naturally run and post it in the nearest letter-box.”

“I think I agree with you. Let’s get the date.”

This, unfortunately, we found impossible. The stamped dates were blurred beyond recovery.

“Go back,” said Gregory, “and piece together some of the torn up bills and circulars. If they were all of one date it is probable that the date of this letter is the same. She may have thrown just one day’s mail into the scuttle.”

Macrae looked terribly crestfallen. “I might have thocht o’ that,” he murmured as he departed.

Gregory picked up the letter again and studied it intently, only to throw it aside with an unsatisfied air.

“Somehow I doubt if it’s half as important as it looks,” he said. “It is an hysterical effusion. People who threaten murder and suicide—on paper—seldom commit either. The dead woman evidently agreed with me, since she disregarded the threat sufficiently to throw it into the coal scuttle. All the same, the person who wrote it must have spent some bad half hours since the murder. Let’s have Miss Emsley in now and get her opinion about the baby slip.”

But we were not destined to hear what Miss Emsley had to say that day, for just as I bent forward to touch the bell, the ’phone rang, and Gregory announced Miss Hampden, on the wire.

“Better cut in with the other receiver,” he told me, “and make notes of what she has to say. After all, although she doesn’t know much, she was the nearest to the actual crime of any witness we have found yet.”

“I hope you won’t think I’m silly,” the girl’s voice was saying, as I cut in, “but you asked me to try to remember everything. Do you mean impressions, too, and not just what I actually saw or heard?”

“Yes, Miss Hampden. Impressions, if they were really impressions received at the time, are quite as valuable as facts.”

“Well, then, when I first went into that room, I had quite a distinct impression that there was someone there. That was why I couldn’t believe she was—wasn’t alive. Do you understand? It didn’t feel like an empty room. Even when I knew she was certainly dead, the feeling of someone there did not go. That was partly what frightened me, I think.”

“Yes, I understand. But are you quite sure that there was nothing tangible to suggest that feeling. No sound, no movement?”

The voice over the 'phone was silent for a moment and then "no," it went on, "there was nothing. Only that strange noise that made me drop the envelope—that horrid cat!"

"Any other impressions?"

"Yes. I remember as I went in—before I saw what had happened—that the room smelled sweet; of flowers, I think. Were there any flowers in the room?"

"No. There were no flowers."

"Well, I can't account for it, but I certainly thought there were flowers somewhere. I forgot all about my first impressions after I saw—her. But now that I am not so nervous, I can think back and remember, I clearly remember thinking that the room was warm and that the flowers were very sweet, and that if she liked flowers, she might not be so terribly bad. That is all and I know it sounds silly and hardly worth mentioning."

"Not a bit of it. Thank you very much. And don't worry. Things are going to come our way."

He rang off and we looked at each other.

"Sensible girl that!" announced Gregory. "Not afraid of being laughed at."

"Still, it was rather a silly fancy, wasn't it? There were certainly no flowers. And not a trace of perfume. Although," as a certain fact struck me, "I'll admit that I could not have smelled it if there had been. I haven't smelled a thing since I took this confounded cold!"

Gregory grinned, "I'd trust Miss Hampden's nose in preference to yours anyway," he declared. "If she thought she smelled flowers, depend upon it, the scent of flowers was there. And if she thought there was someone in the room—at least we must not forget that her entrance must have taken place shortly after the woman's death. For all we know she may have been very near death herself."

"You mean," I said, a little startled, "that the murderer may still have been in the room?"

"Or the next room, or the hall. But it's only a possibility. Her sense of human presence may be simply attributable to the fact that its occupant was so lately dead."

“More than likely, in my opinion,” I said dryly, whereupon we entered upon a psychological dispute which lasted until dinner time.

### CHAPTER III.

**I**t was not until the next morning that we found the opportunity to carry out Gregory's idea of showing the baby slip to Miss Emsley. We told her nothing of its history and merely asked her to use her eyes.

The girl was obviously interested. She took up the little dress tenderly, in the way nice women always touch baby things, and examined it in silence. When she spoke I was modestly pleased that her conclusions came so near my own.

"Do you want me to tell you just what I think?" she asked. "Or must I tell you why I think it?"

"Both, if possible. But what you think, anyway, if only *because*."

She smiled. "It is not new. It has been laid away in a box or drawer for years. It has been washed and ironed but not often. The baby it was made for could not have worn it long. It is made of cheap flannelette, but it is stitched as beautifully as if it were of the finest cambric. Look at these tiny stitches; every one is put in by hand by someone who loved to do it and who knew how also. I should say it was made by the mother. No one would pay to have such fine work put on cheap material and no one but a mother would think the doing of it worth while. It has been a work of love. The only reason it is not made of the finest fabric must have been poverty. A poor mother, then, made and kept it after—after it wasn't needed any more. I think, too, it must have been made for a first baby—the mother didn't know how babies grow—see it is so tiny!"

I declare there were tears in the girl's eyes!

"You reason very well," said Gregory thoughtfully. "Is that all?"

"Yes—except that the dress is faintly scented."

"Scented! with what?"

Miss Emsley sniffed delicately. "Heliotrope, I think."

"Oh, dash this cold!" I groaned. "However did I come to miss that?"

Gregory paid no attention to my lamentations. His keen eye had brightened. He called the girl back as she was leaving the room and handed her the letter and envelope brought us the afternoon before by Macrae.

“Take this away, quite away, from the dress,” he ordered, “and see if there is any trace of the same odour upon it?”

The girl did as directed, and her verdict was “no”.

Gregory then gave her the empty envelope dropped by Miss Hampden with the same result. Then he handed the box containing the paper-wrapped coins, and to our surprise she replied instantly:

“Yes, it is here. It is the same perfume. I smell it, quite plainly.”

Gregory jumped up. “By Jove!” he exclaimed. “Oh, dash all people without noses! We might have missed this if it had not been for a woman. Now, Miss Emsley, I want you to do something for me. Take this card, which will admit you, and take a taxi down to No. 3 Richly Road, and go through the house, especially the drawers and cupboards, and see if you can tell us whether Mrs. Simmons used heliotrope perfume—and hurry up.”

The girl, delighted to be of use, did hurry up, but when she returned she looked a trifle crestfallen. There was no trace of perfume, heliotrope or otherwise, at No. 3 Richly Road.

Gregory was plainly delighted. “Glorious!” he declared. As for me I felt so chagrined at having missed so obvious a clue that I said nothing at all.

“Now,” began Gregory, “we have something which to the meanest intelligence—”

But he got no further, for the office-boy, entering, announced Mr. Carlton Smith to see Mr. Hubbard. Miss Emsley returned to her typing, and Mr. Carlton Smith came in. He was a man whom I knew very slightly, a rather heavy type, somewhat pompous and old-fashioned. When I introduced Gregory, he looked embarrassed and intimated somewhat clumsily that he wished to see me privately.

“But if it is a matter in which you wish the firm to help you,” I told him, “Gregory is quite as necessary as I am, more so, in fact. But if it is anything else—”

“No, no, that is—an—it is in a sense a professional matter. But confidential, very.”

I intimated that our clients’ affairs were always held in strict confidence.

“If the police get hold of it, you know,” explained Carlton Smith, “it would be deuced awkward. But my wife is worried and she wants me to get your opinion. It’s about a girl—a maid my wife employed in whom she took

a great interest—a rather superior type. Two years ago this girl left us to be married. She did well, married the foreman of one of the big fruit farms near here. Well, this girl came to my wife last Saturday morning in great trouble. Her story is this: When she was a very young girl—several years before she came to us—she had been unfortunate. There was, in fact, a child. The child was placed with a woman to look after, and Jennie (that's the girl's name) went to work to support it. She really is a rather fine girl. Not at all the type you would expect. Well, the child died. Jennie buried all that part of her life and began over. She was clever and intelligent and has been very happy and respected in her married life. But—she didn't tell her husband! She said she just made up her mind that she had paid for her folly and had a right to a chance of happiness. Now, in some way this woman learned of Jennie's prosperity and attempted blackmail. The girl had sense enough to see that if she once paid money there was an end to her peace. She came and told my wife the whole story, but not before she had written a letter to the woman—a letter written in the white heat of fear and anger, threatening to kill herself and the blackmailer, too, if her husband were told—”

“I think we have the letter here,” said Gregory casually.

“Great Scott! Do the police know?”

“They have seen the letter.”

“Well, I'm sorry for the girl. Of course, she didn't kill the woman. When she heard of the death, she remembered the threat in her letter and came to my wife again this morning in a great way, frightened to death, naturally. For, as ill luck will have it, she was in town all the afternoon of the murder.”

“She does not live in town, then?”

“No. But the fruit farm of which her husband is foreman is near Glenvale, just an hour's run out from here. She comes in often to shop.”

“That would account for the postmark of Central station. But surely the girl is safe enough? The time of the murder is pretty well substantiated. Where was she between four and six on Monday afternoon?”

“Search me!” said Carlton Smith helplessly. “She says she doesn't know. Saturday when she came in to see my wife she was far too upset to do her usual shopping, so she came in again on Monday to do it. Had lunch with a friend, but left her about two o'clock and spent the rest of the afternoon getting through her shopping list. How women spend so much time in these stores beats me. She was in the big departmental stores mostly, no one would be likely to remember her. She went home on the 6.30 local.”

“I wish I could see your wife for a moment,” said Gregory, after a thoughtful pause.

“Why, you can, if you like. She’s down there now in the car waiting for me. I’ll go and tell her you want her.”

Mrs. Carlton Smith was exactly what a good wife should be—the opposite of her husband. Where he was big and heavy and stiff she was little and light and genial. She was pretty too, and had the eyes which always go with a kind heart.

“We won’t keep you long, Mrs. Smith,” said Gregory, “but there is just a question or two—is your former maid fond of using perfume?”

She looked surprised. “Perfume? No, I wouldn’t have a maid who used perfume. But she may have taken to it since she left me.”

“Do you remember her ever showing any fondness for any particular flower?”

“I remember that she was fond of all flowers, especially roses. But—”

“We are just working in the dark, Mrs. Smith. So do not wonder if our questions seem senseless. What I particularly want to know is why you are so certain that this girl is as innocent as she protests? We know that she made a threat and we know that she had the opportunity for carrying out that threat—”

“Yes, but you don’t know Jennie. I do, and I know that the thing is absolutely impossible.”

“Why?”

“Why?—because it is.”

“An excellent reason,” said Gregory, smiling, “but hardly such as would appeal to the police.”

“The police—heavens! Arthur said you weren’t the *police*. Arthur dear, run down and get my bag. I left it in the car seat. There’s a photo of Jennie in it. When Mr. Gregory sees her chin, he won’t go suspecting her of murder and sudden death. As a matter of fact,” she went on as her husband departed, “I am not sure that the bag is on the seat at all, but I wanted to tell you something that Arthur doesn’t know. I went to see this horrible old woman myself. Arthur would have a fit if he guessed it. But Jennie was really in great trouble and I thought I might be able to help, so I just went—”

“When did you go?”



“Let me see—it was on Saturday, two days before the murder, the day Jennie came into town and told me.”

“The day she posted the letter?”

“Yes, she posted it before she came to me. She was terribly worked up.”

“Well, now, Mrs. Smith, tell us exactly everything you can remember about your visit—all your impressions—everything.”

“There is very little to tell. I saw the woman. She was sitting in that very chair with a big gray cat on her knee, a regular grimalkin. She was quite the horridest person I ever met. She was as sleek and cruel and gray as the cat. And she had cat’s eyes. But I was pretty angry and I let her have it straight. I told her that Jennie was not without friends, and that if any more was heard of her blackmailing threat she would find herself in the hands of the police. I said rather than have Jennie pay a cent I would tell her husband myself—and—oh, anything I could think of, to show her that she’d made a mistake in going after Jennie. I think I convinced her, too. She looked so hateful.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes—at least, it’s all about her. She hardly said a word. I did all the talking. But there was someone else there. The oddest creature! I wasn’t going to speak before her but the woman told me not to mind her, that she was almost stone deaf.”

“Yes, yes, tell us all about her.”

“There isn’t anything to tell. She just sat there. She didn’t say a word, or make a movement. She got on my nerves. I was glad to get outside again.”

“But my dear Mrs. Smith, this may be of the highest importance. Try to remember something about her. What she looked like, how she was dressed.”

“Oh, I can’t—here comes Arthur, don’t give me away to him! She was just an ordinary deaf-looking person in a purple bonnet—oh, Arthur, I’m so sorry to have troubled you. The bag was here all the time. Now Mr. Gregory look at that chin.”

We looked but we did not see much chin. It was as she had warned us somewhat of a missing quantity. The face was that of an ordinarily pretty girl with intelligent eyes and weak mouth.

“Not exactly the accepted idea of a murderess,” agreed Gregory.

“She’s just a nice, silly, excitable thing. And if you don’t hurry and get this affair cleaned up, she is going to have nervous prostration.”

“We’ll hurry,” I promised, smiling. And it really did look as if things were moving a little; for no sooner were the Carlton Smiths gone than Miss Hampden rang up again. She was plainly excited.

“The strangest thing has happened,” she said, “and if there aren’t any policemen or anything hanging around, I’d like to come down and tell you about it.”

We assured her that we were absolutely *sans* policemen, and as quickly as her small electric brougham would bring her she arrived.

She was looking very pretty, and distinctly happier than when we had last seen her.

“It’s a letter,” she said without preliminaries—“or rather it isn’t a letter, but it came in an envelope. Look for yourselves and see what you make of it.”

At first sight we did not know what to make of it. It consisted of four sheets, torn apparently from a note book or a diary. The paper was old and soiled and the date of the first entry was the 22nd of July, twenty years ago. The contents of the first page were as follows:

July 22nd. Received G.B. one week old No. 17.

Description—Six pounds, dark, long hands, blue eyes (liable to change), no birthmark.

Mother—Alice Brook.

Father—Not stated.

Pay certain and prompt.

Memo—Find out father.

Note: Similarity in size and coloring to G.B., No. 16.

“Mother’s name was Alice Brook,” said Miss Hampden, who was watching us read with scarcely suppressed eagerness, “and I must have been G.B.—(‘girl baby’ I suppose)—No. 17. Now read the next entry.”

The next entry was dated three months later and was very brief:

October 6th.—G.B. No. 16 died last night. Mother not likely to make trouble.

Miss Hampden would not let us linger over this but hurried us on to the next one which was an entry dated the next day:

October 7th.—Mother removed G.B. No. 17. Paid to date. No complications.

Father—John P. Hampden.

Nothing usable at present.

Memo—Showed mother G.B. No. 16 and remarked on similarity to her own child, in view of future possibilities.

Then followed several dates scattered through the intervening years and opposite to them were various addresses.

“These addresses,” explained Miss Hampden, “are all addresses of where my father and mother lived at the dates given. She followed them, year by year. And look at the fourth page.”

The fourth page was much cleaner and of a different paper. Its date was only two weeks old and opposite were the cryptic words, “quite feasible. One thousand dollars.”

The sordid story seemed plain enough. Gregory and I both shook Miss Hampden’s hand in sincere congratulation.

“I don’t think you need worry any more about the possibility of your having died in infancy,” said Gregory, smiling. “I fancy that babies whose parents paid well stood a fair chance of living under Mrs. Simmons’s care, whatever might be said of the others—poor mites! Still our baby-father had a long head and the casual resemblance of a perfectly good baby to a dead one was too promising a coincidence to be overlooked. Nothing was wasted in her blackmailing business. Only, she couldn’t trust her memory, hence these notes.”

“It was a horrible, horrible scheme,” said the girl. “And she was a bad woman. I am glad that she is dead. But—if these are pages from her diary—where did they come from?”

“Ah,” said Gregory dryly, “where indeed? There are no post-offices in the other world.”

“But it didn’t come by post,” she told us, smiling. “It must have been dropped in the letter-box at the house last night. It is not stamped. Yet I found it with the rest of our letters this morning.”

Gregory flipped the envelope to me discontentedly. “See what you can make of the writing,” he said. “Of course it is apparent at first glance that it has nothing in common with the writing of Mrs. Smith’s protégé, and therefore goes far toward letting that young person out. For whoever sent diary-leaves has the rest of the diary and probably all the private memos and papers which the police failed to get. And the person who has those papers is—the person we want to find.”

“But why send the leaves to Miss Hampden?”

“There seems only one answer to that. Surely it is the most suggestive thing yet. If only the girl Jennie has received some mysterious mail also—we can put that problem aside as solved.”

“I don’t see—” I began.

“Oh, I do,” exclaimed Miss Hampden. “You think that the person who has the papers is trying to—to put things right.”

“Why?” I asked again.

“Ah,” said Gregory, “that is a different question.”

“A murderer would hardly be sufficiently altruistic to fling evidence around for the sake of relieving the minds of other people?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Some murderers are very altruistic. What about those anarchists who give their lives freely, proud to have killed some oppressor of their countrymen? Some murderers murder and think they do God service. Also the late Mrs. Simmons was undoubtedly due for removal. Still the sending of these pages suggests a lot more than this one shadowy possibility. It suggests that the person with the papers understood the purport of them; knew the uses to which the notes upon them had been put and—by Jove, yes—was not the threatening letter from the murdered woman also delivered by hand—and at night, Miss Hampden?”

“Yes,” eagerly. “I see—you think there is a connection there. But why would a person threaten one day and reassure the next?”

“We don’t know. There might have been some sort of compulsion—a compulsion removed by the death of the principal. Wait a moment, and I’ll call up Mrs. Carlton Smith, for if there is anything in our theory, Jennie may have something fresh to tell us.”

He hurried away to the 'phone in his private office, leaving me to inform Miss Hampden of the identity of Jennie and her part in our queer tangle.

We were still talking about it when I saw, through the glass partition, Miss Price come into the outer office. Miss Price, you will remember, was one of the young ladies of whose services Gregory sometimes availed himself and who was at present personating the girl in blue. She did not wait for the boy to announce her but came straight through, pausing at the door only when she saw that I had a visitor.

"Come in, Miss Price," I said. "Mr. Gregory will be back in a moment. This is Miss Hampden." I introduced the two girls with a word of explanation. Miss Price's worried look brightened.

"This is lucky," she said. "For it is Miss Hampden's business that I am here to tell you about. The police have found out about the encounter of Mr. Maddison and a lady-in-blue."

Miss Hampden turned a shade paler, and then the colour rushed back into her face in a way that perilously resembled a blush.

"But—Mr. Maddison—he—he didn't—" she stammered.

"Oh, no, he didn't, of course," Miss Price caught her up quickly. "He did his best to twist them up, but in the end did as he was told, and gave them my address. I was getting along beautifully when suddenly one of them, a big-nosed Scotchman named Macrae asked to see the dress I was wearing that afternoon. And I haven't a blue dress to my name. Fancy! I never wear blue. It's my fault. I should have provided one. Mr. Gregory will be angry. I had only a moment to think and I told them it had gone to the cleaner's. They asked which cleaner's, and my only safety was to pretend to be annoyed at their inquisitiveness and refuse to answer. But I offered to show them the dress when it came home. I am out now to get the dress and I thought I had better let you know."

"Why not have the real dress?" suggested Miss Hampden. "We are much of a size and if the fit is not perfect a mere man won't know it. I'll send it around to your address with the hat and bag to match."

"Good idea. Then if they go farther Mr. Maddison can swear to the costume without hurting his conscience. He can say it was too dark to swear to the face. But—has it ever been to the cleaner's?"

"No. It is almost new."

Both girls thought quickly and Miss Hampden found the solution first.

“I’ll spill something on the front of it,” she said, “and have it taken out with gasoline. That will give the proper ‘cleaned’ effect and even brand new clothes have things spilled on them.”

“That ought to be all right,” said Miss Price thoughtfully. “And I’ll do my very best. I don’t quite see how they can go behind both Mr. Maddison and me. But I ought to tell you that the big-nosed Scotchman is suspicious. He doesn’t know what it is, but he has a feeling that there is a nigger in the fence somewhere. I think he even started out to follow me but, well, there’s where I shine. I never saw a man yet who could follow me when I don’t want to be followed. I—”

“My dear girl,” interrupted Gregory from the door, “if I were not so busy I would make that a bet. Some day when we want livening up, you shall be the hare and I shall be the hounds with five pounds of the best chocolates on the result. In the meantime,” turning to me, “I have got in touch with Mrs. Smith who was just setting out to come down here with the news that Jennie has received an envelope containing the one piece of incriminating evidence which would have substantiated Mrs. Simmons’s word had she carried out her threat of informing the girl’s husband. No doubt, if we only knew of them, there are many other women, and men too, who have received mysterious mail of a nature calculated to relieve their minds. Whoever has the dead woman’s papers is making good use of them.”

“Then,” said Miss Hampden fervently, “I just hope that he or she or whoever it is doesn’t get caught.”

“My dear young lady, your hope does you honour.” Gregory’s tone was grim, “but remember someone will have to answer for the death of Mrs. Simmons, bad as she was. And if we don’t get the guilty party, the police will get an innocent one—the girl Jennie, perhaps, or perhaps—you!”

Miss Hampden choked back an “oh” which sounded very like a frightened sob. The other girl put a capable hand on her arm and her eyes shot lightning at Gregory.

“What d’you want to frighten her for?” she asked belligerently.

“I don’t want to frighten her. But I want you two to realize that there is real danger in this affair. Now hurry away and repair your blunder about the blue dress—if Macrae is suspicious, better make love to him. He isn’t half so bad as he looks.”

As the door closed after them Gregory sat down in his chair with a gesture of resolution.

“We’ve got to get somebody soon,” he said, “or Macrae will certainly get that girl. He is more than suspicious. I was talking to him on the ’phone just now. I don’t think they could possibly convict her but they could ruin her life quite easily. To be mixed up in a scandalous murder case would be almost as bad as conviction. Her mother too—and her father—it would ruin them all. Get out your notes and let’s shake them through a sieve and see what remains.”

“Let’s begin by eliminating,” I suggested. “If we count Miss Hampden out that does away with all the evidence of the little girl about the blue lady. If we count out the girl Jennie that disposes of the threatening letter in the coal scuttle. It seems to me that, excepting the fact that we know who and what the dead woman was, we are not very much ‘forwarder.’ The clues are still the first clues—the infant’s slip and the box of wrapped-up coins.”

“And the scent of flowers—don’t forget that—that heliotrope scent is our winner, or I’ve missed my vocation.”

“Lots of people use perfume.”

“But few people commit murder. So if we come across someone who had the opportunity for committing murder and who uses the particular perfume, we have a striking combination not likely to be due to chance. Now let us both go over these notes with these three clues in mind and see if there is the slightest item bearing upon any one of them. This is where you shine.”

But I was not to be allowed to shine, just yet. No sooner had we got nicely settled down to a studious perusal of my record of the case than the office-boy informed us Macrae was in the outer office.

“We can’t see him,” said Gregory crossly.

“Hoots, mon!” came Macrae’s voice in its broadest Scots, “ye canna help seein’ me, if ye’ve e’en in yer heid.”

The big Scot had taken no chances and had followed the office boy without ceremony.

“You’re a confounded nuisance,” declared the irate Gregory, “and a word in your ear, Mac, if you’ve got anything to say, say it in English, for I haven’t got time for foreign languages to-day.”

“Sure, Mike,” said Macrae cheerfully. “I’ll be as English as never was. And it’s good news I’m givin’ you. I’ve got the blue girl!”

“What!” exclaimed Gregory, and “Where?” stupidly, from me.

“When I say I’ve got her, I’m not meaning that I’ve just exactly laid hands on the lassie, but I ken where she is and I’m on my way now to the chief for a warrant.”

“Tell us about it,” said Gregory quietly.

“Well, you’ll hae to excuse a bit Scotch, for I’m fair excitit. It all began frae that notice in the paper I telt ye aboot over the ’phone. I’m thinkin’ it’s no news to ye—though why you kept it so canny, I can’t see. I went to look over the young man and found him verra obligin’. Yes, the leddy had answered the adveertisement. Yes, the leddy had recovered her property. No, he didn’t know the leddy. But, after a bit pressin’, he could give me her name and address. Did she wear blue? He thought mebbly it was blue. And all the time he was being so nice to the police he was lookin’ as if he would like to hang for the murder of us. It made me just fair anxious to see that lassie.

“So I went and I saw her. And she wasn’t much to see, forby. But she was nice to the police too, and she answered all I speered at her quite polite. And then it came to me that mebbly yon blue dress wouldn’t say so much but might tell the more. So I asked to see the dress and my leddy just forgot all her pretty nice story and stared at me as if I’d asked to see a sea serpent. And it came over me that she wasn’t the colour of a lassie to wear blue at all! As you’ve seen her you’ll remember that she’s a lassie for brown and pinks like. And the blue dress was at the cleaner’s! Well, I just thocht I’d find out a bit more, quiet like, but she shook me—just as easy. She’s a clever lass. It was straight chance and a longin’ to see you that brought me in a taxi to the door downstairs just as the lost one hersel’ and another lassie were comin’ oot. I kenned the driver of my taxi and I wasn’t long in takin’ his place at the wheel. The other lassie had an electric brougham waiting and as she stepped in I heard her say:

“I’ll send it right down as soon as I get it ready.”

“And then they said ‘Good-bye,’ both looking rather worried. I knew where the Price lassie lived, so I followed the other and I just camped around waiting to see what she was going to ‘send down.’ It wasn’t so long before a maid came oot with one of those big dress boxes in one hand and a hat box in the other. She was in a hurry and my taxi was right on hand. Seeing she was so burdened, I helped her in, but, losh! I was that clumsy! I almost fell over the dress box and knocked off the cover to that extent I couldn’t help seein’ what was intilt—and what was intilt was a fine blue dress and a fine blue hat in the hat-bot, forby, and who d’y think was the



leddy of the brougham? Who indeed but the only daughter of John P. Hampden—and as pretty a lass as ever a man told a lee aboot!”

When Macrae had finished his triumphant recital there was silence in the office for a little. For myself I was genuinely dismayed. Finally Gregory spoke.

“You think this Miss Hampden was the lady-in-blue?”

“Mon, I’m sure of it.”

“And you think that Miss Price, for some unknown reason, is acting for her?”

“I do, but I think the reason is not unknown—to present company.”

Gregory slapped down his pencil with a bang. “You’re right, Mac. You see we thought you would be just smart enough to do what you’ve done and we didn’t want Miss Hampden to come in. She has absolutely nothing to do with the affair of the murder. I am sincerely convinced of that. And think what it would mean to associate her with it—even for an hour. We want to find the guilty, not to shame the innocent.”

“If she’s the one the wee lassie saw runnin’ oot of the murder hoose there’s enough against her to arrest her a dozen times,” said our Scot stubbornly.

Gregory shrugged. “That’s all right. But I tell you she has an explanation which absolutely explains.”

“She might hae that, an’ I wad like to hear it.”

“You would, but I haven’t time to tell it to you. There simply isn’t a moment to lose. So you’ll have to take my word for it.”

Macrae arose. “I must be gettin’ along. I must make my report to the chief.”

“No, you won’t, Macrae, you know the papers are worrying the chief to do something—arrest somebody. He might arrest somebody and be very sorry afterwards. You know Hubbard and I are not the sentimental kind who take chances on letting a criminal escape. But we want to get the real criminal—not an unfortunate girl. Have a heart, man, we’ve simply got to keep little Miss Hampden out.”

The big Scot looked moved but unconvinced and murmured something about his duty.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said Gregory. “Give us twenty-four hours to find the murderer, and I’ll promise that you’ll be in at the end. You needn’t talk about duty. You haven’t any duty which calls you to go around making innocent people miserable. The girl isn’t going to run away. Give us twenty-four hours to clear her.”

“It’s a fair proposition,” said Macrae, evidently relieved. “She’s a bright lookin’ lassie and I’d be glad to see her free of this coil. But I’ll be keepin’ an eye on the home forby.” He looked at his watch. “This time to-morrow I’ll call you up. And if there’s anything I can do let me know.”

“We won’t be able to hold him after the twenty-four hours,” said Gregory when he had gone. “He is acting against his instincts now. And if the papers keep on about the incompetence of the police, the chief is only too likely to give them something else to talk about by arresting the girl on the strength of her presence in the house at approximately the time of the murder. Now for heaven’s sake let’s get at those notes.”

“If you’ll tell me just exactly what you want to look for, I’ll stand more chance of getting it,” I said.

“We want anything that has to do in any way with the scent of heliotrope. We must scan every word. Sometimes people notice things and record their impressions without knowing it.”

I nodded and for the next half hour we were both absorbed in our search. Then Gregory pushed back his papers with an impatient sigh. “Not a thing,” he exclaimed. “Not a trace of anything except what we have already.”

“Wait,” I said. “I don’t know, but I think there is something—just a little thing.”

“Where?” snapped Gregory, pouncing on me like a dog on a bone.

“Well, don’t get excited. It’s not much and may be nothing. It’s just a sentence in Mrs. Carlton Smith’s evidence. Here it is:

“*‘She was just an ordinary deaf-looking person in a purple bonnet.’*”

“Well, whatever—”

“Don’t you see? *Purple* bonnet. Lots of people call heliotrope ‘purple.’ Supposing this person wore a heliotrope bonnet, wouldn’t it—”

“It would, by Jove, it certainly would! You score, old man. It’s a smart hit, even if it isn’t a right one. It is quite conceivable that a woman who was fond of the scent of heliotrope might be fond of the colour, too. On the other

hand, that the colour and the scent should come together even remotely into this strange case and remain entirely unconnected is unlikely, at the least. We must get Mrs. Smith at once and induce her to give us more detail. I'll call her up. You listen and make notes."

We were fortunate in finding Mrs. Smith at home and her voice came gaily over the wire.

"Now that Jennie's out of it, I'm not a bit interested in your old case," she said, when Gregory began to question.

"Jennie isn't out of it yet," he told her in a tone which quenched some of her gaiety. "And there are other innocent people who may be involved. It is a serious matter, Mrs. Smith."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I'll do all I can to help, of course. I'm not really as frivolous as I sound."

Whereupon the following dialogue was duly transcribed upon my note book.

"You said that when you called upon Mrs. Simmons there was a visitor already there. We want to know all about her. Everything you can remember, impressions, thoughts, everything."

"I don't remember very much. She was deaf. Mrs. Simmons said she was deaf and she was the deafest looking person I ever saw. Sort of blank looking. Seemed to pay no attention to anything. Just sat there. She looked like someone who hadn't an object in life or like someone whose object in life was so absorbing that nothing else mattered."

"A very good description. But what was her physical appearance?"

A little giggle came over the wire. "She didn't have any. I mean she was so indeterminate that I can't describe her. She was little and oldish young or youngish old, might have been thirty or forty-five. She had a small face and you couldn't notice anything about it except the eyes. They were light hazel and blank like dolls' eyes. I simply can't tell you what she wore. I don't know—except the bonnet. I noticed the bonnet because it was a bonnet. No one wears bonnets now. But this was a bonnet all right—a purple bonnet."

"What do you mean when you say 'purple'?"

"Why—purple, of course."

"But there are so many shades of purple—mauve, lilac, heliotrope, lavender, deep purple—"

“Oh, spare me! I see what you mean. Well, I think this purple was—let me think—rather a pretty shade—I should say as near heliotrope as anything.”

Gregory and I exchanged a congratulatory look, but he gave no other sign of satisfaction.

“Did you notice anything else?”

The voice came more slowly now. “She carried a bag, I think—yes. I remember seeing a small bag on her lap—a kind of reticule thing—the same shade as the bonnet. That is absolutely all.”

“Did she speak at all?”

“Not at all. She sat like a graven image.”

“Did Mrs. Simmons speak to her?”

“No.”

“She did not mention her name to you?”

“No. All she said was: ‘You can say what you wish before her. She is stone deaf.’ ”

“Just one more question. Did it strike you that Mrs. Simmons, or anyone else in the room, used perfume?”

Again the little giggle. “How funny! No, it didn’t. But she might have used quarts and I would not have known it. I had a frightful cold.”

Gregory thanked her and rang off. “Confound people with colds!” he grumbled. “But the bonnet and bag were heliotrope, and that’s something. We’ll have to find this deaf lady and find her quickly.”

Furrows began to deepen upon my already corrugated brow. I am not good at long-distance shots. But Gregory’s absorbed face showed that he was already at work upon a plan.

“Well,” I said, leaning back with a sigh of relief, “here’s where *you* shine.”

## CHAPTER IV.

Gregory sighed.

“Not much chance for shining, I fear,” he said. “But we’ll see what can be done by a little close reasoning. We are ahead of the police only in that we have found reason to connect some definite person with the clues of the baby slip and the box of coins. The connecting link, of course, is the scent of heliotrope, which the police have missed so far. We can be fairly certain that the coins and the slip came from the same place, and that place was nowhere inside the Simmons house. Miss Emsley ascertained that. They were brought to the house therefore by some outside person. That person was not Miss Hampden, nor was it the girl Jennie. It is possible, certainly, that they were brought by someone of whom we have no knowledge at all so far. But it is also possible that they were brought by the only other person who has emerged in this inquiry, i.e., the odd-looking deaf woman who was known to visit Mrs Simmons occasionally and whom Mrs. Smith actually met there upon the Saturday before the murder. Our one definite reason for thinking that it might be she is the fact that she wore a heliotrope bonnet and carried a bag of the same colour. It is not a reason which would appeal very strongly to the police. Macrae would say: ‘Mon, ye’re daft!’ But to me it seems a clue well worth working on. I have never doubted the close connection of the slip and of the box of coins with the actual murder. Therefore, if we can get the person behind the slip and the coins——.”

I had been glancing over the notes under my hand, and as Gregory paused, my eyes fell suddenly upon a date——

“Look here!” I cried eagerly, “here’s something we’ve missed. This last date on the papers wrapped about the coins corresponds with the Saturday before the murder. The Saturday on which Mrs. Smith met the heliotrope person in Mrs. Simmons’s house. If the dated coins are a record of some kind of transaction between the victim and the murderer—that also tallies!

“Right! And another thing, we haven’t yet looked for a trace of perfume on the envelope sent to Miss Hampden. Let us have Miss Emsley in. If the heliotrope person is the person we want, she must be the person who sent the leaves from the diaries of Mrs. Simmons, in which case there *might* be a trace of her peculiar perfume on the envelope. Though if there is not, we should not allow its absence to discourage us. She may have used a new envelope.”

With considerable excitement we submitted the envelope to Miss Emsley's cultivated nose and awaited her verdict with eagerness. It came hesitatingly.

"Yes. I think I can trace the scent of heliotrope. But I must honestly say that I should scarcely have noticed it if I had not known what I was to look for."

Gregory nodded, and seemed satisfied.

"Hubbard," he said, with new conviction, "I am sure we are on the right track. If the woman did not actually commit the murder, she knows all about it. Our only problem is to find her. But that isn't going to be easy. If we only had time—but we haven't time!"

"Find her in twenty-four hours? It simply isn't possible," I declared gloomily.

As usual, when I grew depressed, Gregory brightened.

"We'll have a try, anyway. Now, let's see! Your notes say that this woman was accustomed to come down Carrall Street on a westbound car, therefore she came from somewhere on the south-east side——"

"Not at all. She may have come from the north-east just as easily. The north-east cars transfer to the westbound lines at Carrall Street."

"Yes, but where is the point of transfer? Look it up and you'll see that it is at the junction of Dundas and Carrall, and Dundas is just one short block from Richly Road. No one wishing to go to any place on Richly Road would dream of using a transfer for one short block. Too much wasted time and energy. Anyone alighting from the north-east cars would walk the remainder of the distance; and in this particular case, anyone wanting No. 3 Richly Road would not go on to Carrall Street at all, but would alight at Stanley Street, two blocks up, and walk the one short block which would bring him exactly to No. 3 on the corner."

I assented, looking rather foolish.

"Well, then, let us suppose she came from a south-east car?"

Gregory got up, and drawing down a large map of the city from our roll on the wall, found the junction of Carrall Street and Richly Road with his pencil.

"The south-east car which runs down Carrall Street," he mused, "does not run through the centre of the city. It skirts the business portion—here,

d'ye see?—and runs through the warehouse section for a considerable way. We can safely eliminate the warehouse section. Fortunately it does not run through any rooming-house or boarding-house area, where we would be lost as in a maze. Just here at Wardlaw Street it takes a turn and runs through a very good substantial section; not a fashionable part, of course, but a district of good homes where servants are kept and money is solidly invested. Now, if this woman is a domestic servant, she may be found in this section. Otherwise, not; for from her general appearance and from the nature of the few clues we have, it would be most unlikely that she would prove to be a monied householder. Let us look over your notes and see what we make of the domestic servant possibility.”

We pored over my papers for a time in silence. Then I gave my opinion decidedly against such a probability.

“I find,” I said, “that she has been seen to visit Mrs. Simmons upon different days of the week, and at different times in the day. She was not regular at all. Domestic servants are not masters of their own time. Had she been in service, it is more than likely that she would have paid her visits upon her ‘day out’, which would have been the same every week and always in the afternoon. Also, if she were deaf, as everyone testifies, she would hardly have held a post as servant in a well-to-do family.”

“I agree with you,” said Gregory.

“Well, then, that takes us well through this prosperous section, and here we are nearing the end of the line in a very much more likely environment—Parkhurst. We ought to know Parkhurst, Hubbard—that was where we made our first success in the case of the man, you remember, with the crooked eye!”

Yes, we both knew Parkhurst very well. It was a depressing sort of place—the outskirts of a city without any of the half-country beauty which lingers in some suburban districts. I remembered it chiefly as long rows of houses, small and boxy, with front windows much given to the display of cards announcing “Dressmaking done here”. The houses were nearly all of the rented class and looked like it. In fact, “respectable” was the one kind word which might safely be applied to the neighborhood.

“Do you remember O'Donnell?” asked Gregory thoughtfully. “What do you think about going to see O'Donnell?”

I thought so well of it that I at once reached for my hat. O'Donnell was a patrolman and an Irishman. We had had a lot to do with O'Donnell in the

case before referred to, and we found in him that miracle—a policeman who sees what is going on under his nose. O'Donnell, in fact, had an insatiable desire to know which would not have disgraced a scientist. This marvel was stationed in Parkhurst, and it was safe to reason that if there were an odd little deaf woman anywhere within his eager-eyed ken he would know of it.

“Half of O'Donnell's pleasure in life lies in his watching people get on and off street cars,” said Gregory as we left the building. “And even if the woman we want is not in his particular district, he may have noticed her at some time on the line. Fortunately Parkhurst is not large.”

We drove our car slowly along the route taken by the street railway and were considerably encouraged by the fact that the warehouse and resident districts through which we passed seemed utterly unlikely as places of residence for a woman such as the one we sought. Parkhurst became more and more clearly indicated. We found O'Donnell standing upon a street corner doing something mysterious with the interior of a black iron box attached to a telegraph pole. He greeted us with heartiness and a new fire of interest in his eye. Things were very quiet in Parkhurst and our artist in the ways of life was plainly bored.

“Perhaps you would be on a case again, Mr. Gregory?” he asked, with ill-concealed hope.

“Well, in a way, yes. We are looking for someone. But it is the kind of hunt that resembles that of the proverbial needle. We have little to go on, but the little we have seems to point to Parkhurst. Now, nobody knows Parkhurst like you do, O'Donnell, so we want your help.”

“You can have that,” said the Irishman, beaming all over.

“It's a woman we want. A deaf woman, very deaf. It would seem that this is the most noticeable thing about her, since everyone mentions it. She *looks* deaf. For the rest, she is small and slight with a rather blank-looking face. She wears a purple bonnet and carries a purple bag. She may be anywhere from thirty to forty-five.”

“Lots of them may be that,” said O'Donnell with a grin. “And sometimes there's lots of them that takes to purple.”

“But not to bonnets,” said I.

O'Donnell admitted that bonnets were not popular. He took off his cap and scratched his head, an operation which seemed to aid in the process of cerebration.



“That’s too bad, now,” he said, after a moment’s thought. “There’s several bonnets I’m thinkin’ of, and two that you might call purple bonnets, or thereabouts; indeed, there’s one bonnet I’m thinkin’ of in particular, but it’s not a deaf one. The only deaf one on the beat is a hat, a brown hat, and weighs about 200.”

“It could hardly be that one,” said Gregory, disappointed; “but, of course, your beat doesn’t take in the whole of Parkhurst. We must just make the rounds. We’ll keep to this car line first, for we must remember that people naturally travel by most direct route, and this is the only Parkhurst line going right through to Carrall Street. We had better separate; it will save time. We can meet here in an hour’s time or as soon after as possible.”

As it turned out, we were both back within the hour, displaying discouraged faces to the interested O’Donnell. We had come upon no trace of our quarry anywhere.

“Nothing for it but to go back and do the interviewing all over again,” said Gregory. “The Richly Road women will have had time to brush up their memories. We may light upon some additional fact which may furnish a clue.”

“It’s too bad entirely,” sympathized O’Donnell. “If she wasn’t deaf now, or if she wasn’t small and slim, I might be able to point you to what you want. It’s the combination that’s hard to come by.”

“Well, if you do light on the combination, let us know.” This despondingly from me, for I really felt as if our last chance were gone. Not so my senior partner. The harder up against it Gregory is, the keener he grows.

We hurried back to Richly Road, and with some admiration, but little hope, I listened to his masterly re-examination of those witnesses who had at some time or another seen, or spoken with, Mrs. Simmons’s mysterious visitor in the purple bonnet. It was as Gregory had said, their memories (or their imaginations) had freshened up wonderfully. We found out quite a few new details, but, unfortunately, nothing bearing upon the point of our subject’s past or present residence. All the evidence along this line amounted to exactly what we had already, namely, that her visits were irregular, that she came at any hour and on any day; that she never stayed long, and that she invariably got off a car at the corner of Carrall Street, and when going home, got on a car at the same point, but going in the opposite direction. At last we found one woman who was almost sure that the car upon which she had seen the woman going home was the yellow shield car, and this fact,

rather doubtful though it was, seemed to prove that our deductions had been correct in the first place, for the yellow shield car is the car which has its terminus in Parkhurst.

“I feel sure she is in Parkhurst somewhere,” declared Gregory, “but how we are going to find her in the time at our disposal I don’t know—unless we call in the police and have them make a house to house search. But I doubt if Ridley would consent to do it on the shadowy evidence we have.”

It was getting dusk by now, and, as we hurried on to our next witness the newsboys were shouting an extra.

“P’lice ’bout to make arrest! All about mysterious lady-in-blue! Extree, extree!”

“That’s the beginning of the end for Miss Hampden,” said Gregory, glancing rapidly over the paper. “We are her only chance now. See, here’s a statement of Ridley himself, promising an arrest by to-morrow morning.”

“But surely if we see him and tell him all we know, we can convince him of the girl’s innocence.”

“I’m afraid he won’t want to be convinced—unless we have someone else to offer him as scapegoat. Well, we have one more witness to interview and our luck may change.”

Our last witness was the mother of the little girl who had proved so observant in the case of the lady-in-blue. She was a busy, rather harrassed-looking woman, and although she tried bravely to help us, I could see that she had nothing new to tell.

“You see,” she explained, “I never noticed her much. She was such an odd-appearing person and so very deaf.”

“She wasn’t deaf always,” said little Jessie unexpectedly.

If a bomb had exploded beside us we would have been scarcely more startled. The little girl had been following our inquiry with childish interest, but this remarkable observation was the first word she had offered.

“What do you mean?” asked her mother sharply. “Of course she was deaf—deaf as a post!”

Jessie shook her head. “No,” she said positively, “not always. She asked me what time it was once, and she heard quite well when I told her. And once I walked down the street with her and told her all about my dolly and she heard every word.”

“Lip-reading, I suppose,” I hazarded. But Gregory seemed immensely interested. He took the child on his knee and questioned her closely upon why she thought the lady had actually heard what she had told her. The child could give no sensible reason, but she was unshaken in her conviction. The lady had “looked like it” was the best she could do.

Gregory waited for nothing more, but hurried me away and proceeded to break all speed limits in a mad rush back to Parkhurst.

“Don’t you see?” he told me in intervals of avoiding certain and sudden death, “one error in our premises has set us all wrong. We took for granted that the woman was deaf because everyone said so, including the murdered woman herself. We have been looking for a deaf woman in a purple bonnet. What was it O’Donnell said? *‘If she only wasn’t deaf now, I might be able to point you to what you want. It’s the combination that’s hard to come by.’*”

“But you’ve only got a child’s fancy to go by,” I objected, “against all the other evidence.”

“The child was right! I have a hunch that the child was right. The woman isn’t deaf at all.”

“But why should she——”

Here Gregory avoided a motor truck with a jerk which left me gasping and swept up to Patrolman O’Donnell in a fashion which made even that hardened officer stare.

“Oh, it’s you, Mr. Gregory. Sure, if it were anybody else, I’d be arresting yourself as a danger to little chickens,” declared O’Donnell, with his broad smile.

“O’Donnell,” said Gregory, without preliminaries, “you said that if the party we want were not deaf you had an idea of someone who might answer to the description. Is that correct?”

“Shure, it is. But——” the man’s open face clouded. “You wouldn’t be wanting to do any harm to the party, Mr. Gregory, would you?”

“She is wanted for something serious, O’Donnell, I may as well tell you; we think she knows something very important in a pretty big case—murder, as a matter of fact.”

O’Donnell, who had been looking very glum, relaxed at the word “murder” and began to laugh.

“Oh, well, then,” he said, “I needn’t worry about showing you the little lady I had in mind. Shure, she’s not had anything to do with a killing, and that’s certain. Why, only to-night I saw her get faint with the mere thinking of one. But she fits your description to a hair, barring the deafness. For she’s not deaf at all. I see her often getting on the car to go west. A decent woman, with her living to earn——”

“Does she sew for a living?” asked Gregory suddenly.

“She does. My best girl says there’s not her like in Parkhurst. It’s fine work she does, ladies’ *lingerry* and such. She lives right down there at this end of my beat, not far from where we’re standing now. And by the same token, I spoke to her not more than an hour ago.”

“How was that? Do you know her?”

“Just in the way I know all the ladies.” O’Donnell’s grin grew wider. “She was just coming off the car and an imp of a newsboy nearly knocked her down. He was racing along shouting ‘Extree—extree. All about the lady in blue. P’lice ’bout to make arrest.’ You’ve see the extree, haven’t you, Mr. Gregory? It looks as if——”

Gregory stopped him with a hand upon his arm.

“Never mind about that, O’Donnell,” he said, “what happened when the newsboy nearly knocked the lady down?”

“Why—nothing happened. I gave the gosoon a cuff on the lug, and Miss Walker bought a paper off him, to make it better. That’s the kind she is. Though I expect she wanted to see who the police have got for the Simmons murder, too. But she didn’t like the reading of it, for she turned quite white entirely and dropped the paper.

“‘It’ll be good if they get the one that done it, ma’am,’ says I, picking up the paper and glancing at it mesilf.

“‘The idea of a murderer around loose is not a nice idea at all. If they get next to this here lady in blue, we’ll have some interesting reading soon.’

“‘But she didn’t do it at all!’ says my little lady, as certain as you please.

“‘Didn’t she now, ma’am?’ says I. ‘Well, that’s heard in a good moment. You can just tell them that at headquarters, and they’ll be letting her go at once.’

“Bless the ladies,” continued O’Donnell, with his spreading grin, “they always know who done it, better than the murderer himsilf.”

“Was that all that was said?” asked Gregory, betraying none of the excitement which I knew must have consumed him.

“Why?” asked O’Donnell, startled. “It was just by way of a bit of a joke, you know. She was just like the rest of them, terrible int’rested, but sort of frightened, too—I like them that way.

“‘Oh, officer!’ says she, ‘what will they do to her if they get her?’

“‘Well, as for that, there’s only one thing to do, ma’am,’ I says. But she didn’t wait to hear what that was. Afraid she might hear some unpleasant details. They nivir like——”

“I rather think she is the woman we want, O’Donnell,” interrupted Gregory. “You say the description fits?”

“Like a glove. She’s small and slight, and sort of ash-coloured. Her eyes look as if they didn’t see you, but something farther beyant, and she wears the very bonnet you were speaking of and sometimes she has a bag of the same colour. But I can’t think what you gentlemen can be wanting her for at all.”

We were walking along now in the direction indicated by O’Donnell as “down there”, but the big patrolman’s steps were slow and his face once more looked clouded and dubious.

“I wouldn’t like to be the one to get the little lady into any kind of trouble,” he added.

“O’Donnell,” said Gregory, “you know enough of us to guess that we don’t go after people without reason, and that if we make a mistake we shan’t mind admitting it. I can’t say more than that. Duty is often unpleasant, but it’s seldom that an innocent person comes to any real harm.”

“You’ll find her as innocent as a babe,” said O’Donnell, with conviction, “and it’s my belief that she’s an ‘innocent’ in another way, too. Her eyes are queer entirely. There is the house—the third one, with the drawn blinds.”

It was quite dark now, but we could see that the house he indicated was the smallest and poorest one in the small, poor row.

O’Donnell stepped up to the door and knocked his resounding policeman’s knock.

There was no stirring within. No answer of any kind.

“Are you quite sure that she isn’t deaf?” asked Gregory.

“Shure and shure,” declared O’Donnell, knocking again.

“We’ll have to go in,” said Gregory. “We haven’t a moment to waste— O’Donnell, force the door.”

The Irishman exerted his strength somewhat gingerly, but to our amazement the door opened without effort. In an instant we stood in the dark little hall. Gregory pulled out his flash and we saw the electric button and pressed it. There was no response. Electric light was evidently not used in these poorer homes. One of the two doors in the hall stood open, and we entered what was plainly the living-room and lit the coal oil lamp which stood upon the table in its centre.

“She is not here at all. She is gone!” declared Gregory with sudden conviction, and with this new fear to spur us, we hardly hesitated to race back to the small hall and to try the one closed door on its other side.

A cold air, strangely sweet, blew in our faces as the door opened. O’Donnell suddenly clutched me by the arm. “Look you there!” he whispered, pointing toward the narrow bed.

I looked—and the mystery of the empty house, of the woman who had gone in and had not come out, was explained. We all felt that she was dead before we looked at her. The window stood a little open and the chill air was sweet with heliotrope. A small bottle of the perfume stood uncorked upon the dresser and by it lay an envelope, addressed in a hand which I recognized at once.

In the little sitting-room we read the contents of the envelope, which I append here without comment. The writing began abruptly:

I saw the extra paper to-night and it says that the police are going to arrest a young girl for killing Mrs. Simmons. I never thought of that. I knew they might find me and I was ready, but I didn’t think there could be anybody else. So I must tell all about it, before they hurt anyone. I never wanted to hurt anyone. I didn’t want to hurt *her* either. I only wanted to kill her. I wanted to kill her because I knew I was appointed to. I waited seven years until the right time came. Seven years ago Mrs. Simmons had a home for babies. I took my baby there because I had to work and couldn’t take care of her. She was a lovely baby. I called her Heliotrope because she was so sweet. I was ill a long time and when I went to see baby again, she was dead. Mrs. Simmons said: “I can’t be bothered with children when I don’t get my pay. I

thought you had deserted it.” I looked at her and I knew she had let my baby die. That night I had a vision and I heard a voice, and it said: “Seven years shall the wicked flourish.” So I knew that I must let her live for seven years.

Presently I got better and went back to work, but I always kept near her. I went to see her and I let her think the fever had made me deaf. I couldn’t bear to hear her voice. When she gave up keeping the babies I followed her. I found out all about her and what she did. I couldn’t stop her until the seven years were up. Sometimes I carried letters for her to people she wanted money from. She always gave me a quarter for going. I kept them all in a little box, and on the last day of the seven years, I took them with me to show her that I had never used them. I couldn’t use wicked money. I took my baby’s little frock, too, so that she would remember and know that it was my duty to kill her.

When I had killed her I took all the papers from under the chair where she kept them, and I have sent them to the people whose names were on them; all that had names. The others I burned. I had just collected all the papers and was going away when I heard the front door open. I hid behind the kitchen door and I saw the lady in the blue dress come in. I knew who she was and guessed why she had come. When she saw that I had killed Mrs. Simmons she was frightened, but I think she was glad, too, to know that the wicked had ceased to flourish. I waited till she had gone, and then I came away through the side door as I always did. No one saw me. The revolver I threw away down a gutter hole at the corner of the street where I live. I don’t want to be arrested, so I won’t wait. My head has troubled me since I had the fever and my heart is bad, so the doctor gives me tablets. He has warned me not to take too many. But to-night I will take more than he said and the police can find this letter and not trouble about Mrs. Simmons any more. It was quite right that I should kill her as commanded in the vision, and this is the truth, as told by me.—  
Ann Walker.

We were silent after we had read the letter. O’Donnell had turned away his face to hide his not unmanly tears. The little house was very peaceful. When Gregory spoke at last, all that he said was: “God rest her—let us go.”

THE END



## 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 *Heliotrope* by Isabel Ecclestone Mackay]