

Cobweb  
Castle  
by J. S. Fletcher

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*Title:* Cobweb Castle

*Date of first publication:* 1928

*Author:* J. S. (Joseph Smith) Fletcher (1863-1935)

*Date first posted:* July 6, 2026

*Date last updated:* July 6, 2026

Faded Page eBook #20260712

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# COBWEB CASTLE

J. S. FLETCHER

First published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1928.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE LETTER FROM NICE

It was my first job of a morning, as managing clerk to Farbrake & Saunders, Solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn Fields (the office was on the north side, and close by the Hans Sloane Museum) to open the firm's letters. When I say firm, I mean Farbrake; Saunders had been dead some years before I went there. On the morning from which the queer story that I propose to tell is dated, a morning of the early spring of the year 1902, there was a rather bigger pile of correspondence than usual. I took my time in dealing with it for the simple reason that Farbrake was not expected to show at the office that day; he was just then down with influenza at his house in Bayswater. I attended to two or three more urgent matters before opening a letter; when at last I sat down to my desk and picked up a paper-knife preparatory to slitting the flaps of the envelopes, I noticed that the uppermost letter bore a French postage stamp and a French post-mark—Nice. It was addressed, not to the firm, but to Farbrake, but there was nothing to show that it was of a private and confidential nature, and in another moment I was reading it.

Hotel Algresco,  
Nice, France.  
March 28th 1902.

MR. FARBRAKE,  
SIR,

I beg to inform you of the death of my master, Lord Stretherdale, which took place at his Lordship's rooms in this hotel on the 25th instant. His Lordship, who had been in his usual health since we came to this place three weeks ago, had a sudden seizure soon after dinner on the evening of the day mentioned, and was immediately unconscious, and although two English doctors were quickly in attendance upon him, and did all they could, he never regained consciousness, and died at a few minutes before eleven o'clock. In accordance with certain instructions given me by his Lordship some time ago, and subsequently repeated more than once, I have caused his Lordship's body to be embalmed, and am starting out in charge of it, for conveyance to England, early tomorrow morning. I understood from his Lordship that in the event of his dying abroad, you, as his solicitor, have instructions that the body should be brought home for burial in the family vault at Stretherdale. As I am unaware of the present address of the heir to the title, Mr. Humphrey Starke, his late Lordship's nephew, but as you probably know it, I should be much obliged if you would inform him of the demise of his Uncle. I may add that in the presence of the two doctors referred to above, and in that of the Manager of the hotel and a French official, I have sealed up such papers and documents as his Lordship had with him: few, and, I think, unimportant, and am bringing them with me, together with all other personal effects.

I am, Sir,  
Your obedient servant,  
JAMES KENCH.

I folded up and put this letter in my pocket, and then, hastily running through the other correspondence, nothing in which was of any great importance, and leaving it to be dealt with

by my second-in-command, hurried out and into the first taxi-cab available; it was necessary that Farbrake should see the valet's letter at once. And as we sped along to Bayswater, where Farbrake lived in a quiet street off Cleveland Square, I reflected on what I knew of this odd old gentleman who had died so suddenly with no one near him but his valet. I say odd, for Henry Massinger Starke, fifth Baron Stretherdale in the Peerage of England, was a decidedly eccentric character. Although Farbrake had been his solicitor for many years, it was rarely that Lord Stretherdale came to the office; he had been there, however, just before leaving for Nice, and I had taken a good look at him. It is no exaggeration to say that if one had met him in the street one would have taken him for a rag-and-bone man, for he was of commonplace appearance, habitually clothed in ancient and ill-fitting garments, and, if truth be told, not over scrupulous about his personal cleanliness. London knew him well enough—whenever he was in town you would find him prowling about the better-known second-hand bookshops, or in attendance at the fashionable auction rooms, an old carpet bag in one hand, a mass of books or pamphlets or papers under the other arm; whatever the weather, he always wore a wretched old overcoat, green with age, and a battered straw hat, which, it was said, he had owned for thirty years. Nobody would have given twopence for him—yet he was one of the richest men in England, the owner of broad acres, big houses, of a magnificent collection of books and pictures, the patron of a score of ecclesiastical benefices, and the head of a family which had given various eminent men to the law and the Church. Summed up, he was a miser, a bibliophile, an eccentric, who, with half-a-dozen houses to choose from, lived in a couple of rooms in his great town mansion in Mayfair, and when he was not there hid himself at Stretherdale Castle, one of his country seats, where, it was said, he was even more inaccessible than when he was in town. But there were all sorts of tales about him—such as that while he would give thousands of guineas for a fine picture or a rare book, he himself never spent more than half-a-crown a day on his own food, and that beyond his faithful valet, Kench, the writer of the letter I had just read, he refused any service but that of an old woman or two. Some of these tales, no doubt, were a little exaggerated—but only a little.

I found Farbrake in bed, miserable with influenza. But he woke to life before he had read far in Kench's letter, and when he had made an end of it he turned to me with his usual readiness in tackling any important affair.

"Umph!" he exclaimed, dropping the letter on his counterpane. "So the old fellow's gone, eh? Mailey!—we shall have to find the new peer! And—I don't know where he's to be found!"

I knew something, not much, but still something, of the successor to the title. He was the late Lord Stretherdale's nephew, son of a deceased brother, and in his way he had a reputation as queer as his uncle's. He had been in a crack regiment—and got himself cashiered out of it. He had been mixed up in a Turf scandal. He had painted the town red, more than once. Altogether Humphrey Starke, now sixth Baron Stretherdale, although not yet thirty years of age, was what is commonly called a bad lot.

"I suppose he'll come in for a good deal?" I suggested.

Farbrake showed his teeth in a cynical grin.

"Good deal! Good Lord!—but you don't know, of course. You may as well know. The old man who's just dead never made a will! He wouldn't—nothing would persuade him to. He never married; he never made a will. So—this chap, Humphrey Starke, comes in for—oh, practically everything! And the new Lord Stretherdale is the sort that'll make ducks and drakes of whatever he gets hold of! Still—we'll have to find him."

"Isn't there another nephew?" I asked.

"There is! Mr. Maxwell Starke, son of Charles Starke, a younger (deceased) brother of Lord Stretherdale. He's a lad of about one and twenty, I fancy. He, of course, is now next in

succession to the new Lord Stretherdale. Well, now, you'll have to find Lord Stretherdale. I can't get up today, though I'm hoping to be about again tomorrow or the day after. The last I heard of his Lordship he was living at a private hotel in Jermyn Street—a place kept by an Italian, name of Luciani. But he may have left that."

"A club?" I suggested. "Surely he belongs to some club!"

Farbrake gave me a look that meant a good deal.

"Club!" he exclaimed. "He's been kicked out—made to resign—from two clubs! After that Turf scandal. No—try Luciani's first. They may know where he is. Once upon a time I daresay you'd have got news of him at Tattersall's—but then, he's been warned off the Turf!"

"Nice person to inherit his uncle's lands and money-bags!" I remarked.

"Exactly! But there it is! Well, hurry down to Jermyn Street, and see if you can find him. Luciani may know—he certainly lived there for some time."

"Am I at liberty to mention that Mr. Humphrey Starke is now Lord Stretherdale?" I asked. "To—whichever it is I see at this place?"

"No reason why you shouldn't. But ask for Luciani himself—I know him. A big, fat Italian man. Yes—you can say that. And then," concluded Farbrake, "come back here. There's more to be done."

I had kept my taxi-cab waiting at Farbrake's door; now it took me down to Jermyn Street. I soon found Luciani's Hotel—typical of Jermyn Street and its peculiar characteristics. And I soon had hold of Luciani, a tall, thickly built, big-faced, black-moustached Italian, sumptuously attired in black clothes and glossy linen, whose eyes were of the sort that are popularly said to be able to see through a stone wall and whose expression was inscrutable. I am sure that after he had looked me over just once Luciani knew that I was a solicitor's clerk, and suspected me of having a writ in my pocket.

"Mr. Starke is not here," he replied politely.

"Can you tell me where he is to be found?" I enquired with equal politeness.

"I cannot! I do not give information of that sort."

"I think you will be quite ready to give me information if I give you some!" I retorted. "Mr. Starke's uncle, Lord Stretherdale, is dead, and Mr. Starke succeeds to the title. Mr. Starke, in short, is now Lord Stretherdale."

The man's impassive face underwent an extraordinary change. A strange gleam shot into his eyes, and his plump white fingers worked.

"You are—eh?" he asked quickly.

"From the late Lord Stretherdale's solicitor, Mr. Farbrake," I replied. "We have just had the news. Naturally, we wish Mr. Starke—Lord Stretherdale—to hear it."

"Well," he said, suavely, "but I do not know where he is! Yes, it is true that he has rooms in my hotel. He comes and goes—it is a *pied-à-terre* for him when he is in town. He was here three days ago. Then he went away—I do not know where. Nor when he will come back. I should say he has gone racing—to the Grand National."

He looked at me reflectively, then suddenly spread his hands.

"But you can get him—instantly!" he went on. "That is, comparatively instantly! You will announce this in the newspapers—this evening's papers. You will see him tomorrow morning, if he is in England."

I turned away, he coughed, gently, following me.

"A moment!" he whispered. "Now that he is milord Stretherdale, there will be money—much money, eh? He will be able to pay those who have—trusted him? Is it so?"

"I don't think you need have any fear about getting paid if he owes you anything!" I said. "And I daresay he does—eh?"

He smiled, rubbing one white hand over the other.

“Oh, well, well!” he answered. “But—you put the news in the papers! I think you will see him at your office, speedily—yes!”

I went back to Farbrake, who had writing materials on his bed and had evidently been busy in my absence.

“Yes,” he said when I told him the result of my enquiries. “Luciani’s right, there. As a matter of fact, I’ve written out the notices for the papers—take them, Mailey, and get them off to the proper quarters at once. But now, there’s more to do. You must go down to Stretherdale, yourself, to make arrangements about the funeral. Go down by the 1.40 to Harrogate. Drive from there to Stretherdale—it’s a ten or twelve miles drive, so far as I remember, and a wild, fearsome place when you’ve got there! But there is a good inn—the Stretherdale Arms. Put up there. You’ll not get to Stretherdale until late this evening. See the parson and the parish clerk early tomorrow morning and arrange about the funeral—they’ll have to open the family vault and so on. I shall no doubt hear from Kench as soon as he reaches London with the remains; I’ll wire you at Stretherdale as to when the funeral is to take place.”

“You wish me to remain there?” I asked.

“Certainly—and to do something while you’re waiting and until I come, for I shall come down with Kench,” he answered. “Look here,” he went on, producing a massive key. “You see this thing?—it’s the key of Stretherdale Castle! His late Lordship had a trick of locking up his old place when he went to the Riviera every Spring—as he always did—and of leaving the key with me. After you’ve seen the vicar and sexton tomorrow morning, go and see the Castle, and if necessary get some village women to put things in readiness for the funeral. I’ve only been there once, myself,” he concluded, with a smile, “but from my recollections of it, you’ll find it in need of a good deal of dusting, sweeping, and so on. Now be off!”

I made haste back to the office, sent the notices of Lord Stretherdale’s death to the papers, furnished myself with ready money, got a hurried lunch, and caught the train which Farbrake had mentioned. It was nearly dark when I came to the end of my two hundred miles journey; it was quite dark when, after a chilly ride in a car over open moors, I reached Stretherdale. But the car set me down at the door of what was evidently a roomy, old-fashioned inn, from whose quaint casemented windows shone hospitable light, and when I opened its door and walked in, the first thing I saw was a roaring fire of logs. The next was a big, bluff man, white-haired and rosy-cheeked, standing by that fire, and at his side a pretty and shapely girl who held in one hand a glass, and in the other a foaming jug of amber-tinted ale.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CHAMPAGNE BOTTLES

These two looked at me with equal enquiry; the man's glance travelling from my face to the suit-case which I carried. The girl glanced at that, too, but she calmly finished her task of pouring out the ale before she spoke. Then, handing the glass to her customer with a smile that betokened intimate acquaintanceship, she turned to me.

"Yes, sir?" she said politely. "What can I do for you?"

"I want to get a room here for a few nights," I answered. "And—if it's convenient, some dinner, or supper."

"I'm afraid it'll have to be supper!" she remarked with a smile. "If you'll sit down, sir—"

She disappeared within a curtained doorway at the back of the room: the man by the fire and I looked at each other.

"Cold night, sir," he said. "Come nearer the blaze. Travelling over our moors and hills is chilly work for those who aren't used to it."

"You guess that I've come across the hills and moors, then?" I replied, smiling at him as I went up to the fire.

"No guess-work!" he answered. "There's no other way of getting here! You mayn't have noticed it in the dark, but if you've come from Harrogate, as I reckon you have, you've crossed twelve miles of as wild country as you'll find in the North. And here we're twelve hundred feet above sea-level!"

He nodded emphatically in saying his last words; before I could make any reply the girl came back, followed by a man whom I at once set down as the landlord. He was a little, shrewd-faced, apple-cheeked, clean-shaven fellow, who wore very large spectacles on the bridge of his nose and blinked over them at me as he advanced into the light of the lamp.

"Good-evening, sir," he said. "You want to put up here? Just yourself?"

"Just myself," I answered. "I'd better tell you who I am. My name is Mailey—I am managing clerk to Mr. Farbrake, of Lincoln's Inn—"

He interrupted me with a sudden start, and a gleam of knowledge came into his eyes.

"Aye!—Lord Stretherdale's solicitor," he said. "Farbrake and Saunders. I know!"

"Quite right," said I. "I am here on business. The business is that Lord Stretherdale is dead, and I have come to arrange about his funeral."

I was immediately conscious that my news had produced an effect. The man at the fire, who had just picked up his glass, set it down untasted; the girl let out a sharp exclamation. As for the landlord he took off his spectacles and began to polish them with the aid of a big bandana handkerchief of gay colours.

"Aye?—and when was that, sir?" he enquired. "We've heard nothing here."

"Lord Stretherdale died at Nice, on the 25th instant," I replied. "The news came this morning in a letter to Mr. Farbrake from his lordship's valet, Kench."

"Aye!" he said, reflectively. "Kench, of course, would be with him. We all know Kench hereabouts—"

"Well enough!" murmured the man by the fire. "Never was a time—any time this five-and-twenty years—when Kench wasn't with him! Or—close at hand."

I turned to the girl.

"That supper?" I asked.

The landlord came out of a sudden reverie.

“Yes!” he said. “See to it, Emmie—something hot and good. Come this way, Mr. Mailey, I’ll show you your room. You can depend on a well-aired bed and every comfort here, sir,” he went on as he led me across the hall and up a wide oak-panelled staircase. “We’re used to visitors at the Stretherdale Arms, but it’s mostly in summer time, when tourists come about. How will this room do, sir?” he continued, showing me into an old-fashioned, comfortably furnished chamber, in the middle of which stood a four-poster bed. “I call it the best in the house, and there’s a fine view from the window, as you’ll see in the morning.”

I assured him that the room would do very well indeed, and he bustled about for a minute or two seeing that things were in order and fetching me hot water and towels. Then, as he was about to leave, he suddenly returned, and coming close to me, gave me a confidential sort of look.

“My name is Tapp, John Tapp, Mr. Mailey,” he said. “I was once upon a time butler to his late lordship—in the days before he became so odd and queer. So I know all about the family. And I was going to ask you, sir—” then he came still closer, and sank his voice to a whisper, as if he feared being overheard—“going to ask you—does the new lord know?”

“I can’t say, Mr. Tapp,” I answered. “He may know, by this time, if he’s seen the evening newspapers in London. I tried to find him this morning, but I couldn’t. You don’t know where he is, I suppose?”

“No, sir—the last I heard of him he was in London,” he replied. “Well—there’ll be strange alterations, Mr. Mailey, strange alterations! But I’ll leave you, sir—your supper shall be served in two minutes. And, I promise you, as good as a dinner, sir!”

He was as good as his word there—I found an excellent hot meal awaiting me when I went downstairs, served in a snug little sitting-room by a neat maid who, if rosy cheeks and bright eyes were anything to go by, was a proof of the healthiness of Stretherdale. I went back to the parlour when I had finished; Tapp was there, smoking a long pipe by the fire; his daughter sat near him, busied with some needlework; the man I had already seen was there, too, facing Tapp and fingering another long pipe.

“This is Mr. Middleton, Mr. Mailey,” said the landlord, indicating his *vis-à-vis* by pointing the waxed end of his pipe at him. “Mr. Middleton is the principal tenant farmer on the Stretherdale estates. Your family’s been on the land a long time, Mr. Middleton, I believe?”

“Ever since Henry the Eighth’s time,” replied Middleton. “We were here before these Starkes bought the estate—two hundred years before.”

“I suppose you two gentlemen knew old Lord Stretherdale very well?” I remarked as I took a seat and pulled out my tobacco and pipe. “Intimately, no doubt.”

The two men looked at each other with a world of meaning in their faces. The girl, stealing a half-shy, half-whimsical glance at me, smiled quietly.

“Um!” said Middleton. “A stiff question, young gentleman! We knew—and saw—what we were permitted to see and know. His Lordship was—his Lordship!”

“A strange old gentleman—in his latter days,” remarked Tapp.

They began to talk of the dead man—which was just what I wanted. I sat quietly smoking and listening. Bit by bit a picture of the late peer rose up before me. In his youth he had evidently been wild and racketty, but for the last thirty years or so he had lived the life of a hermit when at Stretherdale. He was rarely seen in the village or the neighbourhood. What business there was to be done with tenants was done by a steward; with tradespeople, by Kench. For many a long year there had been no indoor servants at Stretherdale Castle; what work was done there was done by two village women under Kench’s superintendence; they were admitted at a certain hour in the morning and dismissed at another in the afternoon. No horses or carriages were kept; no entertaining done; according to the women his lordship lived

in one room, both eating and sleeping in it, and never put his nose into any other except the library.

“And what the state of the old place may be!” concluded Tapp, “Heaven only knows! To keep it up properly a whole regiment of servants is necessary, and as I say, there’s never been but these two women near it for years. Fine furniture, rare old tapestry, priceless pictures, and all that!—I should say there’s never been brush or cloth brought near ’em for a generation!”

“You know what they call it in the village, Father?” said the girl, smiling. “It’s all the name they know it by now-a-days.”

“I know, I know, my lass!” replied Tapp. “And a very suitable name, too—for that’s what it is!”

“What do they call it?” I asked.

The girl looked up and laughed softly.

“They call it Cobweb Castle!” she said. “If you know what cobweb means?”

“Cobweb is local for spider-web, Mr. Mailey,” observed Tapp. “Well!—there’s plenty of spider-webs in there! The place is festooned with them, I should think. And now—as I said upstairs, sir, there’ll be strange alterations!”

Then he and Middleton began to talk of the new lord. Each had seen him now and then—very occasionally at Stretherdale, usually some race-course or other. They knew his reputation; they knew, too, that because of the old Lord’s fixed determination to make no will, the new one would come into everything.

“And he’ll make it fly, Mr. Mailey, he’ll make it fly, sir!” said Tapp, when I bade him good-night. “Alterations? Ah!—we shall see, sir. And don’t forget to look out of your bedroom window when you wake in the morning!”

I took care to remember that last injunction. And I was well rewarded: the view from my window was one which it was well worth travelling two hundred miles to see. In front of me lay a deep valley, through whose narrow defile ran a winding river: from the banks of the river on either side the land rose abruptly; to what height it attained on my side I could not see, of course, but on the opposite side of the valley, which just there was more of a ravine than a valley, it rose higher and higher until it terminated in a long, dark range of hills well over two thousand feet in altitude. In the deepest part of the valley lay the village, a few scattered houses and cottages, clustered about a three-arched bridge; just above it, on a pine-fringed plateau, stood the church; above that, half-hidden amongst high trees, I saw the place to which I had been sent—Stretherdale Castle. And little as I could see of it, I made it out to be a dark and gloomy place. From the little houses beneath it rose cheery spirals of blue smoke, but from its own tall and twisted chimneys rose nothing.

I went off to find the vicarage and the vicar as soon as I had breakfasted. The vicar, an old man, heard my news without showing any particular interest in it; indeed, I gathered from his manner that what chiefly concerned him was that he would be disturbed out of his evidently placid existence by the necessary obsequies. He heard what I had to say and referred me to the parish clerk, who, he said, would attend to the opening of the family vault. But as I was leaving him he called me back.

“—Er, I think you said you represent the late Lord Stretherdale’s solicitors?” he asked. “London people, I believe?”

“Farbrake and Saunders, sir—Lincoln’s Inn Fields,” I replied.

“Yes, yes—to be sure! Then, perhaps you will tell me—does the new Lord Stretherdale propose to take up his residence at the Castle?”

“I have no knowledge of that, sir,” I answered. “We are not his solicitors.”

“You’ve not heard anything of his intentions?” he enquired.

“Nothing!” I said. “We have not been in communication with him—so far.”

He nodded his head, fingered his chin, seemed about to speak, then changed his mind, and with a murmur of dismissal went back into his study, leaving me to seek out the sexton. I found him in a cottage near the church, and went with him into the churchyard, where he showed me the family vault of the Starkes, a sort of mausoleum at the side of the chancel. It would be a bit of a job opening it, he said; he hoped that Kench wouldn't turn up with the body for at least three days. And then he, too, plumped me with the question that the vicar had put—but more abruptly.

“New Lord coming to live here?” he asked.

“I'm sure I don't know,” said I. “Why do you ask?”

“'Cause I hope he isn't!” he growled. “Don't want the likes of him hereabouts!”

“Why—what do you know of him?” I enquired.

“Plenty!” he said gruffly. “Enough, anyway! But I reckon London'll suit him better. Next door to Hell, is London—so they tell me!”

He turned unceremoniously away, and feeling sure that I should get nothing more out of him, I went off to the Castle. And in the village street, near the Castle gate, I met Emmie Tapp, a basket on her arm, and evidently going a-marketing. She gave me a demure smile.

“Have you seen Cobweb Castle, sir?” she asked.

“I'm just going there now,” I replied. “And if you'd promise something, I'd ask you to go with me.”

“What?” she asked with another demure look.

“Not to call me sir!” I said. “I'm too young for grandfatherly titles. Come along! I'm a bit afraid of going into such a gloomy place alone.”

She hesitated a second; then, glancing up and down the street, and seeing nobody about, she turned and walked up the slope, to the dark, forbidding old pile above us. As we went, I saw at once why the village people called the place what they did; everything about its exterior was lost, dilapidated, uncared for. Nothing had been done at grounds or gardens for years, and weeds grew everywhere.

There was a dreadful silence in that house when once we had entered its cavernous stone hall, and the girl at my side caught her breath as if she was frightened.

“It's an awful place!” she whispered. “How anybody can live in it—”

I stopped her with a sharp exclamation. There was a door partly open on our right, and through it I could see a table, on which stood a champagne bottle and glasses—one glass still held some liquor. Next moment I was in the room, a sort of morning room, examining these things. I knew at once that somebody had been in that room not many hours before—two people, drinking.

A sudden scream from my companion twisted me round from the table to stare at her. She pointed to another open door at the back of the room. Across the threshold, face downwards, lay the body of a smartly dressed man, and near him, as if flung carelessly aside, another champagne bottle.

### CHAPTER III AT WHOSE HAND?

In that first hurried glance at the still figure and its surroundings I saw more than Emmie Tapp did; she, indeed, after that sharp scream of surprise shrank back towards the door by which she had entered. And what I saw was a scarlet patch on the paper label of the champagne bottle, and another on the back of the man's white linen collar—I knew both for blood-stains.

I turned quickly to the girl. She stood staring at me; her eyes big with fear; her hands clutching at the light drapery about her throat; it seemed to me that in another second she would scream. And laying a hand on her shoulder I pushed her out of the room and towards the outer door.

“Run!” I said. “Run down to the village! Get your father to come here—and the policeman, if there is one—anybody! Is there a doctor in the place?”

“No!” she panted. “No!”

“Never mind—run, now!” I urged. “I'll stay here.”

The need for action did her good; her face, which had gone white, recovered some colour, and she suddenly turned and ran, swiftly, too, down the neglected avenue. I went back into the morning room and heard myself muttering.

“Doctor? As if a doctor would do any good! That's—death!”

For I knew the man was dead. It was only in death that a man would lie so still, so rigid. I guessed, too, how he had come by his death. His murderer had struck him down, battered the life out of him with that empty champagne bottle—a formidable weapon in the hand of a ruthless assailant. But I would make sure, and moving over to the windows I pulled up the blinds—dirty, grime-encrusted things they were!—and let more light into the place. I did that in both rooms—the inner one, I found, across the threshold of which the body lay, was a library, packed from floor to ceiling with magnificent, richly bound books—before making any examination of the dead man. And when at last I bent closer to him, I saw that he was not only dead, but had probably been dead some little time. His face was half-hidden in the crook of his arm and in the thickness of a fur rug across which he had fallen, but I saw that he was a young, good-looking, fair-haired man, of apparently something between twenty-five and thirty years of age, fashionably and smartly attired in a grey tweed suit. And I saw more blood-stains on the coat, and more on the rug, and more on the fair hair, and though I carefully refrained from putting a finger on him, it needed no close examination to see that his skull had been badly crushed by repeated blows from the champagne bottle.

I turned from the dead man to the room which Emmie Tapp and I had first entered. On its centre table stood, as I have already mentioned, another champagne bottle and two glasses. They were tumblers—not champagne glasses. About three-quarters of the contents of this bottle had been drunk, and in one of the glasses some of the liquor was still left. The two men—the man lying there and the man who had killed him—had, accordingly, drunk nearly two large bottles of champagne, a famous brand, too, before this orgy had ended in tragedy. But what had happened? Was it a sudden quarrel or was it a carefully-planned murder? There were signs of a struggle—or what I took to be signs. Not much—an overturned chair at the side of the table, a ruffled hearthrug, close by, as if somebody had tripped over it—but still, something. Of any trace of the murderer I saw nothing. But there might be the prints of his fingers on the neck of the champagne bottle, and I must point out that possibility to the police once they came.

Suddenly, looking around the dingy room, I saw a hat. It had been thrown, carelessly, with a heavy overcoat, into an easy-chair in a dark corner. I picked it up and examined it; it was by a well-known maker and bore the name of a tradesman in Burlington Arcade. But there was no name pencilled within its lining—nothing to show to whom it belonged. I had no better luck with the overcoat; there was the label of a firm of fashionable tailors in Saville Row stitched into it, but nothing more.

I had just finished examining these things when I heard people hurrying up the avenue outside, and going out to the front to them I saw Tapp, Middleton, a policeman, and a man whom I knew at once to be a doctor: he was, indeed, a doctor from the market-town, whom Emmie Tapp had come across in the village. They were all talking together but they grew silent as I hurried down the steps to meet them.

“Your daughter’s told you?” I said, addressing Tapp. “We found a dead man here!—a man who in my opinion has been murdered. He and another man must have got into the house—but you’ll see, yourselves, how things are.”

I led them through the hall and into the morning room and straight to the body. The man whom I had taken for a doctor immediately bent down and turned it over so that the face became fully visible. And at that Tapp and Middleton both let out a simultaneous cry of horrified surprise, starting back in uncontrollable astonishment.

“Good God!” said Tapp, in an awestruck whisper. “It’s the new lord!—Mr. Humphrey that was!”

“Right enough!” muttered Middleton. “That’s who it is! And what’s he doing here—and who did it?”

I pointed to the champagne bottles; the overturned chair; the disturbed hearthrug.

“If this is Lord Stretherdale,” I said, “he—”

“It is Lord Stretherdale!” interrupted Tapp. “We knew him well enough, Mr. Middleton and myself. Oh, yes, there’s no doubt about it, gentlemen—that’s he!”

“Then he must have come here secretly, with some companion, and somehow found a way into the house,” I said. “There’s plenty of proof there, anyway, that there were two of them! But why he came, and when—”

The doctor, who had been quietly examining the dead man, looked up.

“Whoever this man is,” he said, “he’s been dead for at least twenty-six hours! He was probably assailed—struck repeated blows with that bottle—night before last, and has been lying here ever since. Has no one entered the castle during that time?”

“No one’s entered the Castle since the old lord went away, doctor,” replied Tapp. “He locked it up himself and carried the key off to London and left it with his lawyer. This young gentleman brought it down last night, and he’s the first person to enter the place since old Lord Stretherdale went out.”

“No!” said I. “If this is the new Lord Stretherdale, he entered it!—he and some companion. But how did they get in?”

The policeman, a typical countryman and, I should say, not long a member of the force, who had stood by, open-mouthed, staring from the dead man to the doctor and from the doctor to the dead man, looked round him as if searching for inspiration.

“Well, it beats me how anybody could get in here without me knowing!” he exclaimed. “I’ve taken a walk round here every day since the old lord went off to foreign parts, and was round yesterday, and I’ve never seen anything!”

“Well, you’d better take a walk round now, my man!” said the doctor. “I think you’ll find something has been forced. And you’d better let your Superintendent know of this at once and get him over. Here, stay a minute!” he continued, as the policeman, still mystified, was about to leave the room. “Give me a hand, and let us lift this on to that table.”

We helped, all of us, to lay the body on a fine old table in the middle of the library. The doctor covered it over with a sheet snatched up from a cabinet.

"We'll just leave all examination of his clothing and so on until the superintendent of police comes," he said. "He's the proper person to do that sort of thing. Well, you're quite sure, Mr. Tapp, and you, Mr. Middleton, that this is the body of the gentleman you knew as Mr. Humphrey Starke, next in succession to the late Lord Stretherdale? Both dead sure of it? Well—I wonder if Mr. Humphrey Starke, when he came here to Stretherdale Castle, in this evidently surreptitious fashion, probably breaking into the house, knew that his uncle was dead, and that he had succeeded?"

"No one knew—no one in England, I mean—knew that old Lord Stretherdale was dead until yesterday morning," I remarked. "We—Farbrake and Saunders—were the first to know."

The doctor regarded me gravely.

"You're from them, eh?" he said. "And the first intimation came to you? Yesterday? Well, this poor young fellow, in my opinion, was killed night before last. What was he doing here? And—who was with him?"

The policeman made a sudden re-appearance: he looked innocently triumphant.

"I've found it!" he exclaimed.

"Found what?" asked the doctor.

"Where they got in! Plain enough! I'll show you if you'll come this way," replied the policeman. "Didn't take me long to spot it when I'd once started."

He led us along various vault-like corridors, cold and silent as the grave, to an arched doorway, where he pointed, still triumphant, to the door and to certain marks on it.

"Been forced, that has!" he said. "Crowbar shoved in there, then the door prized off its lock. And look here!" He drew the door open and leading us out into what was evidently a back-alley in the thick shrubberies that encircled the house, pointed to a bar of iron, thrown aside on the turf. "That's what it was done with," he went on. "I found it!"

The doctor gave him a sharp look.

"Ah, you're a clever chap, you are!" he said satirically. "You'll go a long way, you will! But I thought you said you took a look round here every day?"

"Every day since his lordship left," assented the policeman.

"And tried all the doors, of course?" suggested the doctor.

"Not tried 'em—glanced at 'em," said the policeman. "I saw this door, yesterday—looked all right to me, too. But I was at the end of the walk there—didn't come no nearer—so of course I didn't notice this crowbar."

"No, you wouldn't, I'm sure," agreed the doctor. "Well, this is where they got into the house, no doubt—and how the other man, murderer, assailant, whatever he was, and whoever he was, got away. And he's had a long start, and the thing to do now is to get the Superintendent here. I'll go to him myself—my car's down at the Castle gate—and do you, constable, take care that nobody enters that room where the body is until I bring him back. See to that, Mr. Tapp, will you? I'll hurry over to the Superintendent as quick as I can."

Tapp replied that he and Middleton would see to things, and the doctor and I, walking back through the gloomy house, went down the avenue together.

"This is a strange business!" he murmured when we were clear of the others. "What do you make of it?"

"That's beyond me!" said I. "I'm absolutely amazed. There's no doubt that's the new Lord Stretherdale, who was Mr. Humphrey Starke. But what was he doing here? I called at his hotel in Jermyn Street yesterday morning to tell him that his uncle was dead, but didn't find him—the hotel proprietor said he was away and probably at some race-meeting; Liverpool, perhaps."

“Aye, it’s Grand National time,” said the doctor, nodding. “Well—we know now where he was, anyhow! But—why? Do you know anything of him?—I’m almost a newcomer to the neighbourhood.”

“Only that he was a wild, improvident sort of chap,” said I. “There’d been trouble with him.”

“The old lord, I understand, was fabulously wealthy,” remarked the doctor. “Did this man come in for any of it as well as the title?”

“All!” I replied. “The old man left no will—utterly refused to make one.”

“Then who comes in now?” he asked, with obvious inquisitiveness. “Who’s next?”

“As far as I know a cousin of this man whose dead body I found,” I replied. “A Mr. Maxwell Starke, another nephew of the old lord.”

“Queer business! Well, here’s my car—I’ll hurry to the police,” he said. “What are you going to do?”

“Wire to my principal,” I answered.

“Then you’ll go back up there?” he suggested, nodding at the gloomy pile behind us. “All right—keep an eye on things till I get back. That fool of a policeman—don’t let him do anything stupid.”

He went off in the direction of the nearest town, which, I had learned, was six miles away in an adjacent valley, and I walked on to the village post-office. The news of our discovery at the Castle had got out—Emmie Tapp, I suppose, had told it—and the village folk were at their doors as I passed, staring curiously at me, and, as I knew very well, not because I was a stranger. The woman at the post-office stared, too, but she asked no questions until I had written out a long message to Farbrake, telling him of what had occurred and begging him to come down at once. Then, as she read it over, she looked at me.

“This is true, then, sir?” she asked.

“True enough!” said I. “Did you know this gentleman?”

“I’ve seen him,” she answered. “He came here, just once, two or three years ago, to see his uncle, and was at the Castle a few days. He—” she paused, glancing about her, and lowered her voice—“he was a bad young man, sir—wicked!”

Somebody came in just then, and begging the postmistress to get my wire off at once, I went away and straight back to the Castle. A knot of villagers had assembled inside the gates, and some of the bolder amongst the crowd were advancing on the front entrance only to be waved back by Middleton, who had posted himself on the steps.

“Now go back, my lads!” he was saying as I got up to him. “You can’t come in here, and there’s little to tell that you don’t know already—you’ll know more in good time. Mr. Mailey!” he went on, drawing me aside. “Here’s a discovery been made since you and the doctor went out. The vicar came up just after you’d gone. He knows all about what’s in this old place, and he says the heirloom cupboard’s been broken open and a lot of priceless things taken out of it—things worth thousands! Go in and see him.”

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ABANDONED CAR

I went back into the house; the policeman, mounting guard in the morning-room, was staring inquisitively into the library, where I could see Tapp and the vicar, talking earnestly in a corner of the room. The policeman gave me a fatuous grin.

“Vicar says there’s been a burglary!” he whispered. “Gold and silver stuff gone, and other stuff, too. Knows what’s missing, he does!—used to spend a good deal of time up here in the old lord’s days.”

I went forward and past the centre table with its still burden to where the vicar was standing with Tapp.

“I could almost supply a list of them!” the Vicar was saying. “I knew the contents of that cupboard intimately and of the bookshelves, too.” He turned and blinked at me over his horn-rimmed spectacles. “Oh?” he went on. “The young man from Farbrake’s eh? There has been a serious robbery here, young man, as well as a murder!”

“Things are missing, sir?” I questioned him. “You can speak as to that?”

He took a stride or two to the panelled door of a cupboard built into the wall between two bookcases.

“Look here!” he said. “This has been forced open! there are the marks of the thing that did it—a burglar’s—what do they call them?—a jemmy, isn’t it? There you are! the marks are plain, and the lock’s broken. Now look inside that cupboard! You see a quantity of valuable objects of art; all sorts of rare things. Yes, but you don’t see what’s gone! I do! I knew the contents of this cupboard as well as I know what lies on my own study table. It was filled with heirlooms, and with equally valuable objects collected at one time and another by the late Lord Stretherdale—I don’t mean that unfortunate man,” he broke off, pointing to the table, “but to his uncle. I last saw the contents of this cupboard a day or two before Lord Stretherdale set off for the South of France; as a matter of fact he and I, between us, dusted all the things which he kept there. There is a good deal gone, and three almost priceless objects in particular.”

“Yes, sir?” I said. “What, now?”

“One is a silver-gilt crucifix, studded lavishly with diamonds, once the property of the Emperor Charles the Fifth,” he replied. “It was given by a King of Spain to the third Lord Stretherdale when he was Ambassador at Madrid. A second is a miniature of Queen Elizabeth, set in diamonds, for which the late Lord Stretherdale, I believe, paid an enormous sum a few years ago. A third is a Monstrance of 14th Century work, elaborately studded with precious stones—diamonds, pearls, rubies; that, too, is an heirloom; it came into the family through the fourth lord, who secured it at a vast price from some noble but impoverished family in Italy. Those three objects alone are worth a huge sum—and there are others missing. And see here!” He closed the door of the cupboard again, and directed our attention to a glass-topped case close by, the lid of which had been forced open and in such a fashion that the thick glass had cracked. “In this case,” he went on, pointing to two vacant spaces, “were the two most valuable books which the late Lord Stretherdale possessed, and that is saying a great deal! One was a Book of Hours that had belonged to Louis XI of France, a wonderful example of its sort—Lord Stretherdale gave several thousand guineas for it. The other was a veritable first edition of Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress—any bibliophile knows the immense value of that! And what does all this mean?”

“That there have been thieves here, sir!” exclaimed Tapp.

“Obviously,” said I.

The vicar gave us a pitying look.

“It means that whoever has appropriated these valuable objects was a person who knew they were here and who was well aware of their value!” he said. “And, what is more, who knew where and how they could be disposed of. And I fear—I fear!—Yes, I fear that I have already formed an opinion, and theory, which I should not be surprised to find correct!”

“May one ask what it is, sir?” I inquired.

He gave a sharp side-glance at the muffled figure on the table and lowered his voice to a whisper.

“One hears rumours even in an out-of-the-way place like this,” he said. “The unfortunate man who is lying dead there had a reputation which was far, very far, from good! It was well known that he was a gambler, a spendthrift, and worse; well-known, too, that he had bad companions. My belief is that, knowing this place, knowing, too, that his uncle was away, and that the Castle would be unprotected, he came down here secretly with some scoundrelly accomplice, broke in, and took these things in order to raise money on them. I fear—I fear!—that is the truth!”

“But his murder, sir?” I suggested.

The vicar took a pinch of snuff from an old box that he produced from a waistcoat already liberally ornamented.

“I should say his companion murdered him!” he replied drily. “What else? But that is an affair for the police.”

The police came just after that, and in some force; the Superintendent, three or four men in uniform; a couple of plain-clothes men, and, with the doctor whom I had seen before, another medical man who turned out to be the police-surgeon. They displayed a commendable eagerness to get busy, the Superintendent dispersing his men to search house and grounds after he had been informed of the first superficial facts. Then, with no one in the room but the two doctors, one of his sergeants, and myself, he announced his intention of searching the dead man’s clothing. We gathered about him as he made a careful examination of every garment.

Not a great deal was brought to light, but we got some illumination from the character of the various things which the searcher drew out of the pockets and laid, one by one, on a table. There was a cheap watch; one of the sort you can buy for a guinea, attached to the waistcoat by a leather guard. There was a purse which contained a five-pound note, a few sovereigns, and some silver coins. In one of the waistcoat pockets was a latch-key; in another a much-worn silver cigarette case, with the monogram H. S., on its side. Nothing much in all this—we anticipated more when a leather pocket-book came to light from an inner pocket of the grey tweed jacket. But there was little in that—yet what little there was had a significance. There were several bills from West End tradesmen; a couple of circulars from money-lenders; some newspaper clippings, relating to horse-racing; a letter from the manager of a bank, reminding Mr. Humphrey Starke that his account was overdrawn. And then came three pawn-tickets. One referred to a gold watch and chain; the others, respectively, to a pair of diamond and platinum sleeve-links and a diamond ring; all were of recent date, and the transactions had been effected in the name of Henry Smith.

It was impossible to gather any idea of what they thought of these discoveries from the impassive faces of the two police functionaries, but presently they unearthed something which seemed to stir their official curiosity and interest. This was the half of a railway ticket which the sergeant found in a side-pocket of the overcoat that I had noticed lying on a chair. It bore the date March 27th—the day after the death of old Lord Stretherdale at Nice, according to Kench’s information, and two days before I had called at Luciani’s Hotel, in Jermyn Street—

and it had been issued from Kings Cross Station in London, to Doncaster, in Yorkshire, and back. What the sergeant found was, of course, the return half—Doncaster to Kings Cross.

“Evidently he came here from Doncaster,” remarked the Superintendent. “How and when and who with, we’ve got to find out.”

He and the sergeant carefully put together the various things they had found, and the Superintendent then turned his attention to the empty champagne bottles and the glasses, which he handled very gingerly, saying that there’d likely be finger-marks on them.

“I suppose there’s no doubt that he was murdered with this, gentlemen?” he said, indicating the empty bottle on the label of which were blood-stains. “You’re sure of it?”

“Sure!” said the doctor who had come there first. “No doubt whatever! And a terrible weapon, too! His skull’s smashed to pieces.”

A policeman put his head in at the door, with news in his face. Some of us went out to him. He had been examining the lower regions of the house, and had found the door of the wine-cellar broken open: that explained where the champagne had been got from. And, Mr. Tapp remarked in an aside to me, it was a further proof that there had been design in the entrance to the old place.

“But then,” he added, with a jerk of his thumb in the direction of the dead man, “he knew it well enough, to be sure! Not that he ever was here a great deal, but still he had been here, time and again, and he knew all the ins and outs. But Lord help us! Mr. Mailey, whoever can it have been who came with him.”

“That, as the Superintendent said just now, has got to be found out,” said I. “And I think it will be a stiff job. What amazes me is that these two men should have been able to get in here unobserved!”

“Oh, I don’t know, Mr. Mailey!” he remarked. “This old place is out of the way of the village, and there are thick curtains in these rooms that would shroud any light they had. And they could approach the place by way of the moors, sir, in such a fashion that no one hereabouts would know of their presence. There’s one station four miles away; another six miles. But in my opinion, Mr. Mailey, they came by car—and I know the neighbourhood well enough to know that they could get, by the moorland roads, to the woods at the back of the Castle, leave the car there where nobody would find or see it, and get down by the shrubberies to that door that we found without anybody being the wiser. It only required knowledge of the place and the district, Mr. Mailey—and Mr. Starke, sir, he had it!”

I went down to the door by which access had been had to the old house. The police were outside, carefully examining certain foot-marks on the soft, moss-grown path that ran from the door through the shrubbery. One of the plain-clothes men, who evidently had more experience of that sort of thing, pointed out certain marks to me which he said were recent. Following them towards the edge of the shrubbery we came across some really plain prints, in a patch of bare soil: my companion went back to the house and returned with the Superintendent who brought with him one of the dead man’s shoes. And into one of the clearer impressions that shoe fitted exactly.

But there were other prints, just as clear. They were larger; the prints of the foot-marks of a bigger, heavier man—prints, said the plain-clothes policeman, of a number ten boot, and the soles that had made them were evidently studded with heavy flat-headed nails.

“Pair of boots for rough country wear, those,” said the plain-clothes man. “And the chap who wore them walked heavily. They get plainer as the turf gets barer—the two men came through this shrubbery without a doubt!”

We followed this path to the end of the shrubbery and through a gate into a lane that presently turned into a wood. It was a grass lane, but here and there were patches of bare soil, and we contrived to trace the footprints. The lane and the wood sloped upward for some

distance behind the Castle and terminated at last on the open moor. And there was a road that wound in and out of the moor and its undulations and disappeared over the brow of the hill. A quarter of a mile away from where we stood a pile of grey ruin rose against the heather; the plain-clothes man suddenly pointed at it.

“Sure as I’m a living man, I see something there!” he exclaimed. “And it looks to me remarkably like a motor car! We’ll see, anyhow!”

He set off running, and being a lithe and active fellow was at the object he had indicated a hundred yards ahead of us. Then he turned, waving his hand triumphantly.

“It is a car!” he shouted as we made towards him. “Abandoned! Look here,” he went on as we came nearer. “It’s been turned aside from the road there, run under this wall, and left. But they took very good care to take off everything by which it could be identified—number plate and all the rest of it. Still, they wouldn’t want to carry that about, so they must be hidden somewhere near.”

The Superintendent pointed to various mounds that figured here and there on the moors.

“No end of those old lead-mines all over these moors,” he observed. “Anything dropped down one of them would take some finding. But let’s look at the car.”

I was already examining that. It was an old car: I knew enough about automobiles to know that it must have been built in the early stages of the industry. But there was no clue as to its ownership anywhere about it. There it stood, forlorn, derelict, sodden with recent rains. There was little to be learned from it, but much to guess at.

The plain-clothes man, having satisfied himself that there was nothing left in or about the car that would help him, was now scouting about on the surface of the road close by. Once more he let out an ejaculation of triumph.

“Here we are!” he exclaimed. “Same footprints! And all pointing towards the Castle. They ran that car in there, got rid of the number plate, left the car and went down this road to the wood and the shrubbery. That’s my opinion!”

The Superintendent looked at the prints. He seemed dubious about something.

“What puzzles me is—why was this car abandoned?” he said. “If they came here in it, why didn’t they go away in it?”

“One was left behind—dead!” I said.

He glanced at me for a moment without speaking.

“You’re supposing that Mr. Starke, the dead man—Lord Stretherdale I suppose he was, by that time—came in this car with another man,” he remarked at last. “Well—maybe! And maybe not. Supposing—in spite of his shoe fitting one of these marks, that it wasn’t his shoe that made them, but another man’s shoe of the same size? Supposing Mr. Starke, came here secretly, and interrupted—two burglars? Eh? But that’s supposition!—let’s get on with our investigation.”

We got on—we were busy all that afternoon. But little more had transpired when, in the middle of the evening, Farbrake arrived at the Stretherdale Arms, bringing with him a man from Scotland Yard.

## CHAPTER V FROM THE PAST

Farbrake was all impatience to hear everything I could tell him; he had not been five minutes in the house before he got me and his companion into a private room and bade me give them every detail. During the afternoon, for my own satisfaction, I had made some memoranda of the various happenings, from my finding of the dead man to the discovery of the abandoned car; with the help of these I gave my two hearers a circumstantial and full story, omitting nothing that I could remember. And at the end Farbrake turned to the detective.

“What do you make of it, Garland?” he asked. “Does it help you to any theory?”

Garland, a quiet, reserved man, shook his head in a non-committal fashion.

“Early to say anything yet, Mr. Farbrake,” he answered. “On the face of it, and considering this young Mr. Starke’s reputation and the undoubted fact that he was hard up, I’m inclined to think—it’s a mere first impression, mind you, and may be utterly wrong—that there may be a good deal in the vicar’s suggestion. But there’s a question I’d like to ask you. Considering that this young gentleman—the murdered man, I mean—was next in succession to the old lord, wouldn’t he have found it fairly easy to raise money on his expectations?”

“We don’t know that he didn’t,” said Farbrake.

“What I mean,” continued Garland, “is this—a man must be in a desperate financial state—and especially if he’s a gentleman and heir to a peerage!—when he decides to rob his own uncle! However, if the vicar’s theory is correct—and it’s a plausible one—there’s one thing certain, and that is that my field of operations isn’t here! This affair would be planned in town, and my first job will be to find out all about the dead man’s life there, and who his associates were; and so on. I’ll do what I can, and learn all I can while I’m down here, but I think you’ll find that the man we want isn’t in this quarter of the country—not he! There’s just one place I shall call at, though, when I go back—Doncaster. For it looks as if Starke and his companion—I’m supposing something, you see!—had come on from there in that abandoned car, and I may be able to find out where it was got, and particulars of who got it. However, I’m not going to set up any notions of my own until I’ve seen the local police tomorrow morning and heard all the Superintendent has to say—my firm opinion, Mr. Farbrake, is that there’s a lot more mystery about this job than appears at present, and there’s a tidy lot now. The thing to investigate, sir, I’m convinced, is the recent private life of Mr. Humphrey Starke—or, I should say, Lord Stretherdale.”

“If he was murdered on the evening of the 27th, as, according to Mailey, the doctors agree he was,” remarked Farbrake, “he certainly was Lord Stretherdale and had been for two days, though he didn’t know it.”

The detective turned on us with a sly smile.

“How do you know he didn’t know it?” he asked. “There may have been people at Nice who let him know!”

“Would he, in that case, have come down to steal things that were his own?” exclaimed Farbrake. “Nonsense!”

“We don’t know that he did,” replied Garland, quietly. “That may be all wrong. As I said—there’s mystery! And you’ll find it will be added to before we’ve done with it. No end, sir, of additions before we get through.”

We got some sort of an addition that night. Tapp, meeting me in the bar-parlour, drew me aside and said that if it was convenient to Mr. Farbrake, there was something that he would like to tell him; something, he said, that had occurred to him during the evening, and that he

thought Mr. Farbrake had better know, though whether it had anything to do with this affair or not it was beyond him to say. We had Tapp into our private sitting-room there and then; Farbrake bade him tell us everything he could think of; apparently unimportant matters, he said, might turn out to be of vast significance.

“Well, sir, this is just something that came into my mind,” responded Tapp. “It’s this—Mr. Humphrey Starke was last down here three or four years ago. He stayed at the Castle some three weeks. He left rather suddenly—at least, we suddenly heard that he’d gone: our impression had been that he was to stay longer. And not very long after he’d gone, a young lady disappeared!”

“What do you mean by disappeared?” asked Garland, sharply.

“I mean, she left this neighbourhood,” replied Tapp. “She was a young lady who’d been here about a year as housekeeper to old Mr. Wilson, a retired gentleman who at that time (he’s dead since) had a very pretty little place on the other side of the Castle; his grounds and the Castle grounds adjoin. She was a handsome girl—”

“What age?” demanded Garland.

“I should say twenty-two or three years,” answered Tapp. “A very handsome girl—greatly admired, and much run after by the young men round here: and there was one young fellow who was so much in favour with her that it was considered a settled matter. But as I say, just after Mr. Humphrey Starke had left, she left, too—and in a hurry. She went to old Mr. Wilson one morning with a telegram that had come for her and that said her mother was very ill and she must go at once, and in an hour’s time she was off. And—Mr. Wilson never heard of her again! He wrote several times to an address she’d given him when he first engaged her, but he never had any reply. And of course people began to talk, and it came out that she and Mr. Humphrey Starke had been seen, late of an evening, on the moors, more than once, and so it got talked of that she’d run away to him, and that the telegram about her sick mother was all a blind. That’s the story, gentlemen—all of it.”

“By no means!” said Garland. “That’s the preface!” He got out a note-book and a pencil.

“What was the girl’s name, Mr. Tapp?”

“Name, sir? Her name was Farrell—Miss Esther Farrell.”

“Know anything of where she came from?”

“No, sir—except that it was the South, somewhere.”

“What was the name of the young fellow that you said she favoured above the others?”

“Starley, sir—young William Starley—a farmer.”

“Is he anywhere about, now?”

“To be sure, sir! Martenbeck Farm—on the moors, back of the Castle.”

“Is he married since this girl left?”

“No, sir, no! He was very sore indeed about her going off like that!—I have heard that the girl had really promised to marry him. No—he’s always looked a soured and angry man since she ran away, gentlemen. But of course, whether she really did go to join Mr. Humphrey Starke is a question that—”

“To be sure!” said Garland, putting his note-book away. “Can’t tell, can you?” He turned to Farbrake when Tapp had left the room. “You mentioned that another nephew of the old lord’s succeeds to the title now that this death’s occurred,” he said. “Mr. Maxwell Starke, wasn’t it? Has anything been done to inform him of what’s happened here?”

“Yes,” replied Farbrake. “Immediately I heard from Mailey this morning I wired to Mrs. Starke, his mother, who lives at Cheriton Park, near Leicester, giving her the news—I put it fatal accident—and asking her to inform her son and to communicate with me here. I expected to find a wire from her when I got here, but nothing’s arrived so far.”

“This young gentleman lives with his mother, then?” asked Garland.

“As far as I’m aware. I know very little about him,” said Farbrake. “I’ve never known much of either nephew.”

A wire arrived early next morning, just as Farbrake, Garland, and myself were setting off for the Castle, to meet the local police. Farbrake read it out.

Mrs. Starke is at Biarritz and we do not know where Mr. Maxwell is but his town address is Rockingham Chambers, Corke Street. Jane Carruthers, housekeeper.

“Wherever Mr. Maxwell Starke, now Lord Stretherdale, is, he must know by now,” remarked Farbrake. “It’ll be in all the papers this morning. I suppose the police saw to that yesterday, didn’t they Mailey?”

“As far as I know, they did,” I replied. “There were reporters here yesterday afternoon and I saw the Superintendent in conversation with them.”

“I want to know about that,” remarked Garland. “It’s important that a complete list and description of the missing articles should be supplied to the press. The thieves, whoever they were, didn’t take them to keep as curiosities, you may be sure! If they can be traced we shall be getting somewhere. I suppose this parson you spoke of can be trusted to give an accurate description of the things? Well, then, if it hasn’t been done, the first thing to do is to circulate such a description all over the world. I’ve a pretty good notion where they’ll have gone, though,” he added, with a dry chuckle. “Not much doubt about that!”

“Where, then?” asked Farbrake.

“Across the Atlantic!” said Garland. “Fine market for that sort of thing! And no questions asked, either. Well!” he exclaimed, as we came in sight of the Castle. “So this is the scene of the affair, is it! Excellent setting for such a drama, now—I wonder if it’s the first time a murder’s taken place here? From the general atmosphere of the place I should say not!”

We found the Castle swarming with police that morning. The Chief Constable had come in person; the Superintendent had brought additional men with him; they were conducting a minute examination of house and grounds. Farbrake entered into a long discussion with the Chief Constable: Garland got himself posted by the Superintendent and took a quiet look round on his own account. And having examined everything and made an inspection of the path in the shrubbery and of the abandoned car on the moors outside, he came to me, suggesting quietly that we should take a stroll together. We went out on the moors at the back of the Castle; for a minute or two he walked aimlessly along in silence; then he gave me a glance out of his eye- corners.

“You’ve no idea why I brought you out here?” he said.

“None!” said I. “Why?”

“I want to see that man Starley that the landlord told us about last night,” he replied. “I thought you’d know where his place is.”

“Martenbeck Farm? I do, it was pointed out to me yesterday—it’s in a dip of the moor, just over there,” I answered.

“But—why do you wish to see him?”

“Ah!” he replied. “You never know, Mr. Mailey, what might be behind an affair of this sort! There was a good deal in that story we heard last night from friend Tapp. For instance, this may be a case of murder from motives of revenge.”

“You mean that Starley may be the murderer?” I exclaimed.

“Why not?” he remarked coolly. “Starke no doubt got his girl away from him, and didn’t Tapp say that Starley had been angry and sullen ever since? And there are men whose instinct for vengeance doesn’t grow less as time gets on, but the opposite. And isn’t this Starley a Yorkshireman? I’m not, but I’ve heard it said that a Yorkshireman will carry a stone in his

pocket for years, and then turn it over and carry it another ten years, but he'll fling it sure as fate, in the end! Oh, yes!—if Tapp's story about the girl is correct, I shouldn't be a bit surprised to learn that Starley murdered Starke!"

"But—the burglary?" I suggested.

"Oh, that!" he said, almost indifferently. "Um!—Well, I don't know that that isn't quite another thing. You see, Mr. Mailey, I don't know that the burglary and the murder were done at the same time. There are some big questions. Had the murder anything whatever to do with the burglary? How do we know when the burglary took place? I know that the old lord went away from here some weeks ago, and that this place had been closed ever since: I found out this morning, in talking to him, that that idiot of a village policeman, though he'd take a walk round the place every day, had never once tried or inspected a single door or window!—he'd just gone round the gardens with his thumbs in his belt and made a glance of the eye serve instead of using his hands. So—burglars may have been in there days, even weeks, before the murder took place. Mind you, I don't say that the burglary and the murder weren't, as it were, simultaneous; all I say is, I don't know that the murder and the burglary are relative."

"In other words, you don't think that Starke's murderer was even the man who stole those things?" I suggested.

"I don't say he was and I don't say he wasn't," he answered. "All I say is that at present I've no evidence to show that murder and burglary are relative—as I just said. There's nothing to show that they took place on the same occasion. Of course, there's the old parson's theory—that Starke was hard up, came down here to get what he knew to be of great value and brought an accomplice with him and that the accomplice murdered him and cleared out. But I want to know a lot before I fall in with that. Starke came here on the 27th; his uncle had died on the 25th. How do I know that Starke was not aware of the death? It took place at Nice—well, there are some queer fish from London to be found on the Riviera! One of Starke's associates—he evidently kept queer company in London—may have been in Nice, or at Monte Carlo, close by, heard the news, and wired him. I think that very probable, considering everything, and if it was so I don't think Starke would come here to seize what was already his own, for as soon as he became Lord Stretherdale there'd have been all the money he wanted in London."

"But he did come!" said I.

"Exactly! He came!—right enough. But, I think, not for that!" he remarked, smiling cynically. "He came for some other reason. What that reason was I don't think we shall find out here—it'll have to be looked for in London."

"And then, I suppose, you'll have to seek for the man who came with him," I suggested.

He turned and regarded me with a smile which seemed to have something of pity for my ignorance in it.

"What evidence is there that anybody did come with him?" he said. "Two bottles of champagne—two used glasses, you say? Yes—but the murderer may have got himself a bottle and a glass, after—after what he did. You see, Mr. Mailey, I see this possibility—Starke came along! His murderer found him there!—came on him unawares." He paused, suddenly pointing to the figure of a man outlined against the sky in front, waving his arm to a sheepdog. "That," he said, "is our man—Starley!"

## CHAPTER VI THE STRONG BOX

We went forward, in silence, to where the man, with the aid of his dog, was rounding a flock of sheep into a stone-walled fold amongst the heather. He closed the gate on the last of them, whistled to the dog, and was turning away in the direction of his farmstead, close by, when he became aware of our presence, and turned his head towards us with a sharp, challenging gesture. I looked at him narrowly as we approached him; he was a tall, well-made man, handsome in a dark, somewhat arrogant fashion, and would have been attractive to look at but for his expression, which was angry and sullen. He bent his brows scowling at us as we went up to him, and when he spoke to his dog, which growled threateningly as we drew near, his voice was that of a man of decidedly ugly temper.

“Down, damn ye!” he snarled. “To heel!”

The dog cowered to its belly at his heels; its master, with a glance at us that was distinctly unfriendly, turned away again. Garland hailed him, suavely.

“Mr. Starley?” he said. “A word, sir!”

Starley looked back, over his shoulder, unwillingly.

“What d’ye want?” he demanded, surlily. “I don’t know you!”

“No reason why you shouldn’t,” replied Garland, cheerfully. “My name’s Garland, Mr. Starley—Detective Inspector Garland. I’m enquiring into the affair that’s just happened at the Castle, down there, and—”

Starley turned deliberately away.

“I know nothing about it!” he growled. “You needn’t come to me.”

“Well, but stop a bit!” pleaded Garland. “You don’t know what I wanted to ask, and you can’t object to a simple question or two. You see, you’re only just a short distance away from this place—”

“What do you want?—and get done with it!” snapped Starley, turning sharply on us. “I’ve already told you, I know nothing.”

“Well—have you seen any strangers about these last few days?” enquired Garland. “Noticed anything unusual?”

“No, I haven’t!” answered Starley. “Nothing and nobody!”

“You can’t tell us anything about the car that’s been left over yonder?” asked Garland, pointing to where the abandoned car still stood. “You don’t know—”

“I know nothing, I tell you!” interrupted Starley. His dark face had grown darker and his expression angrier while Garland questioned him and now he suddenly exploded. “You want to be finding out who killed yon devil that’s lying with his head smashed down yonder!” he burst out fiercely. “If I knew I wouldn’t tell you! But I’ll tell you this much, Mr. Policeman—I’d shake hands wi’ the man that did it, for ridding the world of a piece o’ vermin! Hear you that!”

He turned, with a fierce growl, as he spoke the last word, and calling to his dog, strode away down the dip to his farmstead. There was that in the carriage of his head and the set of his shoulders that, however curious I might have been, would have made me afraid to call him back.

Garland, however, showed no intention of pursuing Starley further. He watched him go away and turned quietly to me.

“Hot-tempered man, that, Mr. Mailey,” he remarked. “Well—I think he knows something, for all his denial. And we haven’t wasted any time in seeing him: I can turn it into account.

Look at that, now!” He pointed to a bare patch of soft, black, peaty soil on which Starley had been standing and following the direction of his finger I saw that the man had left behind him remarkably definite impressions of his footprints.

“There’s something that may be of use,” continued Garland. He produced a neat folding foot-rule from a pocket, and stooping over the marks proceeded to measure them with great care. “Pretty large size boot, that, Mr. Mailey,” he remarked as he rose, and putting the rule away, entered the figures in his note-book. “But then, of course, he’s a big man. Now we’ll just make a little diagram of the position of the nails in those soles, eh?—you never know how these details will come in. All useful, you know, Mr. Mailey, all useful in a job of this sort.”

He had just finished marking a careful sketch and was putting his book in his pocket when he heard the sound of horse’s hoofs on the hollow-sounding turf, and turning, saw Middleton, who came riding over the brow of the moor close by. Middleton glanced at us and then at Starley’s retreating figure; he drew rein as he neared us, and gave us a significant look.

“Been having a word with him?” he said brusquely, nodding at Starley, who by this time was near his farmstead. “Ah, I thought some of you might! Thought so, anyway, since Tapp told me, last night, that he’d told you a bit of a story.”

“I suppose Tapp’s story was all true?” asked Garland.

“Oh, true enough!” replied Middleton. He paused a moment, studying the detective’s face as if wondering whether he was the sort of man you could talk to confidentially. “Oh, yes—no doubt of it. Mad as a bear with a sore head was Starley yonder, over that affair—yes, sir, the young woman had promised Starley.”

“You think Starke got her away from him?” suggested Garland.

“No doubt on it, no doubt at all!” affirmed Middleton. “Got round her with his fine talk, of course. Starley—ah, he was angry, too! I heard him, myself, one market day, threaten what he’d do if Starke ever came his way.”

“What?” asked Garland.

“Go for him!” answered Middleton with a significant grin. “That’s what! And he would ha’ done, too.”

“But that’s—what is it?—four years ago,” remarked Garland, with affected surprise. “He’ll have forgotten all about it by now!”

Middleton looked at him—a long look with something of contempt in it.

“You’re a Southerner!” he said. “You don’t know us Northerners! We forget nothing—especially an injury!”

He shook his horse’s bridle and went on, and Garland and I turned towards the castle. He looked at me and smiled as Middleton disappeared.

“Never forget an injury in these parts, eh?” he said. “Well, that’s something to know, Mr. Mailey, isn’t it?”

“Are you beginning to suspect Starley?” I asked.

“I shouldn’t put it into words,” he answered. “But the thing is to keep one’s mind on all these points until you’ve learnt all you can. Let’s learn a bit more,” he continued as we came to the path that traversed the shrubbery. “Now here are some of these footprints which were pointed out to me this morning—let’s compare them with my measurements. Here’s a good clear one. Well,” he went on, after some experiment, “if these aren’t Starley’s foot-marks, they’re the foot-marks of a man who wore similar boots, in size, shape, and nails! There! But even then, you see, there’s another little matter to consider. Starley may have been down this walk for quite another purpose. The fact that these marks correspond to what he’d make doesn’t prove that even if these marks are his he made them at the same time that these other marks which correspond to Starke’s shoe-marks were made, does it? Still, it’s interesting, and —”

A police-constable interrupted him by calling to us from an open window above the door in front of us.

"The Superintendent would like you to come up here," he said. "Both of you, if you please."

We entered the house, and with some difficulty—for there were several staircases in the place, and all of them tortuous and dark—reached a room in an upper storey in which the Superintendent and Farbrake were standing, a room which was primarily a bedroom and certainly contained a bed, but was otherwise a veritable lumber-place of old books, folios, quartos, octavos, piled in stacks on the floor, on shelves, in chairs, mingled with papers, curiosities, and all sorts of queer objects. But it was at none of these things that Farbrake and the Superintendent were looking; they were bending over a square box, an affair of massive oak, clamped with iron at the corners; the heavy lid was lifted and I saw two things at a glance—first that inside the box was a mass of tumbled documents, chiefly on parchment; second, that the lid had been roughly forced open and that the heavy lock was torn from its wooden setting.

"Look at this, Garland," said the Superintendent. "You see this box? It's clamped to the floor: we had to move the bed aside to get at it. There we found that the lid had been forced, and quite recently, too—look at the splinters of wood; they're quite fresh. Evidently old Lord Stretherdale kept papers of importance in this box, but whatever he kept, everything's been tumbled upside down by the people who broke it open. Of course, no one can tell what's been taken out of it, but Mr. Farbrake, who knew the old gentleman's habits pretty well, thinks he may have kept money and negotiable securities in it. And look here!"

He lifted up the mass of papers and signed me to look into the bottom of the box. There lay some scattered gold coins—sovereigns.

"Those fell out when we first lifted these papers," continued the Superintendent. "There may have been more. And who knows what besides?"

"What are those papers?" asked Garland.

"Title-deeds, conveyances, leases, all that sort of thing," replied Farbrake. "No use to a thief! But there may have been things like bearer securities which were worth appropriating."

"Was this his bedroom?" enquired Garland.

"It was—so we're told. As the Superintendent said just now, this box was under the bed, in this corner—you see we've lifted the bed clear aside."

"Dirty hole, anyhow!" commented Garland with a sniff. "Well—I should advise you to seal that box up, Superintendent, until a closer examination can be made. Put your seal on it, Mr. Farbrake. Pretty stiff old box that!" he continued, bending over it. "I see one fact about it, too, that I noticed about that heirloom cupboard downstairs and about the glass-topped bookcase. None of 'em were broken open by any professional tool nor by professional hands! A skilful master of his craft—by which I mean an accomplished cracksman—would scorn such rough-and-ready work as that. All these things were forced open by something picked up in the house—heavy kitchen poker, with a good point to it, or something of that sort. But the thing used to force this box wasn't the thing used downstairs, and that makes me incline to the opinion that these two robberies or burglaries were carried out at different times."

Before the Superintendent could make any comment on this opinion, the policeman who stood at the window turned to him.

"There's a man driving up from the village in a motor car," he announced. "He's looking about as if he wanted somebody."

"Go down and see who it is and what he wants," said the Superintendent. He began to examine the door when the man had gone. "We'll lock up this room altogether," he continued.

“Strikes me there’s a good deal of investigation before us yet, Mr. Farbrake! I wish you could give us some idea of what was likely to be in that box?”

But Farbrake could give none beyond what he had given, and the policeman moving to tell the Superintendent he was wanted, we all went down to the hall, where a commonplace, middle-aged man of the mechanic type stood awaiting us.

“Yes?” said the Superintendent.

“My name’s Pickering,” said the man. “From Doncaster—I have a bit of a motor business there, near the station, a garage you know. I read in last night’s evening paper about a car that had been abandoned on the moor here, and it seemed to me, from the description, that it’s one of mine, so I concluded to run over here this morning and see about it.”

“Yes?” replied the Superintendent. “Is it a car that you hired out to somebody?”

“It is—or I expect it is, sir. Let out during the afternoon of the 27th it was,” continued the man. “There was a young gentleman came into my place that afternoon about four o’clock or so, and asked me if I could lend him a car for a few hours?—he wasn’t particular about the make so long as it was good for a hundred miles’ run. But he was particular to know if my place would be open for him to return the car late that night; he said it might be midnight before he brought it back. It so happened that all the car I had in just then was an oldish one—I’m sure it’s the car described in the paper!—and I showed it to him and told him what he could have it for—”

“How much?” asked Garland.

“Well—three pounds. He said it would do, and paid for it there and then, and said that as far as he could reckon he’d be back with it about half-past eleven. Then off he went—and he never came back. So, of course, I’ve never seen the car since, nor heard of it, till I read that bit in the paper.”

“Was this man alone when he came to you?” enquired Garland.

“Alone, yes! And went away alone—driving himself, of course.”

“Did he tell you where he was going?”

“He did not! Leastways, not particular. Said he was going up north a bit—that was all. I think he mentioned something about the trains not being convenient.”

“What was he like?” asked Garland.

“Well—he was a gentleman! I could tell that. I gathered he’d come off from the London train that gets in a bit before the time he came to me. Good-looking young fellow—a swell.”

“Would you know him if you saw him?” suggested the detective. He glanced at the Superintendent. “Let him see him,” he said. “It’ll clear up that point.”

The Superintendent drew aside the sheet and our companion stepped close up, looked, and drew back.

“Oh, yes!” he said, in a hushed whisper. “That’s the gentleman! Poor fellow—poor fellow!”

## CHAPTER VII

### WHERE IS MR. MAXWELL?

That night, when dusk had fallen, Kench arrived, and with him the remains of his eccentric old master. They were placed in the Castle, in the room in which Humphrey Starke's body lay, and there, unwatched, they were left. The opening of the inquest on the murdered man had been fixed for ten o'clock next morning; it would be a mere formality, said the police, to enable burial to take place; the coroner would hear the necessary evidence of identification and would then adjourn the proceedings for perhaps a fortnight—that would depend on the progress made in obtaining further particulars.

Kench was a quiet-mannered little person; the sort of man you naturally associate with a pair of neat whiskers and an irreproachable morning coat; a capable and managing man, too, as I soon saw from the way in which he went about his work. He was a good hand at his business knowing exactly what to do; and doing it in thorough fashion: from the moment of his arrival he took all the arrangements for his dead master's obsequies into his own hands. And late that night he came down to the inn and asking for Farbrake placed before him a sealed packet.

"There is something there, sir, that his lordship left, in the way of papers," he said, in his quiet, respectful fashion. "I do not think there is anything of importance, sir; the papers are chiefly of what I should term a literary character—notes and memoranda, sir, about the subjects his lordship was interested in. They were all examined by the English doctor whom I called in, and by myself—we sealed this packet in each other's presence."

"Nothing in the shape of a will, I suppose, Kench?" asked Farbrake.

"Oh, no, sir! There is nothing whatever there that has any reference to his lordship's property or business affairs, nothing! As to his lordship's making a will, sir, I may state that I have frequently heard him remark, in the most emphatic manner, that he would never make a will as long as he lived: he appeared to have a most extraordinary dislike to the mere notion, sir."

"He had!—I know that," observed Farbrake. "I suppose he never said anything to you about what was to happen to the property at his death?"

"Well, yes, sir, he did. He remarked to me, more than once, that when he'd done with it, he'd done with it, and the next Starke could step into his shoes. I ventured once to remark to him—he allowed me to speak freely, as an old servant—that Mr. Humphrey was a little wild, and might make ducks and drakes of a fine inheritance, but he merely replied that Mr. Humphrey was, after all, a Starke, and would settle down when he'd had his fling. Oh, no, sir—his lordship made no will."

"Well," said Farbrake, "I suppose you're acquainted with all that's happened here during the last few days, Kench—the murder of Mr. Humphrey, and so on?"

"I am, sir! Of course, I read of it in the newspapers as soon as I reached Dover—indeed, I'd seen something about it in a French newspaper in Paris. A most distressing affair, sir—and an extraordinary one."

"Have you formed any opinion about it?" enquired Farbrake.

"Well, sir, I have, of course, thought it over, a good deal, on my way down," replied Kench. "A certain idea has occurred to me. I think it just possible, sir, that the news of his uncle's death was communicated to Mr. Humphrey from Nice early on the morning after his lordship's demise. It was known in the town late that night—I mean the night he died—to

various English visitors, at any rate. I think, sir, that there may have been some friend of Mr. Humphrey's in Nice, who, on hearing of the news, wired it to him."

"Well—and then?" said Farbrake. "Why should that have sent him down here to Stretherdale?"

"I cannot say, of course, sir. He may have had reasons of his own. It is, however, the unfortunate fact that he came, sir!"

"But the theft, Kench? What about that?"

"I have my own opinion about that, sir. I think Mr. Humphrey interrupted burglars."

Farbrake shook his head.

"That's stretching coincidence to a big extent," he said. "A very big extent."

"I'm aware of it, sir. It is! But I've known some extraordinary instances of what's commonly called coincidence in my time. And I can't account for these events otherwise than as I have suggested, sir."

"Everything was all right, all safe, when you and your master left, I suppose?—All locked up?"

"Everything, sir!"

"There's just one question I'd like to ask you, Kench, on that point. You know of the strong box, clamped to the floor, which was under Lord Stretherdale's bed? Do you know if he was in the habit of keeping money—cash—in it?"

"Yes, sir. He was! His lordship, as you know, sir, was a decidedly eccentric gentleman. He had some very curious habits. Dangerous ones, I considered—indeed, I have more than once taken it upon myself to expostulate with him, but, as I need not say, all to no purpose. One of those habits, sir, was to draw a large sum out of his bank in notes and gold, and to place these in that box, from which he would help himself as he had occasion to need money. It was foolish, he used to say, to go to the bank every time you wanted a thousand or so, and the money was as safe in his box as in the Bank of England. Oh, yes, sir! his lordship kept a good deal in that box."

"Do you think he'd leave cash—bank-notes, gold—in it when you and he set off for Nice?"

"Yes, sir. He'd been to one of his banks—he'd current accounts in two or three places, London, Leeds, Harrogate, and the one I refer to was Leeds—only a few days before we left the Castle, and he would put what he brought back into that box, and would only take with him what he knew he would be likely to want. However, I can tell you something definite about that, sir. A day or two before we left, the vicar called on his lordship to ask his help for some deserving case in the village. His lordship—who, I may say, always trusted me with great confidence—gave me the key of his box and told me to fetch him a ten-pound note out of it. Of course I saw what was in the box, sir. There were several bundles of notes of various denominations, and two or three bags of sovereigns. I imagine that these were left there when we went away—in fact, I'm sure they were, for a very simple reason."

"What's that, now?" asked Farbrake.

"This, sir. I always carried the money in our trips abroad, or, indeed, anywhere. His lordship had the greatest objection to carrying money about him: he always gave it to me. When we went off on this occasion he handed me five hundred pounds in notes—I have a record of what I have paid out of it, and the balance is in my pocket now. Five hundred, sir!—but there was a great deal, a very great deal more than that in the box when I took the ten-pound note out of it; more like five thousand, I should say!"

"We can get at that," observed Farbrake. "They'll know at the bank what he carried away from there. Well, this is all a very strange business, Kench, and I suppose you can't throw any further light on it?"

“Unfortunately, sir, I can’t!” replied the valet. “I was very well acquainted with my late master’s affairs, but I know little beyond them.”

“You didn’t know much of Mr. Humphrey Starke, eh?”

“No, sir—very little.”

“Nor of the other nephew, Mr. Maxwell Starke?”

“No, sir! Nothing of either young gentlemen was known to me—that is, beyond just knowing who they were. I know one fact, however, sir,” continued Kench, with a quiet smile. “Every now and then one or other used to apply to his lordship for money! He used to show the letters to me.”

“Well, did they get it?” asked Farbrake.

“Never, sir! His lordship used to smile and chuckle over the letters and then, after showing them to me, he put them in the fire. I never remember that he sent either of them a penny!”

Kench left us at that, and Garland, who had listened intently without breaking in on the conversation, turned to Farbrake.

“Very interesting!” he said. “Ve-ry interesting! I should like to see more of that chap—he’s got his wits about him. I wish he’d known more of these two nephews, though. I suppose we shall see Mr. Maxwell Starke at the funeral tomorrow?”

“He ought to be here,” said Farbrake. “He must know by this time. We wired to the address his mother’s housekeeper gave as soon as we got her telegram from Cheriton, but there’s been no reply, so he can’t be in town. Still, he must have learnt the news from the papers—they’re full enough of it by now!”

“I suppose he knows he’s now Lord Stretherdale?” suggested Garland.

“Of course, he’ll know!” said Farbrake. “I expect he’ll turn up tomorrow.”

But the new Lord Stretherdale did not turn up, nor did we get any news of him. The inquest on his cousin was opened and adjourned; an hour later the fifth and sixth Barons Stretherdale were buried, side by side, in the family vault. There was a vast crowd in the old churchyard, and in the village, but we had no sign of Mr. Maxwell Starke.

That afternoon, Farbrake, Garland, and myself returned to town; for the moment there was nothing more that we could do at Stretherdale. And on the way up, Garland, who before leaving had had a long conversation with the Chief Constable and the Superintendent, set forth to us precisely how matters stood, so far as he and the local police were concerned. They—the local police—were, first, to find out, if they could, if the car hired from Doncaster on the afternoon of the 27th had been seen anywhere between Doncaster and Stretherdale and if so if there was more than one person in it; second, if any stranger or suspicious person had been noticed in the immediate neighbourhood of Stretherdale on the evening or night of the 27th; third, if any such person had been seen to arrive at or leave any of the local stations; and fourth, if any hotel-keeper in Harrogate had recollection of any late arrival on the night in question. And they were also, as secretly as possible, to make enquiries about Starley’s whereabouts on that night; a difficult task, said Garland, who had already made some investigation himself, for Starley lived alone at his moorland farmstead, and it was almost impossible to find out from independent testimony where he was at any given moment. As for Garland himself, his job lay in London. He was going to investigate Humphrey Starke’s past; to find out all he could about his haunts, associates, and habits. But he had with him, carefully packed, two champagne bottles and glasses, to be submitted to the finger-print expert.

Farbrake, as we journeyed along, tried to get out of Garland what his opinion was on the case as it had so far presented itself. But Garland was not to be drawn, and I was under the impression that at that time he had formed no clear idea—the only thing he seemed certain of was that the solution of the mystery could be found not down there at Stretherdale, but in

London. As we were running into Kings Cross, however, he permitted himself something in the way of a definite remark. But it was prefaced by a sigh which indicated despair.

"If I thought it would be the least good," he said, with a wry smile, "I'd spend a bit of time here trying to find out if anybody—porters, booking-clerks, ticket inspectors, anybody at all—had any recollection of seeing Humphrey Starke leave Kings Cross for Doncaster on the morning of the 27th. But that's hopeless. Those express trains to the North are always packed, and the presence of one ordinary young Englishman in a grey tweed suit amongst two or three hundred other passengers would pass unnoticed. No—I'm not going to waste the time!"

"What did you think of finding out—if you did enquire?" asked Farbrake.

"Why, if he was alone! And if he wasn't alone, who was with him," replied Garland.

"You think that he was accompanied," suggested Farbrake.

"I think that he was accompanied all the way," declared Garland. "I think that though he went by himself to that garage in Doncaster, he had a companion close at hand, waiting for him until he got that car. I want to find out who that companion was! Stiffish proposition, sir!"

"There are a good many stiff propositions in this affair," said Farbrake. "I've one before me—I must get at Mr. Maxwell Starke, now Lord Stretherdale."

"Oh, he'll materialize, hard enough!" remarked Garland. "I should say he's been at the races at Liverpool these last few days, and wasn't going to let even this change in his fortunes interfere with his sport until it was over. You'll find him turn up at your office when he's ready. Titles and money-bags don't go unclaimed long!"

But Mr. Maxwell Starke did not turn up at our office, nor was there any letter from him nor from anyone representing him. Two or three days went by; Farbrake grew impatient.

"Didn't we hear that Mr. Maxwell lived at Rockingham Chambers, Corke Street, Mailey?" he said to me one morning. "Go there at once and try to find him."

I went to Rockingham Chambers. But I did not find the young gentleman we wanted. Instead I found a man who told me that he was valet-waiter to the floor on which Mr. Maxwell Starke had rooms and that Mr. Starke wasn't at home—hadn't been at home for some days. No—he didn't know where he was; Mr. Starke was often away, after the flat racing season had begun.

Farbrake tried another wire to Cheriton Manor; when it yielded nothing in the way of precise information he wired again, this time for Mrs. Starke's address at Biarritz, and on the next day we got a reply from that lady.

If Maxwell has not yet called on you ask Major Yelverton, 5a, Vimiera Mansions, Jermyn Street, if he knows where he is. In consequence of recent events I am returning to England immediately.

Sophie Starke.

On this Farbrake sent me there and then to seek Major Yelverton.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MAJOR YELVERTON

I had no difficulty in finding Vimiera Mansions; a block of residential chambers close to the hotel at which I had unsuccessfully sought Mr. Humphrey Starke. There was a list of residents on the board in the entrance hall; Major Christopher Yelverton appeared on it as occupier of Number 27, which after an ascent of two or three flights of stairs I discovered on the fourth floor.

A smart man-servant answered my knock at the door; everything about him suggested the ex-orderly turned valet. But there was more than that about him; some considerable practice in this sort of thing showed me that he was not the sort of man who would admit strangers to his master's presence without knowing their business. He looked me over very knowingly, and I don't think he was surprised when I said that I had called on Major Yelverton on behalf of Messrs. Farbrake and Saunders, Solicitors. However, he admitted me to a little entrance hall and left me to gaze at certain sporting prints which hung in company with a fox's mask and a stag's antlers on its panelled walls while he sought further instruction.

I was not kept waiting long. The man was back again in a few minutes—to open a door on my right and usher me into a room which was a sort of compound of study, library, and office. There were a few good pictures on the walls, a couple of low bookcases filled with well-bound books, a corner cabinet in which old china was displayed and on a side-table a number of silver cups which I took to be racing trophies. But in the centre of the room was an eminently business-like desk, supplied with everything that a man who has a good deal of correspondence to transact could want, and furnished with a telephone. And from the fact that a revolving bookstand close by the desk was liberally stored with volumes of Ruff's Guide, the Racing Calendar, and other works of a similar nature, and that a newspaper stand was stocked with the best known racing papers, I came to the conclusion that Major Yelverton had something to do with that great national institution, the Turf.

Major Yelverton did not keep me waiting very long. Presently he came in; active in his movements, business-like altogether: He was not at all what I had expected; I had imagined him as a big, soldier-like man, horsey, doggy; the sort of man who, even in London, would be seen in loud checks, with a white four-in-hand tie and a gold horse-shoe pin in its folds. He was nothing of the sort; instead, he was a dapper little man, immaculately attired in a suit of blue striped serge, neatly finished off in every respect of neck and footwear, and looking generally as if he had just been taken out of a press in which he and his garments had been laid up in lavender. He was clean-shaven, save for a small, slightly grizzled moustache, he had very rosy cheeks and bright blue eyes; his manner was frank and open. But on looking at him more closely I observed that he had a slight cast in his right eye; this gave him a somewhat sinister appearance when he looked full at one. As to his age, I set it down as uncertain; he might be sixty: again, he might be a few years younger. Whatever he was in age, he was exceedingly well-preserved and eminently vivacious.

"Yes?" he said as he came in and gave me a pleasant nod. "From Farbrake's eh?—Farbrake was solicitor to old Lord Stretherdale, wasn't he? To be sure—I've heard of him. Take a seat. Your name's—"

"My name is Mailey, sir," I replied. "I am Mr. Farbrake's managing clerk."

"Right!" he said. "Always like to know a man's name if I'm talking to him. Try that chair and have a cigarette." He handed me an open box, and when I had taken a cigarette from it, took one himself, and dropped into an easy-chair opposite my own.

"And what does Farbrake want with me, Mailey, eh?" he continued. "Information, no doubt!"

"Quite right, sir," I replied. "Mr. Farbrake has been anxious ever since the affair at Stretherdale—you're acquainted with all that, of course, sir?"

"Newspapers, you know, newspapers!" he replied. "Read what they had to tell, of course. Oh, yes, I know—what the rest of the public knows, you know. No more."

"Well, sir, Mr. Farbrake's been anxious to get into communication with Mr. Maxwell Starke," I said. "He hasn't been able to find him. But to-day we got this wire from Mrs. Starke, his mother, at Biarritz," I continued, handing the telegram over, "so Mr. Farbrake sent me to see you."

"To be sure—quite proper," he said, glancing the telegram over. "I had a wire from Mrs. Starke myself just before you came, and I replied to it at once. Yes, I know where Maxwell is—Lord Stretherdale he is now, of course. He's in the private nursing-home of a medical man at Hampstead."

"Ill, sir?" I enquired.

"Not seriously—oh, dear me, no!" he answered. "Nothing for anybody to be anxious about. The truth is, he came to see me, here, several days ago, and I saw that he was not at all well—he's not a strong lad, and he hasn't taken very great care of himself. I persuaded him to see my friend Dr. Horrell, of Hampstead—a man in whom I have very great belief—and took him up there myself, then and there." He paused, eyed me over again, and then giving me a sort of between-you-and-me smile, went on. "The fact is, Mailey, the lad had been indulging a little too freely in liquor—you understand? His nerves were—rather the worse for it. So Horrell and I persuaded him to stay in Horrell's private nursing-home for a week or two. He'll have every kindness and attention there and come out as fit as a fiddle—in a few days."

"I suppose I may tell that to Mr. Farbrake, sir?" I enquired.

"Why not? Tell anything, you know, to a priest, a doctor, and a lawyer! Professional secrecy, eh? Oh, yes, tell Farbrake—just what I've told you," he said. "Farbrake'll understand. And tell him, too, that I expect Mrs. Starke to arrive in town from Biarritz in a day or two, and shall see her, and she'll come with her son to see Farbrake—there'll be a great deal to arrange and to talk about, no doubt."

"Very good, sir," I said, rising. "I'm much obliged to you."

"Don't go!" he exclaimed. "Sit down again—take another cigarette. I wanted to ask you—wasn't it you who found Humphrey Starke's dead body?"

"It was, sir!" I replied.

"I'd like—if you don't mind—to hear all about it from your own lips," he said. "These newspaper accounts, you know—eh?"

I told him all about it, from the beginning to the end; that is, from my going down to Stretherdale to our coming away from it. He was a good listener; he sat, smoking cigarette after cigarette, listening attentively, and scarcely ever interrupting me to ask a question.

"I suppose that things stand pretty much as they did when you came away?" he asked when I had finished. "You haven't heard anything further from the police there, or from the detective, Garland, here?"

"Nothing," I replied.

"Do you think the police attach any serious meaning to what was said about the farmer, Starley?" he asked.

"I can't say what the local police thought about that," I answered. "And I don't know what Garland's real thoughts about it were. I know that he and they arranged that they should make further enquiry about Starley's movements and whereabouts on the night in question."

"They think that his concern about the girl was real, eh?" he asked. "That this man, Starley, really cherished feelings of revenge against Humphrey Starke?"

"That's a convinced opinion in the neighbourhood," I replied.

"They really think there that the girl—what's her name—? Esther Farrell, came to London to join Humphrey Starke?"

"I heard two or three men express that as a decided opinion."

"Did you hear anything said about the police trying to find her?"

"No! I heard nothing of that. My opinion," I said, after a moment's thought, "as regards the local police, was that they were much more concerned to find out the truth about the burglary than about the murder!"

"They lumped the two together, I suppose?" he suggested.

"I think the belief of the local police was this," I answered. "I think they believed that Humphrey Starke, unaware of his uncle's death, and being hard up for money, came down from London with an associate, to get what they could conveniently carry off from Stretherdale Castle, and that the associate, whoever he was, murdered Humphrey Starke and got away with the stolen property. They scarcely said so much in words, but I feel sure that that was the local police opinion, from the Chief Constable downwards."

"And this Scotland Yard chap? What, do you think, is his real opinion?"

"The only real opinion I heard him express, definitely," I answered, "was that the solution of this mystery would be found, not down there at Stretherdale, but here in London! I know that he proposes to devote his energies to investigating Humphrey Starke's recent past."

"Um!" he said, reflectively. "It will land him into some shady quarters! Humphrey Starke knew some very queer people!"

"You knew him, sir?" I enquired.

"I knew something of him—not a great deal. He lived a wild, a very wild life. I used to see him occasionally in this street. He had rooms somewhere about."

"Yes," I said, "at Luciani's Hotel. I sought him there when we first heard the news from Kench."

"Ah, Kench!" he exclaimed. "Kench, now, had been with the old lord for a great many years! What was Kench's opinion of all this—if you heard any?"

"I heard a good deal said by Kench the night he arrived at Stretherdale with his master's remains," I replied. "Kench's theory about the murder was that Mr. Humphrey Starke interrupted the burglars."

"Oh, come, come!" he said, laughing. "No—no!—that won't do! I'm surprised at a man like Kench suggesting such a thing! No—no! there's far too much coincidence about that. But that detective, Garland—does he think that the burglary and the murder took place at the same time or that they were on separate occasions?"

"He had theories about that, at the beginning," I replied. "I remember that he said to me, after his first look round, that there was nothing to prove that the murder had anything to do with the burglary. In the end, I don't know what he thought—I don't think he knew himself."

"The fact is, I suppose, that at present, nobody is definitely suspected of the murder, and nobody suspected of the burglary?" he suggested. "That is really the position, isn't it?"

"That's about it. Unless Starley is taken into account. There's some suspicion about him—as a sort of second string—because of his threats. There's no doubt whatever that he used threatening language about Mr. Humphrey Starke after Esther Farrell's disappearance."

He nodded, and rising from his chair, began to turn over a pile of newspapers that lay on a side-table. Selecting one he glanced at a column headed *THE STREThERDALE MYSTERY*.

"There's a list here of the various articles which the vicar said were missing from the cupboard in the library at Stretherdale Castle," he remarked. "Do you know if the police have

circulated this list all over Europe?"

"All over the world, I believe," I answered. "I heard talk of it between Garland and the Chief Constable up there."

"But there's also the question of what was in the strong box," he suggested. "There's no mention of that here."

"That wasn't known, then," I said. "That discovery was made later. And even after it had been made, nobody knew that the box contained—almost certainly contained—bank-notes and gold until Kench returned. From what Kench told us, I don't think there's the least doubt that there was a considerable sum in gold and notes in that box when old Lord Stretherdale left the Castle for the South of France."

He tossed the paper back to the heap from which he had taken it.

"Well," he remarked, "gold is difficult, indeed, impossible to trace, but bank-notes are a different thing. I suppose these can be traced."

"I think that's being done," I said.

He pulled out his watch: I took the action as a sign of dismissal.

"Well," he said, "thank you for your information. Tell Farbrake what I've told you about Mr. Maxwell—Lord Stretherdale we shall have to call him now. I shall turn him into his mother's hands as soon as she arrives—he's a bit too much for me to look after. The Starke blood, you know, Mailey, the Starke blood!"

"You know the family well, sir?" I ventured to enquire.

"This much of it—yes! I was a brother officer of Charles Starke—Maxwell's father—we were in the Guards together. There's a queer strain in all the Starkes, but the old gentleman who's just dead was the most remarkable. By-the-bye, I suppose it's true that he never made a will?"

"He made no will, sir," I said.

He nodded, said good-bye, and showed me out himself. I went back to Farbrake and told him what I had learned. Farbrake seemed to consider it all as a matter of course: we would now, he said, await Mrs. Starke's arrival; there was nothing to do until then. Two days later, however, and before we heard more of Mrs. Starke or her son, Garland walked into our office with a piece of news. Starley had disappeared from Martenbeck Farm.

## CHAPTER IX WHAT BURTON SAW

Before we had time to comment on this announcement or even to wonder what it might mean, Garland produced a long, official-looking envelope, and drew from it several sheets of blue paper.

"I got this an hour ago, and came on with it as soon as I could, knowing it would interest you," he said. "It's a letter from the Superintendent of Police, Pearson, that we saw down there at Stretherdale, and it contains a remarkable statement, the contents of which I wish I'd known before I left. However, there it is! Starley's evidently cleared out, and they don't know where he's gone. But there's more than that in it, and you'd better read it yourselves."

He passed the sheets of paper over to Farbrake, who, signing me to come to his side, spread them out on his desk. We read them together.

Office of the Superintendent of Police  
Wateley: April 9th 1902.

DEAR SIR,

I beg to inform you, in pursuance of my promise to keep you posted up in any developments that might occur in the Stretherdale Castle case, that I came into possession, last night, of certain facts that seem to have an important bearing on the affair. At a late hour last evening I was visited by a young man named Matthew Burton, who is an agricultural labourer in the employ of Middleton, of Stretherdale. Burton, who is about twenty years of age, is an intelligent fellow of good character, shy and reserved in manner, and of that type of countryman which adheres to the habit of silence about matters not directly concerning himself. He informed me that he had come to see me by the advice of his master, to whom, it presently appeared, he had already told what he subsequently told me. I found that he had been in possession of certain facts since the night of March 27th, but had been afraid to tell them to anyone; eventually, being, as he put it, sorely bothered in his mind, he had confided in Mr. Middleton, who had urged him to see me at once and tell me all he knew. Before telling me anything, however, he wanted an assurance that he himself would come to no harm; he was evidently afraid of some person, and the person turned out to be Starley, the farmer, who lives at Martenbeck Farm. On giving Burton a firm assurance that he would be protected, he told me what he had already told Middleton. I subsequently took his entire statement down in writing, and he signed it, and I now incorporate a copy of it.

*COPY*

This is a statement made by me, Matthew Burton, labourer, of Crimple Cottages, Stretherdale, to Superintendent Pearson, at Wateley, this eighth day of April 1902, of my own free will.

On the night of March 27th last, after having had my supper at my mother's cottage, where I live, I went out to see a friend of mine, Daniel Thornthwaite, who was lying ill at his father's house at the far end of the village, near the Stretherdale Arms. I arrived at Thornthwaite's about nine o'clock and stayed there until half-past ten. That was later than I had intended to stay, and I took a short cut home across the grounds of the Castle. This I did by climbing a wall, going across some of the lawns,

and reaching the moor behind the Castle by way of a narrow path that runs through the shrubberies. I was nearly at the end of this path when I heard voices of men talking in low tones on the right of me. I was just then at a place where the path I was following is joined by another path that comes up from a door at the back of the Castle. When I heard the voices I stood still, sheltering behind a holly bush at the corner of the paths. Two men came along the path from the Castle, passed on, and went on to the moor. It was a clear, starlit night, and I could see their figures clearly, and I recognised one as Mr. Starley, of Martenbeck Farm. They were talking as they passed me, but it was in such low tones that I could not catch anything of what they said. The man who was with Mr. Starley was not so tall or big in the body as Starley; I should say he was three or four inches less in height. I cannot say how he was dressed except that I think he wore a soft cap. When they got out on the moor, just before where I stood, I could see their heads and shoulders clearly against the sky.

As soon as they reached the edge of the moor they went off across it in the direction of Martenbeck Farm. They walked very quickly. I was curious to know what was afoot, and after a minute or two I followed them. I traced them across the moor to the farm, keeping some distance behind them. I knew when they had got into the house, for I saw a light turned up in the house-place, and shadows on the blind. I was going a bit nearer when I heard somebody come out of the house and go to the stable, and in a minute or two I made out that Mr. Starley was getting out his horse and putting it into his trap. He took the horse and trap back to the door and went into the house again. I saw the other man was having a drink of something. After a few minutes, the light went out, and I heard the two men come out and the door locked. They got into the trap and drove away. There is a cart-track from Mr. Starley's farm to the road that runs across the moor; I could tell by listening where the horse-and-trap left the grass-track and got on the hard road. Near where that motor car was left on the moor the trap was pulled up for a few minutes, after which it went on. Not far from where the grass-track and the road meet, there is a turning where another road turns off from the road across the moor. As far as I could gather from the sounds, the horse and trap were turned into that road, which leaves the moor a hundred yards or so further on, skirts the plantation at the back of the village, and goes in the direction of Harrogate. I am sure that road was taken, for the other road—the one into which they turned first from the grass-track—soon terminates at the beginning of the village street, near the church, where there is a steep rise: if they had gone along that I should have heard the horse drop into a walk; the Harrogate road, however, is quite level for a couple of miles, and I heard the horse's feet going steadily along it at a good pace until the sounds died away.

I went across the moor homeward as soon as I heard no more. It was just a quarter-past-eleven when I got in. My mother had gone to bed. I went to my work next morning before she was up, so I did not tell her anything about what I had seen and heard. That day Mr. Middleton sent me across the hills with a prize beast that he had sold, some distance off, and I had to bring some sheep back from another place near that to which I took the beast, and had to stay overnight there, so I never had any opportunity of saying anything to my mother or to anybody until the news came out that a dead man had been found at the Castle. I was afraid then of saying anything lest Mr. Starley should get to hear of it, so I held my tongue, until I got so much bothered in my mind that I decided to tell my master, Mr. Middleton, about

this matter. What I have here told, and what has been read to me by Mr. Pearson, is the truth.

(Signed) MATTHEW BURTON.

Having received this information (continued the Superintendent's letter) I went out at an early hour this morning, in company with one of my plain-clothes officers, to Martenbeck Farm, only to find the doors locked and no one about. Eventually I came across a man employed by Starley who told me that he had not seen his master since early the previous morning, when he saw him driving off with his horse and trap in the direction of Wateley. I thereupon returned to Wateley, and after some enquiries, found that Starley's horse and his trap were at the Malt Shovel Inn, in the stables of which he had left them at half-past eight yesterday morning. Further enquiry elicited the fact that Starley left Wateley by the nine o'clock train that morning, and that he took a ticket for York. He had therefore left the neighbourhood some hours before I received the information from Burton which is given above. I have not been able to make much further enquiry about him, but I have discovered the fact that at the weekly auction mart held here two days ago, that is, the day before he left, he sold a number of sheep, and received the proceeds in cash from the auctioneers. He was, therefore, probably in possession of a considerable sum of ready money when he went away. He said nothing to the ostler at the Malt Shovel as to when he would return for his horse and trap.

We are considering here the advisability of instituting a search for Starley by making known the fact of his disappearance and issuing a description of him. As I think it likely, from various reports I have heard about him, into which I need not go at present, that he has gone to London, I shall be obliged if you would consult with your authorities as to what should be done in this respect.

Yours faithfully,  
SAMUEL PEARSON, SUPDT.

Farbrake folded up the sheets of blue paper, handed them back to Garland, and taking off his spectacles began to swing them backward and forward in his fingers—a trick of his when his speculative faculties were roused.

“Um!” he said after a pause. “Now what do you think of that, Garland?”

Garland replaced the letter in its envelope, put the envelope in an inner pocket, and buttoned his coat over it.

“I think Starley's come to London!” he said.

“Yes—but why?” asked Farbrake.

“Because I think he wants to find that young woman,” replied Garland.

“Esther Farrell?”

“Exactly—Esther Farrell! He knows, now, that Humphrey Starke is out of the way, for ever!”

“Well,” said Farbrake, after thinking awhile. “That may be. But this young fellow's statement? What do you think of that?”

“True enough, no doubt! I knew Starley was lying when he talked to me and Mr. Mailey. Didn't I say at the time that he knew something? Of course, I've already got a notion as to what may have happened that night. I think it's a dead sure thing that for some reason of his own Humphrey Starke went to Stretherdale Castle in secret and took another man with him. Whoever he was, that's probably, nay, certainly, I should say, the man who killed Starke. Most likely they were drunk—we know they'd settled two big bottles of champagne; not small

bottles, but big ones. Being drunk, they quarrelled: Starke got his quietus. Starley came on the scene. Well, we know that Starley felt murderous himself about Starke—here was his job done for him! He decided to help the other man, took him off to his farm, put his horse in the trap and drove the man away. Probably he put him down within convenient walking distance of Harrogate. Well, now, if all that's correct, how very easy it was for the murderer to get clear away! From what little I know of it, I should say that the railway station at Harrogate is pretty busy of a morning. Harrogate is within easy reach of Leeds, and of Bradford; both very large towns. There must be no end of business men living out there who go into Bradford or Leeds by the early morning trains—what easier than for this man to travel by such a train, unobserved amongst the crowds, to one of these big towns, at either of which he wouldn't find the slightest difficulty in getting a through express to London? Starley's help, indeed, settled all his difficulties—Starley proved the friend in need! And from what I saw of Starley, it was just the thing Starley would do! What do you say, Mr. Mailey?—you saw him."

"I say exactly what you say, Garland!" I replied. "It is precisely the thing Starley would do! I haven't forgotten what Starley said, nor his look when he said it. If he didn't actually murder Humphrey Starke—"

"Lord Stretherdale," corrected Farbrake.

"Lord Stretherdale, of course, sir! I mean, if he didn't, he was obviously rejoiced that somebody else had!" said I. "That, I think, was plain to Garland and myself."

"As a pikestaff!" assented Garland. "Murderous fellow!—truculent!"

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Farbrake.

"I've already started on two or three lines of enquiry—all relating to Mr. Humphrey Starke, as I prefer to call him," replied Garland. "I think I shall start another—an enquiry for this young woman, Esther Farrell. She must be alive, somewhere, and I've a pretty strong notion that if she is, she'll know something. I think we may take it that she certainly ran away from Stretherdale to join Starke."

"In that case she's probably somewhere in London," remarked Farbrake. "If so—"

He was interrupted just then by the entrance of one of our junior clerks, who brought in a card. Farbrake read it with a look of surprise. He turned to Garland and me with a whisper.

"Mr. Andrew Macnaughton, Manager of the Caledonian & Cosmopolitan Bank at Leeds," he said. "Of course, it's something to do with the Stretherdale case—I remember that old Lord Stretherdale had an account at that bank. Show Mr. Macnaughton in, Smith!"

## CHAPTER X

### THE RECLAIMED DEPOSIT

Mr. Macnaughton proved to be a shrewd-looking, elderly gentleman whose first action after he had exchanged a word or two with Farbrake was to favour Garland and myself with questioning, if polite glances. Farbrake hastened to reassure him: he saw, I think, that Mr. Macnaughton was the sort of man that will not unburden himself in any company that he was not sure of.

“I dare say you wish to speak to me about some affair relating to the late Lord Stretherdale—the old lord—Mr. Macnaughton,” he said. “You can speak freely before these two gentlemen. This is Detective Inspector Garland, of Scotland Yard, who has the case—and rather more than the case!—in hand; this is my managing clerk, Mr. Mailey, who knows more of it than I do.”

Mr. Macnaughton inspected both of us through his gold-rimmed spectacles, nodded, and favoured us all, collectively, with a dry smile.

“Well, I certainly do wish to speak to you about that affair, Mr. Farbrake,” he said. “I had to come to town on business, and I thought it advisable to take the opportunity of calling on you, as I know that you were the late Lord Stretherdale’s solicitor. There are certain things within my knowledge which I think the police should be informed of—indeed, I was a little undecided this morning as to whether I should go to you or to Scotland Yard; in the end, as you see, I came to you, first. However, as the police are represented here, I can kill two birds with one stone—Mr. Garland will no doubt be able to apprise the police of what I have to say. Now, to begin with, I have, of course, read all that has appeared in the newspapers about these extraordinary affairs at Stretherdale. I take it, there is no doubt that old Lord Stretherdale’s nephew, Mr. Humphrey Starke, who, I suppose, at the time of his death had himself been Lord Stretherdale for a matter of hours, was found murdered there?”

“No doubt!” replied Farbrake.

“Nor that examination of a certain cupboard in the library revealed the fact that a number of extremely valuable objects of art had been stolen, together with two books of great value?”

“No doubt of that, either!”

“So much, of course, I learnt from the papers, where a full description of the stolen articles has appeared. But I want to ask you this,” continued Mr. Macnaughton, “is that the full extent of the robbery?”

Farbrake turned to Garland, as if to suggest that the last question was one on which he might exercise his judgment about answering. Garland answered promptly.

“No, sir!” he said. “It’s not! According to certain information received by Mr. Farbrake and myself other property was stolen.”

“What sort of property?” enquired the bank-manager.

“Notes and gold!” answered Garland. “But mind you, we’re not absolutely certain of that. We think it highly probable. What we know is that it is highly probable that a certain strong box, kept by Lord Stretherdale under his bed, contained a lot of money in notes and gold, and that this, which the local police found to have been broken open, was rifled by the thieves.”

“May I ask who told you that it was probable that this box contained notes and gold?” asked Mr. Macnaughton.

“Kench told us—Kench, the old gentleman’s valet,” replied Garland. “He gave the information to Mr. Farbrake, Mr. Mailey, and myself at the Stretherdale Arms, the night he brought his master’s remains home for burial.”

“May I hear exactly what Kench told you?” enquired Mr. Macnaughton. “It is precisely this matter that I came to see Mr. Farbrake about.”

“He told us, to put it in a few words, that it was one of his master’s eccentric habits to draw cash from his bank in considerable amounts, at intervals, and to put the money in that box. That not long before he and his master set off for Nice, Lord Stretherdale drew a large sum from his bank at Leeds, out of which he handed Kench five hundred for expenses. That, from what he knew, he believed all the rest of the money so drawn remained in the box when they left the castle, and that it probably represented thousands of pounds,” answered Garland. “He gave us some reasons for his belief.”

“And this money—if it was there when Kench and his master left the Castle—was gone when the police discovered the box broken open?” asked Mr. Macnaughton.

“Except for a few loose sovereigns, amongst the papers—yes,” replied Garland.

Mr. Macnaughton remained silent a few minutes. He was evidently going over certain matters in his own mind.

“Well,” he said at last, “Kench was quite right as regards that particular habit of Lord Stretherdale. It was only one of his many eccentricities, but it was a dangerous one. When I became aware of it—he used to talk pretty freely to me whenever we met—I expostulated with him. That was no good! He was one of those men who will not pay any attention to expostulation or remonstrance: a self-willed man in everything. And Kench was quite right, too, in saying that his master drew a considerable sum of money a few days before they left for Nice. He drew it from our bank, in Leeds. The amount was the usual one—£5000. That is what he did—he’d draw £5000 in notes and gold, take it away with him, put it in his box, help himself to it as he needed it, and when it was exhausted, come for more. No doubt he did the same thing with his other banks—he had two or three accounts, to my knowledge.”

“How did he take that particular £5000?” enquired Garland.

“Most of it in notes, of various denominations,” replied the bank-manager. “In fact, you may say practically all of it. One hundred pounds in gold.”

“Well, I suppose you have particulars of the notes issued to him?” suggested Garland.

“The numbers, yes. All of them, of course. But it is not such a difficult matter after all, to get rid of stolen bank-notes, and you may not find it easy to trace them,” said Mr. Macnaughton. “However, you shall be supplied with a list at once. But now I wish to ask a most important question! Did Kench tell you of anything else that his master brought home from the bank, our bank, when he brought that money?”

“Anything else!” exclaimed Garland, instantly on the alert. “No, he did not! Did Lord Stretherdale take anything else away from you?”

Mr. Macnaughton gave us a comprehensive glance; the glance of a man who is going to communicate some highly important news to his audience and looks round to see if its attention is fixed.

“He did!” he said. “Some two years ago, Lord Stretherdale deposited with me, for safety, a magnificent rope of pearls, which, according to him, was worth a fabulous amount. He had a passion for collecting jewels, and this particular thing he told me, was the result of a good many years’ labour—it had taken him a long time to collect the pearls of the quality and size he wanted. He had been having the rope re-strung, in Leeds, and he brought it to me to lock up; it lay in our strong room for two years. And as I have just said, he claimed and took it away with him when he called at our bank and drew out that £5000 we have just been talking about.”

“Did he say what he was going to do with it?” asked Garland.

“No!” replied Mr. Macnaughton. “He did not! But—” he paused and gave us a look full of significance—“I knew where it was when he went off to the South of France!”

"Where?" demanded Garland.

"In that strong box which you saw, broken open!" replied Mr. Macnaughton. "I know that for a fact!"

"How do you know it?" asked Farbrake. "If that's so, more than the money disappeared! There was nothing of that sort in the box when I examined it, which I did, thoroughly, before the police, at my request, sealed it up."

"I'll tell you how I know," said the bank-manager. "Not many days after Lord Stretherdale had drawn the money and taken the rope of pearls, he dropped in at the bank again and told me that he was staying the night at the Queen's Hotel at Leeds, and would be glad if I'd give him my company at dinner there. I went. He then told me that he and his man, Kench, were off to the Riviera—an annual event—next day; that he'd left Kench at Stretherdale Castle to pack the things and join him with them at Leeds next morning; and that he himself had come into Leeds that day to have a word or two with his medical man before leaving. In the course of after-dinner conversation I mentioned the rope of pearls, and said, chaffingly, that I supposed they were now ornamenting some fair lady's neck. 'Not they!' he said. 'They're in my good old box at home, and there they'll stop!—it's sufficient for me that I've got 'em!' I expressed my surprise that he should leave an article of such value in an empty house, but he only laughed at me. He was like that—a strange mixture. At times he'd show the most extraordinary carefulness about taking precautions; at others his carelessness was—well, really culpable. Anyway, according to his own statement, he left the rope of pearls, worth no end of money, at his own estimate, in that box!"

Farbrake and I looked at each other: I think the same thought occurred to us. And it evidently occurred to Garland, too, for he put it into words.

"Do I understand you to say, Mr. Macnaughton, that Lord Stretherdale spent the night before he set off for Nice at Leeds—alone?" he asked. "Yes! And that Kench was left—alone—at Stretherdale Castle?"

"I don't know that he was left alone," replied Mr. Macnaughton. "He was left behind, to pack up, and to join his master at Leeds next morning. As a matter of fact, I was present when he did join him. I went down to the hotel to see Lord Stretherdale that morning; I was there when Kench arrived with the luggage, and a little later I saw them leave for London by a Midland express."

"My information," remarked Garland, after looking at his note-book, "is to the effect that for many years Lord Stretherdale never had any indoor servant at the Castle except Kench. What service he allowed was that of two women who came out of the village of a morning and left the Castle before evening. Can you corroborate that, Mr. Mailey?"

"Yes," I said. "That's what I heard, too."

"Therefore, Kench would have the place to himself that night," continued Garland. "And that being so, there is now the possibility to be faced that Kench appropriated the things from his heirloom cupboard, the two valuable books, and the property in the strong box! What was to stop him? He could put the lot in a moderately-sized suit-case or portmanteau and leave it in London when he got there—where it may be just now, awaiting his pleasure! Well—well!—this is a very nice development!"

Farbrake shook his head.

"I have known Kench for a great many years!" he remarked. "I have always regarded Kench as an honest, straightforward man. He was certainly a most devoted and unselfish servant to his master. I question if many more would have remained in Lord Stretherdale's service so long as Kench did."

"I agree," said Mr. Macnaughton. "Lord Stretherdale's eccentricities and habits were undoubtedly very trying. Still—what I have told you is prime fact."

“There was the opportunity!” exclaimed Garland. “And opportunity, gentlemen, is a prime factor in crime. And where did you ever hear of a finer opportunity than this? Kench is left alone in the house with all this valuable property at his disposal. He knows that next day he and his master are going abroad, and that when he himself locks the doors next morning nobody will open them for several weeks. What easier, when he and Lord Stretherdale return, than to set down the thefts as the work of burglars who had forced an entrance during the owner’s absence? Opportunity? I never heard of a better one!”

“Are you seriously accusing Kench?” asked Farbrake.

“I think the whole thing demands very serious consideration,” replied Garland. “If you remember, I’ve always said that it might turn out that there was no connection whatever between the robbery and the murder. It may turn out so.”

Mr. Macnaughton turned to Farbrake.

“I suppose nobody knows why Mr. Humphrey Starke went to Stretherdale Castle?” he asked.

“I haven’t the ghost of an idea!” replied Farbrake. “The whole thing is an absolute mystery. Have you formed any notion?”

“Well, it did occur to me that there may be quite a simple explanation of his presence there,” answered Mr. Macnaughton. “Nobody seems to have thought of it, though!”

“I shall be very glad to think of it, sir, if you’ll put it into words,” said Garland. “What may it be?”

“Why, that his uncle, Lord Stretherdale, had written to him from Nice asking him to go down there and take a look round, to see that all was safe,” replied the bank-manager. “I think that is not a far-fetched idea.”

“No!” agreed Garland. “Frankly, it isn’t. But—it wouldn’t fit in with the fact that a door had been forced!”

“The door may have been forced before he got there,” suggested Macnaughton. “He may have found it forced. According to what I read in the papers, the village policeman never examined the doors or windows—only inspected them from a distance.”

“Well, there are a lot of things to consider,” observed Garland. “It’s something to know all we’ve learned this morning. I’d be glad, gentlemen,” he added, looking round us, “if we kept the pearl business quiet a bit. It’ll be best.”

Macnaughton and Garland went away together, and we had no further visitors in connection with the Stretherdale mystery for the next two days. Then, one afternoon, a well-fed gentleman in glossy black garments and silk hat presented himself—Signor Luciani.

## CHAPTER XI THE TELEGRAM

I had a pretty good idea of Luciani's object in visiting our offices, and I told Farbrake what it was when I went to announce the hotel keeper's presence—Luciani, of course, wanted his money. But he was diplomatic enough to say nothing about that, at first; indeed he was no sooner closeted with Farbrake and myself than he gave us a very good reason for his call.

"I have come, sir, to acquaint you with something," he announced, addressing himself to Farbrake. "This young gentleman, your clerk, I believe, told me when he came to enquire about Mr. Humphrey Starke that you were the lawyers of the family: I come to you, then, instead of visiting the police. I do not like going to the police—they are, eh? what you call fussy, inquisitive—they want to know this, that, the other. So I prefer to come to you—fountain-head, eh?"

"You know something that you think would be of interest or use to the police?" suggested Farbrake. "In that case, Mr. Luciani, I'm afraid it will have to get there—eventually."

"Through you, sir, if you please," said Luciani. "I give you the information; you do with it what you please. Of course, I am always there to—eh? corroborate what I tell you. But I tell it first to you."

"Well—what is it?" asked Farbrake. "Something to do with the late Mr. Humphrey Starke, of course?"

Luciani folded his fat white hands over the head of his neatly-rolled umbrella, and looked from one to the other of us.

"Your young gentleman there—beg pardon, his name—yes, Mr. Mailey—when he comes to see me, it is now some days ago, asking for information about Mr. Humphrey Starke, I do not tell him much—no! It is not always well to tell all one knows about one's customers—until you know more yourself. Well, now I know much more: I read all the papers have to say about this affair down there at the Castle of Stretherdale—murder, eh? According to the papers Mr. Humphrey Starke goes down to that place on the morning of March 27th from Kings Cross Station. So I begin to think—very seriously I think—about when it was, the exact date, eh, when I last see Mr. Starke alive. Very well—it was on the afternoon of the day before that 27th—the 26th—On that afternoon he comes to my hotel."

"I thought he lived at your hotel," remarked Farbrake.

Luciani smiled—the smile of a man who feels that he must necessarily explain much.

"It is like this," he continued. "Mr. Humphrey Starke has had a room, nothing very grand, a mere bedroom, at my establishment for—yes, four, perhaps five years. But—he is not always there! Sometimes he will be there; sometimes he will be somewhere else, I suppose. Where, of course, I do not know. What he has at my establishment serves him as a convenient  *pied-à-terre*; letters come for him there, and telegrams. Altogether, summed up, as you say, he is there off and on. Well, he is there, for an hour or two, on the afternoon of March 26th. And while he is there a telegram comes for him. A telegram!"

Luciani spread his hands at the repetition of the last word, as if to impress us.

Farbrake looked at him, dubiously.

"Something unusual?" he asked.

"No—no! He has telegrams sent to him there, often, especially when the races are being run," replied Luciani. "But this occasion, eh?—in view of what happened at the old Castle next day? I think that telegram will be of importance to the police. And I have it—I—Luciani!"

"You have the telegram?" exclaimed Farbrake.

"I have it! It is this way. After I read in the papers all that is there told about this mysterious affair, I examine Mr. Humphrey Starke's room, in which he had been all the afternoon of the 26th, for an hour or two, and in which he was, changing his attire, I think, when the telegram arrived for him. Well, I find that telegram! Crumpled up—thrown aside—in the fender I find it! And—here it is!"

With dramatic effect, Luciani, diving into the recesses of his glossy garments, produced a pocket-book and from it extracted a much creased sheet of pink paper, which he laid with a flourish on Farbrake's blotting-pad: within a few seconds Farbrake and I had taken its contents in. The message had been despatched from Spring Street, Paddington, at 3.35; received in the S. W. 1 district at 4.18 on March 26th. And all it said was:

Right old boy will be at Kings Cross nine forty-five tomorrow.

Farbrake shook his head; he was clearly disappointed.

"Not much use, Mr. Luciani," he said. "It's unsigned."

But Luciani shook his head—with a different meaning.

"No, no!" he said. "Much use—great deal of use! For, there is a regulation that the sender of the telegram must sign his or her name at the back of the form, and his or her address. Very well!—you give that to the police. They go to the office—Spring Street—from which that telegram is despatched; they make the telegraph people produce their forms: they find the original of that: they see the name and address of the sender—and, there you are! You have got it!"

"Got what?" asked Farbrake.

"The very thing that is wanted—the name of the person who accompanied Humphrey Starke to the Castle of Stretherdale!" responded Luciani, excitedly. "There it is—that person meet him at Kings Cross at a quarter to ten on the morning of the 27th. It—what you call all fits in!"

"We can try it," said Farbrake. "You've no objection to our handing this telegram to the police? Very well—let Garland have it, Mailey: take it to him yourself." He turned again to the hotel-keeper. "Did Mr. Starke spend the night of the 26th at your hotel—after receiving this telegram?" he asked.

"He did not!" replied Luciani. "He went away again—and of course, I never saw him more."

"Did you have any conversation with him while he was there?"

"A little—I spoke with him a few minutes when he came in."

"May I ask what about?"

Luciani made a grimace and shrugged his shoulders. "It is always the same thing—of late," he said. "Money! He owed me a great deal of money. A great deal for a poor man like me!"

"You probably mean a great deal for a poor man like him!" retorted Farbrake, drily. "How came he to owe you money? If it was a great deal, why did you trust him so far?"

"I know who he was—knew about the old lord," replied Luciani. "So did others. We knew there would be a time—"

"There might not have been any time," said Farbrake. "The old lord, as you call him, need not have left Mr. Humphrey Starke one penny!"

Luciani spread his hands.

"Oh, well, sir!" he said apologetically. "You understand! We—"

“Took your chances, eh?” interrupted Farbrake. “Now, come, if you knew there was money sure to come to him why did you bother him for any?—you say that when you spoke to him that afternoon it was about money.”

“One is glad to get something to go on with,” said Luciani. “Something—on account, eh?”

“Did he never pay you anything?” asked Farbrake.

“Oh, yes—when he had had a good time with the horses! But just then, for some little time before this we are talking of, he was very hard up—I had not had any money from him for a month or two.”

“Look here, my friend!” said Farbrake, suddenly adopting a new tone. “How much did Mr. Humphrey Starke owe you at the time of his death. You want to be paid, I know! Very well—no beating about the bush! How much?”

“Two thousand pounds!” replied Luciani, promptly. “About, that is.”

“Got any proof of it?”

Luciani plunged into his recesses again and drew forth the pocket-book.

“There!” he said, producing a small bundle of blue paper. “Promissory notes! All in order.”

“Did he get the face value of whatever sums are mentioned on these?” enquired Farbrake.

“Oh, well, well, there was a little margin!” admitted Luciani.

“To be sure!” said Farbrake, with a cynical laugh. “I suppose that when he gave you a promissory note for a hundred pounds, you gave him fifty in cash, eh?”

“More sometimes!” expostulated Luciani. “It might be sixty!”

“Might be sixty, eh?” sneered Farbrake. “Now look you here, Mr. Luciani, if you expect these promissory notes to be taken up, it’ll have to be on a condition! The condition is that you tell me, here and now, everything that you know about the dead man—everything!”

Luciani spread his hands wider than ever.

“But, sir, I know so little!” he pleaded. “Already I have told you most of what I do know. As I have said, Mr. Starke is only known to me as one who occasionally makes use of his room in my hotel; where he is the rest of his time, I don’t know! I hear of him being at the races—”

“He was warned off the Turf!” remarked Farbrake.

“So!—but that would not prevent him attending race-meetings, sir,” replied Luciani. “From what I know of him, his chief occupation was backing horses. Indeed I do not know much to tell you. But I know of a man who, I believe, was more intimate with Mr. Starke than any man in London—I can tell you of him.”

“Well, who is he?” asked Farbrake.

“A man named Bentwick, a bookmaker,” answered Luciani, with alacrity. “He and Mr. Starke were constantly together—I think, in some way, they did some business together.”

“Do you know Bentwick, and where he is to be found?” enquired Farbrake. “Can you introduce Mr. Mailey to him?”

“With great pleasure!” responded Luciani. “If Mr. Mailey will call at my hotel tomorrow evening, I will take him to where he can see Mr. Bentwick, and will introduce him. But, you understand, I cannot make Bentwick talk? Whether he will be disposed to give any information about Mr. Starke I cannot say—all I can say is that he knew Mr. Starke better and more intimately than I did.”

Luciani went away with a promise from Farbrake that his promissory notes should be redeemed when the Starke family affairs came to be settled up, and when he had gone, I, too, left the office, to carry the telegram to Garland. Let Garland do what he likes about it, said Farbrake; he would probably be glad to take any opportunity.

Garland heard my story and read the message in silence. Suddenly he looked up and gave me a sly smile.

“Now I wonder if you and Farbrake spotted anything about this wire?” he asked. “Something that’s absolutely on the surface!”

“Can’t say what Farbrake may have done,” I replied. “I didn’t. What is it?”

“This telegram is from a woman!” he said. “That’s so certain that I’d stake a fortune to a penny on it. No man would say, ‘Right old boy’ in a telegram to another. No—the sender was a woman. Well—come with me to Spring Street.”

We went to Spring Street. Garland got hold of officials. Eventually we were shown a bundle of telegrams—the originals—despatched from Spring Street on the afternoon of March 26th, and in due course came the original of that in Garland’s hand. He turned to me with a triumphant laugh.

“There!” he exclaimed. “What did I tell you? A woman’s writing, of course. Bold and dashing sort of script, too! just the sort of handwriting that you’d expect from a woman who wasted three words by writing ‘Right old boy!’ Well—and who was she?” He turned the form over, and read the name and address given there. “Um!” he exclaimed. “M. Smith. Great Western Hotel. Very good!”

The post-office authorities allowed Garland to take the original form away with him; armed with it we went across to the Great Western Hotel, and after an interview with those in authority were allowed to inspect the visitors’ book. There was no record of any M. Smith having stayed at the hotel about March 26th, and no feminine handwriting in the register at all corresponding to that in which the message to Humphrey Starke had been written out.

“That’s just what I expected,” said Garland as we went away. “Fictitious name and address. However—I may learn more, later. Now for the present—you’re going to see Luciani tomorrow evening, with a view to seeing this man Bentwick? Very well—I want to shadow you!”

“Secretly?” I asked.

“Of course! There’ll be me and another man,” he said. “Now, you do exactly what I tell you. Have you arranged any particular time for your call on Luciani? You have? Eight o’clock? Very good. Now understand—when you go into Luciani’s at eight o’clock tomorrow night, we shall watch you in. We shall be there when you and Luciani come out. We shall follow you wherever you go. Understand this, too—if you should see me enter wherever you go (it’s sure to be some public place) you don’t know me or give any sign that you know me. Be careful! And—one word more—when you meet this man Bentwick, don’t press him too much. Play the innocent!—tell him that, on behalf of Mr. Farbrake, you’d be greatly obliged if he could supply any information about the late Humphrey Starke. Don’t let him think that you believe he knows a lot. And if he’ll talk, you hold your own tongue!”

## CHAPTER XII THE BOOKMAKER

Probably because of Farbrake's assurance that he should not lose anything by his transactions with the late Mr. Humphrey Starke, Luciani received me the following evening with great politeness and an expression of his sincere desire to be of whatever use he could. And as a proof of his sincerity, he lost no time in setting out with me to find Bentwick, who, he said, was generally to be found of an evening at a place to which we would forthwith proceed. I looked about me as we left Luciani's hotel, remembering what Garland had said, but I did not see Garland. Still, there were two or three men hanging about the pavement close by, and others across the street; it was with a consciousness that Luciani and myself were being watched and followed that I accompanied him across Lower Regent Street and the Haymarket into the small streets that lie on the south-west side of Leicester Square. In one of them, in front of a very modest looking tavern, Luciani paused.

"It is not a very grand looking place, this, as seen from the street," he observed, with a smile, "but it is, I assure you, a famous resort of men who are what you call sports. And behind this unpromising exterior there is—but you will see for yourself that it is something which, so they tell me, is reminiscent of Old England. Designed for that purpose, eh?"

He pushed open a door and led me into the entrance to a long passage from which on the right-hand side, various bars and small rooms opened. Striding past all these to the extreme end, he opened another door and ushered me into a large room which, I saw at once, had been fitted up in imitation of an Old English inn parlour of the coaching days. Panelled walls, with old pictures and sporting prints; old furniture and ornaments; churchwarden pipes in racks; odds and ends of the Queen Anne period; a wide fireplace with long settles on either side and a great fire of logs on the hearth; all these things were suggestive of the good old days, which were further suggested by such trophies of the chase as deer's antlers, foxes' masks, and stuffed badgers disposed here and there amongst the prints and pictures. To further heighten this effect there was a barman in a snuff-coloured suit of the early Georgian period, and a barmaid in a mob-cap and a gown to match.

There was scarcely anybody in the room when we entered. On one of the long settles near the fire a couple of horsey looking men were talking confidentially over their pipes and glasses; in a quiet corner a similar sort of man, spectacles on the bridge of his nose, was poring over what looked like an account book and occasionally making entries in it; by the bar, obviously exchanging pleasantries with the young lady in the mob-cap, was a young man in a suit of a very loud pattern, whose white hat was worn at a rakish angle, and whose white choker was ornamented by a gold pin wrought in resemblance to a running greyhound. I felt very much out of it in my plain business suit, but Luciani, who, as usual, was arrayed in frock coat and immaculate linen, bustled up to the bar with the air of one thoroughly at home.

"Mr. Bentwick been in this evening?" he asked.

"He ain't showed up yet, Mr. Luciani," replied the barman with a glance at the grandfather's clock that ticked loudly by the hearth. "About his time, though, this is. What can I do for you, now?"

Luciani invited me to refreshment—for the good of the house, he whispered with a smile; we carried our glasses to a quiet nook near the fire. And we had scarcely sat down there when the door by which we had entered opened again and in walked a man at sight of whom Luciani gave my elbow a nudge and bending close to me whispered a name—Bentwick!

Bentwick was not at all the sort of man I had expected to see. My conception of bookmakers, based, I am bound to say, on the trifling experience gained by one or two visits to Epsom, to see the Derby run, was that they were gentlemen of large build, full-fed, red-faced, raucous-voiced, given to loud suitings, much jewellery, and hats of the style worn by nigger minstrels. The man who now entered did not come up to this pattern in any way. He was a little man, clean shaven, except for a pair of small side whiskers, of a quiet looking, somewhat placid expression; he was well dressed, but in very sober fashion, in dark clothes; he wore a silk hat and carried a neatly rolled umbrella; had I seen him in the street and been asked what I took him for, I should have said he was a City man, of a type that you can see by the thousand any day. Still, this was Bentwick, the bookmaker, who, according to Luciani, was the most likely man he could think of to give information about Humphrey Starke.

Bentwick went up to the bar, nodded familiarly to the barman, ordered something, and drew off his gloves before handling his purse or his glass. He looked round, nodded again—this time to the men on the settle. Then he caught sight of Luciani and nodded for the third time. Luciani rose and approached him; they shook hands; they conversed; presently Bentwick glanced at me. He seemed to assent to some proposition which Luciani made to him; he picked up his glass and Luciani led him across to the corner in which I sat. There was a formal introduction; Bentwick greeted me easily and pleasantly; there was an air of quiet self-possession about him which made me feel that if he did speak he was the sort of man on whose word you could rely.

“Pleased to meet you, sir,” he said. “I have seen your name mentioned in the papers, I think, in connection with the Stretherdale case. It was you who found Humphrey Starke’s dead body, I believe?”

“Yes,” I replied, “I have been mixed up in the case a good deal. I understand that you knew Humphrey Starke very well, Mr. Bentwick?”

He turned slightly to Luciani, smiling a little.

“There are a good many people in the West End of London who knew Humphrey Starke very well, Mr. Mailey!” he said. “I daresay there are more who knew him better than I did. But—I did know him, yes.”

“We are anxious—our firm, Mr. Bentwick, is Farbrake & Saunders, of Lincoln’s Inn—”

“Yes, yes!” he interrupted, waving a hand. “I know Farbrake—by repute, you know. Anxious to get all the information you can, of course. Well, I don’t know I can give any—about what happened, that is. I daresay Mr. Luciani here knows more than I do.”

“No—no!” exclaimed Luciani. “No—I am only his host—I see not so much of him as you.”

“How do you know what I saw of him?” retorted Bentwick, good-naturedly. “Of course, I did see a good deal. But you say you were only his host—you mean, his landlord. Well, I was only his commission agent—and not the only one. Still, I’ve no objection to telling what I do know. But I don’t want my name in the newspapers, Mr. Mailey!—I suppose this is all private and confidential.

“Oh certainly!” said I. “For our private benefit.”

Luciani got up, glancing at the clock.

“I leave you, to your little talk,” he said. “I have another engagement. You talk at your leisure, eh?”

He bade us good-bye and went away, and Bentwick turned to me.

“How much have you got out of him?” he asked.

“Not much,” I replied. “Only that Humphrey Starke had a room at his hotel which he sometimes occupied and sometimes didn’t.”

“And—I’ll be bound—that he owed him money, eh?” he said. “Luciani went on the chance that Starke would get his uncle’s money with the peerage. And—I suppose he would, wouldn’t he?”

“The old lord left no will—so far as we’re aware,” I answered.

“There was always the chance, though, that he might make a will,” remarked Bentwick thoughtfully. “He was a man of marked eccentricity, if not worse, and you never know what an old fellow of that sort might do. After declaring all his life that he would never make a will, he was just the man to turn round and make one, leaving all his money to the Lost Dogs or something of that sort. And that was well known, and it was why Humphrey Starke had no luck in trying to raise money on his expectations.”

“I’m quite sure no will was made,” said I.

“In that case, then, if Humphrey Starke hadn’t been murdered, he’d have been a rich man?” he suggested.

“Immensely rich!” I replied.

He seemed to reflect a little on this, and taking a cigar from a case, lit it and began to smoke.

“Well,” he said, “Humphrey Starke, as I knew him, lived a very queer life. He’d a drain on him, somewhere. There were times when he won considerable sums of money, on the Turf—I could tell you of two or three such occasions. But when he had money, it seemed to go like water. He was chronically hard up. There was a mystery in his life. And he certainly never told me anything of it.”

“How long had you known him, Mr. Bentwick?” I asked.

“Oh, some few years. And for most of that time, ever since he was turned out of the Army—you know he was cashiered?—he made a living by his wits. I don’t know if it’s true, but he once told me that though he was heir to the title, old Lord Stretherdale never allowed or gave him a penny in his life!”

“I believe that’s quite true,” said I.

“Well, it was very bad, very wicked treatment! However, they’re both gone—so there it is!”

“You can’t tell me anything that might possibly throw any light on the murder?” I ventured to suggest.

“I?” he exclaimed. “No, I can’t throw any light on it. I may have ideas, notions, suspicions of my own, but if I have, I shouldn’t voice them to you or anybody, Mr. Mailey, for they might be wholly wrong. No!—the last time I saw Humphrey Starke—it was on the Sunday before his death—he had very different plans for his doings that week.”

“Did he tell you what they were?”

“Oh, yes—I met him in here, on the Sunday evening. He often came here. Yes, I knew what he was going to do. He was going to Lincoln next morning for the opening of the flat racing season, and from Lincoln to Liverpool, for the Grand National. You know that he’d been warned off the Turf? Yes, but he couldn’t keep away from it. However, it’s now very evident that he went to neither Lincoln nor Liverpool.”

“Something evidently, made him alter his mind,” I said. “So far, we haven’t the ghost of a scrap of really reliable information as to why he went to Stretherdale, though, of course, we have theories.”

“Theories!” he exclaimed. “Ah, theories—they aren’t much good. But I suppose you can build things up from them.”

“Luciani says that Humphrey Starke only used his room at the hotel in Jermyn Street occasionally,” I remarked. “Have you any knowledge of his having any other place of residence?”

"None!" he answered. "None whatever!"

It was plain to me, by this time, that I was not getting much out of Bentwick: indeed, I was coming to the conclusion that he did not know much. But having *carte blanche* from Farbrake as to what I was to do, I tried another tack, and told him we had heard at Stretherdale about the young woman named Esther Farrell. Did he know anything about that?—had he ever seen Humphrey Starke in company with any young woman who would answer to the description?

"No!" he answered. "I never saw Starke in the company of any woman during all the time I knew him, except once, and that was some three or four months ago. I saw him dining one night at the Trocadero last winter with a very showy girl about whom I spoke to him, chaffingly, next time we met. He said he wasn't dining with her at all; at least, he hadn't asked her to dine; the place was unusually crowded, and chance had put him at her table and they'd got talking—she was a professional dancing girl, he said, over from Paris and seeking an engagement in London. No—I know nothing about this country damsel you mention. From what I knew of Starke, though, he was not exactly the sort to induce a girl to run away with him—he was too damned selfish and fond of himself!—he wouldn't have wanted the bother that would have been attached to any sentimental affair."

"Mr. Bentwick!" I said. "I'm going to ask you a plain question. What was your opinion of Humphrey Starke as a man?"

He gave me a sharp, direct look.

"I'll tell you!" he answered. "He was a rank bad lot! Capable of—anything!"

We talked a little longer, and then I left him; he promised that if he ever heard anything that might be of use he would let me know. As I walked down the passage that led to the street-door, a man came in, and suddenly emerged full in the light of an overhead lamp, and I recognised Kench. Kench recognised me. He stopped.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed. "You've left the Castle, then?"

"This morning, sir," he replied. "There was nothing, of course, to be gained by my remaining there longer. I had done all that I could do, sir."

"I suppose the police are in charge of everything?" I said.

"Of everything, sir! And they are conducting what I should call an absolutely exhaustive examination of the entire premises. Every room in the place is being turned upside down. Superintendent Pearson, sir, is a most painstaking person."

"You know that Starley has disappeared, Kench?" I said. "What do you think of that?"

"I don't know what to think, sir. That it has some connection with the—the dreadful occurrence, sir, I make no doubt. But what the connection may be, I am not in a position to say."

"I've just been talking to a man in here who knew Mr. Humphrey Starke," I remarked. "Bentwick, the bookmaker."

He nodded gravely, his eyes fixed on the door from which I had just emerged.

"Yes, sir," he said, "Mr. Bentwick is usually here of an evening. I dropped in here to find him. Mr. Bentwick, sir, is my cousin."

## CHAPTER XIII

### POWER OF ATTORNEY

I was so much taken aback by Kench's last words that I made no comment on them; bidding him a hasty good-night I went out into the street. Before I had gone many yards I felt a light touch on my arm and turning sharply found Garland at my elbow.

"You met Kench?" he said.

"Yes, I met him!" I replied.

"Speak to him?"

"I spoke to him, yes."

"What was he doing there?"

"Why, he was going to meet the man I'd been talking to—Bentwick! Bentwick, he says, is his cousin!"

"He is, is he? Um!—and Bentwick was an intimate of Humphrey Starke's eh? Well, and what did you get out of Bentwick?"

"Next to nothing, as far as I can judge," I replied and went on to tell him all that Bentwick had said. "Nothing much in that, is there?" I concluded. "Do you make anything of it?"

Instead of replying, he turned to the man who was with him, and drawing him aside talked earnestly to him for a few minutes. The man, a quiet-looking person of very ordinary appearance, listened, nodded once or twice, and finally turned back towards the place I had just left. Garland turned to me again.

"I'm going to know more of Kench—and Bentwick," he remarked as we walked away. "The fact that Kench was that queer old lord's confidential servant, and that he knew all his secrets, and the other fact that Bentwick knew Humphrey Starke so well are a bit—well, they tend to suspicion. Of what I don't quite know! But we'll know more yet. And what's Kench doing here?"

"He said there was nothing more to be done, by him, at any rate, at Stretherdale Castle," I replied. "He left it in the hands of the local police. Superintendent Pearson, he says, is conducting a further search of everything, in a most exhaustive and methodical fashion."

"Oh, we shall be hearing from Pearson again!" he said confidently. "He's an exact sort of chap, Pearson! Well, Mr. Mailey, do you know what I think?"

"Indeed I don't," said I.

"I think these two, Bentwick and Kench, know a damned lot about this affair," he answered. "I think Kench knows things that he hasn't told, and won't tell. And I think Bentwick knows something—not all, but something—of what Kench knows."

"Bentwick gave me the impression of being an honest, straightforward man," I remarked. "I don't think he was trying to fence with me, either—he appeared to be quite dependable."

"I daresay he's all you suppose," replied Garland. "As a matter of fact, since I heard from you yesterday that Luciani was going to introduce you to Bentwick tonight, I've been making enquiries about Bentwick. He's a very good reputation in his own line of business—bookmaking. There's nothing against him. He's a well-to-do man, too—a property-owner and a good citizen. But he may be all this, and a lot more, and yet know things about this that he won't tell. He may know, for instance, who it was that accompanied Humphrey Starke to Stretherdale on March 27th, a highly important piece of knowledge!"

"If he does," said I, "I should say, from what I saw of him, that Bentwick won't tell—unless he's obliged to!"

"No doubt!" he agreed. "Well, we shall see. He gave you a bit of information, however, that's of great importance and of use to me, though it hasn't struck you, I daresay."

"What was that?" I asked.

"Why—not so much information, after all, but an opinion of his," replied Garland, with a cynical laugh. "His opinion that Humphrey Starke was a rank bad lot!—capable of anything!"

"Yes!" I said. "He certainly said that."

"Well, it's a bit of a key," remarked Garland. "If Humphrey Starke was that sort, we know the sort of people he'd associate with. Birds of a feather—you know the old saying. I'm beginning to get a definite idea of what this business has really been, Mr. Mailey. I think Starke, being desperately hard up, formed the idea of going down to Stretherdale Castle to get what he could—probably he knew something of his uncle's habit of leaving money in that strong box; certainly he would know of the immense value of the treasures and curiosities in that heirloom cupboard and in the bookcases. He'd know, too, that nobody would dream of attributing a burglary to him. The thing is—who was his associate, who, without doubt, was assisted to get away by Starley?"

"Starley will know that," said I.

"Starley would no doubt know the man if he saw him again," replied Garland, "but I don't suppose Starley knew his name. And all the facts about Starley's own disappearance make me incline to the belief that Starley will be a bit difficult to trace. He may, for instance, have been sent out of the country so that he couldn't give evidence—that's quite on the cards."

"What's been done to trace anything, or anybody?" I asked.

"Well, the usual thing," he replied. "Macnaughton has supplied us, and the local police, and we've supplied the press, with the numbers of the bank-notes issued to old Lord Stretherdale just before he left for the Riviera. We've issued to the press as full a description of the rope of pearls as we could get from the firm of jewellers at Leeds who re-strung them for the old gentleman. The press, too, has a description of the three articles taken from the heirloom cupboard and of the two missing books. So, if any of these bank-notes are presented, or the articles or books offered for purchase, we may get on the track of—something. By-the-by, what do the family say about all this?"

"The family?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"Why, the relations!" he answered. "There's a sister-in-law, Mrs. Starke, isn't there, and her son, who now comes into the title. What are they doing?"

"We haven't seen anything of either," I replied. "Mr. Maxwell Starke, the successor, is ill in a nursing-home, and his mother has only just come back to England from Biarritz. We're expecting them to turn up at our office any day now."

"Well, see if either of 'em can give you any information that would be of use," he said. "There may be family secrets. You never know!"

Neither Mrs. Starke nor her son, now seventh Baron Stretherdale, however, presented themselves at Farbrake & Saunders within the time in which we had reason to expect their presence. Several days had passed; then, one morning, Major Yelverton came in and was shown into Farbrake's private room. I was with Farbrake at the time, and Farbrake bade me remain. Major Yelverton, urbane and easy-mannered as ever, lost no time in going to business.

"I called, Mr. Farbrake, on behalf of my friend Mrs. Starke and of her son, Mr. Maxwell Starke," he began. "As your clerk, Mr. Mailey, will have told you, Mr. Maxwell Starke—"

"Hadn't we better give him his title?" interrupted Farbrake. "He is Lord Stretherdale, now, you know!"

"Certainly—if you say so," agreed Yelverton. "I confess I am not up in the etiquette of these things and I don't know how soon it is usual to begin calling a man by the title he's succeeded to!"

“His two immediate predecessors to that title are dead and buried,” said Farbrake. “So I think we may call him Lord Stretherdale. We’ve been expecting to see Lord Stretherdale here for some days. There are things to do—a good many things!”

“Precisely!” said Yelverton. “There must be. But, as I explained to Mr. Mailey when he called on me at my rooms, Lord Stretherdale has been ill. Nothing serious, but sufficient to prevent him from giving any attention to business matters.”

“I hope his lordship’s better?” enquired Farbrake.

“Better than he was, certainly,” replied Yelverton. “But far from well. The fact is, he is not of a good constitution, and I’m afraid—eh?—that he’s taken liberties with it which he shouldn’t have taken. Mrs. Starke, his mother—widow, you know, of my old friend and brother officer, Charles Starke, old Lord Stretherdale’s younger brother—was much upset when she returned from Biarritz the other day and found him looking so very unwell. And I came to tell you, Mr. Farbrake, that on the advice of her own medical man, which coincided with that of the doctor in whose private nursing-home I had placed Maxwell—Lord Stretherdale—Mrs. Starke has taken her son abroad, to recuperate.”

Farbrake let a frown of dislike cross his face. I could see he was vexed.

“Gone?” he asked curtly.

“They left town day before yesterday,” replied Yelverton. “I should have called to inform you of this before, but I am just now very much pressed for time.”

“Where have they gone?” demanded Farbrake.

“First to Biarritz, whence Mrs. Starke had just come,” answered Yelverton. “Mrs. Starke has great faith in the restorative qualities of that resort. Then they go into Spain—I think she plans a longish tour in the South of Spain. Until it gets too hot, of course.”

“How long do they intend to be away?” asked Farbrake.

“Oh, several weeks, I believe,” replied Yelverton, easily. “Enough to set Maxwell—Lord Stretherdale—on his legs again. He has really been very unwell.”

“I think Mrs. Starke, or somebody, should have informed me of this,” observed Farbrake, acidly. “I am, I believe, the only solicitor in the family’s employ; old Lord Stretherdale certainly had no other solicitor in his; and I have not heard that the unfortunate young man who succeeded him for a few hours had any legal representative—we have heard of none, here, anyway. And there are things to do!”

Major Yelverton gave a discreet cough.

“Yes, I quite understand, Mr. Farbrake,” he said. “Mrs. Starke, however, is a mother—and an affectionate one. She is also a lady of impulse. Her one idea as soon as she saw her son was to get him away instantly. All this business about the title and estates must wait until Maxwell is in a condition to deal with it!” he declared. “The first consideration is his health. She took matters into her own hands and—well, got him away at once.”

“She should have communicated with me,” said Farbrake, sourly. “As I say, there are things to do.”

Major Yelverton favoured us with another discreet cough.

“Er—exactly!” he said. “Er—well, I may say—in fact, one of my objects in calling upon you, Mr. Farbrake was to tell you that before leaving, Maxwell—Lord Stretherdale—executed a power of attorney in my favour. So I am empowered to act on his behalf in—er, anything that needs immediate attention.”

There was a dead silence. Then I ventured to steal a glance at my principal’s face. I saw at once how Farbrake had taken this announcement. He was relapsing into what we in the office called his high-and-mighty mood. And when he spoke his tone was extremely distant and icy.

“Oh!” he said. “Oh!—indeed? Ah, well—I’ll let you know, Major Yelverton, when it is necessary that attention should be given to—er, anything?”

“Yes,” assented Yelverton. “Oh yes! Of course, Lord Stretherdale will naturally want money.”

Farbrake laughed—and in the laugh there was a good deal of a sneer.

“Then he’ll have to want it!” he said. “I don’t know of any means of furnishing him with money!”

Yelverton stared—it seemed to me that his face fell.

“But, surely—” he began. “The old lord left no will?”

“Not that we know of,” said Farbrake. “I think I may say that he certainly did not!—he died intestate. His real property, accordingly, passed to Humphrey Starke. And the real property is, of course, the main thing concerned.”

“But—Humphrey Starke is dead!” exclaimed Major Yelverton. “And his cousin, Maxwell —”

“Succeeds to the title, yes!” interrupted Farbrake. “But I don’t know whether he succeeds to anything else. Humphrey Starke, for anything I know, may have left a will. Nay, more, he may have been married and left a family! All that is a matter about which, at present, I know nothing.”

“But the old lord left personal property!” urged Yelverton. “A share of that would come to Maxwell—he would share equally with Humphrey in personal property.”

Farbrake spread his hands and rose from his desk.

“Mr. Maxwell Starke, now Lord Stretherdale, should have remained in England to look to his own interests!” he said, acidly. “Until many matters are cleared up, I do not know how things stand. At any rate, I have no authority to pay Lord Stretherdale—or anyone appointed by him!—any money. A great deal will have to be done, sir, before we come to a question of handling money, and my advice to you is to tell Mrs. Starke to bring her son back to England at once! I suppose the new Lord Stretherdale is competent to manage his own affairs?”

He bowed Major Yelverton out, and when he had gone, turned to me.

“I don’t like that, Mailey!” he said. “Why has that woman got her son away in this fashion? It’s my belief that that man we’ve just seen has something to do with it! Perhaps this new Lord Stretherdale is a puppet in Yelverton’s and his mother’s hands? Anyhow, I don’t like Yelverton, and I shall do nothing until the young man and his mother return. Things may slide as they like till then!”

Next morning, however, came Garland—with fresh news.

## CHAPTER XIV GARLAND THEORIZES

Garland's fresh news was comprised in another letter from Pearson, who, as Kench had already told me, appeared to be making a thorough job of his examination of things at Stretherdale Castle. Farbrake and I read it together; it certainly threw fresh light on the circumstances of Humphrey Starke's murder though it left the identity of his murderer as much a problem as ever.

Office of the Superintendent of Police:  
Wateley: April 14th 1902.

DEAR SIR,

Since writing to you last week I have personally investigated more of the curious matters connected with the affair at Stretherdale Castle, and as a result have made certain discoveries which I will now communicate to you.

As a result of a thorough examination of the interior of the Castle, we yesterday came across an unopened suit-case which had been placed in a corner of the entrance hall, near the opening of the passage which leads to the door facing the shrubbery, which door, you will remember, bore evidences of having been forced from without. On opening this suit-case I found that it contained, loosely wrapped in sheets of newspaper, the three articles which the Vicar declared to be missing from the heirloom cupboard in the library, and the two books missing from the glass-top case in the same apartment. These five articles have been identified by the Vicar as those he described to us. I conclude that the thief or thieves after taking them from their proper receptacles, had packed them in the suit-case and placed the suit-case near the door by which he or they had entered and intended to leave. The suit-case is an old one, and from certain foreign hotel labels on it appears to have belonged to the former Lord Stretherdale.

On the same day, one of my men, examining the room leading into the library, on the table of which the two drinking glasses and one almost empty champagne bottle were found, discovered in the grate of the fireplace, amongst a quantity of wood-ash, the remains of a former fire which had never been cleared away, a revolver, two chambers of which I found to have been discharged. The revolver is of a recent type, bore a number, and is stamped with the name of a London firm of gunsmiths, with whom I am communicating at once.

The discovery of this revolver led me to make a close examination of the panelling and furniture of the room in which it was found, with the result that we discovered two bullets that had presumably been discharged from it. One was embedded in the post of the door across the threshold of which the dead body of Mr. Humphrey Starke was found: the other was in the panel of an oak press on the left-hand side of that door. They were both deeply embedded, and I conclude from this fact that the revolver had been fired at close quarters to the door and the press.

My further information relates to the farmer, Starley, of whose whereabouts we have not, up to the time of writing, received any news. I received some days ago, agreeably to a request from you, from Mr. Macnaughton, bank-manager, of Leeds, a list of the numbers of the notes paid out to the late Lord Stretherdale at his Leeds bank just before his departure for Nice. I circulated this list to the local banks and to

local tradespeople, and also caused it to be printed in the local newspaper. On the following day the Manager of the Wateley Old Bank came to me with a £50 Bank of England note, the number of which was on the list. It had been paid into his account at that bank by a local farmer named Robinson, of Stretherdale Hill. I drove out there at once to see Robinson about this, and he told me that the note had been paid to him on March 29th by Starley in partial discharge of a debt owing for some cattle which Starley had bought from Robinson.

On the same day that I saw Robinson, I procured a search warrant and visited Starley's farm-house, of which I made an exhaustive search. I found nothing that threw any light on his movements.

Since Starley disappeared from the neighbourhood I have made all possible enquiries about him. I have ascertained that he has a sister who is married to a man named Vinney, who was at the time of this marriage an assistant in a general provision shop in Harrogate. Mr. and Mrs. Vinney left Harrogate some three years ago for London, and the latest information I can procure about them is that Vinney became manager of a dairy business in the Harrow Road in London. I shall be much obliged if you will endeavour to trace these people and ascertain in your own way if they know anything of Starley's whereabouts. Starley's two farm-hands have heard nothing of him since he went away, but that he contemplated going is proved by the fact that he left money with one of them sufficiently to pay their wages for at least a month, making some excuse for his action. I have also ascertained that he carried away with him all the money he received from the auctioneers over the transaction I mentioned in my former letter. He is therefore in possession of considerable funds.

Since you left the neighbourhood I have had the most exhaustive enquiries made all along the local route between here and Doncaster and on alternative, though unlikely, routes, with a view of finding out any person who saw the motor-car hired from Doncaster on March 27th and who could speak as to the person or persons in it. The usual route, however, is one on which there is always an immense amount of traffic, and although we have questioned a great many persons such as inn and hotel-keepers, garage proprietors, and men on duty at railway crossings, we have so far failed to come across anyone who can tell us anything.

Having in view the statement of Matthew Burton as to what he saw on the night of the 27th March, I have also made exhaustive enquiries as to whether any person sought admission to any Harrogate hotel or inn during that night, but without result. I am of the opinion that the man who was seen to leave Martenbeck Farm by Burton, in company with Starley, was driven by Starley almost to Harrogate; that he completed the journey into the town on foot, and that he either managed to get a lodging for the night or hired a car or taxi-cab to take him to Leeds. If the latter, I may yet get on his track; if the former, he would have no difficulty in leaving Harrogate next morning by one of the early business trains to Leeds or Bradford.

Kindly inform me of the result of your investigations regarding the Vinneys.

Yours faithfully,  
SAMUEL PEARSON, SUPDT.

Farbrake read some of this letter twice over; when he had finally done with it, he turned to the detective.

"What's your definite opinion about this affair, Garland, now that all this is before you?" he asked. "You've learnt a lot, you know, since we first went down there."

“Yes,” agreed Garland. “Well, to tell the plain truth, my opinion varies from day to day! But I’ve still got something to tell you, and something more to show you, and when you’ve heard and seen, I’ll tell you what my present theory is. I got that letter,” he continued, pointing to the blue sheets still lying on Farbrake’s desk, “late last night. I got a notion from it—or the notion came into my head while I was reading it. And as a result I wired to Pearson, asking him to find out at once if on or about March 27th, Starley had anybody visiting him at Martenbeck Farm? I got a wire from Pearson, in reply, at half-past eleven this morning—just before I came to you. Here it is,” he went on, producing a telegram. “Pearson wires:—

Have ascertained from Starley’s farm hands that on March 27th a man came to visit Starley at his farm. Men gathered he was from somewhere south by something he said to them about sheep. Men saw him there during afternoon of 27th but he was gone on morning of 28th. They do not know who he was, but describe him as well dressed man who talked fine.”

Garland folded up the telegram, reached for the letter, and put both back in his pocket. “Now what do you think of that Mr. Farbrake?” he asked. “It somewhat alters the complexion of things, eh?”

“No—I want to know what you think about the whole case,” retorted Farbrake. “You’re a detective, skilled in these affairs,—I’m not. Tell me what you really think—now!”

“Well,” replied Garland, “up to last night, I’d a pretty clear opinion about the whole thing. I thought this: That Humphrey Starke was pretty desperate for money. That he had some knowledge of his uncle’s trick of leaving money in Stretherdale Castle. That he certainly knew the value of the various art-treasures there. That he made up his mind to go and help himself. And that he took one of his London associates with him, and that they drank too much, got quarrelling, fought, and Starke got a crack on the head that proved fatal. I thought that Starley then came on the scene; realised that the man who, as he thought, had stolen his girl from him was dead, and resolved to help the man, who’d done what he’d more than once expressed his intention of doing himself, to get away. He did. As to Starley’s disappearance, I put that down to a desire to find Esther Farrell. It seemed to me, in this whole thing, that the only thing to do was to solve one problem—who was the man who accompanied Humphrey Starke to Stretherdale Castle? But now, since reading Pearson’s second letter, and especially since receiving his wire this morning, I’m inclined to throw all, or, at any rate, most of that aside. I’m not inclined, any longer, to look for the man who went with Humphrey Starke to Stretherdale. Why? *Because there never was such a man!*”

“You think he went alone?” suggested Farbrake.

“I’m going to tell you what I think, now, in view of this letter and this wire,” replied Garland. “The first part of my theory holds good. Humphrey Starke decided to rob his uncle. He went down, alone, from Kings Cross, with that intention on the morning of the 27th. Before he left Kings Cross he had, I feel sure, an interview with the woman who sent him a wire to Luciani’s Hotel the previous afternoon—why he had that interview I don’t know, but I’ve a suspicion. Anyhow, he got to Doncaster, and there he hired a car and made his way to Stretherdale. He left his car in a convenient spot on the moor behind the Castle; he broke into the Castle. He selected certain things from the heirloom cupboard, and appropriated the two valuable books, and packed them up in that old suit-case. Then he broke open the old gentleman’s strong box and took bank-notes and gold out of it—and the rope of pearls. And I’ve a strong suspicion—connected with that woman I’ve just referred to—that Humphrey Starke knew of the rope of pearls, but how he got to know of it, I don’t know—still, I’m

convinced he did. Well, he got all these things together, and was ready to depart, and was busy with his second bottle of champagne—”

“Garland!” I exclaimed. “I’m obliged to interrupt you! How do you make out that Starke was alone? There were two glasses!”

Garland laughed knowingly.

“Ah!” he said. “I thought of that difficulty! But there is none—Starke, when he opened his second bottle did what a man who drinks good wine would do—he took a clean glass from the sideboard—if you remember, there were plenty there. But to resume my theory— He was busy with his second bottle when in walked Starley and the man who was staying with Starley! No doubt they’d been out; no doubt they’d seen a light; approached the Castle; found that door near the shrubbery open, and entered. Now what do you suppose Starke would do? I don’t think there’s the least doubt as to what he did! He drew his revolver and fired at them! Probably he fired—twice—at Starley. I feel sure he fired at Starley—and that Starley’s friend, whoever he was, snatched up an empty champagne bottle, and struck him—once, twice! We know the rest. Those two blows settled Starke for good.”

“It may be!” muttered Farbrake. “It’s a possible theory.”

“In view of what we know, now, it is,” declared Garland almost with enthusiasm. “It all fits in. I think the two men possessed themselves of the notes, the gold, and the pearls and went off: how else did Starley get hold of the note? Starley drove his friend there and then to Harrogate or towards Harrogate; the friend got away in the fashion Pearson suggests in his letter. Now—who was he?”

“Not a murderer, if your theory’s correct,” said Farbrake.

“Exactly—if my theory’s correct in every detail,” agreed Garland. “Still, we’ve got to find him! Well, Pearson’s given me some help in this last letter. Starley, without doubt, is in London. And the first thing to do is to ascertain if this sister of his, Mrs. Vinney, is still in Harrow Road, and if she knows anything of her brother. She won’t know anything of him, of course!—but I’m prepared for that.”

## CHAPTER XV

### MRS. VINNEY

Garland was obviously contemplating an immediate call on Starley's relations in the Harrow Road, but Farbrake, who was beginning to take a something more than professional interest in these complications, had a suggestion to make on that matter which drew me into the affair.

"If I were you, Garland, I wouldn't call on these people," he said. "If they know anything of Starley, they're not likely to tell what they know to the police. Starley's disappearance has been noised abroad pretty freely in the papers, and they'll know he's wanted, and if you go there in your professional capacity, they'll tell you nothing. I think I can suggest a better method of procedure. Let Mailey go."

"In what capacity?" asked Garland.

"I'll tell you how he can go—without arousing suspicions," replied Farbrake. "Our firm had old Lord Stretherdale's affairs entirely in its hands. Starley was one of Lord Stretherdale's tenants. Mailey will call on these people on behalf of the firm, saying that we have heard that Starley has left his farm, that we want to know what it means, and that having been informed that his sister, Mrs. Vinney, lives—which she does—we have come to ask her if she can give us any information about her brother. Mailey, of course, will say nothing about any charge against Starley, or any suspicion—his will be a mere business call on our behalf. And he may pick up something, which he can report to you."

"All right," agreed Garland, after a moment's thought. He turned to me. "When will you go?" he asked.

"This evening—when I leave the office," I replied. "It's on my way home—I live up Maida Vale."

"Well, be particular about this," he said. "You'll see Starley's brother-in-law, Vinney, no doubt. Take a good look at him! Because—he may have been the man who visited Martenbeck Farm on the 27th March. You see, whoever that man was, the farm-hands can identify him."

I gave Garland an assurance that I would keep my eyes and ears open to anything and promised to report the result of my investigations first thing next morning. And at half-past five, wondering, I confess, what luck I should have in this, my first active participation in what was really detective work, I set out on my mission. It was not such an easy business as might have been supposed. The Harrow Road is one of the longest thoroughfares in London. It runs out of Edgware Road, across Paddington by the famous Green, winds round its further corner, winds again, and goes meandering through a somewhat mean district north of Bayswater in the direction of Kensal Green and Willesden. Its total length, indeed, is a matter of mileage, and as I did not know the name of the dairy at which Vinney was manager, nor the number of the shop, I was faced with the prospect of walking the whole length of the road and examining every one of the hundreds of shop-fronts on each side. But luck was with me—I had not gone far along the road from its eastern end when I came across a dairy, bearing the name of a well-known company, and in the corner of its signboard another name—A. E. Vinney, Manager.

I walked in, without any preliminary examination of the shop from outside. It was a spick-and-span little place, white-tiled, scrupulously clean and neat; there were pans and bottles of milk and baskets of eggs and pounds of butter in evidence, and at a desk in a corner a sharp-looking young man in a white linen jacket was busily engaged in writing in a day-book or ledger. He put down his pen as I entered and came to the counter.

"Yes, sir?" he asked briskly.

"Mr. Vinney?" I enquired.

"That's me, sir!" he responded still more briskly.

I laid a card before him.

"I am from Messrs. Farbrake & Saunders, Mr. Vinney," I said. "I called to see you on a private matter."

"Yes, sir?" he said, fingering the card. "No idea what you can want with me, though!"

"Messrs. Farbrake & Saunders, Mr. Vinney, have charge of the Stretherdale Estate, near Harrogate, in Yorkshire," I said. "I daresay you know it?"

"I know Stretherdale well enough," he answered. "Lived close by at Harrogate, for some time—before coming here. But—"

"I'll make matters plain, in a few words," I said. "We understand that your wife is a sister of James Starley, one of the Stretherdale tenants—Martenbeck Farm. Well, we hear that Starley has disappeared, left his farm suddenly, with a good deal of stock on it, and we want to know if you or your wife can give us any information about him. Perhaps," I continued, watching him narrowly, "you've already read of his disappearance in the newspaper?"

I saw at once that he had not. His surprise was genuine.

"No!" he answered. "We've heard nothing of that, mister. I haven't much time for reading—scarcely any, except the Sunday paper. We did hear about the murder down there at Stretherdale Castle, but no more. When did James disappear?"

I began to tell him what I knew; he interrupted me before I had said many words, and opening a door at the back of the shop, called to some one within.

"Polly! Come here a minute!" he said. "I should like my wife to hear about this, mister," he went on turning to me. "It'll be news to her!"

A young, fresh-faced woman, in whom I fancied I traced a resemblance to Starley, came in, a piece of sewing in her hands. Vinney briefly explained my presence and the object of my visit; she listened attentively, and as I came to an end, turned sharply on her husband.

"Albert!" she exclaimed. "He'll have gone after that girl!"

Vinney said nothing. He looked at me. But I looked at his wife.

"Are you referring to a young woman named Esther Farrell, Mrs. Vinney?" I asked.

"Yes!" she replied quickly. "Essie Farrell! He was head-over-ears in love with her, was James, and I believe she'd promised to marry him. Then that Mr. Humphrey Starke came there and got round her, some way and it was believed she ran away to join him somewhere—here in London, no doubt. Well, now, Mr. Humphrey Starke's dead, and James would hear of it. And you can depend on it, James has run away to find her. He's the sort, James, that would never forget!"

"You've neither seen nor heard of him, here?" I suggested.

"Us!" she exclaimed. "No—we know nothing of him. He's not been here, if that's what you mean."

"When did either of you see him last?" I asked.

"We've neither of us seen him since we left Harrogate and came here, three and a half years ago," replied Mrs. Vinney. "Of course, it's a long way down there, and James was never a one for London. No—we've never set eyes on him since we left those parts."

I saw she was telling me the truth—so there was an end of Garland's theory that Vinney might have been the mysterious visitor at Martenbeck Farm.

"Do you think—if he has come to London in search of Esther Farrell—that he'll come here?" I asked.

"Why not?" said Mrs. Vinney quickly. "I'm his sister! But you see, he mayn't have come to London. He may have got word that she's somewhere else. We don't know that she's in

London; we don't know anything about her, do we, Albert?"

"No, nothing!" agreed Vinney. "Never heard of her since she ran off from Stretherdale."

He turned from me to his wife. "You'd a letter from James, not so long since," he said. "There was nothing in that about his going away?"

"No nothing!" she answered. "But there was this in it, as I told you at the time, Albert. He said that he was considering giving up Martenbeck Farm. Indeed, he mentioned that he'd a man coming to look at it next day who was likely to take over the tenancy from him."

I pricked my ears at that. There might be some reason for Starley's disappearance at which we had not even guessed.

"What was the date of that letter, Mrs. Vinney?" I enquired. "Can you tell me?"

She turned and went back into the room behind the shop, and was back again in a moment with an open letter in her hand.

"It was written March 26th," she said. "That's the date a-top of it, anyhow."

"He doesn't say who the man was that he expected?" I asked.

"No! No more than what I've said," she answered, glancing over the letter. "A man likely to take over the tenancy—that's all."

"Does he give you any reason why he wished to give up the farm?" I enquired.

"Not in this letter," she replied, "but in times past James has said more than once—in his letters, you understand—that he'd ideas of trying his fortune as a sheep-farmer in Australia."

"Maybe he's set off there?" suggested Vinney.

"I should hope not!—without saying good-bye to his own flesh and blood!" exclaimed Mrs. Vinney.

"It wouldn't be like him. No, you mark my words—James has gone off to find that Essie Farrell, and more fool he!"

"You didn't approve of your brother's fancy, Mrs. Vinney?" I said.

"I don't approve of him running after a young woman that behaved as she did!" retorted Mrs. Vinney. "And especially after all these years. And if James comes here, and I find that he is after her, he'll hear my opinion of such foolishness!"

"Well," I said, "if he should come to see you, ask him to call at our office—the address is on the card I gave you, Mr. Vinney. We want to know what he intends to do about the farm—he's left stock there, you know."

I was going then, having got all I wanted, but they kept me back—they wanted to hear, at first hand, about the murder of Humphrey Starke. I soon made out that they had not the slightest idea of any connection between that murder and the disappearance of Starley, except that Starley, now sure that Starke was finally out of the way, had lost no time in setting off to find the woman who, in his opinion, had forsaken him for the dead man. I found out, too, that they knew little of the actual circumstances and evidently had not read the papers very carefully. And having formed the impression that they were straightforward, honest people, I talked to them confidentially.

"Well!" remarked Mrs. Vinney. "A mystery it is, and no doubt will be! But knowing the place and people as I do, or did, I know what I think! Us Yorkshire folk reckon to be able to see into things a bit deeper than most people, and I'll lay anything I can put my tongue to a name—yes!"

"But not to mention names, Polly!" said Vinney, shaking his head.

"You can say aught to a lawyer," remarked Mrs. Vinney, "and I understand this young gentleman is one, and he doesn't look the sort to give a lady away. Yes, I can think of a name that would come to my lips very ready!—and I'll bet its owner knows more about all this than he's ever let on!"

"And who is that, Mrs. Vinney?" I asked. "You can trust me."

“Who?” she exclaimed. “Why, Kench! Kench!—Lord bless you, I wouldn’t trust Kench as far as I could see him! I’ll bet Kench knows a good deal about this affair—if he isn’t behind it!”

“Come, come, Polly!” said Mrs. Vinney’s husband, deprecating and uneasy. “It’s a bit—”

“Never you mind, Albert Edward Vinney!” retorted his better-half determinedly. “Us Yorkshire folk likes to speak straight out! If I was a ferret,” she continued, nodding at me, “not that I imply you’re one, young man, but if I was a ferret, trying to get at the bottom of this business, I should go for Kench! Folks that knows Stretherdale and that half-mad old lord that’s just dead, knows very well that Kench has feathered his nest very well during this last twenty years or more—oh, yes!”

“I thought Kench was considered the personification of everything that was perfect!” I said, smiling. “A sort of pink of propriety, in his line.”

“His line!” exclaimed Mrs. Vinney, scornfully. “And what was his line, pray? A sly, sneaking—”

I left Mrs. Vinney abusing Kench to her husband and went my way, wondering if her feminine prejudices might not have some sound basis. Did Kench know something? He might. But I was very sure of this—if Kench did, nothing would make Kench tell what he did know unless Kench wished to tell.

Meanwhile, where was Starley? I had got no further in my quest for him by my visit to the dairy: there was nothing much to tell Garland next morning. But my doings for that evening were not yet ended. I had not gone far along the street in returning towards Edgware Road, when, suddenly, on the opposite side, I caught sight of Major Yelverton. He was walking, very quickly, in the direction from which I had come. And on the sheer impulse of the moment, I turned, and, keeping on my own side, followed him.

It was dark then, for I had stopped longer than I had intended at Vinney’s. But there were plenty of street-lamps about, and I had no difficulty in keeping an eye on my man. He crossed Paddington Green, behind the old church; went through St. Mary’s Square, turned the corner, and approached the big block of flats called St. Mary’s Mansions. Within the entrance he disappeared, and still wondering why I had troubled to follow him, I turned away and went home.

Garland was to call at our office next morning to hear what I had to tell him. I expected him at an early hour, but ten o’clock passed, and then eleven, and there was no sign of him. Then, at a quarter-to-twelve, the telephone bell rang: a moment later I recognised Garland’s voice.

“Is that you, Mailey? Is Farbrake there? Yes?—well, come at once, both of you, to the City Police Office in Old Jewry—at once, do you hear? Can you?”

“Yes,” I said. “At once. But what is it?”

“Starley has been found!” he answered. “He’s dead—murdered!”

## CHAPTER XVI WHOSE VOICE?

In all the course of my acquaintance with him, I had never seen Farbrake so thoughtful as he showed himself during our hurried ride down to the City. He seemed silent and pondering until we had reached Cheapside: then, at a block in the traffic, he turned on me suddenly.

“Mailey!” he said. “If what Garland said is true, that this poor fellow has been murdered, we’re face to face with a blacker problem than I’d looked for! For, if Starley’s met his death at the hands of a murderer you may be sure that the murderer’s motive was—Starley’s knowledge of the murder at Stretherdale!”

“I’ve realised that, already,” I replied. “At least, it’s occurred to me. Still, there may be another explanation. We know that Starley had a good deal of money on him when he left home: I gathered from his sister that he knows next to nothing of London. He may have let it be seen that he had money, and have been followed and murdered for the sake of what he had on him. Still—”

“No!” exclaimed Farbrake, “It’s been as I say! Starley was murdered to keep his tongue quiet! I’m convinced of that, before I know anything. And if that is so, then the murderer is a daring and desperate man, and probably the same man that murdered Humphrey Starke.”

“I daresay Garland’s formed the same opinion,” I said. “He always asserted his belief that the secret would be solved in London.”

“Solved!” retorted Farbrake. “I hope it may be solved! What has taken place already is sufficient to show me that the murderer is a clever scoundrel. Well!—there’s Garland, and he looks grave enough.”

Garland came up to the door of the car as we pulled up at the police station. He certainly looked unusually grave, and beyond a word or two, he said nothing until we were all closeted together in a little waiting-room the use of which he had evidently bespoken. But there, alone with us, he found his tongue.

“This is a bad business!” he began in a low tone. “There’s been more behind all this than I’d bargained for. First Starke: now Starley.”

“Is it a fact that Starley was murdered?” interrupted Farbrake. “Fact?—not mere supposition?”

“Fact!” declared Garland. “Not a doubt of it! And—I don’t know if it is coincidence, or from intention on the part of the murderer—he was murdered in just the same way that Starley was—by blows on the head, from some blunt instrument. That’s a curious, and perhaps significant fact.”

“When was it—where?” demanded Farbrake.

“I’ll tell you all about it—as it’s been set out to me,” replied Garland. “Between one and two o’clock this morning, the policeman on duty on the east side of West Smithfield was going through one of those little streets near St. Bartholomew’s Church when he came across the body of a man, which, as it afterwards appeared on examining the surroundings, had been dragged into a dark corner. He saw at once that the man was dead, and got assistance. It was seen at the first, that he had terrible injuries to his head: a further examination later on, showed that he had received at least two blows from some heavy, blunt weapon—probably a life-preserver—either of which was, in the doctor’s opinion, sufficient to cause almost instantaneous death. The body was, of course, removed to the mortuary, but before that it was very evident that the murderer had, literally, turned every pocket of the clothing inside out, and the police present, naturally, set the affair down as one of murder and robbery. There was

no money on the man, except a few silver and bronze coins; no watch or chain; no papers; nothing by which he could be identified, or so they thought at first; later, they found that on the buttons of the trousers there was a tailor's name and address—Slater, Harrogate. These particulars were given in a description which was circulated before breakfast-time; it was what attracted my attention when I heard the news at the Yard. I was late in going there this morning, and I didn't hear of the affair until half-past-ten. Of course, I hurried down here at once, and was shown the dead man, and I at once recognised him as Starley. And, up to now, that's about all there is to tell."

"What could he be doing, down here, at that time of night?" said Farbrake. "It's a somewhat deserted part, that bit where you say he was found, isn't it?"

"About as deserted as it could be, midnight," asserted Garland. "A real backwater, at night-time, I've had a look at the exact place where the policeman found him. It's a narrow street that winds sharply half way down its length, and part of it is more or less in ruins—in the hands of the house-breakers, in fact. There were indications that he'd been struck down half-way along the street, and that the body had afterwards been dragged into the dark corner in which the policeman found it. Starley, as Mr. Mailey will remember, was a biggish man, so that there may have been two assailants at this job. Still, it wouldn't have been beyond the power of one man to drag him a few yards."

"There was nothing on him to show where he'd been stopping, I suppose?" asked Farbrake. "No hotel bill, or anything of that sort?"

"There was nothing beyond what I've told you—so the police say," replied Garland. "Some of the pockets remained turned inside out, and the murderer or murderers had even gone to the length of removing a body-belt that Starley wore—presumably to see if he carried anything in it. That he was robbed after being murdered there is no doubt—the question, to me, is, What was the murderer's object? Was he after Starley's money, or did he believe that Starley had papers on him that contained a secret?"

"Garland!" said Farbrake. "He was murdered to prevent him from telling what he knew of the affair at Stretherdale! The rest of it was—a mere nothing in comparison with that. He may have had something on him—a letter or two, perhaps—which it would have been dangerous to have there, but that would be about all. What papers—documents—was Starley likely to carry? As to the robbery, I regard that as all bluff!—done to make the police think he'd been murdered for the sake of what he had on him. No—Starley had to be silenced!"

"I agree!" asserted Garland. "And so far there isn't a clue as to the man who silenced him! We don't even know where Starley had been living since he came here—nor how long he'd been here—or anything."

"Has nothing been done in that way?" asked Farbrake.

"Oh, yes! A full description of Starley has been circulated to the press—I expect there'll be some editions of the evening paper out presently," replied Garland, "and if he's been staying somewhere in London, somebody'll be sure to come forward—unless," he added, significantly, "unless it's against his or her interest to do so. But just come this way and have a talk with the bosses down here—I want them to understand about the undoubted connection of this murder with the Stretherdale Castle affair."

We followed Garland to another room, where we were introduced to certain officials in authority with whom Farbrake proceeded to discuss the case in all its bearings. This went on for some time; the discussion was interrupted at last by the entrance of a police-sergeant who made a whispered communication to the principal official, who immediately turned to Garland.

"There's a man arrived who says he believes, from the description furnished to the papers, that the murdered man is a person who's been staying at his hotel," he said. "Will you take

him to see the body and bring him back here?"

Garland went out at once. He was not away long, and when he returned I knew from the expression of his face that the man whom he ushered into the room had identified Starley. Garland drew him forward.

"Mr. Abbott," he said. "Proprietor of Abbott's Hotel—"

"Abbott's Temperance Hotel," corrected the man.

"Abbott's Temperance Hotel," continued Garland, "in Charterhouse Square. Mr. Abbott has seen Starley's body and recognises it as that of a man who has been staying at his hotel for several days."

The principal official pointed Abbott to a chair.

"Take a seat, Mr. Abbott," he said. "You've no doubt about your identification?"

"None!" replied Abbott. "Knew him at once!"

"Under what name did you know him?"

"Name of James Starley."

"When did he come to your hotel?"

"It'll be about eleven days ago. He came in one afternoon, with a portmanteau, and asked if he could be accommodated for a week or two; he'd some business near by, he said, and wanted a convenient lodging. So of course we took him in. A very quiet sort of man."

"Been there ever since?"

"Ever since. Till last night of course."

"What did he do with himself— What were his habits?"

"From what I could gather, he spent most of his time about Smithfield—meat markets, and so on. He told me he was a farmer."

"Did he make any show of money?—in anybody's presence, I mean."

"Not that I know of. He'd no occasion—in my house. He paid up his bill each Saturday morning while he was there, but that was no great amount. I never saw him show his money."

"Did he receive any letters while he was with you?"

"No! Not one that I know of."

"When did you last see him alive, Mr. Abbott?"

"Last night, about ten o'clock. He was there in our smoking-room, talking to me and another man who was staying in the house. My daughter came in and said Mr. Starley was wanted on the telephone. Starley seemed surprised. But he got up and went to our telephone box—it's in the entrance hall. He was there a few minutes. Then he came back and picked up his overcoat and hat which were on a chair in the smoking-room, and said he was going out for half-an-hour. 'You'll let me in if I'm a bit late?' he said to me. 'I might be kept a bit.' 'Don't bother yourself,' said I. 'I never go to bed before half-past twelve.' However, he hadn't come in at half-past twelve; he never came in at all, of course."

"Did he say anything to you about where he was going?"

"Not a word!"

"Nor mention any name?"

"No! He said nothing but what I've told you."

"Has he left anything in his room at your hotel—any property or belongings?"

"Only that portmanteau I spoke of—that he brought with him when he came."

The official turned to Garland.

"I suppose you'll go along with Mr. Abbott and examine the portmanteau?" he suggested. "Let me know if you make any discovery."

Farbrake and I followed the detective and the hotel-manager to Charterhouse Square. Abbott's Temperance Hotel turned out to be a very modest affair, chiefly noticeable, once you had entered it, for a strong odour of mutton-chops and stewed tea. There was a tiny office just

inside the hall, and in it was a young woman who, on our entrance, looked expectantly at her father and inquisitively at the rest of us.

“My daughter,” said Abbott.

“The young lady who fetched Starley to the telephone?” enquired Garland. “Ah, I should like to ask a question or two. I suppose you took the call for Starley last night?” he went on. “Just tell me about it.”

The young woman looked at her questioner and then at her father.

“There’s scarcely anything to tell,” she said. “The telephone bell rang, and I went to the box. I got the question ‘Is that Abbott’s Hotel’ and replied that it was, the next question was ‘Is Mr. James Starley staying there?’ I replied ‘Yes,’ ‘Is he in at present?’ was the next. I said he was. ‘Ask him to step to the telephone’ came through. I went straight to the smoking-room and fetched Mr. Starley. He was in the box perhaps four minutes—then he went back to the smoking-room, and got his coat and hat, and went out.”

“Did he say anything to you as to where he was going?” enquired Garland.

“No—not a word. He walked out without a word to me.”

“Did you notice which way he turned?”

“Yes. He turned towards the corner, as if he was going to Aldersgate Street.”

“Well—a more important question,” continued Garland. “Was it a man’s voice or a woman’s that called?”

“It was a woman’s,” replied the girl, promptly.

“You’re sure of that?”

“No doubt whatever!”

“And the time was—what?”

“Five minutes past ten.”

“Thank you,” said Garland. “That’s all. Now Mr. Abbott, if we can see that room—”

Abbott took us upstairs. There was little to see. A plainly furnished bedroom, neat, clean, no luxuries; an old-fashioned portmanteau on a stand at the foot of the bed; a few comic journals—Starley’s library—and a chest of drawers; that was all. Garland examined the contents of the portmanteau. A change of clothes and of linen—nothing more. No letters, papers, private belongings. There was nothing else to suggest Starley except that in one corner of the room stood an ash-plant stick, evidently fashioned by himself with his own knife.

We went away from Abbott’s, the girl in the little office, not in the possession of the news, staring at us with wide eyes, as if fascinated. And as we were so near to it, Garland took us to see the place at which Starley’s dead body had been found. There were policemen there, guarding the exact spot as if it had been a shrine, and at each end of the miserable little street there were crowds of gapping and staring people.

## CHAPTER XVII THE LETTER

On going back to the police station we found that the officials there had just received some news to which they appeared to attach a great deal of importance. A man who described himself as a meat salesman of Smithfield had been in to say that on reading the description of Starley in the mid-day editions of the newspapers he had immediately recognised it as that of a man who during the past week or two had been seen about there a good deal and who had often talked to him on subjects connected with sheep-breeding and cattle-rearing. But he had more precise information to give. On the previous day, he said, about noon, he had been in the parlour of an inn much frequented by men having business at the markets, and had seen Starley there. Starley was in the company of certain men who the narrator knew to belong to the racing fraternity; there were also there a good many men whom he described as loafers, fellows that hung about seeking anything they could get hold of. He saw Starley produce a bundle of bank-notes and hand one to one of the men with whom he was in company; the narrator formed the opinion that it was money given over to put on some horse. Any of the men close by, he said, could have seen the bundle of bank-notes in Starley's hand; he held it in his hand for a minute or two before putting it away. He had watched Starley particularly, thinking he was a fool for showing himself to be carrying money in that open fashion, and had intended to warn him, but he had been called into another room just then, and when he returned Starley was gone. This man was positive as to his facts, even to the detail of asserting that Starley thrust the notes carelessly into the inner pocket of his coat, and his story inclined the City police to believe that Starley had been lured from his hotel by the telephone call, got on some pretext into the bye street in which his body had been found and had then been murdered and robbed.

Leaving Garland to investigate this matter still further, Farbrake and I returned to the office. Before the end of the afternoon Garland was with us again; he came in obviously full of some new discovery.

"I've got a clue at last!" he announced as soon as we were alone in Farbrake's room. "The sort of thing that ought to lead to something, anyway. I got them to let me examine Starley's clothes: they'd gone through them, of course, before that, but I asked to see them myself, for a special reason. I've had some experience of farmers, grocers, and those sort of chaps in my time, and I know that because they generally carry a good deal of money on them on market and auction days they usually have a secret pocket somewhere. Well, I found such a pocket in Starley's coat, as I'd expected—a pocket inside a pocket which had escaped notice previously. And in it I found this—a letter. Look at it!—notice the address!"

I had seen the address already, as he laid a much smudged sheet of note-paper on Farbrake's desk and smoothed it out.

84B St. Mary's Mansions,  
Paddington: W. April 3rd.

DEAR JAMES,

You once promised me that if I was ever in trouble and needed a friend I could rely on you. I am in sore trouble now and do not know which way to turn, though it is not about money, but something much worse. If you can come here at once and help me I shall never cease to be grateful to you.

ESTHER.

Farbrake let out a sharp exclamation as he came to the end of this letter.

“Good Heavens!” he said. “This must be the young woman we heard of? Esther Farrell!”

“Turn the sheet over,” said Garland.

The letter was written in a big, sprawling hand; what was there filled the whole of a page. Farbrake turned the page hastily: on the next was a postscript.

*“Ask for Mrs. Humphrey.”*

“What do you make of that?” demanded Garland. “I know what I make of it! This is where Humphrey Starke and this young woman lived—84B St. Mary’s Mansions—under the name of Humphrey. She’s read in the papers of his murder—she’s had no one to turn to—she thought of her old lover, Starley, and appealed to him. Now, then, did Starley ever see her after his arrival in London? Was she the woman who telephoned to Starley last night? Anyhow, I’m off to this address, and I want Mailey to come with me.”

“We’ll all go,” said Farbrake. “It must be as you surmise. By-the-bye, Mailey, wasn’t it to St. Mary’s Mansions that you tracked Major Yelverton, last night?”

“It was!” I replied. “Early in the evening.”

Garland turned sharply on me.

“What’s that?” he asked. “What was he doing there?”

“I haven’t had the opportunity of telling you before,” I said. “Nor about my visit to the Vinneys. You’d better hear about both matters,” I continued, and gave him a short account of my doings. “There are one or two things about all this that strike me as being extremely odd.” I went on. “Vinney’s dairy is close at hand to St. Mary’s Mansions—not five minutes’ walk from it. Mrs. Vinney evidently knew Esther Farrell well enough. How is it that she never saw her about that neighbourhood? Again, if Starley has been in that neighbourhood, why hasn’t he called to see his sister? And, finally, is it mere coincidence that Major Yelverton, who certainly has some close connection with the Starke family, was going into St. Mary’s Mansions last night?”

“Don’t know of any answer to any one of those questions!” exclaimed Garland. “Of one thing I feel sure, though, the name Humphrey means Humphrey Starke! Now let’s get up to this place as quick as we can and make enquiry.”

It was an excellent idea of Farbrake’s that he should go with us. As a well-known solicitor of irreproachable standing, he had only to mention his name to the official in charge of the estate office to receive immediate attention. And I perceived that as soon as Farbrake made known what he wanted that official showed that he already knew that there was mystery afoot.

“Yes,” he said, “84B has been tenanted by a Mr. and Mrs. Humphrey for about three years. Young people—who have a baby.”

“A baby?” exclaimed Farbrake. “Boy or girl?”

“Boy—rather over eighteen months old, I think. Quite good tenants. Mr. Humphrey was away a good deal. We have no knowledge of his business, but always thought him to be a commercial traveller of good standing.”

“Are they at home?” enquired Farbrake.

“No! As a matter of fact, we have been wondering about them,” said the clerk. “Mr. Humphrey went away on March 26th and has never been seen here since. Mrs. Humphrey went out, with her child, one morning some days later, and she has never been back. We have not heard from either. Of course, that may be all right—tenants do leave their flats and go away, for holidays and so on. All the same we’ve rather wondered about this—Mrs. Humphrey went hurriedly. But the hall-porter can tell you more about that than I can.”

He summoned the hall-porter to the office in which we were talking; the hall-porter, perceiving that he had license to do so, talked freely of what he knew.

“Mr. Humphrey,” he said in answer to Farbrake’s question, “was last seen by me on March 26th, when he went out in the morning. I’m certain of that date, because I’d a word or two with him before he left about the Lincolnshire Handicap and the Grand National—he was a young gentleman with a bit of knowledge about these things. He’s never been back since. Of course, it was no uncommon thing for him to be away days at a time, but I never knew him to be away as long as this.”

“And Mrs. Humphrey?” enquired Farbrake.

“Mrs. Humphrey, she went out one morning, with the baby, a few days—can’t be certain how many, but getting on to a week—after that. And she hasn’t ever been back since, neither!”

“Did she say anything to you when she went?” asked Garland.

“Nothing in particular—nothing to make me think she wasn’t coming back, certainly. Just went—as it were.”

“Has anybody been to enquire after them—any visitors?” asked Farbrake.

“Well, yes. A day or two, might be two or three days, after Mrs. Humphrey had gone, a man came one afternoon asking for her. A country chap, I took him for—farmer sort. Of course, I said she was away.”

“Did that satisfy him?”

“He seemed a bit taken aback. Wanted to know where she’d gone, and when she’d be home again. Of course, I couldn’t tell him anything. So he went away.”

“Did he leave you any name to give her?”

“He did not, sir!”

“Did he ever call again?”

“No, sir!”

“Well, has anyone else made any enquiry about them?” persisted Farbrake.

“Not until yesterday evening,” replied the hall-porter. “Then there was two gentlemen called—one very soon after the other. The first was a gentleman that I believe—mind, I ain’t certain of it, but I’m under the impression—once called to see Mr. Humphrey some two or three years ago, when they first came here. I fancy he was, ’cause his face seemed familiar to me. He wanted to know if Mr. or Mrs. Humphrey was at home? I told him they were both away.”

“Did he say anything about that?”

“No—he made no remark. Just went off. No message nor nothing.”

“Well,” said Farbrake, “what about the other man?”

“He came about half-an-hour after the first. He was a young ’un. He said he was from Mrs. Humphrey’s solicitor, and gave me a card. He was to ask if I had any letters for Mrs. Humphrey, and if so, I was to hand them to him.”

“Had you any letters?”

“Yes—three or four. I gave them to him.”

“Did you ask him any questions as to where Mrs. Humphrey was?”

“No, sir, I did not! Not exactly my business, you see.”

“I should like to see the card that was given to you,” said Farbrake. “Have you still got it?”

The hall-porter said that he believed he had and left the room, to return a moment later with a card which he presented to Farbrake and at which Farbrake looked with keen attention, before suddenly putting it in his pocket. He turned to the clerk, said a few words to him in an undertone, and motioned Garland and myself to follow him out.

We walked a few yards down the street before Farbrake spoke. Then he turned to us with a significant smile, at the same time drawing the card from his pocket.

“I don’t propose to know the names of every solicitor in London!” he said, drily. “But I’d stake all I have in betting that there is no solicitor in London of that name! This card is a fraud!—it’s been printed for its purpose!”

He passed the card to Garland—I looked over Garland’s shoulder. In spite of the serious news of the situation what was printed on the card made me laugh.

Mr. Adolphus Pennicott,  
Solicitor, Pump Court,  
Commissioner for Oaths. The Temple, London.

“Barefaced!” said Farbrake. “As I say, printed for the purpose! The purpose, to get those letters from the hall-porter!”

“Who’s at the back of it?” asked Garland.

“Since a certain conversation that we had with him at our office,” replied Farbrake, “I’m beginning to suspect Major Yelverton of having some share in this mystery—of what precise sort I’m not even going to guess! We know Major Yelverton called at these flats last night—it’s my impression that the young man presented this card half-an-hour later was in his employ. And what I propose now is that we should all three go and ask Major Yelverton to explain himself!”

## CHAPTER XVIII FRIEND OF THE FAMILY

Garland considered this proposal for a minute or two: it seemed to me that he was somewhat dubious about it.

“Yes,” he said at last. “That seems a practical sort of thing to do; there’s no doubt that Yelverton is mixed up in this affair in some way. But I’m not sure if it would be wise for me to go with you to see him. He’d want to know who I am, and if you didn’t tell him, he’d suspect my identity! At present, it won’t be well to excite his suspicion. Couldn’t you and Mailey go, on the pretext that you know he’s acquainted with the Starke people, and ask him if he knows anything of Mr. and Mrs. Humphrey? If you can worm anything out of him without letting him see that he’s suspected, eh?”

Eventually we settled it at that: Farbrake and I were to see Yelverton at once; Garland was to return to the City, to see if anything further had transpired as regards the Starley affair; he was to come to our office first thing next morning. We parted then, and Farbrake and I, chartering a taxi-cab, hastened down to Jermyn Street.

Yelverton’s valet admitted us to the flat: I thought he gave me a look in which there was more than I exactly understood. But he made no bother about letting us in, and showing us into the room in which I had had my previous interview with his master he went off with Farbrake’s card. We waited several minutes; then the door opened suddenly and Yelverton appeared. He was in evening dress, and carried a cloak, gloves, and hat in his hand; his manner suggested that he had little time to spare. But he closed the door, carefully, as he entered.

“Good-evening, Mr. Farbrake: good-evening, my friend!” he said, off-handedly. “I’m afraid I’m very much pressed for time! Anything new in this business, Mr. Farbrake—fresh developments?”

Farbrake was not to be bounced; he was the last man in the world for that. His tone was distinctly cold and business-like as he replied.

“This is a case in which there may be some remarkable developments, Major Yelverton,” he said. “We are leaving no stone unturned in our efforts to bring them about—whatever they may be. I called on you,” he went on, watching his man steadily, “knowing that you have considerable acquaintance with the Starke family—”

“One side of it, my dear sir, one side of it!” interrupted Yelverton.

“To ask you,” continued Farbrake, taking no notice of the interruption, “a very plain question, to which, if you please, I should like an equally plain answer. For the last three or four years there has been living at a certain flat, 84B, in St. Mary’s Mansions, a Mr. Humphrey. I wish to ask you if Mr. Humphrey, so-called there, is identical with Humphrey Starke? For I think you know!”

Yelverton had walked over to the mantelpiece. He picked up a cigarette box, took a cigarette, and lighted it, calmly; his hands, I noticed, were as steady as steel. He turned and glanced from one to the other of us.

“I suppose—as you’re both solicitors—that this is strictly confidential?” he asked. “Entirely between ourselves? Very well! Yes!—Mr. Humphrey and Humphrey Starke are—were, rather—one and the same person. Now, why?”

“And there is a Mrs. Humphrey?” suggested Farbrake.

Yelverton gave him a queer glance.

"Now you are getting to very delicate and secret matters!" he said. "Well, I suppose you may as well know! There is a lady who is *known* as Mrs. Humphrey!"

"But—not Mrs. Humphrey?" demanded Farbrake.

"In the legal sense, no!"

"To be plain," said Farbrake, "this lady has passed as Humphrey Starke's wife?"

"Precisely!" answered Yelverton, drily.

"And—legally—is not?"

"Legally, as you say, is not!"

"I suppose you know who she is?" asked Farbrake, after a minute's silence.

"I do. A young woman named Esther Farrell, who ran away with Humphrey Starke from Stretherdale and has lived with him ever since," replied Yelverton. "You've no doubt heard of her—there were rumours."

"How many people know of this?" asked Farbrake.

Yelverton shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands.

"Oh, I don't know that!" he exclaimed. "I—as a matter of fact—heard it from Humphrey Starke himself. I forget exactly how that came about—I think I met them somewhere. Handsome girl!"

Farbrake remained silent for a moment. Yelverton, in spite of his remark about having very little time, had dropped into a chair and sat there, smoking. But I could see that in spite of his affected nonchalance he was watching us keenly, and was thoroughly on the alert.

"I think I had better be perfectly open with you," said Farbrake. "Last night my managing clerk, Mr. Mailey here, had occasion to go into that neighbourhood to make some enquiries in connection with this case, and he chanced to see you entering St. Mary's Mansions. May I ask an explanation?"

Yelverton suddenly jumped to his feet, laughed, and throwing away his cigarette, helped himself to another.

"My dear Mr. Farbrake!" he exclaimed. "It seems to me that it isn't a question of 'may!'—you do ask! Now, considering that no end of people live in St. Mary's Mansions—I've known the place ever since it was built—there might be at least a score of people living there on whom I could call. There might be a lady for instance, whom I was about to take out to dinner; there might be an acquaintance who was ill in bed. If I'm to be asked to explain all my movements!—come, come! However, I'm a good-natured man, not easily offended, and you are a solicitor. I did go to St. Mary's Mansions last night. I went—to ask for Mrs. Humphrey. There you are!"

"May I ask why?" said Farbrake.

"You may! Out of sheer concern for the poor thing! I knew, of course, from the papers what had happened at Stretherdale," replied Yelverton. "It occurred to me that she might be in want of a friend—I went to see if there was anything I could do."

"Pardon me if I make the remark that your attentions were somewhat belated!" said Farbrake, icily. "It is a good many days since the murder of Humphrey Starke."

"You are quite right—it is," agreed Yelverton. "But I have been much engaged, and for part of the time, away from town. Anyway, this is the truth for you—I went to see if I could do anything for Mrs. Humphrey."

"It is scarcely for me to ask if you were able to do so?" said Farbrake.

"You can ask just what you like!" retorted Yelverton. "I am at present, whether I like it or not, under examination. As a matter of fact, I didn't see Mrs. Humphrey—I didn't get further than the entrance hall."

"Yes?" said Farbrake. "May I ask—"

"How that was? Certainly! I didn't see Mrs. Humphrey because Mrs. Humphrey has cleared out! I was informed that Mr. Humphrey went away, somewhere, the flat people don't know where—any more than they knew who he really was!—on March 26th, and that some days after Mrs. Humphrey also went away, and has never come back. So there you are—and now you know all that I know!"

"You have no idea where Mrs. Humphrey has gone?" suggested Farbrake.

"I?" exclaimed Yelverton. "Good Heavens, my dear sir!—how should I have any idea where Mrs. Humphrey has gone? Of course, I have my own opinion and notions about the whole thing. I think the poor girl learnt what had happened, from the newspapers, you know, and feeling the position difficult, perhaps impossible, left the flat and went to her friends. But—I know nothing of her friends."

"She must be traced," said Farbrake. "That's imperatively necessary."

"And certainly not a matter in which I have any concern, nor in which I can do anything," remarked Yelverton. He walked towards the side-table on which he had laid his out-door things and gave signs of putting them on. "I know no more than I have told you."

"It is a matter which must be fully investigated," said Farbrake. "And for a very simple reason. Mrs. Humphrey, I understand, has a child—an infant son."

"I heard from the flat people that she took a child away with her," replied Yelverton. "I concluded that what you say might be so."

"If Humphrey Starke, after all, was legally married to this young woman," continued Farbrake, "that child, which is, I understand, a boy, is Lord Stretherdale!"

"If!" exclaimed Yelverton, with a palpable sneer. "You do well to say if, Mr. Farbrake. There is no if about it!"

"I am not sure of that," said Farbrake. "I have had some information as regards this young woman, Esther Farrell. I think, in spite of your opinion, that it may be found that there was a marriage—a secret one. And if so—"

Yelverton, who had now got into his cloak, made an impatient gesture.

"My dear Mr. Farbrake!" he said, testily. "Why waste time in possibilities! The facts of the case are known—to two or three people, anyway. There was no marriage! That's known to me. And it's known to Humphrey Starke's cousin—the new Lord Stretherdale."

"Oh!—Mr. Maxwell Starke knew it, did he?" said Farbrake.

"Knew? He knows it!—Humphrey confided that much in him," replied Yelverton. "It was—an alliance! No more."

"We won't detain you any longer, then," remarked Farbrake, suddenly, after a pause during which Yelverton drew on his gloves. "May I ask if you've had any further news from Mr. Maxwell Starke?"

"I haven't heard a word from Lord Stretherdale since he and his mother left England," said Yelverton. "Of course, as I told you, I hold his power of attorney. I shall have to see you about that again, Mr. Farbrake, in a day or two. At present—I'm already late for an important engagement."

He bowed us out of the room; the sharp-eyed valet let us out of the flat. And before we had gone two yards along the street, Farbrake turned on me.

"Mailey!" he said in a low voice, "That man is a damned scoundrel! Clever, if you like, but a wrong 'un. Whatever his game is, I can't think, but that he's playing a game I'm as certain of as that this is Jermyn Street!"

"He was pretty candid about some things," I remarked.

"Candid when he couldn't help being candid," said Farbrake. "But he knows a lot that we don't know. Now as regards this alliance as he calls it—just reflect on what it means if there

was a marriage, however secret! That child, the boy, is the seventh Lord Stretherdale! He succeeded when his father was murdered at Stretherdale Castle that night!”

“Surely the mother and child can be traced?” I exclaimed.

“In my opinion, mother and child have been spirited away,” said Farbrake. “They may be in danger. What a coil!—no sooner does this Starley business occur than we’re confronted with this. Of course they’re all mixed up together—all these puzzling things!”

“You didn’t ask Yelverton anything about that apparently bogus card?” I remarked.

“No!” he said. “I kept that up my sleeve, Mailey—no good letting him see all our papers. I’ve a notion for tomorrow, when Garland comes.”

“In view of that letter which Garland found in Starley’s pocket,” said I, “do you think it possible that it was Mrs. Humphrey who telephoned to Starley last night?”

“May have been,” he replied. “That’s another thing we’ll have to find out, if possible. But I confess that my present disposition is to go for Yelverton! I’m absolutely positive that man is behind the scenes in this affair to an extent that at present I can’t fathom. If he isn’t a scamp, an adventurer, and a first-class liar, then, Mailey, I am no judge of men when I see them! And,” he concluded, with a laugh, “I’m in the habit of flattering myself that I’m an excellent judge!”

## CHAPTER XIX

### FLAT 84B

Garland, coming to our office early next day and hearing Farbrake's account of our visit to Major Yelverton, appeared to agree with him that the friend of the family of Starke was playing some game.

"But you did right not to mention that matter of the letters," he said, when he had heard everything. "It strikes me that a good deal hangs on that affair! I think these letters—I mean, the delivery of them to the man who got them the other night—"

"Who was probably in Yelverton's employ!" said Farbrake.

"Very likely," agreed Garland. "They were, perhaps, handed over to Yelverton within a few minutes of the messenger getting them. But I was going to say—I think they have to do with the murder of Starley."

"How?" asked Farbrake.

"The idea's easily come by," replied Garland. "We feel pretty sure, don't we, from the description we got of him that Starley was the man who called at St. Mary's Mansions and asked for Mrs. Humphrey? He didn't find her; he was told that she'd left home. What more natural than that Starley should write to her?—addressing his letter, of course, to the only address he knew? That letter would be amongst those handed to the man who described himself as clerk to Mr. Adolphus Pennicott—by the bye, is there a solicitor of that name?"

"No!" said Farbrake. "Of course there isn't! There's a Law list, if you'd like to see for yourself."

"All right—now we know where we are, as regards that," said Garland. "Well, whoever got hold of those letters, would get Starley's letter—if he wrote one to Mrs. Humphrey, and I feel sure he did! And he'd therefore get Starley's address in London—Abbott's Temperance Hotel. Now put two and two together. Let's tabulate it:—

"1. Night before last, Mailey sees Major Yelverton go to St. Mary's Mansions.

"2. The hall-porter at St. Mary's Mansions says Major Yelverton asked for Mrs. Humphrey and was told that she wasn't there—had gone away and hadn't yet returned.

"3. Soon after Major Yelverton had gone, a man came, said he was from Mrs. Humphrey's solicitor, handed in a card purporting to give the name and address of that solicitor, and asked for Mrs. Humphrey's letters, which were given to him.

"4. Two hours later, Starley is rung up on the telephone at Abbott's Hotel, and as a result leaves the hotel, goes towards Aldersgate, never returns, and is found, a few hours afterwards, murdered.

"What's to be made of that—but that Starley's address had been got from a letter found amongst those handed to the messenger of the bogus solicitors?" continued Garland. "That's what I make of it, anyhow!"

"Abbott's daughter, you remember, said that it was a woman's voice she heard on the telephone, asking for Starley," pointed out Farbrake. "A woman's!"

"All right—part of the game," said Garland, smiling. "I've an idea how that would be worked. But if you've seen the papers this morning—"

"Seen nothing!" interrupted Farbrake. "No time yet."

"Well, when you do see them, you'll see that the police are asking for information about that telephone call," said Garland. "If my surmise about it is correct, we shall get that information. But that'll come later—what I'm pointing out is that I feel dead certain that it was through possession of those letters, and of the one in particular—there may have been one

or two—from Starley that Starley was lured out of his hotel and murdered. And it's quite plain to me, knowing the precise facts, why he was murdered."

"Well?" asked Farbrake. "Why?"

"Because Starley was the only person who actually knew who killed Humphrey Starke!" replied Garland. "The only person, that is, besides the murderer. And so long as Starley was alive and could tell, the murderer wasn't safe. However, Starley's dead, and silenced—and now we'll get on, if you please, to the next thing."

"And what's that?" demanded Farbrake.

"The next thing," announced Garland, "is to inspect the flat 84B at St. Mary's Mansions. I want to see what I can find there, now that I know that Mr. Humphrey and Humphrey Starke were one and the same person. I've got a search-warrant—and you'd better come with me, both of you."

Once more we presented ourselves to the hall-porter at St. Mary's Mansions. No!—nothing had occurred in relation to our business since last night. He'd neither seen nor heard anything of Mrs. Humphrey since he'd seen us. But Garland wanted more information out of this functionary.

"Just try to remember all you can," he said. "I want to know exactly what happened the day that Mrs. Humphrey went away. I mean, as regards her exact going. What do you recollect about it?"

"There's not very much to recollect," replied the hall-porter. "It was a few days—I can't be to a day or two, ye know, but a few days—after Mr. Humphrey was last here. A district-messenger boy came one morning with a letter for her. He took it up to her flat. I don't think she gave him any answer, for he was down again and went away at once. Within a very short time, say, half-an-hour, she came down herself, with the child, carrying it. She asked me to get her a cab. She drove off—and I've never seen her since."

"Did she say anything about coming back?" asked Garland.

"She did not! Not a word. She said nothing to me, except about the cab. There was one passing, so she hadn't to wait."

Garland enquired for the clerk we had seen the previous night, and showing him his authority asked for admission to the flat. Within a few minutes the hall-porter showed us into it.

"Nobody been in here since Mrs. Humphrey went away that morning," he remarked as he opened the door. "It's just as she left it."

He went away, and Garland led us into the sitting-room. The first thing to be noticed was a small pile of newspapers on the centre-table; each paper was of a date closely following on that of the murder of Humphrey Starke; each had headings, here and there, about the Stretherdale mystery. It was evident that Esther Farrell, left alone there and wondering what it all meant, had read everything she could lay hold of.

At these papers Garland cast no more than a glance. He went straight across the room to the mantelpiece, on one side of which hung an old-fashioned letter rack. There were letters on its shelves; he took them down and began turning them over, one by one. As for Farbrake and myself we stood looking round. The room was comfortably furnished. There were a few pictures, chiefly of sporting subjects; a bookcase, the contents of which were either works of popular fiction or volumes on sporting matter—the Racing Calendar, Ruff's Guide, and the like. A piece of needlework was thrown aside on a chair; a child's toys lay scattered about on the hearthrug; on the mantelpiece a pipe-rack held half-a dozen well coloured briars; above that, the most prominent object in the room was a really fine water-colour drawing of Stretherdale Castle. There was no doubt about it, in my mind or in Farbrake's—Humphrey Starke might have a *pied-à-terre* at Luciani's, for reasons of his own, but here was his home.

A sharp exclamation from Garland caused us to turn to him. He stretched out an envelope. "Look at that—and that—and that!" he said, selecting others. "Humphrey Starke, Esq., Luciani's Hotel, Jermyn Street, S.W. I think we know where we are now, Mr. Farbrake! See here—some of these letters are addressed Humphrey Starke, Esq., at Luciani's; others are addressed Mr. Humphrey, Esq., 84B St. Mary's Mansions. These I've opened are either unpaid bills, or receipts, or letters about racing matters. Nothing very informing, yet. Now then Luciani's hotel ones—ha!—what's this? Oh—oh!—here's a letter from that quiet-mannered gentleman Kench! Written, you see, from Stretherdale Castle, and dated February 14th. Let's read it together."

He laid the letter on the table at which we were all standing; we all three bent over it.

Stretherdale Castle:  
Wateley: R.S.O.  
February 14th 1902.

SIR,

I beg you will pardon the liberty I take in addressing you; the excuse I offer is the faithful service I have given to my master, his Lordship, your uncle, for a great many years. Sir, I have of late been a good deal concerned about his Lordship, for although he is as active as ever, his little peculiarities have become more marked, and I think it is high time his relations were aware of this undoubted fact. As you are his Lordship's heir, Sir, I venture to address you on the matter. Sir, his Lordship is about to start on his usual trip to the French Riviera; I, of course, accompanying him. We shall be in town for three days, on our way, from February 24th to 27th., and if you would please give me an interview one evening during that time I should be glad to say to you what I cannot very well write. A letter at his Lordship's town house will find me, and I trust that this will find you, Sir, at Luciani's which is all the address of yours that I have.

I am, Sir,  
Your respectful and obedient servant  
THOMAS KENCH.

"That letter's worth a lot of money!" exclaimed Garland. "I'd give something to have Kench here this minute! But I'll see him before many hours are over! This is real luck!" he went on, chuckling. "I hoped to find something here, but I never expected such a piece of good fortune as this." He bundled the rest of the letters into one pocket and put Kench's epistle carefully away in another. "Splendid—splendid!" he concluded, with a chuckle. "Now we really are getting on! For, of course, Humphrey Starke did give Kench the desired interview, and Kench—but we'll leave that. Now let's see what's in this bedroom."

A door was half-open on the opposite side of the sitting-room, and Garland walked in. He spoke as he crossed the threshold.

"Just what I expected!" he exclaimed. "All the signs of a hasty departure. The lady got that letter from the district-messenger that the porter told us about, read it, came in here, changed her clothes—there's the gown she tore off, thrown anyhow across the bed—dressed up the child—there are its discarded things—and went off as quick as she could. And—what's this?"

He suddenly caught sight of and snatched up a sheet of letter-paper that lay, evidently turned aside, on the dressing-table. We knew at once that he had made another fortunate discovery.

"By George!" He exclaimed, turning on us. "This is from Yelverton! It's the letter the district messenger brought, of course. Look at it!"

He thrust the letter into Farbrake's hand; I read it looking over his shoulder. There was no address, no date, but Yelverton's signature was at the foot, plain enough.

“You had better come here, with the boy, at once; there is positive danger in remaining alone there any longer. Don't trouble about any luggage; say nothing to the flat people, but come here immediately you receive this and we will decide what is best to be done.”

Farbrake handed the letter back.

“Well, Garland?” he said quietly. “That's plain! And now— What next?”

Garland motioned me towards the outer door.

“The next is that you see Major Yelverton again at once!” he said, coolly. “And this time I'm going with you.”

## CHAPTER XX

### THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG HERE!

We rang and knocked for admission at Yelverton's outer door once, twice, thrice—and got no answer. And we were debating whether to go away and come again when the door—two or three minutes having elapsed since our final summons—suddenly opened before us. There stood the man whom I had set down as an ex-orderly; he swept the three of us into a comprehensive glance and spoke before any of us had found tongue.

“Not at home, gentlemen!” he said with a snap. “Away!”

He made as if to shut the door, but Garland thrust himself forward.

“Do we understand that Major Yelverton is away from home?” he demanded.

“I've just said so!” retorted the man.

“You took your time about telling us anything,” said Garland. “We've been knocking and ringing for several minutes!”

“I was changing my clothes,” replied the valet. “Came as soon as I could.”

Garland looked him over.

“I suppose you're going away, too, as you're dressed up?” he asked. “May one ask if you're going to join your master, anywhere?”

“My business, that, I think!” replied the valet, acidly. “Not yours!”

“It's mine to find out where your master is, and as quickly as may be!” exclaimed Garland.

“And as he isn't here, I'm going to get a warrant to search this flat—you can stay here till I come back or not, as you like!”

He made as if to turn away, but the valet stopped him.

“Half-a-minute!” he said, with a certain eagerness. “And—do I understand you're from the police? This young gentleman who's been here before I know, and this other gentleman I know—lawyers. But, if you're a detective—”

“Well, I am a detective!” interrupted Garland. “What of it?”

The man stood back, motioning us to enter. It seemed to me that a look of something very like relief came over his face. He ushered us into the room in which we had previously met Yelverton: I heard him shut the outer door again before he joined us. And he shut the door of the sitting-room, too, as if he wanted to insure secrecy.

“Look here!” he said, as he came in. “I'm about through with all this! I know there's something going on, and I'm not going to run the risk of being mixed up, or of being suspected of being mixed up in it. As you're a detective—might I know the name?”

“Detective-Inspector Garland—Scotland Yard.”

“My name's Mayall—been valet to Yelverton for three years—old Army man I am. Colour-sergeant, last step. Well, there's such a thing as a man's being able to read, and there's such another thing as the newspapers, isn't there?”

“Go on!” said Garland.

“I've heard all there's been in the paper about this Stretherdale affair and about the Starkes,” continued Mayall. “Yelverton's something to do with those Starkes! This Humphrey Starke that's been murdered, I've seen him a time or two; the other one, Maxwell, was constantly here—thick as thieves, him and Yelverton, though Maxwell's only a youngster. Now Humphrey Starke was here—it can't have been more than a day or two before he got his quietus at that old Castle.”

“Here to see Yelverton, eh?” said Garland. “You don't know of anything that passed between them? Didn't overhear—accidentally, of course!—any conversation?”

"I did not! Yelverton's too damned clever to run the risk of eavesdropping. No, I heard nothing said. And I heard nothing said a few days—I can't say how many days, exactly—later, when a young lady came here that I recognised as having seen, more than once, with Humphrey Starke in Kensington Gardens. The two of 'em—good-looking couple—seen 'em many a time in Kensington Gardens, with a youngster in a perambulator. She brought the youngster here."

"One morning, you say, a few days after the Stretherdale affair was in the papers?"

"Exactly! Came, as I say with the youngster. Had it in her arms. And, I thought, looked nervous, or excited—or something."

"Well?"

"She was with Yelverton, in this room, some little time. Then they went out—all three. The porter downstairs told me afterwards that they went off in a cab, but he didn't catch where Yelverton told the driver to go."

"Seen anything of this lady since?" asked Garland.

"No! Never been here—unless it was when I was out. But I think I know something about her. Night before last Yelverton told me that he wanted me to do an errand. He gave me a card with the name of a lawyer on it, and told me to go to St. Mary's Mansions in Paddington at a certain time, give the card to the hall-porter and tell him that I was to take Mrs. Humphrey's letters. Now I reckon, not being quite a fool, that Mrs. Humphrey is the lady—eh? Well, I went, and got a packet of letters. I was to meet Yelverton with them at the Edgware Road Metropolitan Station—I did so, and gave the letters to him."

"You were suspicious at the time?" suggested Garland.

"I was suspicious all the time, but I wasn't going to show it. I did what he told me to do."

"Well, what happened after you'd given him the letters?"

"Nothing! He said that was all he wanted—I could go home."

"Where did he go?"

"How do I know? I left him in the booking-office of that station."

"What time would that be?"

"All around a quarter-to-eight."

"Did you come home—come here?" asked Garland.

"I did—but I did something on the way," replied Mayall, with a sly laugh. "I can do a bit of your sort of work myself, if need be!"

"Glad to hear it," said Garland. "And what might it be?"

"I dropped in at a favourite house of call of mine where I knew they keep the latest up-to-date London Directory," answered Mayall with a grin, "and I looked up Mr. Adolphus Pennicott!"

"Well?" asked Garland.

Mayall grinned again—at all three of us.

"I read Dickens when I've nothing else to do," he said. "Prime favourite, Dickens! Maybe you gentlemen will remember what Betsy Brig said to Sairy Gamp about Mrs. Harris? 'There ain't no such a person!' Well, there ain't such a person as Mr. Adolphus Pennicott, solicitor!"

"Quite right, my man!" said Farbrake. "There isn't!"

"All a fake, sir," continued Mayall. "To get those letters! I suspected as much at the time. But, as I say, I obeyed orders."

"Just let your mind go back to that evening, will you?" said Garland. "You say you left Major Yelverton in the booking-office at Edgware Road Metropolitan Station about a quarter-to-eight. Now what time did he come home that night?"

"About midnight," replied Mayall.

"Was that about his usual time?"

“No! It was very rarely he was ever out till that time. His usual time, whether he’d been at his club, or to the theatre, or dining out, was eleven. But that night he wasn’t in till just after twelve.”

“Had you gone to bed?”

“I had—usual thing.”

“How do you know what time it was then?”

“Because I was reading in bed. I glanced at my watch when I heard him come in.”

“Well,” said Garland, after a moment’s pause. “You said when we came in that you were about through with this, and you’ve been pretty candid about things! Why?”

“Why? Why, because in my opinion, Yelverton’s off!” replied the valet. “In fact, I know he is! But where, or for how long, I don’t know. What I know is that this morning he sent me out on an errand that kept me away from the flat for an hour. When I came back, he’d gone. So had a suit-case. So had clothes and linen and so on. He’s not taken a great deal—but there you are. And on that table was a note for me, enclosing a month’s wages, and saying he was going to be away a bit, and I was to lock up the flat and hand the key to the people downstairs. As for me and my future not a damned word! But that’s Yelverton. A month’s wages!”

Garland looked round the room. He turned to Mayall again.

“Has Major Yelverton got any other sitting-room like this?” he asked.

“There’s a small room, a sort of den, where he keeps a few things,” replied Mayall.

“Let us see it for a minute,” said Garland.

Mayall took him out: Farbrake turned to me.

“Things are developing, Mailey!” he whispered. “I can see that Garland now suspects Yelverton as the murderer of Starley!”

“It won’t surprise me, sir, if Garland suspects Yelverton to be the murderer of Humphrey Starke as well as of Starley!” I answered.

“What do you think, yourself, though?” he asked.

“I don’t know, sir,” I said. “What do you think?”

“I think that unfortunate young woman, Esther Farrell, and her child are in danger,” he answered. “I can’t get over a suspicion that Esther Farrell is really Mrs. Humphrey Starke, in which case, of course, her boy succeeds his father. Why is Yelverton concerning himself so much in these affairs?”

“I’ve been wondering,” I said, “if it was Esther Farrell who telephoned to Starley the other night, and if so, if that was at Yelverton’s instigation? Starley was waiting to get in touch with her, and Yelverton knew, probably, that he’d only be too ready to keep an appointment made by her. And this man of Yelverton’s says that she and the child went away with Yelverton.”

“I doubt if she telephoned to Starley,” replied Farbrake. “But I feel certain of this—that Yelverton made use of her name in telephoning. I take it that he got Starley’s address from a letter found in those handed to Mayall, and that he at once laid a plan for getting an interview with Starley. But—”

Garland came back. At sight of him Farbrake stopped. Garland was carrying something in his hand—some article wrapped in a sheet of loose paper. Behind him came Mayall, looking as if a new idea had come into his mind. And Mayall was muttering.

“Hanged if I thought he’d go to that length!” he was saying. “Murder! Oh Lord!”

Garland began unwrapping the parcel.

“You may as well see what I found in there,” he said. “Interesting! You don’t often see these things now-a-days, except in police museums. I daresay neither of you has ever seen one before.”

He had got the wrappings off by that time, and held up to us an object at which he himself gazed with almost affectionate interest.

“Neat little thing, isn’t it?” he said. “Old-fashioned life-preserver! Life-preserver, indeed! More like life-destroyer! A good crack on your skull with that, and—eh?”

“What—what are you doing with it?” asked Farbrake. “Is it—was it—”

“Found it on Yelverton’s desk in that den of his,” replied Garland, coolly. “Mayall says that until the other day it always hung on the wall, by this leather thong, on the wall in the lobby there, with other curiosities.”

“And you think—” suggested Farbrake.

“I think Yelverton must have had a purpose when he took it down,” replied Garland, as imperturable as ever. “Perhaps he cracked Starley’s skull with it. We’ll see about that, all in good time. Anyway, it goes now into my pocket.”

With a word or two to the valet as regarded keeping in touch with him, Garland departed, and we followed. And as we walked out of the entrance hall into Jermyn Street we came face to face with Kench.

## CHAPTER XXI

### WHAT KENCH KNEW

Kench, thus suddenly encountered, and by three men of whose attitude towards him he might, I suppose, have had some suspicion, showed no self-consciousness; he was the same calm, unperturbed, respectful-mannered serving-man that he had always been since my acquaintance with him. He bowed courteously as he met Farbrake: the presence of Garland made no difference to his composure.

"Hello, Kench," exclaimed Farbrake. "This is rather fortunate! We wanted to see you. Are you, by-the-bye, going up to Major Yelverton's flat?"

"I am, sir," replied Kench.

"You can save yourself the trouble," said Farbrake. "Major Yelverton is not there—he's gone away and his man doesn't know where he's gone, either."

Kench showed no surprise.

"Indeed, sir?" he remarked. "Then I need not go up. You observed, sir, that you wished to see me?"

"Mr. Garland here wants to have a word or two with you, I believe," said Farbrake, nodding at the detective. "Anxious to get a little information out of you!"

"A good deal!" muttered Garland. He hesitated a moment, and then suddenly plunging a hand in his inner pocket he brought out a bundle of papers and selecting a folded one, showed it to Kench. "Look here," he said. "This is a letter of yours, Mr. Kench, written by you to Mr. Humphrey Starke, and found by me amongst his belongings. I want to have a talk to you about it."

I thought this might have knocked Kench off his pedestal of composure, for it came with startling suddenness. It did nothing of the sort. Kench, after a mere glance at the letter, which Garland had unfolded before him, turned from the detective to Farbrake.

"I am not sure that I was not about to mention the fact that I wrote that letter," he said. "I don't quite know whether I should have mentioned it to the police, or to Mr. Farbrake—that is, when I had definitely made up my mind that I should mention it! I have been in doubt whether I should mention it at all—I was not aware, of course, that it was in existence."

"Well, here it is!" exclaimed Garland. "And—I want to know about it. What I want to know is this—was there a meeting between you and Humphrey Starke before you and Lord Stretherdale set off for Nice?"

Kench lifted his neatly gloved hands, and began to press each glove more carefully into place: evidently he was thinking. After a moment's silence, he looked round. "If I am to engage in conversation about this," he said, "I should prefer a more suitable environment. This is not exactly private—"

"Let us go to my office," said Farbrake. "Get a cab, Mailey."

Kench maintained a thoughtful silence all the way to Lincoln's Inn Fields. But when we were all four safely closeted in Farbrake's private room, he was the first to speak.

"I should like to know how that letter came into your possession?" he said. "It is some time since it was written."

"I'll tell you that readily," replied Garland. "I found it, in the presence of Mr. Farbrake and Mr. Mailey, in a flat at St. Mary's Mansions, in Paddington, which was tenanted by Humphrey Starke under the name of Mr. Humphrey. It was amongst other letters—many of which were addressed to Luciani's Hotel."

“Did you ever hear of Humphrey Starke passing as Mr. Humphrey, Kench?” enquired Farbrake.

“Never, sir!” replied Kench. “I am quite unaware that he ever did.”

“Did you ever hear of his being married?”

“No, sir! I have heard it rumoured that a young woman from the Stretherdale district ran away with him, or after him, but I know nothing beyond the rumour. I have never been acquainted with Mr. Humphrey Starke’s private affairs. When I wrote that letter to him which Mr. Garland has produced, I did not even know his address, but I had a vague recollection that he was to be heard of at Luciani’s and so I sent it there.”

“Well, now, Garland wants to know if you and Humphrey Starke had an interview, in consequence of your letter?” continued Farbrake. “Tell me what you can, Kench—it’s of the highest importance.”

“We had an interview,” replied Kench. “It was an evening or two before my late master and myself left London for the Riviera.”

“Where did it take place?” asked Garland.

“At the Criterion Restaurant,” said Kench. “Mr. Humphrey Starke made an appointment to meet me there at a certain hour. I have no objection—now—to stating what took place at that interview. But I should like to explain why I sought it—why I wished to see Mr. Starke. You will bear in mind, sir,” he continued, turning to Farbrake, “that for a good many years, I, to your knowledge, have had what you might call sole charge of Lord Stretherdale: you will remember that I knew Mr. Starke as my lord’s heir. Also—a most important thing—I knew nothing against Mr. Starke. I knew, of course, that he had been a little wild and extravagant and the like, but I did not know anything to prevent me from seeking his confidence as regards his uncle. When all is said and done, sir, Mr. Starke, as you know, was next-of-kin to my lord!”

“Quite so, Kench, quite so!” agreed Farbrake. “I quite see your reason for confiding in him.”

“Well, sir, in my opinion, it was high time that I confided in some one!” said Kench. “I wish now, I do indeed, considering how things have turned out, that I had come to you! But, as I say, I regarded Mr. Humphrey Starke as head of the family, next to my lord, and I went to him. And what I wanted to say to him, sir, was that in my opinion it would very soon be necessary for some person to assume control of his lordship’s affairs.”

“You had reasons, no doubt, Kench?” suggested Farbrake.

“Strong reasons, sir, exceedingly strong reasons,” replied Kench. “His lordship, sir, from the time of my first entry into his service, had always been eccentric, whimsical, and strange in his habits and manner, but at the time I speak of he was getting worse and began doing things which were not only questionable but dangerous. And in this respect nothing was so marked as his utter carelessness about valuable property and even available cash. Indeed, sir, I was beginning to consider him unable to take care of his possessions. And it was no use advising, suggesting, or remonstrating—nothing was of any effect. He would do what he pleased!”

“You put all that, of course, to Mr. Starke?” asked Farbrake.

“I did, sir; I said, too, that I could take every care of his lordship while we were away, but that when we returned I should be much relieved if the family would consider fully what I thought,” said Kench. “All that, of course, I thought harmless—I am sorry now, however, that I proceeded to tell Mr. Starke what I did.”

“What did you tell him?” asked Farbrake.

Kench shook his head sadly and gravely.

"I regret to say, sir, that to strengthen my arguments, I told him all about that strong box!" he said. "A mistake, sir, a great mistake!"

"Look here, Kench!" exclaimed Garland. "That's just what I want to get at! You told Humphrey Starke, evidently, all about what you knew that strong box to contain. Yes?—well, now what did it contain? That is, of your knowledge?"

"Well, there was a large sum of money in bank-notes," replied Kench. "And there was a certain amount—not a great deal—in gold—There was a pearl necklace which my lord had just had put together and thought a great deal of—what he was going to do with it I don't know, but I knew that from his own remarks he must have spent a fine fortune in getting those pearls together. Then there was a quantity of bearer securities—"

"Ah!" exclaimed Farbrake. "You know that for a fact, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I took the liberty, sir, of examining the contents of that box when I went to take out the money for the village charity—which occasion I have previously mentioned to you," answered Kench. "It was a rapid examination, but a thorough one. I saw everything that was there when we left the Castle."

"Then—as I believe you saw what remained in the box after the discovery that it had been broken open—you knew what was abstracted?" suggested Garland.

"Yes!" said Kench. "The money; the pearls; the bearer securities. All these had been taken."

"What did Humphrey Starke say when you told him this, Kench?" asked Farbrake.

"He made light of it, sir—he said nobody'd suspect the stuff, as he called it, was there, and it wasn't likely that anybody would break into the Castle," replied Kench. "We'd see about things when my lord returned from Nice."

"Careless, eh?" suggested Farbrake.

"I do not know, sir," said Kench. "That was all he said. Nothing was to be done until we came back. So I went away—leaving Mr. Starke in full possession of the facts relating to that strong box. And," he continued, glancing significantly at Garland, "I am quite sure that nobody else knew them!"

"Just you and he, eh?—is that it?" asked Garland.

"That is it!—as far as I am aware," assented Kench. "And I deeply regret that I ever allowed Mr. Starke to share my knowledge!"

"Kench!" said Farbrake. "What do you really think? I mean, about Humphrey Starke in relation to this affair?"

Kench became more owl-like than ever. He shook his head slowly from side to side, he studied the fit and make of his neat gloves.

"Well, sir," he replied at last, "much against my will, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that Mr. Starke went to Stretherdale Castle with a companion, in consequence of what I told him. But I cannot make up my mind as to whether it was to steal the property I had described, or whether he'd gone to see that things were safe."

"But—the murder!" said Farbrake.

"I cannot make up my mind about that, either," replied Kench. "I cannot decide whether his companion killed him after they'd both assisted in the robbery, or whether he'd told his companion of the property before they went and the companion had killed him soon after their arrival and had then helped himself to the contents of the box."

"Those are matters to be worked out," said Garland. "Now listen, Kench!—have you any idea, any idea whatever, even the faintest scrap of an idea, as to who the man was that went with Humphrey Starke to Stretherdale? Think!"

It required little observation of Kench to know that he was a man of caution; the sort of man who thinks before he speaks. He was thinking now, and what seemed a considerable time

elapsed before he replied.

“Frankly, Mr. Garland, I have not!” he answered at last. “I may have had vague ideas, suspicions, and that sort of thing, but they only are—vague. No!—I can’t name anybody!”

“I wouldn’t be squeamish about it, if I were you,” said Garland. “It’s not the occasion for squeamishness or for too fine a regard for anybody. Anybody, mind you—never mind who!”

“I’m not squeamish,” replied Kench. “But I can’t name a person. All I can say is that I’ve heard that Mr. Starke kept some very bad company. It may, perhaps I should say must, have been one of his associates. One in my position, gentlemen, hears things. I’ve heard it said, more than once, that Mr. Starke knew some very questionable persons—was seen with such persons. A sad pity that a young man of his position and prospects should have formed such habits, but I blame my old master, gentlemen; I blame him greatly! He should have made his nephew a proper allowance.”

“Well, there may be something in that, from one point of view,” remarked Garland. “But it’s a matter that doesn’t concern me. What I want to get at is—who murdered Humphrey Starke that night at Stretherdale?—if it was murder!”

“Could it be anything else, sir?” asked Kench, wonderingly.

“Might have been a blow or blows struck in self-defence,” replied Garland. “A revolver was fired by somebody—may have been by Starke. Starke may have fired it at his companion and the companion hit him with the champagne bottle. But—who was his companion? That’s the question! For whoever he was, he cleared out with the money, the rope of pearls, and the bearer securities you mention! Look here, Kench!—we met you just now going to Major Yelverton’s. May I ask why?”

“You may, Mr. Garland. I met Major Yelverton in St. James Street the other day,” answered Kench. “He said that when the new Lord Stretherdale returned from abroad, where he’s gone with his mother for the benefit of his health, he’d want a valet—would I care to serve him? I was going to Major Yelverton’s just now to decline the offer—I have had one that will suit me better—the service of an elderly gentleman.”

“What do you know about Major Yelverton?” asked Garland.

“Very little,” said Kench, “except that he’s a friend of the Starkes. I’ve seen him about, at times, with both young gentlemen. I have also, on the rare occasions when I’ve attended my late master to race meetings, seen him at such places as Newmarket, Ascot, and Goodwood. If I were asked to describe Major Yelverton, sir, I should say he was a man about town.”

“You’ve never heard anything particular about him?” suggested Garland. “Nothing to show that he’s an adventurer, eh?”

But Kench had heard nothing of that sort, and before we could ask any further questions of him the conversation was interrupted by one of our clerks who came in to say that the City police had telephoned to ask if Garland was at our office—if so, would he come to them at once?

## CHAPTER XXII

### RIVAL THEORIES

Farbrake, by this time, was so thoroughly engrossed in the task of getting a solution of our problems that all other business had lost interest for him, and he insisted on going along with Garland to hear why he was wanted. We were all three down at the City police office within a few minutes of receiving the call; in an anteroom through which we passed on our way to the man who had requested Garland's presence we saw two women who looked at us with obvious nervous curiosity and probably took us for detectives. One was a middle-aged comfortable-looking person, evidently shepherding the other, a rather good-looking young woman, fashionably dressed. The man we had come to see nodded in the direction of these two through his half-open door.

"The two ladies outside," he said, "came in a little time ago with an intimation that the younger one, having read the newspapers, believes she can tell something about the telephone call to Starley at Abbott's Hotel the other night. I haven't yet heard what she has to say—I asked her and her mother to wait while I sent for you. Now we'll have them in and hear all about it."

He ushered the two women inside, gave them chairs, and turned to the elder.

"Now, ma'am," he said, "we can get to business. What is it your daughter has to tell us?"

"Well, sir, it is, of course, my daughter's duty to tell you what she knows," replied the woman. "It's not a nice thing for respectable people to be dragged into these affairs, but after what my daughter told me, consequent upon her reading certain pieces in the newspaper, I said to her that there was no other course open to us than that we should see the police authorities at once."

"Quite right, ma'am—couldn't do better—we shall be much obliged to you if you can furnish us with any information," said the official. "Your name, ma'am is—?"

"Mrs. Chilton, sir; I live at 23, Acacia Grove, Somers Town. My daughter is Miss Arabella Chilton—she's assistant book-keeper at the Great Northern Hotel, at Kings Cross."

The official turned to Miss Arabella Chilton.

"What is it you have to tell?" he asked. "You'd been reading about this murder in Smithfield, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," replied Miss Chilton. "It—it was about the telephone call."

"To the dead man, Starley, at Abbott's Hotel, you mean?"

"Yes, sir. It was I who made it!"

"You, eh? On behalf of somebody else, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. On behalf of a gentleman."

The official glanced at Garland, as much as to imply that if he pleased he could take up the questioning. But Garland remained silent, watching Miss Arabella Chilton.

The official nodded at her.

"Just tell us all about it," he said. "Tell it in your own way."

"Well, it was just this," replied Miss Chilton, gathering courage. "I'm at the Great Northern Hotel, as my mother says—assistant book-keeper in the office. One Tuesday evening a gentleman came in, a stranger—"

"Half-a-minute," interrupted Garland. "What time was that?"

"About a quarter or twenty minutes past eight. The office is on the left-hand side of the hall, as you come in—I was standing at the window. The gentleman turned to me when he got inside; I could see he didn't know the hotel at all. He asked if it was too late to get dinner. I

said no, not at all, and showed him the way to the dining-room, round the corner. He went in there. About three-quarters of an hour afterwards I saw him going along the corridor towards the smoking-room. Then, half-an-hour after that, he came to the office window again."

"That would make the time—what, now?" asked Garland.

"It was all about a quarter-to-ten, then," replied Miss Chilton. "I know it was, because I go off duty at ten o'clock, and it was about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes previously."

"Well, what did he want, that time?" enquired Garland.

"He asked me if I could telephone for him," said Miss Chilton. "He said he wanted to ring up a friend in the City, but unfortunately he himself could not hear one word on a 'phone, owing to some sort of deafness. Of course, I obliged him. He told me to ring up Abbott's Hotel and ask for Mr. Starley."

"Did he give you the proper number?" asked Garland. "I mean—did he know it, or did you have to look for it?"

"He gave it me, correctly, at first. I got a reply at once. Mr. Starley was there. I asked that he should come to the telephone and turned to the gentleman for his message. He—"

"Half-a-minute!" interrupted Garland. "Now, if you can remember it, tell us exactly what passed, word for word.

"I remember all of it," said Miss Chilton. "Starley said 'Hullo!—Starley here!' I said, repeating the words the gentleman had given me: 'Will you meet Mrs. Humphrey's solicitor outside Aldersgate Street Station, close by you, in twenty minutes?' He replied 'Yes, certainly.' No more was said: the gentleman told me to ring off as soon as Starley had replied.

"And after that?" asked Garland.

"That was all. The gentleman thanked me, said good-night, and went out. The hall-porter got him a cab."

"Thank you—that's all very clear," said Garland. "Now tell me, as near as you can, what this gentleman was like?" He turned to Farbrake and myself when the girl had given us a brief description. "Yelverton, of course!" he whispered. "It all fits in! He was at the Metropolitan Station at Edgware Road a bit before eight; he runs along on the train to Kings Cross and goes into the Great Northern Hotel there a bit after eight—oh, it all fits, like a simple puzzle. Yelverton, certainly!"

Mrs. Chilton and her daughter, duly thanked, presently went away, and the official, having bowed them out, sat down again at his desk, put his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat and looked at Garland.

"You're dead nuts on it's being Yelverton, aren't you?" he said, with a smile.

"That was Yelverton!" exclaimed Garland, nodding after the departed women.

"No—I meant you're about resolved, in your own mind, that Yelverton settled this man Starley?"

"Well?" retorted Garland. "What then?"

"I'm not!" replied the other, with a shake of the head. "Not after what we've just heard! I've no doubt that was Yelverton who got the girl to telephone for him. I've no doubt Yelverton went and met Starley. But—I don't believe Yelverton knocked him on the head and robbed him. If he did, he's the clumsiest murderer I ever heard of. For, as we see, what he did at the Great Northern Hotel, is told of almost at once! Besides, he gave names—Starley, Humphrey! Any man with any common sense would know that all that would come out and that he'd be traced. No—I don't believe it was Yelverton!"

"There is much in what you say," observed Farbrake. "I can scarcely believe that Yelverton would have done what we've just heard he did if he was meditating the murder of Starley. His doings at the Great Northern Hotel invited discovery."

Garland smiled.

"You're all very clever!" he said cynically. "Perhaps I'm not! But you see, I never said anything about meditation. I never said Yelverton went to meet Starley with the intention of killing him! Perhaps he didn't. But that isn't to say that he didn't kill him. I bet Yelverton did kill Starley—and I bet I've got the thing he killed him with in my pocket!"

He suddenly pulled out the life-preserver that he had possessed himself of at Yelverton's chambers and waved it, half-playfully, in the air.

"Put it away—put it away!" exclaimed Farbrake. "Horrible—"

"Depends on who handles it, Mr. Farbrake," said Garland. "You see," he went on, restoring his find to its place inside his coat, "you've not reckoned on this:—Yelverton, in my opinion, went to see Starley in order to find out how much he knew—"

"Knew about what?" asked the official.

"Why, the murder at Stretherdale Castle, of course!" exclaimed Garland. "At which Starley was actually present or on the scene just after. Yelverton, meeting and pumping Starley, found out not only that Starley knew a lot too much, but something else—*that Starley was going to make use of his knowledge!* And so, perhaps in a fit of sudden desperation, he applied this weapon to Starley's skull! That's my theory! And if it isn't yours—pray what is yours?"

"We think, here," replied the official, "that though the Yelverton business is highly suspicious, Yelverton is not responsible for the murder. We think that Starley was followed about from the time he showed that money of his in the tavern, and was finally murdered for what he had on him."

"I should like to know your grounds!" retorted Garland.

"We have some," replied the official. "And we're in hopes of having them strengthened. You'll hear, all in good time. As you're so certain of your theory, you'll work on it, of course. We're at one with you in one respect, anyway—we quite agree that Yelverton met Starley outside Aldersgate Station. But, after that—" he spread out his hands and shook his head.

Garland went away, grumbling. He was by that time convinced that Yelverton had murdered Starley; indeed, he was rapidly nearing a conclusion that Yelverton was also the murderer of Humphrey Starke.

"I'm going to concentrate on Yelverton!" he declared as we went back to Lincoln's Inn Fields. "We're doing all we can at our end to trace him, and I've also set men at work on trying to find out if he was in town on the night of March 27th. If he wasn't, then I reckon I know where he was! Yelverton was probably the man who went with Humphrey Starke to Stretherdale; the man who was seen to leave the Castle with Starley and go to Starley's farmhouse; who was afterwards driven away by Starley in the direction of Harrogate. And if he was, then these recent developments are easily accounted for. Starley, probably, was threatening to turn King's Evidence."

"It may be," said Farbrake. "I confess I'm unable, at present, to get a very clear idea of any dependable theory. What I should like to know is—what were the exact transactions of Major Yelverton about this young woman we know as Mrs. Humphrey? Why is she spirited away—and where is she?"

"If we can get hold of her, I daresay she'll have plenty to tell us," agreed Garland. "The devil of this case, so far, is the small result achieved by publicity! We've had full descriptions of Mrs. Humphrey out for two days—nothing's resulted. We've raised a hue and cry for Yelverton—beyond what this girl that we've just seen told us we've heard nothing, and what she told doesn't help towards finding him. Then, look how the numbers of those bank-notes have been advertised!—and nothing much has come of that. Nor have we heard anything of the pearls! And about that I'm surprised—I should have thought the thief would have tried to

get rid of things, that, after all, aren't easy of identification. Who's to tell one pearl from another? But—nothing!"

"Perhaps the person, or persons, into whose hands all this property—bank-notes, pearls, securities—fell isn't at all hard up for money?" remarked Farbrake. "There's that to be taken into account in wondering why they don't come into the light."

"I reckon Humphrey Starke was hard up enough when he went down there to Stretherdale Castle!" said Garland. "And his accomplice, too—whoever he was! Of course, if the accomplice has found a millionaire to back him up and shield him since he got away—"

"You're going on the lines, then, that the real object of Humphrey Starke's visit, accompanied by a companion, to Stretherdale Castle that night, was to rob his uncle?" asked Farbrake. "That he was, in short, a criminal?"

"What else?" asked Garland, with a sneer. "That's precisely what I think!"

"Humphrey Starke," said Farbrake, "was doubtless a wild, badly-regulated young man, but I should hesitate to think of him as a thief. There may be an explanation—"

"If you'll excuse me, sir," I interrupted, "there may be an explanation which nobody seems to have even thought of! How do we know that when Mr. Humphrey Starke went down to Stretherdale he did not know that he was already Lord Stretherdale and that everything in the place was his? He may have had a wire from Nice informing him of his uncle's death. He may have decided to go down to the Castle in strict privacy, to take a look round. He may—as he knew they were there—have got the various things, bank-notes, pearls, and so on, out of the strong box, to make sure they were safe. The murder may have arisen out of something of which we know nothing!"

"Yes—yes—there's a lot in it," agreed Farbrake. "Good reasoning!"

"Who was the man who went with him?" growled Garland. "Let me find out that! That's what I want!"

"You'll have to find out more about Humphrey Starke's associates," said Farbrake. "There's one line of investigation that you don't seem to have followed up. The sender of that wire to him from Spring Street post-office—eh? A woman?—well, who was she? Why did Starke—as he evidently did—ask her to meet him at Kings Cross before he left for the North? Did she meet him? And is anybody enquiring into that, Garland?"

Garland made no answer. He appeared to be lost in sudden thought, and after a moment's silence, remarking that he must be off, he turned abruptly and left us.

## CHAPTER XXIII THE VOLUNTARY WITNESS

We neither saw nor heard of Garland during the next two days; we had no news from the city police. Nor did we hear anything of Major Yelverton, or of Mrs. Humphrey, or of the stolen property, or of anybody concerned in the various matters which had lately absorbed our attention. But on the third evening, Farbrake and I being late at the office as a result of some very special business, there came to us news, dramatic and circumstantial.

It came in the shape of a person who made his entrance to our clerks' office, in which I happened to be standing at the moment, by protruding a face and a head round the lintel of the door. That, for a second or two, was all I saw—a face and a head! I concluded, however, that there was a body attached, and I had a momentary thought that if the body was as ill-favoured as the face the person who thus took stock of us while keeping most of himself hidden must be vilely ugly.

“Come in, you there!” I exclaimed. “What are you after?”

The face and head vanished. They reappeared, a second later—as the top-gear of a hefty, raw-boned fellow whose bull-neck was swathed in a handkerchief of many strong colours and the rest of him in the peculiar garb affected by East End costermongers. He held a fur cap in his hands, and twisting it round and round in his fingers, came up to the counter, and leaning over it, beckoned me to him with a come-close-up movement of his flame-coloured head.

“Guv'nor!” he said in a hoarse, half-choked sort of whisper. “A word!”

I went up, not close, but close enough to catch a distinct aroma of beer, onions and rank tobacco.

“Well?” I said tartly.

“A word in your ear, guv'nor! Is this 'ere Farbrake's, the lawyer?”

“It is! What do you want?”

“'Im! Farbrake! If so be as it's convenient.”

“Mr. Farbrake is extremely busy,” I said. “You'd better tell me what you want.”

He looked me closely over before replying.—The inspection was not rendered the more pleasant by the fact that he owned a particularly sinister squint.

“No offence, guv'nor,” he answered presently, “but 'oo might you be?”

“Mr. Farbrake's managing clerk,” I replied. “Will that do?”

He twisted the fur cap again, as if perplexed. Then he give me a grin that was clearly intended to be confidential.

“It might, guv'nor, under wot you'd call ordinary circumstances,” he answered. “But you see, these 'ere, they ain't! Very extraordinary, they are! The fact is, guv'nor, it's about this 'ere murder—Starley!”

“Oh!” I exclaimed, taken aback. “You know something?”

“That's for me to say to Farbrake, guv'nor,” he replied. “I see Farbrake's nime in the pipers, d'ye see, 'as 'avin' something to do with it, and though I can't abide lawyers as a rule—no offence, guv'nor—I'd rather talk to a lawyer than to them blinkin' p'liece! I would like to see Farbrake, guv'nor—private!”

“Wait a minute.” I said. “Take a chair.”

I went into Farbrake's office and told him what was outside. Farbrake, who was deep in a conveyance, shoved it aside.

“Bring him in at once!” he said. “Come in with him.”

I beckoned the red-haired gentleman to come forward. He slouched in, nervously inspecting everything as he came; his looks and actions reminded me of an animal that is being persuaded to enter a cage and studies exits and entrances before entrusting itself. But he got well into Farbrake's room, and at the sight of Farbrake made a sort of ducking bow and a pull at his forelock.

"Evenin' guv'nor," he said politely. "'Ope I ain't intrudin'?' But 'avin' a word or two to say, confidential, like—"

"Sit down," replied Farbrake. "Close the door, Mailey. You can stay. This gentleman," he went on, pointing the visitor to me, "knows just as much, and perhaps more than I know about the Starley case—you can talk before him. Now what do you know, my man—and who are you?"

The man sat down on the extreme edge of the chair which I gave him. He subjected both of us to a long, critical inspection. Then he looked at the door through which he had come, and at another that led into an inner room. Farbrake laughed.

"Sound-proof, both of 'em, my lad!" he said. "Nobody'll hear anything that's said in here."

"Carn't be too careful, guv'nor," remarked our visitor. "And this 'ere in private, ain't it?—confidential, as between gentlemen?"

"As between gentlemen," answered Farbrake, solemnly.

"Well, guv'nor, my nime—if you was to ask for me dahn the other end of the tahn and rahnd abaht Smiffield, you'd ask for Carrots!—wot I'm known by. But my real proper nime is Arthur Frederick Stigwell, and I ain't ashamed of it, neither—ain't never been in trouble in my time, guv'nor, not once, nor up agin the p'liece in no wye! 'Onest, I am!"

"That's right," said Farbrake. "Well—and what do you want to tell me, Stigwell? You know something about this Starley case, eh?"

"Something I do know, guv'nor, and seein' your nime in the papers I come to you, instead o' goin' to the p'liece," replied Stigwell. "'Yer see, guv'nor, I knew this 'ere Starley—by sight, that was. 'E was a feller, Starley, wot's been comin' arahnd the Meat Market this last fortnight or so, a country feller, farmer or something o' that sort, wot seemed to tike a great deal of interest in the meat trade—I seen him reg'lar, a-talkin' to the dealers rahnd abaht there. I'm a meat-porter myself, I am."

"Well?" said Farbrake. "Go on!"

"Well, guv'nor, the morning of that day as Starley was scragged, abaht noon, it was, I was in a pub near Smiffield 'avin' a pint with a pal or two and I see Starley there. 'E was with some men as does a bit o' bettin', like, on the quiet, and they was talkin' about racin'. And I sees Starley pull aht an old pocket-book and a nice wad o' bank-notes—there must ha' been a good deal, guv'nor, judging by the thickness. 'E sorts aht a note from the lot and gives it to one o' these 'ere fellers 'e was talkin' to, and shoves the rest back careless-like, in his pocket. Does it all in broad day-light, guv'nor, so to speak. A reg'lar fistful o' notes—wot anybody could see! Askin' for trouble that was, guv'nor—in a company like what was in that pub!"

"Well?" said Farbrake. "That's not all?"

"Not by a long chalk, guv'nor, it ain't! That's what you might term the preface, in a way o' speakin'. Nah, guv'nor, there was two fellers, leanin' against the bar, wot I saw was watching Starley—I see 'em foller every movement of his when 'e pulled aht them bank-notes and when he put 'em away. Two fellers, guv'nor, wot I knows to be wrong 'uns! Been in trouble—and in quod—many a time. Well known to the p'liece they are!"

"You know their names, of course?" asked Farbrake.

"I know wot their names is rahnd that quarter," replied Stigwell, "and what their nimes was what time they was at the Central Criminal. Rahnd abaht Smiffield they calls 'em Shifty,

that's one, and Blowsher, that's t'other. Shifty's nime, leastways, the one he last called 'isself by, is Sam Lowins, and Blowsher is James Dutton, but I reckon they've others. Shifty and Blowsher, guv'nor, is wot I calls 'em."

"Go on!" said Farbrake.

"Well, guv'nor, that night, I sees Starley again! I see him a-hangin' abaht rahnd Aldersgate Station. He was a-walkin' up and down, Starley was, like 'e was lookin' for somebody. All of a sudden, like, a gentleman comes rahnd the corner, looks up and down a bit, and then goes up to Starley and speaks to him. Starley, he nods, and they shake hands, like they was uncommon glad to see each other—"

"Stop a bit!" interrupted Farbrake. "Now tell us as clearly as you can, what this gentleman was like."

But that was asking a great deal of Mr. Arthur Frederick Stigwell. His powers of accurate description were limited. All he could do was to tell us that what he saw was a gentleman, a toff, 'one o' them West-End swells,' and that he was a middle-aged one, about up to Starley's shoulder. Still, we had no doubt that the man he had seen was Major Yelverton.

"Well, what happened after they met?" enquired Farbrake.

"Wot 'appened, guv'nor, was that they talked a bit, where they'd met, and then they turned rahnd the corner and went up Aldersgate. I followed 'em—"

"Why?" asked Farbrake, sharply.

"Just aht o' curiosity, guv'nor—I'd nothing to do. No 'arm in that, guv'nor, as I knows on. Hahsoever, I did follow 'em, and all of a sudden I sees Shifty and Blowsher! They was a-comin' dahn the street, loafin' along, like, and they passes by Starley and this here toff. I sees 'em reckernise Starley, and the instant they passed him and the other gent they turns and goes after 'em. So I follows 'em, 'cause I ain't without a eye for things and I sees that them two wasn't up to no good."

"Had those two men, Shifty and Blowsher, seen you?" suggested Farbrake.

"I dunno that they had, guv'nor, or that they hadn't," replied Stigwell. "They don't know me, though I knows them. Anyhow, they didn't take any notice of me—they was follerin' Starley and the toff. An' they follered 'em until they turned into a bar, and then they follered 'em in there."

"Oh!—Starley and his companion went into a bar, did they?" said Farbrake, "What bar, now?"

"Saloon bar o' the Hound and Falcon, guv'nor, a plice up the street. Starley and the toff, they walked in there; Shifty and Blowsher they follered 'em in. And thinks I, I'll go in, too, and see wot their little gime is! I was in my best that night as it happened, 'cause I'd expected to meet a young lidy wot I'm interested in, on'y she never turned up, so, of course, there wasn't nothing out o' the way in me walking into a saloon bar—I was dressed up to the nines, I was. And I goes in, and then, of course, I sees 'em, all four."

"Together?" asked Farbrake.

"Not at all, guv'nor! Starley and the toff, they was sittin' in a nice, comfy corner with a little table in front of 'em, with their glasses on the table and cigars in their mouths, talkin' friendly, like. Shifty and Blowsher, they was amongst the crowd at the bar—but they kep' their eyes on Starley and the toff. And so did I—and on them! I gets myself a modest drink and sits dahn with it where I could see, and I watches all of 'em!"

"Did you see anything particular about Starley and the man he was with?" enquired Farbrake. "I mean—did they do anything?"

"Starley and the toff, guv'nor, they was talking. The toff, he seemed to do most o' the jaw—he talked, Starley listened. 'Peared to me, like, as if the toff was a arguin' with Starley or persuadin' him to something. The toff, he seemed to be putting something to Starley, Starley

kept a-noddin' of his head. And at last, Starley he appeared to consent to whatever it might be, and the toff he pulled out a note-book, and started a-writin' in it with his pencil. And after he'd written a bit, he tore out the page he'd written on and give it to Starley, and Starley 'e seemed uncommon pleased about somethin', I dunno why!"

Farbrake glanced at me.

"Mailey!" he said in an undertone. "That was Mrs. Humphrey's address! Lay a million to one on it!" He turned to Stigwell. "Well—and after that?" he asked.

"They had another drink, guv'nor, a short 'un, and then they went. And they'd scarcely passed the door when Shifty and Blowsher was after 'em. So I went after 'em, too! I followed the four of 'em dahn the street to Aldersgate Station. Outside it, Starley and the toff stopped a bit, talkin'. Then they shook hands and parted, and the toff went inside the station, where the bookin'-office is."

"Well?" said Farbrake. "Starley?"

"Starley, he stood a minute, doing nothing. Then I see him pull out his watch. He looked at it, stood another second or two, and then he turned up the street again, like he was goin' back to the Hound and Falcon. And then Shifty and Blowsher met him and spoke to him."

"Did he seem to know them?" asked Farbrake.

"He didn't seem not to, guv'nor—he may ha' met 'em, d'ye see, abaht Smiffield. Anyway, he stopped, and they all three stood talkin' a bit. Then they turned down the street, and round the corner. I follered 'em—I'd an idea they were goin' to some other pub. However, guv'nor, just as I'd got round into Long Lane, I meets a pal o' mine, and stops to speak to him, and so I lost 'em. The last I see of 'em, guv'nor, they was turnin' into Kinghorn Street—and if you knows anythin' o' that part, guv'nor, you'll know that out o' Kinghorn Street is that bit of a lane where Starley was found!"

Farbrake talked earnestly to Arthur Frederick Stigwell for the next ten minutes. The end of it was that, under our protection, he consented to see the City police. We put him into a cab, and kept him going until we reached the office of the man whose theory was not that of Garland. He welcomed us with a half-shy smile.

"I was about to telephone to you, Mr. Farbrake," he said. "We've made an arrest in that Starley case! A couple of men—we know them!—who've been trying to pass bank-notes in the East End. What brings you here—and who's this man?"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### QUEST OF THE PEARLS: I

The official got out of Stigwell in five minutes what it had taken him half-an-hour to tell Farbrake and myself. When he had heard everything he turned to us.

"Those are the men!" he said. "We heard of them this afternoon as having tried to get rid of bank-notes, down Whitechapel. They'd managed to trade one off, and we found on examining it that it bore the stamp, of a bank at Wateley. So—the rest was fairly easy, for we'd some knowledge of where to lay hands on these fellows, they've been through our fingers before! There's no doubt that what this chap says is correct. Of course, these two men have an excuse about the bank-notes; they say they got them from bookmakers, but that's all rot! Oh, yes—we've got 'em, right enough! Bit of a disappointment for friend Garland, isn't it?" he concluded with a smile. "He was dead certain about the other man!"

"After all," remarked Farbrake, "the other man was in it! I see no reason to doubt Stigwell's story as regards the meeting at Aldersgate Station or the conversation in the Hound and Falcon. I don't doubt, either, that the other man was Yelverton."

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt it was Yelverton!" agreed the official. "Of course, we, here, aren't so much concerned with that Stretherdale case—that's more Garland's affair. But I've followed it up in the papers, and I should say that Yelverton contrived that meeting with Starley in order to sound him about what he knew, for it's struck me that Starley knew a lot! And another object may have been to ensure his further silence. There's one fact I've not forgotten about Starley—a fact mentioned to me by Garland. Garland says that when he was down at Stretherdale, just after the murder there, there was some rumour about Starley, and Garland made it his way to see him. According to Garland, Starley professed he didn't know who killed Humphrey Starke, which was no doubt a lie, or an evasion (he mayn't have known the man's name, you see, though he certainly assisted him to get away), but he added that he'd cheerfully shake hands with the man who did! So Garland says."

"Starley did say so," said I. "I was present."

"Well, there you are! That shows that Starley was not likely to give away the murderer. He didn't come to London to split. He came for some purpose of his own—"

"Starley," interrupted Farbrake, "without doubt came to London to find the girl of whom Humphrey Starke had robbed him, four years before!"

"That's a side-issue," said the official. "My point is that Yelverton and Starley both knew who killed Humphrey Starke. For all we know, it may have been Yelverton himself. Personally, I never believed that Yelverton killed Starley—and now we know. As to the other affair, well, as I say, it's more Garland's affair. And Garland'll know pretty soon that he was wrong and we were right."

What Garland thought of this latest development, which was duly noised abroad in the newspapers next morning, we didn't know; he never came near us at Lincoln's Inn Fields nor communicated with us for the next three days, during which time the two men arrested by the city police had been formally charged, brought up before a magistrate and remanded. But on the fourth day he turned up, late in the afternoon, looking worn and haggard.

"I don't want to hear anything about that Starley business!" he said as he sat down in Farbrake's room. "I was wrong in my theory there, and those chaps in the city were right, and it's their job. I've been at it hammer and tongs since I saw you on a different line!"

"What?" asked Farbrake.

"Those pearls!" answered Garland. "Effort to get some news of them. It seemed a hopeless sort of thing, because I believed they'd be out of the country, long since, and to go round every jeweller and pawnbroker, and dealer in precious stones in London is a pretty long job! However, not an hour ago, I got on their trail, at least, I'm hopeful that I have."

"The trail of that rope of pearls!" exclaimed Farbrake.

"I'll tell you about it," said Garland. "For I want your help, presently. I've interviewed no end of jewellers during these last few days," he went on. "To see, of course, if there'd been any attempt to dispose of that rope as a whole—which I felt to be highly improbable—or the pearls singly in small quantities, which I thought just possible. I made no headway whatever until half-past three this afternoon, and then I struck something. I called on Mr. Brickstein, a jeweller in the Strand, and made the usual confidential enquiry. When Mr. Brickstein had heard all I had to say, he told me, after some thinking it over, that he could certainly tell me something, but whether it had anything to do with my particular business he, of course, didn't know. And, anyway, he pledged me to secrecy until we were in a position to know more. Now then, as a preface to the story, look at that!"

He produced from his pocket-book and laid before us a lady's visiting card at which we both stared with interest. It bore the name of Miss Stella Van Dehlen, with an address in New York. The address had been crossed out, in pencil, and in the opposite corner of the card was written, also in pencil, Savoy Hotel, London.

"Promises to be interesting, Garland!" said Farbrake. "Well?"

"Day before yesterday," continued Garland, "a young lady came into Brickstein's and asked him if he could make her a pair of ear-rings from pearls to be supplied by herself? She produced the pearls: according to him, they're of, relatively, great value—a magnificent pair. He saw at once that they'd at some time formed part of a necklace, or rope. He discussed the job with her and asked how much time she could give him, and she handed him this card and told him that she'd be at the Savoy for at least four weeks longer. He promised to do the work within a fortnight, and she left the pearls with him. There they are!—at his shop."

"Did she give him any particulars of their history?" asked Farbrake.

"No! He asked her no questions. He gathered, from their conversation, that she was a wealthy young woman—anyway, no expense was to be spared in making the ear-rings. Well, now, are those pearls off the rope stolen from Stretherdale Castle? That's the question!"

"Did you see them?"

"I did! They're two magnificent pearls. I asked Brickstein what he estimated their value at. He said—well, if the young lady had wanted to sell them, he'd have cheerfully given her twelve hundred pounds for them."

"Good Lord! And that's only a couple—out of the lot!" exclaimed Farbrake. "What must the rope be worth? We've never ascertained that! What do you want us to do, Garland?"

"We know of a man who cannot only tell us the value of the entire rope, but who, as it passed through his hands not so long ago, can probably identify the two pearls now in Brickstein's possession as part of it," replied Garland. "That's the jeweller who roped the pearls for the old Lord Stretherdale."

"He's a Leeds man," remarked Farbrake. "And I don't know his name."

"You know a man who knows his name," said Garland. "Macnaughton, the bank-manager. Wire to him to get the jeweller's name and address. When you've got that, wire to the jeweller and ask him to come at once—explain why."

"What do you propose doing after that?" enquired Farbrake.

"If this Leeds man can identify those two pearls, or if he feels reasonably certain that they belong to the rope he made for old Lord Stretherdale," replied Garland, "I shall get Brickstein

to ask Miss Van Dehlen to step across! Then she can be questioned as to her ownership of the pearls.”

“Suppose she won’t tell you anything?” said Farbrake.

“Rather foolish of her, that,” answered Garland. “Stolen property, you know! But she’ll answer!”

Farbrake glanced at his watch.

“The bank at Leeds will be closed,” he said. “And I don’t know Macnaughton’s private address. Still, he may live over the bank, as lots of these provincial managers do. Take this in hand, Mailey. Get a wire off, asking Macnaughton—you know what to do, though. Will you wait, Garland?”

“No,” said Garland. “Telephone what result you get to me at the Yard. If the Leeds jeweller’s coming, let me know what time you can bring him to meet me at Brickstein’s in the Strand, tomorrow morning.”

In the chance of Macnaughton’s still being about the bank, or of his living in premises over it, I sent off a wire in the suggested terms, and within an hour and a half got a reply—brief and business-like.

WOLSTENHOLME, 591, BOND STREET, LEEDS

Farbrake had gone home when this arrived. I got off another wire—a lengthy, explanatory one—to the Leeds jeweller, and resigned myself to waiting at the office, with tea instead of dinner, until his reply came. It was nine o’clock when I got it—but it was satisfactory.

Coming immediately by night train will call on you ten o’clock tomorrow morning.

Wolstenholme.

I telephoned this to Garland, and heard him give a grunt of satisfaction.

“All right!” he replied. “Ten-thirty, tomorrow morning, then, outside Brickstein’s.”

Wolstenholme—it is, I am told, a Yorkshire characteristic, or, perhaps, peculiarity—was the soul of punctuality. He walked into our office next morning as the clocks were striking ten; a little, spectacled, keen-looking man, who listened with the deepest interest as we explained the situation to him.

“I can identify them if they are pearls which formed part of the rope I restrung for Lord Stretherdale,” he said, with a knowing smile. “I took too much stock of those pearls to forget them! I question if anybody has ever seen a finer rope of pearls than that was. Of course, if old Lord Stretherdale hadn’t been as mad as a hatter he’d never have left that rope where he did!”

“Fine as all that?” asked Farbrake.

“Fine? It’s enough to break an expert’s heart to think of what may have happened to it!” exclaimed Wolstenholme. “To start with, every pearl on that rope was a round one! That of course, is an achievement in itself. There were eighty pearls in all. Six of them, perfectly round, weighed each, mind you, over twenty-five grains! You don’t understand the significance of that, perhaps? Well, a pearl of that weight is extremely rare. Then there were twelve more, each weighing over twenty grains. And so on—carefully graduated. The old man had spent years in collecting them—and then he goes and throws the result into a box under his bed! Mad, mad!”

“Look here!” said Farbrake. “I should just like to know. What did you estimate that rope of pearls to be worth when it left your hands?”

Wolstenholme’s answer came sharp and emphatic.

“Every penny of fifty thousand pounds!” he replied. “Every penny!”

Farbrake glanced at me as he got up from his desk.

"Hear that, Mailey?" he said, drily. "We'd no idea the thing was of that value! Well, let's get down to this appointment."

Garland was waiting for us outside Brickstein's, a quiet-looking, evidently severely first-class establishment. He had a short talk with Wolstenholme before we entered the shop; eventually he marshalled us inside and introduced us to Mr. Brickstein, a middle-aged, highly-respectable gentleman who took us into a private room, and after a little conversation produced the two pearls and handed them to Wolstenholme. Wolstenholme took one look at them.

"Oh, yes!" he said. "I know them! These are two of the larger ones I mentioned to you just now, Mr. Farbrake. They belong to the six, each of which weighs over twenty-five grains. Now I brought with me a list of the weights of the eighty pearls I strung for Lord Stretherdale—if I mistake not, Mr. Brickstein, these are the two that weigh exactly twenty-six grains each?"

"You are quite right," said Mr. Brickstein. "That is the precise weight."

"You're absolutely sure, then, Mr. Wolstenholme?" asked Garland. "You would swear to it?"

"I'm positive!" replied Wolstenholme. "Another and most important proof, is this—Mr. Brickstein, you see, has not got to work on the pearls yet, and there is still *my* work on them—I should be a poor hand at my trade if I couldn't swear to my own handiwork! These pearls, gentlemen, without any doubt whatever, formed part of the rope I made for Lord Stretherdale, and they have been taken off the rope by some unprofessional hand."

We all turned to Garland. Garland looked at Brickstein.

"Well?" he said. "This young lady? Miss Van Dehlen? You can get her across?"

Brickstein hesitated a little.

"I have been thinking," he said. "From what I observed of the young lady I should say it will be a tremendous surprise to her to hear that these pearls are stolen. A very—eh?—unpleasant thing. Now, instead of asking her to come across the street, suppose I go over to the Savoy, see her, and put the matter delicately,—eh?"

Farbrake murmured his approval. But Garland looked gloomily determined.

"I'm not taking any chances!" he said. "She may be all right, and she mayn't! Anyhow, if you're going alone, I'm going, too, to watch. If you like to see her in the lounge of the Savoy, with me looking on—"

Eventually we hit on a plan satisfactory to Garland. Mr. Brickstein was to go over to the Savoy, and Garland and I were to follow. He was to do the preliminary talking with Miss Van Dehlen; we, in the character of lawyers, were to observe her.

"For you never know!" muttered Garland, as we followed the jeweller. "And we don't know what this girl may be!"

Ten minutes later, we knew, at any rate, what Miss Van Dehlen was like. To Mr. Brickstein, prim and polite, waiting in the Savoy lounge, there came a smartly-gowned, vivacious, evidently care-free young lady whose pretty face showed her astonishment at the sight of him.

## CHAPTER XXV

### QUEST OF THE PEARLS: II

Within a moment of her sitting down to talk to her caller, Miss Van Dehlen's look of astonishment changed to an expression in which surprise, vexation, and incredulity were all plainly mingled. She flushed all over her pretty face; her brows drew together in a frown; she stared at Brickstein as if he had told her something unbelievable. But Brickstein went on talking to her, gravely, and in another moment he turned and beckoned Garland and myself to join him, at the same time whispering something to his companion.

Miss Van Dehlen turned, too, and as we approached, inspected us both, from top to toe, with keen, searching glances. Brickstein motioned us to sit down; he had purposely taken the young lady into a quiet corner; we were now all four safely removed from the crowd sitting or moving about the big lounge.

"I have told Miss Van Dehlen—something," said Brickstein. "That is, that the two pearls she brought me have been identified as having been stolen. And I have asked her where she got them. For," he added, turning to the girl with a sort of fatherly smile, "I have a vague recollection that when you brought them to me, you told me—am I not right?—that you had bought them, recently."

Miss Van Dehlen looked round all three of us. Then she nodded.

"Why, yes!" she answered. "So I did! I did buy them, recently. Right here, in London!"

Garland cut in. He had been watching Miss Van Dehlen closely.

"From whom did you buy them?" he asked sharply.

The girl—she was certainly little more than that—hesitated.

"Well, now!" she said. "Are you quite sure that there's no mistake about this affair? Are you certain that the two pearls I took to Mr. Brickstein—"

"There is no doubt that these pearls formed part of a rope of graduated pearls of the highest quality and value which was recently stolen," answered Garland. "They have been identified, just now, by the jeweller who last strung them, not very long ago. Now we want to know how they came into your possession?"

"Well," said Miss Van Dehlen, "as I've already said, I bought them! I bought them from a lady. I think, still, there's some mistake, for she is a lady of title."

"What title?" asked Garland. "I think you had better understand that this is a most serious matter. We must have the lady's name."

"It was a private transaction, believe me," remarked Miss Van Dehlen. She favoured Garland with another keen look. "I guess you are a policeman!" she said. "Well, the lady was the Honourable Miss Gwendoline Brockendale. There!"

Garland possessed a very abrupt manner—at times. He showed it now, in an undisguised sneer.

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "There is no such person!"

Miss Van Dehlen flushed quickly.

"But I've met her—of course!" she retorted. "How could I have bought the pearls from her if I hadn't? And I have her card." She began to fish about in a handbag which hung from her left arm and eventually produced a stylish-looking visiting card on which was a name—but no address. "There you are," she said, triumphantly. "That's plain enough!"

"There is no such person!" repeated Garland, possessing himself of the card. "What I mean is that if this woman, whoever she may be, is entitled to call herself *Honourable*, she would be the daughter of a peer. Now there is no peer whose family name is Brockendale!"

You can verify that fact by slipping across to the information bureau there and asking the clerk to lend you a Peerage. And this little matter, too," he continued with a smile, "if this person were the daughter of a peer, she wouldn't put 'The Honourable' on her card! It would simply be 'Miss Gwendoline Brockendale'."

Miss Van Dehlen looked troubled—and puzzled.

"Well, I don't know the habits and customs of your British aristocracy!" she said. "I took it for granted, of course, that she was what she said she was. She was a very smart, accomplished young lady, anyway!"

"This card is a fake!" declared Garland. "No address! Where did you meet this woman?"

"Well, I met her—I've met her several times—at a dancing club that I've occasionally been to since I came to this hotel," replied Miss Van Dehlen. "That's the Hyperion Club in Regent Street."

Garland gave me a sly kick under the table. I looked at Miss Van Dehlen with renewed interest, and began to wonder if she had a mother, or an aunt, or a chaperon. For the Hyperion Club was an establishment with a reputation.

"Oh!" said Garland. "Well, she sold you the pearls? How did that come about?"

"Oh, in just a casual way! We got talking about that sort of thing, and she told me that she had recently come into a collection of family jewels of great rarity and value, and that if I liked she would sell me some pearls. And next night she brought some for me to look at."

"Yes?" said Garland. "How many did she bring?"

"Oh, well, perhaps a dozen or so. Various sizes. I selected the two which I afterwards took to Mr. Brickstein."

"And how much did you give her for them?" asked Garland.

Miss Van Dehlen hesitated about answering that. She looked a little uncomfortable; I think she was beginning to realise that, in some way or other, she'd been taken in.

"Well," she said at last, "if you must know, I gave her eight thousand dollars!"

"That's about sixteen hundred pounds," remarked Garland.

"A reasonable price!" murmured Mr. Brickstein. "The pearls are worth it."

"Unfortunately," said Garland, "the pearls were not this woman's to sell—I mean, unfortunately for this young lady. Now Miss Van Dehlen," he went on, "you'll have to help to get hold of the Honourable Miss Gwendoline Brockendale! Have you seen her since the pearl transaction?"

"I've seen her whenever I've gone to the Hyperion," replied Miss Van Dehlen. "She's always there. I saw her there two nights ago. She wanted me to buy more pearls."

"Well," said Garland, "you must please go there again tonight. I and some of my associates will be there. If—or, rather, when you see me, take no notice of me. Get into conversation with this woman—and leave the rest to me. We'll do our best, by-the-bye, to get your money back. Now what time will you go to the Hyperion?"

"Well, I'll be there at ten o'clock," agreed Miss Van Dehlen. "I don't want to get mixed up in any scene, though."

"There'll be no scene," said Garland. "Everything shall be as quiet and orderly as at a Quaker's meeting! Leave that to me. And in the meantime, you'll say nothing of this to anyone."

He rose; Brickstein and I rose, too. We were all going, when Miss Van Dehlen, who had kept giving me questioning glances, murmured a couple of words to me.

"Stay behind!"

I looked at Garland; he nodded and taking Brickstein's arm, led him away. I sat down again; Miss Van Dehlen resumed her own seat.

"Are you a policeman?" she asked.

“Not at all!” said I. “I’m a solicitor.”

“Well, say,” she said. “What is all this? I think you’ll be more likely to tell me about it than the man who’s been doing all the talking. I’m in a whirl about it!—in a muddle. Can’t you put me wise about the whole thing?”

I told her what I thought it judicious to tell her. She was evidently of a quick understanding and soon took in all the facts.

“This woman—she’s a little more than a girl, though—you think she’s something to do with the theft?” she asked. “Well, I wouldn’t have thought it!—she’s quite a lady-like person!”

“Oh, no doubt!” I said. “Well able to play a part. But—if you don’t mind my telling you—there are some very questionable sort of people to be found at the Hyperion.”

“Is that so?” she asked, evidently surprised. “Well, I didn’t know! Everybody I’ve seen there seemed very well behaved—gentlemen and ladies.”

“All the same,” said I, “it has a reputation. How did you come to go there?”

“Well, I just saw the advertisement in one of your newspapers—the *Times*, I think—and as I’m fond of dancing, I concluded to go.”

“Alone?” I ventured to ask.

“Naturally, since I’d no one to go with,” she replied. “I’m travelling Europe all by myself. However, after all this, I’ll not go there again, and I don’t relish going there tonight.”

“I’m afraid that’s absolutely necessary,” I said. “But if you’ll allow me, I’ll call here at a quarter-to-ten and take you. I’ll see that no harm comes to you!”

“Why that’s awfully nice of you!” she answered, beaming. “Considering what that friend of yours wants to do which is, I suppose, to arrest this woman, I’ll feel a lot more comfortable if I’ve somebody with me. Won’t you tell me your name?”

I gave her my name: I did more, I stopped and talked longer. Garland and Brickstein had disappeared—I was much more interested in Miss Van Dehlen than in them and the pearls. Before I left I had made out that she was a lady who held independent views of life and was wanting to see a good deal of it from her own angle! I guessed also that she was very liberally endowed with the riches of this world and that she was very well able to indulge herself in the purchase of such trifles as pearls at eight hundred pounds apiece.

I left Miss Van Dehlen at last and went back to the jeweller’s, where Garland, in conference with the others, was explaining what he would do that night. The Hyperion was simply a dancing club—any person of outward respectability, suitably attired, could obtain admission, any evening, by merely paying an entrance fee and subscription at the door. It was quite well conducted, said Garland, who knew all about it, and he had no doubt that he would be able to get the Honourable Miss Gwendoline Brockendale away from it without much fuss. He would go there, with a couple of associates, in evening dress; I was to take Miss Van Dehlen. And when Miss Van Dehlen had indicated the lady whom Garland was so anxious to see, we would leave the rest to Garland and his companions.

Farbrake, having heard everything, was highly excited about it; nothing would satisfy him but that I must take him with me when I called on Miss Van Dehlen at a quarter-to-ten that night. It was not in my scheme of things, but I had to do it—and was rewarded by seeing my principal, who, like most somewhat-over-middle-age men, had a decided eye for a pretty young woman, making himself remarkably agreeable to what he evidently considered an extremely interesting and novel specimen of her sex. Miss Van Dehlen responded gallantly, but when she, Farbrake and I, about half-past ten, had made a quiet entrance to the Hyperion Club, she began to grow nervous.

“I don’t like this business!” she murmured as she looked round. “Seems like I was playing the part of a spy!”

"In the interests of justice, my dear young lady, in the strict interests of justice!" said Farbrake. "And after all you have only to indicate—merely to indicate! A word—a glance—a nod—quite sufficient. Leave justice—in the shape of Garland and his companions—to do the rest. And in the meantime, now that we are here in this hall of festivity—permit me—eh?"

He led her off, and I, left alone, proceeded to look round. I soon came across Garland—in full evening attire, and looking very much like a bored man about town.

"I've two more men here," he said to me as I drew aside. "That's one of 'em—that handsome young fellow dancing with the girl in yellow—good-looking couple they make, too, don't they? Lord!—if she knew who it is she's dancing with! And that's the other—you'd take him for the colonel of a crack cavalry regiment!"

"There's Miss Van Dehlen," said I, "dancing with Farbrake."

"Don't you bother yourself, Mailey!" he answered. "I see *her*! I shan't lose sight of her! And as soon as she indicates the party we want—well, then the fun will begin. We'll see who the Honourable Miss Gwendoline Brockendale is!"

"Stiff job, that, won't it be?" I suggested.

"I don't know," he said. "She may be known to us. Well, keep your eyes open."

He moved away, lounging around with apparent indifference, and I took up a post against a pillar of the room and watched my principal enjoying himself with Miss Van Dehlen. Perhaps she saw and commiserated my solitude—anyhow, when she had finished with Farbrake, she transferred herself to me.

"You haven't seen her yet?" I whispered.

"No! But it's a bit before her time," she answered. "She's here about eleven, as a rule."

Eleven o'clock came and went; eleven-thirty passed, and still nothing happened. Then, suddenly, about a quarter-to-twelve, two men and a girl came in. The men were of the man-about-town type; the girl, beautifully dressed, was a handsome creature, a brunette, dashing, alluring. And at sight of her, Miss Van Dehlen, just then dancing with me, caught her breath.

"There she is!" she whispered. "The dark girl! Save me the trouble of going over to her—you point her out!"

The girl had dropped into a chair; her two men friends had wandered towards the bar. I went over to Garland, who stood, hands in pockets, in a corner.

"There she is, Garland!" I said. "The black beauty, across there—just come in!"

He followed my glance and the next instant let out a sharp exclamation.

"Good Lord!" he said. "Gwennie Pryce! Well—"

"You know her?" I exclaimed.

"Know her?" he announced. "Had her through my hands—twice! She's an ex-convict!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

### QUEST OF THE PEARLS: III

I was too much astonished by this announcement to do anything but stand and stare, but Garland lost no time in going about his business. Within a minute, by some free masonry known only to himself and them he had attracted the attention of his two associates, and I saw them carefully moving in the direction of the corner in which the girl was sitting. There, too, moved Garland, with me at his heels. He walked unconcernedly along, as if looking at nothing in particular, and he was at the girl's side, with me and the other men in close attendance before she was aware. Then, suddenly, she glanced round, saw him, and went white to the lips. And Garland spoke, quietly.

"I want you, Gwennie!" he said in a low voice. Then, as she half-rose, turning in the direction in which her two men companions had gone, he shook his head. "It's no good, my girl!—come on outside, now. No nonsense—there are three of us here, and we don't want a fuss!"

The girl rose. She was still pale, and for a second she looked round again, like a hunted thing. Then, with something like a defiant shrug of her shoulders, she turned and walked swiftly through the doors by which she had just entered, with the three detectives close upon her. Garland gave me no invitation to follow, and for a moment I stood staring after the retreating figures. Then I heard Farbrake's voice and turning saw him and Miss Van Dehlen at my elbow.

"Clever of Garland!" muttered Farbrake. "I was watching. Nothing could have been quieter! Look round—nobody's any suspicion. If anybody noticed anything, they thought she was going to the supper-room."

I looked round me. Everything was going on just the same. The floor was crowded with dancers; in the bar beyond I saw the two men who had come in with Garland's captive standing side by side, glasses in their hands.

"Did Garland say anything?" asked Farbrake.

"He knew her!" I said. "She'd been through his hands before. He—he called her an ex-convict!"

Miss Van Dehlen let out a shuddering exclamation.

"Sakes!" she whispered. "And she seemed—well I'm glad, anyway, I hadn't to do the giving away. Such a nice, friendly girl, too! What'll they do with her, now?"

"Lock her up!" said Farbrake, cynically. "You'd better let me call for you, my dear lady tomorrow morning and take you to the police-court. For one thing you'll be wanted as a witness; for another, it will be an amusement."

I went home soon after that. Farbrake had cut me out with Miss Van Dehlen; he was a handsome man and of a gaiety of manner, which, in middle-aged men, always seems to have some extraordinary fascination for girls half their own age, so I saw no use in stopping. And on my way I thought not so much of Miss Van Dehlen as of the girl shepherded out of that gay scene to a police cell. Who was she?

We didn't get much light on that next morning when we attended the magistrate's court at which Garland's prisoner was brought up. The police were unusually reticent; all they wanted was a remand, and that they got within a few minutes. But we learnt something. The girl was charged under the name of Gwendoline Pryce—but two aliases were mentioned. And in the short time in which she was in the dock I got some information about her which I speedily

communicated to Garland. For there, in court, was Bentwick, and he, after a good look at the prisoner, made his way to my side.

"You remember our conversation, Mr. Mailey?" he said, with a significant glance.

"Quite well!" said I.

He nodded his head, sidewise, at the dock, in which the prisoner, still in her finery of the previous night, scarcely hidden by her equally fine cloak, sat with downcast head, and then smiled, meaningly, at me.

"That's the girl I saw with Humphrey Starke, at the Trocadero!" he whispered. "I knew her again, instantly!"

"But you don't know anything of her?" I asked.

"Not I! I came in here because I met Garland in the street just now. He asked me to drop in. Oh, that's the girl, right enough! In possession of those pearls, is she? Well, Garland says she's done time once before for that sort of thing!"

The prisoner just then disappeared—remanded for a week, and, of course, in custody. Garland came across to me: I told him what Bentwick had just said.

"That's something to know," he said. "I've no doubt, too, that the telegram you and I tried to trace was sent by this girl. However, it's my opinion that she'll make a clean breast of things before she comes up again. I haven't got her present address out of her yet, but I'm going to have a bit of a straight talk to her before they take her off, and I shall give her some fatherly advice about things."

"How do you think she got the pearls, Garland?" I asked.

"Wait a while! wait a while!" he answered, smiling. "I shall get it out of her. She's a bit resentful and sulky now—give her time to reflect. I can tell you this much, however—she'd half a dozen of those pearls on her last night! What I want to know is—where the others are."

He went off, promising to keep us informed, and I returned to our office, where a little later I was joined by Farbrake who had escorted Miss Van Dehlen from the police-court to her hotel and seemed highly delighted with everything.

"We're getting towards something, Mailey," he said, rubbing his hands, "we're certainly getting towards something! Most satisfactory, I'm sure."

"We may be getting at something about those pearls," I said, "but we don't seem to be getting at far more important things!"

"Such as what?" he asked.

"Well—Yelverton's whereabouts, and his connection with all this, and the whereabouts of Esther Farrell and certain matters relative to that, and—and, more than all, the big question—who murdered Humphrey Starke?" I said. "This pearl business is a side-line!"

"Wait a while—wait a while!" he answered, repeating Garland's phrase. "One thing comes out of another! There's no doubt the girl is in possession of the pearls—very well, find out how she got them, and you'll find out a lot more! Now, I think she got 'em from Yelverton! I think Yelverton is the man who went down to Stretherdale Castle with Humphrey Starke. That's *my* opinion, Mailey!"

"And murdered him?" I asked.

"Settled him, anyway. Perhaps they quarrelled. Yes, I think it was Yelverton. And that Starley helped Yelverton away. However," he added, sitting down at his desk, "time will show, and Garland has made a beginning. That girl, Mailey, knows a lot! Handsome creature!—great pity! But leave things to Garland—leave things to Garland! And now let us get on with that conveyance in which we've had so many interruptions."

Conveyancing seemed dull work after the doings of the previous twenty-four hours. But late that afternoon Garland came in—with an air of triumph, and once in Farbrake's room drew out and flourished a bulky envelope.

“Solved!” he exclaimed joyfully. “Got it all at last! Some nice surprises, too!—I’ve been surprised, anyhow, and I guess you’ll be.”

“What have you got?” demanded Farbrake putting his work aside.

“Full statement—confession, if you like to call it so—it is one, really, from the girl,” answered Garland. “Everything!—everything, that is, that she knows. I told you,” he continued, turning to me, “that I’d try to get something out of her before she was removed this morning. Well, I didn’t succeed. She was sulky—in a bad temper. I wanted her present address—she wouldn’t give it. However, I’d an idea where and how I could get it—and I got it, before noon. The young lady had a small flat in those very mansions where Humphrey Starke, as Mr. Humphrey, had his! I went there, duly armed with authority. And a nice find we had—I and the man I took with me. To start with, the greater part of the bank-notes taken from old Lord Stretherdale’s strong box. Then, a bundle of securities—from the same source. And, sixty-eight of the missing pearls! She had six on her when we got her last night; she sold two to Miss Van Dehlen; that leaves four to be accounted for. And other things—not pertinent to this case—amongst them a ring stolen from a Bond Street shop some weeks ago. Well, as soon as we’d collared all this stuff and put it in safe hands, I hurried off to see my lady in her new quarters. I told her what I’d done—she seemed chiefly anxious that we hadn’t messed up her fine clothes! I assured her on that point and then talked to her like a father-and-mother combined. She began to change her tune—and having been in my hands before, she knew that I would do a bit for her, and eventually she consented to make a full statement as to all she knew. Here it is!” concluded Garland, drawing several sheets of official looking paper from the bulky envelope. “I had it all taken down from her own lips, read over to her, corrected by her, added to, there and then, by her; a fair copy was made, read by her, and duly signed by her. And now, I’ll read it to you gentlemen—and I think you’ll admit that that as a bit of literary work, it knocks all the shockers into a cocked hat! Real stuff, you see, this—but you listen!”

Settling himself in the elbow chair at the side of Farbrake’s desk, Garland, who was obviously highly delighted with himself or with the way in which things were tending, proceeded to read.

*This is a statement, made of my own free will, by me, Gwennie, otherwise Gwendoline Pryce, at present on remand at H. M. Prison, Holloway, this 24th day of April 1902.*

*I got to know a man named Mr. Humphrey about six months ago. He had a flat near mine in St. Mary’s Mansions. I knew him first by sight. We first spoke to each other at the Hyperion Club. I met him there occasionally. Once or twice I had lunch with him at various places. He knew me before I knew him—I mean that he knew who I was, as he had been in court when I was sentenced to a term of imprisonment in connection with a theft from a West-End jewellers. I did not know him as anything else than Mr. Humphrey. I knew he had a wife and a child at his flat. I did not know Mrs. Humphrey to speak to, though I saw her constantly.*

*About six or seven weeks ago, I met Mr. Humphrey one morning in Regent Street where I was doing some shopping. He said he wanted to have a quiet talk with me. We went into the Café Royal. He told me that he knew where a quantity of extraordinarily fine pearls were to be got and that it would be the easiest thing in the world to get them; the only difficulty about the matter, he said, was how to dispose of them to the best advantage. I asked for more particulars. He said that the pearls had been specially collected, and from what he had been told, were of immense value. It would be impossible, he said, to offer them anywhere, either in*

*London, or Paris, or New York, as a whole; they would have to be got rid of in small lots and that would have to be done very privately. He wanted to know if I could make any suggestion. Before making any, I wanted to hear about how they were to be got—if there was any risk about it. He said he could get them as easily as picking a crumb off the table—neither he nor I would ever be suspected, so long as great care was exercised in disposing of the pearls afterwards. I said the best thing to do would be to take time in selling them, and to be very careful about who the people were that we sold them to. I said I had no doubt I could get rid of some of the best at intervals to American ladies, in London or in Paris: I had had transactions of that sort before. He said that he himself could do little in that way, but that if I could help him in getting rid of the pearls at good prices, we would go shares in the proceeds on a fifty-fifty basis. We talked a lot more about it, and finally agreed on the matter, on the basis just mentioned, and on the understanding that he was to let me know more in due time.*

*On the 26th March I had a letter from Mr. Humphrey whom I had not at that time seen for several days, asking me to meet him at Kings Cross Station at a quarter-to-ten next morning and to be prepared for the little affair I knew of. I was to wire him on receipt of his letter saying if I would be there, and I was to address the wire to Humphrey Starke at Luciani's Hotel in Jermyn Street. I did not know that Starke was his real name. I thought it was a name he had assumed for the purposes of the wire, or a name that he passed under at Luciani's. I knew, through living near him, that he was a good deal from home, and I thought he found it convenient to have one name in one place and another in another place.*

*I went to Spring Street post-office soon after getting this letter and sent Mr. Humphrey the wire he asked for—addressed as he had suggested. I didn't put my name at the back—I wrote down a false name and address. Next morning I went to Kings Cross station. I went very plainly dressed, on purpose—in a tweed tailor-made coat and shirt, over which I had a tailor-made travelling coat of dark grey tweed—my idea was to look like a young lady going down to the country. I did not know, however, when I went if Mr. Humphrey wanted me to go with him. As soon as we met, he led me aside, and asked me if I would go?—there wasn't the least danger, he said, and it would be a lark. Of course I said I would—and he went away and got the tickets.*

Garland stopped reading and looked from one to the other of us.

“There!” he said. “Now you know who it was that went with Humphrey Starke to Stretherdale Castle!”

## CHAPTER XXVII THE EYE-WITNESS

Farbrake started in his seat, staring from Garland to me.

“But—but Burton’s statement!” he exclaimed. “He saw a man with Starley!”

“He *thought* he saw a man,” said Garland. “No doubt he felt sure it was a man! But remember that it was night—dark. All Burton saw was figures—he recognised Starley by his voice. Remember, too, this is a tallish, well-made girl, and that she was wearing tailor-made clothes; in the darkness her figure could easily be taken for a man’s. Anyway, it was she who was with Starley when Burton saw what he did. But let me go on with my reading:—

*After he had got the tickets and found seats in a first-class compartment Humphrey told me that we were going as far as Doncaster and that he should then hire a car for the remainder of the journey. He thought it would be advisable if we passed out of Doncaster station singly, and gave me my ticket, a return, and told me what to do. When we left the station at Doncaster I was to turn to the left and go past the cattle-sidings until I came to the end of the station-yard where I was to turn left again into Frenchgate. I was to walk along there and into the high-road outside the town, and to continue along it, past the Sun Inn, until he caught me up with a car. I followed his instructions, and had walked about a couple of miles outside the town when he came up with me. It was then about half-past four o’clock. I got into the car and he said that we’d no end of time before us and needn’t hurry. I don’t know that part of England, so I can’t say which way we went, except that we passed through several villages and a small town or two, and came at last to Leeds. He said we’d have dinner there and put the car in a garage. We had dinner at an hotel near a station, and remained there until past eight o’clock. It was dark when we set off again. I don’t know which way we went, but at last we came to what I could see was a very wild country, and at last on to some moors, where there were no houses nor a light to be seen anywhere: we had then—since leaving Leeds—been driving more than an hour.*

*At a place on the moor, near some high rocks, Humphrey stopped the car and told me we were close to the house. He ran the car behind the rocks and led me down the moor till we got to a wood and then by a path through a shrubbery. I could then see the house against the sky; it seemed a queer old place and absolutely solitary and deserted. I made out that he knew it well, for after leading me to a door at the side we were on, he went somewhere close by and came back with some implement with which he forced the door open. When we were inside he left me again while he found candles—he knew where to go for them. He then closed the door, took me inside, and led me along some passages into a room. The first thing he did then was to see that the curtains and blinds were drawn across the windows. After that, and telling me we needn’t have the slightest fear of interruption as the place was quite out of the village and had no other houses near it, he left me in the room with some lighted candles that we found on the mantelpiece and side-tables, and went away. He was away for some minutes and I was afraid; the place was so old and gloomy. When he came back he had two big bottles of champagne in his hands, and after finding glasses, he opened one and said we could do with a drink. I*

asked him how it was he knew the place so well; he only laughed, and wouldn't tell me.

We drank some of the champagne, and then he took one of the candles and we went into a room that opened out of that we had been in first. I held a candle while he broke open a cupboard in which there were a lot of curios—all sorts of things. He took out three which he said were worth no end of money and could easily be got rid of. Then he forced open the lid of a case in which, under a glass front, there were some old books; he took out two books, and said they were worth their weight in gold. He carried the three curios and the two books back to the other room and went away to find something to pack them in. He came back with an old suit-case, and I helped him to pack the things in it in some stuff we found lying about, after which he put the suit-case out in the passage near the door by which we had got into the house.

We had more champagne after that, and a cigarette or two, and I wanted to know where the pearls were. He said all in good time—there was no hurry; we were safe as could be: there wasn't the slightest danger of our being caught there. So we stopped there a bit, finishing that bottle, and then he said we'd see after the pearls. He put out the candles, all but one; with that, carefully shaded, we went upstairs to a bedroom. I waited outside while Humphrey made sure that the shutters were closed over the window. When I went in, he showed me a box under the bed and said the pearls ought to be in there. He moved the bed aside. The box was screwed down to the floor. He forced the lid open and threw it back and began to take things out. There were some packets or small bundles of bank-notes on top, and some gold in paper-bags; he thrust these into his coat-pocket. He also took out some papers and after examining them, put them in another pocket. We then came across the pearls; they were in a black morocco case. He handed it to me, and I put it in an inside pocket of my coat. After that we went downstairs again, and he opened the other bottle of champagne and we drank each other's health.

I wanted him to get off now that we had got the stuff, but he said there wasn't the least danger and hung on, drinking the champagne and smoking, longer than I liked—I was afraid, every minute, of somebody coming. It was no use asking him to go, however; he was an obstinate fellow. He went across to the mantelpiece and pulling out the papers he had taken from the box upstairs began to turn them over. He had his back to the door by which we had come in; so had I; I was sitting at the table in the middle of the room, smoking a cigarette. All of a sudden, without the least warning, I heard a sound—a soft step, it seemed—and turning round I saw, close to the table on the opposite side a tall, dark-faced man. Humphrey heard him at the same time; he turned, too. Before the man could move or speak, in fact; at the very instant, I saw Humphrey's right hand go to his side-pocket, and before I'd even time to scream he'd drawn a revolver and fired. The man, however, was as quick as he was: he snatched up the empty champagne bottle and flung it straight at Humphrey. I think it hit him exactly as he fired at the man a second time, but anyway, it did hit him on the temple, I think, and sent him spinning to the floor, and before I could do anything the man had leapt forward, picked up the bottle again and hit Humphrey twice with it, two awful blows, right over his head. He made a sort of stifled moan, and after that he never made another sound nor moved a finger.

For the second time Garland paused—to look at us.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Now you know who killed Humphrey Starke—and why! After all, you see, it was Starley!"

"Go on with it!" said Farbrake. He was listening with keen attention. "Go on—to the end!"

"There's plenty of interesting stuff to come yet!" responded Garland. "Well—"

*I knew, from the way Humphrey lay, that he was dead. I think I'd been going to faint before, but the knowledge that he was done for seemed to pull me together. I looked at the man. He stood by Humphrey, glaring at him, and muttering. For a moment I thought he was mad. Then he turned on me 'Who are you?' he said, in a sort of threatening way. 'Never you mind!' I said. 'More like, who are you? You've killed him!' 'He tried to kill me!' he said. 'Damn him!—you saw him shoot at me!' 'Well, he's dead, now,' I said. 'I want to get out of this.' 'What was he doing here?' he asked. 'What are you both doing here?' I didn't answer. I was watching him closely; he didn't seem to be a bad sort, and after all Humphrey had shot at him as soon as he saw him. 'Help me to get away!' I said. 'And I won't say a word about you!' 'About me?' he answered, as if he was surprised. 'I don't care if you do, my girl—he tried to murder me! Who are you, now?' 'Let me get out, and I'll tell you!' I said. 'I promise I'll tell you, only do let's get out of this!' 'Wait there, then,' he said and went out of the room. As soon as he'd gone I took the bank-notes and gold out of Humphrey's pocket, and picked up the papers that had fallen from his hand. I'd just put them in my pockets when the man came back. 'Come on!' he said. 'I'll get you away. Blow them candles out and give me your hand.' 'What about—him?' I said. 'Damn him!' he said. 'Let him lie there till he's found!' I did as he told me, and he led me out of the house by the same way that Humphrey and I had entered it and through the shrubbery and wood on to the moor. He again asked me who I was and what we were doing there. I told him something, not everything, to satisfy him. 'Don't you know who that fellow really is?' he asked. 'He's old Lord Stretherdale's nephew, Humphrey Starke, and as bad a lot as ever was made. Robbing his uncle, was he?—well, he robbed me of a wife four years gone past—damn him!' Of course that took me absolutely aback. Before I could speak, he said, 'Look here, if you know him, as you evidently did, do you know anything of a young woman called Esther Farrell? Help me to some news of her, and I'll help you to get away safe and sound!' 'I don't know anybody of that name,' I said, 'but there's a young woman at his flat, who I believe is his wife, and they've a child!' 'Tell me what's she like!' he said. I described her as well as I could. 'That's Esther!' he said. 'And you say she's his wife?' 'It's understood so,' I answered. 'I can't say.' 'And that's where?' he asked. I told him. 'Now then,' he said, 'I'll get you away, my lass! Is it a bargain between you and me that neither of us says a word about this night's doings? For nobody need know if you keep your mouth shut and I keep mine!' 'I shan't speak,' I said. 'Then it is a bargain!' he said, 'Now then, listen to me. How did you come here?' I told him. 'You'll have to leave that car just where it is,' he said. 'I'll get rid of the name and number on it. As to you—have you money on you?' 'Plenty!' I said. 'Very well,' he said, 'I'll get out my horse and trap and drive you close to Harrogate, and I'll tell you of somebody that'll put you up there till morning. Then, you get off to London—and hold your tongue. And I'll hold mine, and nobody'll ever know.'*

*He took me into his house and got out some brandy, saying it would do me no harm. He gave me a stiff drink and had one himself. Then he went to get his horse and trap ready. While he was out of the way I looked at the bank-notes I had put in*

my pocket, and picking out one for fifty pounds hid it under the brandy bottle—I knew he'd find it later. He came back and beckoned me out and we got into the trap and drove away. Near the car he stopped, got down, and came back to the trap, with the name and number plates. He said he'd get rid of them, and got in and drove off again. We seemed to drive a long way; it was a very wild and cold drive, and a lonely road that went up and down. At last we saw lights in front of us and he told me that that was Harrogate. Then he said I was to do exactly what he told me. On getting out of the trap I was to walk forward until I came to the edge of the town, at a place where four roads meet. Just before getting to this I should see two cottages by the roadside. I was to knock at the door of the first cottage until I got an answer—a woman, he said, lived there on whom I could depend. All I was to say to her was that James Starley had sent me and that he would see her next day. He would have taken me right up to the cottage, he said, but for fear of there being a policeman about the cross-roads. He put me down about half-a-mile from the cottage; we again promised each other to keep silent. He turned back, and I went on to the place he had told me of. The woman was still up; she took me in at once on mentioning the name he had given me, and she asked no questions.

I left this cottage early next morning, having taken care to make myself as tidy and smart as possible: before leaving I gave the woman ten pounds in gold, though she hadn't asked for anything. When I had got away I thought I had done a foolish thing in giving her so much, but I decided that as Starley had said he would see her, he would make it all right. I then went to the station; there were lots of people about, and I found out a lot about trains and also bought a local railway guide. After thinking things over, I decided not to hurry back to town, and to go there by totally different routes. As I had only had a cup of tea at the woman's, I went into the refreshment-room and got breakfast, and thought out my plans. Having breakfasted, I went into the town and had a look round the shops. Eventually, I bought a good substantial travelling-bag, one which I could easily carry myself, taking care that it was a second-hand one. Then I bought some toilet things, night-things, linen, and various articles that took my fancy or were necessary when one is away from home, packing everything in the bag, and underneath them the bank-notes, the pearls, and the gold, with the exception of what I thought I should want for expenses. Most of the morning had gone in doing this, so I went into a restaurant and had lunch. While I sat there I thought everything out as regarded the chances of being sought after, and it struck me that as I had travelled with Humphrey from Kings Cross to Doncaster, I had better keep off that line in going back and also destroy my return ticket, which I did there and then. It also struck me that I had better get out of the things I was wearing lest any description of them should be issued. So after lunch I went back to the shop where I had bought the second-hand travelling-bag, and bought a second-hand suit-case, a handsome one which had been very little used. I then got a cab, and having had the suit-case put in it, went to a fashionable shop where you can get ready-made gowns and so on, and bought two gowns and a coat, paying for them, of course with gold. I also bought a new hat and some other things which, with the new gowns, I put in the suit-case. I thought I had been long enough in Harrogate, then, so I drove to the station, and after a cup of tea and a look at the local time-table I took a train for Bradford. In the train I put on the new coat, a long one which absolutely covered my tweed coat and skirt. When I got to Bradford, I booked a room at the big hotel at the station, and at once changed my things.

*I stayed at this hotel for two nights, keeping my ears open for any news of the recent affair. Then I left Bradford for Birmingham, where, a day or two later, I read in the papers of the discovery made at Stretherdale Castle by a solicitor's clerk who had gone there. There was no reference to me, and I knew at once that nobody knew anything at all about my accompanying Humphrey, or as he turned out to be, Mr. Humphrey Starke. I remained in Birmingham a day or two, keeping an eye on all papers, morning and evening; then I went on to Oxford, and after that down to Bournemouth. There I found that the gold was beginning to be used up, and as I was afraid of changing the bank-notes there, I returned to London. I got rid of some of the bank-notes, smaller ones, soon after returning, by changing them at shops in different districts, endorsing them, if I was obliged to do so, with fictitious names and addresses.*

*I sold two of the best pearls to a young American lady that I met at the Hyperion Club and four others to a dealer in Hatton Garden, in each case saying that they had come to me as a legacy. The rest are at my flat together with the papers and bank-notes brought away by me from Stretherdale Castle.*

*The afore-written is an absolutely true statement.*

(Signed) GWENNIE PRYCE.

“That’s all!” concluded Garland, folding up his sheets of blue paper. “What do you think of it?”

“Marvellous—marvellous!” murmured Farbrake. “Clever young jade, that! Pity she’s what she is, poor thing. Well, the next thing, Garland, is—where is this Esther Farrell?—Mrs. Humphrey?”

To my great surprise, Garland, having put his bulky packet away, pulled out a torn scrap of paper and waved it at us.

“Now I come to that!” he said. “It’s my belief she’s—here!”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE SEVENTH LORD STRETHERDALE

The scrap of paper, laid before Farbrake and myself, bore in pencil, nothing but an address:—

*71, Willesden Road, N. W.*

—we looked to Garland for an explanation.

“That bit of stuff,” he said, “was sent on to me this afternoon by the City police. They found an old pocket-book in the possession of the two men in custody over the Starley affair which undoubtedly belonged to Starley—it contained papers of his, and amongst them this. It’s my belief that this is the scrap of paper on which Yelverton was seen to write something in the saloon of the Hound & Falcon, afterwards handing it to Starley. That writing is the writing of an educated man, and the paper is such as would be torn out of a note-book of good quality, such as such a man would carry.”

“But what do you think it refers to?” asked Farbrake.

“I think it’s the present address of Mrs. Humphrey Starke,” replied Garland. “I now think that Yelverton saw Starley with an idea of making some arrangement between him and Mrs. Starke which would have the effect of getting her away. That’s my theory, anyhow!”

“But—why such an arrangement?” said Farbrake.

“You know what you yourself have said? If Humphrey Starke was legally married to this young woman, their son is—you know what!” replied Garland. “That’s obvious. Now if he could be got out of the way—if the fact of Humphrey Starke’s marriage could be clean blotted out—what then? That this other nephew, Maxwell, would come in!”

Farbrake got up from his desk.

“We’d better see into this at once,” he said. “If you think this address—”

“I propose we all go there,” interrupted Garland. “No time to be lost, in my opinion. Let’s get a cab and drive up—it’s somewhere in St. Johns Wood.”

I got a taxi-cab from the nearest rank and we all three set off. Garland was still full of the confession he had got out of Gwennie Pryce, but I think neither Farbrake nor I paid much attention to his talk of it; we were thinking of the successor to the Stretherdale title and the Stretherdale property. I was beginning to see through things—Yelverton, it seemed to me, had probably been engineering matters so that his protégé, Maxwell Starke, should come in. And I became conscious of a fear—had anything happened to Humphrey Starke’s widow and child?

Willesden Road proved to be a long, somewhat dreary street at the back of Lord’s Cricket Ground; at Garland’s suggestion we stopped the cab at the end of it and walked down looking for No. 71. It was now dusk; the house, when we found it, looked gloomy and dismal; there was no light in any window and none over the transom of the door. And we had knocked and rung the bell three or four times before we got any reply to our summons. Then the door opened, a little, and a woman, middle-aged, heavy-faced, her eyes full of suspicion, looked out. Garland, with ready resource, got a shoulder and foot within the slightly opened door.

“Mrs. Humphrey in?” he demanded.

I saw the woman start, visibly. She peered past Garland at Farbrake and myself.

“Nobody of that name here!” she said.

“I think there is!” retorted Garland. “Anyway, you’ve a young woman and her child here and I’m going to see them!” Then, as he saw that his piece of sheer bluff had had its effect, he went on. “My good woman, I’m a police-officer and—”

The woman caught her breath and held the door open. It was plain that the mere mention of the police suggested possibilities to her that she had no mind to face.

"Well, they are here!" she said sullenly. "You can come in, then—I shall be glad to be done with it! I told him no good would come of his bringing them here, secret—it's been nothing but anxiety to me! Come this way, if you please."

She led me along a narrow, ill-lighted passage to a door at its further end, and throwing the door open, made a curt announcement to some person within.

"Here's some gentlemen to see you!"

We walked in, Farbrake, at Garland's silent suggestion going first. Looking over his shoulder I saw, sitting by the fire, a young woman who held a boy on her knee. She was a handsome creature, but it seemed to me that I saw signs of simplicity in her face which argued badly for her if she came under designing influence. She turned startled and wondering eyes on us as she rose, and I noticed how she took a firmer grip of the child, a fine little chap who looked fearlessly and frankly at Farbrake as he walked in.

"My dear young lady!" exclaimed Farbrake in his best manner. "I beg you not to be alarmed! I am Mr. Farbrake, solicitor to the Stretherdale family, and I have been trying to find you for several days. Now you will let me put a plain question to you—you are Mrs. Humphrey Starke?"

"Yes!" she said. "Humphrey and I were married at St. Mary's Church, Paddington, when I left Stretherdale. I've the marriage lines in my pocket."

Farbrake gave a deep sigh of relief. He bent down, patting the boy's head.

"I'm delighted to find you!" he exclaimed, turning to the mother. "But you know, my dear young lady, you're not Mrs. Humphrey Starke any longer! You're Lady Stretherdale, and this little chap is the seventh Baron Stretherdale. And now—what are you doing here in this house! Have no fear of telling me anything—I'm here to protect and take care of both of you."

Lady Stretherdale stared wonderingly at him.

"I haven't understood anything of it!" she said. "It's all been a sort of maze—since Humphrey went away that morning. Humphrey—he—he wasn't what he might have been! I began to find him out. And though we never wanted for anything, he neglected us—sometimes he was away for days and weeks and I never knew where he was. And when he went away that last time, I didn't know where he'd gone till I saw what I did in the papers. And I didn't know what to do—I knew of nobody to turn to. Then I thought of James Starley—he'd promised, long since, to help me if I ever wanted help. I wrote to him, but he didn't come—at least, he hadn't come when I met Major Yelverton.

"Where did you meet Major Yelverton?" asked Farbrake.

"I met him at Humphrey's cousin's flat—Mr. Maxwell Starke's," she replied. "I went there to make enquiries. Major Yelverton came. He talked to me a long time about things—law matters. He said that Mr. Maxwell would come in for everything—that I couldn't claim anything. Of course, I didn't understand anything, and I didn't know where to turn: I was frightened of being asked questions about Humphrey. Then, one morning, Major Yelverton sent me a note, telling me to go down to his rooms at once. When I got there, he said I mustn't stay in the flat at St. Mary's Mansions any longer; the police would be coming there and they'd ask me all sorts of questions about Humphrey. He said I must go away somewhere where I wouldn't be found until he could arrange matters for me. Then he said that I hadn't any claim on anything, but that the family would provide for me and the child if I would promise to go elsewhere and not interfere. I said I didn't know where to go. Major Yelverton began to talk to me about Starley then. He said Starley had come to London to find me, and that he knew Starley, now that Humphrey was dead, wanted to marry me, and he proposed that Starley and I should go abroad—if we would, he said, the Stretherdale family would set us up

with money to buy a farm in Australia or wherever Starley liked. He talked and talked till I didn't know what to do!"

"And then, I suppose, Major Yelverton brought you here?" suggested Farbrake.

"Yes—he brought us here straight from his rooms. We've been here ever since. Is—is it true what you say? You see, I know nothing! Major Yelverton's been just once—he said he was arranging matters for me. But I don't know what's going on, and—"

"What I have told you is all true!" said Farbrake. "I'll tell you more afterwards. What I want now is to take you away—I'll take you, in fact, to my sister's house; she'll take care of you. Now tell me, has this woman, landlady or whatever she is, been attentive to you?"

"Oh, she's been kind enough—but we've never been out, and I've seen no papers, or anything," she answered. "We've just had to wait here—"

"Well, you shall wait no longer!" said Farbrake. "Go and get a cab, Mailey—we will leave at once."

I hurried out. The woman of the house was standing in the passage. She looked at me with obvious apprehension.

"Are you going to take them away?" she said. "I hope she's said nothing against me? I've done what I could. I didn't want to have them left here—"

I muttered something reassuring to her and ran off to find a cab. Cabs were not much in evidence in that district; it was several minutes before I found one. When I got back with it Farbrake and his charges were at the door of the house: Farbrake was carrying the seventh Lord Stretherdale in his arms and talking nonsense to him. In another minute he, the boy, and the mother had driven off, leaving Garland and me to look after ourselves.

Garland began to rummage in his pockets as we walked away. Finally he found and produced a cigar, and under the next street lamp paused and lighted it. He glanced slyly at me.

"Do you know what I'm smoking this cigar for, Mailey?" he asked. "No?—well, I'll tell you! It's to help me think how I can get hold of that chap Yelverton! For get him I will! Now you're a lawyer, and I'm not—I noticed a highly respectable looking tavern at the end of this street; come into it, Mailey, and have a drink, and tell me, out of your legal knowledge, all you can about the law of conspiracy!"

[End of *Cobweb Castle*, by J. S. (Joseph Smith) Fletcher]