

An outstanding mystery yarn

DARK INTERLUDE

Eerie, Dramatic, Exciting

E.V. TIMMS

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THE HILLS OF HATE
JAMES, DON'T BE A FOOL
THE CRIPPLE IN BLACK
WHITEHALL
ALICIA DEANE
CONFLICT
FAR CARAVAN
MAELSTROM

DARK INTERLUDE

By
E. V. TIMMS

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DARK INTERLUDE

Deep Valley Siding! Just a half forgotten platform of weather-worn sleepers brooding beside a single line railway track.

The valley itself, hidden, deep, is far from human activity. Even in summer the sun scarcely warms it, and in winter the valley and its forlorn platform are veiled night and day in ground-mist and deep shadow.

From the platform the single track begins its sinuous climb to the heights some two thousand feet above. Up and up it winds, spanning with the aid of lofty viaducts the deep chasms, hugging the cuttings blasted out of the sheer mountain, thrusting through rumbling, steam-clouded tunnels, running past giant forest trees, on and up until it forks to become a convenient loop where the slower freight trains await the passing of the fast expresses. After the loop there is but one long tunnel before the track comes to its busy platform at the Junction.

The Deep Valley Siding, with its fog, its shadows, and its loneliness, is an unenviable place in which to be stranded after dark. The rusty water tanks abutting the sleepers, with the curved main pipe and hanging leather sleeve, seem like the petrified remains of a monster eternally guarding the solitude against intrusion.

So quiet is the valley, so still, that all sound apart from the whispering of leaves and the rustling of bark, seems like sacrilege. Consequently, when the service car that usually flashed past in a cloud of dust stopped at the platform, the trees seemed to lift their heads to listen, and the rocks became watching eyes on the mountain side.

From the car first stepped Roger Balcombe, dark-haired, grey-eyed, handsome, tall, and with a leather coat protecting English tweeds of fine quality. Then came his fiancée, Judith Ann Harper, dainty, dark-eyed, neat in dark grey costume and heavy wool travelling coat. Roger and Ann stood together smiling while her brother, John Joseph, six foot four in height and weighing sixteen-stone, wriggled from the car to the road. The car driver pointed to the platform.

“There it is, folks,” he said. “Deep Valley Sidin’.”

Ann, Roger and Joe looked at it.

“What’s it for?” asked Joe sarcastically.

The driver grinned, his eyes sweeping the dark mountain mass beyond the track.

“Trains stop ’ere sometimes. Don’t seem to be a reg’lar schedule for locals—they fit ’em in accordin’ to freights, I reckon— —”

“But,” interrupted Ann, “we can get a train here, can’t we?”

The man shrugged.

“There may be a train, may be not; but if you must get back to where you come from, there’s the sidin’.”

“We’ll chance it,” said Roger.

The driver gave him a quick glance.

“Well, I’d rather you than me— —” he muttered.

“What do you mean by that?” asked Joe.

“Well,” replied the drawling voice, “it looks like rain, there’s no shelter, an’ it’s comin’ on dark. Not a nice place to be at, after dark— —”

“What’s wrong with it?” demanded Ann.

The man looked from the platform to the wild, towering mountain side.

“Some say . . . it’s ’aunted, miss. Many years ago a train picked up three people from this same platform. Two men and a woman—just like y’selves.”

“And what happened?” asked Roger.

“It was a freight train. Started up from ’ere just at dark. An’ it was peltin’ rain. But it never got to the Junction up top— —”

With true appreciation of dramatic values he paused. Joe Harper eyed him closely. Joe was practical in all things.

“Why not?” he grunted.

“There’s three tunnels. As the train went into the last tunnel just before the Junction, the tunnel collapsed— —”

Ann shuddered.

“Collapsed? Oh, good heavens!” she muttered.

“Yes; all was dead when they was dug out. Lucky there was only one carriage on that train. Maybe a dozen people was smashed to pulp along with the train. Back in the nineties, that was— —”

“I seem to remember hearing about that,” said Ann slowly. “Wasn’t there a Madame—a Madame Geraldine Kelaher on that train?”

The driver nodded.

“That’s the name, miss. Couldn’t remember it m’self, but she was one of them.”

“And who was Madame Geraldine Kelaher?” asked Roger.

“A very famous medium of those days,” replied Ann. “A woman whose knowledge of psychic truths was remarkable.”

Roger and Joe exchanged quick glances. They both knew Ann. Joe said deliberately:

“Go on, driver. What’s the rest of it?”

“Well, she was killed with the rest of ’em. But the queer thing about it was they found out there’d been trouble on the train before it got to the tunnel.”

“Trouble?” asked Roger.

“They’d been fightin’ among themselves. Anyway, they was all killed, poor devils. There’s a new tunnel now, of course. But there’s lots of people I know won’t pick up a train ’ere at night, ’specially just about this time. No; not for a fortune. I wouldn’t meself. Only fair to tell you, but if you *will* wait for a train I’ll be gettin’ on.”

“We’ll risk it,” said Joe.

The man nodded, slammed in the gear, waved a hand, and then drove away. Ann, Roger and Joe watched the car until it disappeared, then they walked on to the platform. Ann looked about her, but the night shadows were deepening, and all objects were blurred and dark.

“It could be haunted,” she said.

Joe dug Roger in the ribs. Both men were smiling.

“Forget it, Ann,” said Joe. “It’s dark, lonely, a bit aloof and weird, but it’s just another valley at the foot of another mountain.”

“I wonder what they were quarrelling about,” mused Ann.

“Who?” asked Joe.

“The people on that train — —”

Joe took her by the arm. Both he and Roger knew that when Ann got started on her pet subject she would have her mind on it for hours. Ann was deeply interested in spirit séances, and although not a fanatical adherent of occult belief, nevertheless agreed that somewhere behind it all were truths yet to be established. Joe said gruffly:

“What does it matter? That was a tragedy of the long ago, and it has faded into the forgotten things of long ago.”

“I don’t agree with that, Joe — —”

“There she goes again,” groaned Joe. “Stop her, Roger.”

Balcombe laughed and looked up at the mountain.

“Mountains,” said he in his pleasant voice, “fascinate me.”

Ann shivered slightly.

“They frighten me,” she retorted. “When I look at them, and then at me, I feel ridiculous.”

“I don’t,” grunted Joe. “I feel hungry.”

Ann looked up at him and laughed. Joe had always been like that, unimaginative. She laughed again as her eyes travelled over her brother’s Herculean frame.

“Always the little boy, Joe,” she murmured.

“I’m not susceptible of those influences you are always talking about,” he retorted. “You’ve been talking psychic stuff to Roger all day. And now, when there was a chance of your returning to sanity, that fool driver trots out the yarn about that train.”

“All the same, Joe,” said Roger. “Ann knows her subject. And, incidentally, there is something weird about this spot.”

“There undoubtedly is,” agreed Ann. “I felt it the moment we stepped on this platform.”

“Felt what?” demanded Joe.

“To put it crudely, the atmosphere of this valley.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“It is cold, sullen, inimical, resentful, unfriendly, menacing. It breeds premonition, death. It wraps itself in darkness and mystery; hates the sun. It is brooding and vengeful— —”

Joe heaved his wide shoulders cynically.

“Another trance? Stop posing as a mystic. There’s nothing wrong with this valley. Good shooting here, I’ll bet.”

Ann smiled.

“Sometimes I wish I had your bucolic solidity,” she retorted.

“Sometimes,” said Joe meaningly, “I wish you had. There are certain advantages in being born a bone-head.”

“To wit?” asked Roger.

“Sound sleep at night, a hearty appreciation of breakfast, no necessity for whistling in the dark. Put Ann in a dark room and she scuttles round like a mouse searching for a mythical cheese. Ultimate truth, she calls it.”

Knowing Joe as she did, Ann avoided the challenge.

“It’s starting to rain,” she told them.

“And that,” Joe growled, “is the immediate truth. Any sign of a train?”

“I think there’s one coming now,” replied Roger.

They stared along the dark track. A pin point of light shone in the distance. It grew larger and brighter.

“Here it comes,” said Ann. “It must be a special. Too slow for an express. I’d hate to have to wait long on this platform. It’s too eerie.”

Joe relented a little as he turned up the collar of his overcoat.

“Maybe you’re right,” he grumbled. “It’s a bit queer. Kind of place where you could let your mind loose, if you had that kind of a mind.”

“I have,” said Ann.

Roger looked round into the darkness. Nothing except vague shapes in the black shadows were to be seen.

“Don’t blame the natives for keeping well away,” he said. “It has the peculiar stillness one imagines exists far out in space.”

They could hear the train now, and the echoes in the far hills. It was as though the unseen mountains, infuriated by the noise of the engine, caught up all sound and flung it back defiantly. Ann, Joe and Roger watched the light coming in towards the platform, a watery eye already dimmed by rain.

“A special,” Joe informed them.

A special it was. Engine, covered trucks, one corridor car in darkness, then a lighted guard’s van.

“It’s stopping,” cried Ann. “Oh, for the comfort of a cosy seat — —”

“Maybe,” said Joe. “It’s a pretty old outfit, by the look of it, smells of soot, leather, weather and train oil.”

With a squealing of brakes and a bashing of buffers the panting engine stopped opposite the tanks. The open fire-box cast an infernal light on glistening steel and coal. Ann, Joe and Roger saw the fireman swing the leather sleeve into the tank of the tender. They had a brief glimpse of tarpaulin covered trucks between the engine and the dark corridor car. The rain fell in heavier drops.

“Quick,” said Ann. “Open the door, Joe — —”

A deep voice from the guard’s van hailed them. Looking that way they saw a swinging lamp drop from the van and come along the platform towards them.

“The guard,” muttered Roger.

“Hey, there,” said the deep voice. “Just a minute, folks.”

Joe pulled his hat down over his eyes, scattering raindrops from the brim.

“Don’t make a speech, guard,” he said quickly. “It’s raining.”

The lamp was raised so that the yellow rays flashed directly on them. They had a blurred impression of a thick-set man regarding them intently. The lamp was lowered.

“You can’t travel on this train,” they were gruffly informed.

“What — —?” gasped Ann.

“But I have to get back to my paper—urgently,” said Roger.

“And I’m hungry,” growled Joe. “Why can’t we travel on this contraption you call a train?”

“We don’t pick up,” was the surly explanation. “Thought I’d better tell you. Save trouble all round. No passengers.”

“But, when is the next train?” asked Ann.

“Five o’clock in the mornin’. G’night.”

“But we can’t stay here,” protested Ann. “There’s no shelter, there’s no house within miles, and the rain’s setting in — —”

The guard prefaced his next remarks with a characteristic, throat-clearing grunt.

“Uhuh! Sorry. Reg’lations is reg’lations. We don’t pick up.”

Without further speech or sympathy he turned and ran back to the van. Joe’s mighty hands propelled Ann and Roger across the platform.

“Into that carriage,” he directed them. “To hell with his ‘reg’lations.’ Luckily the carriage is in darkness — —”

Roger wrenched open the door.

“Get in, quickly! It’s raining harder — —”

Joe slammed the door just as the train started. A shaft of scarlet light from the fire-box stained trucks and carriage, and then faded away.

“We made it,” said Ann thankfully.

“Let’s take the end compartment farthest from the van,” said Roger.

They walked along the corridor, feeling their way in the darkness.

“No lights,” observed Ann. “And look! There’s someone in the corner of the compartment — —”

“Sound asleep,” said Joe. “All the better. Get in.”

They went in and sat down, Joe next to the sleeping man, Roger and Ann opposite. The train gathered speed.

“Never mind the lights,” said Joe. “Might give us away.”

Ann was looking about her in the darkness.

“I don’t like this train,” she said suddenly.

The uneasy note in her voice brought Joe and Roger the uncomfortable conviction that Ann was sensible of new and powerful influences. If so they would hear about them.

“What’s wrong with the train?” asked Joe.

Ann was breathing quickly.

“I don’t know. Something. I feel that all the evil currents of that dark valley have entered this carriage— —”

“Oh, good Lord,” groaned Joe. “Don’t be a little fathead, Ann— —”

“You’re thinking of that other train,” said Roger.

Ann admitted it.

“Yes. I wish now we hadn’t got on this train— —”

“Bosh!” snarled Joe. “That happened years ago.”

Ann’s voice was steady.

“I know. But there are remarkable resemblances.”

“What resemblances?” asked Roger.

“The train that was smashed was a slow freight, the same as this. It started from Deep Valley Siding at dark, the same as this one has done. It had only one carriage, the same as this train.”

“You’ll be telling us,” said Joe with heavy sarcasm, “that we have stepped back through time to board the doomed train. That by some occult power we have become the three persons who boarded the train on that fatal night.”

“So even you have become aware of it,” said Ann.

“Aware of what?” demanded Joe irritably.

“Of the thought impressions, thought projections directed at us— —”

Joe waved his hands hopelessly.

“Forget it! Relax—relax.”

“I can’t,” said Ann tensely. “Frankly, I’m frightened.”

“Frightened?” echoed Joe.

“Of what?” asked Roger.

There was a little pause, then Ann said slowly:

“Of this dark interlude.”

The train was steadily climbing now, with heavy rain beating against the window panes. Through the dim, glimmering glass the scarcely discernible night light merely intensified the impenetrable blackness of the

compartment. Ann, Joe and Roger were silent, the man beside Joe huddled and unmoving in his corner seat. The creaking of the carriage, the muffled hammering of the bogies, the hoarse rhythm of the exhaust, all combined to form a monotonous nocturne.

Joe glared across at the flooded windows. In spite of himself Ann's words would not be dismissed. They kept recurring. Resemblances, resemblances. Certainly there were resemblances, but what of that? Any amount of trains with only one carriage had started at dark from Deep Valley Siding over the years. Confound Ann. The truth was they were fortunate in boarding this train. A night such as this would have been the death of them had they been compelled to remain on the platform. And confound that stupid, grunting guard. Joe decided that when they came to the Junction he would have a word with that fellow. What did he think they were? Who did he think he was? A few pungent words later would inform him correctly and unmistakably. And confound this carriage. It must be the night, the rain, the creaking, the movement, the darkness, the sense of emptiness, of void, of resemblance—confound the resemblance! The train that had gone to its doom under a crumbling mountain had not been empty; the single carriage had about a dozen people in it. Was it a dozen? How did he know there had been a dozen in the carriage? No one had said so—ah, yes, the car driver. And confound that fool, with his childish talk. Ann's quiet voice was a relief to thought.

“Joe— —”

“Yes?”

“What were you thinking about?”

“What were you?”

“Madame Geraldine Kelaher— —”

“The psychic woman?”

“Yes. I found myself imagining she was with us on this train—”

“Oh, for the love of— —”

Roger cut in.

“What was she doing in this country?” he asked.

“She was on a world tour. I'm just wondering— —”

“I know you are,” retorted Joe. “Shut up!”

Ann was silent. Roger grinned. He could safely do so in this darkness. Ann was evidently on the psychic warpath; but in brother Joe she had a lion both sceptical and unmovable. A sensible fellow, Joe. Nevertheless, Ann could not be blamed altogether for allowing her thoughts to run riot a little.

Deep Valley was an eerie place. This carriage with its resemblance to the single carriage on that other train, this night with its rain, this slow freight train starting from Deep Valley Siding at dark—all these resemblances were bound to impress the impressionable Ann. Resemblances? The smile left Roger’s lips. They were rather remarkable resemblances. That other train, as Joe had reminded them, had picked up three passengers from Deep Valley Siding on that fatal night. Two men and a woman. What an extraordinary thing. Ann spoke again.

“Roger— —”

“Yes?”

“What were you thinking about?”

Roger used Joe’s technique.

“What were you?” he asked.

“About . . . resemblances.”

Joe and Roger sat up straight.

“What?” they both jerked out.

“And so were you,” said Ann.

The sleeping gentleman next to Joe seemed to nod his agreement. The movement of the carriage sent him inclining towards Joe, who gently shouldered him back to his original position.

“Drunk?” asked Ann.

“No,” replied Joe.

“It’s a wonder there are no lights in any of the compartments,” observed Ann.

“No passengers, the guard said,” Roger reminded her. “No need for lights. This fellow either sneaked in like ourselves, or having more sense than we have, tipped the guard.”

“Never thought of that,” muttered Joe.

“There wasn’t much time to think of anything,” said Ann. “It seems as if we were willed into this train— —”

“How do you mean ‘willed’?” Joe wanted to know.

“Just that. Some power— —”

“Now listen, Ann,” began Joe patiently. “If you’re going to start on phantoms, spirits, ghosts, apparitions, visions, hallucinations, delusions, all with capital letters, be a sport and wait until I’ve wrapped myself round a big steak up at the Junction, will you?”

“You don’t understand, Joe. You are not receptive.”

Joe sighed.

“All right. Go the whole hog. You’ve got ghosts on the brain. It’s going to be tough on Roger. When he comes home for a steak similar to the one I have in mind, you’ll point to an empty plate and swear there’s a damn steak on it. Good technique if you’re late home from golf.”

“Don’t be absurd, Joe.”

“I’ll risk it,” murmured Roger.

“Joe always makes light of— —”

“I don’t,” protested Joe. “But where’s the proof of all this mystic stuff? It’s all very well to conjecture, suppose, presume, and then take for granted; but any man who does that is a fool— —”

“Is he?” retorted Ann. “You’ve heard of Africa, I presume?”

“Of course I’ve heard of Africa,” growled Joe.

“Ever been there?”

“You know I haven’t— —”

“You haven’t been there, you haven’t seen it, touched it, smelt it, or heard it, yet you believe it to be there, don’t you?”

“Naturally.”

“Why?”

“Because others have been there— —”

“Then you will take the word of others in regard to the existence of Africa— —”

“Certainly.”

“But you won’t take the word of those who, like Madame Geraldine Kelaher, who was killed on this very line years ago, say they have made contact with the spirit world, who have conversed with spirit beings— —”

“No!” said Joe emphatically. “I won’t.”

“You are not consistent, Joe.”

“I think I am. I know of the existence of Africa for reasons other than mere hearsay. Shipping goes there. A man can go there and return, bringing with him visible proofs of both his having been there, and of the existence of that place. But when a man dies what proof have we where he goes, or that he goes, or that there is a place to which he could go, or that he ever gets there if there is such a place. Answer me that, Gungha Din.”

“Certainly,” said Ann. “If a man dies, and his spirit being goes into repose, he cannot, except by reincarnation, return as a man. But his spirit being can and sometimes does return as a spirit being. And only those

attuned to the spirit world can see, hear and converse with him. I can't do these things, but Madame Geraldine Kelaher could, and others as well still do these things."

"Fakes," snorted Joe.

"That's not fair, Joe."

"Listen, Ann. No doubt as an abstract subject it is interesting enough, but as an accepted and living reality it simply won't do. Man has always been frightened of death. And out of that fear come all the excuses and fairy tales to allay that fear. All this spiritism, all religion, is Death's anaesthetic. What do you say, Roger?"

"Tell you more about it when I'm dead," said Roger dryly.

"Joe's hopeless," said Ann.

"I'm not, I have an open mind. But I won't accept ghosts until one is proved to me. Might as well say this fellow beside me is a phantom when my sense of touch proves to me he is a man."

"He might be an apparition, a vision, or even an hallucination," said Roger; "but if Joe can touch him he's no spirit being."

"I think you're both just too, too funny," said Ann coldly. "And anyway, mind your lurching friend, he's falling towards you again."

Joe steadied the man who again settled down against the window. It was a shade colder now, and a rising wind sent the rain gustily driving at the rattling windows. The grade was heavier also, for the sound of the exhaust deepened and became more measured and laboured. In silent thought Ann, Joe and Roger sat unseen and unmoving. Only when they moved could vague body outlines be seen. Ann, as usual, felt a little annoyed with Joe. She always did after one of their futile discussions. Roger too was just a little disappointing; the few remarks he had made seemed to imply that, like Joe, he had an open mind on the subject. Ann smiled. That open mind! Like the hearty handshake and the still heartier pat on the back. Humbug! Roger and Joe were responsive only to the physical side of being and nature, could understand only what the five simple senses conveyed. Nothing more. Neither would have been much of a success as a homing pigeon. The sixth sense, common sense, allowed no margin in their thoughts for any state or condition not sponsored by the five senses. Therefore, common sense, as Joe facetiously termed the sixth sense, showed that all reasoning, all belief beyond the boundaries of the five common senses were the products of unbalanced minds. Joe was satisfied to let it go at that, and being Joe he did so. But Roger had a finer intelligence than Joe, and Ann was somewhat exasperated by his non-committal manner. But men were strange, almost

inexplicable creatures, and if a woman did not exercise a profound patience with them, well, she simply could not hope to control and manage them. After all, Joe really was a fine fellow, and Roger was wonderful.

To her astonishment Joe, who usually dismissed the subject somewhat contemptuously, came back to it.

“Has there ever been an accepted belief in spirit beings? Has there ever been a manifestation of the return to our natural world by these supernatural people?”

“You have read the Scriptures, haven’t you?”

“Yes, but — apart from them?”

“So it is claimed. But why are you so interested, brother Joe?”

“Oh, just . . . filling in time.”

Ann was exasperated.

“Indeed? I suppose this carriage, this remarkably similar carriage to the one that carried Madame Kelaher, the two men and the woman, and the others to death on that wild, black night long ago, has nothing to do with it?”

“Naturally it hasn’t,” retorted Joe. “And I’m not a bit scared of the dark. But since you give so much thought yourself to these matters — —”

“You thought you’d encourage me with a little friendly patter, eh?”

“All right,” Joe growled. “I don’t want to talk about it. It’s all rhubarb, anyway.”

“I wouldn’t say that, Joe,” said Roger. “Some uncanny things have been witnessed by perfectly honest persons.”

“I know. They are eventually sent to a home if they don’t keep off it — —”

Ann was disgusted.

“Oh, Joe’s impossible. He’d joke with the devil.”

“Only if the fellow could prove to me he was the devil,” said Joe calmly. “I hate substitutes.”

Roger laughed and turned to Ann.

“Comfortable?” he asked.

She moved closer to him.

“Physically, yes; but mentally, no. I can’t help feeling that something — —”

“What?” grunted Joe.

“I don’t exactly know. Something I can’t define — —”

“Rubbish,” said Joe in his downright way. “I refuse to believe in any of that idiotic superstition. If people will believe— —”

The sleeping stranger lurched again. Joe broke off to shoulder him back.

“If people will believe— —”

The man swayed again, and again Joe heaved him back.

“Some new kind of game, Joe?” asked Ann.

“If people will— —” said Joe stubbornly.

“He’s coming at you again, Joe,” said Roger.

Joe chuckled and moved quickly down to the other end of the seat. The sleeper swayed, went back, cuddled the window as the wheels bit on a curve, swung over again on a hesitant arc, paused, then slowly, very slowly began to fall.

“That’ll wake him up,” said Ann. “He may be interesting.”

The man fell to the seat. He did not awaken. Joe laughed. The somnolent gentleman continued to fall and, before Joe could prevent him, fell from the seat to the floor. Ann, Joe and Roger sat very still.

“He’s not moving,” whispered Ann.

“I’ll switch on the lights,” said Joe.

The switch clicked but no light came.

“Strike a match, quick,” said Joe. “Something wrong with the lights
— —”

Roger struck one. They stared down at a bearded face. The man was dead, the knife that had killed him still fast in his heart. Glassy blue eyes stared back at them. Of stocky build, he was dressed in a grey sac suit of an old-fashioned cut, but of good material. On his feet were highly polished tan shoes.

Ann choked back a scream as she recoiled. The match went out, and the darkness rushed upon them. Joe’s voice was vibrant.

“Murder!” he rasped.

A shuddering echo from Ann:

“Murder— —”

A shocked exclamation from Roger:

“Murder!”

In the flare of the second match they saw grasped in the dead man’s hand a woman’s black handbag. The clutching fingers crushed into it. Ann’s horrified eyes saw another detail: there was no handle on the bag. Joe blew out the match.

“There’s been the devil to pay here,” he said grimly.

“There is still the devil to pay by someone,” added Roger. “Let’s get out of this — —”

“Oh heavens, yes!” choked Ann.

“I’m wondering about those lights,” said Joe.

“Don’t!” snapped Ann. “Let me out of this compartment. The sight of those staring eyes, that talon-like hand, and that—that knife—ugh! I’ve my share of nerve, but that’s more than enough for me — —”

Joe caught her by the arm.

“Steady, Ann — —”

“What do you mean—steady? Let us get out of here — —” she panted.

“Take your time, or you might walk into something.”

“Joe’s right,” agreed Roger. “Try the lights again.”

Again the switch clicked. No light.

Ann’s teeth were chattering, her veins seemed to be filled with rods of ice.

“All—all the other compartments are in darkness. Do you think — —”

“Steady, Ann,” said Joe again. “Whoever killed this man is still in this carriage.”

Ann shuddered.

“He must be,” she agreed. “He didn’t get off at the siding.”

“That’s a woman’s handbag,” said Roger. “He might have been killed by a woman — —”

“By a woman?” whispered Ann. “By a . . . woman?”

Joe moved towards the door.

“Let’s take a peep into the next compartment.”

Roger nodded.

“Go ahead, Joe. We can’t stay here any longer.”

“I know that. If any one catches us in here with a murdered man—we’ll have some mighty awkward explaining to do.”

“Let me out of this — —” panted Ann.

They filed out into the dark corridor, Joe shutting the sliding door behind them. In the mind of each was the recollection of the car driver’s words “there’d been trouble on that train.” Silently they looked about them. It was as though they stood on a lost world without light or human sound, a lost far

world rushing, rocking, filled with an infinity of metallic echoes, an eerie void through which they must grope blindly with futile effort.

Shock still gripped them. Ann's heart felt as though it would burst. Before her eyes was the terrible picture revealed by the flickering match. All were breathing heavily, all were still in the grip of terrific reaction.

"Listen," muttered Joe.

Without movement they stood. Outside the train shadows rushed past. Inside was close, almost impenetrable darkness. The floor of the corridor quivered under their feet, the window frames rattled, the dark glass was flooded by the driving rain. They could see practically nothing, and above the rattling, the jolting, the bumping, the clatter, the creaking, the whisper of wood and the clang of steel, they strained their ears to catch any sound of human presence.

"I—I can't hear any one— —" whispered Ann.

"Not a light," muttered Roger. "Absolutely Stygian."

"Appropriately so," said Joe, "but that doesn't make things any easier for us. Here's the door of the next compartment. The dead man is— —"

"Never mind him," said Ann sharply. "Let's find somebody— —"

"Right. Here's the door. Ready with a match, Roger—I'll open it."

Roger struck one as the sliding door rasped open. They stared in. The musty smell of leather came to them.

"Empty— —" breathed Ann. "Look under the seat."

Roger did so.

"Nothing there," he muttered.

"I'll shut this door, and we'll try the next compartment," said Joe.

The match went out, and Roger struck another.

"Here's the door— —"

Joe opened it. Three pairs of eyes stared in at an empty compartment.

"Another empty," muttered Joe. "Dashed queer— —"

"Queer? yes— —" choked Ann. "I know just how queer it is— —"

"Now don't start on that," said Joe harshly. "Try that switch, Roger— —"

Roger pressed the switch. It clicked, but no light came.

"Just as I thought," said Joe. "The lights in this carriage have all been put out of action."

"The next compartment," said Ann. "Oh, hurry. If what I think— —"

"Don't think," grunted Joe. "Here's the next compartment."

It was empty. They went on, carefully examining each compartment. They came to the end of the corridor. The women's lavatory compartment also was empty.

"I knew it— —" whispered Ann.

"Rot," said Joe. "It's pretty clear now."

"What is?" asked Roger.

"The man was knifed just before we boarded the train. Whoever killed him left the train as we got on it—got off on the other side."

"That's about it," agreed Roger.

"It isn't it, it isn't it," jerked out Ann. "I know what it is. Ever since we got on this train I have been aware of weird influences— —"

"Keep off that occult stuff, Ann," said Joe. "I'm going back to that compartment to have another look at that bag."

"No!" cried Ann frantically. "Don't do that— —"

"I'll be all right. You stay here with Roger."

"If you go—we all go— —"

"No need," Joe assured her.

Ann clutched at them both.

"Listen— —" she hissed.

Tense and taut they stood.

"I—I heard something," the girl whispered.

"What was it?"

"I—I don't know— something moving— —"

"Where?"

"It seemed to come from the compartment we were in."

"Wait here," said Joe. "Watch Ann, Roger. I'll be back."

They stood motionless as he walked away. Down the corridor went his footsteps. When his match flared they saw him staring into the end compartment. His face was distorted with astonishment, even from where they stood they could see his jaw had dropped. Then he called:

"Roger! Ann! Come quickly—quickly!"

They ran to him. He pointed into the compartment. Ann grasped convulsively at Roger, whose jaw, like Joe's, had sagged.

"Empty— —" cried Ann.

"Gone— —" gasped Roger.

The match burnt Joe's fingers as it went out. He fumbled for another. It seemed an age in that menacing darkness before the tiny flame spurted, an eternity in which came crowding apprehension, fear, horror. The unsteady light revealed every detail of the compartment, the stained seat, the worn leather, the dull woodwork, everything except that for which they looked.

"Stop the train — —" shrilled Ann. "For God's sake stop this train — —"

Joe stepped into the compartment, and reached up to smash the glass disc protecting the communication button. But they saw it had already been smashed.

The match went out.

Over Ann had swept a sudden, awful sense of inevitability. Nothing that had happened was the outcome of chance, no fortuitous circumstance had led them into this. This train, this carriage, themselves, the murdered man whose death and disappearance had almost stunned them, the rain-lashed night, this uncannily repetitive journey from Deep Valley, was no sheer coincidence. Here was design. Meaning. Purpose.

The silence of Joe and Roger, the rigid, unmoving posture of their bodies were more eloquent than words. Ann knew that through their minds were rioting similar thoughts to her own. She knew now that something, that something she had tried to define but which would not take shape in words, had come into their minds.

Like statues they all stood during those interminable seconds. Through a deep cutting thundered the train, the streaming rock walls crimson wet screens in the momentary glare of the furnace, the throbbing bogies thudding like the hammers of Titans defying the might of the Olympian gods, a last defiance before defeat and banishment to Tartarus.

As the train left the cutting Joe moved. A spell had been lifted. Gone was the red glare, returned was the lightless, sightless night. Roger's arm was round Ann. Joe said quietly:

"Into the next compartment."

Roger closed the door after them. Still without speaking they sat down. Speech seemed utterly futile. Ann sat at the corner window seat, her back to the engine, Roger sat next to her, Joe at the window opposite, facing the engine. Scarcely conscious that she had spoken, or had meant to speak Ann said:

"What do you make of this? Was I not right?"

Joe's shadow moved as he replied:

“One thing is obvious, there is someone beside ourselves in this carriage.”

“I did not mean that,” said Ann quickly.

“I know what you are implying,” said Joe, “but we can’t believe it. You are suggesting that, in some way, we are on the doomed train.”

“I am,” panted Ann. “I know it, I know it— —”

“That is . . . impossible.”

“No! It is not impossible. We are again making a journey we made once before— —”

“But, surely, Ann,” said Roger. “You don’t believe we three are the three persons who boarded the ill-fated train that night?”

“I know it,” said Ann. “They have been reincarnated in us. And through us they are revealing the reason and manner of their death.”

“But, Ann,” said Joe, “that’s utterly preposterous. The shock of this thing, the admitted resemblances, your predilection for the occult, have all caused you to imagine what is happening is a repetition of those unfortunate events.”

Ann’s voice was tremulous. Fight for control as she would, the conviction of the coming of imponderable things would not leave her.

“Do you think I am not sensible of all that?” she retorted. “I am. I am not a child, nor am I exercising the imagination of a child because we are in the dark. I am curiously perceptive . . . and receptive. Did I not say the moment I stepped into this train I was frightened of this dark interlude? God! I can only hope that you are right, and that I am wrong, for if I am not— —”

“If you are not?” they both echoed.

They were silent after that, there was no need to say more. If Ann were right then death again awaited them in that tunnel. Could she be right? Or had the shock of what she had seen in the end compartment created such a monstrous conception?

Joe braced himself. This flow of thought would not do. It made of terror a greater terror, and of horror a thing unimaginably terrible. Besides, this thing was physical. He said so.

“This won’t do. We’ve had enough of the psychic stuff, Ann. Drop it, or you’ll have us all dithering. This murder is physical. So is this train, so are we. The plain fact is that in this unlighted carriage was a murdered man. We saw him. Now he is gone. Someone carried him out of that compartment. That is all there is to it.”

“There was no one in the carriage when we searched it,” Ann reminded them.

“There must have been,” said Roger. “Dead men don’t walk. And that fellow was too solid for any spirit being to shift.”

Ann was conscious of a new fear, a state of feeling, of sensitivity she had never before experienced. Not only was every nerve in her body tingling, but each of the millions of brain cells was in a condition of unprecedented nervous stimulation and tension.

“Yes; there was someone in the carriage,” she said slowly. “And there will be others — —”

“For heaven’s sake, Ann—what others?” demanded Joe.

“Those who died in the tunnel — —”

“But Ann,” Roger protested. “We have seen they are not in the carriage — —”

She interrupted him.

“Did we see who carried the dead man away?” she asked.

“No,” admitted Joe. “But one swallow doesn’t make a summer, and whereas one man could reasonably have dodged us, a crowd couldn’t do so.”

“I hope I am wrong,” she muttered.

“What you suggest is impossible, Ann. Let’s think back.”

“No! I don’t want to think back. I don’t wish to remember what I saw. I don’t want to see those terrible eyes staring at me again. I shall never forget the look in them—hatred, amazement, defiance, shock. I’ve seen plays, I’ve seen films, but for the first time I have seen a murdered man whose life’s blood was a red apron on him. I’ll never forget that man’s eyes, that knife, those awful, gripping hands.”

“Cigarette?” muttered Roger. “Might help.”

She took one. Joe lit it. The light showed all three faces set in hard lines of tension. It also showed the rain streaming down the panes, the broken glass of the communication disc. While each lit a cigarette in the brief moment of illumination, their eyes were narrowed, alert and gleaming. Joe’s face, as homely and grim as a bull terrier’s even in normal moments, was now set like granite. Roger’s handsome features were drawn, his grey eyes restless and quick. Ann’s dark eyes, wide and frightened, were like the eyes of a doe aware of the crouching death. Her lovely face was without colour, the sensitive lips compressed to a thin line. When the light flickered out the

three cigarettes made moving red points in the darkness, fiery little imps dancing together to the rhythm of the bogies.

“Keep your mind off that side of it,” said Joe.

“Good advice,” agreed Roger.

“All right, I’ll try,” said Ann. “Do you think we ought to risk these cigarettes?”

Roger reassured her. “They won’t make any difference. Someone already knows we are here. I don’t doubt that whoever is responsible for the murder is cold with fear at this moment.”

“And all the more dangerous because of it,” said Ann. “But I still think I am right. I know I am. Joe said that all we had experienced so far was physical. But I say that that is not all. The other side cannot be denied or ignored. The spirit side. I believe we shall have revealed to us all the happenings of that night long ago. I believe the murdered man we saw was a man who was killed on that train so many years ago. I believe that all that we shall do before we come to that—that tunnel, was done by the three persons who boarded that train at Deep Valley that night.”

“Ann,” said Joe. “You can’t be serious, surely— —”

“I am serious, Joe. I was never so serious in my life, never so terrified. I believe it to be an amazing manifestation of spirit being, and because we were the three who were killed along with the others that night, we shall live again through those dreadful moments.”

“Then,” said Roger quietly. “You believe us to be the possessors now of the spirit beings that once belonged to those others?”

“Yes. I do. I am sure of it. If it were not— —”

The faint sound of a sliding door opening silenced her. Very still they sat, listening. Then Ann whispered:

“A door! Someone opened a door— —”

“I’ve had enough of this,” growled Joe. “I’ll see who it is— —”

“No!” Ann jerked out. “Don’t leave this compartment.”

Joe stood up.

“I’ll be back. You stay with Roger.”

“Joe,” Ann panted. “Please don’t go, don’t go— —”

Joe laughed grimly.

“I’m going to lay this ghost. The door that opened was that of the end compartment where we found the dead man. I’ll be back.”

He stepped out into the corridor, his shadow dimly visible against the corridor window. It turned towards the forward end of the carriage and vanished. Ann was trembling as Roger drew her arm through his. Together they stared at the scarcely seen night glow. Presently Ann whispered:

“There’s Joe again— —”

Roger nodded. They watched the shadow pass the compartment and go on towards the guard’s van. The hollow thudding of the bogies was maddening. Ann jumped to her feet.

“I won’t stay here, Roger—I can’t. Let’s join Joe.”

Roger restrained her.

“Here he is now,” he said.

The door opened and closed and Joe sank down on the seat. Ann also seated herself.

“See anything?” they both hurled at him.

“Nothing,” he replied tersely. “Not a sound, not a soul. Just darkness, emptiness.”

“You went right through the carriage again?” asked Ann.

Joe’s voice was level.

“No; just had a look in the end compartment, and in the men’s lavatory. Nothing there.”

Roger spoke quickly.

“But we saw you pass this compartment and go on towards the guard’s van— —”

“The guard’s van?” repeated Joe. “I didn’t pass this compartment— —”

“But we saw you,” said Ann positively. “We watched your shadow go past.”

“But I didn’t go past,” said Joe flatly.

“Then,” said Roger, “we watched someone else go past.”

“Impossible,” grunted Joe.

“But we did, we did,” insisted Ann.

Joe was stubborn.

“That couldn’t be. I left this compartment, looked in the end compartment, which is right next to us, and saw there was no one there. Then I looked in the men’s lavatory, no one there. To pass this compartment any one would have to pass me. No one did, no one could.”

Ann’s voice was unsteady.

“I tell you, both Roger and I saw it, Joe. We saw the shadow of a man go past. We both watched it.”

Roger backed her up.

“We did, Joe. Ann said to me, ‘there’s Joe again.’ We both saw the shadow of a man, or a woman, pass this compartment.”

Joe stretched out his long legs.

“How could that happen then? No one could have passed me. Confound it, I’m not that small.”

“Well,” snapped Ann, “it was done. However it was done, someone did it, and went towards the van— —”

“How?” asked Joe.

“I don’t know. But I can almost— —”

“Bosh!” snarled Joe. “You can’t see a spirit— —”

“Are you sure of that?” Ann retorted.

Roger spoke quietly.

“I can only suppose he heard you step out into the corridor, and the sound warned him. He was probably crouching somewhere watching you. Somehow you went past him, and he sneaked along towards the other end of the carriage, not thinking we could see him against the night glow.”

“Then,” said Joe, “he’s somewhere between us and the van right now.”

“Yes,” said Ann and Roger together.

Joe stood up again.

“Let’s get him— —”

“Joe,” said Ann sharply, “stay where you are— —”

Roger stood up.

“Joe’s right, Ann. We must find that man.”

Ann got shakily to her feet.

“All right,” she panted. “I’ll come. But I know we’re fools, fools to meddle— —”

They filed out into the corridor. Joe’s towering height and breadth of shoulder just about filled it. How any one or anything could have passed him none of them could imagine.

“Take each compartment separately again,” said Joe. “We’ll make sure this time.”

They did so, slowly, deliberately, thoroughly. The doors slid open, and then slid shut. Again they came to the end of the corridor. Each and every compartment was empty. Joe was terse.

“Well, I’m damned,” he said.

“Not a sign of any one,” breathed Ann. “I knew there wouldn’t be. I tell you this thing isn’t physical— —”

“What about the guard’s van?” suggested Roger. “From there the guard can stop the train.”

Joe tried the communication door between the corridor and the van.

“Locked,” he grunted. “Queer, infernally queer— —”

“Let’s get back— —” gasped Ann. “My head’s spinning, my heart feels as if it will burst— —”

“The women’s lavatory,” said Joe. “We didn’t look there.”

Roger struck a match and braced himself as Joe opened the door. Three pairs of straining eyes stared into the small space. Roger relaxed.

“Empty— —” he muttered.

Ann gave a quick exclamation as her hand came up to point.

“No; not quite. Look— —” she cried.

On the porcelain washbasin was a black, square object. Instantly Joe stepped in and reached for it. There was a puzzled look in his eyes as he turned to face the others.

“We’ve seen this before,” he informed them.

Ann shrank away from it, one hand slightly raised as though to keep from contact with it.

“The handbag— —” she breathed.

Roger nodded.

“The same one. It has no handle.”

Joe turned it over in his large hands.

“Yes, but how did it get here?”

The match went out. Ann spoke harshly.

“I tell you both again—this thing isn’t physical. No human being put that bag there— —”

“Ann, that’s sheer rot,” said Joe. “For the love of mike get off that psychic mule you’re riding.”

Ann shuddered.

“Well you tell us how it got here?” she retorted. “The last time we saw that bag it was clutched in a dead man’s hand, at the other end of the carriage.”

“The shadow!” exclaimed Roger. “The one we saw pass the compartment. I venture to suggest, Ann, that spirit beings don’t have shadows— —”

“You’re laughing at me— —”

“I’m not,” said Roger. “But, like Joe, I can’t accept occult phenomena as the cause of what is happening here.”

“You will . . . before long,” said Ann. “I don’t know what is to happen, but whatever does will convince you that we are the witnesses of pure psychic manifestation.”

“Then this bag would have to be of spirit stuff,” said Joe. “Well, it isn’t. It’s solid leather, and I can feel the smooth touch of it in my hands.”

“I know I am right,” said Ann. “Have you never in a vivid dream seen persons and things in all the solid reality of the day mind? I have. I have seen men and women and conversed with them. I have known their names. I have observed what they were wearing. I have been on trains and ships the reality of which was beyond question— —”

“But you admit those things were only dreams,” said Roger.

“I do. I merely want to show you, if I can, that it is not the eyes, not the ears, not the hands that make the physical things of the conscious world real — —”

“What is it then?” demanded Joe.

“One thing and one thing only—the mind. It is the mind, the brain, if you like, that sees, hears, touches, and tastes. Through the process of our evolution we have developed the physical side of our beings, the physical mind to serve daily our physical needs. But the mind is still capable of recognizing, seeing that other side, and in that manifestation revealing the persons who are spirit beings, together with the physical things of their lives.”

Joe grunted as only Joe could.

“Rhubarb,” he said brutally. “If I listen to you much longer I won’t know whether I’m here or not. Tell me this, Ann: did I or did I not see a murdered man?”

“I don’t think so. I believe we saw a man of other years who was murdered in those years. But you won’t believe me— —”

“For the sake of my sanity I’ll try not to,” Joe retorted. The wail of the siren came back to them. Ann held Roger’s arm more firmly.

“Let’s go to the compartment,” she said faintly. “My legs won’t hold me up much longer— —”

In silence they walked back to the second end compartment. Roger could tell Ann's nerves were in pieces by the way she trembled and breathed, and he was glad when at last she sat down and leaned back against the padded leather. Joe struck another match.

"Here's the bag," he said. He tossed it to Ann. "You examine it. More in your line. What's in it?"

Ann stared at it as it rested on her lap, and both men were struck by the extraordinary intensity of her gaze. They both thought she was about to refuse to touch it, but she took it in her hands, opened it, and looked at the contents. Slowly, very slowly, she examined each article.

"An ivory comb, a beautiful thing," she murmured. "Here is an old photo of a little child, a child with remarkably large dark eyes. A linen handkerchief. A bunch of small keys. A small pair of scissors. Some hairpins. Some loose revolver cartridges — —"

"Cartridges?" exclaimed Joe and Roger.

She held one up.

"See for yourselves . . ."

Joe examined it with interest.

"It's a revolver cartridge, all right, but I've never seen one like it before. Looks like something out of the Indian Mutiny."

"Anything else, Ann?" asked Roger.

"Nothing else. The bag is old and has been repaired more than once. Take it, I don't want to touch it again."

Joe took it and put it in his pocket.

"Why not?" he asked.

"That bag tells us more than this empty carriage."

Joe was deliberately sarcastic.

"Did you ever see a ghost with a handbag?" he jeered.

She watched him blow out the match.

"That bag," she told them quietly, "was bought in Bond Street, London, in the year 1894. That is a long time ago."

Both Joe and Roger were silent.

Joe was determined to ignore Ann's incredible suggestion. Secretly he was a little alarmed to know she took her own thesis so seriously. Spirit beings? Manifestations? Reincarnation? Dangerous stuff, terrifying against such a grim background as this. The beginning of it all, of course, could be found in

the car driver's story. Ann, who had a weakness for the weird and the inexplicable, had with a woman's lack of logic instantly constructed an elaborate and absurd resemblance between the present situation and the tragic happenings of that other black, wet night so long ago. It was an extraordinary instance of the power of suggestion, an unpleasant revelation of the weaknesses and workings of a mind influenced by sheer superstition masquerading in the mysterious garments of psychic manifestation. For such an intelligent woman as Ann to subscribe to such beliefs was inconceivable until one remembered that other highly intelligent minds honestly believed in the existence of spirit beings and their ability to make contact with the living world. And from the dawn of time there have been men and women who have sincerely believed in the fact and truth of the supernatural.

But, however Ann argued, Joe knew there was nothing supernatural about this train. They had walked into a dark, empty carriage, and had discovered a murdered man. They had searched the carriage, and while they were searching the dead man had been removed, proving that the carriage they thought was empty held at least one other person. Nothing supernatural about that, Joe reasoned. On the contrary, it was too grimly natural. Where murder is done are both guilt and motive. Someone had stabbed the man in the compartment, someone had removed him. Who? The black bag had belonged to someone, had been taken by someone from the end compartment to the lavatory at the other end of the dark carriage. Who? Someone had passed the compartment while he had been searching the end compartment and the men's lavatory. Who? Was that someone man or woman? The removal of the murdered man, the passing shadow of the unknown, the finding of the black bag were all mysterious enough, and at the moment beyond explanation, but they were certainly not supernatural as Ann suggested.

Joe listened to the lashing of the rain, the rattling of the windows, the pounding of the bogies. He could just make out the presence of Ann and Roger on the opposite seat. What were they thinking? Doubtless they, too, were racking their brains to account for what they had seen and experienced. Ann, perhaps, was waiting for what she felt to be inevitable, a further revelation in the dark sequence of psychic events. Roger would be going over it all, seeking a practical answer to a baffling but still practical problem.

Nevertheless, in fairness to Ann, there were strange facts associated with this train and this murder. It was on a similar train, back in the nineties, that similar events occurred. It had been a dark train, a train with only one carriage. The night had been another such as this night. Storm, darkness and death. Both trains had left Deep Valley at dark. There had been trouble on

both trains. But, to Joe's secret relief and satisfaction, there were no people in this carriage, there had been in the other one. He would point this fact out to Ann presently. She had said, of course, that the people would come into the carriage to synchronize with the events of the past. That in itself was too childish, only the state of Ann's nerves could explain such a statement. No one could come into this carriage while it was travelling — —

Then a doubt as to that crept into Joe's mind. Someone had entered the carriage while it was travelling, for it had definitely been empty while he, Ann and Roger had been searching it. There could be no doubt about that. Joe scowled at the flooded window. Someone had come into the carriage; someone had taken away the dead man; someone had passed the compartment; someone had left the black bag in the women's lavatory.

But where was this someone? Where was the dead man? Why had the dead man grasped this black bag so tightly, so despairingly? What was the secret of the black bag? Had he wrenched it from a man, or from a woman? A woman? A woman had owned the bag, a woman probably still owned it, but what woman? And where was she? Could she have killed the man? Could it have been a woman whose shadow passed the compartment? Could a woman carry away the murdered man? Impossible. Could there then be a man and a woman in the carriage? No. Unless they had the power to render themselves invisible. Yet a man's strength was required to remove the body, and a woman's presence was indicated by the black bag. Joe gave it up for the moment.

"Got me beat," he informed the others. "What's more, we can't call for help, can't stop the train, can't even get to the guard."

"I told you," said Ann, "that anything we may attempt to do won't matter. Something here is working itself out as it did once before. You don't believe that, do you?"

"No," snarled Joe. "Not even if the damned handbag is dated 1894."

Roger spoke.

"If we could only see someone, or catch the sound of voices. All we have seen so far is the murdered man, the bag, and the shadow passing this door. We have heard nothing."

Ann corrected him.

"I heard the sound of a door sliding open, you will remember."

"That could have been a sound you thought was a door sliding open," objected Joe. "Why are these lights out of order, why is the communication system smashed?"

"Because," said Ann calmly, "they were like this on that other train — —"

“Ann,” said Joe warmly, “you’re being a damn fool — —”

“Joe!”

“Oh, all right. Sorry. But tread on that confounded psychic jitterbug. The thing will bite us all presently. There are things here we don’t understand, things we can’t yet explain; but for heaven’s sake don’t let’s become like three kids frightened of ghosts just because we’re in the dark both literally and metaphorically.”

“Joe,” said Ann evenly, “*you’re* being a damn fool.”

Joe gasped.

“What?”

Before Ann could reply Roger leaned forward.

“Quiet — —” he said tensely. “I heard something then.”

They listened. All they heard was the rain on the panes, the wheels on the rails, the rattling and creaking of the carriage. Roger whispered:

“I could have sworn I heard footsteps near our door — —”

Ann gave a start.

“Look — at the door — —” she hissed.

Joe nodded and rose to his feet.

“I see it,” he muttered. “Someone is listening to our conversation — —”

“Quiet, Ann,” warned Roger. “Ready, Joe?”

“Yes,” said Joe. “Now, both together — —”

Back went the door with a crash. From a pace along the black corridor came a familiar grunt.

“Uhuh! So you don’t respect reg’lations, eh?”

“The guard,” panted Ann.

Two matches flared together. In the light they saw the guard, uniformed, thick-set, powerful. Two staring little dark eyes watched them unwinkingly from under the peak of the cap. A face that is bearded is unusual these times, and the pointed black beard was as startling as the cunning gleam in the man’s dark eyes.

“What do you want?” growled Joe.

“Tell him about the — —”

“Quiet, Ann,” warned Roger. “Joe’s doing the talking.”

The guard was taking stock of them in the matchlight. Joe asked again:

“What do you want?”

The man’s reply almost paralysed them:

“Miss Francis, that’s the lady in the third compartment, reported she’s lost her ’andbag. She asked me to find it.”

Joe’s voice seemed a little unsteady.

“Are you trying to tell us there’s a woman in the third compartment?”

The guard grunted again. Roger lit another match.

“Uhuh! Miss Francis— —”

Ann interrupted wildly.

“There’s no one there, there’s no woman in the third compartment— —”

The guard blinked at her.

“She was there a moment ago, Miss. Just asked me to look for ’er bag as I come through past ’er compartment.”

“But we’ve searched this damned carriage twice now, and there was no sign of any woman—or any one else,” said Joe.

The guard shrugged.

“Sorry, sir. I ’ate to contradict a gent, but I just spoke with Miss Francis. ’Ave you seen the bag?”

“No.”

“Do you mean this compartment next to us?” asked Roger.

“No; the other end, sir. Third compartment from the van end,” the guard replied. “Well, I’ll be gettin’ back to the van— —”

“Just a moment, guard,” said Joe. “What happened to the lights and the communication?”

A faint smile touched the bearded lips and then vanished.

“Dunno, sir. Been done some time. I ’ope you gents an’ the lady ain’t frightened of the dark.”

“I don’t think we are,” retorted Joe.

The man turned away.

“Well, can’t ’elp it about the lights, gents. Or the communication. You shouldn’t ’ave broke reg’lations. Always trouble when you break reg’lations. G’night.”

He lurched down the swaying corridor. They watched him until the match burnt out. The corridor door slammed.

“He didn’t stop at the third compartment,” said Ann.

“Why should he? No one there— —”

“I wonder— —”

“Dammit all, Ann, we know there’s no one in that compartment. We’ve searched it twice, haven’t we?”

Ann was stubborn.

“He said he’d just spoken with a Miss Francis, didn’t he?”

“He did,” said Roger. “That fellow knows something.”

“So do I,” retorted Ann. “Did you see the beard that man wore?”

“What of it?” demanded Joe.

“Do men wear beards like that . . . to-day?”

“There you go again,” growled Joe. “Some still do.”

“Why didn’t you tell him about the murdered man?” asked Ann.

“Why didn’t he mention the dead man to us?” countered Joe. “I think the guard knows all about it— —”

“And so, probably, does Miss Francis— —”

“Listen, Ann— —”

Ann’s voice was edged with fear again.

“So you still don’t believe there is a Miss Francis?”

Joe almost snorted.

“I know there’s no Miss Francis— —”

“Joe, you don’t want to believe there is a woman in that compartment. It would support my absurd thesis, wouldn’t it?”

“Ann,” said Joe patiently. “We looked in that compartment twice. Thoroughly. There was no woman there. There is none there now. There couldn’t be.”

“You heard what the guard said. He said a Miss Francis, of the third compartment, had lost her bag. Why don’t you look?”

“Ann,” said Roger. “Do you think there is a woman in that compartment?”

“I do. I told you I believe that each of the people who died that night will, at the right moment, reveal himself or herself to us.”

“Then the guard must be one of them?” said Joe.

“Men don’t wear beards like that any more, Joe— —”

Joe shrugged. If Ann would persist in making a fool of herself it was not his fault. There was no woman in the third compartment for the simple reason there could not be, Ann or no Ann, guard or no guard.

“Come on, then,” he said gruffly. “I’m half inclined to think the guard killed that man— —”

“But guards don’t carry women’s handbags round with them,” said Ann.

They walked along the corridor, the darkness like a thick, black blanket round them. Twice as the train lurched Ann supported herself against the woodwork. Her limbs were cold, her hands like ice. At the door of the third compartment they paused. Ann heard Joe breathing heavily as he stared in through the glass of the door. Ann and Roger peered through. Roger muttered something unintelligible. Ann gave a peculiar little cry. Dark against a corner window was a shadow. They did not move. It did not move.

“You . . . see?” whispered Ann.

“Hell— —” rasped Joe. “A match, Roger— —”

He opened the door as Roger’s match flared to reveal a woman sitting there. Ann clutched at Joe, whose ugly face was grim and set. The voice of the woman seated by the window was as level as her eyes, and as cold.

“You want somebody?” she murmured.

Joe drew in a mighty breath.

“Are you Miss Francis?” he asked.

The eyes of the woman did not move, her voice did not alter.

“Yes. What do you want?”

Joe took the black bag from his pocket.

“Is this yours?” he asked curtly.

The woman stared at it, then up over the flame of the match to Joe’s narrowed eyes.

“No,” she said calmly. “That is not my bag.”

“Good heavens,” muttered Ann.

She had been observing Miss Francis. The amber-brown eyes were magnetic, reflecting hard little points of light. Long hair coiled into a coiffure of other days was held in place by two tortoise-shell pins. Miss Francis, Ann saw at once, was about thirty years of age, slender, with white, delicate hands. Her features were composed, the face a little long, the chin determined, the mouth pleasant, the lips parting to reveal good teeth. But the reason for Ann’s astonishment and involuntary exclamation were the clothes Miss Francis was wearing. On the lap of a full skirt of black satin was an enormous fur muff. The skirt itself went down to the sharp points of black shoes. A jacket of white satin lined with fur and piped with scarlet was in striking contrast. Ann almost gaped as she stared at what was so obviously a fashion of the nineties. It was fascinating, but it also had a quality that chilled the blood. Neither Miss Francis nor her clothes were modern.

Roger looked at the bag as Miss Francis coolly denied ownership.

“You are sure that this is not your bag?” he asked.

“I am quite sure. I told the guard I had lost my bag, but that is not it.”

Ann spoke.

“Why are you here . . . alone? Aren’t you afraid?”

The amber-brown eyes widened. A faint smile touched the still lips. Miss Francis was amused.

“Afraid? Of what?” she asked.

“Then you don’t know about — —”

Miss Francis shrugged.

“Oh, they are always quarrelling. Take no notice of them. Do you mind shutting the door? And thank you for coming to see if that bag was mine. Good night.”

The amber-brown eyes were watching them, narrowing in the dying light of the match. As it went out Ann whispered:

“Good night.”

Joe grunted:

“Sorry if we disturbed you. Good night.”

Roger said nothing as the door closed behind him. Without speaking they returned to their compartment. Joe carefully shut the door and then sat down.

“Well?” he demanded.

“We seem to be back in the nineties,” said Roger slowly.

Joe passed cigarettes across to them. Roger lit Ann’s, Joe lit his own. Ann inhaled before speaking.

“So . . . there *was* a woman in the third compartment. I knew there would be. And even Roger noticed her clothes.”

“But, Ann,” protested Joe. “It is impossible — —”

Ann’s tone was dry, her voice tired.

“Then why did she say ‘take no notice of them, they are always quarrelling?’ Miss Francis doesn’t think she is alone on this train, furthermore she thinks we are the three who boarded the train that night at Deep Valley. Now do you believe what I believe?”

“No,” said Joe flatly. “I don’t. I admit the handbag was purchased in Bond Street in the nineties. I admit the guard has a beard of that period. I admit that Miss Francis is wearing clothes of those days, but I won’t admit these people or these things are psychic manifestations. It’s too . . . impossible. What do you say, Roger?”

“I?” said Roger thoughtfully. “Frankly, I’m beginning to wonder. So many things tally with Ann’s construction that, as I have just said, I am beginning to wonder— —”

“But,” said Joe in a tone of exasperation, “there is murder here we know, and mystery, I grant you. Some pretty slick work between Miss Francis and the guard, I should say. But that doesn’t make this carriage, this train, these people, or us supernatural.”

“I’m not suggesting we are supernatural, Joe,” said Ann. “We’re not. We’re Joe Harper, Ann Harper, and Roger Balcombe. But we are the instruments of spirit projection, spirit return, reincarnation, if you like, and we were, on that night, the three persons who boarded this train— —”

“That train, you mean— —”

“No; this train. A natural train did not come to Deep Valley while we waited. This one did, and only we three could have boarded it.”

Joe ran his hand through his hair, and cold though the night air was, found on his brow tiny beads of moisture.

“Then this is a spirit train, these people are supernatural, we are the reincarnation of the three who were killed on the physical train that night, and for some reason we are to experience and witness all that happened that fatal night. Furthermore, we shall, when we come to the third tunnel— —”

“What will happen then I don’t know,” said Ann. “But I know— —”

“Listen, Ann. For heaven’s sake let’s get this straight. This isn’t any spirit train, these people aren’t spirit beings— —”

Ann’s cigarette moved.

“Who removed the murdered man?” she asked.

“I’d say the guard,” retorted Joe. “We didn’t think of him. He could sneak in here from the van, dodge us, return to the van locking the door after him.”

“Where did Miss Francis come from?”

“Eh?”

“I asked you,” Ann said calmly, “where did Miss Francis come from?”

“Couldn’t she be in with the guard? She may have been in the van. Perhaps she and the guard between them took the dead man to the van. How they could do so and get past us unseen I don’t know. But it’s easier to believe than all this spirit humbug— —”

“Then why,” asked Ann tonelessly, “have we discovered a handbag that was fashionable in the nineties, the time of the fatal train smash? Why have we discovered the guard wears a beard of that time and fashion? Why, in

what we proved to be an absolutely empty carriage, except for the dead man, have we discovered now a woman also dressed in the fashion of the nineties? Why does she infer there are other people in this carriage, people who are always quarrelling?"

"I don't know," answered Joe. "But there are no other people— —"

"A few minutes ago there was no Miss Francis."

"That's true enough," said Roger. "It's confoundedly queer, to say the least of it."

Joe made a quick movement.

"Tell me! The clothes of the dead man? Were they also in the fashion of the nineties?"

"They were," said Ann. "I thought at the time what appeared to be a normal sac suit was, although of good material, of an odd cut. Furthermore, the dead man's hair, I remember now, came well down the cheekbones in the old fashion of the side-lever. The dead man was of the nineties, as are the guard, the bag, Miss Francis, and this train."

"It certainly is damned queer," admitted Joe. "And I admit things have happened that support what you say, but it is too fantastic, Ann— —"

Roger's cigarette made a quick red arc.

"Listen— —" he muttered. "Listen— —"

Like figures cut from stone they sat, the red points of their cigarettes unmoving. Above them, along the rain-lashed roof, something was being dragged, something ponderous and heavy, very slowly. In the darkness Ann, Joe and Roger stared up at the black roof. They did not move, they did not speak. The sound went on towards the guard's van, the dragging and scraping slowly fading away, leaving now only the sounds of heavy breathing in the compartment, and the clatter of the slowly climbing train.

Out went the cigarettes, quick feet crushing the glowing tips to ashes. Moving as one person Ann, Joe and Roger stared through the wet panes, Joe by himself, Ann and Roger close together. Vague in the black night the tall tree trunks glided past, and only those very close to the track could be seen. All else was a world of darkness and unseen rain. Why they had peered so intently through the windows they did not know. The movement had been involuntary, the cause of it inexplicable. As they drew back from the glass Ann spoke.

"That, I think, explains itself— —"

Joe's voice was as hoarse as the croak of a Deep Valley frog.

“Dragging him along the roof. So they didn’t pass us in the corridor. Hear it Roger?”

Roger nodded. He was staring up at the roof again.

“Working overtime— —” he muttered.

“And overhead,” said Ann.

“And how!” added Joe. “But the nerve of them— —”

“They need nerve,” said Roger. “They took him towards the guard’s van — —”

A cool voice from the door asked quietly:

“Took whom?”

Ann almost screamed. None of them had heard the door open. Joe half rose to his feet, his body crouched as though ready to spring. Roger spoke as he whirled.

“Miss Francis?”

“Why, yes— —”

Ann fought for control. Joe slowly sat down. Roger said quietly:

“Won’t you come in? The lights, as you know, are useless.” To the others he said: “It is the lady of the amber eyes we met a little while ago in unusual circumstances— —”

“May I sit down?” asked the visitor.

“What do you want?” panted Ann.

Miss Francis sat down next to Joe.

“You asked me if I were nervous. I wasn’t then. I am now.”

“Oh,” said Ann.

“Of course, if I am intruding, I will go— —”

Joe answered that.

“Not at all, Miss Francis. Tell us all about it.”

On a sharper note the woman asked:

“All about what?”

Joe laughed. It was an incongruous, horrible sound. Ann shivered. Roger asked quickly:

“What made you nervous?”

“I don’t know,” was the answer. “Until you came to my compartment I hadn’t thought of being nervous, but immediately you left me alone there in the darkness . . . it was different.”

This time Roger laughed shortly. Ann almost writhed. Laughter? Surely it must be true that whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.

“Perhaps it is just . . . the darkness,” Roger said.

“And the rain,” added Joe. “By the way, we have not introduced ourselves. My sister, Ann Harper, myself, Joe Harper, and my sister’s handsome friend, Roger Balcombe.”

“I am Mary Francis,” the woman told them. “You are English, Mr Balcombe?”

“Almost,” said Roger. “I have been there. And you?”

Miss Francis’s voice was almost wistful, a hint of nostalgia creeping into the tone.

“Tunbridge Wells, Mr Balcombe— —”

“A charming spot,” Roger agreed. “The dear old common, and the Pantiles. They are still there, of course?”

“They were when I left,” was the reply.

Roger’s next remark almost stunned Ann.

“You know, Miss Francis, it isn’t cricket, it isn’t English to stab a man. Or is it?”

There was a brief silence. Ann felt the gooseflesh rising. Joe moved his feet. Miss Francis seemed to be perplexed.

“To stab a man, Mr Balcombe? I don’t understand you.”

“Of course not,” said Roger smoothly. “Let it pass— —”

“Gladly. It’s rather a grim subject for a jest, Mr Balcombe. And this dark carriage, and the rain, and your inference, do not make it any more appealing.”

“Naturally not,” Roger admitted. “But you know how it is. Perhaps this ghoulish darkness, this swaying and clatter, the drip and splash of the rain, the ruddy light that looks like blood when the fire-box opens—all this in a way suggests murder— —”

Ann clamped her teeth together to stop them from chattering. Joe lifted his arm and set his fingers drumming against the pane.

“Murder— —?” whispered Miss Francis.

“Murder,” repeated Roger. “Don’t you agree with me?”

The voice of the visitor suddenly became harsh and infinitely cold.

“I think I shall return to my compartment, if you don’t mind.” She stood up. “Oh, and while I think of it! That black bag—the one you thought was mine— —”

“Yes,” said Joe. “I still have it.”

“I forgot to tell you,” Miss Francis went on, “I remembered after you had left to whom the bag belongs— —”

“Yes?” said Joe eagerly.

A little pause and then:

“It belongs to the woman in the end compartment, the one next to yours. Madame Geraldine Kelaher— —”

Like a clap three voices asked:

“Who?”

Ann was already on her feet gasping:

“Madame Geraldine Kelaher? Madame Geraldine Kelaher?”

“Yes. If you will give it to me, I shall return it to her.”

“I’ll give it to her,” said Joe grimly. “Just a friendly question, Miss Francis. Where were you when we searched the carriage? We looked through each compartment twice. There was no sign of you. Do you mind telling us?”

“I think,” said Miss Francis coldly, “I would rather not. Thank you for your company. You are sure you would rather give Madame Kelaher her bag yourself?”

“Quite sure.”

“Then . . . good night.”

“Good night,” came from Ann, Joe and Roger.

But Miss Francis sat down abruptly as the guard’s voice came from the door.

“Uhuh! Everything all right, folks?”

Joe’s match flared instantly to show the guard staring down at Miss Francis. She was returning the look with narrowed, hard eyes. Roger, Ann and Joe saw at once that the guard’s uniform was wet.

“Been out in the rain, guard?” asked Joe.

The man’s sharp little eyes turned to him.

“Yes. Been up on the roof. Bad night,” he said slowly.

“The roof?” cried Ann. “The roof?”

“Uhuh! Yes, miss. Thought I might do something about the lights for you — —”

“But the cables go under the roof, not over it,” Joe reminded him.

The guard looked quickly at Miss Francis.

“Yes. I found that out. You folks shouldn’t ’ave come on this train. Agen reg’lations. Always trouble when you break reg’lations. G’night.”

He turned away as the match went out.

“Good night,” said Miss Francis again. “I’ll leave you all to discuss the suitability of such a night as this—for murder.”

Miss Francis was breathing heavily as she left the compartment. It could be heard. Roger shut the door as Ann sank weakly to the seat.

“Madame Geraldine Kelaher— —” she said huskily. “I told you—I told you— —”

“Stop repeating yourself like a damned parrot,” growled Joe. “You told us, now Miss Francis has told us. That surely was a psychic jolt in the plexus. Madame Geraldine Kelaher. This bag belongs to her, and she was killed on that train back in the nineties. I pass.”

“What is more,” said Roger, “Miss Francis said Madame Kelaher was the woman in the end compartment—the one next to ours. There is no woman in that compartment— —”

“We said that when the guard told us about Miss Francis,” said Joe gloomily. “She turned up.”

“She wouldn’t say where she was when we searched the carriage,” said Roger.

“Why should she?” demanded Ann. “She probably thought Joe was merely being impertinent.”

“Don’t see that,” retorted Joe. “She wasn’t in the lavatory; we looked in there twice. Where the hell did she come from?”

“Where has Madame Kelaher come from?” said Ann.

“Well, you tell us. You seem to be the authority on all this queer, unearthly racket.”

“I have already told you,” said Ann.

“Well, if you’re right,” said Joe, “we’re getting off this train of death and darkness before it gets to the third tunnel, even if we all jump off.”

“I’ll tell you what would happen if we did that,” said Ann.

“What?” asked the two men.

“We’d be killed. What is more, we’d be found on the line back at Deep Valley Siding platform— —”

“Deep Valley Siding platform?” echoed Joe and Roger.

“Yes; run down by the train we were waiting for.”

“Well,” said Joe slowly, “I’d like to know how you figure that out.”

“I’m not figuring anything out, Joe. I told you Madame Kelaher was on this train. You heard what Miss Francis said. I didn’t figure that out. I knew, and I don’t know why, or how, unless there is that in me, the quality or power that is the prerogative of the medium.”

“It may be so,” muttered Roger. “Coincidence here has ceased to be astounding and has become co-indication. It looks as though we have walked into the fourth dimension, the entity beyond limitations of ordinary existence.”

“How?” snarled Joe.

“Perhaps,” replied Roger, “because of Ann’s psychic mind, and perhaps because we were, as she suggests, the three persons who boarded the doomed train that night. I say perhaps. More than that I don’t know.”

“Nor do I know,” said Ann. “I can only state what I feel. You will remember I mentioned it to you the moment we were in this carriage.”

“I remember that,” said Joe. “But I still think you are both giving way to the twin influences of darkness and suggestion. If this infernal carriage were lighted— —”

“Ah, yes—if it were lighted,” murmured Ann. “But if that were so we’d be on a different train. You spoke of influences. Didn’t you hear Miss Francis say the bag belonged to Madame Kelaher?”

“Bah!” grunted Joe. “We’re going round in a circle and getting nowhere. Let’s forget Madame Kelaher. Both Miss Francis and the guard are in this — —”

“Having seen them we know it,” said Ann.

“Wait a minute, wait a minute. Let’s give the occult a miss and try to work it out by sane reasoning. Both that guard and the woman Francis are linked with this murder—the guard wouldn’t get himself wet through merely on our account. And we heard something heavy being dragged along the carriage roof— —”

“Joe may be right there,” said Roger. “The guard admitted having been up on the roof, and we’ve a pretty shrewd idea what was dragged along it.”

Joe went on:

“There must be some way of untangling all this— —”

“All this?” interrupted Ann. “I believe the drama of this, this fourth dimension, to use Roger’s apt definition, is only just beginning to unfold.”

“Maybe,” said Joe. “But let’s analyse it as far as it has gone. We did see a murdered man, didn’t we?”

“Yes.”

“When we first saw the black bag it was in the dead man’s hand, wasn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“When we searched the carriage it was empty, wasn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“When we searched the carriage again it was still empty, but the black bag we found in the far end lavatory, didn’t we?”

“Yes.”

“Right,” said Joe. “Then out of nowhere comes the guard. He wanted that bag, he was searching for it. Miss Francis wanted it. They still want it. I believe she came here a moment ago to get it, and the guard was waiting for her—after he’d dragged the dead man to the van.”

“But,” objected Ann, “why didn’t Miss Francis claim the bag when we went to her compartment?”

“Too clever. We found the bag in the lavatory, but we first saw it in a murdered man’s hand. If Miss Francis claimed the bag she would admit association with the murder through the bag. Isn’t that so?”

“That is so,” agreed Roger. “But to prove your construction we’ll have to prove the dead man is in the van. Even if he is it doesn’t prove that the guard dragged him there although the man’s clothes are wet, and although he admitted being on the roof.”

“I admit that,” said Joe. “But we’ll be getting somewhere if we can trace the murdered man. In any case I’m pretty sore at having that fellow lifted out of this carriage under our very noses. Makes us look like suckers. Shall we venture?”

“To the van?” faltered Ann.

“Yes.”

“Suits me,” said Roger.

“Well, if you both go I’m not staying here,” said Ann. “Those sounds certainly went towards the van.”

“Come on,” said Joe. “Talk proves nothing. But stick together. No separating.”

They went out into the swaying corridor, their senses alert for sound or movement beyond that of the creaking carriage. As their own door closed they heard the main corridor door at the van end slam loudly. Ann’s fingers were tight on Roger’s arm as they stood listening.

“Someone . . . just left this carriage,” she muttered.

“The guard or Miss Francis,” whispered Roger.

Joe held up a warning arm.

“Another queer move,” they heard him say. “Probably heard our door open— —”

“Better hurry,” advised Roger.

Joe went on, Ann next, then Roger. In the darkness it seemed as though they were trembling in the funnel of some monstrous vortex. Ann was clutching Roger almost hysterically. None of them knew what the next step would reveal, all of them knew there was undoubted menace in this baffling darkness. Joe was therefore cautious, and they paused instantly when he stopped abruptly.

“Don’t move,” he flung over his shoulder. “Strike a match, Roger— quick!”

Roger did so. Weirdly in the feeble light the corridor took shape. But their eyes instantly stared at the floor. Lying just outside the door of her compartment was Miss Francis.

“Quick!” rapped out Joe.

“Oh, good heavens,” said Ann.

Joe was already on one knee beside the woman.

“Just in time,” he muttered. “In another minute she would have been strangled— —”

“Strangled!” echoed Roger.

Ann stood absolutely still, her hands by her side, her breathing nervous and quick. But as her dark eyes watched Miss Francis they had in them something ranging far beyond the woman, far beyond the jolting carriage, an impression of limitless vision, a strange light of prescience.

“Yes,” she said quietly, “it is unfolding, this tragedy of the doomed train, this drama of ourselves in the fourth dimension.”

Joe placed Miss Francis on the seat in their compartment. She was rapidly recovering, and presently her brown eyes turned from side to side before staring up at those looking down at her.

“Close,” said Roger, “but you’re all right now, Miss Francis.”

Miss Francis raised one hand to her throat.

“Take it easy,” said Joe. “Another sip of water, Ann— —”

Miss Francis shook her head and slowly sat up. Joe seated himself beside her as the match went out.

“Don’t strike another match,” Miss Francis said huskily. “I think I prefer the darkness.”

“Who attacked you?” asked Ann.

The shadow that was Miss Francis moved a little.

“I don’t know,” she replied. “You must have carried me to your compartment— —”

“Yes, I carried you here,” said Joe. “Didn’t you see or hear anything, or any one?”

“No. I saw no one. I—I must have fainted, I think. The next thing I remember is—well, is being here.”

“We heard the corridor door shut as we left this compartment,” said Ann. “Surely you have some recollection of being attacked?”

Miss Francis was silent for a moment, then:

“Attacked? I fear I don’t know what you mean— —”

“Someone went out of this carriage towards the van,” Ann insisted.

“I—I don’t remember it, Miss Harper.”

“Let’s get the guard,” said Joe.

Roger spoke.

“As a matter of fact Miss Francis, we were on our way to the guard’s van when we found you,” he told her. “I suggest— —”

“What?” demanded Ann and Joe.

“That we four stick together, and that we all go to the guard’s van— —”

Miss Francis stood up, swaying a little as the carriage lurched.

“That is very kind of you, Mr Balcombe, but I really can’t be a nuisance to you any longer. I don’t think any one attacked me— —”

Ann was incredulous.

“No one attacked you?” she asked.

“No. I often have these turns. I probably collapsed just as I was going into my compartment. But I’ll be all right now. Thank you all very much.”

“But aren’t you afraid?” asked Ann.

“Afraid? There is nothing to be afraid of, is there?”

“But . . . the murderer!” Ann said.

“Murderer?” repeated Miss Francis.

Roger said quickly:

“Miss Harper thinks someone tried to harm you, Miss Francis. Miss Harper is highly imaginative, you know.”

“Oh! Yes. I suppose it . . . looks like that,” said Miss Francis slowly. “But that would be just a little too absurd, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, wouldn’t it,” said Ann thoughtfully.

Miss Francis moved to the door.

“Again good night, and thank you.”

“Good night.”

They listened to her footsteps, heard her door open and shut, and then Ann turned to Roger.

“Highly imaginative, am I?” she asked indignantly. “You’ll find, as this train goes on, Roger Balcombe, and you also John Joseph Harper, that anything I might imagine will pale beside the reality of this night’s events. You surely don’t believe, either of you, that Miss Francis fainted? Whatever happened she didn’t faint. I was watching those strange, amber-brown eyes of hers, and they were conscious of all we were doing and saying all the time. She won’t talk, that’s all.”

“We have already gathered that, little one,” said Joe dryly. “What we’d like to know is why won’t she talk?”

“Yes,” muttered Roger. “Why won’t she? Nevertheless, I think she’s very charming— —”

Ann’s reaction to that came like lightning.

“Oh, indeed! Miss Francis is charming, is she— —”

“Now, now, old girl— —”

Joe cut in.

“Don’t be a jealous little idiot, Ann. According to you Miss Francis is some kind of a spirit being. That being so she wouldn’t be any use either to Roger or to me. Don’t be a little fathead and try to have it both ways. If Miss Francis is a woman, then all you have been saying is so much nonsense. If she’s a comeback, as you suggest, what’s the harm in Roger saying she is charming. I agree with him.”

“Well,” gasped Ann. “Isn’t that like a man, and a very stupid one at that — —”

“Now don’t get sore and rattled,” growled Joe. “I’m beginning to like Miss Francis a lot. I’ll take a chance on her being a visible invisibility. She’s a mighty attractive and well-bred woman, and I repeat, with humour touching her lips, and the suggestion of a naughty gleam in her amber-brown eyes. It’s a damn shame there’s been a murder— —”

“Oh,” said Ann, very sarcastically, “she’s cast a spell over you too, has she? I think she’s a very dangerous woman.”

“Bunkum!” snarled Joe. “Why is it every woman thinks every other woman is dangerous?”

“They ought to know,” retorted Ann. “Listen, Roger Balcombe. The first time that woman came in here you hinted she had stabbed that man. Both of you suggested she is in with the guard. Now, just because my fatuous brother has held her in his arms, and because you have had your face close to hers, she’s a charming woman with humour on her lips and a naughty gleam in her eye.”

“That’s Joe’s rhapsody,” protested Roger.

“Subside, Ann. Don’t become hysterical and pitch into Roger,” said Joe.

“Oh, don’t consider me,” panted Ann. “Nobody tried to strangle me — —”

“Then you’re in luck,” Joe retorted. “Don’t brag about it. One thing is certain—there’s a killer on this train. We shouldn’t have allowed Miss Francis to go to her compartment alone. We’re going there right now — —”

“Animal,” sneered Ann.

“Well if I am I like it,” was the reply.

“What have you got against her?” demanded Roger.

Ann shrugged.

“I think she’s clever, and that she’s a man-magnet — —”

“She’s a damned interesting ghost,” said Joe. “I wonder why she wears those clothes?”

“You’ll find that out,” said Ann curtly.

“Do me,” grunted Joe.

Ann jumped to her feet.

“In just one moment I’ll scream,” she hissed at them, “scream my head off. This darkness, this unceasing rain, the rattle, rattle, rattle of the wheels—murder, amber-eyed man-grabbers, a stupid relation and a dithering sweetheart—I tell you I’ll . . . scream!”

“Cigarette?” suggested Roger. “Might help.”

Ann took one.

“Sorry,” she panted. “I’m a bit on edge — —”

Joe lit the cigarette for her.

“We all are, kid,” he said.

“Let’s see if she’s all right,” said Ann wearily. “After all, I—I don’t want her on my conscience — —”

Joe led the way along the corridor.

“Keep smoking,” he told Ann. “It won’t matter.”

The door of Miss Francis’s compartment was open.

“She’s not here,” said Joe. “Of course she may be—h’m, strike a match, Roger— —”

The lavatory door also was open.

“H’m,” said Joe again.

“The guard’s van, I think,” said Roger.

“Yes,” said Joe grimly. “The guard’s van. We may . . . see something.”

Ann stamped on her cigarette.

“She may be there— —”

But the corridor door opening into the van was locked.

“We’re not invited,” muttered Joe. “We are, I think, in the way of becoming a nuisance to certain people— —”

“Don’t lose that bag, Joe,” said Roger.

Joe started and clutched at his side pocket.

“The bag?” he jerked out. “Why—it’s gone— —”

Ann laughed mockingly.

“I wondered. It proves two things— —”

“What does it prove?” asked Roger.

Ann’s tone was cutting.

“That Miss Francis wasn’t strangled, or even nearly strangled, and that the whole affair was a cleverly planned trick to get near susceptible brother Joe. The charming girl with the humour on her lips and the naughty gleam in her eyes coolly picked Joe’s pocket as he carried her into the compartment. What did you say Joe?”

“Nothing,” grunted Joe.

Ann would have said more had not the pressure of Roger’s hand stopped her.

“Listen,” he said.

Above them was the sound of footsteps, as though someone were walking cautiously along the treacherous wet roof.

“I hear it,” said Ann.

“From the van, and going towards the trucks end,” said Joe. “The guard again, I presume— —”

“Must be,” agreed Roger. “Miss Francis wouldn’t go up there. They know we can hear those footsteps. I think they want us to follow them— —”

“But why?” asked Ann.

“That I can’t say. Perhaps to keep us away from this end.”

They were silent, listening. The dark carriage was rocking from side to side with force sufficient to cause them to steady themselves against the woodwork. Above the creak of straining timbers and the metallic rattle of the wheels could be heard the regular coughing of the exhaust. Ann could imagine the powerful, glistening rods relentlessly forcing around the giant wheels. She wondered what the driver peering out of his steel window into the blackness ahead would do if he knew that behind him was murder in the corridor car. Or the fireman whose clanging shovel fed the roaring furnace when the pressure faltered.

Joe’s voice cut into her thoughts.

“Get into the lavatory, quick!” he rasped.

They scrambled in, and he held the door ajar. Almost at once the corridor door opened with a rush of wind and a roar of metallic thunder. A woman’s voice, muffled slightly by the noise of the train, said:

“What do they know? Who are these people?”

The guard’s voice answered:

“Uhuh! One says he’s a newspaper feller. Got on at Deep Valley Siding in spite of me. Uhuh— —”

The voices and the footsteps went on down the corridor.

“Miss Francis and the guard,” whispered Ann. “Are they going to our compartment?”

“Never mind them,” said Joe. “Now’s our chance— —”

“The guard’s van,” said Roger. “Quick— —”

“But who walked over the roof?” panted Ann.

“Someone we haven’t yet seen,” said Joe. “Here we are—get through, quick, before they come back— —”

Roger went first, then Ann, and then Joe followed. The van was in darkness. Joe shut the door and turned the key which was still in the lock.

“What did you do?” asked Ann as he edged close to her.

“Locked Miss Francis and the guard in the carriage. We have this place to ourselves— —”

“Quiet!” muttered Ann. “I thought I heard voices— —”

They listened.

“I don’t hear anything,” said Roger. “Do you, Joe?”

“No.”

“Queer!” muttered Ann. “I could have sworn I heard voices, men and women— —”

“Now don’t start that again,” said Joe.

“I’m not starting anything,” retorted Ann. “Let’s sit down somewhere. My legs feel like jelly— —”

“When do we get to that loop?” asked Roger.

“Don’t ask me,” answered Joe. “Strike a match and let’s have a look round— —”

“Wait— wait!” cried Ann. “There it is again— —”

“What?”

“Voices! I’m sure of it. I’ll swear I heard voices— —”

Joe sighed. Roger struck a match. They looked round the van.

“No one here except us,” said Roger.

“Wrong,” said Joe tersely.

He was staring at a tarpaulin thrown loosely down against a side wall. From under the flap protruded a polished tan shoe still wet and glistening with raindrops.

“Just to remind us,” he said to the others, “that murder has been done. There he is, and he was brought over the roof— —”

Joe took a step forward, staring down at the tarpaulin. Roger, with the match held above him, looked round the van and then at the tan shoe. Ann shuddered as she turned to the door. There could be no doubt now that both Miss Francis and the guard were deeply implicated in the murder. Here, under the tarpaulin, was the body, and Miss Francis and the guard had just left the van a moment ago. The fragment of their conversation proved them to be in some form of association.

The sound of the subdued voices she had heard still echoed in Ann’s mind but a glance showed the van to be empty except for themselves and the man under the tarpaulin. Yet she could have sworn she had heard people talking, talking quietly as though deliberately keeping their voices down. It was uncanny, but the whole strange interlude was uncanny. And grim. And behind it all were possibilities unhuman and unearthly. It was, she knew, the unfolding of a tragedy. Everything that was said, everything that was done, every sound, every movement, every thought in their minds, every thing or person with whom they made contact, every lurch and jolt of the train, every mile that went past, every drop of rain that fell—all had happened before.

There could be no thwarting this power or purpose, no evading events to come.

Convinced of this Ann turned to the door. Roger's match went out.

"You two can stay here if you like," she said. "I'm going back to the compartment. Nothing can harm me, or any of us, until we come to the third tunnel. But I won't stay here with . . . that!"

Without waiting for a reply she unlocked the door and went through into the dark corridor. The rush of wind slammed the door behind her.

"Ann!" yelled Joe. "Ann! Wait, you little fool—"

"After her," gasped Roger. "Quick, quick, Joe—"

Joe tried to open the door, but it refused to move.

"Good . . . heavens!" he panted.

Again he tried, and again. Roger's face was bloodless and yellow in the matchlight, like old and wrinkled parchment brought into the light after many years. Joe hurled himself at the door, a sixteen-stone thunderbolt, and the door crashed open, the lock spinning from the wood.

"Ann!" he roared as he ran through. "Ann! Ann!"

But only the swollen sounds of wind and wheels answered him.

"Ann!" yelled Roger.

"She doesn't answer. Quick, through the carriage," said Joe.

They ran through the corridor to the other end. It was empty. The door facing the unseen trucks was locked. Turning they hastily searched each compartment.

"Madame Kelaher," snarled Joe as he looked in the end compartment. "Madame Devil—"

"Is she there?" gasped Roger.

"No. Compartment is empty—"

"So is ours—"

"The next, and another match—quick!"

But it was empty. All the compartments were empty. The carriage was empty. At the van end again Joe and Roger stood panting and distraught.

"She's gone," choked Roger.

"So have Miss Francis and the guard," said Joe. "They came through here. Where are they? Where's Ann?"

"There's devilry in this dark carriage," gasped Roger. "Some infernal, unearthly—"

"Ann! Ann!" yelled Joe.

“Ann!” shouted Roger.

“Into the van again,” said Joe.

He hurled the door open and then recoiled. The guard’s van was lit brightly with electric light, but it was still empty, and the tan shoe still showed under the flap of the tarpaulin. There was no sign of Ann. Blinking in the bright light Joe turned to Roger.

“You’re right. Ann’s right. This is a hell train.”

“But where is Ann?”

“Back into the carriage. She must be there somewhere.”

They turned and stepped again into the corridor. The door swung and shut behind them. The darkness was as blindness itself after the light. Joe called again:

“Ann! — —”

Roger called, panic in his voice:

“Ann! — —”

A door opened and closed near them. Roger struck another match as they whirled. Ann stood close to them.

“Ann — —” they gasped.

“Ann,” snarled Joe. “Where the devil have you been?”

“Indeed, yes,” Roger’s voice was sharp, “where in all the devils have you been?”

Ann pointed to the lavatory door.

“In there,” she said calmly. “Do you have to ask?”

“Dammit all,” roared Joe. “You might have whistled.”

“Joe,” said Ann as the match went out, “don’t be so brotherly — —”

Joe breathed hard.

“My God—another hour of this carriage—and I’ll think I’m Tutankhamen’s mummy come to life — —”

“Back to the compartment,” said Roger gruffly. “Unless you prefer the van — —”

“Or the lavatory,” growled Joe.

“The compartment,” said Ann firmly. “My teeth are blunt with chattering, and my knees feel like two universal joints. If that woman or that gorilla-like guard come near me again—I’ll shriek. Where are they anyway?”

Joe headed the procession towards the compartment.

“Don’t ask me,” he replied. “They’ve simply vanished. *Spurlos Versenkt* —sunk without a trace.”

“But they went towards our compartment— —”

“Well, they’re not there now,” said Roger. “Neither is your precious Madame Kelaher. Miss Francis was gently putting it across. But I’d like to know who switched on the lights in the guard’s van— —”

“Lights? In the guard’s van?” asked Ann.

“Yes. We went back there looking for you. It was still empty, but the lights were on. Care to go back?”

Ann spoke very quickly and very emphatically.

“No. I don’t want to see inside that van again.”

Joe opened the door.

“Here we are— —”

“Shut the door,” said Ann. “Ever since we blundered into this—this whatever it is, I’ve been expecting to feel the hot plunge of a knife somewhere into me, or the hard fingers of a strangler, or the shock and rip of a bullet. And now that your charming Miss Francis has the black bag back again it may come to that. Our usefulness may have ended.”

Joe’s arm suddenly reached out and hurled her behind him. Rising from a seat was a shadow. A man’s voice spoke politely.

“Oh, I must have returned to the wrong compartment. Mine is the third compartment. Sorry.”

Startled, almost stunned with shock, they stood speechless. Roger dropped his matches and Joe could not find his. Then Joe blurted out:

“Who are you?”

“My name is Shaw. Gerald Shaw. Sorry if I startled you. A little awkward without the lights, isn’t it?”

“Most awkward,” replied Roger. “You said yours was the third compartment, didn’t you?”

“Yes. But it is easy to make such a simple mistake in the dark. I knew you had all made the same mistake each time you looked in my compartment— —”

“Did you . . . see us?” gasped Ann.

“Of course. I was sitting with my back to the door, and my feet along the seat. I didn’t like to speak to you; thought you mightn’t care about it.”

“Oh,” said Joe.

“Yes,” continued Mr Shaw, “I thought you might be looking for the girl in the fourth compartment, the one next to mine.”

“The girl . . . in the fourth . . . compartment?” choked Ann.

Mr Gerald Shaw’s agreeable voice replied:

“Yes. Blonde. Girl about twenty — —”

“But there’s no girl in the fourth compartment,” shrilled Ann. “We’ve looked in there several times.”

“She was there,” said Mr Shaw apologetically. “Perhaps she’s moved into another one.”

“Perhaps,” said Joe grimly. “Glad to have met you, Mr Shaw.”

“Mutual, Mr — —”

“Harper is my name.”

“Mr Harper. My apologies again for inconveniencing you.”

“Not at all,” said Joe.

“An understandable mistake,” murmured Roger.

Ann’s brain was dizzy as Mr Gerald Shaw stepped out into the corridor. She made no comment.

“Where did you say you came from Mr Shaw?” asked Joe.

Mr Shaw replied somewhat coldly.

“I didn’t say, Mr Harper. But I, and not I alone, am brought low by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Good night.”

With that he opened the door of the next compartment, went in, and closed the door. Ann, Joe and Roger sank gingerly down on to the seats.

“Another one of them,” muttered Joe.

“Mr Gerald Shaw,” murmured Roger.

“I want to shriek — —” whispered Ann. “But I haven’t the voice.”

The driving wheels slipped on the wet rails, and the sudden shattering roar of the exhaust was like the laughter of a devil.

“Shut the door—our door,” said Joe.

Roger did so. Joe went on:

“First a dead man, then an absolutely empty carriage, then out of the void comes Miss Francis — —”

“The girl with the amber eyes, with humour on her lips, and with a naughty gleam in her eyes,” interrupted Ann.

“Shut up,” said Joe. “Then queer things begin to happen. She refers to Madame Kelaher, supposed to be in the end compartment — —”

“Where the murdered man was,” said Ann.

“And now,” said Roger, “out of nowhere comes a Mr Gerald Shaw who mentions a blonde in the fourth compartment. I may have an unsuspected astigmatism— —”

“Dammit,” snarled Joe, “we can’t all be cock-eyed. Is there a blonde in the fourth compartment?”

“There is not,” said Roger emphatically. “But if there is—where did she spring from?”

“Where did Mr Gerald Shaw come from?” asked Ann.

“God knows,” growled Joe. “I’ll bet Mr Gerald Shaw doesn’t know himself. If Roger hadn’t dropped the damn matches we’d have had a look at Mr Gerald Shaw. We might never see him again. He might just drift away.”

“I don’t think so,” said Ann. “Mr Gerald Shaw has arrived, and he’ll stay with us. I feel sure of that.”

“Bah!” grunted Joe. “She’s getting the feelly feellies again.”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake,” cried Ann. “The whole thing is driving me mad.”

“It’s weird, all right,” confessed Roger. “For the life of me I can’t explain the uncanny materializing of both Miss Francis and Mr Gerald Shaw.”

“Is there anything about the whole affair we can explain?” asked Joe.

“Your loss of the black bag, perhaps,” murmured Ann.

“No quarrelling,” said Roger quickly. “Joe can’t be blamed for that, Ann.”

“I’m not saying he can,” said Ann tartly. “But big brother Joe has been just a little supercilious towards my belief concerning this affair. I believe, firmly believe I am right. What other explanation is there?”

“I don’t know,” answered Joe. “If there was such a world, or condition, such as you have advanced to explain these strange happenings, maybe I’d think as you do. What proof have you, or has any one, of the existence of such beings?”

“The sense beyond the five senses in myself which receives, perceives, and has awareness of the spirit world. I have never considered myself a medium, or attempted to be one, but on more than one occasion I have had proof of my sensitivity in psychic matters.”

Joe was by nature stubborn, but not stupid. His personality was too strong to accept suggestion as truth, or hearsay as fact. He had known of his

sister's sympathetic leanings towards spiritism, but had imagined they were merely symptoms of a natural curiosity towards such matters.

"Listen, Ann," he retorted. "I admit that what we have seen and experienced in this dark carriage has a strong flavour of the supernatural — —"

"Can you say it is not?" asked Ann.

"No. I merely repeat that if there is a supernatural world then undoubtedly by some manner of means we have stumbled right into it — —"

"That is what I believe," said Ann.

"Let me go on," said Joe. "But before I believe all this is as you say, then I must have proof of it."

"You remember the inscription on Sir Christopher Wren's tomb in St Paul's? It says: 'If you would seek his monument look around you.' I say to you, if you would have proof of this world, of its beings, of its doings, look around you. There wasn't a soul in this corridor car when we first searched it. Now we have seen Miss Francis and Mr Gerald Shaw. We have been told that Madame Kelaher, who died on a train such as this years ago, is here somewhere. Miss Francis said so, and she should know, for how otherwise would she even know the name Madame Geraldine Kelaher? Then Mr Gerald Shaw not only takes shape and being and speaks to us, but tells us about a girl in the compartment next to his, a blonde of about twenty years. If this train, and these people weren't supernatural, how could these things possibly happen. Physical beings can't spring from nowhere. The carriage was empty, the van was empty. We even looked under the seats as well as on them. Mr Shaw says he was sitting on the seat all the time, and saw us look in and then pass on. How?"

"He's a liar," said Joe laconically.

"He's an amazingly clever one then — —"

"Sure," grunted Joe. "Good liars always are."

Roger handed them cigarettes.

"If it weren't for the fact that the fellow we saw in the end compartment had actually been murdered I'd think someone was making a film — —"

"That's silly, Roger," snapped Ann.

"I know it is," said Roger. "But the old-fashioned set-up; the types, the costumes. But there'd be no need to jigger the lights of the carriage and smash the communication system. There'd be no need for Miss Francis to pick Joe's pocket. Even if the killing of that man had been accidental there'd be no need to drag him over the roof. And there wouldn't be a genuine Bond

Street bag with the date 1894 stamped on the leather. And Miss Francis couldn't possibly say it belonged to Madame Geraldine Kelaher, the woman who along with the others was killed on this line so many years ago. There may be phantasy here, Joe, but that phantasy seems to be fact."

"I know it does," said Joe. "That's what's worrying me."

Ann leaned forward.

"Those footsteps we heard going over the roof—before we went into the van—"

"Mr Shaw?" suggested Roger.

"I wonder if his clothes are wet?" muttered Joe. "Damn it—I'll have a look."

"No harm in that," agreed Roger.

He and Ann rose and stood at the door while Joe went to the third compartment.

"Oh, Mr Shaw—"

They could not hear any reply.

"Mr Shaw," said Joe firmly.

Ann and Roger watched intently as Joe went into the compartment.

"Mr Shaw!" they heard him yell.

"He ought to hear that," muttered Ann.

Joe came out of the compartment.

"He's not there," he told them, "unless he's dissolved himself just to keep in practice."

"Don't be flippant, Joe," said Ann irritably.

"Well, he's not there," growled Joe. "He's not sitting with his back to the door and his feet along the seat this time—"

"He wasn't before," said Roger. "We know that."

"He could have gone to the van," said Ann.

"To talk it over with the guard and Miss Francis," suggested Roger.

"But Miss Francis and the guard haven't come back," protested Joe. "They've dissolved too."

"Could they be still in the end compartment—"

"Quiet, Ann," warned Roger. "Joe and I looked in there when we were looking for you. We didn't see them, but if by any chance they are in there, they'll be listening to us at this moment."

“I don’t care,” cried Ann. “Nothing we say or do will alter or divert what is to happen. That guard must have the strength of a gorilla to carry a dead man over the roof— —”

“Didn’t carry him—dragged him,” corrected Joe.

“Joe! Don’t be exasperating. It doesn’t matter how it was done. He was taken over the roof— —”

Joe’s voice became more determined in tone than before.

“The first chance I get,” he told them, “I’m going to satisfy myself on this spirit-being angle.”

“How?” demanded Ann.

“I don’t know yet,” was the reply. “You still believe that the whole thing is manifestation, don’t you?”

“I certainly do,” said Ann. “With the proof we’ve had I wonder that you can doubt it.”

“The guard isn’t the only one who could have killed that man and then taken him over the roof,” said Roger. “There is Mr Gerald Shaw— —”

“That is so,” agreed Joe.

“I give up,” said Ann wearily. “I’m right, I know I’m right. We are as helpless in this matter as were the other two men and the woman the night they boarded their train at Deep Valley. Let’s sit down and wait. It’s all we can do.”

“I think I should tell you,” said Joe slowly, “that as I came out of compartment three I took a quick look into compartment four. Someone in there was smoking a cigarette.”

“The blonde!” said Roger and Ann together.

Joe closed the door as they sat down.

“I saw only the glow of the cigarette. Shall I investigate?”

“I’ll go,” said Roger.

Ann’s hand gripped his arm like a vice.

“You stay here, my lad. A blonde is a blonde at any time, but at a time like this, and in this darkness, she’s probably invisible lightning.”

“I’ll leave it to Joe, then,” said Roger.

Joe half rose and paused in that attitude as he stared at the door. It was slowly opening.

“Quiet,” he warned the others. “We have a visitor, I think— —”

They could scarcely see the door opening, but they could hear it. Ann shrank close to Roger. Joe was crouched ready to hurl his powerful frame straight through the opening at whoever was there. The stealthy opening of the door continued, and just as Joe was about to launch himself like a human thunderbolt they heard the quiet, low-toned voice of Miss Francis.

“Please accept my apologies for disturbing you.”

Joe relaxed. Ann sighed and leaned back against the leather. Roger, who had moved to help Joe, went limp and breathed heavily.

“Don’t mention it,” said Joe sarcastically. “A disturbance of any kind is a positive relief after the monotony of this carriage. Won’t you come in?”

“Thank you,” murmured Miss Francis. “I am in.”

“So you are,” said Roger. “Are you quite alone?”

“Quite,” said Miss Francis pleasantly.

“Sit down,” said Joe gruffly.

She sat down next to Joe, close enough for him to detect the fragrance of some delicate perfume. Perfume? Did astral ladies use perfume? Joe began to grin in the darkness. If Ann got a whiff of that delicious scent she would be furious with envy. The cosmic distilleries were evidently on a high plane. Joe’s grin broadened, there was something about Miss Francis that appealed to him. A pity, he told himself silently, he had not known her in the flesh. However, better late than never. Ann spoke pointedly.

“Are you the spokeswoman for the others?” she asked.

Miss Francis seemed not to have heard the question.

“Cigarette?” murmured Joe.

There was a grateful note in the visitor’s voice.

“Thank you.”

It was obvious that Miss Francis was determined to take her own time. Joe struck a match.

“Have you brought back the black bag?” he asked coolly.

In the brief, dim light Miss Francis gave nothing away. Her good-looking, classical features were composed and expressionless. Just once, as the match left the end of the cigarette, did the vivid, amber-brown eyes sweep from face to face searchingly.

“The bag?” she murmured.

Joe suppressed a chuckle. Miss Francis was playing an extraordinary game of some sort, she was definitely implicated in the murder of the man they had seen in the end compartment, she was taking a very active and

apparently dangerous part in this affair, and yet she was very well bred and pleasant about it all. Her innocent air concerning the bag was perfect in its naïveté.

“Yes; the bag,” Joe replied.

Miss Francis lowered the cigarette.

“I fear you have me there,” she retorted.

Ann was trembling with impatience to know the reason of this visit. Miss Francis would not come to their compartment merely to indulge in idle conversation.

“What is troubling you, Miss Francis?” she asked.

The visitor inhaled, exhaled, and again lowered the cigarette.

“You were all in the guard’s van a few minutes ago,” she said slowly.

“How do you know that?” asked Roger. “You were somewhere up this end of the carriage— —”

“You were seen to go in, and then to come out,” Miss Francis said calmly.

They all noticed the absence of any explanation as to where she and the guard had been.

“How do you know that?” Roger demanded. “Mr Gerald Shaw, I presume?”

“No.”

“The blonde in number four,” snapped Ann.

“No.”

“Then,” said Joe in his most courteous manner, “who the devil saw us?”

Miss Francis answered patiently as one would a child.

“The stout gentleman in number five.”

Three forms slowly sat erect, three voices repeated as a class:

“The stout gentleman in number five?”

“Yes,” said Miss Francis. “Mr Wayne, Mr Gregory Wayne.”

“Oh,” said Ann.

“Indeed,” said Roger.

“Hell,” said Joe.

Miss Francis went on:

“Did you see . . . anything unusual while you were in the van?”

Roger spoke quickly.

“Didn’t have a chance. It was pitch dark, just as it is here. Miss Harper refused to remain there, so we returned to our compartment.”

“Oh,” murmured Miss Francis.

Ann wondered if anything, anything at all could raise the tone of that level voice. Miss Francis seemed to have perfect poise.

“Was there anything unusual we should have seen?” Ann asked. “Mr Gregory Wayne, perhaps?”

“No, no. But you are quite sure you didn’t— —”

“Just what are you driving at, or fishing for, Miss Francis?” asked Joe bluntly.

A little pause, another lungful of smoke, then:

“Well, to be frank with you, the black bag has disappeared again.”

Ann, Joe and Roger spoke in chorus:

“The black bag?”

“Yes— —”

Joe interrupted her. He asked point-blank:

“Miss Francis, didn’t you pick my pocket for the black bag?”

Miss Francis was not in the least disconcerted.

“I did. Now it has disappeared again— —”

“Perhaps Mr Gerald Shaw, or the blonde, or Mr Gregory Wayne, or even Madame Geraldine Kelaher has it— —”

Ann tried desperately to discover the effect of that last name on Miss Francis, but the darkness was against her. Ann still held to her belief that these people were supernatural although they had all the attributes, traits and characteristic appearance of normal beings. The shadow that was Miss Francis did not even move.

“I . . . think not,” she said very slowly.

“The black bag was in the guard’s van?” asked Roger.

Miss Francis adroitly parried the question.

“Knowing your interest in it, I thought perhaps one of you had picked it up again,” she replied.

“Far too dark for us to see it,” said Roger.

Miss Francis smoked thoughtfully for a moment, then:

“Oh, well—there is no need to trouble— —” and then she broke off on a startled note. Her voice went up the scale in a tone of astonishment, an indignant inflexion indicating momentary loss of poise. “Oh! Oh! Did you— did you touch me, Mr Harper?”

Joe was very matter of fact.

“Yes,” he grunted. “Wanted to know if your leg felt like any other woman’s— —”

Miss Francis rose quickly to her feet.

“And—and does it, may I ask?” she inquired coldly.

“Better,” said Joe laconically.

Miss Francis was evidently breathing heavily.

“This is meant in the friendliest possible way, but perhaps for your own sakes it would be better if you did not go into the guard’s van again. And in future, Mr Harper, I trust your sense of touch will not go beyond your sense of discretion. Good night!”

The door slammed. Miss Francis was gone. Joe chuckled deeply.

“Joe!” said Ann ominously. “Why did you do that?”

“I? Me?” he asked innocently. “Just to see what the psychic response would be by the cosmic leg. Believe me, for a ghost, she has a very shapely limb— —”

“You devil, Joe. And you needn’t laugh, Roger. Men are all the same — —”

“Well,” retorted Joe, “I’ve proved one thing.”

“What?” snapped Ann.

“I could be very happy in the spirit world.”

Ann gave an exclamation of annoyance and disgust.

“You’re just a brute—Joe—just a male— —”

“I know, I know,” he agreed. “And as you give such evidence of dislike for males I presume you will have your future children by suggestion.”

Roger laughed aloud. Ann was scarlet and furious.

“You always were a fool, Joe. And you be careful of Miss Francis—she’s deep, deep and dangerous.”

“Why?” demanded Joe.

“Why?” gasped Ann. “Your sense of touch evidently has outrun your sense of discretion. You don’t believe that black bag story, do you?”

“It could be true.”

Ann’s sneer could be heard. If Joe were not careful he might endanger not only himself but her and Roger as well.

“It could be true, eh? She made a fool of you once, Joe; don’t let her do it again. I believe she thinks you the weak link in our chain, and that is why she came back. I notice she always sits very close to you. Miss Francis came

to find out if we saw the dead man, and by oozing feminine attraction over you thought you would talk.”

“You still think she is supernatural?” asked Joe.

Ann began to be angry. Joe could be an exasperating fellow, but this was neither the time nor the place for it.

“I don’t know what Miss Francis is, actually,” she retorted, “but if these people are natural tell me where she, Mr Gerald Shaw, the blonde, and Mr Gregory Wayne came from— —”

“We haven’t seen the blonde or Mr Gregory Wayne,” said Joe.

“Or Madame Geraldine Kelaher,” said Roger. “That makes five of them, six with the guard.”

“Even if we haven’t seen these others they have been named,” said Ann. “Mr Shaw, and Miss Francis, whom we have seen have seen *them*.”

“Don’t ask me,” said Joe. “I don’t know where they came from— —”

“All I know is,” Ann went on, “that everything that happened on the doomed train seems to be happening on this one. There was trouble on that train. There was a Madame Kelaher on it. Three people boarded it at Deep Valley, just as we did. About a dozen were killed in the smash.”

“Well,” grunted Joe, “there aren’t a dozen here— —”

Ann heaved a sigh of deep and infinite patience.

“When we came into this damned carriage,” she said very deliberately, “we were the only living persons in it. Forget the dead man. We were the only living persons in it. The train hasn’t stopped. No one could have got on, yet we have met two people who speak of at least three others. The guard’s van is a possible solution—if we hadn’t seen it to be empty for ourselves. How then, brother Joe, how if these things and people be natural? How? How? How?”

Joe did not speak.

“Anyway,” said Roger, “where was Mr Gregory Wayne when Joe and I searched the carriage when you—er, that is— —”

“When you should have whistled,” said Joe bluntly. “Where was he when we went into the van? Where was Mr Gerald Shaw? Where was the blonde? Where was Madame Kelaher? Were Mr Shaw and Mr Wayne with the blonde? If so were Mr Wayne, Mr Shaw, and the blonde, with Madame Kelaher? If not were Mr Shaw, Mr Wayne, the blonde, and Madame Kelaher, with Miss Francis and the guard? In fact, where the hell was everybody?”

Ann sighed.

“I give up,” she said. “Positively, I give up. They weren’t in the carriage, we saw that for ourselves, yet they couldn’t have been anywhere else. We know that. Yes, I give up.”

Joe thought for a moment.

“Didn’t you say you heard voices while we were in the van?” he asked.

Ann’s head jerked up. She had forgotten that.

“Yes. Yes, I did,” she said quickly.

“There was no one there when I struck the match,” said Roger.

Ann went limp again.

“That’s so. I looked round the van as the match flared. I didn’t see any one. There was no one there, yet I could have sworn I heard voices. But except for ourselves the van was empty.”

“And no one was in the carriage, for Joe and I searched it,” said Roger.

“It certainly is an extraordinary affair,” said Joe. “We know there is a murdered man in the guard’s van. We know, or believe, there is a killer loose somewhere. We know that out of an empty carriage and van people are springing to life. Who killed the man we found in the end compartment, or where these people are coming from, or who they are, we simply can’t imagine.”

“I have told you what is happening,” said Ann.

Joe shrugged.

“Miss Francis seemed very human to me.”

“That doesn’t mean a thing, Joe,” Ann retorted. “You have some idea that spirit people must be formed out of some gaseous substance rather like a luminous mist. That is ridiculous. Many of the manifestations at professional séances are fakes, and have been proved to be merely clever deception. But in spite of that, genuine scientific research into the spirit world has shown there is a genuine spirit world. Too many eminent thinkers and scientists, doctors, scholars, philosophers, savants of all ages as well as prominent people of our own times, have seen and touched and been in the presence of spirit people made to appear to our senses as physical bodies by the power of manifestation.”

“I am not suggesting that you and all those good people are liars,” said Joe soberly. “What I cannot understand is, if this train and all that is happening in this carriage is a repeat performance of the tragedy of the doomed train, why am I, and you, and Roger selected to witness this dark drama?”

Ann replied without hesitation.

“You will remember, as I have pointed out before, that three persons, two men and a woman, got on that train at Deep Valley. They died. We are the ones into whom their spirits passed, so giving us power to live again their last experiences — —”

“Yes, but,” objected Roger, “if that were a rule of the spirit world then all people living to-day would possess the spirits of former persons, and would also have the power to live again the last experiences of their spiritual predecessors.”

Ann shook her head, forgetting that in the darkness they could not see the gesture.

“No living person can give all the truth either of this physical world, or of the spirit one,” she said. “So don’t expect me to answer questions that have baffled wiser minds than my poor one. Man has two beings, physical and spiritual. That has been universally accepted since creation. We inherit physical characteristics from former physical persons, family likenesses, deafness, blindness, deformities, abnormalities, a million peculiarities we term heredity. We also inherit qualities of the mind from former minds. We say a man is a born musician, a born orator, or just a born fool. Why then do we not inherit from former persons the spirits of those persons? I believe we do, and that what we call instinct is but the inherited spirit giving a warning without words. I believe we are, not physically or mentally, of course, but spiritually, those three persons who were killed on the doomed train. And that is why, in a manner inexplicable to us now, we are conscious of the re-enactment of that tragedy.”

“Humph,” said Joe dubiously. “Not a bad argument for a woman; it has a faint logical basis, always accepting the theory that there is such a thing as a spirit. We know we have a physical side, but I for one haven’t seen any proofs of the spiritual. I’m not going to accept Miss Francis as a spirit just because Ann has a spirit-world jitterbug. A spirit can’t possibly have a use for such amber eyes and such a fascinating leg — —”

“Bah!” snorted Ann. “You’re impossible. Shut up!”

“You see,” said Joe to Roger, “what you’re in for, my lad?”

“Oh, be quiet, Joe!” pleaded Ann. “Honestly, I’m too frightened and upset, too horrified by the whole affair for flippancy. Keep it till later, Joe.”

“Sorry, kid,” said Joe. “Only trying to get the horrors out of your mind. Apologies, old girl.”

Ann sighed. It was impossible to be angry with Joe; and after all he could not be blamed if he did not think exactly as she did.

“Forget it,” she murmured.

They were silent. The train crossed a bridge, creating beneath the carriage a hollow roar suggestive of space and depth. The carriage rocked violently from side to side and their bodies were thrown about in spite of the antiquated arm straps. Because of the echoing bridge they heard no other sound, consequently, the sudden and unexpected gruff grunting of the guard from inside the door came as a nasty aural shock.

“Uhuh! Everythin’ all right, folks?”

Ann jumped nervously. Roger stiffened angrily. Joe glared at the standing shadow.

“What do you want?” he growled.

“Oh, just passin’,” was the reply.

“You seem to do a lot of passing,” said Roger.

“Uhuh. I keep goin’ and comin’. Seein’ as ’ow you ’ave broke reg’lations, you might as well be made as comfortable as the others.”

“And are the others comfortable?” asked Ann quickly.

The guard coughed and ignored the question.

“Mr Shaw tells me you’ve all been stretchin’ your legs a bit.”

“Mr Shaw is a gossip, my good man,” said Joe. “What is it you particularly want?”

“Uhuh. I don’t suppose you’ve seen— —”

“No!” came with almost explosive force from all three.

“Uhuh. But I ain’t told you what yet,” grumbled the guard.

“Don’t tell us, we know,” said Joe.

“It has the handle missing,” said Roger.

“Uhuh— —”

“It is a black, square object,” said Ann.

“Uhuh!”

“It is a most important object,” said Joe.

“Uhuh.”

“It has been the cause of a great deal of trouble in this carriage,” said Ann.

“Uhuh.”

“And it seems likely to cause much more trouble,” said Roger.

The shadow moved as though the guard were a little uneasy under this cross-fire.

“Uhuh. But maybe we ain’t talking about the same thing,” he said.

“You mean— —” began Joe.

“And we mean— —” said Roger.

“The black bag,” said Ann.

The shadow moved again. The voice came eagerly and anxiously.

“Uhuh! 'Ave you seen it?”

“No,” came in chorus.

The further movement of the shadow indicated annoyance or disappointment or possibly both.

“Is it lost again?” inquired Ann.

“Yes,” said the guard surlily. “Mrs Fanny Myers asked me to look out for it— —”

Three voices gasped together:

“Mrs Fanny Myers?”

“Uhuh. Lady in compartment six. Very stout lady. Says she lost it.”

“Mrs Fanny Myers— —” panted Ann.

“A very stout lady— —” muttered Joe.

“In compartment six,” said Roger thoughtfully.

“Yes, 'er,” said the guard. “But if y'ain't seen it, or got it, I'll get along — —”

“Good night,” they said together.

“G'night,” grunted the guard.

The shadow moved, the door closed. No one spoke. Mrs Fanny Myers! The name rocketed through each brain. The stout lady in compartment six.

“We're fools,” Ann said suddenly. “We should have asked him who are all these people, and where are they coming from.”

“We'd be fools if we did,” retorted Joe. “He's well in this racket somehow. He won't talk. The first time he asked about the bag he put it across that he was asking on behalf of Miss Francis. Now Mrs Fanny Myers has appeared. I'm beaten. It's utterly beyond me. I guess you're right, Ann. These people just can't be natural—excepting Miss Francis, of course. Nothing intangible about that girl.”

“You should know,” retorted Ann.

“If we can't get a line on these mysterious appearances, I'd still like to know why that black bag is so important,” said Roger. “Can there be a message written in it somewhere? What can it be? The contents are unimportant, we know. Why does everybody want it? Why did the dead man struggle and die for it?”

“Someone killed him for it,” said Ann. “Tried to snatch it from him, but didn’t quite succeed before we blundered in. Miss Francis said it belonged to Madame Kelaher, now, it seems, it belongs to Mrs Fanny Myers. I will ask only one question: Where has Mrs Fanny Myers come from?”

“Don’t,” grunted Joe. “I’m dizzy. And while we are so busy discussing this matter someone is just as busy listening to what we are saying— —”

“What?” breathed Ann and Roger.

“He is at the door,” said Joe. “I saw his shadow move. I shall invite him in.” He drew in a mighty breath and roared: “Come in, damn you— —”

“Joe— —” gasped Ann.

The squeak of the opening door and the polite voice of Mr Gerald Shaw came together.

“Oh, may I trouble you people for a moment? Just for a tiny, brief moment?”

“Mr Shaw,” said Joe deliberately, “we haven’t got the black bag. We don’t know who has the black bag. We are not interested in the black bag. We don’t care who owns the black bag. We don’t want to hear anything about the black bag. And if any one mentions the blasted black bag to us — —”

The door closed with a bang.

“He’s gone,” said Ann. “Rather abrupt, weren’t you?”

“Meant to be,” growled Joe. “I’m fed up with Mr Gerald Shaw, Madame Geraldine Kelaher, Mrs Fanny Myers, the blonde in number four, and with the guard— —”

“You have omitted Miss Francis— —”

“She’s different. A charming woman. Affects a dream of a perfume—a dream of a woman, really.”

“Oh, my God— —” whispered Ann.

“You also forgot Mr Gregory Wayne,” said Roger.

The door opened again before Joe could reply. This time Mr Shaw’s voice was stiff with hauteur.

“I trust,” it said coldly, “you do not think I wished to thrust myself upon you?”

“Mr Shaw,” said Joe. “We are convinced that something sinister is abroad in this carriage— —”

Mr Shaw interrupted him.

“Aha! As Shakespeare said: ‘What! do you tremble? are you all afraid? Alas, I blame you not; for you are mortal, and mortal eyes cannot endure the devil.’”

“What — —?” whispered Ann.

The door slammed and Mr Shaw’s shadow once more drifted away.

“Why did he say that?” asked Ann.

“Search me,” muttered Joe. “An uncanny fellow, Mr Gerald Shaw — —”

“Phew!” whistled Roger. “He made my hair stick up on end. It’s still up.”

“Oh, good heavens,” choked Ann. “Why should he tell us we are mortal? Why should he ask us if we are afraid? That’s enough for me.”

“Bah! We’re getting nowhere,” said Joe. “Darkness, mystery, murder, people coming to life from nowhere — —”

“Open the door,” pleaded Ann. “My head’s aching, throbbing.”

Joe did so.

“Shall we pay a call on the blonde, Mr Wayne, and Mrs Myers?” suggested Roger.

Ann leaned forward quickly.

“Listen — —” she breathed.

“What is it?” asked Joe.

“I thought I heard a woman’s voice talking angrily.”

They listened, hearing only the noise of the train and the thin, penetrating and persistent pattering of the rain.

“I’m sure I did,” Ann insisted. “Yes — there it is again!”

Faintly from somewhere down the corridor a woman’s voice said furiously:

“You wouldn’t dare! And don’t threaten me, or I’ll have plenty to say — —”

And then came a scream, high, piercing, charged with terror. Somewhere along the corridor a door slammed, then another, and then a third.

“Come on — —” panted Joe.

“Oh, hurry!” urged Ann.

“Where was it?” asked Roger.

“I’m — I’m not sure — —” Ann jerked out.

Joe glared into the next compartment.

“You there, Mr Shaw?” he yelled.

“Yes,” answered the suave voice of Mr Gerald Shaw. “Is anything the matter?”

Ann almost collapsed.

“Anything the matter?” she shrilled. “Someone screamed— —”

“Madam,” said Mr Shaw, “I never scream.”

“Go on,” panted Roger.

Joe hurled back the door of compartment four as Roger struck a match.

“The blonde— —” he muttered. “There she is . . . in person.”

A young woman, certainly a blonde, stared up in startled manner at them. Ann saw that she was dressed in green, and on the seat beside her was a wide hat, green with a long scarlet feather.

“Did—did you scream?” asked Ann.

Dumbly the blonde shook her head. She did not speak. Joe slammed the door, raced along, and opened the door of compartment five. Roger’s next match showed Mr Gregory Wayne sound asleep in a window seat. He was snoring, his ample paunch rising and falling with measured regularity. Mr Gregory Wayne obviously had not screamed. Joe closed the door and went on.

“A queer looking egg that fellow Wayne,” he muttered.

“They’re all queer,” said Ann.

Joe slid back the next door.

“Mrs Fanny Myers,” said Roger.

They all stared in at the woman. Mrs Myers, blinking in the light, was seen to be a very fat woman gowned in black. Mrs Fanny Myers was massive. Her attitude was one of pleasant surprise, massively expressed.

“Madam,” asked Joe, “did you scream?”

Mrs Myers opened her eyes in a bland stare.

“Scream?” she murmured in a husky voice. “Did someone scream? I somewhat thoughtlessly trilled a bit of the “Shadow Song,” but I did not scream— —”

“Confound it,” growled Joe, “it must have been Miss Francis. Madam, what we heard was a scream, an unholy yell.”

Mrs Myers bridled. The black silk rustled resentfully.

“Miss Francis is in the second end compartment,” she said haughtily. “And what is more—I never yell.”

Joe’s long legs were already on their way there, Ann and Roger following closely. Miss Francis, when Roger’s next match flamed, was

observed calmly smoking a cigarette.

“Miss Francis, did you scream?” asked Joe.

“I? Don’t be absurd, Mr Harper. Why should I scream?”

The level quality of that well-bred voice infuriated Joe.

“Well, of all the unmitigated liars I’ve ever struck,” he roared, “you and the rest of this hard-boiled bunch take the — —”

The amber-brown eyes seemed to be flecked with little red lights, unmistakable warning signals had Joe known it. Her tone was razor-keen as she cut in:

“Thank you. And of all the insulting busy-bodies—you, and your two friends who also cannot mind their own business, take the — —”

Roger’s quiet voice interrupted her.

“Thank you. But in what way are we meddling, Miss Francis? In what manner are we not minding our own business?”

Miss Francis blew a thin stream of smoke towards Joe.

“I leave that to your very keen discernment,” was her reply. “And now, good night.”

Ann said sharply:

“Did you get the black bag?”

“I am not interested in the black bag,” said Miss Francis smoothly. “I would advise you to forget it also. And one thing more. Your presence on this train could be a menace . . . to yourselves. I suggest that you go to your compartment and remain there . . . whatever happens.”

“A menace, eh — —” began Joe.

“Good night,” said Miss Francis coldly.

Roger shut the door. The glow of the cigarette brightened and then diminished as Miss Francis inhaled.

“A dream of a woman,” sneered Ann.

“I still think so,” said Joe as he turned away. “Let’s get back.”

“We were warned, anyway,” said Ann. “They trick us at every turn. And for goodness sake, Joe, don’t become fatuously infatuated at a time like this, or someone will be plunging a knife into you. Besides, it isn’t decent. It isn’t even common sense. There’s a dead man in the van, and somewhere in this carriage is a murderer. And you babble like a fool about Miss Francis being a dream of a woman — —”

“Are you suggesting she knifed that fellow?” asked Joe.

“How do I know? Someone did. How do you know she didn’t?”

“No,” said Joe thoughtfully; “not Miss Francis—her eyes are too gentle, she is too much of a thoroughbred to be a butcher— —”

“Oh, what’s the use,” sighed Ann. “You’ll get all our throats cut yet — —”

“Rubbish,” retorted Joe. “You said yourself we’ve got to die again in the third tunnel— —”

“And I still believe it,” said Ann grimly. “The more I see what is happening here the more am I convinced we are on the doom train.”

“Well then,” chuckled Joe, “don’t deny a man happiness in his last hour.”

Ann made a peculiar, inarticulate sound. Both Joe and Roger were sure she had sworn vividly under her breath, but whether at Joe or at the woodwork against which she had been thrown by a jolt of the carriage they could not be sure.

“It beats me where they all spring from,” said Roger.

“Why did that woman— —”

“Don’t call her ‘that woman,’” protested Joe.

“That woman!” snapped Ann. “Why did she tell us to remain in our compartment whatever happens?”

Joe paused.

“I’ll go back and ask her— —”

Ann grabbed his arm.

“Joe, do have some sense, here’s our compartment. Get in and stay in, for heaven’s sake.”

Joe went in quietly, Ann followed, and Roger closed the door. In silence Joe sat down, and then sprang up again.

“A match—quick!” he rasped.

Roger struck one. On the seat was the black bag.

“My hand touched it,” said Joe.

Ann picked it up and opened it.

“Just the same as when we examined it before— —”

“Sure?” from Joe and Roger.

“No,” she corrected herself. “The cartridges are missing. But that is all.”

“All?” said Joe. “It may prove to be a whole lot, my girl.”

“Oh,” said Ann quickly, “there is something else. This paper—a note—hastily scrawled by the look of it.”

“Read it, read it,” urged Joe.

Ann read carefully:

Let no one in this carriage get possession of this bag. Give it to Madame Geraldine Kelaher at the Junction.

“Is that all?” asked Joe.

“It’s enough, isn’t it?” Ann retorted. “Perhaps this is why Miss Francis was so emphatic about our returning to this compartment and not leaving it. She put it here.”

“That couldn’t be,” said Roger. “It wasn’t here when we left the compartment, and we went along the corridor to Miss Francis’s compartment. She couldn’t pass us, and get here and back in the time.”

“I’m not so sure,” muttered Ann. “It’s no use us saying what these creatures are capable of— —”

“Miss Francis—a creature?” objected Joe.

“Really, Joe, I’ll lose patience with you in a minute, and I’ll—I’ll— —”

“All right, all right,” grumbled Joe. “But I’m damned if I know why they ever put women on juries. If they don’t like the look of a man’s face, or a woman’s hat—well, it’s just too bad. You’re condemning Miss Francis simply because your burning female curiosity is not yet satisfied.”

“I’m not, Joe,” protested Ann. “I’m merely trying to point out that about Miss Francis, about all these unearthly people there is . . . there is, I repeat, more than the shadow of a doubt. Don’t get sentimental and sloppy because a woman with an overplus of sex appeal looks at you with magnetic amber-brown eyes and happens to have a very shapely leg. You’re behaving like a calf, Joe. Stop it. Our lives are probably very much in danger at this moment. A man was killed for this bag, and now we have it again.”

Joe took the lecture in silence, approval unseen in his eyes, a grin, also unseen, twisting his lips. Any simulated interest in Miss Francis was worth while if it would keep Ann’s mind from dwelling on absurd occult fears. But he decided he had better not overdo it.

“Have it your own way,” he growled. “What are we going to do with the bag?”

“A Sisyphean problem,” muttered Roger.

“Demanding an Asquithian philosophy: wait and see,” advised Ann. “So let’s sit down, and wait and see.”

They sat down, Joe taking the bag from Ann and placing it in an inside pocket.

“Don’t know about that,” he said. “I think we should get rid of it. After all, someone is attempting to make us accessories after the fact. By accepting custody of this bag we deliberately involve ourselves in this murder. What about that?”

Ann shuddered.

“Oh, it’s hopeless. I’m all confused. My mind’s a fog. Who put the bag here?”

“None of those we spoke to a moment ago,” said Roger.

“I wouldn’t say that,” said Joe. “That scream rocked us a little. Mr Gerald Shaw, for instance, or the blonde, could have sneaked here in the darkness while we were talking to Miss Francis. The noise of this train smothers most sounds, the darkness hides every movement unless it is close.”

“Yes; they could have done it,” muttered Ann. Then quickly: “Could it have been Madame Kelaher herself?”

“But she isn’t in the carriage— —” Joe began.

“What’s the use of talking like that?” demanded Ann. “When we first entered this carriage none of these people were in it. They are here now.”

“I pass,” muttered Joe. “Madame Kelaher is a possibility.”

“But who screamed?” asked Roger. “We didn’t find out.”

“They all took care of that,” said Ann. “A woman certainly screamed, an unholy yell, as Joe had it. Mr Shaw seemed unconcerned, the blonde gave a vacant, baby stare of superb innocence, Mr Wayne pretended to be fast asleep, Mrs Myers gave a very good imitation of a dithering female hippopotamus in black, and Miss Francis was frankly rude— —”

“We started it,” said Joe. “I called her a liar, and naturally she ticked us off.”

“Never mind that,” said Ann. “The fact still is that we still know nothing. These people, whoever they are, are against us. Yet one of them wishes to make use of us. Why?”

“Because,” answered Roger, “all the others are double-crossing each other. Even the guard is after this bag.”

“It seems to me,” said Joe thoughtfully, “that it’s time we had another peep into the end compartment— —”

“No,” said Ann. “I don’t want to look in there again— —”

“I agree with Joe, Ann,” said Roger. “We’d better keep our wits about us, and watch every card in the deck.”

“Very well,” muttered Ann. “I can stand near the door without looking in — —”

“Come on,” said Joe.

At the door of the end compartment Roger whispered “now.” Joe opened the door as Roger’s match burst into flame, and as it did both men recoiled and Ann choked back a cry. Then Joe said something under his breath. Roger’s hand was trembling a little. Seated at a window seat, and grinning up at them, was a young man, a hunchback. Never before had they seen such a large head on any human being, such large hands, such small feet. The man’s eyes seemed to be phosphoric, luminous with deep lights. They were wide, staring black eyes holding in their depths an hypnotic attraction that drew their eyes to his. He did not move. The light went out. Without speaking, Ann, Joe and Roger turned and went back to their compartment. Joe closed the door quietly.

“Who—who was he?” whispered Ann as they sat down.

“What was he,” corrected Joe.

Roger was breathing a little quickly.

“Weird,” he muttered. “Another one come like all the others out of nothing and the night.”

“But his eyes— —” whispered Ann. “I have never seen such eyes. After the first quick glance I seemed to see nothing but his eyes, and they seemed to be expanding, coming towards me, staring into my own— —”

“I noticed them,” said Roger. “They were like the black, shining, still eyes of the deep sea octopus, eyes that see in the profound darkness of incredible depths. That fellow, more than any of the others, gave me a twist.”

“Made me jump,” confessed Joe. “There seemed to be nothing to say. There he was. Where he came from—God knows. And yet in the brief light of the match I thought there was something pathetic about that fellow, a defiance yet a shrinking, a certain boldness yet with an air of appeal. Not more than twenty, I should say.”

“I never want to see him again,” said Ann huskily. “Do you think he put the black bag here?”

“Somehow,” said Roger dryly, “we forgot to ask him.”

“Yes,” said Joe. “Somehow . . . we did. Queer devil.”

“They’re all queer devils,” burst out Ann. “Miss Francis, Mr Gerald Shaw, the blonde, fat Mr Wayne, colossal Mrs Myers, the guard, and now this hunchback. Good heavens, will you still try to tell me we are not on the doom train? Will you still argue that such people, such happenings, such vanishings and appearances are natural? If you don’t mind—I’ll keep out of that corridor from now on.”

“What about the bag?” asked Joe.

“Damn the bag,” said Ann tersely. “My nerves are near the snapping point.”

“It’s uncanny,” agreed Joe. “No one in the carriage when we entered it, now there are six, not counting the guard. I’m not a nervy sort of fellow, but I confess that hunchback shook me—not because he is a hunchback, but because the shock of his appearance gave support to Ann’s construction, or reconstruction of the doom train. If these people aren’t coming out of the past, will someone tell me how and where they are coming out of the present? I don’t know.”

“Neither do I,” said Roger slowly.

“I knew it from the beginning,” stated Ann. “The awareness of the meaning of this dark interlude came to me even before we knew that man had been killed.”

“And yet— —” said Joe slowly, “I can’t wholly believe it. It’s altogether too fantastic. There must be a rational and natural explanation for all that is going on here— —”

“Wait and see,” murmured Ann. “One thing is certain— —”

“What?”

“We must—must—get off this train before it goes into the third tunnel. The thought of it drawing nearer and nearer is driving me mad.”

“Steady, Ann,” said Roger. “Won’t do any good if you let go.”

“I know, I know,” panted Ann. “I’m not letting go any more than you and Joe. But that’s how I feel. Every nerve in my body, every grey cell in my brain is tense and taut with terror. I confess it. I’m terrified.”

“Quiet—quiet!” hissed Roger. “Someone at the door— —”

“Who’s there?” snarled Joe.

A woman’s soft voice spoke from the door.

“May I come in?” it asked.

“I thought I’d shut that door— —”

“Who—who are you?” asked Ann.

“My compartment is number four.”

“Oh,” said Roger. “The blonde girl, eh?”

A little laugh, half amused, half nervous admitted it.

“Yes. Mr Caesar Campobasso told me about you — —”

“Mr Caesar Campobasso?” came from Ann, Joe and Roger.

“Yes; the gentleman in the end compartment.”

“Won’t you sit down?” asked Roger. “You, of course, are Miss — er, Miss — —”

“I am Polly Caldwell. It’s — it’s very dark, isn’t it?”

Again that nervous laugh.

“Very,” they all agreed.

“Would you mind telling us — —” began Joe as Polly Caldwell seated herself next to him.

Ann broke in sharply:

“Miss Caldwell will tell us exactly — nothing.”

Once more the queer soft laugh.

“I — I don’t quite understand you, Miss Harper.”

Ann was astonished.

“So you know my name?”

“Oh, yes. I just told you. Mr Caesar Campobasso, the gentleman in the end compartment — —”

“In the end compartment?” interrupted Joe.

“Yes,” said Miss Caldwell, “him. Well, he told me about you.”

“You mean the hunchback?” asked Roger.

Miss Caldwell did not reply at once. She seemed to be thinking quickly. Then she said:

“Hunchback? Oh, you mean poor Pierre Fouché? He’s deaf and dumb. Speaks with his fingers. No; I mean the end compartment next to the guard’s van — beyond Miss Francis.”

“Not this end?” insisted Joe.

“No, no, no! The other end. Haven’t you met Mr Caesar Campobasso?”

Ann, Joe and Roger breathed hard. Had they met Mr Caesar Campobasso? They had not.

“No,” said Ann. “We have not met him.”

“Oh, he’s so interesting. Delightful, really. He has his family with him — —”

All three gave a shout of sheer incredulity:

“His what?”

Miss Caldwell tittered.

“His family. But I shouldn’t gossip, really — —”

“Go right ahead,” said Joe. “We’ve been waiting for you.”

Miss Caldwell seemed pleased. At any rate she laughed again.

“His daughter—she’s a lovely little thing about sixteen years of age—and the boy—he’s about twelve. And, of course, there is Mrs Campobasso — —”

“Of course,” breathed Ann. “There is Mrs Campobasso.”

“Poor Mrs Campobasso has lost her handbag,” said Miss Caldwell.

Ann, Joe and Roger sat up very straight.

“Oh,” said Roger. “What kind of a handbag, Miss Caldwell?”

Miss Caldwell gave a friendly giggle.

“Please don’t call me Miss Caldwell. All my friends call me Polly—it’s so much more informal, isn’t it?”

“Yes, isn’t it?” growled Joe. “What kind of a bag?”

“Oh, a black bag—with the handle missing — —”

“The handle missing?” murmured Roger.

“Yes.”

“And it belongs to Mrs Caesar Campobasso?” asked Ann.

“Yes, yes. Have you seen it?”

“We haven’t seen any bag belonging to Mrs Campobasso,” said Joe gruffly.

Miss Caldwell hesitated, then asked:

“Have you seen a black bag?”

“I’m afraid we can’t help you, Miss Caldwell — —”

“Polly.”

“Er, Polly.”

“Oh, well then, I must tell poor Mrs Campobasso it is gone. Good night. It’s nice to have met you. Good night.”

“Good night.”

And with another little giggle Miss Caldwell melted into the corridor shadows and was gone. Joe heaved a sigh.

“Mr and Mrs Caesar Campobasso—and family,” he said sarcastically. “You remember them, of course. The Caesar Campobassos.”

“It’s extraordinary,” gasped Ann. “It’s just damned well impossible— —”

“Don’t swear,” grunted Joe. “You’ll start me off.”

“This rattling old carriage is hatching a strange brood under its dark roof,” said Roger. “And we mustn’t forget Monsieur Pierre Fouché.”

“I hadn’t forgotten him,” said Ann. “I can see those glowing eyes looking at me even now.”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Joe. “Let ’em all come. They’ve started having families now.”

“Every compartment is now occupied,” said Roger.

“Every one,” said Ann. “And when we got on the train every carriage was empty except this end one. And in it was a dead man. I shouldn’t be surprised if someone claims this compartment before long.” Her voice altered. “Joe! We haven’t thought to look on the racks. Stand up and feel if anything is on them.”

Joe reached up.

“You’re right. There is luggage here.”

“Luggage?” echoed Roger. “I’ll strike a match— —”

He stood up, and in the light they examined the cases.

“Place is becoming like a travelling hotel,” growled Joe. “This stuff belongs to Madame Kelaher. It’s plastered with labels from Singapore, Batavia, New Zealand, Shanghai, Bombay and Calcutta, Cairo, Paris, London, New York and Chicago. Well, she’s travelled a little.”

“What are the labels like?”

“Old, worn and torn.”

“They would be,” said Ann. “Madame Kelaher made a world tour in the nineties. She was terrifically psychic, and had the whole world in a fever of speculation.”

“She’s got us the same way,” said Joe.

“She was the most profound student and exponent of the occult sciences. Men and women flocked to her séances, and she confounded her critics by submitting to any test they cared to impose. She had the power of revealing the past.”

“Of revealing the past?” asked Roger.

“Yes. And in some well authenticated cases the future. But Madame Kelaher could make manifest the forms and persons of those who had passed on. She could recall from the spirit world individuals who proved

that they were the ones who died. These spirits had physical form, normal voice, and recognized and conversed with those who had known them.”

“Evidently she was top of her class,” muttered Joe.

“It’s no use you sneering, Joe. These things were witnessed.”

“How could she — —”

“Why ask me?” retorted Ann. “I’m not Madame Kelaher. I don’t know. Perhaps the forms were composed of astral ectoplasm — —”

“Astral ectobunkum,” snarled Joe. “It’s all dangerously close to Voodoo and devil worship.”

“It’s uncanny when you first experience it, I admit,” said Ann. “I was almost a cot case after the first genuine séance I attended. I did not see the complete form, for the medium wasn’t of the calibre of Madame Kelaher. But I did see the arms and hands materialize, and I did watch those hands paint with lightning speed a landscape of great charm. The painting remained for all to see in plain daylight afterwards. It was left where the hands had dropped it on the table. Had that séance been conducted at night, one could have said the body was masked by a black robe or something, but that manifestation took place one afternoon with the sunshine pouring into the room. I’ll never forget it.”

“Well, I know a dead man when I see one,” said Joe. “That fellow’s no astral ectoplasm—he’s cold meat.”

“Oh, don’t be so horrible, Joe,” panted Ann.

“I know it’s horrible. Murder always is. And there’s no ectobunkum about this gang here. They’re all in it; they’re all double-crossing each other; they all distrust each other; they’re all scared of each other.”

“Do you think any of them know who killed that man?” asked Roger.

“Don’t know,” growled Joe. “I can’t explain it or them any more than you or Ann — —”

“I have explained it,” said Ann. “If you look again at those labels you will see the name Madame Geraldine Kelaher.”

“Let’s count them up,” said Joe. “We started off with the dead man whose name we don’t know. There was no one else. Now we have Mr Shaw, our Polly, Mr Wayne, Mrs Myers, Miss Francis, Mr and Mrs Caesar Campobasso and family, a hunchback called Pierre Fouché, and above us are the labelled trunks of Madame Geraldine Kelaher. If Madame Kelaher is still practising the art of manifestation she’s doing a damn good job.”

“When she turns up I’ll ask her — —” began Roger.

“She’ll turn up, as you put it,” said Ann. “I don’t know how, or where, or when, but she’ll be with us sooner or later. I said the others would come, didn’t I?”

“You did,” admitted Joe. “You’re right in that, at least.”

“And I’ll be right in this,” replied Ann. “This train is the doom train — —”

The hoarse shrieking of the siren silenced her. She shuddered as she listened to the mournful wailing.

“That doesn’t help, either,” she said. “Why is the fool making that noise?”

“Must be coming to the first tunnel. Signal to close all windows,” answered Joe.

“The first tunnel,” muttered Ann.

“And here it is,” cried Roger. “Whoosh! We’re in it — —”

A roar, a rushing cloud of steam past the windows, a momentary flicker of red light, and the tunnel swallowed them. From compartment six came a woman’s voice, high, piercing, held on an ear-splitting note.

“Mrs Myers,” gasped Ann. “Yes; I recognize the end of it now.”

“The end of what?” asked Roger.

“The ‘Shadow Song,’” sighed Ann.

“Curse it,” said Joe bitterly. “That’s what we heard before.”

Firemen no doubt have their own technique, but the one firing the engine of the mixed mountain special will never know with what relief the glow from his fire-box was received when he left open the furnace. Along the tunnel walls streamed the flickering scarlet brilliance, penetrating the steam-frosted windows, and giving to the interior of the corridor car a rosy-red light almost blinding after the abysmal darkness experienced.

Ann, Joe and Roger at once became aware that an unusual activity seemed to have seized upon their mysterious neighbours. The first person to pass their door was Pierre Fouché, the hunchback. Glancing in at them he grinned, a meaning, malevolent grin, Ann thought. Joe was more interested in the flickering dexterity of the fellow’s fingers. Fouché had said something, but what they did not know. He went on, and as he vanished Mr Gerald Shaw came to the door and looked in.

“Ah, ha! There you are,” he told them.

They appraised him carefully, this being the first time they had seen Mr Shaw's face and person. They saw he was almost sixty years of age, but his lean and active frame seemed in no way to be a victim of his years. His pale blue eyes were cold and stern beneath bushy grey eyebrows. Under one arm was a folded newspaper. Opening his mouth he spoke thus:

“‘Fellows, stand fast; I see a passenger. If there be ten, shrink not, but down with 'em!’ Care to read the latest?”

“Thank you,” said Joe as he took the paper. “And what was all that?”

Mr Shaw put his head on one side and raised his eyebrows.

“*Two Gentlemen of Verona.*”

“Are they here?” growled Joe.

“Idiot,” muttered Ann. “He quoted Shakespeare— —”

Mr Shaw's head became upright. The eyebrows came down.

“‘Sirs and madam, ’” he hurled at them, “‘here lurks no treason, here no envy swells, here grow no damned drugs, here are no storms.’ *Titus Andronicus.*”

“Huh!” was Joe's comment.

“And have you,” continued Mr Shaw, “seen anything of a black bag?”

“I thought so. I knew it was coming,” said Joe.

Mr Shaw leaned forward confidentially.

“I might tell you—that bag is vital!” Up went the eyebrows. “*Entre nous*, I don't trust these others.” The eyebrows came down. “Especially the fat man, Gregory Wayne.”

A tenor voice coming along the corridor sang:

Johnny, get your gun, get your gun, get your gun,
Johnny, get your gun by jimminy,
Johnny, get your gun, get your gun, get your gun,
Johnny, get your gun and come with me— —

“Mr Gregory Wayne is arriving now, I think,” said Roger.

The voice then told them:

I don't want to play in your yard,
I don't want you any more— —

It was Mr Gregory Wayne. He stopped singing when he saw Mr Shaw inside the door of compartment two. Instantly a snarl curved his fat lips.

“You won't get it, Shaw. We've all got our suspicions of you— —”

Mr Shaw's head went slowly to one side:

“These lies are like the father that begets them; gross as a mountain, open, palpable. Why, thou clay-brained guts, thou knotty-pated fool, thou whoreson, obscene, greasy tallow-ketch — —”

“*King Henry the Fourth*, I think,” murmured Roger.

Mr Wayne’s eyes had receded behind their folds of flesh to become two black pin points of light.

“I repeat, Shaw, you won’t get it — —”

Mr Gerald Shaw turned dramatically to Ann, Joe and Roger:

“Take the advice of the bastard; be stirring as the time; be fire with fire; threaten the threatener, and outface the brow of bragging horror — —”

“*King John*,” snarled Mr Wayne.

“Damn you,” said Mr Shaw courteously.

With a gesture of contempt he squeezed past Mr Wayne and went towards the guard’s van. Mr Wayne scowled after him.

“Fellow’s mad,” he grunted. “And dangerous. I’ve warned the others about Shaw. I warn you.”

Quickly the scowl faded from the heavy face to be replaced by the blandest of bland smiles. All at once he fairly oozed bonhomie and goodwill.

“Mr Harper, Miss Harper, and Mr Roger Balcombe, I presume?” he murmured affably. “I’m Gregory Wayne.”

“How do you do, Mr Wayne?” came in chorus.

Mr Wayne beamed, and when Gregory Wayne beamed his fat face became convulsed with folds of geniality.

“Newspaper people, eh?” he chuckled.

Joe and Ann looked at Roger.

“Who told you that?” Roger asked.

Mr Wayne waved a fat hand.

“‘A chield’s amang ye takin’ notes, an’ faith he’ll prent it,’” he quoted. “Great fellow, Burns. Liked to have met him. Knew what he was talking about. Are you here to report us, by any chance? Do you intend to record your impressions in sensational ink, may I ask?”

“Who sent you here to ask those questions, Mr Wayne?” asked Roger bluntly.

“Sent me?” wheezed Mr Wayne merrily. “Did you say ‘send,’ Mr Balcombe?”

“You got it right the first time,” said Roger curtly.

“No one ever sends Gregory Wayne, my dear sir. Just a natural deduction on my own part.”

“Well, deductions seem the vogue in this carriage,” said Joe. “But you can return to yourself and tell yourself that your natural deductions are all rhubarb. Here’s Pierre coming back. Mr Fouché in person.”

“Pierre?” grunted Mr Wayne as he turned. His fat face was set and grim again. “Oh, yes, Fouché. Well, glad to have met you people. And by the way, what I really want to ask you is have you seen — ”

“A black bag?” from all three.

Mr Gregory Wayne was not smiling now. The genial jowls were still and forbidding. Roger spoke quietly.

“We fancy it must have been thrown out of the train, Mr Wayne,” he said.

A look of incredulity swept across the quivering folds of fat. Mr Wayne’s face was suddenly moving with horror. Without another word he turned and stumped away, crushing past Pierre Fouché without even glancing at the hunchback. Monsieur Fouché grinned again, spoke again with his nimble fingers and went into the end compartment.

“Is that hunchback laughing or sneering at us?” asked Ann.

“Both, I should say,” replied Joe. “You did something to Wayne, Roger. He was almost paralysed with shock of some kind.”

Roger nodded.

“The secret of the murder is undoubtedly in that bag,” he said. “I wish we knew what it is. These people know. They want that bag very much.”

“There was nothing in it that appeared to incriminate any one,” said Ann. “Or was there?”

“Not a thing,” said Joe. “And yet I think we are tempting providence by having anything to do with it. If the dead man was killed for it, the killer wouldn’t hesitate to take a stab at us if he thought we had it.”

“There’s Fouché going back to the van again,” said Ann quickly.

Just for a moment the large luminous dark eyes stared in at them. A distorted grin bared the fellow’s teeth, and his right hand rose with the fingers writhing like the serpents on the Gorgon’s head.

“I wish I could understand what he is saying,” said Ann.

“I wish I knew who killed the man we found,” muttered Joe.

“For a start,” said Roger, “I’d be content to know how these people came into the carriage, who they are, and where they came from.”

Out of the tunnel laboured the train. The light faded, flickered and died as the furnace closed. Again they sat in solid darkness. Ann relaxed.

“This darkness,” she said faintly, “is beginning to hammer at my temples.”

Joe grunted.

“Same here. Now, I suppose, the manifestations will settle down in their compartments again — —”

“You can scoff, Joe,” said Ann warmly. “But I believe each and every one of them to be visible evidence of Madame Kelaher’s power.”

“How can they be?” retorted Joe. “She was killed on the train with the others.”

“I don’t know how it can be. Will you tell me how it can be that labels bearing her name are on the cases over your head?”

“No,” grunted Joe. “I’m damned if I can. They’re there, all right. I can’t tell you anything. If only some of these ghosts would talk, but they keep their mouths shut. All they can say is ‘have you seen the black bag?’”

“Has it struck you yet that with the guard the number has risen to twelve?” asked Ann. “There were twelve in that other carriage as well as the three who got on at Deep Valley.”

“Twelve,” said Roger. “And when we came into this carriage there wasn’t a living soul in it.”

“Apart from us there still isn’t,” said Ann.

“Bah! It won’t do, Ann,” said Joe stubbornly. “It may all appear to be supernatural, but that’s impossible.”

“You read the name on the labels, didn’t you?” asked Ann.

“Oh, confound the labels,” cried Joe.

“If you like,” Ann retorted. “But they still bear the name of the woman who was the greatest exponent and demonstrator of the occult sciences. If that, combined with what has happened in this carriage is mere coincidence, I’m a fool.”

“Well, you’re no fool, and the name is there, and extraordinary, in fact, unearthly things have happened,” said Roger.

Ann rose to her feet.

“I want to talk to Madame Kelaher,” she told them.

“But she’s not here—she’s still dissolved,” growled Joe.

“She must be somewhere,” insisted Ann. “Let’s ask them one by one.”

“All right,” agreed Roger. “She must be somewhere, as you say. I can’t understand why we haven’t seen her yet.”

“Let’s start with Mr Shaw,” said Joe.

They went to the third compartment and Joe opened the door.

“Mr Shaw— —” called Ann.

As there was no reply Joe walked into the compartment, felt along the seats, and then came out.

“Not there. Talking to the others, I expect.”

A step took them to the fourth compartment.

“Miss Caldwell,” called Ann.

Miss Caldwell did not reply.

“I have my suspicions about our Polly,” muttered Joe.

“Oh, good heavens,” gasped Ann. “Let’s try Mr Wayne— —”

But Mr Wayne was not in his compartment.

“Mrs Myers,” said Ann shrilly. “Quick— —”

“Surely they are somewhere,” muttered Roger.

“All together talking it over, I’ll bet,” said Joe.

“Mrs Myers, Mrs Myers— —” panted Ann as Joe opened the door.

“Not there,” said Joe slowly.

“Then where are they?” said Ann wildly.

“Here is Miss Francis’s compartment— —”

Roger hurled the door back.

“Miss Francis— —”

“Empty,” croaked Joe. “That leaves only the last compartment and the van. Come on.”

The last door slid open. The Campobassos’ compartment was deserted. Joe took a quick look in the van. The tarpaulin was still there, and the tan shoe, but no one else. He stepped back into the corridor.

“The carriage and the van are both empty,” he said gruffly.

“Get back, get back for God’s sake,” gasped Ann.

Passing back along the corridor they peered again into each compartment. All were empty.

“My heavens— —” whispered Ann. “Gone, all of them. Gone as mysteriously as they appeared— —”

Roger gripped her.

“Steady, Ann,” he said.

“Steady? Steady?” she choked. “What did I tell you? These people aren’t human—they aren’t even people. And only one person—Madame Geraldine Kelaher—can prove it. And where she is at this moment . . . or what she is at this moment . . . who can tell?”

Completely mystified, and a little shaken, they stood close together in the dark corridor. It was beyond all comprehension and belief that living flesh and blood could so disappear. There were certain very definite facts, and Joe recounted them briefly.

“No use our going back to the compartment,” he said. “We’ve got to solve this vanishing trick.”

Ann said quietly:

“I’ve told you. The only person who can do that is Madame Kelaher.”

“I heard you,” said Joe calmly. “But as yet she hasn’t appeared. We don’t know where she is any more than we know where the others are. I want to be very definite about this train. When we stood on the platform at Deep Valley— —”

Ann interrupted him:

“I wish,” she said fervently, “we had never seen that platform.”

“Let me talk,” growled Joe. “While we were there we saw this train come in. I for one watched it slow up and stop. First there was the engine and tender, then the trucks, then next to the trucks one carriage in darkness, then the lighted van.”

“And that was all,” said Roger.

“Yes. We know there is only one carriage—this one. We know there is only one van. If we were not sure about these two facts we could assume there was another carriage or another van into which these people could go. But there isn’t. The trucks are up against the carriage this end, the van joins it at the other.”

“Very well,” said Ann patiently. “Having established the fact that there is only one carriage and one van—where are the people? Would Mr Wayne and Mrs Myers go into the trucks?”

Joe shook his head.

“No. They couldn’t do it,” he acknowledged. “In any case, they didn’t come this way—did they?”

Roger looked up and down the black corridor.

“I can’t say, Joe. If they did pass us this end why would they forsake a dry carriage, even if it is in darkness, to go into a wet and dismal and equally dark iron truck? No; they’re not in the trucks.”

“And they’re not in the carriage,” said Ann.

“And they’re not in the van,” said Roger.

“So then,” said Joe, “they must be on the roof, and getting up there is beyond the physical powers of Wayne and Myers even if the others were stupid enough to try it— —”

Ann spoke in a tone of flat finality.

“It’s foolish to look for them. What is happening here is not governed by natural conditions— —”

“I won’t have that,” said Joe obstinately. “We’ll look again. The truth is that people these days, ourselves included, are all subject to suggestion in a manner impossible and unknown to the previous generation. The war, I guess.”

“How?” asked Roger.

Joe was smiling as he waved a mighty arm in the darkness.

“Take a simple illustration—advertisements. Modern advertising has brought suggestion down to, or up to, a fine art. It is no longer mere suggestion, and it is now more than persuasion. It is a form of mental compulsion.”

“To wit?” murmured Roger.

Joe’s grin broadened. He knew Ann was listening with both ears.

“The other day I saw an advertisement for somebody’s pills. It was a photograph of a grinning young bride—you know the type, all teeth and no brains. The caption told the world this happy bride was a happy bride because she swallowed a daily dose of the pills. The husband got no credit. And now all the constipated females with plenty of teeth and no brains will emulate her, grinning all the time like the brainless bride.”

“You’re a fool, Joe,” said Ann crossly.

Joe shook hands with himself in the darkness. Any argument would do so long as it kept Ann’s mind off her pet occult bug.

“Well, if I’m a fool, what’s the use of that advertisement?” he demanded.

Roger smothered a chuckle.

“Are you suggesting all these people have taken somebody’s pills—and hence the exodus?” he asked.

Joe laughed.

“Not exactly. I’m merely trying to show that we all allow ourselves to be suggested, persuaded, and compelled. Walk down any main street, look in any direction, and what do you see? I’ll tell you: a mighty forefinger pointing at you, a benevolent gentleman smiling at you, and another suggestion hurled at you—you need money! And believe me even while you look at that kindly fellow you realize he’s right. You do need money, and in you go. Bah! These fools disappearing from this carriage is nothing, mere kindergarten stuff compared with what modern commerce can do to you. Remember the happy bride and the pills.”

Ann was breathing quickly. Joe could be the silliest fathead imaginable at times.

“I still think you’re a fool,” she retorted. “You seem to forget a man was murdered in this carriage, and that apart from the bewildering antics of these people our own lives may be in danger. We don’t know who is involved, or why, but we know we’re now in the tangle, and it’s up to us to look after ourselves.”

“That’s so, Ann,” agreed Roger. “Joe’s only trying to calm you down a bit.”

“Calm me down?” cried Ann. “I’m calm enough, thank you. I know we are witnessing one of the most amazing occult — —”

“There she goes again,” groaned Joe. “I tell you there’s nothing occult about this.”

“And I tell you there is,” said Ann warmly.

“Then one of us is a fool,” said Joe heatedly.

“Well, it isn’t me — —”

“Listen, you cracked egg — —”

“Gong!” said Roger.

“Well, it was Joe,” panted Ann. “He is a fool — —”

“Fool, eh?” snarled Joe. “The more I listen to you the more I realize why big business pays big dividends. I tell you women to-day are just plain screwy. They believe any hooey so long as it’s in print or cellophane. They live on radio and film dope. They smoke like furies, paint like harlots, and drink like fish. Before long looking natural and having a baby will be something they’ve scarcely heard about. In fact most of them are getting that wrung about the withers and rump I doubt if they could. Soon they’ll all be old and still brainless and barren. And *why*? Because in their striving to be independent and intellectual they’ve become, as I said, just screwy. Your bilge about the occult is a fine example; in fact, you’re worse than the

brainless bride because pills after all are pills, but this psychic stuff you swallow is the sheerest flam.”

“Joe—you’re a beast,” gasped Ann. “Let me tell you something about men. Of all the damn misfits in creation—it’s men. No woman could live with a man without becoming intellectually feeble and completely screwy. They puff out their silly little chests which their wives have just rubbed with camphorated oil and strut about in the instinctive manner of their simian ancestors. Do you wonder women want to get away from them? Do you wonder women grasp at illusions now they are awake to the truth about men? Of all the— —”

“Gong,” said Roger.

“I haven’t finished,” said Ann firmly. “I’m only starting.”

“Gong!” yelled Roger.

“All right,” said Joe. “It’s a draw. Now let’s get busy and find these phantoms. They’re about somewhere. These nuts are real, and we’re going to prove it.”

“Go ahead,” said Ann. “What do we do first? Whistle?”

Joe turned towards the van.

“Maybe,” he grunted.

“I don’t care what Joe says or does he won’t discover anything or prove anything until we get to the third tunnel— —”

“You always were one of those little ‘I told you so’ brats,” Joe flung over his shoulder. “Be quiet! There’s a light in the van— —”

They stopped abruptly.

“There’s no light in the van,” contradicted Ann.

“Yes; there it is,” said Roger. “It’s flickering on and off.”

“Someone in the van,” muttered Joe.

“I wonder if they are all in there,” said Roger.

“We’ll see,” said Joe grimly.

The communication door was swinging with the movement of the carriage. Passing through into the van they stood near the door watching the light.

“There’s the switch,” said Roger.

He went to it. Ann would not look at the tarpaulin as Joe bent and pulled it over the tan shoe.

“Can’t stand the sight of that shoe,” the big fellow told them.

Roger was watching the switch. The light flashed on and off and then on again. Ann shivered as she watched it, and clutched at Joe. Roger pointed to the switch.

“Nothing supernatural about that,” he informed them. “The switch is loose, and every extra heavy jolt of the van puts it on or off. Nothing psychic there — —”

“Nothing except that the switch on the doomed train probably did the same thing,” said Ann.

“Oh, you halibut,” groaned Joe.

“Listen!” said Roger sharply. “There they are—they’re back in the carriage — —”

He snapped off the light and they went to the door. Somewhere in the corridor Polly Caldwell’s high-pitched voice was almost a shriek.

“You wouldn’t dare, Wayne! You leave me alone, I tell you! Leave me alone—leave me alone! I’ll tell Kelaher about this — —”

“You’ll tell nobody — —” they heard Wayne say.

“I haven’t got it — —” Polly screamed. “Let me go, you devil. Let me—oh! Oh — —”

“Come on,” panted Joe. “He’s throttling her — —”

“Quick,” gulped Ann. “Stop him—stop him — —”

The door slammed after them as they ran to Wayne’s compartment. It was empty. They peered into Polly’s compartment, but it also was empty. They searched all the compartments. Joe wrenched at the door between the carriage and the trucks, but it was locked and bolted fast. The corridor was empty, the lavatories were empty, the compartments were empty, and they knew the van to be empty for they had just come from there. Panting and bewildered they stood in the corridor. There was no light, and no sound other than their own heavy breathing and the noise of the train and the rain.

Without speaking they went into their own compartment.

Joe passed a cigarette to Ann, one to Roger, and then selected one for himself as the train went into the second echoing tunnel. A suggestion of light showed Ann’s pretty face to be white and drawn. Her eyes were frightened, her lips a thin, nervous line. Roger was frowning thoughtfully. Joe drew in a mighty lungful of smoke.

“Well,” he said deeply, “I confess it’s got me beat.”

“Same here,” acknowledged Roger.

Ann did not speak. The train shot out of the second tunnel, dissolving all things to three tiny red points of fire. Ann’s cigarette came down jerkily

from her lips to her lap.

“The devil himself must be in this corridor car,” she said huskily. “For ten people to come one by one into compartments proved empty, each seemingly coming from nowhere, and for the same ten to vanish into the darkness itself is, if we hadn’t seen it for ourselves, beyond belief.”

“They must be on the train somewhere,” protested Joe. “The train hasn’t stopped—it’s not racing up these mountains, but it’s travelling too fast for any one to leap on and off with safety. Besides, think of the bulk of Wayne and Mrs Myers. They must be on the train. But where? Not in this carriage, not in the van, and there’s nowhere else.”

Roger said slowly:

“A few minutes ago each compartment was occupied. Nothing has altered; nothing has changed. The train goes on with the same tarpaulin lashed trucks, the same carriage, the same van. And all at once the strange people who came all at once disappear all at once.”

“Where?” grunted Joe. “If this were a film the answer would be easy, but it isn’t a film, and no film is being made. And yet these people of living flesh and blood dissolve like the fade-out on celluloid.”

“Flesh and blood— —” muttered Ann. “I thought you would have known better than that by now.”

“Now listen, Ann,” said Joe firmly. “Don’t let’s have any more of the Kelaher stuff. Neither Roger nor I subscribe to that mystic drivel. All that hooley is clever illusion, suggestion—and rhubarb.”

“Precisely,” said Ann. “Illusion and suggestion. So that’s your idea of the powers you do not understand. Well, supposing for a moment you are right. How do you know Madame Kelaher isn’t practising her art on us?”

“Oh, dammit all— —” began Joe.

Ann gestured wearily. Joe was worse than the man from Missouri. That gentleman merely demanded ocular proof, but one had to drive truth into Joe’s head with a veritable verbal sledge-hammer.

“Let me go on,” she said patiently. “Suggestion; thought transference; the creation of thought forces and objects; thought projection and reception; hypnotic control of mind and body; the recall of those who have passed on; visible objects which have no human or earthly being—all these things have been seen, heard and done.”

“Example?” grunted Joe.

Ann shrugged. Joe was obviously being stubborn.

“Your memory is either very convenient, or it is slipping, Joe. You and I and Roger have witnessed remarkable public demonstrations of the power of suggestion. Call it mass hypnotism if you will. But we have seen usually normal people at a public meeting, a meeting attended by hundreds, suddenly become as though the ancient Gadarene swine had entered them. Some have danced until they have frothed at the mouth and dropped. Others hopped round and round the stage like kangaroos. Others barked like dogs. Others mewed like cats while others sat on invisible chairs playing invisible pianos. It was terrible and horrible to watch. Afterwards not one of the dupes remembered having done these things.”

“Well, go on,” muttered Joe.

“Those people while their minds were controlled must have believed implicitly that they were kangaroos, dogs, cats; that they sat at pianos; that they were sawing logs. We saw two men take off their coats, roll up their sleeves, pick up an invisible saw, inspect a giant log, walk round it, place the saw, and then swing together as they cut into an invisible log with an invisible saw.”

“True,” admitted Joe. “And they worked damned hard at that log.”

“Yes,” said Roger. “It was uncanny. Inexplicable. Do you suggest that from the moment we stepped into this carriage our minds have been under the control of Madame Kelaher?”

“How else can be explained all that we have seen and heard?” demanded Ann. “That is if you will not accept my belief that it goes beyond that, and that these people, this train, and ourselves are a reproduction of the doom train.”

“That’s all claptrap, Ann,” said Joe bluntly. “It proves nothing. Even when these people disappeared a moment ago the murdered man was still in the guard’s van. Wasn’t he? If all this strange business were thought control wouldn’t he go with the others?”

“We may still be under control so far as he is concerned.”

“It can’t be that, Ann,” said Roger. “We wouldn’t be conscious of illusion if that were so.”

“And stop filling yourself up with occult gas from the psychic bowser,” advised Joe. “Your mental machine will stall and crash if you don’t.”

“I’m not,” retorted Ann. “But it’s stupid to deny existence of what exists; just as stupid as people were when they hanged and burnt others for saying and believing that the world was round and not flat.”

“That may be so,” admitted Roger. “But out of a simple molehill of truth don’t let us create a mountain of extravagance.”

“But, Roger, how else can you explain all that has gone on in this dark carriage? Doesn’t it all point to something?”

“Yes,” said Joe. “Something. We know there is a something, we knew it when we discovered the murdered man.”

“Well,” said Ann, “you explain it. Let’s have a natural, a rational, a sensible, a physical explanation from you. Tell us why this train corresponds in every particular with the doom train. Tell us why we boarded it at Deep Valley at dark like those other three people? Tell us how each person appeared and where he or she came from. Tell us why there was trouble on the doom train and there is trouble on this. Tell us why the people of this carriage speak and dress as people of the nineties did. Tell us why Mr Wayne sings the songs of the nineties? Tell us why there is a Madame Geraldine Kelaher on this train when there was a Madame Geraldine Kelaher on the doom train back in the nineties. Tell us why their carriage was in darkness, and why ours is also. Go on, brother Joe, we’re waiting for an explanation that isn’t claptrap and bunkum.”

“Can’t,” grunted Joe. “But I won’t accept hooey, hocus and ectobunkum. A man was murdered. A man or a woman killed him. All these people came from somewhere, and they’ve gone back to the same place — —”

“Yes, but what place?”

“Now don’t start getting frantic about it — —”

Ann dashed her cigarette down and stamped heavily on it.

“I’m not getting frantic,” she asserted. “It’s all very well to say in a large and stupid way that these people have gone to some place. Where could they go? They wouldn’t go tearing the tarpaulin off the trucks and all squat out in the rain, would they? Not Mr Wayne or Mrs Myers, anyway. Nor could either of those fat persons ever clamber over the buffers into a truck. And they didn’t go into the van, and they are not in this carriage. Where could they go? On the roof? Under the carriage perched on the bogies? We know the trucks are right up against this carriage. There are only the trucks, this carriage, and the van. The trucks are impossible, they’re not here, and they’re not in the van. Now come on, Joe. A natural explanation, please.”

“I know all that,” muttered Joe. “But they must be somewhere — —”

Ann’s voice became a little shrill.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake stop being stubborn.”

“I’m not stubborn,” said Joe warmly.

“Were those people we saw associates of the dead man?” asked Roger. “You will remember not one of them referred to him, not one of them hinted at death or murder.”

“Could it have been suicide?” Ann asked suddenly.

“With that woman’s bag clutched in his hands?” asked Joe.

“No; it wasn’t suicide,” muttered Roger.

“He was killed, all right,” said Joe. “But as you say none of these people has referred to it. Nor do they talk about conditions in this carriage. If we mention the lights or the communication they merely say something vague and slide away from it.”

“Hush hush?” suggested Roger. “Perhaps they think we don’t yet know about it, and they are trying to keep it from us. You will recollect that Miss Francis asked us if we had seen anything unusual in the van. Evidently she wasn’t sure whether we knew about the murder.”

Joe shook his head.

“But why was the dead man alone when we entered the compartment at Deep Valley? There he was huddled against the window like a man asleep. Why was the carriage empty then?”

“Oh, good heavens— —” groaned Ann. “And why did the guard try to prevent us from getting into the carriage?”

“Let’s take these people to pieces one by one,” said Roger. “We’ll analyse them. The first person we met was the guard. What’s your opinion of him?”

“I think he was the guard of the doom train,” said Ann.

“I don’t,” said Joe flatly. “I don’t believe he is the real guard.”

“Then where is the real guard?” snapped Ann.

“How in blazes do I know,” replied Joe heatedly. “I’m no Madame Kelaher. I think he tried to stop us boarding the train because he knew there was a murdered man in this carriage.”

“That’s what I think,” said Roger. “It was the guard who dragged the dead man over the roof to the van. All that nonsense about trying to fix the lights is too thin.”

“He is obviously well implicated in the murder. He could easily be the killer—if he is not the guard,” said Joe.

“I agree,” said Roger. “The next person we met was Miss Francis. It’s no use asking ourselves again where was she when we entered the carriage. We don’t know. But we do know she was desperately anxious to get her hands on that black bag— —”

“Schemed to get it,” said Joe. “Picked my pocket.”

“Exactly. The bag was associated with the murdered man. He wanted it, and it looks as though he died to keep it. Miss Francis wanted it. Therefore

she is definitely associated with the murder and knows all about it.”

“No doubt about that,” agreed Joe. “She and the guard left the van together after the dead man had been placed in the van. Remember?”

“That makes two who without any shadow of doubt are associated with the crime,” said Ann. “Next?”

“Mr Gerald Shaw,” said Roger. “Mr Shaw has been at considerable pains to get the black bag into his own hands.”

“A very queer character is Mr Gerald Shaw,” said Joe.

“They all are,” Roger went on. “Shaw’s association with the murder is proved by his anxiety concerning the black bag.”

“The naïve Polly also made discreet inquiries about it. She said Mrs Caesar Campobasso lost it. The guard said, the second time, that Mrs Myers had lost it. Miss Francis said that Madame Kelaher owns the bag. Therefore the innocent Polly, Mrs Myers, and Mrs Campobasso are all in this game of murder.”

“Mr Wayne?” asked Ann.

“Hates Mr Shaw and Mr Shaw hates Mr Wayne. We saw that for ourselves. Mr Wayne waddles along to us in his own good time— —”

“Also to ask about the black bag,” said Joe. “He was almost paralysed when Roger told him it had been thrown off the train.”

“Therefore Mr Wayne is in it,” said Roger.

“Definitely,” agreed Ann.

“And Monsieur Pierre Fouché?” asked Joe.

Ann shuddered. She hated to think of Fouché.

“Him? God knows what he is or where he came from. He hasn’t spoken.”

“The others know him although they all treat him with a kind of bitter contempt. Miss Caldwell knew about him. Mr Wayne knew about him. Therefore again by association Monsieur Pierre Fouché is implicated.”

“They’re all damn well in it,” growled Joe. “From the guard down to the hunchback.”

“Yet not one of them has mentioned the dead man,” said Roger.

“Not one,” said Joe.

“Why?” snapped Ann.

“Because each and every one of them is scared about something,” Roger answered. “Not one trusts the other.”

“Well, I still hold to my belief,” said Ann. “It is the only answer . . . to the impossible.”

“You make me tired,” snarled Joe. “Confront an imaginative woman with something she can’t understand or explain, and she goes all gooseflesh and psychic. It’s bosh!”

“Well, they’re not on the train, and they couldn’t get off the train,” said Ann hotly. “So what?”

“I still don’t believe— —”

“No?” shrilled Ann. “Answer me, bright brain. Are these people on this train? Of all the fatuous, fiddleheaded, ineffable fatheads! Are they? Are they? Are they?”

“No,” groaned Joe, “unless I’m hypnotized, which I’m not.”

“Could they get off it?” demanded Ann, her voice still rising. “Could they?”

“No; not travelling at this clip— —”

Ann sagged.

“Then,” wearily, “where the hell are they?” There was silence until Roger said sharply:

“Do you smell anything?”

They sniffed.

“A cigar,” said Ann.

“And a good one,” muttered Joe. “Mr Gerald Shaw?”

“Or Mr Wayne?” suggested Roger.

“There is, of course, another query,” said Ann.

“What?”

“As the carriage is empty, where is that smoke coming from?”

Joe got to his feet.

“Follow your nose,” he grunted. “Come on.”

In the corridor the aroma of a very good cigar was quite strong. Joe pointed into Mr Shaw’s compartment.

“There he is,” he said. “Back again. Mr Gerald Shaw in person.”

Ann stared at the glowing cigar tip.

“It’s beyond all comprehension,” she said slowly.

“He’s there all right,” admitted Roger. “Where did he come from?”

“Ask him,” said Ann shortly.

“Wait a bit,” said Joe. “Let’s look in the other compartments. Perhaps the others have also materialized.”

They moved along a few paces. In compartment four a shadow moved.

“Our Polly has returned to us,” said Joe. “It’s probably wet and cold out on the astral outer — —”

“Next,” said Roger.

They opened the door of Mr Wayne’s compartment.

“Want me?” an unctuous voice inquired.

“Ah, Mr Wayne—Mr Gregory Wayne,” said Joe pleasantly. “Did you find the black bag?”

“Damn the black bag!” came explosively.

“Just thought I’d ask as we passed,” said Joe. “Thought you’d like to know Miss Francis has it — —”

He closed the door.

“Strange fellow, Gregory,” he said thoughtfully. “Well, he also has returned.”

“And Mrs Fanny Myers is in,” observed Ann.

The door was open.

“Do you want me?” Mrs Myers asked.

“Not at all, not at all,” said Joe. “Is Miss Francis in, do you know?”

Mrs Myers’s husky voice became heavily charged with sarcasm.

“If you care to stretch your neck—you’ll see.”

Joe retorted:

“Some necks that are stretched prevent their owners from seeing, my dear lady.”

Mrs Myers’s shadow moved a little.

“I don’t know what you mean. Do you mind closing the door?”

“Not at all, not at all,” replied Joe. “I wondered if you knew Miss Caldwell has the black bag. She got it from Mr Shaw — —”

With that he closed the door with a force almost sufficient to shatter it. Miss Francis opened her door.

“I heard your voices,” her cool voice told them. “On the prowl again, Mr Harper?”

“So there you are,” said Joe heartily. “We’re coming in.”

“Are you? Very well, come in.”

They filed in.

“What is on your mind, Mr Harper?” Miss Francis wanted to know.

“You,” said Joe deeply. “Can’t stop thinking about you.”

“About me?”

“You,” Joe repeated. “Mr Wayne just told us he had the black bag— —”

Miss Francis was amused. She laughed as she sat down.

“Really, Mr Harper, a little more finesse, please. If Gregory Wayne has the bag he certainly wouldn’t tell you or any one else— —”

“Why not?” asked Ann.

“He would doubtless have his own reasons, Miss Harper.”

“Deep, aren’t you?” said Joe.

“Very,” was the reply.

“Why did you kill the man in the van?” demanded Joe.

Miss Francis’s voice hardened a little.

“That is a terrible accusation, Mr Harper— —”

“Then you didn’t do it?”

Miss Francis spoke icily.

“You are merely being foolish, Mr Harper; as you were when you were airing your opinion on women generally a few minutes ago.”

They all stared at her until Ann said:

“Did you—did you hear what we said?”

“Yes,” was the astonishing reply. “And my further acquaintance with your brother merely supports your own observations of men.”

“Where were you?” asked Roger.

Miss Francis laughed softly.

“I think there must be something wrong with your eyesight, Mr Balcombe. Good night. It is not pleasant to be accused of—murder. And this is the second time Mr Harper has shown us his incredible stupidity. Good night.”

“Incredible stupidity,” echoed Joe. “Dammit all— —”

“Good night,” said Miss Francis pointedly.

“Good night,” grunted Joe.

He closed the door after Ann and Roger.

“Deep as the sea,” said Ann.

The door opened and Miss Francis spoke quietly.

“I think you three are being very foolish. What has happened here doesn’t concern you. What we do, what we say, and where we go also do not

concern you. I give you good advice when I suggest you all go into your compartment and remain there whatever happens.”

“Then you admit the murder?” asked Joe.

“Murder?”

“The man in the van.”

“So far as I am concerned you are talking in riddles, Mr Harper.”

“Liar,” grunted Joe.

Miss Francis gasped. Ann said quickly:

“Joe!”

“Well, so she is. They’re a bunch of liars.”

“How nice of you, Mr Harper,” said Miss Francis coolly. “In a moment I shall regret trying to help you — —”

“Help us?” from all three.

“If the one who killed the man in the van thinks you have the black bag — he may become interested in you, singly and collectively. That is all.”

“And are you in no danger?” demanded Joe.

“I may be.”

“Then I’ll stay with you.”

“Joe!” gasped Ann.

“Dammit, can’t leave a girl alone — she may have the black bag — —”

“I haven’t the bag,” said Miss Francis. “And I prefer to be alone.”

The door closed. Joe stood irresolute for a moment.

“Come on, you idiot,” hissed Ann. “You were warned, weren’t you?”

“He was, very clearly,” said Roger. “Let’s beat it, Joe.”

“I like that girl,” sighed Joe. “Dream of a girl. She ought to know Mr Shaw has the bag — —”

“Oh, what a fool,” panted Ann.

“Just wanted her to know. She’s listening to what I’m saying.”

“I’m going back,” snapped Ann. “Joe’s gone mad.”

“I’m going into the van,” said Joe.

“Why?” asked Roger.

“The guard. Have you forgotten the guard with the Van Dyke beard?”

“No. But come back to the compartment, Joe,” pleaded Ann.

“Miss Francis wasn’t joking when she warned us. She meant it. Stop meddling, for God’s sake — —”

“Listen, Ann. These people don’t like us prowling round, and, confound it all, it’s as much our carriage as theirs. They give us a pain when they disappear like they do. We’ll give them a pain by not disappearing. Fair enough?”

“See what you can do with him, Roger,” said Ann.

“I think Ann’s right, Joe. Never mind the van— —”

“I want to see the guard. He’s keeping well out of the way for some reason. I want a talk with that lad, if he has come back from space, that is.”

“All right,” sighed Ann. “I know Joe. He’s both irresistible force and immovable object. In fact he’s a fool. Lead on into the van, Joe.”

He did so. Roger switched on the light while Ann remained beside her brother. There was no sign of the guard.

“Still larking round on one of those cosmic rays, I’ll be bound,” said Joe.

“He has been absent for some time,” said Roger.

“Perhaps the killer thought the guard had the bag,” suggested Ann.

Joe’s hand felt the bulge of the bag in his pocket.

“Maybe. Anyway, he’s not here. Let’s get back.”

“Somebody is starting another argument in the corridor,” said Roger. “Better wait here— —”

“Just listen to them,” muttered Ann.

They stood listening. From the dark corridor came the sounds of quick footsteps and angry voices.

“I’ve started something,” said Joe.

“You have,” agreed Ann. “You might regret it yet.”

“It’s the only way to find out anything,” Joe protested. “Let them wrangle and argue. We’ll listen.”

Wayne’s hard voice was accusing Miss Francis.

“You’ve got it all right, Francis— —”

Ann envied the girl from Tunbridge Wells her quiet self-possession.

“Don’t be absurd, Wayne. You know that is untrue. I don’t know what has become of the bag. Perhaps you do.”

“I’ve been trying to find it for Kelaher,” rasped Wayne. “And when we find the one who has it, we’ll know who killed— —”

“Shut up,” hissed Polly Caldwell. “Do you want us all in the headlines, Wayne? These strangers are news hounds—one of them at least— —”

“You needn’t talk,” retorted Wayne. “I have it on good authority you have the bag— —”

“There them prick’st her with a thistle,” quoted Mr Shaw.

“Me?” gasped Polly. “Don’t you dare accuse me, Wayne. Only a moment ago you accused Francis. I have it on good authority that Shaw has the bag— —”

“I?” protested Mr Shaw. “What pace is this that thy tongue keeps?”

“Shaw, you make me sick with your damned quotations,” snarled Gregory Wayne. “And it’s more than possible you have the bag, as Polly says— —”

“You should mark well her words, Wayne, for it is likely ‘you . . . have vanquished the resistance of her youth, and made defeat of her virginity — —’”

“You . . . devil!” gasped Polly. “Take . . . that!”

A resounding slap echoed above the angry voices. Polly had evidently lost control and had slapped Mr Gerald Shaw’s face.

“Serves you right, Shaw— —” bellowed Mr Wayne.

Then came the unmistakable sound of a fist on flesh. Mr Wayne gave a choked cry as his heavy body bumped against the woodwork.

“He—he struck me,” the fat man panted. “I’ll get him for that— —”

“He threatens me,” Mr Shaw loudly informed them. “Mark well those words. The fat fool threatens me, and as for you, Caldwell— —”

“Don’t speak to me, Shaw,” cried Polly hotly.

Mr Shaw’s voice rang sonorously.

“O you panderly rascals! there’s a knot, a ging, a pack, a conspiracy against me: now shall the devil be shamed.’”

“Don’t you sneak away, Shaw— —”

“Out of my way harlots and liars,” was the furious rejoinder.

“What—what did he call me?” panted Mrs Myers.

“A harlot,” snapped Polly.

“Me?” screamed the stout lady. “He ought to know better. Let me get at him—let me get at him— —”

Voices rose and fell. A confused sound of stamping, panting and bumping filled the corridor. Shrieks from Mrs Fanny Myers and declamations from Mr Gerald Shaw deafened the ears. Polly Caldwell and Mr Wayne were in a heated and bitter argument, and the cool tones of Miss Francis were scarcely heard in the din. Then gradually the tumult died away, the footsteps and voices seemed to fade into silence, leaving only the sound of the wheels and the rain to fill the corridor and compartments.

“They’ve settled down again,” whispered Ann.

“All back in their compartments,” said Roger.

“Let’s go to ours,” said Joe. “All that tells us precisely nothing.”

They moved along the black corridor. At Miss Francis’s door Joe paused.

“I’m going to apologize,” he informed them.

“Oh, come on,” cried Ann. “Something will happen to you yet, Joe— —”

“It has,” he informed her.

Opening the door he peered in.

“Miss Francis— —” he called.

There was no reply. Roger struck a match, but the compartment was unoccupied.

“Dissolved again,” said Joe. “Maybe she’s in with Fanny Myers.”

But Mrs Myers was not in her compartment, neither was Mr Wayne nor Polly Caldwell, and a quick match showed that Mr Gerald Shaw had also vanished.

“Can you beat it?” gasped Joe. “Gone. All of them.”

“Even the hunchback in the end compartment has disappeared,” said Ann.

Roger propelled Joe into their compartment.

“This is the time to take Miss Francis’s advice, Joe,” he said. “It’s when the carriage is empty the killer will strike.”

“And which of them,” asked Joe as he went in, “is the killer?”

But they could not answer him.

“I am more than ever convinced,” said Ann as she sat down, “that what I have said is the truth.”

“Well,” said Joe grudgingly, “I confess it’s enough to start one thinking that way.”

“I can’t make out these amazing disappearances,” said Roger. “I simply can’t understand it. I’m half inclined to believe Ann.”

“You’ll be wholly inclined to believe me before long,” the girl replied. “Everything we have seen and heard was enacted and spoken on that train long ago. It must be so. If these people were as we are there’d be some trace of them, but they simply dissolve.”

“What is your explanation of that?” asked Joe.

Ann spoke deliberately:

“I believe these disappearances are gaps in the events of that other awful night— —”

“You mean,” cut in Roger, “that things we did not see and understand then are now represented by the fading from sight and sound of these people? I am momentarily suggesting we are the three persons who boarded the train that night.”

“Yes,” said Ann. “That is what I mean. These fadings, as you call them, are not physical vanishments, but mental gaps that were never filled in by the three persons before their death in the tunnel.”

“There are gaps all right,” acknowledged Joe. “And I’d like to know how it’s done.”

“I’m telling you how it’s done,” said Ann.

Joe shrugged.

“How you can believe all that is beyond me, Ann,” he said slowly. “You must be hypnotizing yourself. You might as well say that all things that can’t be explained— —”

Ann interrupted him:

“No. Not at all, Joe. And I’m not hypnotizing myself. I shan’t try to explain other effects by a similar cause. But you must admit that all things on this train seem to correspond with the people and events of the doomed train. Isn’t that so?”

“Coincidence,” muttered Joe.

“Can you explain these disappearances as coincidence? Even if the presence of Madame Kelaher is coincidence— —”

“She hasn’t announced herself yet,” said Joe.

“She will. I told you of that séance I attended. I saw the hands and arms of a dead artist as plainly as I saw my own, then they gradually faded. It was beyond description. These forms here fade, just as— —”

“You’re slightly wrong there, Ann,” said Roger. “You watched the hands and arms fading. We haven’t actually seen these people fading—I mean we haven’t seen them in the process of fading. We have merely become aware of their absence.”

Ann nodded.

“Yes; but in this darkness you wouldn’t see such a process. You’d need light for that.”

“That’s so,” Roger admitted. “Well, whether it’s human or superhuman, natural or supernatural, it’s got me rattled. If a gifted medium can produce the psychic phenomenon of dead hands painting a landscape, perhaps this

Kelagher woman is, after all, reproducing for our benefit the tragedy of the train on which they were all killed.”

“Ourselves included?” asked Joe dryly.

“Two men and a woman boarded the death train that night at Deep Valley,” said Ann.

“Bah!” grunted Joe. “I refuse to believe in ghosts—Kelagher or no Kelagher.”

“But you believe there’s been murder done here?” asked Ann.

“That’s obvious,” Joe retorted. “And what destroys your fading theory is the fact that the dead man doesn’t fade. He remains constant in the guard’s van.”

“He does,” admitted Ann. “But please don’t expect me to know all that is happening or why. If the murdered man remains constant it proves to me that there were no doubts concerning him in the minds of the three persons who boarded the train. He was seen and understood from the time they got on the train until the crash. But there were thought gaps concerning the others in the carriage, and these thought gaps are represented to us by the uncanny disappearances of the people we have seen.”

Joe waved his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

“It’s just marvellous how you can string words together, my girl. After this I’ll never argue again with a woman.”

“I’m not arguing,” said Ann. “Words were intended to express thought. I’m trying to express my thought of this extraordinary situation. That is all. Even at this moment I have a feeling of premonition I couldn’t explain with words.”

“What kind of a premonition?” asked Roger.

“A warning. Something seems to be telling me to be on the watch for something. I think it began when Roger said the killer would strike when the carriage was empty.”

“I’ve been a bit uneasy about things myself since the crowd vanished,” confessed Roger.

“Tension? Yes; there’s tension,” admitted Joe. “You think the killer suspects us of having the — —”

“Not so loud, Joe,” said Ann quickly. “Murder was done for that bag, and may be done again — —”

“Perhaps we should be more careful,” said Roger. “This crowd, when they are in the carriage, are fighting among themselves like wild cats to get the bag. The man in the van was killed because of it.”

A shadow moved in the corridor. Scarcely discernible though it was they saw it instantly. Ann clutched at Roger. Joe's huge frame stiffened warily. The shadow came to the door, paused, and then moved back towards the guard's van. Ann, Joe and Roger sat very still. The shadow moved again, paused again by the door, and this time went the opposite way towards the trucks. Still Ann, Joe and Roger did not move. There was no sound of footsteps, nothing except the shadow to tell of a presence in the corridor.

Quietly Joe got to his feet. Ann put out a hand to restrain him, but he shook it off. Roger also rose as Joe went to the door, and both men peered out into the black corridor. Nothing was to be seen, no sound other than that of the train could be heard. Moving into the corridor, Joe, with Roger and Ann at his heels, looked into the end compartment. The match he struck showed it to be empty. The lavatory was empty. There was no one except themselves in that end of the carriage. Joe blew out the match, and in silence they returned to their compartment and sat down. Someone had been in the corridor, there was no doubt of that. Someone, for an unknown reason, had paused for a moment outside their door. They had seen the shadow move, go towards the van end, come back, pause again, then move towards the trucks end. They had all seen it, and as the shadow had not returned whoever had been loitering in the corridor must be between their compartment and the locked door leading to the trucks. But the end compartment and the lavatory were empty. The door opening on to the trucks was still locked, and there was no key in it. Whoever had passed their door had disappeared, had vanished as completely and as absolutely as though he or she had dissolved to become part of the blackness of the carriage.

But who had appeared and then vanished? Miss Francis? Polly Caldwell? Mr Wayne? Mr Shaw? Mrs Myers? The hunchback? The guard? One of the Campobassos? Or had Madame Geraldine Kelaher passed that way?

They wondered.

There seemed to be grim truth in Roger's suggestion that the murderer would strike only when the carriage was empty. Joe, Ann and he were silently asking themselves if the slayer knew they had the bag, and if he did know—was the shadow that of the killer? But everything was so baffling, so intangible and unsubstantial that it seemed impossible to throw any light of reason on the dark happenings of this dark interlude. Above all, they wondered if the shadow would return. Why would any one linger in the corridor? Why would any one pause so deliberately, so ominously near their

door? Obviously the shadowy unknown had a reason for being there, and they all were certain the reason was the bag in Joe's pocket.

"What do you think of it?" whispered Ann.

"Dangerous," muttered Joe.

"You think—"

"Someone with a taste for blood. He or she either sensed or saw we were alert and warned."

"A pity we didn't grab that shadow the first time," said Roger.

"If we see it again," said Joe, "we will."

Ann made a quick movement.

"Look—"

Against the dark glow of the corridor window a shadow flickered. Ann's mouth and lips went quickly dry with fear. But Joe did not hesitate. Like a panther he leapt, with Roger close on his heels. Ann heard a gasp, a scuffle, and then a heavy body crashed on to the seat opposite her. Roger's match flared instantly. Panting, dishevelled, and struggling to a sitting posture was Mr Gregory Wayne.

"Good God—" he gasped. "Good God . . . who did that? Who sent me flying through the air? Who attacked me? Who—"

"I did," said Joe grimly. "Why are you snooping round this compartment, Wayne?"

"You fool," choked the trembling Wayne. "You utter, interfering, meddling fool! I was after Shaw—"

"Shaw?" they all cried.

Wayne was breathing hard. The force and power of the gigantic Joe's man-handling had reduced him to the resemblance of an enormous, quivering jellyfish. In the light, the jowls of fat and flesh were as red as the wattles of a cock.

"Yes—Shaw," he panted. "I've been following that fellow—"

"Was that Shaw we saw a moment ago?" asked Roger.

"Well, it wasn't me," grunted Wayne. He staggered to his feet. "Take my advice—keep out of this business, or some of you may be hurt—"

Joe's tone was ominous.

"Just a moment, Wayne. You can take it from me that if I do lose patience—someone will be hurt."

Wayne squeezed through the doorway.

"Well, don't pick on me," he snarled.

Joe went on:

“If I see any one lingering near this door, I’m going into action. We won’t detain you, Mr Wayne.”

“Fools,” they heard him mutter as he stumped away.

They sat down.

“Good heavens, Joe—you might have broken his neck,” said Ann. “If he hadn’t landed on a seat— —”

“He hasn’t a neck, and I threw him on the seat,” said Joe calmly.

“You certainly did,” said Roger. “You must have the strength of a bull buffalo to toss a fellow like Wayne through the air like that.”

“I’m annoyed with Mr Wayne. I’m becoming annoyed with them all — —”

“Look — —” hissed Ann.

Even as she spoke Joe was through the door. A shriek came hurtling into the compartment, and Roger’s next match revealed Mrs Fanny Myers, sprawled dazed and dumb on the seat just vacated by Mr Wayne. Mrs Myers was purple in the face from shock and breathlessness.

“Oh—it’s you,” grunted Joe. “Thought it was Wayne again.”

The stout lady swallowed several times before speech came.

“Did you . . . do that?” she croaked.

“I did,” said Joe. “What were you hanging round here for?”

Mrs Myers was still fighting for breath.

“I was going to my compartment. How dare you lay hands on me like that? How dare you — —”

“Easy,” said Joe. “I’m warning your gang off, and if I see another shadow hugging that door—I’ll break its damn neck. Do I make myself clear, Mrs Myers?”

“Clear? You—you homicidal maniac!” puffed the fat woman. “Let me get out of this. You’ve busted my stays, you fool — —”

“You and Wayne will spread the news, anyway,” said Joe.

Mrs Myers gulped in a lungful of air.

“Wayne? Did Wayne come in here?” she panted.

“I threw him in.”

“Wayne! I—I think I should tell you—no, no! Where is he?”

“Went to his compartment. Said he was trailing Shaw.”

“Shaw, eh?” muttered Mrs Myers. “There’ll be another killing yet. Those two hate each other like poison. You’d better keep out of this. We’ve got a tough enough job as it is. Mind your own business, and maybe you’ll get through. That’s all I can tell you.”

At the door she paused.

“And you be more careful, young man. You don’t know what it means to have your stays busted.”

“It might have been worse,” said Joe brutally.

Mrs Myers lurched away, a rumble of comments trailing back after her.

“Perhaps the first shadow was Shaw,” said Roger.

“Must have been,” said Joe. “But I’m not taking any more risks.”

“Anyway, the carriage is filling up again,” observed Ann.

A level voice from the door said:

“You are a fool, Mr Harper.”

That was all. Another shadow slipped past the door.

“Miss Francis,” said Joe glumly.

Another voice spoke coldly:

“And I agree with Miss Francis,” it said.

“Polly Caldwell,” muttered Roger.

“They’re back again,” sighed Ann. “They come and they go. I wonder what happened long ago during that time gap?”

“Forget it,” growled Joe. “That was then—this is now. You keep what wits you have left concentrated on the present, it will be more helpful. I wish I had scragged Miss Francis.”

“You would,” sneered Ann. “Joe, you’re just a lousy male.”

“All right, all right,” grumbled Joe. “But I reckon I’d have squeezed the truth out of her.”

Roger chuckled, and the sound infuriated Ann.

“I don’t understand men,” she said contemptuously. “And as Joe is a determined bachelor I fail to understand his sudden interest in Miss Francis.”

“She’s charming,” muttered Joe.

“She is one of these mysterious people— —”

“She’s gracious and dignified and fragrant— —”

“Oh, my God!” panted Ann. “I give up. She’s as likely to be the killer as any of them.”

“She has a lovely voice, soft, cultured, restful, magnetic, though not so magnetic as her amber-brown eyes. I could look into those eyes all night.”

“Idiot,” hissed Ann. “You make me sick — —”

“And the same to you,” retorted Joe. “Hasn’t Roger told you word for word what I have just said?”

“Roger and I are in love — —”

“Miss Francis and I are in love,” said Joe calmly.

“What?” choked Ann. “Joe—you’re mad! You’ve only seen the woman in the dark — —”

Joe chuckled.

“Ah, but what a woman,” he murmured.

“And what a dark,” said Roger dryly.

Ann seemed dazed.

“Beats me,” she muttered.

Joe rose to his feet.

“I feel the urge upon me now,” he informed them.

“What urge?” demanded Ann.

“To talk with Miss Francis—with Mary Francis — —”

“I think you’ve gone completely off your silly head,” snapped Ann.

“Doesn’t alter the urge,” said Joe. “When I get an urge—I get an urge. That’s all there is to it, or nearly all. I desire to be with Mary Francis.”

“You’re not going alone, my lad,” said Ann promptly. “Roger and I are coming with you.”

“Must you?” sighed Joe.

“Stop fooling, Joe. What do you want to talk to her about?”

“These thought gaps you’re raving about—for one thing. I can think of others. A quiet little chat about astral conditions on the outer, so to speak. If she’ll talk she’ll tell us more in one minute than you’ll guess in a lifetime.”

“Of all the hopeless, inept, gargantuan fatheads. But I know you, brother Joe. If your petrified mind is made up nothing will stop it, or teach it sense. Let’s go.”

“You don’t have to come — —” Joe began.

“We’re coming,” said Ann firmly. “Now these people are back again it’s up to us to make at least one of them talk, and I suppose it might as well be Miss Francis. But in spite of anything she may say—I bet I’m right, John Joseph.”

Joe led the way. They looked into Mr Shaw's compartment; it was empty.

"Yapping to the ladies," muttered Joe. "He wouldn't be in with Wayne."

They paused at Polly Caldwell's compartment. It was empty. With a mounting sense of uneasiness they stopped at Mr Wayne's door and looked in. Mr Wayne's compartment was empty. So was that of Mrs Myers, and so also was the compartment of Miss Francis.

"Good God," growled Joe. "The van—quick!"

The van was empty. And the carriage once again was untenanted except by themselves. Without comment they went into their compartment.

The more bewildering the problem of the dark carriage became, the more determined grew Joe to find some rational explanation of the conduct of these people. He realized that the discovery of the identity of the murderer was a problem for experts to solve, and he knew that end of it would be taken care of as soon as the train reached the Junction.

But the uncanny behaviour of those in the carriage baffled him, as it did Ann and Roger. Ann's theory, or rather her belief was, of course, impossible, yet he was now willing to admit that what was going on in the carriage was, at the very least, extraordinary. If it were not for the dead man in the van he would be inclined to believe they were being deliberately hoaxed; but the body under the tarpaulin was very definitely no hoax, nor was the palpable anxiety of these weird ones to obtain the bag just mere pretence.

But how did these people disappear? Rack his brains as he would he could find no solution. Van and carriage had been thoroughly searched time and time again. There was not the slightest doubt that both were empty, that they held no persons other than themselves. Yet the next moment back would come the occupants of the various compartments. That Madame Kelaher and the Campobassos had not yet appeared mattered not. Those whom they had seen, and with whom they had conversed, had the secret of vanishing at will. It was futile to suggest they passed through into the trucks. On a night of drenching rain and darkness such as this a truck, although covered with a tarpaulin, and even if empty, would be no attraction for any one. Another thing: their clothes were quite dry each time they reappeared, so obviously they had not been out in the rain, and they could not escape the rain if they went into a truck.

So what? Where did they go? And how? Were they concealed in the carriage itself? Or the van? But he and Ann and Roger had been in the van during one of the disappearances. It didn't seem to matter at which end of the carriage they were, these strange passengers vanished just the same.

Joe shook his head as he pondered. Had he not experienced this weird interlude himself he would have said straight out the whole thing was impossible and could not be done. But he had seen it for himself. It was both baffling and bewildering. No wonder Ann, with her leaning towards psychic revelation, believed it all to be supernatural.

For a moment Joe asked himself if she were right. Could these occurrences be the result of supernatural forces? Surely that would be unthinkable. Do phantoms smoke cigarettes and cigars? But would supernatural forms necessarily be phantoms? Phantoms, after all, were generally believed to be disembodied, vague shapes in human or animal form, a form without substance, but unless his senses were no longer to be believed these people were definitely of the same substance as himself—flesh, bone and blood.

But what of Madame Kelaher? What of these manners and modes of the nineties? What of the Bond Street bag with its address and date? What of the car driver's simple statement that local people avoided the mixed train which left Deep Valley at dark? What of the two men and the woman who had boarded the doomed train as they had done? Undoubtedly it all smacked of the supernatural, but no. It could not be.

Nevertheless, Ann was convinced. That of course proved nothing except that Ann, who was deeply interested in occult matters, was susceptible of influences and suggestion, and over eager to explain such happenings as having a supernatural origin. However, he admitted her predictions had come true. She had said that in their own time and way the forms of those who had been killed on the doomed train would appear in this carriage. These inexplicable ones had done precisely that.

When he and Ann and Roger had entered the carriage at Deep Valley it was unquestionably empty except for the dead man. Then they had discovered Miss Francis, and then, one after another, had come the others. Ann had said she believed Madame Kelaher was on this train, and Madame Kelaher's luggage, or some of it, was on the rack above his head at this moment. It was decidedly perplexing and uncanny. If one were credulous enough to entertain the idea of the supernatural, it would not be difficult to develop that idea into belief as Ann had done. Indeed, he was aware that her nerves were at breaking point—so firmly did she believe it. Somehow he and Roger would have to prove to her before they came to the third tunnel that these people and their actions were natural, and the sooner it was done the better. They had better talk it over.

“Cigarette?” he murmured.

Three cigarettes were lit again, and when the match went out three red points made nervous arcs in the disgruntled silence.

“A vacuum, that’s what it is,” muttered Ann. “Just a roaring black vacuum into which we have been drawn.”

“Vacuums don’t roar,” said Joe gloomily. “No sound in a vacuum.”

“This one does,” said Ann. “It roars, rattles, moans, clatters, squeaks, clangs, bumps, sways, lurches, shudders, creeps, chatters, whispers, rasps, slams, echoes and hisses. It has all the sounds of an African jungle from snakes to elephants, and all the impenetrable darkness of the inside of the pyramids. I can’t see you, you can’t see Roger, he can’t see me. We’re merely physical consciousness bumping up and down on a leather seat. And we can’t see even that. Even a cat would be blind here.”

“And,” said Roger, “the rain is still pouring down.”

“That proves they didn’t go up on the roof,” said Joe.

“On the roof?” sneered Ann. “Mrs Myers and Mr Wayne? Imagine it. You’re not helpful, Joe.”

“Well, I can’t help it, can I?” he retorted.

“That’s what I just said. Haven’t you any possible solution of it all, Roger? Joe’s all right when we need weight and bulk. At the moment we need intelligence.”

“Huh!” grunted Joe. “That lets me out.”

“The seemingly incongruous elements in it all may supply a clue,” said Roger.

“What incongruous elements?” asked Joe.

“The peculiarities and amazing contradictions of these people,” answered Roger. “Where would you find such opposites as Mr Wayne and Mr Shaw?”

Joe sneered:

“I could tell you.”

“I mean outside *those* walls, Joe,” Roger went on. “Then there’s that really weird fellow Pierre Fouché. He seems to be apart from the others — —”

“But they all give the impression they are apart from each other,” Joe pointed out. “Why does Miss Francis have a compartment to herself? Why doesn’t Polly go in with her?”

“Oil and water,” murmured Ann. “A silk purse and a sow’s ear.”

“And Mrs Fanny Myers? Why are the women so distant towards each other?”

“Those are the things to which I refer,” said Roger. “We have presumed they know each other. If they don’t we could be wrong in assuming they are associated in a body with the crime.”

Ann was very emphatic.

“They are interested in each other. They know each other by name, and each is trying to beat the other to the black bag.”

“Precisely,” said Roger. “But so far we don’t know their reactions to Madame Geraldine Kelaher.”

“I wonder,” mused Ann, “if she is the nigger in the woodpile?”

“Bah! She’s not on the damn train,” said Joe sourly.

“Joe,” said Ann reprovingly, “I wish you wouldn’t swear so much. This — this doesn’t seem to be the right place for it.”

Joe almost choked.

“Swear? Do you want to hear me say what I’d like to say? Do you want to hear me describe in detail and in general this carriage, this murder, these people, and the whole unearthly outfit? If you like I’ll start on ’em from the guard down to the hunchback— —”

“No!” protested Ann. “Roger—stop him! Once he gets going, he’s terrific.”

“I’ve heard him,” said Roger. “It’s more than a gift, it’s an endowment, nature making up for deficiencies in other directions. But even if he does let fly it won’t solve this puzzle for us.”

Ann inhaled.

“It seems nothing will. I’ll stick to what I said. But we must get off before the third tunnel. On our last search I saw a number of things I hadn’t noticed before.”

“What?” asked the men.

“A Mexican blanket on the seat occupied by Polly Caldwell. Polly has also travelled. And beside where Mr Wayne dozed so peacefully were several newspapers from New York, Chicago and San Francisco. Furthermore, why does Mr Wayne, like Mr Shaw and the guard, affect the side-levers of the nineties, and carry across their coloured vests cables that would hold a battleship?”

“You tell us,” said Joe. “Don’t be vague, you were taught the language.”

“I have told you,” said Ann. “These people are the people of the doom train, tragic shades of the gay nineties travelling again the last journey of

their human lives.”

“Then it seems,” grumbled Joe, “that we’ve butted into a strictly private affair. They resent us.”

“If so why ask us to mind the black bag?” asked Roger.

“I don’t know, I don’t know,” said Joe. “But if Madame Kelaher was on this train I bet we’d have seen her before this — —”

“We haven’t seen the Campobassos,” Ann reminded him.

Joe ignored that.

“Suppose someone questions us about the bag — with a gun in his hand, I mean?” he asked.

“I thought of that,” said Ann quickly.

“So did I,” said Roger. “I don’t see why we should run risks for any one on this train.”

“There’s no one on the train,” Joe reminded them.

“Joe — you’re an exasperating devil,” said Ann crossly.

“Well, you two are now talking as if the Kelaher creatures are coming back to us.”

“I thought you wouldn’t admit — —”

“Not me,” snorted Joe. “But they’re about.”

“But where?” shrilled Ann.

“I don’t know!” yelled Joe.

“Break,” said Roger calmly. “Don’t get rattled — —”

“I’m not rattled,” said Ann wildly. “It’s Joe — he’s being just as difficult as he can be.”

“Me?” gasped Joe. “Dammit — it’s you! For the last ten minutes you’ve been chattering like a female monkey with the mumps. I’ve never in my life heard such drivel. You haven’t said one sensible thing since the gang beat it.”

“Gong,” said Roger hastily.

“Like a female monkey with the mumps, am I?” panted Ann. “You haven’t said anything a fish couldn’t say, anyway. All you’ve contributed is ‘I don’t believe it; I don’t believe it.’”

“Well, I *don’t* believe it!” shouted Joe.

“Gong!” said Roger loudly.

“Well, I do!” shrieked Ann.

“Shut up,” snarled Joe. “You’re worse than Mrs Myers reaching for her top note. Shut up!”

“I won’t! I won’t! I won’t!”

“Gong!” roared Roger at the top of his voice. “Grab her, Joe—she’s hysterical— —”

“I’m not! I’m not! I’m not!” screamed Ann, bouncing up and down on the seat.

Joe threw an arm round her.

“There, there, old girl,” he said contritely, “take it easy, take it easy. Shouldn’t have lost my temper— —”

“I won’t take it easy,” Ann hissed. “I’ve had enough of this train—I’ve had enough of everything.” Her voice went up the scale a little. “I’ve had enough of you!” Up went the voice. “I’m getting off this train!” High on the shrill note now. “And I’m getting off—now!”

“Hold her,” urged Roger. “Hold her— —”

“You little devil,” growled Joe. “Stop struggling! You can’t get off the train. It’s moving fast now— —”

“I will! I will! I will!”

“Hold her— —” gasped Roger. “She’s gone out of her mind.”

“Stop fighting like a wildcat,” roared Joe.

“I’m getting . . . off . . . this train!”

“Dammit . . . you can’t . . . get off . . . this train!”

“Hold her,” choked Roger. “She’ll kill herself— —”

“I will go! I will go— —” howled Ann.

“I’ll smack your head if you don’t subside,” thundered Joe. “Like I used to do years ago— —”

“Strike me, will you?” shrieked Ann. “Bully! Brute! Beast! I hate brothers. I hate everybody. I hate Roger— —”

“Good God— —” wheezed Roger. “Let go my throat, Ann—you’re . . . throttling me— —”

“You’re choking Roger,” bellowed Joe.

“I don’t care—I don’t care— —”

“Hold her,” whispered Roger. “She mustn’t get away.”

“I will get away— —”

“I’ve got her,” said Joe. “Got an arm bar and body press on her. Now, my girl, come to your senses—and if ever I lay hands on Madame Kelaher, I’ll break her damned neck— —”

Ann suddenly went limp. Sobbing, she collapsed on the seat.

“She’s all right,” breathed Roger. “Phew! She had the strength of a maniac. Does this often happen, Joe?”

“Never saw her like it before,” said Joe. “It’s all this cursed business here. The poor little devil’s scared out of her wits, and my shouting at her just put the lid on it. Get her some water, Roger— —”

Roger did so. Ann sat up, still sobbing heavily. “There you are, old girl,” said Joe. “I suggest we forget the whole affair, stay in this carriage until the train gets to the Junction, and then the devil take the rest of them. Why should we worry, anyway?”

“I agree,” said Roger emphatically. “I’ve had enough.”

Ann gave back the glass to Roger.

“Oh, I’m so . . . sorry,” she whispered. “Sorry, Joe. Sorry, Roger— —”

“So am I, kid,” said Joe. “Don’t know what made me perform like that. Seemed as if I just had to let go everything— —”

“You’ll be all right now, Ann,” said Roger.

“Yes, I’m . . . all right,” she said weakly. “What . . . happened? What did I do? What did I say?”

Roger spoke quickly.

“Don’t you know what you have been saying?” he asked.

“No. Why am I . . . so exhausted all at once? Why did you give me water? Did I faint . . . or something?”

Joe and Roger sat very still. Then Joe said:

“You don’t remember wanting to get off the train?”

“No—surely I—I didn’t try to do that, did I?”

“No, no, of course not, Ann,” said Roger hastily. “We were just talking — —”

Ann spoke listlessly.

“I think . . . I must have gone . . . to sleep— —”

“Joe!” said Roger sharply. “Strike a match! Someone at the door— —”

Joe struck one. Standing grinning at them in the doorway was Pierre Fouché, the hunchback. They stared at him, and then Joe and Roger exchanged quick glances.

“They are coming back,” said Roger.

“How long have you been there?” demanded Joe.

“He can’t hear you or talk to you,” Roger reminded him.

The hunchback's eyes were brilliant in the limited light, his hands moving jerkily, the fingers flinging out some message, some threat, or some command. Joe watched him grimly.

"That devil . . . hypnotized Ann," he whispered to Roger. "He's been there all the time. That's what's going on here. Hypnotism. I'll fix him."

"Steady, Joe," warned Roger. "The fellow may be innocent—may be trying to tell us something."

"Tell him to go away," pleaded Ann. "Oh, tell him to go away—I can't stand the sight of him—I feel as if I want to get up and follow him."

"You do, eh?" said Joe slowly. "All right. I'll stop that!"

With ominous deliberation he stood up. Fouché's grin vanished as he looked at Joe's set face. With a final flourish of his fingers he turned and scuttled back to the end compartment. They heard the door slam. The match went out.

"Just as well," said Joe. "I believe I'd have killed him. I believe he put it into Ann's head to— —"

"Steady Joe," said Roger quietly.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Ann.

"Nothing, nothing," replied Joe. "Let's have another cigarette. I've a good mind to make a bonfire of this carriage, and if the rain weren't pelting down outside—I would."

The loud clattering of the wheels drew their attention. The carriage lurched violently, throwing them over at an angle.

"We're crossing some points," said Roger.

Ann leaped to her feet.

"The train's stopping," she cried. "Oh, it's stopping."

With a squealing of brakes and a bumping of buffers the train came slowly to a standstill.

Somewhere along in the streaming night the engine panted triumphantly.

"The loop," said Joe. "We've stopped."

Mr Gerald Shaw arrived at the compartment with the usual dramatic quotation. His voice, coming so unexpectedly after the encounter with Fouché, was another shock.

"The cheapest of us is ten groats too dear. What art thou? and how comest thou hither, man, where no man never comes?" King Richard the Second, for your thought. But the train is on the loop again— —"

“Why are we on a loop?” asked Ann. “And why do you say ‘again’?”

Mr Shaw’s shadow made a vague movement.

“In a moment the down mail will thunder past. So it goes on, and on, and on— —”

A gleam of yellow light along the corridor proclaimed the coming of the guard. Carrying his lamp he stumped to where Mr Shaw stood.

“Uhuh! They’re coming,” he said.

He turned the lamp on Ann, Joe and Roger.

“Who are coming?” Roger asked.

“Uhuh! Everybody. I brought the lamp so that everybody could see everybody.”

“He came from the trucks end,” whispered Ann to Roger.

Joe addressed the guard sarcastically:

“Thoughtful of you. The lamp has been conspicuously absent for the last hour— —”

“You shouldn’t ’ave broke reg’lations,” the guard retorted. “Always trouble when someone breaks reg’lations.”

“There seems to be enough trouble here as it is,” said Roger.

Mr Shaw said curtly:

“Stand aside, guard. . . . Take no notice of the fellow, my friends. ‘An he had been a dog that should have howled thus, they would have hanged him; and I pray God his bad voice bode no mischief. I had as lief as heard the nightraven, come what plague could have come after it!’”

The guard stood back as Mr Gregory Wayne appeared and thrust his bulk close to Mr Shaw.

“You’ll die with Shakespeare dribbling off your tongue, Shaw. We have other matters to discuss. Here come the rest.”

Footsteps and voices announced the coming of Miss Francis, Polly Caldwell, Mrs Fanny Myers, and the Caesar Campobassos. Ann, Joe and Roger stared at the Campobassos. They were Italians. Campobasso himself, of medium height, slender and swarthy, was grimly silent. The boy and girl, sombre in dark clothes, were silent and unsmiling. Mrs Campobasso was dressed in what appeared to be a sweeping gown of black velvet, with a single star of brilliants at her throat. Ann, Joe and Roger remembered the flashing of that star long afterwards. Ann again whispered to Roger:

“But—but they all came from the trucks end— —”

Roger nodded. A movement in the group drew their quick attention to a woman of middle age who held their eyes in spite of themselves. Tall, regal, with a mass of hair as white as driven snow, she moved in a deliberate manner to the door. Mr Wayne and Mr Shaw stood aside.

“I am Geraldine Kelaher,” she said quietly.

Her voice was as clear as a bell, cultured, yet holding an imperious note in its tone. On the mass of silky white hair was a wide white hat with across it a large black ostrich feather. Her features were finely chiselled, but her eyes were mere narrow slits of darkness. From each ear dropped a pendant that flashed green fire. Her gown was of flowing folds of white satin, and Ann racked her brains desperately to remember where she had ever seen anything like it before. But she could not remember. Madame Kelaher went on:

“I have been asked to speak to you.”

Roger said courteously:

“If we have unwittingly intruded into your compartment, we apologize.”

The dark slits observed him. Roger said afterwards he felt the hair on the back of his head slowly lifting.

“I am not concerned with that,” was the reply. “My fellow passengers, whom you see here, add their voices to mine when I ask you to get off this train at once without question or delay.”

“Get off . . . the train?” gasped Ann.

“Yes. Otherwise— —” the clear voice faltered. One white hand came up and rested on her bosom. “Otherwise you will go from darkness into darkness. The train will go on.”

“What do you mean?” asked Joe.

Madame Kelaher seemed about to reply but closed her lips firmly.

“Why should we leave this train?” asked Roger. “We have as much right on it as any of you— —”

None spoke. Ann, Joe and Roger looked round the set faces. All seemed to be utterly devoid of expression. Ann had a quick impression of a set of wax masks she had seen in a museum. Madame Kelaher spoke again.

“You must try,” she said. “You must will yourselves to get off this train before it goes on.”

“Why do you say that?” demanded Joe.

Again there was silence. The exhaust of the unseen engine pulsed like the beating of a giant heart.

“Has it anything to do . . . with the black bag?” asked Roger.

Madame Kelaher nodded. Ann watched the black plume quivering.

“Everything,” said Madame Kelaher.

“Madame Kelaher,” said Roger quickly, “do you know these other persons?”

The black feather trembled again.

“We are fellow travellers. You will not heed us?”

A sound on the air silenced her, a rising, rushing wind, a metallic throbbing, swelling in volume. All turned together to the corridor windows.

“The down mail— —” they cried.

The fast night mail on the clear track thundered by with its lighted windows flashing and winking as they passed. Across the faces of all in the corridor went the quick succession of light and shadow from the racing mail. Then it was gone, and its passing seemed to break some spell. Ann, Joe and Roger were apparently forgotten. As the red lights of the mail van went by and on into the night Mr Wayne started an argument by accusing Mr Gerald Shaw.

“Shaw had it,” he said bitterly.

“A lie,” snarled Mr Shaw, looking round at the others. “I saw it in Wayne’s own hand. ‘These eyes that now are dimmed with death’s black veil, have been as piercing as the midday sun’ — —”

“I gave it to Mrs Myers,” said Wayne sulkily.

Mrs Myers’s broad bosom heaved as all eyes turned to her.

“I gave it to Mrs Campobasso — —”

Mrs Campobasso was quick and shrill in denial. In swift, broken English she made her excuse:

“To me? Oh, no, no, no! You forget, I ’ave not got ze black bag. Mees Francis— she ’ave it. I see ’er tak’ it from ze seat of Mees Caldwell. Si.”

“That is a lie,” said Miss Francis calmly. “Did you have the black bag, Miss Caldwell?”

“I certainly did not,” said Polly quickly.

“Then I couldn’t have taken it from your compartment, could I?”

Polly hesitated, then:

“No. I—I suppose not.”

“To whom does the black bag belong?” cut in Roger.

He was ignored. None answered him or even looked in his direction. It was as though Ann, Joe and he were not there.

“So you see,” said Miss Francis coolly, “it was impossible for me to take it.”

“Someone took it from Ben—someone has it,” said Madame Kelaher.

“More than that,” interrupted Wayne, “I’d like to know if Campobasso still has that wicked knife he carries— —”

All eyes stared at the Italian. The guard turned the lamp directly on him. Campobasso’s dark eyes were gleaming with resentment.

“So— —” he hissed. “I am suspec’—eh? You t’ink Tony Campobasso keel Ben Clarke, eh? Well, I say now Ben ’ad it come to ’im, but it was not ze knife of Tony Campobasso zat let out zat dirty life. No! ’Ere ees my knife — —”

From under his right hand he drew a long, thin, glittering blade, holding it up for all to see. Joe muttered to the others:

“Our Tony is left handed— —”

“See it?” snarled Mr Campobasso. “So accuse me no more. Someone else—someone who ees ’ere—keeled Ben Clarke . . . ze dir-r-rtly life . . . a r-r-robbber, anyway, a t’ief . . . a low life who would swindle oders out of zere money. ’E ees better dead—si, si, si.”

The stiletto went back into its snug sheath. Mr Wayne was not satisfied.

“How do we know you hadn’t another knife?” he demanded.

“You not know, fat fool,” Mr Campobasso spat at him. “An’ zat you weel never know.” To his wife and children: “Come. When zis train arrive at ze Junction—we leave zem all.”

The Campobassos turned and went in file towards their compartment. Polly spoke tremulously.

“Do—do you really think he—he did it?”

“I don’t,” said Mr Gerald Shaw. “Ben had a terrible quarrel with Wayne only an hour before he was knifed— —”

“You swine, Shaw,” yelled Mr Wayne. “If I wanted to kill a man, it wouldn’t be Ben Clarke.”

“Don’t threaten me,” snapped Mr Shaw. “I call all here to remember the threat.”

“You could have done it, Shaw,” said Wayne harshly. “We all know you’re crazy. I didn’t do it. I don’t possess a knife. Never have. Maybe if it wasn’t Campobasso, or this Shakespearean ham, it was a woman— —”

“Me, perhaps?” suggested Miss Francis.

“Or me?” panted Polly.

“Or me?” wheezed Mrs Myers.

“Or perhaps Mr Wayne is hinting that I stabbed Ben Clarke,” said Madame Kelaher.

“You’ve all been mighty friendly with him,” sneered Wayne. “All of you at different times.”

“Cad,” said Miss Francis icily.

“Beast!” hissed Polly.

“Liar!” shrilled Mrs Myers. “I’m well past that foolishness.”

“You’re an evil-minded fellow, Wayne,” said Madame Kelaher. “You should remember that every thought, every act, is recorded ineradicably upon time, as surely, as clearly as any scene on a photographic plate— —”

Mr Wayne had thrown away the mask of friendship. He stood there a fat figure swelling with spleen.

“Don’t talk that stuff to me,” he rasped. “Keep it for the suckers. The photographic plate, yes! The thought and action record on the negative of time—no! You stick to your line, Kelaher—I’ll stick to mine. And don’t try to sell that stuff to me. You sold it to Ben, and yourself with it. We all know that, you poor devil. Maybe you know something about that knife. The bag was yours, dear Geraldine.”

Madame Kelaher had not moved.

“You can’t sell sense to a fool,” she said calmly. “But I tell you now, Wayne, that this very scene, the murder of Ben Clarke, this journey of us all, although it will all fade from physical sight, will remain etched for ever, fixed for all time, able to be recalled. There is a justice that is eternal, a punishment that is inevitable— —”

“Bah!” croaked Mr Wayne. “You give me the creeps.”

Shrugging his bulging shoulders he turned away and lurched angrily towards his compartment. His door closed noisily.

“I’m going to talk to Pierre,” said Madame Kelaher coldly. “Wayne will discover very soon the truth of my words.”

Turning she walked into the end compartment. Miss Francis, Polly and Mrs Myers looked at each other, then they also went to their respective compartments. Mr Gerald Shaw looked at the guard.

“‘And then we shall repent each drop of blood, that hot rash haste so indiscreetly shed.’”

“Uhuh!” grunted the guard. “You know I ’ad nothin’ to do with it, Mr Shaw. You know that— —”

Mr Shaw waved him away.

“Women and fools, break off your conference,” he quoted.

“That I will,” said the guard.

He darkened the lamp as Mr Shaw went into his compartment, and his heavy footsteps went down the corridor towards the van. A moan of the siren, a quick succession of jolts, the clash of metal, the heavier coughing of the exhaust, and the dark train pulled off the loop to commence the last miles of the climb to the Junction. Ann was the only one who spoke.

“A cigarette, please?” she said.

Ann smoked furiously. They were all somewhat shaken by the angry scene they had just witnessed. Whoever these people were it was proved now that each was suspicious of the other, and that no love was wasted between any of them. The venom of Campobasso, the ugly effrontery of Mr Gregory Wayne, the bitter anger of Mr Gerald Shaw, the cold indignation of the women, scandal, slander, charge and countercharge, the gelid calm of Madame Kelaher under Wayne’s scurrilous attack, were all sombre threads in the ever darkening pattern of this already dark interlude.

Joe was the first to speak.

“What a row. One of those people killed Ben Clarke. Which one?”

“I’d say that Latin fury—Campobasso,” said Ann. “He uses a knife, or if he doesn’t actually do that he carries a stiletto—the one he drew was a wicked weapon.”

“He made no pretence of concealing it,” said Roger. “I think . . . it was a woman. I believe the murder was one of passion, and not robbery. It rather looks, after Wayne’s illuminating remarks about Clarke’s amorous propensities, that feminine jealousy might have driven home that knife.”

“Miss Francis?” asked Ann.

“No,” said Joe. “Not Miss Francis. Whatever that girl is doing with this bunch I don’t know. I can’t imagine her being ever jealous of any of those women, or considering an affair with any one of the apparent character of the dead man.”

“Mr Campobasso would watch Mrs Campobasso pretty closely . . . unless . . . h’m! If Clarke and Mrs Campobasso . . .”

“Improbable, I should say,” said Ann. “We needn’t consider Mrs Myers. That leaves Madame Kelaher and Polly.”

“Polly—” muttered Joe. “No; it’s scarcely fair to any of them. One of them did it, we know. What about the hunchback? . . . It’s no use. It’s only

guesswork. We might just as well write their names down and stick a pin in one and say that one is the killer.”

“That’s so,” admitted Ann. “I wonder why Madame Kelaher told me to will myself off this train?”

Joe was astonished.

“Told you? She said that to me— —”

“To you?” protested Roger. “She was looking directly at me. Her eyes were like two thin slits of coal in a mask of alabaster.”

“Well,” said Ann, “I had all I could do to prevent myself from obeying.”

“That’s queer,” muttered Joe. “I wanted to get going myself. Never felt like that before.”

“I felt the same way,” confessed Roger. “Something in me seemed to be urging me to jump out of this carriage. I had all I could do to master it. What a tense scene that was. I thought Campobasso was going to throw that stiletto at Wayne.”

“I wonder just what these people are to each other. They seem to know each other inside out,” said Ann.

“What would you say they were individually, Joe?” asked Roger.

Joe was thoughtful, very thoughtful. His convictions had received several heavy jolts in the last hour, and he was inclined to be less dogmatic in his opinions.

“A weird crowd,” he said slowly. “I’d say Miss Francis was a governess, or some kind of a teacher. Music perhaps.”

“What of Mrs Myers?” asked Ann.

“Widow, I should think. Probably in business. She could be a buyer of corsets or a café proprietress.”

“She’s had quite a good voice in her day,” Ann pointed out.

Joe nodded.

“We heard it. It might have been good in her day. That was yesterday. She’s no fool, anyway.”

“And Polly Caldwell?” asked Roger.

“Well now— —” began Joe.

“I think so too,” said Ann.

“So do I,” agreed Roger. “Any man can see it. She has the sign of the harlot in her eyes—a different kind of thought projection.”

“Don’t joke about that, Roger,” said Ann sharply.

“I wasn’t joking,” said Roger. “The Campobassos?”

“Italians obviously,” said Ann. “That gown of Mrs Caesar Campobasso cost money.”

“Whose money?” wondered Joe. “Campobasso’s—or Clarke’s?”

“That’s going back on the old circle. It doesn’t help, and is probably very unfair to Mrs Campobasso,” said Ann.

“I was only thinking of what Wayne said,” replied Joe. “Apologies to Mrs Campobasso. If, as Roger suggests, it was a crime of passion and jealousy, and Clarke was stabbed by a woman, then they are all starters.”

“Mr Gerald Shaw?” asked Ann.

“He speaks for himself,” said Roger, “‘larding his slender brains with the fat of other men’s work,’ to distort another quotation. Mr Shaw is probably slightly crazy as Wayne suggests. Any one who goes round babbling Shakespearean tags is either slightly mad or filled with an obvious literary conceit. If the immortal Bill were alive he’d probably ache to kick Mr Gerald Shaw in the pants—and a few other Shakespearean babblers as well.”

“The hunchback?” asked Joe.

“God knows,” muttered Ann. “He seems to keep very close to Madame Kelaher. For my part he can stay there.”

“He’s only a boy, poor devil,” said Roger. “Perhaps he keeps away from the others because he senses their attitude towards him. I think he’s harmless, and I don’t think he had anything to do with any attempt to hypnotize Ann.”

“Well,” muttered Joe, “you may be right. It was strange all the same—very strange. And Mr Wayne?”

“Just a nasty piece of work in every way,” said Ann.

“Agreed,” said Joe and Roger.

“And Madame Kelaher?” asked Joe.

“True to label,” said Roger. “That woman’s no fakir.”

“Then you believe what she said?” asked Ann quickly.

“Well . . . she impresses,” said Roger. “I wonder where she has kept herself hidden?”

“Yes,” said Joe. “Where the blazes did she come from?”

Ann shrugged.

“The same old question: where did they all come from? We saw them all, except Mr Wayne, come from the trucks end of this carriage. Now there is only one small compartment next to us, the men’s lavatory, and then the

wall of the carriage. They wouldn't all cram into one compartment, the women wouldn't go into the men's lavatory, and they weren't standing in the corridor. So, once again, where were they?"

"We don't know, and they're not telling us," said Roger. "It's the most baffling thing I've ever seen. They just vanish—they just disappear. There's nowhere they can go, nowhere they can come from, yet to that amazing nowhere they go and from there they come."

"They do," agreed Joe. "Take this end of the carriage. There's only the trucks up against it, and in this darkness and in this rain women like Miss Francis, Mrs Myers and Madame Kelaher are not going to clamber over dark and dangerous buffers to sit under a damn tarpaulin. Yet they go along the corridor and vanish. It's beyond me."

"Yet you say my construction is stupid," said Ann. "You wouldn't call Madame Kelaher a stupid woman, would you?"

"Not me," said Joe emphatically. "She's all there. But, like you, she has a jitterbug, and she rides on its back everywhere. I'll admit it's a mysterious and magical bug, but it's still only a bug for all that."

Ann placed her fingers against her temples. They were throbbing.

"You're wrong, Joe. Madame Kelaher is a genuine medium. She has power given only to very few — —"

"Then on her reputation she would know who killed Clarke," said Joe.

"Perhaps. I don't know what she knows. You're unreasonable, Joe."

Ann's hands came down from her temple to touch the paper left by Mr Gerald Shaw. She had forgotten all about it.

"Strike a match," she said. "Here is the paper Shaw left with us — —"

Joe struck a match and all examined the paper. They saw it was a London *Times*.

"Good heavens," muttered Ann. "Look at the date!"

Joe read it slowly:

"April the twenty-first, 1898. The large headline states: United States goes to war with Spain."

"Mr Shaw evidently likes his reading well matured," said Roger thoughtfully. "Do you realize that paper is forty years old?"

"Yes; strange fellow, Mr Shaw," muttered Joe.

He would not look at Ann as she put the paper down.

"Forty years," she murmured. "Forty years. Any comment?"

"No," grunted Joe.

“No,” said Roger.

Ann tossed the paper to one side. None of them spoke. A London *Times* of 1898. Just another very strange coincidence.

“What . . . was Ben Clarke?” asked Joe.

“Why ask us?” Roger wanted to know. “Madame Kelaher could tell you. He had her bag in his hands when he died.”

“That is so,” Ann agreed. “Could he have been struggling with her when he was stabbed? Suppose for some reason he demanded the bag, tried to wrench it from her — —”

“He did,” cut in Roger. “Either from her or from someone else. But as it is Kelaher’s bag the chances are she was the one to struggle for it. Why would any other man or woman have her bag? A woman usually has her own bag in her own possession — —”

“Unless someone stole it from her, and Clarke discovering it tried to snatch it away from the thief — —”

“That’s an idea,” said Joe. “But why should any one steal that old bag, and why should any one kill a man for it? It has no value.”

“So far as we know — —” muttered Ann.

“Well it hasn’t,” Joe insisted. “We all saw what was in it. Wait! The handle! Where’s that handle?”

“We haven’t seen it—why?” asked Ann.

“Perhaps the valuable part of the bag was the handle — —”

“No,” objected Roger. “Nobody wants the handle. They all want the bag. If the handle were of any importance they’d be after it.”

“H’m. Another brain-wave flattened out,” growled Joe. “Maybe Ann’s right. This problem needs intelligence.”

“Intelligence?” grunted Roger. “The way these people fade in and out it needs genius. I’d give something to know how they do it.”

“When Madame Kelaher comes in again I’ll ask her,” said Joe. “Until then you’ll have to work it out for yourself. It’s bound to be damn simple, anyway.”

“Simple?” echoed Roger. “Simple? Oh, yes, it’s simple all right.”

“Try thought projection,” advised Joe.

“Don’t be just a mocker, Joe,” said Ann tartly. “You can’t dismiss it as easily as all that.”

“I’m not dismissing it, I just can’t explain a single thing that goes on here. None of us can. And I’m prepared to admit these people are different.

Miss Francis and Polly are definitely English. Madame Kelaher and Wayne are Americans. Shaw sounds like a New Zealander to me. Mrs Myers could come from anywhere. And their clothes are just a knock-out. I don't remember ever seeing any others like them."

"Nor I," confessed Roger. "And never before in my life have I felt so detached from myself—"

"What do you mean?" asked Ann quickly.

"Just that. There are moments when I feel that I am not really here, that I am only mentally here."

"I'm beginning to wonder if any of us are mentally all there," said Joe, "or here, or anywhere else. I'm that damned dizzy with it all I'm cock-eyed. I'm in a mental spin with tail and rudder gone. Presently there'll be a wham of a crash, because presently I'm going to take someone by the ear and twist some truth out of some of these close-mouths. Just a little bit more, and John Joseph Harper will cut loose."

"You keep control of yourself, Joe," said Ann hastily. "You don't know your own strength. If you go berserk there'll be more bodies in the van."

"Huh!" grunted Joe. "It wouldn't take much for me to show these shades something. I've been mighty polite so far. I'm just aching to jump on a jitterbug."

"Roger said something a moment ago—"

"Oh, don't be ridiculous, Ann," snarled Joe.

"I'm not," said Ann calmly. "I know more of these things than you do, Joe."

"What do you know?" demanded Joe.

"In the East men practise a system known as *Atmâ Vidyâ*, the spirit science—"

"What of it?" jeered Joe. "Fakirs, Yogi magicians, and all those charlatans have always practised humbug and deception—"

"I wouldn't call it that, little man," retorted Ann. "In the East are men who have evolved and perfected their spiritual natures until their bodies and brain-consciousness are mere instruments for spiritual intelligence. These men and women can cause manifestations that are miraculous. Madame Geraldine Kelaher is one who claims these powers."

"Listen, Ann," said Roger. "What we have struck here is just a plain murder. That's all."

"Just a moment ago you said yourself that Madame Kelaher was no fakir," retorted Ann. "Such as she postulate that at death the spirit enters a

state of repose, a state of spirit living, not spirit death, in which the spirit permanently keeps all the characteristics of the person it has left. In the inevitable time of its own cycle the spirit returns to the materialistic or physical state for embodiment.”

Joe laughed grimly. Ann had evidently skated on the thin ice of psychic illusion until she had fallen through, and was now up to her neck in it.

“And so we have ghosts,” he said satirically. “Visions. Hallucinations. Incredible tosh— —”

“No,” Ann said quietly. “Hallucinations, as with dreams, are but products of living tissues of the human brain. The brain has countless millions of receptive cells. Memory proves that they are storehouses for our experiences. But the hallucination or sleep dream of the living brain is a very different thing from the living spirit world of the *Atmâ Vidyâ*, from which living spirit world can be called at times the forms and events of the past.”

“And Madame Geraldine Kelaher is a priestess of this cult?” asked Roger.

“Yes.”

Joe laughed again. That Ann should believe such nonsense gave him a greater sense of uneasiness than the shock of the murder itself.

“Well, of all the— —” he began.

Roger interrupted him.

“The mind, or the spirit, is something we do not yet understand,” he said. “It is no use rejecting, as being impossible or stupid, what we do not comprehend. Something, somehow, somewhere has compelled man to realize there are two states of existence—natural and supernatural, for want of better terms. Where and what the final and fundamental truths are is beyond my limited intelligence and conception. But there is something. Even animals are conscious of the unseen presence. That has been proved over and over again. Horses and dogs, being the closest animal companions of men, have given time and time again irrefutable evidence of this awareness of the unseen existence. How far men and women who have devoted their lives to its study can be successful in not merely understanding it, but in being able to command it, I don’t know. Like Joe, I like proof. But like Ann I believe there is a genuine foundation for such opinions.”

“As far as you have gone, I agree,” said Joe. “But some people for their own ends distort truth into sheer fanaticism. They turn the whole problem into a pantomime more fantastic than Aladdin’s lamp. Astral planes, spirit

forms, spirit scenes, Madame Kelaher's psychic powers, are not going to solve the problem of who killed Ben Clarke."

"We don't know that yet, Joe," said Ann. "Madame Kelaher said the truth of her words would yet be proved."

"Listen, Ann, you'll go crazy if you start believing that sort of thing. Man is conscious of death, and is frightened of it. Out of that fear has sprung all religion, all spiritism, all superstition. He wants another life. So the clever ones have invented another life beyond death for him. Look at the thing without fear or desire. Man is a growth, an animal growth, made up of known and proved chemical and mineral elements the same as a tree, a fish, or a piece of seaweed. As with these other forms, so with each individual man. He passes away. In the process of growth and evolution his brain has given him reason and memory up to a certain limit or standard. That brain has also retained in it the dim lessons of the past.

"The strongest influence that has been retained is fear, the fear of the frightful things of past ages. That fear comes to us now in warning as instinct. Let anything move in the air, the sea and the forest and our eyes are on it at once. The same with animals. Movement, the ages have taught us, is danger. A sound proclaims a movement. We do not see what has moved, but man, horse and dog, and all living things that have to ward off attack, will stand at gaze and listening, waiting for the sound to become sight. Sometimes just the sound will send us running. From these unseen things we have created a spirit world. Doubtless the dog and the horse have done the same, but they can't tell us about it. Sorry, old girl, but I can't believe in spiritism."

"Well," muttered Ann, "that's a long speech for brother Joe."

"I want to know which one of this extraordinary bunch killed Clarke," said Joe. "It's a plain problem of murder—"

"Just a moment," said Roger quickly. "Has it occurred to either of you that, so far, we are implicated in this killing as much as any of them?"

"That's ridiculous," cried Ann. "We had nothing to do with it."

"Neither had all the others who didn't kill Clarke," retorted Roger. "And isn't it possible that whoever did kill Clarke is endeavouring to transfer the guilt to us?"

"To us? How?" demanded Joe.

"By asking us to hold that much wanted black bag. If when we come to the Junction it is found on us, or we admit having it—"

"But—but who left the bag with us?" stammered Ann.

“The one who killed Ben Clarke,” said Roger, “and he or she is slipping the noose towards us.”

“Good heavens,” muttered Ann. “I believe you’re right.”

“I’m damn sure he is,” said Joe. “It’s time we called a public meeting. We’ll produce the bag . . . and see what happens.”

The rain beat against the rattling panes in greater force. Outside, passing dimly, were the drenched trees, the closest of them occasionally flicking the window panes. The grade was steep now, the belching engine putting forth its utmost power to haul the dark train towards the last unseen tunnel.

A flicker of lightning stabbed the corridor with its momentary radiance, showing Ann in between Joe and Roger. Roger’s suggestion that the murderer intended involving them to save himself had made them all realize the danger of retaining the bag. What its secret was they had no idea. That it had great value of some kind was only too obvious. That it might prove an unanswerable and accusing factor was also now plain to them. It mattered not that none of them had killed Ben Clarke. Circumstantial evidence had hanged many men. They had gone into his compartment, he had been killed, and had been removed after they had been with him. It came to them that perhaps with one exception all these people believed they actually did kill Clarke, who had, just before his death, gained possession of the black bag. Perhaps because of this belief were happening all the mysterious appearances and disappearances, the whisperings, the passings to and fro, the whole uncanny atmosphere now intensifying the terror of this travelling black carriage.

And yet every one in the corridor car seemed anxious, even eager to have the bag. But as Ann, Joe and Roger walked along they were conscious of the fact that they knew no more than when they had first discovered Clarke and the bag. The gradual and astonishing peopling of the compartments was as inexplicable as the identity of the killer, but the shock of that had now passed. Joe’s suggestion of calling them all together to thrash out the problem seemed the only feasible and safe thing to do. They did not dare retain the bag any longer if Roger were right in his conjecture.

They were developing cats’ eyes with the continual effort of straining to see in the darkness. They saw, before they came to it, that Mr Wayne’s door was open. A step proved he was not in his compartment, but from Polly’s compartment, which they had just passed, came voices. They crept back. The roar of rain and train rose above any sound they made, and also rendered it a little difficult to hear what was said.

“Don’t be a stubborn little fool,” Wayne was rasping. “You know me, Polly—and I know you. I know you’ve got the bag, and that you stabbed Ben to get it— —”

Polly’s voice was shrill in denial.

“That’s a lie, Wayne—it’s all lies,” she yelled at him. “I didn’t kill Ben—and I haven’t got the bag.”

“You haven’t got it?” snarled Wayne. “It’s no use putting that across me, Polly, and what’s more . . . if you don’t come across and split . . . I’ll tell what I know.”

“What do you know? What do you know?” gasped Polly.

“I know this,” said Wayne suavely, “if you and me worked together we could disappear at the Junction and— —”

“I know you, Wayne!” Polly cried passionately. “You’re a dirty sock if ever there was one. You’d double-cross me as quick as look at me. I wouldn’t trust you with a blind man’s money box. You get out! I didn’t kill Ben Clarke. I haven’t got the bag. Get out!”

Mr Gregory Wayne’s voice was as smooth as silk.

“Now, listen Polly, that talk won’t get either of us anywhere. If you throw me down—I’ll swear you killed Ben Clarke— —”

There was a violent movement in the compartment.

“You dog! You’d frame me, eh?”

“Sit down, Polly. Sit down, my dear,” chuckled Wayne.

“I won’t stay in here with you,” shrilled Polly. “I wouldn’t mind betting you knifed Clarke.”

Mr Wayne laughed.

“You’d have a hard job proving that. Now come across, Polly, and don’t be a fool— —”

“Did Miss Francis send you to me?” sneered Polly. “Well, I don’t want her leavings, thank you.”

“Miss Francis isn’t my sort,” said Wayne. “She may be a perfect lady and a perfect accompanist, but so far as I am concerned that’s all.”

“You and she were mighty thick on the boat coming across. She used to call you ‘Uncle’— —”

“You know we are both musical—just common ground, that’s all.”

“Don’t tell me,” mocked Polly derisively. “The men just flock round her. She has only to look at a man, and he falls as if someone had stunned him with a club. If any one has the bag—she has it.”

“No; she hasn’t got it— —”

“How do you know?” Polly fired at him.

“Never mind. But I know,” retorted Wayne. “Just as I know you have it.”

“Liar!” hissed Polly. “Get out of this compartment, Wayne. Get out! And don’t come throwing your hog’s weight about with me—or you might collect what Ben Clarke got.”

Wayne’s tone changed.

“So you’d threaten me, eh, you damned moll?” he grated. “I’ll fix you — —”

As Polly screamed Joe made to step into the compartment, but Roger’s hand urged him along the corridor. Ann was close to them.

“Gerald Shaw,” whispered Roger. “I heard his door open—yes; here he comes— —”

Mr Shaw paused at Polly’s compartment, then throwing the door back to its limit went in. They heard his dry, crackling voice addressing itself to Wayne.

“Up to your old tricks, eh, Wayne? Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?”

Wayne was hoarse with fury at this intrusion.

“Get out of here, Shaw—get to the devil out of it— —”

“Mr Shaw, Mr Shaw,” gasped Polly, “don’t leave me alone with Wayne—he accused me of stabbing Ben, he accused me of having Geraldine’s bag—he tried to strangle me. Put him out. Put him out— —”

“I’ll put *him* out— —” roared Wayne.

“Wayne, get out!” snapped Mr Shaw. “Now . . . out! ‘Curst miscreant when thou comest to the stake’— —”

Mr Wayne must have hurled himself at Mr Shaw, for Polly ran screaming out of the compartment and dashed towards the end compartment where Madame Kelaher and Pierre Fouché were. From her own compartment came heavy bumping noises, half-strangled cries, and fierce, muffled oaths.

“They’re fighting like the devil,” said Joe calmly.

“Stop them, Joe—stop them,” pleaded Ann. “Oh, it’s ghastly— —”

“Get back to our own cell,” said Roger quickly. “The wasps will swarm now.”

They dashed back just in time. Headed by Polly, Madame Kelaher and the hunchback ran past the door. Other doors were flung open. Mrs Myers shrieked:

“Get the guard! Get the guard!— —”

The Campobasso boy hurled himself through the communication doorway into the van, and almost at once came back with the lamp in his hand.

“Come on,” said Joe. “We can’t be out of this. We wanted to get them together—and here they are— —”

When they came to Polly’s door again Miss Francis was holding the lamp while Mr Campobasso and his boy pulled Wayne and Mr Shaw apart.

“*Signor—signor,*” hissed the Italian, who held Mr Gerald Shaw, “you ver’ near dam’ keel ’im. Si, si— —”

Mr Wayne staggered to his feet, his bloated face purple in the lamplight. Two hideous eyes goggling with hatred glared at Mr Shaw. Mr Gerald Shaw himself was a wreck. Blood trickled from a wound on his temple where Mr Wayne’s heavy ring had cut him. His gold chain had snapped and was dangling loose, and the back of his coat had been ripped up as though by giant hands. Mr Wayne howled at Campobasso:

“Get out of my way! I’ve had enough of this gang. Stop the train!—I’m getting off.”

“We can’t stop the train,” said Polly spitefully.

“I’m getting off,” bellowed Mr Wayne. “Kelaher—I quit! I don’t care if it’s raining cats and dogs—I quit! Stop the train!”

Madame Kelaher said coldly:

“Quit if you like; but you don’t leave us yet, Wayne.”

Mr Campobasso’s stiletto had slipped from its sheath to the floor of the compartment. No one seemed to notice it. Mrs Campobasso and Mrs Myers were holding each other, with the slender Campobasso girl standing terrified behind them. And behind Madame Kelaher, in the manner of a peering, frightened child, stood Fouché. Miss Francis, cold and mistress of herself, held the lamp so that its rays shone into the compartment. Polly Caldwell, still panting from shock and fury, stood dishevelled with her yellow hair coming loose from its tawny coils. Behind her were Ann, Joe and Roger.

Ann had a peculiar impression of sound, sound rather than sight. Back from the rocky walls were flung the echoes of the train to mingle with the strident voices in the corridor. The booming rhythm of the train was in *crescendo*, the exhaust was quick thunder, the rain a thin note, the rising wind a wail sighing through the sound pattern. Ann thought of the pulsing of the Peer Gynt suite, and wondered if Greig had ever known a mountain special carrying murder and hate locked fast in a pitch-black corridor car.

Roger had a quick impression of the hunchback as Miss Francis changed the lamp from one hand to the other. As the dipping light changed direction momentarily it flashed across the face of Pierre Fouché. As Wayne was snarling at Madame Kelaher, Fouché's lips were parting in soundless hate. The huge black eyes were burning as they stared unwinkingly at the fat man. Roger caught his breath. The hunchback was reading Wayne's lips. Fouché was shedding what little human character and likeness were his, and under the poisonous alchemy of Wayne's words was becoming a monster.

Joe had been watching Madame Kelaher. If, as Ann claimed for her, this woman had the powers attributed to her, those powers seemed to have little effect on Mr Gregory Wayne. Wayne obviously considered her no different in mental and physical texture from other women, and his distorted mouth, wet and repulsive, kept hissing words that only a hate-crazed man would speak. Even the irritating grunting of the guard, who was somewhere out of sight beyond the light of the lamp, failed to make itself heard.

"Kelaher— —" panted Wayne. "You killed Clarke."

Polly hissed:

"You said I killed him, you dog— —"

"He said I killed Clarke," said Miss Francis coolly.

"He is . . . no good," muttered Campobasso.

Mrs Myers nodded but did not speak.

"Maybe I did say that," snarled Wayne. "But I reckon Kelaher did it. Clarke wanted what was in her bag. He knew what was there. He was through with her, and he planned to dump her at the Junction and beat it — —"

"You blackguard, Wayne," said Madame Kelaher. "Clarke was nothing to me—nothing."

"You're a liar, Kelaher," yelled Wayne. "I've been wise to you all through—in more ways than one. You were Ben Clarke's woman, and he was through with you."

Madame Kelaher recoiled as though he had drawn a wet whip-lash across her face. But the hunchback did not recoil. Without any warning except a choking, guttural grunt he leaped for the stiletto on the floor, seized it, raised it, and then lunged at Wayne.

"Pierre—Pierre— —" screamed Madame Kelaher.

But it was Campobasso's quick hand that saved Wayne. It closed round Fouché's wrist like a band of steel, twisting the hunchback's arm until the knife fell to the floor again. Frothing at the mouth Fouché reached with

clawing fingers for Wayne's eyes, but Joe caught him and sent him reeling back to stand again behind Madame Kelaher.

No one moved. Not even Wayne. All eyes were fast on the quivering hunchback. Then Madame Kelaher wailed:

"Pierre!—Pierre! Why did you do that? Why did you do it?"

From Polly's lips came the significant exclamation:

"Fouché! He did it. Fouché killed Clarke— —"

"Why not?" panted Wayne. "Pierre Fouché is Kelaher's son."

There was a deathly silence of human sounds. All eyes were staring at Madame Kelaher now. So the pitiful, cringing creature behind her was her son. How that explained so many things.

"Yes," she said, "Fouché is my son."

Wayne was triumphant.

"Yes," he raved. "And he . . . killed Ben Clarke!"

"Let's get out of this," gasped Ann. "I can't stand it. That woman's despair is terrible to see."

Joe and Roger went with her into their compartment, leaving the silent company still staring at Madame Kelaher. Roger closed the door.

"So we saw . . . what we saw," he said quietly.

"I pity Madame Kelaher from the depths of my heart," said Ann. "What a brute Wayne is."

"I think there's little doubt now as to who killed Clarke," said Joe soberly. "If she was quarrelling with him, and if he struck her or uttered words as brutal as Wayne's, the hunchback would fly at him as he did at Wayne."

"Oh, it's terrible," panted Ann. "I'm weak with shock."

"Well, there's the climax," said Roger.

"No!" said Ann sharply. "Not yet— —"

"What do you mean?" asked Joe.

"I don't know. But I still have that premonition of something terrible yet to come."

"Nerves," said Joe. "And I don't wonder at it. But we'll soon be at the Junction now."

The reverberating echoes from the rock wall of the cutting outside were monstrous, mocking voices. Down the dark glass still streamed the rain. The

metallic hammering of the wheels seemed to beat remorselessly at their brains, an infernal dance of steel.

“There is still,” said Joe slowly, “the matter of the black bag. There was no chance to mention it out in that brawl.”

“If the bag belongs to Madame Kelaher it must be returned to her,” said Roger.

“Don’t let Wayne get it,” said Ann quickly, “or any of them. I believe now that Madame Kelaher herself left the bag with us just in case something should break loose as it has done.”

“But there’s nothing valuable in the bag that I can see or imagine,” said Joe. “Why do they all want it? I’m going to give it back to Madame Kelaher now — —”

“Do you think it wise to do so?” asked Roger.

“If I knew for certain she wrote that note I’d keep it for her. But there’s still the chance that someone else — —”

“If that is so Fouché didn’t kill Clarke,” said Ann.

Joe gave a low whistle of astonishment. Ann had touched a vital spot.

“I’ll be back in a moment,” he said hurriedly.

“Wait! We’ll come with you,” said Ann.

In the corridor they found Madame Kelaher, cold and imperious again, facing the others. Fouché was still behind her, his eyes still fast on Wayne. Her words brought Ann, Joe and Roger to an abrupt halt.

“I warn you, Wayne, if you still persist, that I shall summon the powers that are in me — —”

Wayne’s harsh tone was merciless.

“It’s no good, Kelaher. That brute behind you is a menace to us all. He got Clarke, he damn near got me. At any moment his homicidal mania is likely to break loose, and another one of us will die.”

Madame Kelaher eyed them all in silence as approval and support for Wayne came from all.

“I agree with Wayne for once,” said Miss Francis.

“So do I,” said Polly.

“Lock him up,” said Mrs Myers harshly. “Little murdering devil.”

“Si,” agreed Mr Campobasso. “He ees a keeler.”

“Put ropes on him,” hissed Mrs Campobasso.

“Yes; tie him up,” said Mr Gerald Shaw. “He’s too deadly to be at large.”

“You hear, Kelaher?” sneered Wayne.

Madame Kelaher put out her arm. Fouché took it and clung to it while the united fear and hate of all were thrust at him. Madame Kelaher's face was as white and composed as a death mask. Only her eyes, roving from face to face, were uncannily alive. She spoke quietly, yet each syllable was as clear as a bell.

"You will never touch Pierre," she said slowly. "I will ask you a question. I can, by the power in me, summon the spirit being of Ben Clarke to your midst. I can, by the power in me, cause the spirit being of Ben Clarke to stand in silent accusation beside his murderer. But all who look upon it will be doomed. And only those who express the desire so to witness this thing, and so know the one who killed Ben Clarke, will be given the power of witness. What say you?"

"I say—let's grab that hunchback," roared Wayne. "Don't listen to Kelaher's bluff."

Madame Kelaher's eyes were on him.

"I am not bluffing. It would be too futile." Her voice was deepening in tone, acquiring a strange timbre, a lifelessness in keeping with the stillness of her face and form.

"We know you are doing this to protect Fouché," said Miss Francis. "I for one give you my consent to summon Ben Clarke."

"I don't," snarled Wayne. "There's Ben's killer—"

"Do you consent?" asked Madame Kelaher of Polly.

"Sure, Kelaher. But Fouché killed Clarke, and he should be put away."

"Poor Pierre," said Madame Kelaher softly. "Doomed from birth to be an object of contempt and scorn. Doomed to be outcast. But now fated to bring doom to the murderer of Ben Clarke—"

"You make us sick, Kelaher," growled Wayne. "Let's get that devil and tie him up—"

"Wait!" said Madame Kelaher. "Do you consent, Gerald Shaw?"

"It's useless, Kelaher," said Mr Shaw. "You can't make us believe Fouché didn't do it—"

"Do you consent?" he was asked again.

"I do, but you can't bluff yourself and Fouché out of this."

"Do you consent, Mrs Myers?"

"Yes—" breathed Mrs Myers.

"And you, Caesar? For you and your family?"

"Si."

“And you, guard?”

From the outer darkness came the grunt:

“Uhuh!”

“So, to doom my son, the hunchback, you are willing to doom yourselves. So be it. I will show you who killed Ben Clarke— —”

“You fools,” gasped Wayne. “Why waste time—they’ll both beat it.”

Madame Kelaher said simply:

“Watch the communicating door leading into the van.”

She took the lamp from Miss Francis’s shaking hand, directing its rays. As the lamp swung the door was seen to be slowly opening.

“God— —” choked Ann.

“Steady,” panted Roger. “Hold her with me, Joe— —”

“I’ve got her,” breathed Joe.

As he spoke gasps of sheer terror came from the lips of all in the corridor. The communication door was open wide.

“Ben Clarke— —” choked Polly. “Oh, God— —”

“He’s not there,” trumpeted Wayne.

“Ben . . . Clarke!” whispered Miss Francis.

“He’s not there, I tell you,” yelled Wayne.

“Ben Clarke— —” chattered Mrs Myers. “Here he comes. Oh, God— —”

Wayne could see the figure now. It had come slowly out of the darkness of the van into the feeble light of the lamp. The tan shoes still sparkled with rain drops, the death stain was still on the grey vest, the face was still staring and twisted as in the moment of vital shock.

“Clarke— —” mouthed Wayne. His voice soared to a screech. “Clarke— —”

A step at a time the figure came along the corridor. Madame Kelaher tipped the lamp so that the convulsed face should not again be seen.

“My God— —” croaked Mr Shaw. “She’s done it— —”

Madame Kelaher said tonelessly:

“Ben Clarke has returned to us. Stand beside the one who slew you, Ben Clarke.”

Mr Wayne swung his arms wildly. His fat face was puffy and assuming a grey hue.

“No,” he bleated. “Ben Clarke—Ben Clarke—no! Ben Clarke is dead. He can’t come back—he’s dead!” On a shrieking note now he told them

again: “Ben Clarke . . . is dead, dead, you fools, dead, dead, dead— —”

Speechless, Ann, Joe and Roger stood motionless. They could not have moved, they had no power of speech or volition. Miss Francis was licking dry lips with an equally dry tongue. Mrs Myers was swaying, sucking in deep gulps of air. Polly Caldwell had one hand half-raised, and her blue eyes were fixed and glazed as though she too were dead. Mr Shaw’s eyes were closed, his hands having come up to cover them. The Campobassos were huddled together with their arms across their faces. Madame Kelaher’s eyes were closed, but her lips were moving. Behind her the hunchback stood like a dazed ape, his heavy shoulders drooping, his long arms swinging.

Wayne’s hysterical scream seemed to pass unheard. He would not look at the figure close to him; his bulging eyes were staring madly at the attitudes and expressions of those in the corridor.

“Fools—fools— —” he screamed. “You can’t see anything, Ben Clarke is not here— —”

“Wayne,” jerked out Polly Caldwell. “Your bluff is done. Ben Clarke is standing beside you. We can see him, you can see him. Look into his face, Wayne— —”

“Ben Clarke— —” came Madame Kelaher’s voice. “Who killed you?”

All heard the voice. From afar off it seemed to come, from far beyond the carriage, from far beyond the night.

“Gregory Wayne.”

All heard it. Ann, Joe and Roger heard it. Wayne heard it.

“Ben Clarke— —” he choked.

There was silence as he collapsed. Slowly the figure of Ben Clarke turned and went back towards the van. Wayne’s terrible eyes never left it as he grovelled on the floor. Out of the rays of the lamp it went and melted into the shadows. Wayne half lifted himself on his left elbow.

“Ben . . . Clarke!” he panted. “Leave me alone . . . for God’s sake . . . leave me alone . . . Damn you, I—I killed you . . . yes, I killed Ben Clarke . . . I knew about Kelaher’s diamonds . . . found out she kept them . . . in the bag . . . I planned it all . . . I fixed the lights . . . the communication, and I . . . I would have got them . . . only Clarke walked in on me . . . just as I got the bag. He knew . . . what I wanted. . . . He taunted me for a thief . . . We fought for the bag . . . I stabbed Clarke . . . and in a panic . . . rushed out leaving the bag . . . with him. Yes; I killed Ben . . . Clarke.”

The lamp crashed from Madame Kelaher’s hand as the gasping voice ceased, and with the going out of the light a combined sigh seemed to leave the lips of all in the corridor. Madame Kelaher said gently:

“You all saw and heard for yourselves. I can never thank you all sufficiently. It was magnificently done. Here is the last tunnel— —”

The last tunnel! Ann turned wildly as the train plunged into the opening. High above the roar of train and tunnel was her cry:

“The last tunnel! Roger—Joe—jump. Oh, jump— —”

Roger caught her as she fainted.

“Poor child, poor child,” said Madame Kelaher compassionately. “Bring her this way, Mr Balcombe. What an ordeal for you all— —”

She walked to the door leading to the trucks. Still shaking and bewildered, Joe and Roger followed, Roger carrying Ann. Both men were dumbfounded when Madame Kelaher opened the door to reveal not the buffers and drenched end of a truck, but a small and cosy observation compartment in which a dozen persons could sit comfortably.

“We kept the door locked while we talked,” she explained. “Put Miss Harper in that chair, Mr Balcombe—we’ll soon have her right again.”

“But—the trucks?” stammered Joe.

“They are next to this observation compartment, Mr Harper. You probably thought they were next to the locked door. We kept it locked while we planned to trap Wayne.”

Ann opened her eyes as the carriage came into the brightly lit platform of the busy Junction.

“Roger—Joe— —” she whispered.

They smiled down at her.

“Everything is all right, Ann,” said Roger. “And so are we— —”

“But only just, I guess,” said Joe. “Only just— —”

Ann looked round to see Madame Kelaher, Miss Francis, Mrs Myers, Polly Caldwell, the Campobassos, the guard, Mr Gerald Shaw, and even Pierre Fouché, all smiling at her. And although still gripped by the influence of the dark carriage she saw now in the bright station light that these people were very human and very kindly.

“I—I don’t understand,” she panted. “Tell me, please, tell me— —”

“There is no mystery, Miss Harper,” said Madame Kelaher. “Not now that Wayne has confessed.”

“But—where am I?” asked Ann.

“In the observation car of the same corridor carriage,” was the reply. “The locked door you thought opened on to the trucks hid this compartment

from you.”

“But . . . you are Madame Kelaher, the medium?”

Madame Kelaher nodded.

“Oh, yes — —”

“But—the Madame Kelaher who was — who was — —”

Madame Kelaher replied gently:

“You are thinking of the famous Madame Kelaher who was killed on this line many years ago. She was my mother. As a medium she was justly famous. I was a child, in America, when she was killed. She decided not to take me with her on that tour. Once every seven years I travel over this line. It is a pilgrimage. And just for me a little sad.”

“It must be,” murmured Ann. “Perhaps I shouldn’t ask — —”

Madame Kelaher smiled again.

“Of course you should. Wayne schemed to get this old bag of mine. It belonged to my mother. It has a false leather bottom, and in it I keep my diamonds, worth several thousands of your pounds. Wayne somehow found that out. The mysterious appearances and disappearances are due to this observation compartment which you did not know existed. And we did not want you to know. Mr Balcombe, the guard told me, is a newspaper man, and I didn’t want any interference with my plan to force Wayne to confess. We were all in here when you got on at Deep Valley, even Wayne. We did not talk, of course, about him while he was with us. Knowing you must find the body of Ben Clarke if you went into that compartment we waited until you went down the corridor in search of someone, and then Mr Shaw and Caesar Campobasso brought the body into this compartment. I don’t wonder at your shock and surprise when you returned to find it gone — —”

“But why take it over the roof?” asked Joe.

“It wasn’t taken over the roof. While the guard was on the roof doing his best to rectify the lights, Gerald and Caesar carried Ben along the corridor to the van, and then returned. You would not see them in the darkness, and you certainly would not hear them.”

“We didn’t,” admitted Ann. “I—I began to think — —”

“You did think,” said Joe dryly.

“And no wonder,” said Madame Kelaher. “Our odd behaviour must have completely mystified you.”

“But . . .” said Ann slowly. “The figure—the figure of Ben Clarke?”

“Curiously enough, in spite of his denials, I knew from past conversations that Wayne was very superstitious. Most people are, if I may

say so. Wayne, indeed, was highly impressionable, but masked it with an air of unbelief and cynicism. But I knew. So we planned. We have to thank the guard for the part he played. Not many men would have donned the suit of the dead man. He did. But for his courage and willingness Wayne would still be free. A little grease paint, a little wax, and in the dim lamplight Ben Clarke lived again. As I say, we have to thank the guard— —”

“Uhuh!” said a dry voice. “But it was agen reg’lations, an’ when you break reg’lations there’s always trouble.”

Ann saw that the face she had thought surly and sinister in the night shadows was in reality a smiling, homely one.

“But why did you all occupy different compartments?” asked Joe.

“Again for Wayne’s benefit. While he was with us we pretended to quarrel, and every one loudly declaimed the intention of having a separate compartment. Actually, the idea was to keep watch on Wayne’s movements right along the carriage.”

“And the bag? We were convinced that it was valuable somehow, but why did everybody try to get it for himself or herself?” asked Roger.

“We very nearly crashed over that,” said Madame Kelaher. “At one stage every one thought the bag was lost, or that you had it again. So you had visitors whose different technique must have rather bewildered you— —”

“It did,” said Joe. “It did— —”

“When it came to me I finally decided to trust you, so I asked you to mind my bag for me until we came to the Junction. I knew Wayne would be desperate. I knew he’d kill again for my diamonds. I thought the least risk to us, and none to ourselves, would be run by my asking you to hold it.”

“But the amazing costumes, Madame Kelaher?” said Ann.

Madame Kelaher looked round at them all.

“My friends and I tour the world, as my mother and her company did before us. Mr Gerald Shaw is a fine character actor. Miss Francis is a brilliant pianist. Polly is inimitable as an *ingénue*. Mrs Myers sings. So did Wayne. Poor Ben Clarke was a host in himself as an entertainer. The Campobassos are miracles on the trapeze. I manage to convince people of all sorts of things, but they like it. I convinced Wayne. These clothes are our costumes for the act, which has the time and the doings of the nineties as its motif. Knowing we would have little time to change at the Junction, where we are billed to show to-night, we dressed beforehand. We often do that, and it’s not bad publicity, believe me. Mrs Campobasso has only to slip off that velvet frock and she would dazzle your eyes— —”

“Si,” agreed Mr Campobasso.

“You bet we’ll come along and see,” said Joe, looking very intently at Miss Francis.

The amber-brown eyes seemed content to look back at Joe.

“And where is . . . Wayne?” asked Ann.

Mr Gerald Shaw said slowly:

“Gregory Wayne . . . was dead when we picked him up off the floor of the compartment.”

Joe looked at Ann, then at the guard. In Joe’s eyes was a faintly quizzical look.

“Some of them still wear beards, Ann — —”

Ann sighed.

“All right. I’ll go quietly, Joe,” she said.

Joe was looking at Miss Francis now. The amber-brown eyes were regarding him steadily, and touching the sensitive lips was the same inscrutable smile.

“And so,” said Joe, “shall I.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

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

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Dark Interlude*, by E. V. (Edward Vivian) Timms.]