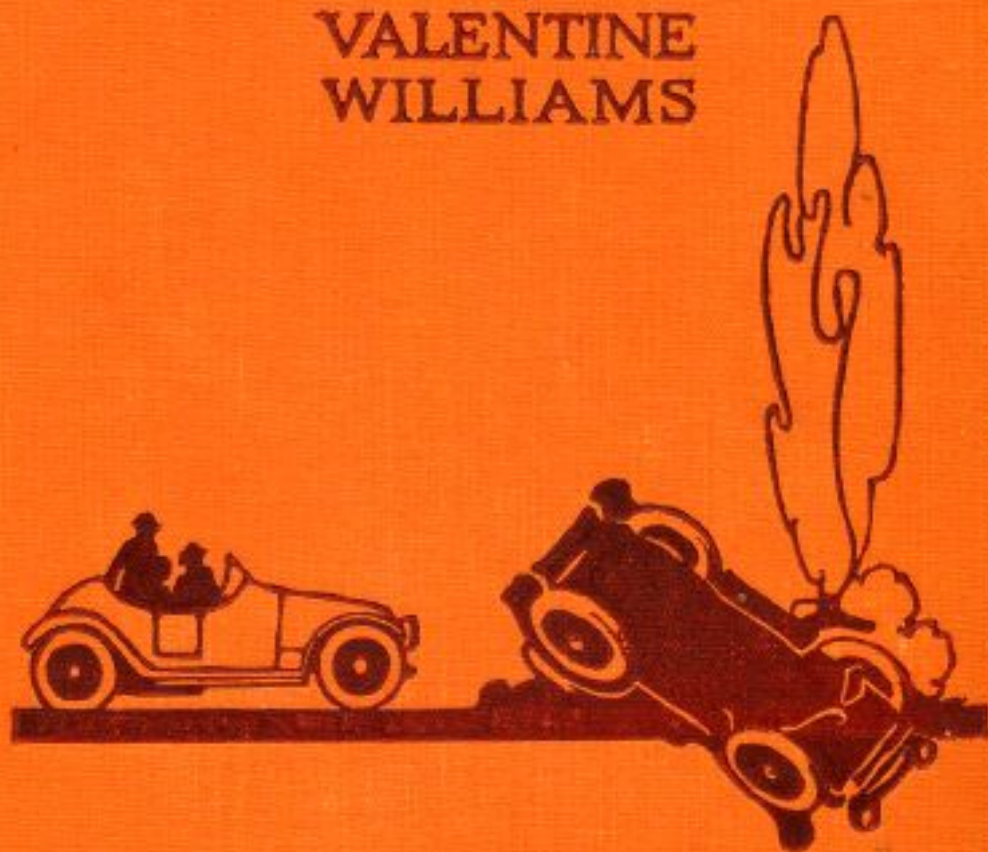


THE ORANGE DIVAN

By
VALENTINE
WILLIAMS



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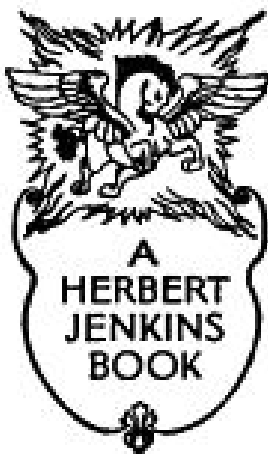
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THE
ORANGE
DIVAN
BY
VALENTINE
WILLIAMS

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THE ORANGE DIVAN

CHAPTER I

A STRANGER IN ALDON STREET

IT was a stifling evening in high summer, the hour when, in the green country, there comes that subtle mellowing of the light which presages the stately pageantry of sunset, and by the sea that little stirring of a breeze which atones so generously for the noon-day glare.

But in London there was not a breath of air. The lead-coloured sky seemed to press down upon the noisy and restless streets like a hot and heavy hand laid upon the face of the city. Since early morning the sun had blazed fiercely out of an unruffled heaven and now, though the approach of evening had dulled the molten splendour of its rays, it seemed to beat as hotly upon the panting street as it had done throughout the steaming day.

Here in this narrow side-street the sun was not a friend, a joyous companion beckoning the leisurely to the cool swimming-pool or to a stroll in the shade of some leafy grove, but an enemy, a malignant foe, that took delight in embittering still further the life of the very poor.

Aldon Street is the dwelling-place of humble folk. It lies in that labyrinthine No Man's Land which is wedged in between South Kensington, West Kensington, Earl's Court, and Fulham, a slum which through the years has remained a slum while the genteel upon which it bordered slowly sank to the shabby. From time to time, in the long years of the Victorian era, an attempt seems to have been made to raise the social level of the street. At one end the dreary frontage of squalid houses with their crumbling steps and rusting railings is interrupted by half a dozen decrepit villas, each with its strip of black and blighted garden before, the playground of emaciated cats; elsewhere the stucco façade has been unexpectedly broken by a terrace of jerry-built cottages, once of staring yellow brick, but long since endued with the sombre neutral tint which is the colour scheme of Aldon Street.

In point of fact, nothing save dynamite could hoist Aldon Street from its chronic condition of decay. It is merely a rusty link in the chain of streets which lead from the smug respectability of Kensington to the frank slumland of Walham Green. Two streets away, it is true, gentility yet raises its head in

Broke Place, a quiet cul-de-sac given over exclusively to studios; but that is merely owing to the curious proclivity of painters to attach more importance to a good north light than to the antecedents and social status of their immediate neighbours.

Aldon Street is the home of curious trades. Exponents of the art of midwifery, of pinking, of French polishing and of mangling proclaim, by means of brass plates or painted signboards, that their place of business is identical with their residence. There are half a dozen shops, including a green-grocer, a baker, a herbalist, a second-hand clothes dealer and a chemist. At almost every side-turning the corner is neatly rounded off with a public-house. The street can regulate its clocks by the habits of these rather cheerless taverns, by the appearance of the thirsty-looking queue which lines up at midday as by the stentorian cries of "Time, gentlemen, PLEASE!" the scrape of feet and the banging of doors, which proclaim the closing-hour at night.

On this hot June evening Mrs. Rosa Amschel, proprietress of Aldon Street's second-hand clothes store, sat on a kitchen chair at her shop-door contemplating the view. The dusty pavements and dirty gutters fairly reeked of heat and the air of the street was laden with uncleanly odours, that blend of dirt, decaying vegetables and stale fish which is the characteristic smell of a London slum. The street was very quiet, so that one could hear the distant boom of traffic from the main-road; no one was in sight except a group of filthy children hocking in the gutter at the far end.

Mrs. Amschel was a large and rather frowsy Jewess with narrow black eyes, rather red about the rims, a thick hooked nose and a big gash of a mouth. She was scarlet in the face with the heat and her dark, frizzy hair, scraped back off her forehead and bundled up in a knob at the back of her head, was dank and untidy. Her enormous bosom bulged loosely in the dirty striped cotton wrapper she was wearing. Her age might have been anywhere between forty and fifty; but like most Jewesses of her class she probably looked older than she was.

At her elbow the long, shallow window of her shop was filled with sundry soiled and faded articles of clothing, topping a variegated assortment of leather suit-cases, boots and shoes and hats in picturesque confusion. Against the window-pane was gummed a notice which, written in faded ink on yellowing paper, informed the Nobility and Gentry that Mrs. Rosa Amschel paid the Highest Prices for Cast-Off Clothing, Uniforms, Jewellery and Teeth and that, moreover, Ladies and Gentlemen were Waited Upon at their Residences by the aforesaid Mrs. Amschel at Any Convenient Time.

Mrs. Amschel was rather an enigma to her neighbours of Aldon Street. In the language of the street she kept herself *to* herself. She lived alone and when business called her abroad—presumably on those occasions when she waited upon the Nobility and Gentry at their Residences—she locked up the shop and hung on the door-knob a printed notice bearing the convenient and elastic announcement “Back In An Hour.” For the rest, as far as customers calling at the shop were concerned, business was not brisk. Mr. Chas. Ruddick, Chymist, as he described himself on his plate-glass window, who kept the chemist’s shop adjoining Mrs. Amschel’s, was in the habit of declaring that he didn’t rightly know how that Mrs. Amschel contrived to get a living.

With a fat hand Mrs. Amschel smoothed the hair back out of her eyes and sighed heavily.

“Ei! Ei! it’s hot!” she murmured to herself. First she looked down the street, past the chemist’s shop where the afternoon sun was striking all sorts of pretty colours out of the three jars of coloured water which stood in the window and then she looked up the street. And there her gaze remained fixed.

Across the top of Aldon Street runs Branscombe Street which, at its farther end, becomes Broke Place, the cul-de-sac with the studios. Now as Mrs. Amschel looked up Aldon Street towards Branscombe Street she observed a woman turn the corner and hasten down the right-hand pavement of Aldon Street, the same side as that on which Mrs. Amschel’s shop was situated. At a glance the second-hand dealer, with her shrewd eye for clothes, saw that the woman, who was young and slim, was extremely well-dressed. Her silhouette which, after all, is the test of present day elegance, was of the most fashionable.

But it was not the appearance of a woman of fashion in those squalid surroundings that made Mrs. Amschel stare so much as the fact that, despite the warm evening, the woman seemed to be in desperate haste. She came hurrying down Aldon Street with every appearance of alarm, her head down, her two arms crossed clutching her cloak across her breast. She walked desperately, unheedingly, zigzagging from side to side in the rather helpless fashion of the average woman who is not habituated to violent exercise.

Her alarm was so obvious that Mrs. Amschel rather awkwardly scrambled to her feet with the intention of retiring into her shop as if she fully expected to see some criminal turn the corner in hot pursuit after the stranger. But, save for the woman, Aldon Street, from Mrs. Amschel’s shop to Branscombe Street, was completely deserted. The second-hand dealer stood at her shop-door and waited.

And now the stranger, when she was within a few yards of the shop, raised her head. On catching sight of the Jewess she stopped abruptly, faltered and, clutching at the wall for support, raised dark and lustrous eyes to the dealer's hard and rather uncompromising countenance. Then Mrs. Amschel saw a strikingly beautiful face, oval and olive-skinned, the ears hidden by loops of blue-black hair resting against the cheeks, while through the scarlet lips, parted as the stranger struggled for breath, she had a glimpse of even, dazzlingly white teeth.

But there was an odd, strained look about the regular features and the eyes were staring with terror.

"Du lieber Gott!" exclaimed the Jewess, receding in amazement and oversetting her chair which fell with a crash back into the shop.

"A taxi!"

The words came in a gurgling whisper from the stranger's lips, a scarlet smear in a bloodless face.

"Get me a taxi!"

She raised a hand as she spoke in a little gesture of appeal. As she did so the pleated cloak she was wearing fell back, displaying her beautifully rounded throat, about which a string of pearls was clasped, and the gentle swell of her bosom in a simple black satin frock.

For an instant the dealer remained motionless where she stood, whilst a look of terror deepened in her beady eyes. Her face distorted with horror, she drew back and raised one pudgy hand, with a slow and tragic gesture, to her cheek, her eyes fixed upon the other woman's breast. So the Jewess stood for a moment in a terror-stricken silence, staring with eyes that slowly distended with fear. Then suddenly she shrieked aloud, shrieked again and again, her fat hands, thrust out from her body as though to ward off some terrifying vision, pawing the air in a frenzy of fear.

So Mr. Ruddick, the chemist from next door, found her when, at the uproar, he burst from his shop into the street. He saw the Jewess, who had fallen back against the doorpost of her shop, pointing with trembling finger at the elegantly dressed stranger while scream on scream shattered the heavy air and woke all the squalid street into life. Windows were thrown up; there was the muffled thud of heavy feet on bare wooden stairs; doors slammed; while the stranger, with a wan little smile on her bloodless face and a veiled and distant regard in her dark eyes, stood, swaying a little, silently contemplating the shrieking Jewess. The chemist followed the direction of Mrs. Amschel's pointing finger, then recoiled in horror himself.

In the strange woman's left breast a knife was plunged, the hilt projecting from the black satin corsage.

CHAPTER II

MR. CRANMORE RETURNS FROM THE CITY

JIM CRANMORE leisurely mounted the steps of his club. Following his usual custom, when business was quiet, he had walked from the City to St. James's Street and, though he had taken it easy on this warm afternoon, he felt hot and sticky in the conventional clothes of the London stockbroker which, as everybody knows, consist of a very shiny top-hat, a short black coat and what the tailors call "fancy" trousers.

On the broad shallow steps of the club where, in the London of a vanished age, the gilded youth and the old bucks had stood and quizzed their passing acquaintances, Jim Cranmore paused to wipe his damp forehead and, while doing so, to gaze on the habitual stir of the celebrated street. With pleasure he let his eyes rest again on the quiet dignity of the old Regency façades, the trim green corner-posts fashioned out of the guns of the Peninsula and Waterloo, the shining wood paving and, away at the bottom of the street, the sentries in their scarlet tunics on guard outside the Palace. Cranmore liked St. James's Street; it gratified his conservative nature, a perpetual reminder of the immutability of London life.

Of course, Cranmore didn't word it quite like that; for he had not a very extensive vocabulary in his native tongue at his command. He had been brought up, rather than educated, at a famous public school. Thence he had gone to spend three very pleasant years of idleness at Oxford before going into the City to take up a junior partnership in his father's old-established and highly respectable firm of stockbrokers.

When the war came Cranmore followed the drum with the same air of quiet reserve with which he had been brought up to go about the business of life. With the same absence of fuss (at least on his part) he had been severely wounded and had spent a year in hospital. It would not be going wide of the mark to say that what had impressed the war upon Jim Cranmore's mind was not so much his temporary transformation from a stockbroker into a soldier as the circumstance that it had brought him a wife. For Jim Cranmore had met Carmen when she was serving as a V.A.D. in the Mayfair hospital to which he was first sent after being wounded.

His wife's face came into Jim Cranmore's mind now as he stood outside the club and took the last few pulls at his cigarette. He thought of her very often, not so much, perhaps, because of her splendid Spanish type of beauty, as on account of the wistfully sweet expression which lay in her big dark

eyes and her exquisitely regular features. They had been three years married. They adored each other quite frankly, "though what she sees in me," Jim used to say to his brother, George Cranmore, the barrister, "I'm jiggered if I know!"

The thought recurred to him now, on this warm, still evening in St. James's Street, that he was very happy in the possession of a beautiful and affectionate wife, excellent health, sufficient means to have enabled him to tide his affairs over the difficult war period, and a sound business. Old Cranmore had built up his connection carefully and well and when, towards the close of the war, he had died, he had left his two sons and his daughter very comfortably off.

Jim Cranmore pitched away the stump of his cigarette and walked through the swing-doors into the club. In the hall he came upon his brother seated on the fender, his hat on the back of his head. George Cranmore was, like his brother, dark and clean-shaven, but he was almost a head taller and altogether a leaner and slimmer stamp of man than Jim who, broad of shoulder and thickset, had in his day played full back for the Harlequins and still looked the part.

"Cheerio, Jim!" said George, looking up from the evening paper.

"Hullo, George!" answered Jim as he took some letters from the porter.

"How's Carmen?"

"Grand!" said the other, absently running his eyes over his mail, "grand! You ought to come along and see her! You haven't been around for ages. . . ."

"H'm!" observed his brother, "I'm not sure I'm wanted. . . ."

"My good ass . . ." began Jim, but George interrupted:

"You and Carmen are all right, I know," he said. "It's Dolores I mean. . . ."

Dolores was Carmen Cranmore's half-sister who made her home with the Cranmores.

"My dear old boy," said Jim, "if you're going to make Carmen and me responsible for how Dolores treats you. . . . Have you two been squabbling again?"

"There was no assault and battery on my part," rejoined George, "much as I was tempted. But words passed! Oh, but she's an independent young devil is Dolores!"

"Bah!" answered his brother. "You young fellers don't know how to treat the girls of to-day, that's all there is to it! Now, look at Carmen and me! Do we ever have a word? Have we ever had a row?"

"My poor fool!" George remarked with withering sarcasm, "do you really mean to say you don't realise even yet that that is none of your doing? Carmen is a saint. She couldn't fall out with an income-tax assessor! And anyway you are too fat and middle-aged and self-satisfied for the poor girl to pick a quarrel with! But it's different with a fine, upstanding, audacious devil like meself. . . ."

"Shut up, you ass!" cried Jim. "Look here, you can buy me a quick drink and I'll tell you how to be happy though married. . . ."

"It would be far better for your figure," replied his brother, "to come up to the Bath Club and have a game of squash and a swim. And that arrangement will have the added advantage of enabling you to drive me back to the Temple afterwards. Isn't that your car outside?"

"Yes," said Jim. "I told Bartlett to bring it round to meet me. But I can't play squash with you, old boy. I've got to be home by half-past six to dress. I've promised to take Carmen to dine at the Ritz and then on to the new show at the Pavilion. . . ."

"Anniversary?"

"No, domestic crisis! There's no housemaid—Carmen fired the last for wearing her silk stockings—and the cook's mother has picked upon this particular time to fall mortally ill. So as there's only the parlour-maid left and she has her evening off, I told Carmen we'd make a night of it!"

"That's an idea!" exclaimed George. "I haven't seen that thing at the Pavilion either. Suppose I came and took Dolores?"

"Guess again!" retorted his brother. "Dolores has gone to Ranelagh to dine. And if you think Carmen and I are going to stand for a dull fellow like you butting in. . . ."

"Oh, dry up!" said George. "I suppose you and Carmen will sit in a box and hold hands all night like a couple of Cockneys. Come along to the smoke-room! I'll stand you a drink if it's only to stop your nauseous twaddle about matrimonial bliss!"

In the bow window of the smoke-room they had a Martini apiece. They were good friends, the two brothers, and presently the barrister said with spontaneous warmth:

"Joking apart, Jim, old man, I'm devilish glad you're so happy with Carmen. . . ."

"She's a brick!" replied the other fervently, "I'm the luckiest fellow alive. I honestly believe I've got everything in the world a man can want to make him happy. In the old days I never knew what it was to feel contented . . . to feel, well, at peace and all that, don't you know? Things run so smoothly for

me that I feel quite scared at times. I wonder whether I oughtn't to throw a ring in the sea or something, like the old josser what's-his-name one read about at school. I hope you'll be as happy, George, old boy! Carmen and I always think that you and Dolores ought to make a match of it. . . ."

"My dear chap," his brother retorted with the utmost promptitude, "forget it! Dolores would no more marry me than . . . well, I'd marry her! And when she hears that you've been trying to match-make, she'll just give you merry hell! . . ."

Jim laughed.

"Well," he remarked after a reflective sip of his cocktail, "Dolores ought to marry. She's high-spirited and devilish obstinate and all that and wants a man to look after her a bit. But she's a dam good sort and I'd like to see some good chap make her happy!"

George looked at him curiously.

"Perhaps some man will sooner than you think!" he observed quietly.

"I shouldn't wonder. She has plenty of chances. Besides being about the prettiest girl, after Carmen, that I know, she's awfully popular. Wherever she goes she is fairly surrounded by the men. Though, mind you, they're not always the right ones. Dolores has got this modern bee in her bonnet about her 'independence,' 'living her own life' and all that bunkum. She draws the line at no one! She started bringing some of her Bohemian friends to the house till I put my foot down!"

"I met her in Bond Street on Monday," said George. "I thought she seemed a bit subdued. . . ."

And again he stole a glance at his brother's face.

"Can't say I notice it," said Jim. "She always seems to be out dashing about. . . ."

George Cranmore laughed.

"What an unobservant bloke you are, Jim," he remarked. "I bet you a new hat that Dolores knows whom she's going to marry. And she'll marry him for all you say. . . ."

An obstinate look came into Jim Cranmore's face.

"You mean that fellow Quayre?"

His brother nodded.

"I don't know what you've got against Quayre," he said. "Of course, he's an artist. But his stuff is good, especially his portraits, and he's making quite a name for himself. Of course, he hasn't a bean as yet, I know, but he's really

a thundering good chap. And after all he's an old friend of Carmen's. She knew him in America. . . ."

"My dear George, I'm not prejudiced against Quayre in the least and I'm not old-fashioned, either, I think. But it's pretty hot when a girl of nineteen like Dolores comes home time after time from some artist spree in Chelsea or God knows where at three or four in the morning. That was bad enough. But when she brought this fellow Julian Quayre into the house at some unearthly hour of the night to give him a drink, it was going a bit too far. It's not good enough, old man. Dolores has lived with us ever since she left school and she can't play up in this fashion. Carmen absolutely agrees with me. As a matter of fact, though, as you say, she knew Quayre in New York. I'm not at all sure about her being so keen on him. And I can tell you she quite approved of my reading the Riot Act to Dolores about her artistic friends. After her last exploit I sent for Master Julian Quayre and ticked him off properly. I told him he would not be seeing anything more of Dolores and I gave Dolores as well to understand that she was to cut him out. I grant you that Quayre's quite a good fellow, but he hasn't a bean, and Dolores, with her looks and charm and all that, can do better than that. And she'll have a settlement, too, when she marries. I promised Carmen to see to that. But I'm going to take care at the same time that she gets a good husband. . . ."

He looked at his watch.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, scrambling to his feet, "it's half-past six. I'll have to sprint if I'm to get to Sloane Crescent, dress and be ready by seven. I never keep Carmen waiting. So long, old man! Ring up and come and dine one night soon, won't you? Can I drop you anywhere?"

No, George said, he'd have a quiet chop and go down to the dormy-house at Wickham after dinner to have a night in the fresh air. So Jim waved a hand to his brother and vanished abruptly through the smoke-room door, alert, confident, content.

Piccadilly was a roaring tangle of traffic as Jim Cranmore's big car made its way among the motor-buses and taxis. He drove himself with the sure touch of a man who is in fine physical and moral condition. His was a placid, kindly disposition, inclined, perhaps, to complacency and dogmatism, but with no leaning to arrogance. He was always happier at home than at the office or the club, and one of his chief joys in life was to return to his Carmen after his day's work was done. Jim Cranmore made no claim to introspective or intuitive powers; but he believed his wife to be in love with him though much less, as he told himself with the modesty which was one of his characteristics, than he was in love with her.

"Mind that lorry, sir, goin' to turn!" said the chauffeur, Bartlett, in his ear.

Cranmore, still busy with his thoughts, gave the wheel a half-turn and brought the car nearer the pavement. His three years of married life, he reflected, had been a dream of happiness unclouded. Not a misunderstanding, not a quarrel, never a harsh word on either side. There had been no children, it was true, but that was an omission which time might rectify; besides, he sometimes wondered whether this very absence of children did not perhaps make his domestic harmony more absolute.

In his daily work, in the tumultuous surroundings of 'Change, in the very masculine atmosphere of his club, the living reflection in his mind of his wife's face, the dark sheen of her eyes, the piquant disdain of her short upper lip, the haunting charm of her smile, accompanied him like a silent friend. As the car glided in and out of the stream of traffic, he recalled her, with a thrill of warm affection, as he had left her that morning, seated at her dressing-table in the white silk kimono that became her so well, remembered the look of loving kindness with which she had sped him on his way.

She was alone in the house. His fingers drummed impatiently on the steering-wheel as again and again, in the crush of vehicles, he had to slow down the car.

CHAPTER III

THE EMPTY HOUSE

AT twenty minutes to seven Jim Cranmore put his latchkey into the lock of his front door in Sloane Crescent. The door swung back and closed behind him, leaving him in the tidy, oak-panelled hall lit by an old cast-iron lamp. On a big Florentine chest his opera-hat, evening scarf and overcoat lay in a neat pile as the parlour-maid had left them ready before going out.

The house was very quiet. As Cranmore set down his hat and gloves and Malacca cane he heard the solemn tick of the grandfather clock which stood in the staircase recess behind the green silk curtains shutting off the stairs. Remembering that the servants were out, he gave Carmen the call she had taught him, a funny little Spanish call on a rising and falling cadence which they used between themselves when they were alone like this.

“O!—Carmen!” he sang out and waited for the familiar reply to echo back in that soft, caressing voice which always set his heart beating faster: “O!—Jim!”

But there was no answer. A taxi hooted raucously in the street outside and somewhere in the distance one of those long drawn out, lugubrious motor whistles sounded.

“O!—Carmen!” he called out again. “I’m—i-i-in!”

But his voice fell dully on the quiet atmosphere of the house. No response was awakened. All remained profoundly still and there seemed to be something positively aggressive about the ponderous ticking of the hall clock. Cranmore parted the curtains and ran lightly up the stairs. His feet made no sound on the heavy pile carpet. On the first landing he paused and called again. Still there was no reply.

He followed the staircase up to the next floor where their bedroom and his dressing-room lay. But now he stopped short in surprise. The bedroom door stood open and at a glance he could see that the room was empty.

The bed had been turned back in preparation for the night and on it lay Carmen’s fine white *crêpe-de-chine* nightdress, at its foot her little blue quilted bedroom slippers edged with white fur. On the couch at the end of the bed her evening things were spread out, a silver tissue frock, silver slippers, grey silk stockings, a brocade bag.

Cranmore looked round the room in perplexity. It was most unlike Carmen to be as late as this, for if she had not even started to dress they would certainly not be able to dine and reach the Pavilion by 8.15 when the curtain rose on the new revue. The sight of the empty chair in front of her dressing-table with its array of silver and glass, powder puffs and other feminine toilet requisites gave him a sudden poignant stab of loneliness.

How empty the house seemed!

Then he decided that Carmen must, after all, be in the drawing-room or the morning-room. She might have fallen asleep, as she sometimes did curled up on a sofa.

He descended to the first floor and pushed open the drawing-room door, but the big, cool apartment was empty. So was the little book-lined library behind it—Jim's den, this—with his desk and a few war souvenirs and his big cedarwood cabinet of cigars. Perplexed, he went on down to the morning-room.

This, situated behind the dining-room which looked out on the street, was eminently Carmen's room. The French window opening on to a vista of smooth green turf in the gardens at the back had attracted her and she had transformed a prosaic back-room in a prosaic West End house into something exquisitely beautiful and exotic like herself. The walls were black, the ceiling was golden; and, with the broad divan of flaming orange, piled with great black and golden cushions, the black curtains, the lacquer furniture and the quaint Chinese lamps, the whole bizarre art of the Far East seemed to have brought a blaze of colour to lighten the London gloom.

But Carmen was not there. So permeated was the room with her personality, however, that her husband had to look twice to convince himself that she was not present. In its simplicity, its fragrant daintiness, its serene beauty, the shrine was like the goddess, and in the bizarre note which predominated was something of the mystery which envelops every woman in the eyes of man.

He looked at the orange divan, a low and broad couch with curiously carved Chinese feet in black teak displaying the five dragon's claws, the emblem of majesty in old China. Carmen was romantically attached to this quaint old piece, the only possession she had brought with her in marriage. "My dowry," she used to call it. In her early days of struggle, when she was a poor art student in New York, she had slept on the orange divan in her tiny bed-sitting-room. Together with a few pieces of modern furniture it constituted the only legacy, except her artistic sense and her Irish-blue eyes, she had inherited from her father, Lucius Driscoll, Bohemian, dreamer and free lance, dead these many years in New York. As Cranmore gazed rather

helplessly around the room, a great yearning for his wife surged over him. Suddenly he felt a little stirring of uneasiness. . . .

He pulled out his cigarette case and lit a cigarette. His watch showed the time to be five minutes to seven. On a side-table was a morning paper, *The Planet*. The editor, Harringay, was a member of Cranmore's club and had mentioned on the previous day that they were running a striking series of articles on the economic condition of Germany.

Cranmore unfolded the newspaper and turned to the article in the series in question. It was interestingly written and Cranmore, reading it, became absorbed and perused it to the end. Then, from the clock on the mantelpiece, he realised that it was twenty minutes past seven.

He rose to his feet hurriedly. *What* was Carmen doing? He was beginning to feel hungry and consequently somewhat cross. Carmen was not a model of punctuality and she made little account of a quarter of an hour one way or another. But there was a certain consistency about her unpunctuality. Yet here forty minutes had elapsed since the time of their appointment and still there was no sign of her.

In a rather irritable frame of mind Cranmore went out to the telephone in the hall and called up Carmen's club. She was a member of the Ladies' Criterion in Bond Street and sometimes went there in the afternoon. On the spur of the moment it was the only place he could think of where he might glean news of her.

Yes, said the club porter, Mrs. Cranmore had been to the club and had had tea there. She had left about half-past five.

Had Mrs. Cranmore said where she was going?

He couldn't say.

Did she say she was going home?

He didn't know.

"Damn!" said Cranmore under his breath as he put the receiver down. What a nuisance women were about the time! He felt aggrieved. He lit another cigarette and stood in the hall fuming and indulging his sense of grievance until he suddenly realised that he was giving way to this feeling of irritation to still the small, quiet voice which, as methodical as the tick of the grandfather's clock, kept telling him that perhaps something had happened to Carmen.

Perhaps Carmen had unexpectedly decided to go to Ranelagh with Dolores. Jim didn't know the name of the man who had taken Dolores to dinner. Still, he would try Ranelagh. He spent a quarter of an hour in futile telephoning, including several minutes of vain recrimination with a hysterical

voice that clamoured for the National Institute for the Blind, only ultimately to find that nobody at Ranelagh knew anything about either Miss Dolores Driscoll, Mrs. Cranmore, or their escort. Then he rang up George at the club; but the porter informed him that Mr. Cranmore had left for Paddington a quarter of an hour before. As Jim put back the receiver eight o'clock struck from the neighbouring church-tower.

His car was still at the door. The chauffeur, consulted, could throw no light on the question of Madame's movements. He had driven the car straight from the garage to the club and had not seen Madame all day. Nor could he say where the parlour-maid was to be found.

Jim Cranmore stood for a moment in perplexity at the front door. Then on the back of a circular which he found lying on the hall chest he wrote a line for Carmen saying he had waited until eight o'clock and had gone in the car to the Ladies' Criterion to find out what had become of her. If she came home while he was away would she wait for him? He propped the note up where she could not fail to see it and drove off in the car to Bond Street.

In half an hour he was back again. At the club he had learnt little more than the negative information he had already gathered. A little red-haired waitress in the lounge remembered Mrs. Cranmore having tea by herself. She was wearing a small black hat with a white osprey, a string of pearls and a blue serge cape. She had left in rather a hurry about twenty minutes past five. The girl recalled this circumstance because the lady had asked her to make haste with her check. Cranmore interviewed the lady secretary and with her aid tried to discover any member who had seen or spoken to Carmen, but without success. Only a few members were in the club and none of those present had been there when Mrs. Cranmore was in.

The house in Sloane Crescent was exactly as Cranmore had left it. The windows were all dark and in the gathering dusk in the hall the first thing he saw was his note to his wife lying undisturbed on the chest. At the front door Cranmore turned and bade Bartlett wait. Then he entered the silent house and closing the door, shut out the sounds of the street.

He was fighting down a feeling of panic. Even without the evidence of the clock, of the empty house, he was virtually certain that something untoward had happened to his wife. For a full five minutes he stood in the hall, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his brow puckered, a look of anxiety in his honest eyes, while the invisible clock inexorably, ponderously ticked the time away.

At last he raised his head with a jerk and squared his chin. He went to the telephone, consulted the directory and called up a number. It was *The Planet*

office. Cranmore asked for the editor. Then Harringay spoke. His voice was tired, his manner abrupt. It was obvious that he was busy.

"Is that you, Harringay?" said Jim. "Look here, I'm anxious to see you. . . ."

"Yes," said Harringay in a non-committal manner. "Come and lunch one day . . . wait a minute, what about Thursday?"

"No, no,"—Cranmore tried to steady his voice—"it's important. I must see you to-night. . . ."

"I'm sorry, but it's quite impossible. I'm fearfully rushed. . . ."

"Harringay," urged Cranmore, and his voice was low and pleading, "I'm in a hole and I want your advice. I shan't keep you a moment. But it's urgent. I have my car here. . . ."

"But couldn't you tell me on the telephone? . . ."

"Out of the question! I shan't keep you five minutes!"

"Oh, all right!" was the resigned reply, and the editor rang off.

In a plainly furnished room with a double door which shut out the clatter of typewriters, the whirr of telephone bells, the thudding of pneumatic tube carriers and the trampling of office boys on the stairs, Harringay gave Cranmore his hand and pointed to a leather chair opposite him across the desk. The room was illuminated only by the green-shaded reading-lamp which threw its rays down on the desk with its letter-trays and litter of damp proofs.

"Well, Cranmore," said the editor, "what can we do for you? Let me see, you're looking a bit off colour, aren't you?"

"It's very good of you to let me take up your time in this fashion, Harringay," said the other. "I want your advice. It's about my wife. . . ."

The editor's eyes narrowed a trifle and he drew back in his chair as though to take a better view of his visitor. But he said nothing and Jim Cranmore continued:

"She was to have met me at home at half-past six to dine and go to the play. But she hasn't turned up. And I don't know where she is. . . ."

The editor, his left hand propping up his chin, was looking at his visitor thoughtfully.

"Mightn't she have gone to friends?" he asked.

Cranmore shook his head vigorously.

"If she had," he answered, "she would have kept her appointment with me or let me know that she was delayed. As a matter of fact she doesn't go out a very great deal and has few intimate friends. I was with my brother this

afternoon and he hadn't seen my wife for a week. And my sister, with whom she is very friendly, lives down in Hampshire."

He looked about him in a perplexed fashion.

"I don't know where she is," he repeated. "Such a thing has never happened before. There is probably a perfectly natural explanation. But, frankly, I don't know how to act. I don't care to go to the police . . . it seems like making a fuss about nothing. But it's nine o'clock . . . and I'm . . . a little . . . anxious. . . ."

There was a moment's silence in that quiet room which, before Big Ben tolled midnight, would reverberate, with the rest of the building, to the roar of *The Planet's* presses. Then the editor stretched forth his hand and pressed a button affixed to the side of the desk on a level with his knee. The rather reserved manner with which he had received his visitor had now given place to an attitude of marked interest.

"Tell me more about it!" he urged.

The stockbroker explained how he had come home to an empty house and waited in vain for the return of his wife.

"And you've no explanation?" queried Harringay.

There was a rap at the door and a liveried page appeared.

"Mr. March!" said the editor over his shoulder to the page. Then, turning to Cranmore, he continued:

"There was no trouble at home, or anything like that, I suppose?"

Jim Cranmore looked down at his hat, which he turned over slowly in his hands. His eyes were bright when he gazed into Harringay's face and answered.

"Neither of us had a care in the world," he said earnestly. "We've always been very happy together, and if you're suggesting that there's any skeleton in the cupboard, any scandal behind my wife's mysterious failure to keep her appointment with me, you're wrong. There isn't!"

Harringay had picked up a blue pencil from the pen-tray and appeared to be carefully scrutinising the end.

"Quite, quite!" he remarked absently. Then he added, with rather affected nonchalance:

"By the way, what was your wife wearing when she left her club this afternoon?"

Very slowly the colour left Cranmore's face. He rose unsteadily to his feet, dropping his hat which rolled unheeded on the carpet. He bent forward across the desk.

“My God, Harringay,” he said, and his voice sank to a whisper, “*you know something*. My wife’s met with an accident! That’s it, isn’t it? Come on, man, speak! Don’t you see how dreadfully anxious I am?”

But the editor did not speak immediately. He got up from his desk and went round to where his visitor was standing. Harringay had a pair of blue eyes which could be very fierce but which were more often kindly. He rested his hand for an instant on Cranmore’s shoulder.

“You’ll want to be courageous,” he said gravely. “I’m afraid we have bad news for you!”

A knock at the door made Cranmore swing round sharply. A keen-eyed, dark-haired young man in a neat blue suit came in briskly.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Harringay,” he said. “They told me you wanted me. I didn’t know you were engaged. . . .”

“Come in, March,” the editor answered. “This is Mr. Cranmore!”

He added something in a quick undertone to the young man whose eyes suddenly lit up with interest. To Cranmore the editor said aloud:

“This is March, our crime specialist!”

Cranmore, his face the colour of the white blotter on which his clenched fist rested, looked slowly from one man to the other, as he waited to learn what shrewd blow Fate had dealt at his life’s happiness. And Carmen’s face rose before him, dark-eyed, elusive.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE BACK-ROOM AT THE CHEMIST'S

A LITTLE clock stood on the mantelpiece in the editor's room. Its whirring, as it was about to strike, brought Cranmore back to his senses. Who was this tall, stern-looking man with the iron-grey moustache who faced him across the desk? And what was this dapper young man saying and why did he seem so embarrassed?

Cranmore looked in uncertain fashion from one man to the other. He had been thinking of Carmen, thinking of her as he had bade goodbye to her that morning, the flash of her dark eyes as she glanced at him over her shoulder and then held up her face, to be kissed.

But the vision had slipped away and he was back in the room of the editor of *The Planet*, immersed in a most horrible tragedy.

What, again, had they told him? That a young and handsome woman, elegantly dressed, had been found stabbed that evening in a back street in West Kensington and had died a few minutes later in a chemist's shop; that she was wearing a small black toque, a blue serge cloak and a string of pearls; and that her handkerchief and linen was marked "C. C."

". . . you could go along to Aldon Street with March here," Harringay, the editor, was saying, "but I greatly fear, from what you tell me, that there can be no doubt about it."

Jim Cranmore swallowed with a dry throat. With his dead-white face and glazed eyes he looked like a man who had been drinking, and when he spoke his voice was thick.

"But," he protested, "there *must* be some mistake. Where is this Aldon Street? I tell you we don't know anybody in this slum, as you say it is. And what . . . what should my wife be doing there? It's . . . it's . . . absurd; it's just one of those stories you newspaper fellows get hold of, eh, Harringay? . . ."

"Well," said the editor, glancing apprehensively from the clock to the growing pile of damp proofs on his desk, "I can only trust you're right, Cranmore. Go along to Aldon Street with March. He has been there already and knows the house. Besides, he's acquainted with the Scotland Yard people. . . ."

He stretched out his hand.

"I hope to God," he added warmly, "that this time we *are* wrong!"

That mysterious system of news transmission which in Africa they call the "bush telegraph" is just as active in a great modern city as in the wilds. Though the Aldon Street crime had been discovered too late for a report to have caught the final editions of the evening papers, within a few hours the large red lamp hanging in front of Mr. Chas. Ruddick's pharmacy seemed to have become the assembly point of the whole neighbourhood.

The great ganglion of poor streets clustered about the scene of the tragedy appeared to have emptied the bulk of their inhabitants into Aldon Street. A hundred yards from the chemist's shop Cranmore's chauffeur found his progress impeded by masses of people, bare-headed for the most part, who, quite unable to see anything of interest except the tips of policemen's helmets above the heads of the crowd, were discussing in awed whispers the extraordinary rumours afoot.

March, a quiet, matter-of-fact young man, who had all the trained reporter's knack of sweeping difficulties aside, contrived to force a passage for Cranmore's car right up to the cordon which the police had drawn about the house. Within the barrier silence reigned. A couple of uniform constables held watch in front of the chemist's shop where a dark limousine stood at the kerb. Some trowsled women with babies were in the front gardens of the dingy houses facing the house where the murdered woman lay. They conversed in whispers or else blankly stared at the three great jars of coloured water in the chemist's shop-window. A solemn hush rested over the cleared space with its frame of police and crowd, "like a State funeral," the reporter told himself.

At the barrier the police stopped the car. One of the constables allowed himself to be persuaded to go in search of Detective-Inspector Manderton, who had taken charge of the case. The officer disappeared into the chemist's shop and presently emerged in the company of a burly, red-faced man of middle height in a dark jacket suit.

March got out of the car and intercepted the new-comer. The latter waved him aside.

"I can't stop to talk to you now," he said curtly.

"It's all right, Manderton," answered the newspaper man. "Between ourselves and for no other newspaper, eh? I believe we've found the husband of the lady in there."

The detective turned a slow, penetrating regard on the reporter. Though his rather heavy jowl, which a thick tooth-brush moustache seemed to

emphasise, suggested a plethoric temperament, his eyes were extremely good, keen and intelligent.

“Is that so?” he said slowly. “That should make it a bit easier. We’ve only got linen marks to go by so far. She has nothing in her hand-bag to identify her. Who is she?”

“A Mrs. Cranmore—her husband’s a stockbroker. He’s there in the car!”

Cranmore now came across to the two men. He looked from one to the other hesitatingly; but he did not speak. He only made a pathetic little movement of the hands.

The detective paused, distrust in his look. By the way he eyed the reporter, you would have said he suspected a trick with the object of gaining admission to the shop. March touched his elbow.

“It’s all right,” he said in an undertone, “the description of the clothes absolutely tallies. Don’t keep the man waiting. Don’t you see he’s on the verge of a breakdown. . . .”

He pulled his companion forward and introduced him.

Manderton gave Cranmore one of his searching looks and a curt nod. Then he led the way across the dusty macadam of Aldon Street to the pharmacy.

The little shop, strongly impregnated with the combined odour of Gregory’s powder and creosote, was dimly lit by an incandescent gas-burner with a broken mantle which sent forth eerie bubblings and rumblings. Behind a screen of frosted glass inscribed “Prescriptions,” a little ferret-faced man with a long red nose and a long red moustache was talking with lowered voice to a black-bearded individual in his shirt sleeves who was washing his hands in a tin basin.

Manderton nodded to Blackbeard, who was the police surgeon. To the ferret-faced man, who was the Chas. Ruddick mentioned on the big red lamp without, he said:

“Don’t you go away, Mr. Ruddick! I shall be wanting you again presently!”

With that he pushed open a door that stood behind the counter, a door with panels of ground glass above the painted injunction “Private.” A strong whiff of carbolic smote upon them as they followed the detective into a small, darkish parlour. Part of a loaf on a wooden platter and a jug of water that stood on the small walnut sideboard suggested that Mr. Ruddick was in the habit of taking his meals there.

These and other details—the round table in the centre with its stained and faded cover, the steel engraving of the Prince Consort in the Highlands, the

threadbare carpet, the uncleaned window looking out on the squalid backyard—the quick eye of the journalist took in as it swept the room before coming to rest on the object which lay shrouded in a white sheet on the sofa against the wall. But Cranmore saw nothing but the couch—the couch and the humped-up sheet. . . .

At the table in the centre of the room under the gas chandelier a man with his back to the door was busy with a fine paint-brush and a small bottle. In his left hand he was holding by the blade, which he clutched between a fold of cotton-wool, a long knife. March saw the chased metal hilt gleam in the light from the gas lamps as the man applied the paint-brush to it.

Direct in everything he did, Manderton stepped across to the couch and turned back the sheet so as to uncover the dead woman's face. Then he glanced over his shoulder. Cranmore, with set, ghastly face, was at his elbow; but he held his eyes averted.

No word was said between them. After a pause which seemed to March to be an eternity, Cranmore turned his head and looked down upon the still, serene face. Then very slowly he bowed his head and, covering his face with his hands, turned his back on the room and walked over to the window.

Manderton exchanged a glance with the reporter and gently drew the sheet over the face again. The man at the table had laid down the dagger and his brush. Now he went over to Cranmore and placed a hand on his shoulder.

He was obviously a foreigner. He wore one of those suits, in colour an indefinite black or grey, of the material the tailors call hopsack, which are habitually worn by the small French official or clerk, with a very low collar and a made-up bow tie of rusty black. In his button-hole the neat red silken button showed that he was *Officier* of the Legion of Honour. In stature below the medium, he was so broad of shoulder that he appeared to be actually shorter than he really was. A close-cropped but vigorous shock of iron-grey hair, thinning at the temples, a clear, sun-burnt skin—what the French call *basané* in tint—and a wonderfully keen and piercing pair of bright blue eyes, proclaimed him to be a man of no small vitality and rude bodily health. With a little air of consolation he now patted Jim Cranmore a couple of times on the shoulder.

“My poor friend!” he said in French.

Cranmore raised his head slowly and looked round. As he saw the other his face changed.

“Boulot!”

His voice was hoarse with despair.

"I see," said the Frenchman, "that you have identified Madame. She was a relative perhaps?"

The stockbroker's voice shook as he answered:

"It is my wife!"

The Frenchman gripped his hand. Then Cranmore asked:

"What does it mean? Who should have killed her?"

Boulot shrugged his shoulders.

"Patience! It is very dark. There is no motive that one sees. The pearls of Madame have not been taken; her money in her bag seems to be intact. . . ."

The husband turned hopelessly from the speaker and, putting his arm on the window frame, dropped his head on it in an attitude of despair.

"You know this gentleman, Boulot?" said Manderton in his ear.

"*Mais oui!*" was the answer. And in excellent English he added:

"We were at the English General Headquarters together during the war."

March touched Manderton's sleeve.

"Who's your French pal? I don't know him, do I?"

"Ex-Chief of the French Criminal Investigation Department. Only retired last year. He came over to the Yard to study up some cases for his memoirs. Happened to be in my room when they rung up about this murder so I brought him along. He's not here officially. And, friend March, you needn't put this in your paper, see?"

"Right-o!" agreed the reporter.

Manderton stepped across to the window.

"I take it there's no doubt about the identification, sir," he said to Cranmore.

"None whatever," was the sad reply. "Can't you explain things to me? What does it mean?"

"There's nothing I can usefully say at present," replied the detective. "I've only been here an hour myself. If you'd come into the shop outside, there are a few questions I'd like to put to you. And the chemist can tell you how your poor lady died. As for you"—Manderton suddenly turned on March—"you can't stay here, you know!"

Calmly the reporter looked at his watch.

"I should have been glad to," he retorted collectedly, "but I shall have to bolt if I'm to catch our first edition. Good night, Manderton. See you tomorrow!"

With a nod to Boulot he hurried away.

"What a nerve!" muttered Manderton, then caught the Frenchman's eye. Before its merry glint the severity of the Englishman's expression melted.

"*Ah! la presse!*" murmured the Frenchman with an indulgent smile.

They spoke in an undertone out of respect for the presence of death and for Cranmore who still, rigid as any image, remained staring blankly out of the window. But now Manderton invited him to pass into the shop. The two men went out together, leaving Boulot alone with the mortal remains of poor Carmen Cranmore.

For a little while Boulot busied himself with his brushes and preparations and cotton-wool at the table, a curiously soft expression in his clear blue eyes. Now and again he would look in the direction of the door, wag his head and shrug his shoulders as if to say, "Poor Cranmore! Well, it can't be helped!"

Presently he finished his work on the dagger—he had been fixing certain finger-prints—and glanced across the room at the sofa with its still burden. A new look came into his face. The softness vanished from his eyes; he closed his mouth with an audible snap and his brows contracted while, with the index finger of his right hand, he rubbed the bridge of his nose reflectively. When the young men of the *Sûreté Générale* used to see the great Boulot rub his nose, they knew better than to interrupt his train of thought. When *le patron*, as they always called him, was thus engaged, it meant that he was on the scent.

Boulot crossed to the sofa and whisked away the sheet. Very methodically he began a close scrutiny of the body. He became so absorbed that presently he was humming a little tune under his breath as he worked. No race has greater respect for the dead than the French; but they are curiously indifferent to the presence of death.

There was a good deal of dried blood on the corsage about the rent left by the knife. Above the tear at the V-shaped *décolleté* opening the dead woman was wearing a long diamond brooch. Suddenly with a quick intake of the breath, the humming stopped. The detective's fingers were busy with the brooch. Very dexterously they appeared to detach from it some almost invisible thing, for he had to hold it up to the light, between finger and thumb, to see it. He tore a fragment of cotton-wool from a roll on the table, slipped his find into it and thrust the cotton-wool into a waistcoat pocket.

He spent a lot of time examining the dead woman's arms and their short satin sleeves which ended above the elbow. The right sleeve appeared to interest him particularly and, dropping on his knees, he drew from his pocket a folding magnifying glass with which he closely examined it. As he rose to his feet, pocketing the glass, he looked thoughtful.

For a minute he stood inactive while his right forefinger slowly massaged the bridge of his nose. Then he took up his little tune again and resumed his examination.

He now paid great attention to the dead woman's shoes. She was wearing black suède slippers of the sandal pattern (which was then fashionable), having a strap across the instep joined to another strap running up from the vamp.

Boulot spent a long time over the right shoe. The humming grew quicker as he bent down over it, turning the foot this way and that. Finally, he unbuttoned the shoe and took it off altogether. Then the magnifying glass came out again and with it the detective very minutely inspected the shoe under the gaslight. His scrutiny ended, he replaced the slipper on the dead woman's foot and fastened the buttons.

He glanced at his watch, covered the body with the sheet again and then set about collecting his paraphernalia scattered about the table. His eye fell upon the dagger which lay, as he had left it, its blade in a fold of cotton-wool. It was a cheap-looking knife, its total length something over a foot with a blade about nine inches long and a white metal handle with a plain Oriental design hammered in in copper.

"The Balkans or Turkey!" said the detective musingly, "a bazaar article that might belong to anybody!"

The door opened suddenly. There was a clatter outside in the shop. Men appeared with ladders, an electric lighting set, cameras. They were the police photographers come to photograph the body. The beautiful Mrs. Cranmore had sat to most of the famous London photographers who had vied with one another in the exquisite studies they had made of her rare and exotic beauty. Neither she nor they had ever dreamed of a sitting like this. . . .

CHAPTER V

MR. RUDDICK'S STORY

“THAT’S right!” said Mr. Ruddick, who was brewing himself a cup of cocoa in a small saucepan over the gas-ring in the corner behind the counter. “They’ve found the pore thing’s husband. He’s in the back-room now, along o’ the inspector. White as a larst, he was, w’en he come in!”

He turned round and peered through his glasses at the man who had just entered the shop, a red-faced young man with a button nose and large red hands, who wore that curiously sheepish air which distinguishes the police officer in plain clothes.

“Quite one o’ the nobbs, the chaps wuz tellin’ me!” observed the newcomer, tapping a cigarette on the back of his hand.

“That’s right!” agreed the chemist. “That’s his motor at the kerb outside. It’s a shockin’ biz’ness, you know. It’s given me a proper turn, I can tell you. And, mind you, one gets hardened in this perfession of ours, Mr. Smith, wot with street accidents an’ burnt children or maybe a lady as is expectin’, comin’ over faint. But to see that pore young thing in there murdered, as you might say, before your very eyes . . . dear, dear, I don’t know wot the world’s comin’ to! Some lunertick did it, I shouldn’t wonder! Puts me in mind o’ the Ripper murders. Ah! but you’re too young to remember them. Artful chap, he was, mind you. Hung about dark alleys an’ the like—Whitechapel way, it was—an’ pounced out on the pore gels! We lived down the Commercial Road in those days—that was before my pore old Dad had his bankrupsy—an’ I remember Dad takin’ me, as a little nipper, to look at the bloodstains on the pavement down there off Leman Street. Care for a drink of hot cocoa, Mr. Smith? I’ve made enough for two!”

“You’re very kind!” replied the plain clothes man. “I ’aven’t ’ad bite nor sup since my tea. I’ve bin over at ’Ammersmith all the evening after that precious neighbour of yours!”

“There’s sugar in it!” said Mr. Ruddick, passing a smoking cup to Mr. Smith. “And did you find Mrs. Amschel?”

“Aye,” replied Smith with a wag of his head as he noisily sipped his cocoa, “over at her brother’s as keeps a furniture shop. She didn’t want to come back ’ere, though. Not ’arf!”

“I don’t wonder!” observed the chemist polishing his glasses. “She was upset something frightful. Jews is so excitable, Mr. Smith, sir. You recollect

the air raids. You may believe me or not but. . . .”

The bell on the shop door clanged. Mrs. Amschel stood in the doorway. Her face was an unhealthy sallow shade and her eyes were restless. Behind her followed a solidly-built man who was fanning himself with a straw-hat.

“Guv’nor here?” he enquired of Smith.

The latter jerked his head in the direction of the back-room.

Mrs. Amschel, in the meantime, had gone round the counter to Mr. Ruddick.

“Vot they vant to see me for, the police, eh? I ain’t got nothing to do with it, ’ave I? Vot do the police vant fetchin’ me away in the middle of the night? I’m a respectable voman, I am, as vell you know, Mr. Ruddick. . . .”

Her voice rose shrilly and quavered.

“I keeps myself to myself, so vot do they vant with me?”

“Keep your hair on, mother,” said Smith gently. “You ain’t goin’ to be locked up. We only want your evidence. Silly, I call it, bunkin’ off like that. . . .”

The door of the back-room opening interrupted him. Manderton, followed by a well-groomed man with a ghastly face and haunted eyes, stepped briskly into the shop. At the sight of the detective the Jewess, who was standing beneath the burbling gas-lamp, fell back a pace as though she would shrink into the shadows behind the counter.

But Manderton walked straight up to her, his eyes stern, his forbidding jowl thrust out.

“Well, Rachel?” he said.

Mrs. Amschel cast a frightened look around. She nervously twisted her fingers and made a kind of bob to him.

“Goot efening, Mr. Manderton!” she stammered.

“This is a dam fine business for you to be mixed up in, mother!” said Manderton, looking her up and down.

“Mixed op in? Mixed op in?” repeated the Jewess in shrill accents. “An’ me settin’ as quiet as quiet outside me own lawful premises w’en the pore lady drop dead at me feet. She mix ’erself op vith me, Mister, not me vith ’er, vish I may die ef I ain’t a-telling you Gawd’s own truth. . . .”

“Don’t you start going off the deep end, Mother Rachel,” warned Manderton sternly. “You set down quietly on that chair there and answer my questions. And, before you try any of your monkey tricks on me, just you remember that I know one or two things about you. Let me see, there was the Levinsky case and that business in Cable Street. . . .”

"*I Gott! I Gott!*" lamented Mrs. Amschel, one red and dirty hand placed on her vast bosom, "'ow you take a pore voman's character away. You vos very 'ard on me the lars' time, Mr. Manderton, very 'ard. That *schnorrer* Levinsky, 'e made a fool of me along of me being honest an' not suspectin' nothing. But there ain't a vord agin me in the neighbour'ood. You 'aven't only gotter arsk Mr. Ruddick there!"

Manderton firmly propelled her huge bulk into the kitchen chair which Mr. Ruddick pushed forward. So wholly did she fill it that it completely disappeared beneath her ample proportions so that you would have said she sat on air.

"And now," enjoined Manderton, bending his brows at her, "cut the cackle and tell us what happened!"

With many ejaculations and as many digressions, Mrs. Amschel, in her bewildering Anglo-Yiddish jargon, told how the "pore lady," "dressed op so fine," had suddenly appeared hurrying along Aldon Street and, after asking Mrs. Amschel to call her a taxi, had pitched forward at the Jewess's very feet.

As she finished her story, the bell on the shop-door jangled. With feet that trampled noisily on the worn linoleum, while instructions were bawled from the threshold to a husky voice whose visible possessor was swallowed up in the velvety night, a number of men filed into the shop.

"Have they come . . . to take her away?" Cranmore asked the detective.

"They're only the photograph men from the Yard," replied Manderton. "No, no," he added soothingly, laying a retaining hand on Cranmore's sleeve. "I want you to stay right here with me. Mr. Ruddick will tell you how Mrs. Cranmore died, and I want to ask you some questions!"

The photographers passed through into the back-room, dragging their apparatus and ladders with them, the street-door was shut and once more quiet fell upon the little shop. Manderton turned to the chemist.

"Now, Ruddick," he said, "I haven't had time to hear your full story. Suppose you tell us all you know about this affair."

The chemist cleared his throat nervously, rubbing his bony hands together the while.

"Well," he began, "I was in me shop here. . . ."

"Stop!" bade Manderton. "What time was this?"

"I wouldn't be sure of the time. But it was gorn six, 'cos I rec'leck hearing it strike. An' it wasn't the half-hour, for the Horseshoe at the corner wasn't open. It'd have been about a quarter past six, I'd have said. . . ."

Manderton nodded curtly.

"Right!" he said. "Get on with it!"

"I was in the shop, castin' up me books, w'en I hear screechin' on the pavement outside. I nipped out quick and there, at her shop-door, I see Mrs. Amschel, in a condition of considerable agitation, pointin' at a woman—a lady, I *should* say, for elegant she was, one could see that at a glance. At first I couldn't make out w'ot Mrs. Amschel was screamin' about, but all of a sudden I see the handle of the knife stickin' out of the pore lady's chest. Before I could move a hand to help her, the strange lady—Mrs. Cranmore, that is,—just fell all of a heap on the pavement, in a kneelin' position, as you might say. As she went down I heard the knife rattle on the flags. I picked it up afterwards and give it to the officer w'ot my boy fetched off point-duty at the other end of Aldon Street.

"For the moment, gentlemen, I didn't bother about the knife, I give you my word, but picked the lady up—she was light, sir, being of small build—and carried her through the shop into the back-parlour. I laid her on the sofa and was turning quick-like to get Mrs. Amschel, who I thought had followed me indoors, to loosen the pore lady's dress when I see her eyelids flutter. Then she opened her eyes and raised her hand. I saw that she was trying to speak."

Mr. Ruddick broke off and blew his nose violently on a red silk handkerchief which he produced from the tail pocket of his long-skirted frockcoat.

"I bent me head," he resumed, "for I knew the pore thing was near her end—and in my time, gentlemen, I've seen a-many go!—and tried to make out her words. But do what I might, I couldn't catch what she was trying to say. Leastwise, not to make sense I couldn't. . . ."

"Tell us just what you heard, man!" snapped Manderton.

"The only phrase I could make anything of, sir," said the chemist, "was something about a orange and a divan. She said that twice; but very faint-like. And . . . and . . . she looked at me so pleading, gentlemen, so sad, I give you my word, I felt reelly distressed I couldn't understand her. I leant over and I said: 'Madam,' I sez, 'what was it you wanted?' I sez. But she only smiled and sighed. And with that, gentlemen, she died. . . ."

With his long red nose and drooping moustache, his watery eye and long scraggy neck, the chemist was a grotesque figure enough. But there was a simple dignity in the way he told his tale that gripped his audience.

A silence fell on them all as Ruddick finished. It was Cranmore who broke it.

"That was all she said?" he asked.

"Absolutely all, sir; that's right!" was the chemist's reply.

Cranmore turned to Manderton. His eyes were brimming and the wet gleamed on his face. But he kept his voice under control.

"She must have been delirious," he said. "My wife has an orange couch in her room. I suppose she imagined herself to be at home."

"Where was Mrs. Cranmore when you first saw her?" said Manderton, turning to the Jewess.

"But . . . here in our street!"

"Where in the street?"

"Right on the corner, op at the top of the road, on the same pavement as this. . . ."

"You are sure she was alone? There was nobody with her?"

"*Iwo!*" cried the Jewess with a gesture of the hand. "The voman vas alone, I haf said it!"

"Did you hear a scream or any sound of a struggle before she appeared?"

"Nothing!"

"Perhaps Monsieur Cranmore can tell us whether he or Madame had any acquaintances in this neighbourhood?"

Mrs. Amschel started violently at the suave voice which sounded from the shadows of the shop. M. Boulot stepped into the pool of light behind the counter where the others were assembled.

". . . because," he observed blandly, "it would seem to one to be important to establish what Madame was doing here. . . ."

Manderton turned quickly to Mrs. Amschel.

"Here," he said, "you can be off to bed now, Mother Rachel. But don't you go running off again. You're evidence at the inquest, see? And don't you forget it!"

"I von't sleep in me 'ouse alone, Mister!" protested Mrs. Amschel. "I'm goin' back to me brother's at 'Ammersmith."

"As long as we know where to find you!" retorted Manderton.

The Jewess heaved herself out of her chair. Ruddick escorted her to the door and saw her into the street. Then Manderton turned eagerly to Cranmore.

"Boulot's question is to the point," he said. "Have you any idea why your wife came to Aldon Street?"

"Ever since I came here," responded Cranmore wearily, "I've been asking myself that question. There is no reason that I know of."

He stopped; then, looking from one to the other, "Mr. Manderton! Boulot!" he said with almost painful intensity. "*What was my wife doing in*

this slum?"

"That, *mon ami*," answered Boulot, pursing up his lips, "seems to me to be the first thing we have to discover. Another question . . . have you many acquaintances among artists?"

Manderton turned his head deliberately and stared slowly at the Frenchman.

"A few," said Cranmore. "Horace Dingwall, for instance, is a member of my club and my sister-in-law. Miss Driscoll, who lives with us, knows some of the Chelsea set. But I don't quite see. . . ."

"Patience!" enjoined Boulot. "Was Madame in the habit of visiting studios?"

"In the habit . . . no! Sometimes we have been to one of Dingwall's private views. . . ."

"Might she, for example, have visited a studio this afternoon?"

"Carmen . . . my wife," Cranmore answered, "always told me of her engagements. As a matter of fact she went out very little alone socially. She had few close friends and we went to most places together. If she visited a studio this afternoon it was most probably as the result of an engagement made suddenly—over the telephone, perhaps. But I think it most unlikely. And certainly she mentioned no such engagement to me. . . ."

"But have you amongst your acquaintances any artist whom you frequent, who might, say, telephone to Madame and invite her to call upon him?"

The Frenchman's voice was unalterably suave but deadily persistent.

"No," said the stockbroker. "Unless it might be Dingwall. And I happen to know that he's on his way to South America. But why all these questions about a studio?"

The French detective slowly rubbed his nose. Manderton, who had lit his pipe, was eyeing him closely.

"Notwithstanding what you say," Boulot resumed, quite ignoring the other's question, "might not Madame have visited a studio to-day without your knowing?"

Cranmore shook himself rather irascibly. His nerves were beginning to fray.

"It's possible," he returned irritably. "But it would probably mean that she was visiting some friend of whom I had no knowledge. . . ."

Boulot leant over the counter, propped up on his elbows. In his hands he was twisting the dagger which, probably unconsciously, he had picked up.

"My friend," he said bluntly. "It may be that you are right. . . ."

But Cranmore flung his hands out in a gesture of denial.

"Ah!" he cried. "Now I know what you're getting at. Let me tell you at once, Boulot, and you, too, Manderton, that my wife had no lover. Our married life is . . . was . . . ideally happy. And let me tell you something else. With my poor girl lying dead in there, I'll not have her memory blackened. I'll not stand for it, do you hear? You, Boulot, are a Frenchman and perhaps don't look on these things quite as we do but. . . ."

A big red hand descended on his shoulder.

"Steady, steady," said Manderton. "We have to examine every possibility, you know. . . ."

Cranmore shrugged his shoulders.

"*That* possibility you can rule out!"

"I had no wish to offend," remarked the Frenchman, "and I ask your pardon, *mon cher*, for my words. But this possibility apart, do you know of anyone who should harbour a grudge against Madame?"

"No," retorted Cranmore positively. "No! It's unthinkable. My wife did not have an enemy in the world."

"You have no theory then?" asked Manderton.

"None. I am simply stupefied. I can only imagine that this is the work of a madman. . . ."

Manderton studied the tips of his highly polished black boots, turning one foot this way and that so as to reflect the light.

"You mentioned just now," he observed, "that your sister-in-law knows some of the Chelsea set. Was *she* in the habit of visiting studios?"

"She was at one time," said Cranmore. "But I stopped it. To be quite frank I objected. . . ."

"I see!" said Manderton in a perfectly non-committal manner. "And did you object to anyone in particular?"

Cranmore paused and looked at the Inspector. He rubbed his hands nervously together.

"You know I want to help you all I can," he declared. "But I don't want to throw any unjust suspicion on anybody. You asked me just now, Boulot, whether there was anybody who might conceivably harbour a grudge against my wife. Mr. Manderton's question reminds me that we did have some trouble with a painter chap who, my wife and I thought, was seeing too much of Dolores—my sister-in-law, you know. I had to stop him coming to the

house. He was probably sore with my wife because he had known her in New York, in the days before she met me. . . .”

He looked up and found the eyes of the two detectives fixed intently on him. He hesitated.

“I don’t want you to suppose for a moment,” he added hastily, “that I connect him with this horrible crime. Young Quayre is quite incapable of anything like that. . . .”

“What was the name?”

Manderton had pulled out his note-book and his manner was sternly official.

The stockbroker stared from one to the other.

“You don’t imagine? . . .” he began. “My God! . . .”

“Let’s have his name and address,” Manderton interposed.

“His name,” returned Cranmore, “is Julian Quayre. But I’m afraid I don’t know his address. I know he has a studio somewhere in London. But I’ve never been there. You’ll get his address in the directory. . . .”

“Ahem!”

With an apologetic cough Mr. Ruddick rose up from his stool by the gas-ring. The three men had forgotten his very existence.

“What the blazes do *you* want?” demanded Manderton, rounding on him savagely.

“If it’s the address of Mr. Quayre you’re requirin’,” ventured the chemist, nervously plucking at his fingers until the knuckles cracked, “I can give it to you. He’s a customer o’ mine, in a manner o’ speakin’. Why, I sold him a toob o’ toothpaste no longer ago than. . . .”

“Damn it!” cried Manderton irascibly. “Where does he live?”

“In Broke Stoodios, up at the top of the road,” said the chemist.

CHAPTER VI

DOLORES

HARDLY had Mr. Ruddick made his dramatic announcement when the bell on the shop-door clanged. In the eerie light which shone from the great coloured jars in the window they saw a girl standing, a young, slim girl with dark eyes staring out of a dead-white face. Boulot, with his impressionable French temperament, could not suppress a gasp of surprise, for it seemed as though the dead woman on the shabby sofa had come to life.

When the girl stepped into the patch of light flung by the gas-lamp above the counter he saw how greatly she resembled the dead woman. Her beauty was less mature (for she was obviously younger) and her colouring was different. But she had the same finely chiselled features, the same serene, clear gaze and the same sweetness of expression as he had remarked in the still form lying in the back-room. There was, however, the warmth of life in the girl's cheeks and her hair, while dark, was brown rather than black so that the general effect of her beauty was less severely classical than Mrs. Cranmore's.

She advanced swiftly into the shop, then stopped suddenly as her eyes fell upon Boulot. The Frenchman stood at the counter full in the rays of the light. But the girl did not look at him. Her gaze was concentrated with an expression of horror in her dark eyes upon the long knife held carelessly in the plump hands. The intensity of her expression laid, as it were, a hush of awe upon the little shop. The men stood like graven images, the two detectives side by side at the counter, Ruddick, with his mouth open, in his corner, Cranmore, his face ravaged by grief, behind Boulot, and the two plain clothes men just discernible as bulky shadows in the background.

Boulot laid the knife down. Its metallic tinkle seemed to break the spell. The girl went forward towards the group and seeing Cranmore faltered out:

"Carmen. . . ."

Cranmore, with ashen face, lips tightly compressed, nodded.

"It's true then?"

The girl's voice broke with despair.

"I'd just come home from Ranelagh . . . some newspaper rang up . . . it was dreadful . . . there was nobody in the house . . . how did it happen? I can't believe it! I can't believe it! Who would want to kill poor darling Carmen?"

The flood of words choked her and she broke off with a little sob.

Cranmore took her hands in his and soothed her.

“My dear, my dear!” was all he could manage to say.

“Jim,” cried the girl, lifting her eyes to his, “they are saying in the crowd outside that she’s here, stabbed, dead. Oh, let me go to her! Let me see her! . . .”

The stockbroker flashed an enquiring glance at Manderton. The detective shook his head.

“My dear,” said Cranmore, “what’s the use? It would only add to your grief. Perhaps to-morrow. . . .”

His speech was slow and the words dragged themselves from his lips slowly like the gait of one who goes hampered with leg-irons. All the brisk energy of the man who, but a few hours since, had driven his smart car so alertly down Piccadilly, seemed to have evaporated. In some subtle fashion he appeared to have aged since he entered that house of death.

The change in him seemed to strike the girl, for she said softly:

“How dreadfully ill you look! Won’t you let me take you home?”

But now the bulky form of Mr. Manderton thrust itself into the foreground.

“This Miss Driscol?” he asked, and without waiting for an answer, he said to her:

“Did Mrs. Cranmore call on Mr. Quayre this afternoon?”

The effect on the girl was electric. She seemed to shudder and, like a sleep-walker rudely awakened, to come to herself with an effort.

“Mr. Quayre?” she repeated dully. “Jim,” she said suddenly, clasping his arm, “why does he ask me that?”

“Because,” replied Cranmore, “Quayre is the only person Carmen knew in this part of London. You know he lives in some studios at the top of this road. . . .”

“Broke Studios!” said the girl in a dazed fashion. “Then what is the name of this street?”

“This is Aldon Street,” came the answer, sharp and precise, from Manderton, “and we have reason to believe that your sister was stabbed somewhere between this shop and Broke Studios. Therefore it is important for us to know whether Mrs. Cranmore was actually at Mr. Quayre’s studio this afternoon or whether she was perhaps on her way there. . . .”

Dolores Driscol looked up and met the calm, blue eyes of Monsieur Boulot who was watching her face with embarrassing attention. A little

colour came into her cheeks and she averted her gaze. She turned to Mr. Manderton.

"I can't tell you," she replied. "My sister and I lunched together at home. She had not been out all day, as it was so hot, but as soon as it got a little cooler, she said, she was going to have tea at her club. . . ."

The door of Mr. Ruddick's back-parlour opened and the police photographers reappeared. Simultaneously, the shop-bell rang and a voice asked for Mr. Manderton. The detective detached himself from the group and went to the door. From there he called Cranmore over to him.

"You had best take the young lady home now," he said. "They've come to remove the body—there'll have to be a post-mortem, you know—and we don't want to distress Miss Driscoll. I shall want to see you in the morning. I'll be round first thing."

And he turned away to give fresh instructions.

"Boulot," said Cranmore earnestly, "you will come with me? You must. . . . I can't be alone. . . ."

"*Mon cher*," replied the old Frenchman, "I'm a plain man and not habituated to the English ways. I have my little room in my 'boarding' of Bloomsbury and I would not derange you, now of all times. . . ."

The refusal was half-hearted and Cranmore would have none of it.

"You must come," he said. "I need you. . . ."

"*Dame!*" exclaimed the detective, "if it is friendship that calls. . . ."

But, he explained, he could not go just then. He had certain business to transact with *ce cher Manderton*. He would come on later in a *taxi-auto*. Thus it was settled. Boulot, Cranmore explained, would find his room on the first landing at the head of the stairs. He presented him with a latchkey, saying that Dolores had hers.

He asked Boulot to see Dolores into the car. When she had gone, he left them all assembled in the shop and entered once more—but this time alone—into the presence of his dead wife. And when, in a little while, he emerged, he strode blindly through the shop, looking neither to right nor to left, like a man in a blind tempest of passion. But Smith, the plain clothes man, as he held open the door, saw that the tears were coursing down his cheeks.

* * * * *

Ten minutes later quiet had fallen upon the little shop. The police photographers had departed; the stretcher had been borne softly forth into the hot and reeking night of Aldon Street; and Smith and Straw Hat, whom

Manderton addressed as “Mallow,” had glided off like shadows on certain mysterious errands of “The Guv’nor’s” contriving. Manderton and Boulot were left alone, seated on kitchen chairs behind the prescriptions counter. They had accepted the chemist’s offer of “a drop of hot cocoa,” and in due course Mr. Ruddick emerged from his corner bearing two steaming cups on a tray.

“Excuse the liberty, Inspector,” diffidently ventured the chemist, as he handed Mr. Manderton his cup, “but have you got a clue, may I know?”

“Go to bed and don’t be a fool, Ruddick!” admonished the detective. “You needn’t worry about the shop. There’ll be a uniform constable on the door all night.”

Obediently, the chemist let himself out of a side-door and they heard him clumping his way upstairs to his sleeping-quarters above. Then Manderton looked across at Boulot, blew a cloud of smoke from his pipe, took a drink of cocoa, smiled again and set the cup down.

“You’re a great bluffer, Boulot!” he said at length. “‘*Was your wife in the habit of visiting studios?*’ you asked him. Guess-work won’t take you far when you’re dealing with juries who insist on evidence for everything, my friend!”

Boulot raised his eyebrows.

“*Comment*, guess-work?” he demanded. “Surely you know that this is a studio crime!”

Manderton laughed.

“You go very fast, my friend—*after* Mr. Ruddick has told us that our painter friend lives up the road!”

By way of reply the Frenchman picked up the knife which lay, as he had laid it down, on the counter.

“Will you tell me, please, what that is?”

He pointed to a little white smear on the blade.

“I shall tell you myself. It is Chinese white, such as painters use. Ah! you regard me! *Mon cher collègue*, this appears to me an illustration, excessively interesting, of the fundamental difference between our two national temperaments. I dare swear that you and I will presently find ourselves approaching the same goal but”—he paused to grope for his little bag of tobacco and packet of cigarette paper—“by different avenues. For you the map of the locality (which, I avow, I have not yet seen) is the *point de départ*—what is the word in English?—ah, the place of jumping-off. For me it was corroboration. . . .”

“Of what?” asked Manderton, puffing at his pipe.

“*Ma foi*, of what I found on the dead woman’s elbow.”

“You mean that brownish smear?”

Boulot, intent on the cigarette he was rolling, nodded.

“Oil paint,” he replied. “And with the glass I found traces of it on her short sleeve. As though she had brushed against a palette or a freshly painted picture. . . .”

With finger and thumb he pinched off the ragged end of his cigarette and stuck the cigarette in his mouth.

“That gave me the idea to examine the knife again more closely”—he struck a match and lit his cigarette, drew deeply, and, blowing forth a long stream of smoke, extinguished the match—“*et voilà!* It has been used as a palette-knife. You may see where the edge has been worn down. But not recently in use. No! The white is too hard! *Regardez! À propos!*—” he looked sharply at the Englishman—“it appeared to me that the girl recognised the knife. . . .”

“Miss Driscoll?”

“*Bien sûr!* She came in, overwhelmed with this terrible rumour, to seek news of her sister, to find our friend, Cranmore, to discover if this incredible story can be true. She sees me, the knife in my hand. She stops short. She regards not me, not Cranmore—but the knife!”

Manderton shook his head dubiously.

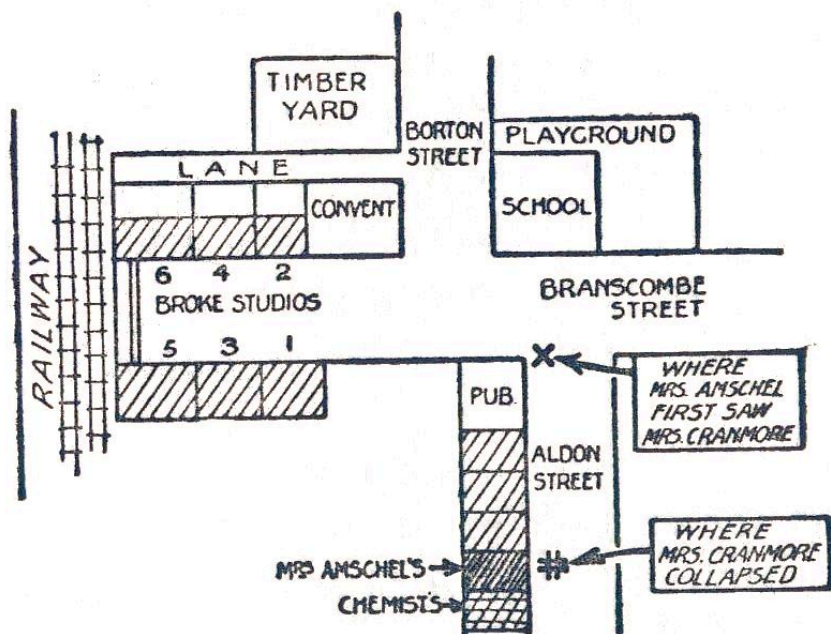
“A young girl might be expected to look askance at the knife that killed her sister,” he observed.

“Perhaps!” returned the Frenchman. “You may be right. *Oui, oui!*”

“Since you have gone so far,” said Manderton rather patronisingly, “perhaps you will tell me where Mrs. Cranmore was murdered?”

Boulot smiled good-humouredly.

“If you and I should presently take a walk in the neighbourhood,” he answered, “maybe I might. Have you a map?”



By way of reply Manderton pulled out of his pocket a folded sheet and spread it out on the counter before them.

"Here's a map of the district, large scale," he said, with pencil poised. "See, here at the corner of Aldon Street and Branscombe Street is the place where Mrs. Amschel first saw Mrs. Cranmore . . . there! I'll put a cross. Follow Aldon Street along for about thirty-five yards and we come to Mrs. Amschel's shop in front of which Mrs. Cranmore collapsed. I'll mark that, too. You'll notice that Branscombe Street runs across the top of Aldon Street and the bottom of Borton Street (which leads to the main-road) and ends in Broke Studios, which are just a few houses forming a cul-de-sac with the railway at the end.

"Now Mr. Sporrán—that's the police surgeon who was here just now—states definitely that Mrs. Cranmore could not possibly have walked very much farther than the distance she was *seen* by Mrs. Amschel to traverse. If we make the corner of Aldon Street, where Mrs. Amschel first saw her, the centre of the circle, the doctor's evidence very much narrows down the radius within which she was stabbed. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly. One could not be clearer!" Boulot assented.

"Now then, you'll agree that we can leave out on account the ground on the opposite side of Aldon Street since, by Mrs. Amschel's deposition, Mrs. Cranmore first came into view on this side and was under observation until

she collapsed. If you'll look at the map again you will therefore see that our investigation must deal exclusively with the houses between Mrs. Amschel's and the pub at the corner, the Board school at the junction of Branscombe Street and Borton Street, the Convent in Borton Street across the way from the school, and Broke Studios.

"Now, we have made enquiries at the three houses between Mrs. Amschel's and the pub.—the Horseshoe—which stands at the corner where Mrs. Cranmore first came into view. We have also questioned the people in the houses on the opposite side of Aldon Street. But we have found nobody who as much as saw Mrs. Cranmore, either before or after the tragedy, or who can throw any light whatsoever on the mystery. I have my doubts about that old fence, Mrs. Amschel. . . ."

"Fence?" queried Boulot with eyebrows uplifted.

"Receiver of stolen goods," translated Manderton. "'Mother Rachel,' as we used to call her, was quite a celebrity in the East End ten years ago. She's kept out of mischief lately, and although, of course, we're watching her, her story seems plain and above board. As for the Board school, it was closed for the day, and at the Convent we likewise drew a blank. There are no houses between the Horseshoe and Broke Studios, only a plot of waste-ground boarded off, so that, unless Mrs. Cranmore were stabbed in the open street, in which case her screams must have been heard, our search is narrowed down to"—Manderton paused dramatically—"Broke Studios!"

The Frenchman rubbed his hands with a low chuckle.

"I said it, my Manderton!" he exclaimed. "Behold us arrived at the same destination by different roads!"

He seemed to think a minute; for he paused.

"Surely," he resumed presently, "surely what we have just learnt about this painter, this Quayre, that he is a friend before marriage of Madame, that her husband forbids him to pay his addresses to Mademoiselle his sister-in-law, and, lastly, that he has his studio within a stone's throw of the scene of the tragedy—does not all this indicate that one might profitably examine this artist? *Hein?*"

Manderton showed his big white teeth in an expansive grin.

"I've not lost sight of the importance of Mr. Quayre's rôle in this case, my friend," he remarked. "Did you really think I was a-setting here smoking my pipe just to pass the time? Hark!"

He sprang quickly to his feet.

"That may be him now! . . ."

But it was only Smith, the plain clothes man.

Scarcely had he set foot in the shop when Manderton was at him.

“Well?” he barked.

“Not a thing stirring, sir,” the man reported, “and the door closed. There are six stoddios, two in each ’ouse, on the one side and six, arranged similar, on the other. It’s No. 2 as Mr. Quayre lives at. ’E ’as the ground floor stoddio; the top one ain’t bin occupied these three months . . . leastwise, that’s w’ot the chap on the beat tell us. I left Mallow with ’is finger on the bell which you can hear it pealing through the place fit to wake the dead. But nobody comes!”

Mr. Manderton looked at his watch.

“Twenty past twelve!” he said, yawning. “He mayn’t be back for an hour or more yet. You know what these artists are. What do you say to taking a stroll round to Broke Studios, Boulot? It’ll give you a chance of telling us where the poor woman *was* done in. . . .”

He winked humorously at Smith. But Boulot, whose self-composure no sallies of Manderton could shake, blandly remarked that he had been about to make this very proposal himself. As the three men reached the door of the shop, Boulot turned to Smith.

“My friend,” he said in his gentle way, “they build in this street of studios, is it not?”

“Build?” repeated the plain clothes man. “No, I can’t say as they’re building. . . .”

“They repair the house then?”

“Wot ’ouse?”

“*Mon Dieu*, any house! . . .”

“I dunno about repairin’,” replied Smith, “they’ve got the pavement up in one place.”

“Where?”

The question rang out sharp like the crack of a whip.

“Outside No. 2!”

They stepped into the warm, stale air of Aldon Street.

CHAPTER VII

THE WELL-REMEMBERED STAIN

BROKE STUDIOS proved to be a very short, rather wide road. It resembled the six one-story red-brick houses which it comprised in seeming almost as broad as it was long. At the end, set between a shoulder-high iron railing and a stout wooden palisade, half a dozen sturdy plane-trees, silhouetted against a black, starry background, gave forth a pleasant leafy smell. As the three men crossed the road from the Horseshoe, a long drawn out rushing sound, increasing in volume and intensity and punctuated by a series of brilliant white flashes across the wide arc of the night-sky, reverberated from beyond the palisade where the plane-trees gently rustled.

“The railway!” explained Smith, pointing towards the end of the street.

Broke Studios was dimly lit by two street lamps, one on either sidewalk. At the entrance to No. 2 the stalwart figure of a policeman was indistinctly seen. At the sound of footsteps he turned and there was the blinding flash of an electric torch. From within the house resounded the steady, frantic trilling of an electric bell. On recognising Mr. Manderton’s burly figure, the constable switched off his light and touched his helmet.

“They’re all from home, seemingly,” he remarked, thrusting his thumbs in his belt in the characteristic attitude of the London police; “dead-and-alive sort o’ place, sir, by the looks of it!”

All the houses in Broke Studios were identical in arrangement, each with four shallow steps leading from the pavement to the front door. The front door of No. 2 stood open, revealing a glimpse of a dark entry hall.

Some sort of repair-work on the telephone or electric-light cables had been going forward in front of No. 2. Part of the pavement had been taken up and the earthen bed of the flags was bare right up to the front steps.

“You’ll find the plain clothes officer within, sir,” said the policeman. Manderton turned to Boulot to find the Frenchman bent double over the excavation.

“My friend,” said Boulot, “she has been here. She—has—been—here!”

“Guessing again?” was Manderton’s sarcastic question.

But Boulot made no answer. With a mute gesture of command he had appropriated the policeman’s electric lamp and was now on his knees, scrutinising with meticulous care the earthen bed of the pavement and a heap of sticky mortar spread out on a mixing-board in front of No. 2. With a shrug

of his shoulders Manderton left him to it, and, accompanied by Smith, entered the house.

By the rays of Smith's electric torch Manderton saw that the entry in which they found themselves was long and narrow, tiled with mosaic set in a border of flags which should have been white but which, for lack of hearth-stone, were dirty and discoloured. On the right a bare stone staircase with an iron handrail led to the studio above. At the end of the hall, set aslant, was a dark red door, rather the worse for wear, with a stained glass fanlight and stained glass panels. On the door, below a small brass knocker contrived out of a grinning head of Pan, a visiting-card was pinned. The name it bore was MR. JULIAN QUAYRE.

At their approach Straw Hat turned, taking his finger off the bell, and its clamour was instantly stilled.

"Nothing doing, eh?" said Manderton, doffing his hard felt hat and wiping his brow.

"No, sir," replied Mallow hoarsely.

"You and Smith will have to wait on here," Manderton ordered, "and let me know the moment Mr. Quayre returns. I shall sleep at the Yard to-night, and if one of you telephones from the station the car can bring me here in a quarter of an hour. Hullo! . . ."

He swung round sharply. Boulot came running in, doubled up, head down, his electric lamp flashing to right and left. He stopped dead at the staircase leading to the upper studio, baulked, then swiftly mounted the stairs and disappeared round the turn.

Mr. Mallow craned his head, then slowly straightened up and sniffed audibly. He made no vocal comment, but in that sniff a political psychologist might have detected one of those imponderabilia which so often complicate the work of diplomacy. Mr. Manderton said nothing, but slowly produced and filled his eternal pipe.

Presently Boulot was back again. They heard his step on the stone stairs, but slow and dragging this time. He descended slowly, switching his torch on and off. At the bottom of the staircase he stopped.

"Pst!" he called to Manderton.

The English detective strolled over to him.

"There is no blood," Boulot whispered. "Yet one would look for it. When they use the knife, there is always much blood, my friend. *Tiens*, I recall Caserio, who stabbed this poor President Carnot . . . *mon cher*, he was drenched! And there is much blood on the lady's corsage. If it was done here . . . and it *was* done here . . . one must find traces. Ah!"

He seemed to take a leap in the air, so swiftly did he shoot off to the extreme left-hand side of the entry hall. Manderton was amazed at the agility in that tubby little frame. But now Boulot knelt on the ground while his lamp cast a round brilliant spot of light on the white flags bordering the mosaic tiles with which the floor was paved.

He turned his head and called across his shoulder to Manderton:

“I told you so! Look there!”

Where his torch shed its beam the begrimed surface of the soft stone border was darkened by a brownish stain.

“One cannot mistake it!” eagerly whispered the Frenchman. “At La Roquette, in the old days, after the knife had fallen, how often have I seen that stain upon the cobbled pavement. Nor could the hose of Deibler’s assistants ever wash it clean. . . . *Tiens, regardez!*”

With his torch he tracked the stain to the very edge of the mosaic where it merged into a dark and viscous liquid which lay stagnant and hardly discernible upon the red tiles. He plumped four fingers into the pool and thrust them into the lamp’s rays. They dripped red.

Manderton sprang up.

“Can you get that door open, Mallow?” he cried in a ringing voice. “Otherwise, one of you must take the car to the Yard and get the locksmith. . . .”

“I ’specs I can make a job of it, Guv’nor,” croaked Straw Hat. “Switch on the ’ead light, will yer, mate?” he added to Smith.

For the space of about three minutes while Smith illuminated the lock, Straw Hat poked and fumbled with a piece of copper wire. They heard his hard breathing as he worked. Then there was a slight click and the door swung back.

Manderton entered first and switched on the light. They were in a narrow little vestibule without a window, a hatstand on one side, an old oak chest on the other. A small door at the end, which stood open, led into the studio, a big bare room with a great north window, partly shaded with adjustable sunblinds.

In the centre of the floor an easel covered with a drab-coloured sheet was placed. Hard by was set a large deal table on which palettes, brushes, mahl-sticks, and tubes of paint were scattered in untidy profusion. In the far corner was a model-stand on which stood a tall Jacobean chair, a panel of Chinese tapestry thrown over the back. There were one or two good pieces of furniture set against the grey-distempred walls. Here and there a splash of colour stood out against the plain background, a mass of scarlet poppies in a

tall black vase, a pink and yellow Chinese embroidery spread over the arm of a shabby couch. Round the walls canvases were stacked at intervals, their backs to the room.

At the far end of the studio was a plain grey curtain hanging straight from ceiling to floor. Near the centre it was parted, showing a small door opening on to a dark passage. This led to a bedroom, oblong in shape, in the wall opposite the door a single tall window, the lower half of frosted glass. A plain camp bedstead with a gas-ring on the chair beside it, a wash-hand stand, a chest of drawers and a Breton cupboard completed the furnishing.

It was curious to see the distinctive methods of the two detectives. Manderton, with his rapid stride, made a lightning examination of the whole premises, his hat on the back of his head, his pipe, now cold and neglected, thrust in the corner of his powerful jaw, his keen eyes darting glances as though to pluck from those non-committal grey walls their secret. Now he was in the bedroom, now back in the studio, now in the vestibule pacing off some distance. He spoke no word and his face betrayed no sign.

The Frenchman's procedure was entirely different. Stepping briskly behind Manderton into the studio, he made a sudden halt in the centre and slowly mustered his surroundings. His cigarette, with its pungent peaty smell of Maryland tobacco, sent up a fine spiral of blue smoke between thumb and finger of his right hand, dropped carelessly at his side; his head was cocked at an angle, like a rooster surveying the barn yard, while his eyes travelled round the studio, scrutinising walls, ceiling and floor in turn.

His manner was nonchalant and placid, the settled calm of the small French shopkeeper *en retraite*; only in that characteristic poise of the head and a certain shrewd narrowing of the bright blue eyes would anyone who had once seen the great Boulot at work have recognised the symptoms.

Presently Manderton, who had vanished down the dark passage, emerged like a cyclone.

"Finger-prints on the window in the room beyond," he snapped. "Have you got the stuff?"

Silently Boulot drew from his pocket the wooden box in which, in Mr. Ruddick's parlour, he had stored his bottles and brushes, and handed it to the other. Manderton seized the box eagerly and disappeared once more. Boulot fell to scrutinising the floor. It was of plain wood, stained, with a fur rug by the model-stand, one or two Oriental carpets, and some Indian matting laid down, as if at hazard, here and there.

In a little while Manderton was back again. As he emerged from the passage he could only see Boulot's stumpy legs, the upper part of his person

being concealed by the easel and painting from which the Frenchman had removed the cover.

"There are two tea-cups in the bedroom back yonder," said Manderton quickly, "and finger-prints and the mark of a heavy boot on the paint of the window-ledge. These look to me like pointing to Mr. Quayre making a quick get-away. They meant to have tea in the bedroom, that's quite clear. The kettle's on the gas-ring and the tea-things, with a plate of cream cakes, on the table. I think one is beginning to see light. . . ."

As he was speaking he had gone round the easel and now stood side by side with Boulot, who was apparently lost in contemplation of the painting from which he had removed the cloth. As Manderton's eyes fell on the canvas, the words died away on his lips and he gave a whistle of astonishment. He found himself looking at an unfinished portrait of Dolores Driscol.

It was an admirable piece of work with something of Greuze in the delicacy of its flesh tints and the softness of its line. It showed the girl looking down on her two hands that clasped to her bosom what seemed to be a flower (for it was only roughly sketched in outline). There was something exquisitely pure and virginal about the charming young face, softly tinged with colour, long dark eyelashes resting on the smooth curve of the cheek. The whole portrait breathed the reverence, the enthusiasm, the love with which the artist had treated his subject.

"This has been worked on no later than this afternoon," said Boulot; "see," and he laid a reverent little finger on the canvas, "it is not yet dry. . . ."

He lifted a palette from the big deal table.

"Look! The sepia he was using for the chair . . . the same chair as you see on the dais over there. . . ."

"You mean," began Manderton, tapping a finger nervously on the table, "you mean that this Driscol girl was here this afternoon. . . ."

Boulot shrugged his shoulders and took a puff at his cigarette.

"*Dame!* unless he drew from memory. But, *mon vieux*, he has talent, this young man. I—I understand these things. This portrait is remarkable—*re-mar-qua-ble!*"

Manderton shook himself impatiently.

"He's got a dam fine talent for attracting the pretty ladies, it seems to me," he ejaculated. "Tea in the bedroom, what? And Mrs. Cranmore caught 'em, eh?"

"I remark only, my friend," Boulot interrupted staidly, "that Miss Driscol was at Ranelagh this afternoon. . . ."

“H’m!”

Manderton frowned and studied the toes of his boots.

“Yes,” he agreed, “yes, she *said* she was at Ranelagh. . . .”

He emphasised the “*said*.”

CHAPTER VIII

MONSIEUR BOULOT TAKES THE MORNING AIR

MONSIEUR BOULOT peered cautiously round his bedroom door. To right and left the highly polished parquet flooring of the corridor gleamed brightly in the pleasantly modulated light of early morning which streamed through the cream blinds. The month of June was nearing its close and now, at half-past four o'clock, it was broad daylight.

The house was profoundly quiet. Over everything rested that atmosphere of hush which in man's sleeping hours seems to communicate itself even to inanimate objects. But though the house yet slumbered, out of doors nature was vigorously awake. From the gardens in rear came a prodigious twittering of birds and through every chink and cranny of blind or window the sunshine thrust itself boldly in long stabbing pencils of gold.

Though half-past four had only just struck from the belfry of the neighbouring church. Monsieur Boulot was fully dressed. Less than four hours before he had parted from Manderton at the door of Cranmore's house. Yet here he was alert and spruce but for the pepper-and-salt stubble which adorned his cheeks and chin. However, no Frenchman ever let his *moral* sink for want of a shave and Monsieur Boulot looked radiant as, pulling aside a blind, he drank in greedily the balmy air through the open window of his room.

Like all his race he adored the early morning hours. The deathlike silence of the London streets at a time when Paris has already breakfasted and got through a good slice of the day's work was one of the things to which he had always to accustom himself afresh on his rare visits to London.

The detective looked quickly about him as, in one swift, noiseless motion, he stepped out into the corridor and closed his bedroom door. On his head he wore the broad-brimmed black felt hat which the cartoons of Caran d'Ache and Forain had made famous in the heyday of his official career when he was unravelling such bewildering mysteries as the murders in the Boulevard Barbès or the affair of the Orlowski diamonds. He glided silently to the head of the stairs. He was about to descend when something, catching his eye, brought him to an abrupt halt.

"Tiens, tiens!" he murmured.

Outside the first door along the corridor a pair of fawn suède shoes stood, dainty, foolish little affairs, sandal-shaped, with a plain strap and a high heel.

First Boulot looked at the shoes and then he looked at the door. Stooping he picked them up and a puzzled expression crept into his eyes. He scrutinised the heel of one while a happy smile, as bright as the morning, parted his lips. Then he softly replaced the shoes, tiptoed downstairs into the hall and let himself out into the dazzling sunshine.

With his short, quick steps he walked the length of Sloane Street. Knightsbridge, looking spotlessly clean in the pure atmosphere, was tenanted by a lonely policeman, a cat sunning itself on the steps of the Hyde Park Hotel, a host of chattering sparrows—and a taxi-driver who, dismounted from his box, was surveying the scarcely animated scene with such rapt absorption that, after the fashion of his kind, he failed for several minutes to notice the plump stroller's frantic efforts to catch his eye. At last he steered his cab across to the kerb where Boulot waited. The latter directed the man to set him down at the corner of Borton Street and the Hammersmith Road.

Borton Street, a characterless thoroughfare of unappetising-looking houses, was as quiet as a church as Boulot trotted briskly down the right-hand pavement towards the rather austere pile of dirty yellow-brick which his recollection of Manderton's map told him must be the Convent. He had noted on the map a little lane shown as running at the back of Quayre's side of Broke Studios from Borton Street to the railway fence.

The lane, a mere path of black earth, had an iron post set across its mouth in Borton Street as a veto on wheeled traffic. Boulot turned down it. On the left was the high wall of the Convent set at intervals with formidable looking iron bolts; on the right, above a wooden fence, the tops of stacks of seasoning timber were visible above some laurel bushes. Where the Convent wall turned a set of broken wooden palings began, surmounted by a trellis-work thickly overgrown with Virginia creeper. In these palings was a gate, the gate to the garden of No. 2, Broke Studios.

On tiptoe the Frenchman sought to peer through the lattice-work. Immediately before him, running along the base of the garden, was a row of tall poplars. Through this screen of shiny leaves he had a glimpse of a weedy, forlorn place of grass and thistles, bordered on either hand by straggling lilac and box bushes which had obviously not heard for many years the snick of the shears. Across the garden he saw the cheerful red-brick of the studio with the sun flaming on a pane of a tall window—the window, he presumed, of Julian Quayre's bedroom.

Boulot looked up and down the lane. Not a soul stirred and, but for the chattering of the birds, the garden was enveloped in silence. The gate hung awkwardly on one rusting hinge and opened to a vigorous push. The next moment Boulot was striding across the grass-grown centre of the garden.

Along the side of the house there once had been a flower bed. A band of black mould, about two feet across, set with a border of broken earthenware tiles in a crenellated pattern, reached right up to the stucco facing which was carried from the ground about three feet up the side of the house to meet the red brick. Some rusty nails and fragments of dingy flannel showed where once roses or the like had been trained against the wall.

The detective's gaze travelled slowly from the flower-bed up the wall to the sill of the tall window and back again. The window-sill was roughly four feet from the ground, a narrow ledge not more than nine inches across.

Boulot dropped on one knee and examined the flower bed. He became completely absorbed in his study. First he shifted his other knee to the grass, then, as he bent still lower over the flower bed, he put down a hand to steady himself, being careful, however, not to touch the garden mould.

His examination concluded, he got up and dusted his knees and then made a leisurely but minute survey of the little ledge made by the stucco where it joined the brick. He spent quite a time over this, but presently, clutching the window-sill with his two hands, and in best gymnasium style, drew himself easily and steadily up until his eyes were level with the lower panes of the window.

But he had forgotten that the under-part of the window was set with frosted glass.

"Zut!" he muttered under his breath, and was about to drop to the ground again when the window was suddenly thrown up displaying Manderton's face in all its matutinal rubicundity. Boulot grinned merrily and sprang lightly to the ground.

"*Ma foi!*" he exclaimed, "here is one who starts his day sooner than these lazy Londoners! . . ."

"You're up early," commented Manderton drily. "And it looks to me, old man, as though the early bird were going to catch the worm! But how the devil did you get out there?"

"By the lane at the back!" explained the Frenchman. "Come out here a little, my friend!"

He jerked his head back in invitation.

"But pass me out first a chair. Thus you will descend more easily. . . ."

Manderton handed out a cane-seated bedroom chair. Boulot placed it on the grass clear of the flower bed.

"Face me," he commanded, "and swing yourself out. *Nom d'un nom!*" he cried out suddenly, "don't touch that ledge, *malheureux*, with your boots so big. . . ."

The Englishman swung his ungainly body clear of the ledge and his feet touched the chair. He descended to the ground. In silence Boulot pointed, first to the flower bed, then to the stucco ledge.

In the black mould below the window two large footprints were discernible. The one showed the deeply impressed mark of a boot from toe to heel complete; the other, less deep, was the imprint of a sole alone. In each case the toe pointed towards the house. The sharp edge of the stucco ledge was freshly grazed in one place and, just above the graze, there was a longish rasp on the brickwork.

Mr. Manderton bent down and inspected the footprints and then turned his attention to the ledge.

“That’s where he got out all right,” he observed.

Then he called out sharply:

“Smith!”

“Sir!” came an answering bellow from the window above.

Smith’s face appeared.

“There’s a pair of shoes under the bed,” said Manderton. “Pass ’em down, will you?”

A pair of stout brogues was handed down. Manderton, after a glance at the footprints, deposited the left shoe on the grass and dusted the right one carefully with his handkerchief. Then he dropped on one knee and rested the shoe lightly on the deeper of the two footprints.

It fitted exactly.

Boulot met his colleague’s questioning glance with a comprehending nod.

“Of course!” he said. “It would fit. It’s his studio. He would know the way out. Besides, he was at the garden gate. . . .”

“You picked up his trail in the lane, eh?” demanded Manderton. “Footprints?”

Boulot shook his head.

“This!” he said, and opened his clenched hand.

In the palm lay half a smoked cigarette.

Manderton laughed, baring his teeth.

“I’ll see you,” he said in the language of poker. “Show us how you worked *that* out!”

Boulot’s chubby finger and thumb pinched the cigarette.

“Still resilient, showing it to have been only recently discarded. I have made some study of *mégots*—how do you say?—the ends of cigarettes or cigars, *hein*? This cigarette was smoked yesterday, my friend. *Et puis*—” a

pudgy finger pointed to the gold lettering; “you see the brand, Cerberus? *Eh bien*, regard a little on the saucer of one of the tea-cups in the bedroom. You will find a cigarette end of the same!”

“Your arguments, friend Boulot,” observed Manderton, “are A1. But I had rather our young friend came back. . . .”

He relapsed into silence and studied the tips of his boots.

“It’s a curious case,” he said presently. “Failing Quayre, I have a fancy that this Driscoll girl knows more than she was willing to tell us last night.”

“How do you see this crime being committed?” asked Boulot.

“Well,” Manderton answered, “without prejudice, as the lawyers say, I look at it like this. Here’s Quayre, forbidden Cranmore’s house, carrying on with the Driscoll girl—painting her picture, if you like; leave it at that! Mrs. C. tumbles to it, comes round to the studio to stop it, there’s a scene of jealousy. . . .”

Boulot looked up quickly. With forefinger extended he made the gesture of pointing from one imaginary person to another.

“You think?”

Manderton nodded impressively.

“That’s about it. France isn’t the only place where you have crimes of jealousy, especially since the war. My idea is—mind you, it’s nothing but just only a bit of a theory between our two selves—my idea is that Master Quayre was carrying on with the two ladies. . . .”

“Ah!” remarked the Frenchman.

But there was a wealth of significance in his exclamation.

“My theory is that in the past, in America, he had had an affair with Mrs. Cranmore. You remarked what her husband said about Quayre being sore with her for stopping him visiting at the house. Well, he comes to London, and, finding his old love married, proceeds to take up with the sister. Mrs. C. makes one attempt to break it off, finds that it’s still going on, so runs round to the studio to get him to leave the girl be . . . they pack the girl off, if so be it she was here, they come to words and he gives her the knife. . . .”

“Ah!” commented the Frenchman.

This time his ejaculation was wholly non-committal.

“We’ll get him in a day or two,” observed Manderton, picking his teeth with a little quill which he produced from his vest pocket. “I know this type of crime. He’ll wander about the place and then give himself up, I shouldn’t wonder!”

He looked at his watch.

“Half-past six! I wonder if it’s too early to go out to Cranmore’s. I want to see that girl badly. And maybe he’d give us a bit of breakfast. I could do with it myself. I’ll just get my hat.”

He put his hands on the window-sill and one foot on the ledge and hoisted himself up. Boulot followed his movements very intently and bending down, studied the footprints in the flower-bed again. Then in leisurely fashion he clambered upon the chair and re-entered the window.

Manderton was in the studio writing in his note-book.

“I must send a line to the Chief,” he said. “I won’t keep you a second.”

Boulot waved his assent with his hand and pottered about the studio. He pulled canvases out from the wall and examined them, he scrutinised the furniture and seemed to be taking mental measurements of the studio’s dimensions. Ultimately he found himself by the easel in the centre of the floor. The cloth had been replaced over the picture and one end, which had rested on the deal table where the paints and brushes were lying, now hung straight down, exposing a corner of the table upon which it had rested when thrown back.

Boulot’s bright and bird-like eye, ferreting round, fell upon a little brass bowl which stood on the corner of the table. It was a common little affair of beaten brass. In it were lying the stubs of four cigarettes. Idly Boulot picked up one and examined it, dropped it and picked up another and so on, until he had scrutinised each one. It was apparently the last stump that interested him.

His whole frame seemed to stiffen into sudden attention. He turned the fragment of paper and tobacco over and over in his hand. Then, glancing quickly at Manderton, who was absorbed in his writing, he whipped an envelope out of his pocket and poured the four cigarette ends into it.

Hardly had he done so and stowed the envelope away in his pocket when there was a firm step in the little vestibule. The next moment a tall, fair young man walked into the studio.

CHAPTER IX

JULIAN QUAYRE

HE was a very presentable young man, fair almost to tawniness, tall, broad of shoulder and narrow of hip. He swung swiftly into the studio but, on seeing the two detectives in possession of the premises—Manderton, writing in the corner, his back to the room, Boulot, bending over the table by the easel—he came to an abrupt halt.

He seemed to bristle up as he looked hard at Boulot. The Frenchman noticed how a quick flush of anger appeared in his cheeks. The young man had very blue eyes but now, as the pupils contracted, the irises appeared to darken.

“Would you mind explaining how you got in here?” he asked in the cold, non-committal voice of the Englishman who believes that his sacred liberty is being trampled underfoot. At the sound of his voice Manderton in a second was on his feet facing the room. His right hand rested lightly in his jacket pocket. Boulot who had made dozens of arrests in his day, noted the pistol barrel outlined against the lining of his colleague’s jacket with the envy of a race whose natural bravery is so often called upon to redeem the consequences of its incurable recklessness.

“You’re Mr. Quayre, I take it?” said Manderton.

“That’s my name,” agreed the young man. “But I’m still ignorant as to what the devil you and your friend want in my studio at this time of the morning. . . .”

“I’m a police officer . . .” began Manderton.

“I’m not aware,” Quayre broke in, “that the interesting profession which you have adopted gives you any right to break into people’s houses.”

He looked up with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

“You don’t want to sit for your portrait by any chance?” he said.

Manderton, who was of that stolid type of Englishman whom sarcasm exasperates beyond measure, grew red in the face.

“There’s nothing to be funny about,” he said grimly. “I imagine you know why I am here? . . .”

With a slow deliberate stare the young man mustered the detective. Then he said:

"Look here, I've been up all night and I want to go to bed. Perhaps you'll tell me what you want. And you'll oblige me by showing me your credentials"—he paused perceptibly before adding, "if you have any. . . ."

Manderton produced a leather pocket-book, took out a card and handed it in silence to Quayre.

"That's my name," he said with a cold correctness that had something menacing about it. "I've come here from Scotland Yard to make some enquiries about the murder which we have reason to believe was committed here yesterday evening."

The young man, who was in the act of opening his cigarette case, looked up quickly.

"*Murder?*" he said.

He laid down his cigarette case, still open, upon the table. He had grown suddenly very pale and Boulot noticed that his hands were trembling, slender, finely shaped hands that betrayed the artist. He took a couple of steps towards Manderton and stopped.

"*Murder?*" he repeated, looking about him blankly. "*Here?* I don't understand. Who has been murdered here?"

He uttered the words slowly, but there was an odd air of eagerness about his question as of one who fears what the answer may be. His nonchalance had vanished and the beam of the early morning sun which shone down through the skylight and picked out the gold in his crisp fair hair illuminated a face from which the last vestige of colour had fled.

Manderton spoke.

"A lady who is an acquaintance of yours. Mrs. Cranmore!"

A deep pucker appeared in the young man's forehead between the eyes. A spasm of pain seemed to shoot across his face. Very slowly he joined his hands, intertwining the fingers, and very slowly unfolded them again.

"You . . . you are quite sure about this?" he stammered out after a long silence.

But his question remained unanswered. Manderton had turned to a small black bag which stood open on a chair. From it he took the long knife with the chased metal handle. He held it up for the artist to see.

"Do you recognise this knife?"

"Certainly," was the artist's reply. "It is mine. . . ."

"This is the knife which was used to murder Mrs. Cranmore."

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Do you know what you are saying? Mrs. Cranmore murdered—*here* in my studio! It's not possible. It's. . . ."

He broke off vaguely and looked about him.

“Have you found any evidence of this?”

“Yes, sir!” announced Manderton crisply. “We have discovered traces of blood in the entrance to the studio. What have you to say to that?”

Quayre shrugged his shoulders.

“Nothing!”

“How do you account for Mrs. Cranmore being in your studio?”

“I can’t account for it!”

Manderton cleared his throat with a rasping sound.

“Come, come, Mr. Quayre. This lady, an old friend of yours, I understand, murdered in *your* studio with *your* knife. What explanation have you to offer?”

With his curious air of apathy, of bewilderment, Quayre replied:

“If you are right in saying that Mrs. Cranmore was murdered here, all I can say is that I was out at the time and know nothing about it. As for the knife, its usual place was on the oak chest on the left of the vestibule. Whoever murdered Mrs. Cranmore must have picked the knife up and stabbed her then and there.”

He stopped and there was a short silence. Manderton opened his note-book.

“You say you were out when this crime was committed, Mr. Quayre. When was it committed?”

The young man glanced up quickly.

“I can’t tell you. It was not committed when I was here, therefore it must have been done when I was out. But please tell me how it happened. What. . . .”

“Kindly give me an account of your movements yesterday afternoon,” interrupted Manderton.

The artist hesitated. The silence in the studio was so profound that they could hear the hollow echo of Smith’s footsteps as he paced up and down in the stone hall outside.

“I’m sorry,” Quayre answered slowly, “but I’m afraid I can say nothing about that.”

Manderton looked up from his note-book. There was menace in the keen glance he fixed on the young man.

“Why not, may I ask?”

“It’s as I tell you,” insisted Quayre. “I have nothing to say!”

"You're acting unwisely!" Manderton observed coldly. But Quayre thrust his hands into his pockets and looked up at the skylight without replying.

". . . especially," Manderton added, "as your refusal to answer my questions will entail my obtaining the account of your doings yesterday by cross-examining Miss Driscol. . . ."

The mention of the girl's name had a strange effect upon Quayre. Boulot, who had never taken his eyes off him, observed that it seemed to shake him up out of his lethargy. A trace of his former hauteur crept into his voice as he said carelessly:

"You will be very clever if you are able to persuade Miss Driscol that she knows anything about me or my doings yesterday. . . ."

"Not quite so fast, my friend," interposed Manderton. "I know all about the ill-feeling existing between you and the Cranmores with regard to the attentions you have been paying to Miss Driscol. . . ."

"That will enable you to understand why Miss Driscol can know nothing about my doings. . . ."

Manderton closed his pocket-book with a snap.

"Then perhaps you will explain what Miss Driscol was doing in your studio yesterday afternoon?"

For a fraction of a second the young man wavered. Boulot's quick eye detected in the rapid glance which Quayre threw at Manderton a shadow of uneasiness. But it passed at once. The artist laughed.

"You mean the portrait? If you'll look in that drawer,"—he pointed at the table by the easel—"you'll find Miss Driscol still there! She's been hiding there ever since yesterday . . . and before that, too!"

Manderton manifesting no disposition to open the drawer, Quayre pulled it out himself, and taking up a photograph handed it to the detective.

"There's my model!" he said.

It was a large study of Dolores Driscol in a classic Greek robe, the same as that in which she figured in the half-finished painting on the easel. Manderton glanced at the picture carelessly and laid it on one side, quite disregarding the artist's rather mocking look.

"We shall have to take a statement from you, Mr. Quayre," he said, very formally. "Perhaps you won't mind accompanying one of my men to the police-station? . . ."

Quayre looked squarely at the detective.

"Am I to understand that I am under arrest?"

Manderton eluded the question.

“In the present stage of the investigation,” he replied gravely, “as the party closest to the crime you should be able to answer many questions which badly require answering. I believe that, when you come to think things over a bit, you’ll see that your silence is most ill-advised. That’s, of course, no affair o’ mine. But I am inviting you to give us what assistance you can. . . .”

Admiration glittered in the bright blue eye of Amédée Boulot. He gave his head a little sidelong jog in silent tribute to his confrère’s tact. Monsieur Boulot always cherished the profoundest sympathy for his unfortunate English colleagues who had to battle with what he regarded as the unwarranted and incomprehensible tenderness of English justice towards the criminal classes. Ah! what a magnificent passage of arms this case, so intricate, so baffling, so pregnant of the human passions, would have afforded him in the old days at the Prefecture! How he would have marshalled his facts, how out of them he would have forged a formidable chain of evidence to be tested, link by link, by the *juge d’instruction*—Descazes, perhaps, with his nimble, gallows-tree humour, or *tiens!* this old Rocher-Montambault, with his mordant tongue!

And then the tense scenes, with the magistrate hurling violently his accusations against the prisoner—“Assassin, confess!” “Miserable one, your sin has found you out!” while all the time, the shrewd old man behind his office desk would watch the prisoner, scanning his face, studying his mien, to record his reactions to this crucial test of evidence.

The heavy footstep of Smith resounding on the studio floor brought Boulot out of his reverie. Manderton drew his aide aside and gave him divers whispered instructions. Quayre slowly put on his hat, then glanced at the table by the easel as though looking for something.

“Your cigarette case?” said Boulot, his face wreathed in smiles.

He spoke in French, perhaps drawn subconsciously by his silent meditation to use his mother tongue. He picked up the case from the table, closed it and handed it to the artist. The young man looked quickly at him with friendly interest in his eyes. It was as though M. Boulot’s pleasant Parisian French had thrown up a bridge between them. Quayre thanked him with a graceful phrase in French, and a little bow. His French was easy and almost devoid of any English intonation. Boulot cocked his head on one side and, screwing up his eyes, shot him one of his searching glances. The artist met it unflinchingly.

“Young man,” said the detective in a low voice, “a word of advice. If there is someone to be shielded, do not be too certain that *you* are the person the best qualified to hold the shield. The police, though dangerous enemies,

can be trusty allies. But remember this! If a shield is held between us and the truth, it becomes our duty, we spare nothing, nobody, to pluck it aside. Think it over!"

The artist wavered as though about to speak. But at that moment Smith of the ponderous tread, leaving Manderton's side, came across to him. Without a word Quayre followed him out of the studio. At the door he turned and saw the old Frenchman standing as he had left him, his head sunk on his chest while his right index finger slowly rubbed the bridge of his nose.

CHAPTER X

THE MORNING AFTER

“**A**ND now,” remarked Mr. Manderton, rubbing the palms of his hands briskly one against the other and bringing them together with a smart clap, “to work! Mallow!”

At his shout Straw Hat poked his head round the door.

“I’m off to the Yard for an hour or so. You’ll let nobody in here while I’m away. Refer anyone who comes to Inspector Hake at the station! Boulot, our breakfast at Cranmore’s is off. But perhaps you’ll tell him that I want to see him particularly this morning and will be along presently. And, hey, you’ll oblige me very much by seeing that Miss Dolores What’s-her-name is on hand when I arrive. I’ll be at Sloane Crescent by ten o’clock at the latest. See you then. . . .”

He whirled out and presently over the still morning air there came to them the throb of the engine of his limousine and the jar of the gears as it started away. Monsieur Boulot found himself alone with Mr. Mallow, who was absorbed in the filling of a small black pipe. Catching Boulot’s eye, Straw Hat jerked his head in the direction of the door.

“Great man, the Guv’nor!” he observed, striking a match on the sole of his boot, “known him a long time, haven’t yer?”

“These ten years,” answered Boulot. “We first met over the affair of Alice Ray, the English-woman who, as you may recollect, was found strangled in the villa at Neuilly. . . .”

Straw Hat nodded reminiscently.

“Aye,” he vouchsafed, “I mind the case. Smart bit o’ work on the part of the French police finding the chap as pulled off that job. Leastways, sich was the impression at the Yard at the time. So you was on that? Dear, dear! And wot d’ye make of this?”

Boulot shrugged his shoulders as he picked up his hat.

“*Dame!*” he remarked, “if this young man would but speak. . . .”

“You’ve said it!” observed Straw Hat, sucking at his pipe. His voice sank to a hoarse whisper.

“He’s rattled. Did you mark his hands w’en he took out his cigarette case? Shaking, they was! But the Guv’nor’ll turn him inside out. Fair rip him

up, he will! Woo-er! he's a terror for tearin' the fax out of a chap is the Guv'nor. You watch him! He'll have a confession by the evening, you see!"

"But why," said Boulot, the question addressed rather to himself than to his audience, "why should he not speak now?"

"Thinkin' out his alibi, that's w'ot!" retorted Straw Hat. "By the time Smith gets him to the station he'll have it as pat as pat, I shouldn't wonder. Deep blokes, these artists!"

Boulot extended his left hand according to the curious French custom which reserves the left hand for greeting amongst familiars.

"I leave you," he said and trotted out into the sunshine of the June morning.

A taxi-cab brought him from the Hammersmith Road back to Sloane Crescent. As they sped along smoothly over the tarred wood pavement, multi-coloured newsbills outside the little newsagents proclaimed to London hurrying Cityward the sensation of the eve. "Woman Stabbed in West Kensington"; "Society Woman Murdered"; "Murder Mystery at Hammersmith": were some of the announcements which caught his eye in red, in black, in mauve lettering. It seemed to him that the straw-hatted clerks and the little typists in their summer blouses bent their heads more closely than ever over their newspapers as the big red 'buses whirled them eastward towards the beginning of another day. On the front page of an illustrated paper which a man was reading in a taxi that sped for a spell beside his own, Boulot caught a glimpse of the calm, serene beauty of Carmen Cranmore's face. It brought back to him the still figure lying beneath the sheet in the chemist's little parlour.

Sloane Crescent on his return was astir with life. A postman was going his rounds and waking the echoes of the prim, curved street with his regular knocking. A milk-cart came clanking along and here and there a housemaid in clean print, throwing up a window or busy with hearth-stone and water on the front steps showed that, tardily, a new day had begun also for this region of London.

Cranmore opened the front door in answer to his ring.

"What news?" he exclaimed eagerly and drew him into the house. "What news? Man, this inaction is killing me. I went to your room at five o'clock but you were already gone. . . ."

"My friend," remarked the Frenchman tranquilly, "I have been up and out these many hours. A cup of coffee. . . ."

"The maid said something about breakfast just now," said the stockbroker. "It's in the morning-room. They told me the blinds in the front

of the house must remain drawn. . . .”

Capel Court would scarcely have recognised in this vague and inert man the keen and buoyant head of Cranmore & Co. His voice was muted to a flat monotone; his gait lacked all resilience. One might almost see the burden of his grief like some leaden weight that bore him down.

On a round table set in the centre of Carmen’s Chinese boudoir, the French window flung open on a patch of sun-lit turf, breakfast was set. Boulot helped himself to a cup of coffee from the silver coffee-pot on its little stand above a flickering spirit-lamp and ate a piece of dry toast. As he breakfasted he unobtrusively observed his host. Though Cranmore’s eyes were haggard, he had shaved as usual and his clothes were perfectly neat. It takes more than a tragedy, the detective mused, to shake a man out of his habits of life.

“Boulot,” Cranmore said presently, pressing his palms together, “I realise you must think a man in my state of mind can be of very little use to the police in their investigations. But I want to help. I want you to use me. Something has happened to the man I was this time yesterday and I feel like . . . like another person who has been watching a terrible tragedy. I’m quite clear-minded and I’m not going to make a nuisance of myself. Only you and the inspector—I forget his name—you’ll let me help you track down the . . . the person who killed my wife?”

The sheer pluck of the man touched a chord deep down in the old Frenchman’s heart. He put up his hand and gently patted his friend’s sleeve.

“*Mon vieux*,” he said, “we count on your assistance!”

“Now listen!” exclaimed Cranmore. “After I had come in last night I went all through my wife’s desk here and the drawers of the dressing-table in our bedroom where she sometimes keeps her letters without finding anything to throw any light on her visit to Aldon Street. Nor did she receive any telephone message. The telephone was out of order yesterday morning and a man was working on the line. It was restored by lunch-time but nobody telephoned in the afternoon. Up to half-past three, when Dolores went out, no one had rung up. Nor did anyone later. I telephoned the Exchange this morning and their report is that the first call we had from outside yesterday was from a City number late in the evening—that was the newspaper which gave Dolores her first news of the murder. If my wife was going to Quayre’s she must have decided to do so on the spur of the moment!”

“My friend,” said Boulot gently, “she was stabbed in the vestibule at Quayre’s studio!”

A deep, narrow furrow appeared between Cranmore’s eyes and his nostrils twitched.

“This is not guess-work?” he queried. “You’re sure of your facts?”

Boulot nodded.

“There’s blood on the flagstones in the hall!”

“Quayre!”

The name burst from the stockbroker’s lips like a cry.

“Let us not be precipitate!” enjoined the detective drawing his friend to the chair at his side. “Some happenings of the most curious took place in the atelier of this artist yesterday afternoon. . . .”

A maid, her eyes red and swollen with crying, appeared at the door.

“There’s a gentleman . . .” she began.

Then Manderton appeared and pushing past her, strode quickly into the room.

“Mr. Cranmore,” he said, “I’m glad to find you. I wish to put a few questions to you. . . .”

The stockbroker turned a ghastly face towards him.

“First answer me one,” he said. “Inspector, did Quayre kill my wife?”

“That,” replied Manderton very decisively, “is a question which, for the moment, I propose to leave unanswered. In the meantime, I am anxious to get information from you on several points. You’ll excuse my directness, but I’m in a great hurry and have very little time to spare. Firstly, about Mrs. Cranmore and Quayre; you told me yesterday evening that Quayre knew her in America. Is that right?”

Cranmore, listlessly gazing out on the green sward spread out beneath the French windows, turned an expressionless face towards the questioner.

“Yes,” was the reply. “They studied at the same art school in New York.”

“When was that?”

“Before the war. 1913 I believe the year was.”

Manderton paused to scribble a note in his black pocket-book. Unceremoniously he jerked his pencil at Cranmore.

“Go on,” he enjoined, “tell me about her. Who exactly was she? How did she meet Quayre? Who is he?”

He fired the questions out explosively.

“My wife’s father was an Irish-American journalist who was killed in a street accident in New York when Carmen was quite a small child. He had married a South American lady from the Argentine. They were left very poorly off. My wife did not care to talk much about her childhood, but I think it was hard. When the mother died Carmen was only seventeen. She had to earn her own living. She used to draw for the magazines and so earned

enough to pay for her classes at the art school and also to keep and educate her sister. When the war broke out she was doing quite well. Dolores was at the Ursuline Convent at Brussels. Carmen gave up her New York apartment and came to England where she joined the V.A.D.'s. I met her at Mrs. Cornwall-Carfax's hospital in Mount Street where I was sent after I was wounded. . . ."

"What year was that?"

"In 1918. After the March offensive. . . ."

"And Quayre? What was he doing in America?"

"I believe his mother was American. . . ."

"But he's an Englishman?"

"Oh, yes. But after his father died he and his mother went out to New York to live. He studied art at a school in Greenwich Village which my wife attended."

"Do you remember the name of this school?"

"Yes, Duhamel's. Carmen often spoke about it. . . ."

The pencil scratched over the paper. Manderton turned over a page of his note-book and hesitated, twiddling the page with his fingers. Then he said slowly:

"Just how intimate was your wife with Quayre, as far as you know?"

Cranmore's right fist nervously pounded the open palm of his left hand.

"They were merely students together. Nothing more than that. Quayre was one of my wife's friends in New York. She used to have a few people round to her apartment on Sunday evenings. Quayre was one of them. . . ."

"How used she to speak of Quayre?"

"Very little. I gathered from her that he was the merest acquaintance."

"Yet, in point of fact, he was one of her oldest friends?"

"As far as years go I suppose he was!"

Cranmore spoke coldly with a note of irritation underlying his manner which made Manderton look up.

"I hope you're not trying to fence with me . . ." he said sternly.

"My God!" Cranmore burst out, "I'm not trying to fence with you. I'm only trying to protect my dead wife's reputation against your rotten insinuations, your . . . your . . . horrible suggestion that Quayre was her lover. Ah! it's no good your denying it. You came here with that in your mind—it's in your thoughts still and I tell you it's a lie, a damnable lie. There was no man in my wife's life but me. Do you understand that? And if you're going to

try and prove that my wife was Quayre's mistress you're on the wrong track and the sooner you give up the case the better!"

On that, his face working, he turned brusquely away. Manderton received this explosion with the utmost calm. He merely raised his eyebrows and looked across interrogatively at Boulot. Then he shut his note-book.

"I should like to see Miss Driscol, please," he said.

The stockbroker made a motion of his head and shoulders in the direction of the bell. Manderton stepped across to the fireplace and pressed the button.

"If you don't mind," he observed suavely, "I should prefer to see the young lady alone. If I might interview her in another room—"

Cranmore swung round and faced him.

"No!" he said with more decision than he had hitherto shown. "If you want to question my sister-in-law it must be in my presence or not at all. She is scarcely more than a child and it is only proper that one of the family should be present."

The red-eyed maid appeared.

"Ask Miss Driscol," he told her, "to come down to me here at once!"

Boulot, who had been whispering to Manderton, said:

"*Mon ami*, what you are doing is most irregular. There is no reason, I remind you, why my confrère should allow it. If he does it is on the condition that he should ask Miss Driscol what questions he likes without interruption or suggestion from you. It is agreed, *hein?*"

"He can cross-examine in his own way," replied Cranmore, "as long as he doesn't bully her or fill her head with his nasty ideas. . . ."

Then the door opened. Dolores Driscol stood on the threshold. Her face was ashen and there were dark rings under her eyes. She was dressed for the street, very plainly, in black with a little black hat. She stood at the door, clasping to her bosom her black leather hand-bag, a woe-begone figure who stared with tragic eyes at the set, stern faces of the three men confronting her.

CHAPTER XI

THE VELVET GLOVE

TO JIM CRANMORE who knew her well it seemed, as Dolores came into their presence, that she had donned an invisible armour of reserve. He had always thought of her as just a charming child to whom he had played the part of an affectionate and generous elder brother. But now—was it the result of the shock she had sustained? was it the effect of the atmosphere of anger, of suspicion which prevailed in the room?—she came in to them with the self-possession, the poise of a woman.

She stepped up to him, ignoring the detectives.

“You asked for me, Jim?” she said, and stood toying with her bag.

“Inspector Manderton here”—Cranmore indicated the detective—“whom you saw last night, wants to put a few questions to you, Dolores. . . .”

“Yes?” she replied. “But won’t you all sit down?”

She seated herself with her back to the fireplace on Carmen’s orange couch. Very deliberately Manderton dragged a Chinese Chippendale chair across the room and, setting it down opposite her, dropped heavily into it. With irritating slowness, at least so it seemed to the other two men who watched him, he pulled out his fat black note-book, opened it and then raised his eyes to the pale young face opposite him.

But the girl was not looking at him. Her long dark lashes veiled her eyes as, with head bent, she opened her hand-bag, and took out her handkerchief. With the tiny scrap of cambric she wiped her lips, then raised her head and composedly met the detective’s challenging look.

Mr. Manderton’s training—he had started life as a uniform constable—scarcely fitted him for dealing with that bewildering complex, the modern young girl. He had a certain inborn quickness of mind, the inheritance of so many Cockneys, which had shown its quality in the manner in which his intelligence had triumphed over the narrow regulations with which his daily work was beset. This natural acuteness, coupled with a somewhat hectoring disposition and the unflinching courage of a man who does not know the meaning of fear, had enabled him to cope very successfully with the criminal classes. He was as adequate for dealing with the frank mendacity of the old “lag” as with the *faux-bonhomie* of the West End crook. But, already somewhat ruffled as the result of his encounter with Julian Quayre, he felt

himself frankly nonplussed by the imperturbable mien of this young and beautiful girl.

Still, Manderton was shrewd. The shield of reserve behind which Dolores Driscoll sheltered had not escaped him. He sensed in the girl's leisurely movements an attitude of suspicion towards himself, a determination to gain time for reflection. He knew he must walk delicately, for the present at any rate, and it was with an *empresé*, an almost embarrassed manner, that he put his first question.

"Miss Driscoll," he said, "when did you see Mr. Quayre last?"

"It must be a month ago," she answered without hesitation.

"Where was it?"

"In Bond Street. We stopped and talked for a while. He told me he was painting my picture from a photograph I gave him. . . ."

"And you've not seen him since?"

"No!"

"Was Mr. Quayre bitter about having been forbidden the house?"

"Bitter, no. He was upset. He thought my brother-in-law unjust. . . ."

"Did he tell you this the last time you saw him?"

"Yes!"

"What exactly were your relations with Mr. Quayre, Miss Driscoll?"

The girl flushed.

"Mr. Quayre wanted to marry me. . . ."

"Would you have been willing?"

The girl nodded without speaking.

"Yet, Mr. Cranmore having forbidden you and Mr. Quayre to meet, you obeyed your brother-in-law's wishes and ceased seeing Mr. Quayre. Is that right?"

"Yes!" replied Dolores.

"You said that Mr. Quayre was painting your portrait from your photograph. Did you ever give him a sitting?"

"No!"

The denial was prompt and unhesitating.

"Very good. You told me that Mr. Quayre criticised Mr. Cranmore for having forbidden him the house. Did he also criticise Mrs. Cranmore?"

"Oh, no!"

"Surely he must have thought it unfriendly on her part, since they had known each other for so many years, not to have taken his side against your

brother-in-law?"

"Mr. Quayre had the highest opinion of my sister. He used to tell me she was the most wonderful character he had ever met."

"Yet your sister did not seem to return Mr. Quayre's feelings? Mr. Cranmore here says she was quite willing to see your friendship with Mr. Quayre broken off. . . ."

"She never said anything to me!" said Dolores stubbornly.

"Did you ask her to speak to your brother-in-law about your meeting Quayre again?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"It didn't seem to be any good. . . ."

Manderton's tone was polite and conversational, his deep voice modulated to a pleasing key. In the same easy manner he asked:

"What motive could Mr. Quayre have had for murdering Mrs. Cranmore?"

On that at last the mask was dropped. A great fear deepened in the girl's dark eyes. She leant back among the gold and black cushions of the orange divan, staring with horror at the detective. She gasped and exclaimed:

"You must be mad to say such a dreadful thing!"

She moved her hands quickly, helplessly, in a rapid gesture that betrayed her Southern blood.

"It's ridiculous. Really, it is. Why Julian was a devoted friend of Carmen's . . . you know he was, Jim."

She turned to Cranmore.

"Surely you don't believe this wicked accusation, Jim? Julian thought the world of Carmen. They were such good friends in the old days. Besides, Julian's incapable of such an act. You may not like him, Jim. But you must be just and say that Julian could never commit a crime like this . . . Speak to me, Jim. Say you don't believe it. . . ."

The words flowed from her lips in a torrent. The pleading gestures of her hands, her volubility, clearly revealed her Spanish strain. But the founts of her eloquence seemed to go dry before the ominous silence of the three men, Cranmore, with his set, grief-ravaged face, Boulot, shrewdly watching, and Manderton, blandly enigmatic.

It was Cranmore who broke the silence.

"My dear," he said, "our poor Carmen was stabbed in Quayre's studio. There is no question about that. . . ."

“Stabbed with Quayre’s knife . . .” added Manderton, eyeing the girl closely.

“It’s . . . it’s horrible,” murmured Dolores and covered her face with her hands.

But Manderton had not done with her. In the same calm, unemotional way he resumed his cross-examination.

“What took your sister to Quayre’s yesterday?”

“Yes, Dolores,” Cranmore broke in eagerly, “why should she have gone there? Didn’t she say anything to you about going?”

The girl took her hands down from her face. She shook her head wearily.

“She said nothing about going to the studio. She spoke of having tea at her club when it was cooler.”

“Then you can’t explain her visit to Quayre’s in any way?”

“No!”

She looked in a despairing kind of way about her.

“And you have no theory?”

“No, I tell you. I don’t know why she went. How should I know?”

She bit her lip and turned away her head. She seemed near tears. But Mr. Manderton, after a glance at his note-book, continued his imperturbable questioning.

“You said last night that you and your sister lunched together here. When you left to go to Ranelagh Mrs. Cranmore was at home, I take it? Is that right? Very good. Now what time was it when you left the house?”

“About four o’clock.”

“Very well. And what time did you get to Ranelagh?”

“About six. Or it might have been seven o’clock. I didn’t notice the exact time.”

“But surely it didn’t take you from two to three hours to go from Sloane Crescent to Ranelagh? Come, come, how did you go?”

“I walked most of the way!”

“What on earth did you do that for, Dolores?” Cranmore interposed. “You must have missed all the polo. . . .”

“I had a headache,” explained the girl, “and I thought the walk would do me good.”

“How did you walk to Ranelagh?” asked Manderton.

“I didn’t walk all the way. I took a taxi from Hammersmith Bridge.”

“But till you got to Hammersmith Bridge which way did you go?”

"I walked up Sloane Street, and along Knightsbridge and the Kensington Road."

"Ah! you went along the Kensington Road, eh? Did you stop anywhere on the way?"

"No!"

Dolores stood up abruptly. As she did so her hand-bag slid off her lap and dropped to the floor.

"I can't answer any more questions. You bewilder me. I . . . I've had a shock . . . I don't know what I'm saying. Jim, let me go to my room now. . . ."

Mr. Manderton had stooped and picked up the black leather hand-bag. He stood there for a moment holding it awkwardly in his big red hands. He now handed it to the girl with a little bow.

"I need not detain you any longer," he said, and with a brusque nod to Cranmore he marched quickly out of the room.

Boulot, who had turned to scribble something at the desk, followed him out and overtook him in the hall. Manderton turned a red and angry face to him at his call.

"I'll blow that young woman's alibi sky-high," he exclaimed wrathfully. "I'll bust it. I'll learn her to come the smart Alec over George Manderton. You meet me in my room at the Yard at, say, three o'clock this afternoon, friend Boulot, and you'll see the fur fly. Bewilder her, do I? She'll be a damn sight more bewildered when she knows what I've got in my pocket-book. . . ."

With an indignant snort he clapped his bowler hat on his head.

"Do not enrage yourself, *mon vieux*," said Boulot. "You go to establish proof that she was at the studio, *hein*? But that is established already. *Oui, oui*, I, Boulot, tell you this. And this Quayre? What of him?"

"He'll be in Brixton to-night," answered Manderton, pulling on his gloves. "He left his finger-prints all over the window in his bedroom. I told you that was where he made his get-away. . . ."

"And the knife?"

"Wash-out!" was the curt reply. "That damned chemist pawed everything of value off the handle. . . ."

"Ah!" was Boulot's pregnant comment. "And," he added, "have you made him to speak, this young man?"

"Not yet," said Manderton, picking up his stick. "But I will. . . ."

Boulot held out a sealed envelope.

“Do me the favour, old friend,” said he coaxingly, “to hand our young man this note. It contains one question. It will unlock his lips. And we will go to him together and hear his story.”

Manderton hesitated an instant, then took the note.

“I don’t know that I can do what you ask,” he said. “Properly speaking I ought to see what’s inside this.”

“Then hand it to the young man open. But do not read it until then.”

The English detective nodded and thrust the note in his breast pocket. Boulot escorted him to the front door. As Manderton entered his car Boulot saw him jerk his hand up in sign of recognition to a man who was lounging against the railings of the house opposite reading a newspaper.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHADOW ACROSS THE SUN

AS MANDERTON'S car sped up Sloane Crescent a taxi rattled past it and drew up in front of Cranmore's house. Boulot, who stood in the porch gravely contemplating the loafer across the way, saw a trim figure in a neat toque being helped out of the cab by a tall young man.

"Thank God!" spoke Cranmore from the hall, "Letty's come. And George!"

Lettice Harbury, who was Jim Cranmore's married sister, had bright brown eyes, like a bird's, iron-grey hair, very tidily arranged, and a quick decisive manner which, with a curious trick she had of clipping her "g's," gave an impression of hardness completely belied, however, by a warm and affectionate disposition.

"My poor Jim!" she said and wrung her brother's hand hard. It was characteristic that she did not offer to kiss him. Lettice Harbury had a family of five strapping sons. What, consequently, she did not know about the male species was negligible.

"Letty, old girl!" said Cranmore, "Dolores is a bit queer. She's in the morning-room. Perhaps you'd go in to her. . . ."

Mrs. Harbury dropped her brother's hand and sped into the house. The three men followed and bulked awkwardly in the doorway. Dolores, looking very pale, was leaning back on the orange divan, her eyes closed.

"Whatever have you stoopid men been doin' to this poor gel?" demanded Mrs. Harbury indignantly as she flew to her side. "For goodness sake, Jim, take 'em all away, d'ye hear? And send me that nice maid o' yours with the brandy. Good God, man, don't stand there starin' at me! Do as I tell you!"

The maid was fetched. She and Mrs. Harbury took Dolores upstairs. The girl had not fainted. But she seemed dazed, like one waking from deep sleep.

"I only got your wire at Wickham this morning," said George Cranmore to his brother, as they re-entered the morning-room, "and I telephoned to Letty straight away. I found she had heard and was going up to London. So I met her train at Waterloo. My dear old chap. . . ."

Jim made no answer. He just put one brown hand on his brother's shoulder and gripped it hard. Then, as is an Englishman's way, he thrust his emotion back and stamped it down hard within him.

“George,” he said, “this is an old friend of mine, Monsieur Boulot, late of the Paris police. He’s been following the case and I believe he’s going to be of great assistance to us in tracking down the . . . the . . .”

His voice faltered. He passed his hand forlornly across his brow. His conventional manner dropped away from him like a cloak.

“My God, Boulot,” he exclaimed brokenly, “you *must* help me. That damn detective with his infernal suggestions, his . . . his secrecy, is simply driving me crazy. I’m just desperate! What, for the love of God, had my poor wife to do with this horrible, dark intrigue that Manderton hints at, that brought her to her death? You’ve been studying this ghastly crime. You’ve been over the ground. You’ve visited the studio. You must have discovered *something*! You must have formed some sort of theory. George, here, is a barrister. He can help us. Can’t we three get our minds down to it and try to pierce this darkness, this stifling, terrifying darkness? . . .”

With great composure Monsieur Boulot rolled himself a cigarette. The very deliberation of his movements, as from his little sack he shook out the black tobacco into the paper and, with a deft twist of his fingers, produced his cigarette, imperceptibly relieved the tension produced by Jim Cranmore’s outburst. With nicotine-stained finger and thumb the Frenchman pinched off the ragged tobacco edge, then stuck the cigarette in his mouth. It was not until he had applied the match and blown out a great cloud of acrid smoke that he spoke.

“In a crime like this, my friends,” he said, “to ascertain the motive is to detect the author. . . .”

“But Manderton clearly thinks that Quayre is the murderer!” broke in Cranmore.

“Happy Manderton!” sighed Boulot and flicked off his cigarette ash with his little finger. “Still in harness, young, buoyant, *quoi*? Not like me, the old war-horse, his fighting days over, turned out in the field to end his life in tranquillity. In my day I, Boulot—*le patron*, my young men used to call me—I, too, was confident. I also saw everything clearly from the start of an investigation and flaunted my *panache* in the faces of these imbecile old men of the Ministry with their doubts, their scruples, their perpetual caution. And rightly, I say, for when one is of the police, let but the bureaucrats suspect you are at fault and”—he made an expressive gesture with his open hand—“feeneesh! But old age brings its own measures with it! And I am old. And I want to be convinced. And *pardi*, touching this Monsieur Quayre, I particularly want to be convinced. But, up till now, I am as a man who feels his way along, groping after he knows not what. . . .”

He stretched out his two hands, miming the gait of a blind man, broke off abruptly and fell into a brooding silence, smoking furiously.

“All my life has been spent in the investigation of crime,” he resumed after a spell. “All my life has been devoted to observation, to deduction, to the examination of the infinitely small details. One becomes familiar with the ways of *Messieurs les assassins*; one acquires a certain instinct for a clue. But seldom, I confess it frankly, have I seen a case so seemingly devoid of *points de départ*, so barren of any of those finger-posts which even the master criminal usually leaves in his train!”

He shook his head dubiously and returned to his cigarette.

Neither of the brothers interrupted him. Both seemed to comprehend that he was, to all intents and purposes, thinking aloud and they feared lest they might break his train of thought.

“Sometimes”—the bright blue eyes clouded abstractedly—“one sits by one’s window reading, absorbed, unmindful of what is passing around one. And then one becomes aware of a check in one’s reading; the print seems hard to follow; you lose the thread. At length, in search of the cause, you look up. Somebody is standing between you and the light, casting a shadow athwart your page.

“So it is with me now. For a time I persuade myself that I can clearly see the mosaic which this excellent Manderton is so patiently seeking to fashion out of the little loose pieces of this case lying about. But then, *tout d’un coup*, I become aware that I see less well. The light has grown bad. A shadow has passed across the sun”—now he turned upon his hearers’ eagerly attentive faces a look full of grim menace—“a mysterious shadow, Messieurs, that comes and goes, that confuses everything, something so remote and intangible that I must ask myself whether I am not, in my old age, allowing my imagination to run away with me. A shadow did I say? Less than a shadow. Messieurs, an influence that has seemed to shape the conduct of each individual actor in this dark drama, a potent influence. And I ask myself”—he shook his upraised hand as though apostrophising an unkind Fate—“I ask myself what can this shadow be which, my poor friend, has thus darkened your life’s happiness?”

Said Jim in a strangled voice:

“For the love of God, man, speak plainly! And tell me what you mean. . . .”

But Boulot merely shrugged his shoulders and pitched the ragged stub of his cigarette into the bare fireplace. He shook his head.

“Another time,” he observed, letting his eye roam slowly round the room, “another time, my friend. Not now. Already, as it seems to me, this talkative

old Boulot has said too much. No, no, *mon vieux*, ask me no questions but let me find out things in my own way. Remember, no man is infallible. And I. . . .”

Again that characteristic upward jerk of the shoulders.

“*À propos*,”—he had turned his back on them and appeared to be surveying the orange divan on which but lately Dolores had reclined, —“*à propos*, this would be the divan of which Madame spoke before she died? *Quelle belle pièce, hein?*”

It was George Cranmore who answered. Jim had dropped his elbows on his knees and covered his face with his hands, the picture of mute despair.

“You say that Mrs. Cranmore spoke of this couch before she died?” he queried.

“*Mais bien sûr!*” answered the Frenchman, without turning round. “With her last breath. . . .”

“What did she say exactly?”

“Nothing but just the two words ‘orange divan’! She repeated them twice, it would seem. . . .”

“But surely this is rather strange?”

“Your brother believes that Madame, in her death agony, imagined herself to be back in her own room here. . . .”

“If I know anything of my poor sister-in-law,” said George very gravely, “—and I knew her very well. Monsieur,—her last thoughts, her last words, would have been of her husband. She loved him very dearly. If, as you say, she spoke, with her last breath, of this divan, it must be that some very potent reason urged her, something, maybe, connected, like this piece of furniture, with her past. . . .”

“*Qu’est-ce que vous dites?*”

The question rang out sharply as Boulot spun round and faced the barrister.

“This orange divan,” George explained calmly, “was the only piece of furniture which Carmen brought with her from New York. . . .”

“From New York?” exclaimed the Frenchman excitedly. “From New York, did you say?”

“Certainly. She lived there before the war, you know!”

“I know, I know. But this divan? What do you know of it?”

“Carmen was always greatly attached to it. She used to call it her dowry. She told me once that it had been given to her father by a Chinaman who kept a chop-suey in the New York Bowery. She used to sleep on it as a young

girl and afterwards she had it in her studio in Greenwich Village. She was so fond of it, do you remember, Jim?"

"I can't look at it without seeing her," said his brother brokenly. "You'll have to get rid of it for me, George. I can't bear to have it in the house. . . ."

Boulot had swung round and was again scrutinising the couch, low and broad, upholstered in fine corded orange silk, resting on four squat black teak legs, each ending in a finely carved foot with five claws grasping a ball.

"It was what you said just now," began George Cranmore, addressing Boulot's uncompromising back, "about some strange influence shaping the actions of the persons mixed up in this mysterious affair that makes me wonder whether some motive which is still obscure to us did not prompt our poor Carmen to speak of this family heirloom before she died. . . ."

Boulot now faced him again, his brows bent, his blue eyes glittering hard. He very slowly passed the index finger of his right hand down the bridge of his nose. He looked intently at George Cranmore.

"My friend," he said quietly, "I think I can work with you. But now. . . ."

He picked up his broad-brimmed black hat from a chair.

"Where are you going?" asked the barrister.

There was a moment's silence in the room. Through the open windows there came to them the cries of children playing in the sun-lit garden, the pipe of a thrush on the grass and, like a faint bass accompaniment, the distant bourdon of the London traffic.

Boulot turned at the door.

"I go," he said, "to search for that motive!"

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. AMSCHEL RECEIVES ANOTHER SHOCK

THE haven which Mrs. Amschel had sought at her brother's, the furniture dealer of Hammersmith, wore the air of inspissated melancholy peculiar to such establishments. There rests, indeed, over these places an atmosphere of brooding sadness which appears to emanate from the battered wreckage of a hundred homes piled up within the dusky shadows of the shop and encroaching upon the sidewalk, pitiful jetsam of life's storms awaiting the caprice of the next wave. Death, the end, and marriage, the beginning of life, are the factors regulating supply and demand in these dingy emporia where everything, down to the very desk in which the dealer spikes his receipts, speaks of the precariousness of life among the very poor.

But there was nothing of gloom, this fine June morning, about Mrs. Amschel's brother, a sunny young man of thirty or thereabouts with sleek black hair and sleek black eyes, set somewhat close together above a large nose. In his dress he was rather natty, thanks to a valuable family connection with a tailoring establishment in the Fulham Road—in fact a police-court reporter would have described his appearance as “flash.”

He was a good specimen of the second generation of the London Ghetto. A Whitechapel street had been his school: a sweating-shop in the Walworth Road his university. In the rough-and-tumble of East End life he had managed to assimilate to his native wits a large flavouring of Cockney sharpness; he had drawn in with the air his infant lungs had breathed the good-natured tolerance of the liberty-loving British working-classes which his parents, and his sister, brought up in the Lemberg Ghetto, had never known: while the sporting instincts he had acquired from his little *Goyim* playfellows of the Commercial Road expressed themselves in his keen devotion to the racecourse and the ring. He was a vital, restless creature with all the Jew's craving for excitement and change. His instinct for a bargain took him far beyond the buying and selling of furniture, and the curious characters who sometimes after nightfall dropped into the room behind the shop found him ready to discuss the most bizarre of deals.

Pencil in hand, a brown bowler set on the back of his head, he leaned over a newspaper spread out on the top of a high desk in the front of the shop engaged in his morning pursuit of “spotting the winners.” This was preliminary to his daily call on the street bookie who stood outside the public-house at the corner. He was in unusually high spirits this morning. The

events of the preceding day had thrown the full glare of publicity upon the family and his heart swelled within him as he again contemplated the photograph of Mrs. Amschel which figured prominently in all the newspapers' accounts of the murder.

A step on the pavement outside made him look up. A tall man in a grey cashmere suit was scanning the shop-front. Mrs. Amschel's brother pulled his hat forward and lounged into the alley-way through the furniture. The stranger was eyeing the rusty bedsteads and the fly-blown pictures which stood out on the pavement with an air which seemed to indicate a customer. He was neatly dressed, a fine, well-set-up figure of a man, and looked affluent. Business was none too good. . . .

"Good morning, sir," said Mrs. Amschel's brother jauntily, "a beautiful day again, sir. 'Ope I may 'ave the pleasure of selling you something to-day, sir. If you'd kindly step inside . . . was it office furniture as you required, sir? I 'ave a lovely roll-top stained-oak desk within, pidgin' 'oles, secret dror, Yale lock an' all, as good as noo—and cheap! I'm fair givin' it away. Or was it for the 'ome? There's a buffit at the back, a most 'andsome piece. . . ."

Unceremoniously the stranger brushed him aside and passed into the shop. There he turned to face the dealer.

"Is Mrs. Amschel staying here?" he asked.

The dealer's eyes narrowed suddenly. Through an atavistic instinct which his English upbringing had never shed, he had a wholesome fear of the police. The stranger's commanding, rather ruthless manner, his hard incisive voice, sent a chill to his heart.

"W'y?" he temporised.

"I went to her store in West Kensington," the stranger replied, "and it was shut up. The people next door told me she was staying with you. You're her brother, I suppose?"

"That's right!" the dealer agreed.

"Mr. Issy Soker?" said the stranger.

And in answer to an enquiring glance from Mr. Soker explained:

"I saw the name over the shop."

He let his eyes roam over the battered furniture and slowly brought them to rest on Issy's pallid face.

"Tell your sister I want to see her!"

"Was it from the p'lice, please?" faltered Issy.

For the first time the stranger smiled, baring two rows of strong, dazzlingly white teeth.

"I'll say it isn't!" he replied rather grimly.

Something in the turn of the phrase, in his intonation, made the dealer look at him more closely than he had hitherto done. He was a powerfully-built man, well-groomed, clean-shaven, with a hard, bitter mouth, a square chin and very glossy black hair, heavily streaked with grey, brushed back off the forehead. His eyes were striking, bold and dark, but in their depths there lurked a poignant, an almost defiant expression which emphasised the grim lines about the mouth. The man's hunted look struck a reminiscent chord far down in the Jew's memory. It was as though he had seen that expression before, but where he could not immediately determine.

"Friend of Rosa's, are yer?" queried Issy.

"Rather a business acquaintance," put in the stranger.

Enlightenment dawned in Issy's eyes. He looked down furtively at the stranger's hands. They were gloved.

"Well," said the Jew, "I'm sorry, I'm shore, but Rosa's out. Fact is, she's gorn to the p'lice. They sent for 'er first thing this morning along of this West Kensington murder as you may 'ave read about in the paper. . . ."

"When will she be back?"

"'Strewth! You know w'ot the p'lice is. They'll keep 'er 'anging about 'arf the day, I shouldn't wonder!"

"Now isn't that just too bad!" exclaimed the stranger. "And I wanted to see Ra . . . Rosa most particularly!"

"Matter of business, I think you said?"

"I said nothing of the kind!" tersely replied the other.

On this the conversation drooped. To bridge the awkward gap Mr. Soker produced from his waistcoat pocket a very yellow pencil and thoughtfully picked his teeth with the point for a spell.

"Seeing as 'ow me sister's out," he said tentatively, "if it was anythink as I could oblige in, Mister. . . ."

He extended a somewhat grimy deprecatory hand, fingers extended.

". . . s'long as it ain't on the crorrss. I got me biz'ness to think of, I 'ave. And me good name. . . ."

"Say!" fiercely demanded the stranger. "Who in hell do you think you're talking to anyhow? Where did you get that stuff? Do you think I'm a crook or what?"

Hot anger whipped into his eyes and such menace hissed in his voice, which he did not raise above the undertone in which he had been speaking, that the Jew receded swiftly.

“’Strewth, Mister,” replied Mr. Soker in a panic, “I didn’t mean no ’arm!”

“Then don’t go shooting off your mouth so fast,” said the other threateningly, “or maybe you’ll get hurt!”

He turned towards the street and threading his way down the alley between the furniture looked out. He withdrew swiftly.

“Here’s your sister coming up the street right now,” he said. “Say! I’m going to give her a surprise. Don’t you let on I’m here? I’ll just step behind that bureau and when Ra . . . Rosa comes into the shop I’ll come out!”

And as Mr. Soker received this playful proposal with a somewhat dubious air, the stranger added:

“And if you open your face, little boy, I’ll bat you so hard that your feet’ll come through your oxfords. Get me?”

Mr. Soker’s acquiescence was manual rather than vocal, for fright had deprived him of the power of speech. With trembling hands he picked up his pencil and, as the stranger retreated behind the office desk, bent over its top and affected to busy himself once more with the complicated finance of his turf operations.

The next moment Mrs. Amschel, red-faced and heated, stepped out of the hot sunshine into the cool of the shop. After the manner of her race she had decked herself out in her best to appear before the authorities. Over a black silk dress she wore a short black cape trimmed with jet and a shabby black bonnet in which nodded a dirty yellow rose.

With an “ouf!” of exhaustion she dropped into a kitchen chair set with its back to the street facing the interior of the shop.

“Oi! oi!” she gasped, fanning her scarlet face with her hand. “I’m that ’ot! And my feet is svelled. Scarcely could I walk ’ome!”

Breathing stertorously she bent down and began to unlace her boots.

“Issy, ron op to the bedroom and fetch me slippers!” she said.

An ominous silence greeted her request. Issy had shrunk back before the appearance of the stranger, who had raised himself to his full height until his head and shoulders were visible above the top of the desk. A cynical smile on his lips, he was looking down on Mrs. Amschel.

At that moment the Jewess looked up and saw him. A horrible change came over her face. From her scarlet cheeks shining with heat the colour faded; her mouth worked and a look of terror came into her beady black eyes. She put one fat hand up as though to defend herself while her brother, with his restless black eyes, looked apprehensively from the stranger to the woman.

He seemed about to speak when the stranger thrust out a long arm and seizing him by the collar, plucked him out of his corner.

“Get to hell out of that!” he commanded.

Mr. Soker did not stop to argue. His peculiar habit of wearing his hat for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four found him instantly dressed for the street. He took two bounds to the front of the shop and they heard his footsteps pounding along the sidewalk.

But Mrs. Amschel sat immobile, white to the lips, her eyes protruding, fixed in a fascinated stare upon the stranger’s stony glance, his hard and cruel mouth.

CHAPTER XIV

MONSIEUR BOULOT IN SEARCH OF A MOTIVE

THE hushed calm of summer noon-day rested over the big lounge of the Ladies' Criterion Club. The swing-doors, folded back to admit the air, let in, discreetly modulated, the sounds and scents of Bond Street in the high season. The hoot of a motor-car jarred from time to time upon the incessant rolling of tyred wheels over the wood pavement; now and again every other sound was swallowed up in the thunderous passage of a motor-'bus while, with the busy clamour of traffic, there drifted into the quiet lounge that blended odour of tar, fresh violets and patchouli which is sent up as a fragrant summer offering by the Street of Mammon.

Katie Carroll and Violet Morris were the lounge waitresses on duty. They leant against the white-covered table by the service lift, looking cool and neat in their white caps and aprons and grey uniform dresses. There is a lull in ladies' clubs of a morning. Presently the after-lunch rush for coffee and cigarettes would set in and extend well into the tea hour which is life's high noon in London's feminine Clubland.

They were talking in undertones about the murder of Mrs. Cranmore. It was the sole theme of conversation in the few groups of women scattered about the lounge. Even the dog-breeders, who abound in women's clubs, had abandoned their favourite topic of canine amours to speculate and theorise upon the mystery which was engrossing the whole of London. Many glances were directed at Katie Carroll, with her aureole of flaming auburn hair, who was the last person known to have spoken to the beautiful Mrs. Cranmore before she went to her death. *The Planet*, which had scored heavily over the other newspapers with its story of the crime, had given her name and thereby launched upon the Ladies' Criterion a deluge of newspaper photographers.

Hawkins, the plump page, who was deputising at the switch-board while the telephonist was having her lunch, pranced across the lounge to where the two girls were standing.

“'Member w'ot I told you 'bout 'aving to give evidence, Miss Carroll?” he demanded with an important air.

“I don't want any of your lip, Hawkins,” replied Miss Carroll with a little touch of brogue which showed to what race she owed her naming hair, “g'wan back to the switch-board or Miss Hardbake'll be after yez! Isn't that

Mrs. Rhodes after complainin' the way she was kep' waitin' for her call a while back!"

"That ole Rhodes," replied the plump lad with spirit, "can boil 'er 'ead. The telephone is all right, Miss Carroll. An' ole 'Ardbake won't say nuffin' neither! Yer wanted in the orfis!"

"Oh, Katie!" exclaimed Miss Morris, a brunette with black sparkling eyes, "it's the police again!"

Miss Carroll's freckled face flushed crimson. But she said disdainfully:

"Ah, don't mind him, Vi! He's coddin'!"

"I ain't coddin'!" protested the plump child. "There's a furrin' gent wiv 'er—bin there for oh! ever so long. I was alongside the porter's box w'en 'e come in. 'Ardbake come down to 'im in the 'all. 'It's about that red-'aired waitress o' yours,' sez 'e. . . ."

"It's not red!" exclaimed Miss Carroll, tossing her scarlet poll.

"'We 'ave a gal o' that description,' sez she. 'Well,' sez 'e, 'an' might you 'ave the obligingness,' sez 'e, 'to fetch the young person toot de suitey,' sez 'e. And then that there 'ulkin' porter fetches me a clip on the ear fer listenin' and I didn't 'ear no more. But 'Ardbake 'as 'phoned down as 'ow you've got ter go to the orfis direckly minute."

There was a distant peal of a telephone bell.

"Oh, lor!" gasped the page, "there's the ole devil again. You better cut along, Miss Carroll, my dear!"

And with a leer he darted off.

"Oh, Vi!" said Miss Carroll, clasping her hands, "whatever will he be wanting uv me?"

"P'raps it's the husband, I shouldn't wonder," observed Miss Morris, her eyes dancing with interest. "She was foreign-born, wasn't she? I'll look after your tables, dear. Mind you remember everythink he sez!"

Boulot's bland persistence had, in his day, overcome many an obstacle more formidable than the invertebrate helplessness of Miss Hardbake, the rather harassed spinster who was secretary of the Ladies' Criterion. His respectable appearance, his perfect good humour and, above all, a little touch of gallantry in his manner to which the secretary's dealings with directors, tradesmen and other West End hard faces had not accustomed her, set the lady wholly at her ease. Boulot had a wonderful knack of eliciting confidences. His manner inspired trust; his questions, adroitly put both as to subject and context, betrayed no thirst for information. "A great reporter gone wrong," his friends on the Paris press used to say of him.

He represented that, on behalf of Mr. Cranmore (whose card he produced), he wished to make certain enquiries regarding the death of Mrs. Cranmore. He had no desire to pain the bereaved husband by retailing to him the idle gossip of a ladies' club. Therefore, he had taken his courage in both hands and thus presented himself, unannounced, unIntroduced even, to the one person whose universal popularity with the members, whose shrewd common sense, his friend, Lady Harrowdean, had assured him, would guarantee his obtaining the information he sought.

The gentle voice, the ingratiating manner, above all the mention of the Countess of Harrowdean (whose acquaintance with Boulot was based on nothing more substantial than a rapid glance which that gentleman had cast into the members' list at Cranmore's that morning), completed the conquest of Miss Hardbake. In three minutes the detective had, figuratively speaking, turned her inside out.

From her he learnt that it had not been possible to discover at what hour Mrs. Cranmore had arrived at the club on the previous afternoon. She was known to have been there, however, between five and half-past. Several members had noticed her in the lounge. They had not remarked anything unusual in her manner. She had received no letters or telephone calls or any visitors. Such matters went through the hall-porter, "an ex-guardsman, a most reliable man," and he was quite positive on the subject. The only person who had observed Mrs. Cranmore to be a little flurried was the waitress who had brought her her tea. This girl had deposed that Mrs. Cranmore was quite herself when she gave her order but, on calling for the bill, seemed to be in a great hurry. She had, in fact, spoken to the waitress quite sharply.

"You surprise me, madame," remarked Boulot fingering his hat, "for Mrs. Cranmore was one of the sweetest-tempered women imaginable. . . ."

"It surprised the girl," replied Miss Hardbake. "The incident remained fresh in her mind just because it was a common saying among our girls (who, in a club like this, I may tell you, have to put up with a good deal from members) that Mrs. Cranmore was always kindness and considerateness itself. . . ."

"I wonder," said Boulot in his musing way, "what could have upset her?"

"The very question I put myself to Carroll—the waitress in question," answered the secretary. "And the girl who, for her station, is quite intelligent, could give me no satisfactory reply. And that reminds me . . . Carroll is on duty this morning. She is probably in the lounge this very minute. Perhaps you would care to see her and question her for yourself?"

Now the detective had listened with an excellent semblance of rapt attention to Miss Hardbake's long and rambling narrative, protracted by

innumerable irrelevant digressions, solely with a view to stimulating her to this very suggestion. But, discreet to the last, he merely replied:

“I fear it would be too greatly troubling madame!”

“By no means, I assure you! Oh, not at all! It would be a pleasure, I’m sure;—I may say a duty!” exclaimed Miss Hardbake, and flashed a look of devotion at M. Boulot’s expressive countenance. Forthwith she minced across to the telephone fixed to the wall and transmitted the message which, as has been seen, created so much perturbation in the heart of Miss Carroll.

When a few minutes later, bashful and trembling, the young waitress was shown into the secretary’s office, an old thought, which had often occurred to Boulot when tracking down crime, again crept into his mind. What a wide net is thrown by crime! he reflected, and what a catch do the fishers of evidence dredge up! The unknown who had planted the dagger in Mrs. Cranmore’s breast had thrown this beautiful *mondaine* into proximity with such a type as Mrs. Amschel or the chemist, Ruddick. And now the net had stretched out into the placid waters of this young girl’s life and dragged her up along with the old clothes dealer, the chemist and all the rest. He shook his grizzled head and sighed as he looked at the young girl, her freckled face suffused with blushes, nervously plucking at her dainty apron.

Boulot’s first glance was always at the eyes. So far as he was concerned, he used to say, all mankind might adopt the *yashmak*. Leave but the eyes exposed and Boulot would guarantee to see farther into a man’s soul than another who should have the whole face from which to read his riddle. Katie Carroll’s eyes satisfied him. They were honest eyes and—what was, from his point of view, even better—intelligent eyes, eyes that gave more than a hint of the quick-wittedness of the Celt.

“Mees ’Ardbake told me how you have given your evidence to the police,” he said to the girl. “It will be of assistance to them, I am sure. But there was one little question I wanted to ask you. Why do you think Mrs. Cranmore wanted to leave the club in such a hurry?”

The waitress gave him a rather scared glance.

“Indade and I don’t know, sir,” she said in an almost inaudible voice.

“Perhaps some lady came in whom she did not want to see!”

“Oh, no, sir!” affirmed Katie Carroll quite positively. “There was very few ladies at tea yisterday and ne’er a tea at all was served after five o’clock!”

“But still some one may have come in?”

“Sure, Vi’let Morris—that’s the other waitress who was on with me in the lounge—an’ I was watchin’ Mrs. Cranmore an’ ne’er a lady in the club tuk

anny notice uv her or yet she uv thim!”

“You say you were watching her?” said the detective. “Why were you watching her, *ma petite*?”

Katie Carroll cast down her eyes and wriggled.

“Ah!” she replied shyly, “she’s such a beautiful lady an’ so elegant, sir. All the girls do be watchin’ her whin she comes into the club!”

Boulot laughed.

“*Voilà bien une raison!*” he said

“I beg your pardon, sir!”

Katie Carroll’s china-blue eyes stared wide at him.

“I mean, I quite understand!” the detective hastened to explain.

“But now,” he resumed, “since you were watching Mrs. Cranmore, will you tell me exactly what she did when she came into the lounge yesterday afternoon, how she ordered her tea, how she called for her bill, and how she left the club . . . everything, just as you remember it!”

The waitress threw a frightened glance at the secretary.

“Go on, Carroll,” urged Miss Hardbake kindly.

“I . . . I didn’t see the lady come into the lounge at all,” said Katie in the curiously protesting tone which, to the Irish, is the strongest form of contradiction. “When I come up from the kitchen, where I went to see about Mrs. Robinson’s patent food, I see the lady sitting at a table by the windey. I went across to her ‘Will ye take annything, madam?’ sez I. ‘I think I’ll take some tea Katie,’ sez she—she always called me by me first name. . . .”

“The servants are addressed by their surnames as a rule,” Miss Hardbake explained. But Boulot shut her off with an imperiously lifted hand.

“‘An’ maybe a tea-cake, Katie,’ sez she. I brought her her tea and she thanked me, same as she always did. Ah! there was not many like her, the poor lady. . . .”

Miss Hardbake’s cold eye flashed a danger signal at the waitress.

“Come, come,” she said with a little acid giggle, “surely the ladies whom you serve always thank you, Carroll. . . .”

“Huh!” remarked Katie with a disingenuousness which forbade any taking of offence, “there’s some o’ thim’ll go a twelvemonth an’ ne’er a ‘thank-you’ past their lips the whole time. . . .”

Miss Hardbake looked severely down her nose. But Boulot laughed heartily.

“You serve the lady her tea and you retire, *hein*? And what did she do then?”

"She drunk her tea very quietly same as she always did. She was a great one for keeping herself to herself."

"And no one spoke to her?"

"No, sir!"

"And when she had finished her tea, what did she do?"

"She sat still in her chair and did nothin'. Seeing her idle like, I tuk her th' evenin' paper what had just come. . . ."

"What paper was that?"

"Th' *Evenin' Despatch*!"

"Well, and then?"

"Then, suddenly, she rapped on her cup. I was away across the other ind of the lounge, and whin I come to her she sez, speakin' very sharp, 'Why don't you come when I call?' she sez. 'Bring me me bill at once!' sez she. . . ."

"You were surprised, because she had never spoken like that to you before?"

"She had not, sir!"

"What was she doing when you came to her?"

"She wasn't doin' anything barrin' just starin' at the newspaper as it lay in her lap. Didn't I have to ask her, did she want her bill, before she noticed me there by her side?"

Boulot thought for a moment.

"This paper you speak of," he said. "How is it called again?"

"Th' *Evenin' Despatch*, sir!"

He turned to the secretary.

"Your evening newspapers have several editions, I believe, madame. Which edition would this one be?"

"I can tell you that," said Katie, breaking in unceremoniously. "'Tis the special. It comes at iv'ry night the same time . . . a quarter past five!"

In a cheap little note-book with a shiny black cover Boulot scribbled a note or two. Then he said to Miss Hardbake:

"I have to thank you, madame, and this young lady, too, for your great courtesy. I will not derange you further!"

He bowed to Miss Hardbake:

"Madame!"

He bowed to Katie Carroll:

"Mademoiselle!"

Outside in Bond Street the traffic squeeze of lunch-hour in the season was at its worst. A solid phalanx of motor-cars stretched to where the high buildings and the flash of the motor-'buses showed Piccadilly to lie. The pavements were thronged. More than once, as he walked slowly along, Monsieur Boulot was jostled. But, immersed in thought, he noticed nothing. Before his eyes was a mental picture of the placid and beautiful face of Carmen Cranmore staring up at him from the couch in Ruddick's cheerless parlour. Was it the face of an innocent victim? or of a sinner suddenly sent to her last account?

Her eyes, those dark and troubled eyes that so strangely haunted his memory, left his question unanswered.

CHAPTER XV

MR. MANDERTON MAKES THE FUR FLY

IN the narrow Soho street in which it stands Poteau's makes a dab of shining white amid much grime. Spotless without and within, from its two trees in their green tubs at the front door to the high desk at which the portly presence of Madame Poteau presides over the books, the little restaurant might be a fragment of workaday Paris whisked entire from one of those quiet streets that wind their tortuous way between the Opéra and the Bourse.

It was at Poteau's that Boulot elected to take his midday meal. He stood for an instant in the doorway and surveyed the six tiny tables, each with its vase of flowers, its snowy white cloth, and Madame Poteau, in black bombazine, dominating the scene from her pulpit over against the shining brass speaking-tube that led to the kitchen.

Boulot's appearance at the door brought Madame in a flutter down from her perch.

"*Tiens*, Monsieur Amédée!" she exclaimed in the rolling accents of Gascony, "back in London, I declare. My husband *will* be pleased. Tell Monsieur that Monsieur Amédée is here, Gaston, and *vite*, a bottle of the Château Yquem!"

Gaston, single acolyte above-stairs at Poteau's, with stubbly red hair cut very short above a beetling forehead, a stunted little man with broad shoulders, hurried across from the serving-table at the sound of Madame Poteau's voice. But, at the sight of Boulot, he seemed to falter. With head held down, rather like an angry bull, he shot a doubting glance at the detective from the corner of his eyes.

"*Eh bien quoi!*" cried Boulot, dropping Madame's plump hand and offering his to the waiter, "it seems to me that I know you, my friend. . . ?"

Gaston did not budge. He continued to regard the other with every manifestation of extreme distrust.

Boulot thrust out his hand again in a gesture of warm spontaneity.

"I should count it an honour," said he, "to shake the hand of a Chasseur of Colonel Driant!"

"*Mais dites!*" ejaculated Madame Poteau shrilly, hands on hips, "you were at Verdun, *grosse bête*, and never told us?"

"*Ma chère madame*," said Boulot in a voice that a sudden surge of emotion rendered strangely tender, "he was at the Bois des Caures, one of that gallant band that, with Driant, soldier and deputy, at their head, fought the Boches to the death. There was but a handful of wounded survivors. Gaston here is one!"

"Is it possible?"

Madame's large black eyes, raised upwards, searched the ceiling for an answer.

"*Vieux farceur!* To have held your tongue!"

Gaston, the picture of embarrassment and suspicion, muttered:

"One did one's service like the rest!"

"Your hand, man!" cried Boulot, and, as he grasped it, added in a fierce whisper:

"*Imbécile*, I remember nothing! The past is forgotten, wiped out at the Bois des Caures!"

On that a slow puzzled smile illuminated the waiter's seared and rugged face. As he gave the detective his hand, he remarked knowingly:

"*Sacrébleu, patron*, you still seem to know everything, just as in the old days. But"—his voice sank to a whisper—"you will say nothing to them? Since the war"—he made an expressive gesture of the hand—"baste! I've quit. I've become a bourgeois, *patron*. I work. I have my little economies too. And the life suits me. *Tiens*, I fetch Monsieur!"

And he darted down the stairs leading to the kitchen.

Such was the warmth of the welcome accorded to "Monsieur Amédée," so long the array of succulent dishes prepared in his honour by M. Poteau's own hands, that it was past three when the detective, pulling the napkin with difficulty from between his bulging neck and collar, announced positively that he must depart. A taxi took him to Scotland Yard to keep his appointment with Manderton. He was curious to see how that hard-working officer would carry out his promise to "make the fur fly."

His colleague's words came back into Boulot's mind as he was ushered into Manderton's private room. The narrow little office with its plain green-distempered walls seemed to be full of people. To judge by the atmosphere of high tension which Boulot sensed the moment he crossed the threshold the Englishman was keeping his word.

Manderton stood upright behind his flat-topped desk, solid, scowling, truculent, his big red hands behind his back. On the one side Dolores Driscoll, pale to the lips and trembling, had just sprung to her feet from her chair as though to protest, but George Cranmore, calm and watchful at her side, had

placed a restraining hand upon her arm. Opposite them Jim Cranmore with his dead-white face and weary, sunken eyes was saying hotly, as Boulot appeared:

"You'll get nothing from the girl by frightening her like this, Inspector! You've as good as accused her of lying to you. . . ."

"I must ask you not to interfere, Mr. Cranmore!" Manderton addressed him in stern level tones. "I am now concerned with Miss Driscoll alone. I am making every allowance for you, sir, but if you interrupt me again I'll have to ask you to leave the room."

He turned to Dolores again.

"You persist in this preposterous story, then, that you walked—walked, mark you, in yesterday's heat—from Sloane Crescent to Hammersmith Bridge, a matter of, I suppose, four and a half miles?"

"It's true!"

The girl's lip trembled. She spoke with a little air of defiance, but Boulot noticed that she flashed a quick look at him in which he seemed to read a mute appeal for aid.

"Then," said Manderton slowly withdrawing his right hand from behind his back, "will you kindly explain how it is that this 'bus-ticket, issued on No. 33 'bus between the hours of 3.30 and 4.15 yesterday afternoon, comes to be in your bag?"

In his right hand he held up a little blue cardboard ticket. Beneath her black satin dress the girl's bosom rose and fell quickly.

"I don't know . . ." she faltered.

"Or"—Manderton's hard, pitiless voice went on as he now took his left hand from behind his back and showed a pink ticket—"how you came by *this* 'bus-ticket, issued, on No. 9 'bus, for a journey from Earl's Court Road to Barnes between the hours of 6 and 7 p.m. yesterday? Perhaps you will deny that these tickets were in your bag, tucked in the outer fold, when you dropped it at your house this morning? Maybe you'll deny that you took the tickets at all? Come on, out with it! Did you have a No. 33 'bus set you down at Borton Street about four o'clock yesterday afternoon?"

The girl's head drooped. She put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You . . . you confuse me so," she sobbed.

"Oh no, I don't," retorted the detective. "You've set out to tell me a pack o' lies and when I prove them to be lies you start play-acting and pretending you can't remember. Would you like me to call the 'bus conductor who put you down at Borton Street? He's outside. Come, now, I put it to you you

went to the studio yesterday afternoon at four o'clock and stayed until six, when you went off to keep your appointment at Ranelagh. Is that true?"

"No, no," sobbed the girl.

A dull brick-red wave slowly mounted in Manderton's heavy face.

"I'm going to get the truth out of you," he said, "if we stay here all night. I know the truth. But you're going to tell me. I've not got to the end of my witnesses yet, Miss Driscoll. Would you be surprised to learn that you were *seen* leaving the studio at six o'clock?"

Then Jim Cranmore spoke.

"Dolores!" he said.

There was disappointment, disgust, almost horror in the way he uttered her name.

"Oh, Jim," she cried piteously, "oh, Jim, I can't explain!"

But Cranmore turned away.

"A man who works in the timber-yard at the back of the studio," Manderton went on, "deposes that he saw Quayre and a young woman come out by the gate into the lane precisely at six o'clock. He is quite positive about the time. He is a Roman Catholic and he says the Convent bell rang the Angelus as Quayre and the girl appeared. The jig's up, Miss Driscoll. You'd better tell me the truth. . . . You were at the studio?"

Listlessly the girl shrugged her shoulders, most despairing gesture of woman.

"Come on now," urged Manderton, "you went to the studio to see your lover?"

"Really, Inspector . . ." expostulated George Cranmore.

". . . as you've been often before, eh?" Manderton went on, ignoring the interruption.

At that the girl flared up.

"It's not true!" she cried, and stamped her foot. "I never went there alone before. I only ran in for a moment to see how my portrait was getting on and Mr. Quayre made me stay for some tea. . . ."

"In the bedroom, Miss Driscoll!"

Manderton's comment was thrust in deftly, dispassionately.

Dolores clasped her hands desperately together.

"Oh, it's revolting!" she cried. "Your suggestions are horrible. . . ."

"I'm only going by the facts," observed the detective.

“We were in the bedroom for the simple reason that the gas-ring is in there as Mr. Quayre has no kitchen and he . . . he likes to make his tea in the morning without getting out of bed. When we were in the studio, looking at my picture, the . . . the kettle boiled over and we both rushed into the bedroom to take it off. . . .”

She stopped and regarded the stern face of the detective with indignant, tearful eyes.

“And then?” the hard incisive voice persisted.

“I shall tell you no more!” retorted the girl and dabbed at her eyes with her little handkerchief.

“Then”—Boulot’s gentle voice broke in—since his entry he had remained standing by the door, so silent a witness of the scene that they turned to him in surprise as he spoke—“then, as you both stand in the bedroom, you hear something in the studio. Footsteps, a voice? Who knows? ‘What a position!’ or something like that, says Monsieur Quayre, ‘for you to be found in my bedroom. *Vite!*’ he says, ‘you must go. You must not stay here. And since you cannot go by the door, you must leave by the window.’ And *pan!* he jumps out and helps you down. Ah! you see well, young lady, one knows the truth. . . .”

Dolores Driscoll was gazing at him with eyes large with terror, her lips parted. Manderton bent over and punched a bell on the desk.

“. . . the whole truth,” continued Boulot. “Monsieur Quayre escorts you through the garden and brings you out in the little lane. You stand and talk a little with him there. Then you remember your appointment, you go off to your polo . . . and he goes back!”

“No!” the girl cried out suddenly, flinging up a hand as though to ward off some hideous apparition, “no, no! He did not go back! It’s not true! It’s not true!”

There was a stir at the door. Julian Quayre appeared, a plain clothes man at his side. His pleasantly regular features were stern and set. His straight eyebrows puckered in a puzzled frown as he caught sight of Dolores.

But when she saw him the girl dropped back in her chair and covered her face with her hands.

“My God!” she sobbed, “what have I said? What have I said?”

CHAPTER XVI

THE QUESTION

MANDERTON'S harsh voice cut roughly across the girl's sobs. "Mr. Quayre," he said, "Miss Driscoll has now admitted that she spent the hours between four and six o'clock yesterday afternoon at your studio. What have you to say to that?"

The detective fixed the artist with a severe eye. His attitude of expectancy seemed to communicate itself to the little group which faced the desk. Dolores' sobs broke off short as, with a kind of eager desperation, she raised her head and looked at Julian Quayre. Even Jim Cranmore roused himself from his cold, silent misery to hear what the young man might reply.

They saw his colour come and go and watched the doubt peer uncertainly from his eyes. Behind Manderton's desk hung a crude steel engraving of some eminent police official of the past, a blank and banal mid-Victorian portrait in mutton-chop whiskers and mechanic's collar. For an instant Quayre's gaze rested on the lineaments of Mr. Jas. Simpkins, C.B., and, as it passed thence to the faces of Manderton, of Boulton, of the stolid plain clothes men at his side, it flashed into his mind that these expressionless features were the countenance of the law, stern, pitiless, unchanging, the Gorgon's head that turns men to stone.

A voice that he scarcely recognised as his own said:

"Nothing! I have nothing to say!"

Very deliberately Manderton eased his collar with a large hand.

"You realise, of course, that your position is exceedingly serious? In your own interest, Mr. Quayre, I must earnestly advise you to tell me what you know of this murder. . . ."

Wearily the young man passed his hand across his forehead.

"I . . . I must think!" he muttered. "This has been such a shock! You confuse me! . . ."

Manderton beckoned to George Cranmore.

"Take your brother and Miss Driscoll away now," he enjoined in a low voice. "And . . . pst! . . . look after your brother. He's had a rough passage. Don't leave him alone in that house. . . ."

Docilely Jim Cranmore followed his brother out. He went like a blind man, a tragic, lonely figure. As Dolores came in front of Quayre she put forth

her two little hands impulsively and clasped the big brown hand he gave her. She said nothing and it was a matter of a second; but there was confidence, encouragement, love in that simple gesture charmingly done. The door closed behind them and they were gone.

“My God!” groaned Quayre and dropped into a chair, his face in his hands.

With a gesture Manderton dismissed the two plain clothes men. Now Boulot crossed to the desk and whispered in his colleague’s ear.

“Remember what I told you,” he said. “Give him, please, my question and you will see that he will speak. Read it first yourself, if you will. It will harm nothing. But give it to him now. It is the psychological moment!”

Reluctantly Manderton withdrew from his inner breast pocket the envelope which Boulot had given him at Sloane Crescent that morning. He broke the seal and pulled out the half-sheet of glazed notepaper which the envelope contained. He scanned it, his lips pursed up disdainfully. For a second or two he twisted the note round in his fingers, looking doubtfully at Boulot the while. Then he walked round the desk and, laying a hand on Quayre’s shoulder, held out the scrap of paper to him.

The young man raised his head. In a dazed way he took the note from the detective. He seemed to have difficulty in collecting his thoughts for he stared at the writing for fully a minute before his face gave any indication that he had grasped its purport. Presently he looked up, his eyes full of wonder. Silently he turned his gaze from Manderton to Boulot.

“You knew . . . all the time?” he faltered.

“Never you mind what we know, Mr. Quayre,” said Mr. Manderton briskly. “We want *you* to tell us what *you* know! . . .”

Quayre stood up and gazed out of the window.

“If I were only sure what I ought to do!” he said wistfully. “Directly you told me about this murder I knew that I could give no account of my actions yesterday afternoon without seriously involving the good name of Miss Driscoll, though, the Lord knows, her visit to my studio was perfectly harmless and nothing to be ashamed of. We have been meeting outside ever since the Cranmores forbade me to come to their house, but yesterday was the first time Dolores—Miss Driscoll—ever came to my studio alone. It was I who persuaded her to come. She was unwilling at first for fear her people should hear about it. I was painting her portrait from that photograph I showed you and I was so anxious to have just one sitting from life. . . .”

He broke off. His growing nervousness was very apparent. Raspingly, Mr. Manderton cleared his throat.

"I may remark, Mr. Quayre," he said, "that you have told us as yet nothing essential that we did not know already. Now listen to me! How did Mrs. Cranmore come to visit your studio?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," the artist protested.

"Did she come at your invitation?"

"Oh, no!"

"To meet her sister?"

"I don't think so. She cannot possibly have known that Dolores—Miss Driscol—was coming to me. . . ."

His reluctance to speak was very marked. It irritated Mr. Manderton.

"Now look here, Mr. Quayre," he said. "I don't propose to drag the truth out of you piece-meal. You are going to give me right here and now a clear and concise account of everything that took place in your studio yesterday afternoon. Miss Driscol did her damndest to shield you, but I very quickly busted that up. Come on now, I'm waiting. . . ."

Julian Quayre's fair face flushed hotly.

"I'm perfectly willing to speak," he replied, "especially as this question you have put to me in writing shows me that you know at least one essential fact. But what happened in my studio yesterday afternoon was so bewildering, so . . . so incredible that I can scarcely expect you to believe it. I couldn't tell you while Cranmore was here—I hadn't the courage. For what I have to say will surely break his heart if it isn't broken already. . . ."

"You know we went into the inner room, my bedroom, to make the tea, Miss Driscol and I. I was just taking the kettle off the gas-ring when I heard a footstep in the studio. When I'm at home I usually leave the front door unlatched so that my friends can walk in as they please and I must have forgotten to put the hasp down on the lock on this occasion.

"My first thought was for Miss Driscol. There she was with me in my bedroom! Obviously she could not be discovered there. So I threw up the bedroom window and hustled her out. . . ."

"*Pardon!*" said Boulot, interrupting, with uplifted finger. "You climbed out first and caught her in your arms, *hein?*"

"Yes!" replied Quayre. "She was rather afraid of the jump. . . ."

Boulot turned to Manderton.

"It was written in the flower bed," he explained apologetically.

"I escorted her through the garden," Quayre continued, "and left her at the gate. She went off to catch her 'bus to Ranelagh whilst I returned to the studio. . . ."

“Why?”

This time the question came from Manderton, short and sharp.

The young man stammered a little.

“I . . . I . . . I . . . don’t know exactly. I think I wanted to know who it was . . . in the studio. In case anybody suspected that there had been somebody in the inner room with me. . . .”

“I see!” remarked Manderton drily. “Go on!”

“I climbed back through the window and stepped softly to the bedroom door, which stood ajar. A curtain hangs in front of the bedroom door to keep out the draught from the studio in the winter. Very gently I drew it to one side and peered out. I saw Mrs. Cranmore there . . . with a man!”

He stopped, nervously twisting his fingers together.

“I only had a glimpse of them. Then I turned and bolted by the way I had come. . . .”

“Why?”

Again came Manderton’s crisp interrogative.

“Because,” said the artist in a low voice, “the man had his arms about her. . . .”

“I don’t see why that should put you to flight,” remarked Mr. Manderton.

Quayre shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t believe I can make you understand,” he said. “Carmen Cranmore always seemed like a saint to me. There was an air of . . . of unearthly purity about her, and to see her in the arms of another man simply staggered me . . . swept me off my feet. I fled from the studio, aghast. It was the . . . the hypocrisy of it that horrified me most, I think. I walked about for hours, torturing my brain to discover why Mrs. Cranmore, who had shunned me ever since I came back to London after the war, should have given her lover a rendezvous in my studio, haunted by the fear of what would happen when Cranmore, who idolised his wife, found out her treachery. . . .”

“Just wait a minute, Mr. Quayre!” Manderton broke in. “This man whom, you say, you saw with his arms round Mrs. Cranmore—do you know him?”

Quayre nodded emphatically. His upper lip was trembling. It was as though he dared not trust himself to speak.

“Who is he?”

“His name is Ramon. He was a friend of Mrs. Cranmore’s in New York. . . .”

“An American, *hein*?”

Boulot’s voice rang out sharp as a pistol-shot.

“He lived in New York but I think he was a South American. Anyway he spoke Spanish very well. He was an art student. I used to meet him at Mrs. Cranmore’s apartment on East 59th Street. . . .”

“Ramon, if I am not mistaken,” put in Manderton, “is a Christian name. What is this man’s surname?”

“I don’t know!” Quayre confessed.

Mr. Manderton puckered his forehead into a frown.

“You say you met him frequently at Mrs. Cranmore’s in New York; you say he was an art student like yourself; yet you cannot tell us his surname. That seems rather curious, doesn’t it, Mr. Quayre?”

“In that set in the old days we lived in an atmosphere of Christian names and nicknames, Inspector. I’ve spent many an evening with Ramon but, as I say, I don’t even know what his full name is. For all I know Ramon may only be a nickname. . . .”

“What were they saying to one another?”

“As far as I know nothing. I did not hear either of them say anything.”

“Your story is, then,” said Mr. Manderton, “that you left Mrs. Cranmore and the man Ramon alone in your studio and rushed away. You were, therefore, absent when the murder was committed. Am I correct? Good. Have you any evidence to show that you left the studio at . . . let’s see, what time would it be? You showed the girl out at 6 . . . say 6.5? No? Or any evidence to show that you were away from the studio until what time?”

“I have no alibi to produce,” rejoined Quayre. “I walked about aimlessly until nearly twelve. Then I looked in on a friend of mine who has a studio with another man in Tite Street, Chelsea. We made coffee and sat up talking all night. I did not return to the studio until I walked in on you shortly after six o’clock this morning. . . .”

Manderton nodded significantly and studied the toes of his boots.

“This man, Ramon, now,” said he. “Can you give me a description of him?”

“He is a tall man,” replied Quayre, “with very thick dark hair which I noticed yesterday is streaked with grey. He used to be clean-shaven. I couldn’t see his face yesterday, as he had his back to me. . . .”

“Is that all the description you can furnish?”

“It is . . . it is so long since I saw him. I seem to remember that he was handsome in an aquiline way with dark eyes. . . .”

“How long has he been in London?”

“I didn’t know he was in London. I haven’t seen him since 1914.”

“What was he wearing?”

“I . . . I’m afraid I didn’t notice!”

Mr. Manderton laid his two hands flat on the desk before him.

“Have you anything further to tell me?” he asked. “No? Then let me just recapitulate your statement for you, Mr. Quayre. Miss Driscoll and you were in your bedroom when you were interrupted by a step in the studio. You helped Miss Driscoll to escape by the window and you yourself returned to your studio to find Mrs. Cranmore in the arms of a man called Ramon, whom you and she had known in New York. You don’t know his surname, you can only positively say that he is tall with dark hair streaked with grey and you don’t know what he was wearing. You heard no words pass between the couple, and you left the studio before the murder was committed though you can adduce no testimony in support of this statement. Is that correct? You realise, of course, the natural inference to be made from your statement?”

Quayre looked at him curiously.

“How do you mean?”

“Why, that this mysterious individual, Ramon, is the murderer of Mrs. Cranmore!”

He pushed the bell on his desk. The two plain clothes men who had brought in Quayre reappeared. Mr. Manderton called one over and gave him a whispered instruction. The second man, who was Manderton’s janissary, Straw Hat, stooped and picked up a half-sheet of blue-glazed notepaper which lay on the floor. On it was written a single sentence, thus:

“Who was the tall American who visited your studio yesterday afternoon?”

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT MONSIEUR BOULOT FOUND ON THE LANDING

WITH a crash Mr. Manderton shut the drawer of his desk and locked it. The slam set M. Boulot's nerves a-tingling. Manderton himself appeared to be quite impervious to noise. He moved through life, like an elephant fraying a passage through the jungle, as regardless of the tumult as of the havoc of his passage. He bent down now and knocked his pipe out on the empty coal-box, a loud and insistent tattoo which sent quivers of anguish, one for each tap, undulating through the Frenchman's more highly organised nervous system.

"Damned thin! . . ." commented Mr. Manderton, sitting bolt upright in his chair, his pipe in his mouth while his right hand fumbled in his pocket for his tobacco-pouch, "damned thin! That's what I call it! . . ."

"It is of the young man's declarations that you speak?" asked Boulot.

"Aye. His story's not even convincing. Why! You could well-nigh see him making it up as he went along. 'A tall South American called Ramon,' indeed! D'you know who this mysterious stranger puts me in mind of, friend Boulot? Why, 'the man with the red beard' in the Steinheil case. . . ."

The French mentality delights in an apt allusion. The sunshine flashed back into Boulot's bright blue eyes at his colleague's neat reference to the most celebrated of the many fictitious personages in the great murder mystery.

"*Bigre!* As shadowy as all that, you would say?"

With a kind of grinding roar which in novels, I believe, is commonly represented by the ejaculation "Heigh-ho!" Mr. Manderton gaped vastly and stretched himself.

"I suppose I'll have to demolish it!" he observed. "If only chaps would be sensible and recognise when they're in the net, what a lot of trouble they'd save the police!"

"You would dismiss this man Ramon altogether from the case, then?"

"Certainly. I don't think there's much doubt about what really happened. Mrs. Cranmore followed her sister to the studio, Quayre ran the girl out . . . I am prepared to accept that part of his story . . . and returned to face Mrs. C. There was a violent scene, probably hinging on their relations in the past, Quayre sees red, pursues her through the studio into the vestibule and stabs her. She staggers away out of the front door and he escapes by the back and

wanders about all night in an agony of remorse! It's all fairly simple, really. . . ."

"But is it?" queried the Frenchman. "In our profession, my Manderton, psychology must surely count for something. Are you going to tell me that this young man, who looks healthy, vigorous and well-balanced, is likely, on the facts you are able to adduce, to have committed a shocking murder of this description? Nothing, I grant you, is more misleading than the human psychology. But before I credit a rather modest, apparently honest young man with this deed of blood I ask you for a plausible motive. . . ."

Manderton shrugged his shoulders.

"My friend," Boulot resumed, "I am what? fifteen, twenty years your senior. In this class of *affaire* I have had much experience; for France, as you know, is the home of the *crime passionnel*. When I saw that this rather charming young man would not speak, I suspected that he was shielding a woman—when they are as young as this, *mon cher*, chivalry almost always forestalls self-interest—but when I realised that the girl was involving herself in a mesh-work of lies, I knew it. I began to look for traces of a third party. And I found them.

"Before this studio of Monsieur Quayre they have dug up the pavement. Here are two fields of information, first, a patch of damp mortar lying right across the approach to the steps of the studio entrance, and second, before it, between the mortar and the kerb, a stretch of moist brown clay, the bed of the pavement flagstones. One who lived in the studio, like Quayre, would know of the existence of this patch of mortar right in his path and would avoid it. Therefore, his shoes, which I took occasion to examine when you were interrogating him in the studio, showed no traces of it.

"But both Mrs. Cranmore and her sister bore signs of the mortar on the heels of their shoes. It was the mark on Mrs. Cranmore's right heel which made me ask your man whether they were building in the road where she met her death. Similar evidence led me to conclude that Miss Driscoll had visited the studio.

"On the clay I found other traces, a footmark that might be Quayre's, another one, much larger, the inner part of the boot cut quite straight as American boots are made—the footprint of an American, a big man. *Attendez!* You are going to say that this is a public thoroughfare and that any passer-by might have left his mark. . . ."

From his jacket pocket he drew an envelope and from it carefully shook out four cigarette ends.

"I found these in the studio," he said, "in a little brass bowl on the colour-stand. . . ."

He extended his open palm to Manderton. His colleague turned the stubs over with his finger. Three had been smoked down beyond the lettering. The fourth bore the printed word "GAZELLE."

"Have you ever visited the United States, *mon cher*?"

"No," rejoined Manderton, stifling a yawn, "I can't say I have! . . ."

"Millions of these cigarettes are smoked in the States yearly," said Boulot. "They are the popular brand *par excellence*. Of their quality I know nothing, but from the standpoint of ubiquitousness they may be compared with Maryland in France or Gold Flake *chez vous*. And, note well what I say. They cannot be bought in Europe.

"A few months ago I was asked by a French friend, who had become used to this cigarette when he was with our war mission in America, to try and procure him some, and this was the answer I received from the Ministry of Commerce. What is the deduction then, the justifiable deduction, from these indications of the presence at the studio of someone who wore large American-made boots and smoked a brand of cigarettes obtainable only in America? That an American visited the studio yesterday afternoon! You see the basis of my written question to Quayre? What if this American were the man Ramon?"

"Ramon?" cried Manderton. "Rot! There's no such person. Do you mean to say you don't realise that it was your infernal question, which I should never have allowed you to put to Quayre at all, that gave him the idea of inventing this rigmarole about the mysterious visitor? My old friend, I stretched a point to oblige you there, and it is my invariable experience that in our work one can never stretch a point without causing a lot of trouble. . . ."

"But the print of the American boot?"

"Bah? Half London wears American-made boots. I wear 'em myself!"

"The cigarette ends?"

"Quayre's! He used to live in America. What is more likely than that he brought back a supply with him? He may have them sent to him for all we know. . . ."

"*Mon cher*," remarked Boulot with quiet dignity. "You are difficult to convince. If I insist it is not to establish my point but only to prevent you from committing an injustice. I have not told you all. There are other indications. . . ."

"Out with them!" exclaimed Manderton jovially. "Let's have the lot and get it over. . . ."

"In that bed of clay, pointing towards the house, there is a woman's footmark, the print of a small shoe with what is now termed, I believe, 'a pin-point.' And, caught up in the brooch in Mrs. Cranmore's corsage, I found this. . . ."

He thrust finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket. From a fold of cotton-wool he drew a long reddish-gold hair.

". . . a woman's hair! What do you make of it now?"

Manderton shook his head and laughed.

"Of footprints in the public street . . . nothing at all! As to that strand of hair, you may not be aware that the last person known to have seen Mrs. Cranmore alive was the *red-haired* waitress who served her with tea at her club. . . ."

"But on the landing was a fragment of dried mortar . . . as though it had been brought in on a shoe. . . ."

Manderton grunted impatiently.

"Quayre, no doubt! He may have heard a sound in the street and dashed upstairs from the hall out of sight. He knew the upper studio was untenanted. . . ."

"His shoes showed nothing of the kind. . . ."

"He had been out for hours walking when you saw him at the studio. . . ."

"On the landing I picked up . . . this!"

Boulot opened his hand. On the palm lay a thin silver chain with a pendant, a little pear-shaped charm of blue enamel, backed with silver, in the centre a crude representation of a human eye.

"You know what that is?"

Manderton shook his head. But there was a quickening of interest in his manner. Here was something concrete which he could understand.

"It is a charm against the evil eye. The women in Southern Italy wear them and give them to their children. One sees many in Naples. . . ."

Manderton took the charm from him and regarded it casually.

"Quite pretty!" he commented, and handed it back.

"Don't you want to keep it?" asked Boulot, balancing chain and pendant on his palm.

Manderton shook his head and jingled his keys in his pocket.

"It has no bearing on the case," he observed "Quayre's our man, you know, Boulot!"

The Frenchman humped his shoulders expressively, picked up his hat and held out his hand.

“You are very sure of yourself!” he said.

“So sure,” retorted Manderton, “that I’m going off now to charge Julian Quayre with the murder of Carmen Cranmore!”

CHAPTER XVIII

“RAMON”

SCOTLAND YARD resembles the Paris Prefecture of Police in that it is not lavish of luxury in the housing of its officials. Its clean stone passages and many windows, however, contrast favourably with the squalid corridors and dark little rooms of the gloomy building on the Quai des Orfèvres. So thought M. Boulot, at any rate, as having taken his leave of Mr. Manderton, he made for the big staircase leading to the street.

At the foot of the steps, where the uniform constable stands, a young man stopped him. He was a trim, neatly dressed youth who wore a grey felt hat. Something in his alert face and pleasant smile was vaguely familiar to the detective.

“I’m March of *The Planet*,” the young man explained affably. “I met you last night. But you were probably much too busy to notice me. . . .”

In Paris relations between police and press are very close and amicable. There was, too, something which attracted M. Boulot about the young reporter with his eager air and quick, almost explosive manner.

“I remember,” said Boulot, and gave him two fingers. “Well, and what is the news?”

“Oh, Lord!” groaned the reporter. “Fancy you asking me that! Manderton is too busy to see me, he says. And I wouldn’t mind betting that you’ve come straight from him!”

“I never bet!” replied the detective, with a twinkle in his wicked old eye.

“It’s been a perfectly blank day,” complained March. “We had a good run this morning and that’s spoiled ’em. They’re clamouring for news. And there is no news . . . at least not as far as I have been able to find out. I’m properly up against it unless you can tell me something. . . .”

“*Jeune homme*,” said Boulot, poking the reporter in the chest with an admonitory finger, “never be discouraged. When, like you, I was the youngest of my *métier*, do you know what I would tell myself when I came up against a blank wall? ‘*Du courage, mon vieux*,’ I would say, ‘now is the time to make a success!’”

Talking they had strolled out on the Embankment where trams and taxis whizzed by incessantly. The dust-stained leaves of the plane trees stirred gently in the air currents of the traffic and the first glow of sunset mixed a touch of red in the yellow Thames flood. The air was sultry and March

diffidently suggested a drink at his club which, he explained, was only a few minutes' walk from where they stood chatting. This arrangement, he added, would enable him to ring up the office and find out if there were any fresh development in the Cranmore case. Boulot accepted the proposal genially.

Arrived at the club they mounted to the smoke-room on the first floor where March installed his guest in a leather arm-chair by the window and, having ordered a brace of vermouths, departed to the telephone. Boulot, from his comfortable seat, let his eyes rove out dreamily across the Thames. In Paris he was wont to tell his friends that one of the compensations of "*la ville brumeuse*" was the unparalleled panorama now unrolled at his feet, the view of the world-famous sweep of river from where the ball of St. Paul's gleams golden through the haze to the wide bend of the Thames at Charing Cross.

But to-day the Parisian did not notice the view. His gaze rested broodingly, almost menacingly, on the ragged skyline of the Surrey bank, on the sharp silhouette of warehouse, wharf and factory mellowed by the golden light of evening. High above the city he seemed to read a name inscribed in the sky . . . "Ramon."

He started from his reverie to find March back at his side.

"There's nothing fresh," the reporter remarked. "I've got two columns to write, too. If I can't get facts, it will have to be theories. Monsieur, your health!"

They sipped their vermouth in silence. Then Boulot asked the reporter what people were saying about the murder.

"Everybody seems to think it's a true bill against this artist chap," March replied. "Only it's difficult to see what motive he had. . . ."

"*Voilà!*" exclaimed Boulot triumphantly. "You have said it. *Voyons un peu!* Manderton, he cannot give you the motive: I, too, am at a loss. Our friend has his theory; you also, doubtless, have formed an opinion. I, perhaps, have my view. But of evidence of any motive . . . *pouf!* Not that!"

He clicked his thumbnail on his hard white teeth in the characteristic continental gesture significant of finality.

The smoke-room was very quiet. A little breeze stole in from the river through the tall windows, bearing with it the softened note of the Embankment traffic. An old man in a big black wideawake hat pulled forward over his white whiskers dozed in a chair and at the dining-tables set at the far end of the room a couple of actors were snatching an early dinner. When the door swung open there drifted into the reposeful room the sound of talking and of laughter from the adjacent bar.

Meditatively Boulot sipped his vermouth.

“What have we to do therefore?” he said, resuming his argument. “Evidently to establish, if possible, what drew this *malheureuse* into the—how do you say? the *rayon*—the region of the crime. Her husband, her friends, her servants, know nothing; her correspondence holds no secrets. Always I come back to. . . .”

He checked and looked at March.

“*À propos*,” he remarked, as though struck with a sudden idea, “you read the newspapers, Monsieur, *hein*?”

“Do I—hell!” the young man retorted with much feeling. “Only about fifteen or twenty a day!”

“Including the *Evening Despatch*?”

“Of course!”

The old Frenchman drew a folded newspaper out of his side pocket.

“See!” said he, and spread it out on his knee. “Last night’s special edition of the *Evening Despatch*! Oblige me by running your trained eye of the journalist over this newspaper and tell me whether you find in it anything . . . *anything* . . . no matter of what trifling interest, which might account for the strange decision of this elegant Madame Cranmore to visit the poor quarter of the city where she met her death. . . .”

“Is it a catch?” asked March, picking up the paper.

“*Pardon*?”

“Is it a trick? Are you playing a game with me?”

“*Moi? Mais jamais de la vie!* It is just a little experiment, a test, *hein*? of your ability as a crime specialist! . . .”

March lit a cigarette, then paused, his eyes screwed up to escape the tobacco smoke, the paper held in his two hands.

“If you’ve been through it already,” he remarked with his bright smile, “as, of course, you have, and found nothing, how do you expect me to do any better? However. . . .”

He began to run his eye methodically down the front page, the skilled eye of the newsman that will pick an inch of fresh news out of forty columns of reading matter as unfailingly as that marvellous counting machine of the United States Treasury will pounce on a false coin from among thousands of pieces of money poured into it. Boulot rolled himself a cigarette, sipped his vermouth and waited. The pursuit of crime as a profession teaches one to wait. . . .

Presently March put down the paper and removed his cigarette from his mouth.

"As far as I can see there is nothing here which has the slightest bearing on Mrs. Cranmore or anybody else in the case. There is one small item, here at the bottom of page three, which might conceivably have interested Mrs. Cranmore, as she came from New York. That is the arrival of the *Gigantic*. . . ."

Boulot, who had lifted his glass to his lips, put it down untasted.

"*Grand Dieu!* . . ." he exclaimed impressively. Then he added quickly:

"You mean the Atlantic liner, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Quite right! Here you are: 'The White Star liner *Gigantic*, with passengers and mails from New York, docked at Liverpool at eleven o'clock this morning.' This is yesterday's paper," the young man pointed out, "so that means yesterday morning. . . ."

The detective had risen to his feet.

"Where are the offices of the shipping company?"

His whole manner had changed. There was nothing about him now of the pensioned palfrey to which he was fond of comparing himself in his retirement. Rather was he the old war-horse which has caught the blare of the "attack" flung to the breeze.

"In Cockspur Street," answered March, and glanced at his watch. "But you're too late. They close at six!"

"*Zut!*" cried Boulot. "And have you, a journalist, no way to batter down doors that close at six? Where can I see the passenger list of the *Gigantic*, *mon petit*? *Voyons, dépêchez-vous!* . . ."

"They might have one at the office. . . ."

"*C'est ça!* You will telephone to your journal, *hein?* and they will send it to the club by messenger? And I must send a cable. Where is there an office? May I write it here? And a boy will take it? But, *mille tonnerres*, what are you waiting for? To the telephone, young man, and send me, quick, a messenger for my cable. . . ."

The words poured from him in a torrent, he gesticulated with his hands, his shoulders, with the whole of his fat, frog-like body, so it seemed to March, and all the time there flickered in his bright blue eyes and about the mobile mouth a little smile of quiet triumph. His example was intoxicating; the reporter felt his blood leap to the thrill of the chase and, leaving his guest at a writing-table, he made a bolt for the telephone box in the hall.

The Planet promised to send up the passenger list and a page departed for the cable-office in Trafalgar Square with Boulot's message. The detective had relapsed into a moody silence, puffing stolidly at his cigarette while his eyes searched the ceiling and his fingers drummed on the arms of his chair. The

club was beginning to fill up for dinner. But Boulot seemed aware of nothing and he ignored March's careful feelers for information as to what this prodigious outburst of energy portended.

At length a waiter appeared with a salver on which lay a long blue envelope.

"Your passenger list," said March, breaking the flap.

On that Boulot awoke from his brown study and fairly snatched the glazed paper booklet from his host. Feverishly he fluttered the leaves, his stub forefinger running down the closely printed columns of names. Presently, he laid the passenger list down on the low table at his side and, with his elbow propped up on the chair, dropped his chin on his hand.

"It's not there, the name you wanted?" queried March, picking up the list.

"No!"

"You know," the reporter explained, "the fact that a name does not appear does not necessarily mean that the passenger did not travel. . . ."

"Ah!"

Boulot turned swiftly to the speaker.

"It sometimes happens that a passenger joins the ship too late to be included in the list which is prepared by the New York office on the eastward voyage. Or sometimes a man specifically requests that his name should not be printed. By the way, what is the name you are looking for?"

March had the name in Fleet Street of being a first-class reporter. Never had he more completely justified his reputation than in the restraint he had laid upon his tongue in regard to the leading question which he had been itching to put from the moment that the detective had betrayed such uncommon interest in the *Gigantic's* arrival. While Manderton, official and unbending, had a wide streak of vanity which sometimes yielded to treatment, Boulot, March realised, was an unaffected and extremely astute person who might hardly be cajoled into giving anything away.

But March had been able to make himself useful to the detective and now his direct question was an offer of alliance.

Boulot mustered the questioner with keen eyes.

"I should be interested to know whether a South American gentleman, known as Monsieur Ramon, was a passenger by the *Gigantic*. . . ."

"What was the name?"

"Ramon!" said Boulot.

There was that in his manner which indicated that this was the limit of his expansiveness.

“But”—March’s face wore a puzzled expression—“I have heard that name quite lately! Either yesterday or to-day. . . . It’s funny! Did I read it somewhere? . . .”

The name seemed to stand out in print before his eyes. It brought into his mind . . . why, he could not say . . . the reporters’ room at *The Planet*, the long, low room with its green-shaded lights and hanging clouds of tobacco smoke, the clicking typewriters, the clamorous telephone bells, the drone of dictation and the News Editor, impervious to the din, at his big desk in the centre.

“Excuse me a second! . . .”

A burly, florid man with a thick thatch of sandy hair had come into the room and stood at the door, as a man does when he enters his club, surveying the company with here a nod of the head, there a wave of the hand. To him March went straight and after a minute or two of conversation, brought him over to where the Frenchman sat, finger-tips joined, eyes roaming out across the twinkling lights of Thames-bank.

“M. Boulot,” said March, “let me introduce our News Editor, Mr. Arthur Thornbury. He will be able to tell you what I could not remember about your friend, Monsieur Ramon. . . .”

Boulot hauled his fifteen stone up out of his chair and shook hands with that little touch of ceremonial stiffness which republican France has conserved in face of the devastating decay of manners in Europe.

“I don’t know whether it’s your friend,” said Thornbury. “One of the evening papers yesterday had a par. saying that a Mr. Ramon de la Bandeira, a first-class passenger by the *Gigantic*, had been in a taxi-smash on his way from Euston! . . .”

“Ah! And was he injured, this Monsieur Ramon de la Bandeira?”

“No. It was quite a small thing. His cab ran into a Ford delivery van. The Ford driver was injured and the front of the taxi was smashed in. The passenger transferred his luggage to another taxi and was driven to his hotel. I remember the accident because no other paper had it and I asked March, who does our police news, to find out about it. . . .”

“And did you discover anything further?” Boulot asked March.

“I didn’t enquire! This murder came along and I dropped everything else for it. . . .”

Boulot drew deeply on his cigarette and blew the smoke out slowly through his nostrils.

“What newspaper had this news?”

“*Evenin’ Despatch!*”

“What edition?”

“The special!”

“I think you must be mistaken,” said Boulot, picking up the newspaper which March had been studying, “unless I have been misinformed. . . .”

“There’s nothing about Ramon What’s-his-name in this edition, Arthur!” March put in.

Thornbury scanned Boulot’s copy of the paper.

“That’s funny!” he remarked. “It’s certainly not here. And yet I feel sure I read it in their special edition. Here, wait a minute, there’s Hopkins. He’s on the *Despatch* . . . let’s ask him. . . .”

He beckoned to a quiet-looking man in a blue suit and horn-rimmed spectacles who was talking in a group by the window.

“Where did you print that story you had in yesterday’s paper about a taxi-smash at Euston?” Thornbury asked him.

“D’you mean that story about a passenger from the *Gigantic*? In the special edition, old man, as far as I remember!”

“But here’s your special edition of last night,” said March. “And it’s not here!”

Hopkins peered down through his glasses at the newspaper.

“No,” he answered. “I remember now. A taxi-driver rang up with the news while the special edition was being printed. We stopped the machines and ‘fudged’ it. It was only in part of the edition!”

Boulot’s remarkable grasp of the English language did not comprise within its scope the slang of Fleet Street. March had to explain to him the arcana of the “Stop Press” which Fleet Street calls “the fudge.”

“Then this news was printed in some copies of the special edition but not in others?” Boulot asked.

“Quite correct,” rejoined Hopkins. “And if you’re worrying about your friend, he’s all right. We enquired at his hotel last night. . . .”

“Where is he staying?”

“At the Niniveh!”

The detective rose briskly to his feet. They pressed him to stay and have a chop with them, but he declined. March accompanied him to the door of the club.

“If you have any news about this Cranmore case,” said March as they shook hands, “you will let me know? After all, I’m a newspaperman, you understand!”

Boulot’s old face wrinkled up into a kindly smile.

“For a journalist you are the model of discretion,” he remarked. “Be patient with me to-day and ask me nothing. I shall not forget you. Tomorrow, or may be, the day after, I give you a *bonne bouche*—how do you say?”

“A scoop?”

“*C’est ça!* But till then”—he laid a finger on his lips—“discretion!”

The night was hot and oppressive. There was an ominous stillness in the air which seemed to presage a storm. Once outside the club, Boulot forgot March and his newspaper colleagues, forgot Manderton and Quayre and Dolores and all the figures who had passed across the screen of his mind that day. His thoughts centred uniquely round the murdered woman. What had the waitress at the club said?

“She wasn’t doing anything but just staring at the newspaper as it lay in her lap . . .”—the newspaper that told her that “Ramon” was in London.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SHADOW DEEPENS

LETTICE HARBURY, the Cranmores' sister, had, in her own phrase, become "rural by marriage." The mother of five strapping sons, she lived in a wholly masculine atmosphere in the Hampshire fastness where her husband was throwing himself with renewed zest into the breeding of Berkshire boars, a pursuit from which the exigencies of the Great War had temporarily severed him.

While no one would have questioned Mrs. Harbury's eminent fitness to manage a household of men, her choice as companion for a high-spirited girl like Dolores was more open to criticism. For Lettice had left the safe haven of forty far behind and was standing well out for the nebulous horizon of the fifties, and to her the post-war *jeune fille* was a horrifying enigma. Her craving after excitement, her insistence on her freedom, her slang, her latchkey, her cigarettes, bewildered this vigorous matron who, nevertheless, herself, when bishop sleeves were young, had adorned a set which some circles in Belgravia had frowned upon as "fast."

Her acquaintance with Dolores had never been very close. This product of Cosmopolis, with her American upbringing, her French education and her English finish, her flawless *chic*, her little air of patronage (the armour of extreme youthfulness oftener than the caparison of conceit), puzzled Lettice Harbury's late Victorian mind.

When she saw the mood in which George Cranmore brought Dolores back from Scotland Yard, rebellious, almost hysterical, Lettice Harbury's heart sank within her.

Tea had been served in the morning-room. But Dolores would touch nothing. She sank down on poor Carmen's orange couch, her back to the room.

"You'll want to mother her a bit, Lettie, old girl," George whispered to his sister. "She's got herself into a proper mess with the police. They handled her rather roughly at the Yard just now. . . ."

But Dolores refused to be mothered. One thing the young generation learnt in the war was to shoulder each his own burden.

"Please leave me alone for a bit, Aunt Lettie," she pleaded:—"Aunt" was the courtesy title which Dolores' youth accorded to Lettice Harbury's grey hairs.

"But, my dear child," Mrs. Harbury protested, "no one's going to worry you. I know what a terrible shock this affair has been. I really think it would be best for you to go to bed and have a good sleep. . . ."

Dolores laughed bitterly.

"Sleep?" she said. "Do you think I can sleep with poor Carmen lying dead and all this ghastly uncertainty about her death? If you had seen the way Jim looked at me! . . ."

"Dolores, dear," the older woman urged, "don't take it so much to heart! You're not yourself, you know. I wish you'd put yourself in my hands. . . ."

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed. "I feel that I shall go mad if you stand there and worry me! What *can* you do? I know you mean it kindly, but don't you realise that I've got to have this thing out by myself? Go and comfort poor old Jim! He needs it more than I do—and he deserves it more! . . ."

She gave Lettice Harbury such an entreating glance that the other felt her heart melt in pity within her.

"I don't want to harrow you, my dear," she answered. "Only when one of my boys gets into a scrape he generally comes and tells me about it. And I try to help him through. That's all! And I think you need a pal. . . ."

But Dolores did not respond to this advance. She looked straight in front of her and spoke in a strained voice.

"Jim seems to think I brought this on Carmen. And I loved her more than . . . as much as anyone in the world. And Jim's a brick too. He's done everything for me. And yet I can't think that I'm to blame. My poor, poor Carmen. . . ."

"Never mind what Jim thinks," comforted Mrs. Harbury. "The poor old boy is beside himself with grief. He doesn't know what he's doing, Dolores. . . ."

"He does, he does!" she wailed. "Until I know the truth, how can I help believing that Carmen went to Julian Quayre's to find me? If only I knew the truth . . . if only I knew. . . ."

Lettice Harbury might be "rural." But she was full of tact. Maybe she did not understand the modern young girl. But she knew all about boys. And in all young things there are many points of resemblance. So she just squeezed Dolores' hand and quietly stole away. Dolores remained seated on the big divan, her dark eyes staring mournfully into space.

So Monsieur Boulot found her on his return to Sloane Crescent about the dinner-hour. They were crying an evening newspaper in the street and the detective was carrying a copy in his hand as he opened the door of the

morning-room and looked in. But when he caught sight of Dolores, who looked round on the sound of his entry, he sought to hide the newspaper.

Forthwith she rose up and went to him, her eyes haunted with a great fear. Drawing him into the room, she closed the door behind them.

“What is this news they are crying in the street?”

“This paper says they have made an arrest . . .” Boulot replied.

The girl put a trembling hand to her mouth. Boulot answered the question which her quivering lips were unable to frame.

“They give no name . . .” he said.

Dolores pointed a slender finger at him.

“You . . . you know?” she faltered.

Boulot mustered her face in a lightning glance.

“Yes!”

“But . . . but . . .” she broke out, “they’re making the most ghastly mistake. Julian never committed this awful crime. And to think that I should have let that man drag from me the evidence that condemned him. . . .”

“No!” said Boulot, “no! It is on circumstantial evidence and on circumstantial evidence alone that he has been arrested. Nothing you said could have made any difference. But you did not make things any better by trying to mislead the police. . . .”

“It was because I knew that he was innocent that I lied,” the girl cried passionately. “Nothing will ever persuade me that this poor boy was in any way connected with my unhappy sister’s death. I knew that he would not try to clear himself because he could not speak without bringing me into it. And I thought, by concealing the fact that I had visited the studio at all, that I should enable him to . . . to make some explanation about . . . what happened in his studio. . . .”

“Monsieur Quayre *has* explained. . . .”

“I won’t believe that he has confessed to the murder!”

“He has not! But his story implicates a man called Ramon, Ramon de la Bandeira. . . .”

Dolores’ eyes dilated with astonishment.

“Ramon de la Bandeira!” she repeated. “But he was a friend of Carmen’s . . . a great friend!”

Boulot drew up a chair and pointed to the orange divan.

“Sit down!” he commanded. “You know this man Ramon then?”

“No!” the girl responded. “But Carmen often spoke of him in her letters to me when I was at school in Brussels. . . .”

“What date was this?”

“Let me think. . . . I went to the Convent in 1911 and I stayed there until the outbreak of war in 1914, when I joined Carmen in London. . . .”

“This acquaintanceship of your sister with Ramon, then, covered the years between 1911 and 1914?”

“Approximately, yes!”

“What did she write about him?”

“Nothing particular. He just came into her letters. He had taken her to the theatre; he helped her to repaper the studio; he had sold a picture. . . .”

“He was an artist, then?”

“Oh, yes! And very talented, Carmen used to say! . . .”

“Did she often speak to you about Ramon?”

Dolores shook her dark curls. A little colour warmed her olive cheeks.

“I meant in her letters. After she came to England she never spoke of Ramon. I mentioned his name to her once and she promptly changed the subject. . . .”

“Why?”

The girl glanced down at her shoes.

“I don’t know; I didn’t ask her. But I have sometimes thought that perhaps at one time she had been rather unhappy about Ramon. . . .”

“Was Ramon de la Bandeira your sister’s lover?” Boulot asked bluntly.

Again the girl’s colour flamed and she turned on him indignantly.

“Carmen never had a lover except Jim!” she retorted. “Can’t a girl be fond of a man without a bad construction being put upon it at once? Almost every girl makes herself unhappy about some man or other once in her life. And if at one time Carmen saw a lot of Ramon de la Bandeira, she may have cared for him more than he cared for her! . . . But her lover! If you had known my sister, Monsieur Boulot, you would not injure her memory by such a question. . . .”

Quickly she turned her pretty head away and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

“It is not I who have done your sister’s memory injustice . . .” said Boulot quietly. “It is Monsieur Quayre. . . .”

“That’s not true! . . .” the girl cried out indignantly.

“He has deposed that when he returned to the studio yesterday afternoon he found your sister in the arms of this man, Ramon. And remember, mademoiselle, that, unlike you, Monsieur Quayre has met Ramon and knows him by sight. . . .”

"I don't believe it, I can't believe it. . . ."

"Exactly what Monsieur Manderton says!" was the bland rejoinder. "My colleague is not a little indignant with your friend for seeking to save his own skin at the expense of your sister's reputation. . . ."

"You tell me that Julian Quayre has said this thing?" asked the girl in a hollow voice.

"I do!"

"My God!" she whispered.

Her hands fell limply to her side as she bowed her head and broke into passionate weeping. Boulot, his face an inscrutable mask, watched her in silence.

Presently she raised a tear-stained face to his.

"I can't judge for myself. . . ." she moaned. "Tell me what is the truth!"

"I think Quayre is not lying!" said Boulot.

"Oh!"—there was deep relief in the quick, gasping exclamation. But then she added sadly:

"Poor, poor Carmen! And poor old Jim!"

"This man, Ramon, then"—she gave a little shudder as she spoke—"is the murderer of my sister? What has become of him?"

"On arriving in London yesterday afternoon," Boulot replied, "he went to the Hotel Niniveh and engaged a room. This was about five o'clock. He then went out and did not return. Up to six o'clock this evening he had not reappeared. . . ."

"But why then has Julian been arrested? Are not the police looking for Ramon?"

"For the moment, no!" replied Boulot. "Mr. Manderton has a certain theory firmly rooted in his head and I would not displace it at the risk of putting Monsieur Ramon on his guard. I will be quite frank with you, mademoiselle! Rather than let the guilty party escape, it is better that your friend should pass a night or two in the cells! Ramon will not go far and my enquiries are well advanced. . . ."

He left his chair and seated himself by the girl's side on the orange divan.

"Your sister's last words were of this couch," he said. "We know that it formed part of the furniture of her home in New York, a link with this past of hers with which, so mysteriously, Ramon de la Bandeira is bound up. Why, with her dying breath, did she twice repeat the words 'the orange divan,' 'the orange divan'? Was it an explanation? A confession? Or a warning? Did she ever mention the divan to you in connection with her friend, Ramon?"

Wearily Dolores shook her head.

"Never!" she replied positively. "I have puzzled so much over these last words of poor, darling Carmen. I have no idea what they meant. I can't explain them at all. . . ."

The detective thoughtfully smoothed out with his hand the rich corded silk of the couch.

"I have the very strong impression," he said, "that here, in this Chinese divan on which we sit, we have the solution of this dark riddle if we could but read it. What if the orange divan should be the *trait d'union*, the connecting link which has brought your sister and the man Ramon together again in this obscure and dreadful manner? And what sent your sister to Quayre's? It looks as though she went there to meet Ramon by appointment. And yet there is no evidence of any appointment ever having been made, by letter, telegram, wireless, or telephone. . . ."

"But how then could Carmen have known that Ramon was in London?"

"He arrived from New York on the morning of the murder. He had an accident when driving from Euston to his hotel, an accident which your sister read about in a newspaper at her club. It is quite clear that, as soon as she had seen in the paper the report of Ramon's arrival in London, she went straight off to Quayre's. Why?"

Outside in the gardens the light was failing fast. The sky was angry with an eerie yellow glow and the tall poplars bent and shook before a sudden whirl of wind that sent the dry leaves dancing across the turf. The morning-room was almost dark. From the distance came mutteringly a long rumble of thunder. The girl instinctively drew nearer her companion on the divan.

"It is awful," she said in a whisper, "to think of that man roaming free in London. . . ."

"Why did she go to Quayre's?" Boulot repeated as though speaking to himself.

"Julian was the only friend of her New York days that Carmen had in London . . ." began Dolores.

"*C'est vrai!*" suddenly exclaimed Boulot.

". . . And he knew both Ramon and Carmen . . ." the girl went on.

Slowly Boulot's right index finger rubbed the bridge of his nose.

"So perhaps Carmen went to Julian's to meet Ramon there or to find out his address in London . . ." she concluded.

"Or perhaps," said Boulot, "she was *afraid!* Perhaps she sought from Quayre protection against this man, protection which she dare not seek from her husband. . . ."

More deeply and nearer now the thunder rolled fitfully.

CHAPTER XX

A FOOTSTEP ON THE GRAVEL

NIGHT fell, black and menacing, heavy with the promise of the storm that would not break. Obedient to Mr. Manderton's recommendation, George Cranmore had carried off his brother to stay with him in his chambers in the Temple. Jim Cranmore would have to give evidence at the inquest, and after that there would be the funeral. But, as soon as feasible, George was going to take the bereaved husband right away to the Broads where the barrister owned a half-share in a sailing-boat. For the present, the two brothers were to room together in the Temple.

Lettice Harbury, Dolores and Boulot dined together. The night was so still that through the open windows, behind the drawn blinds of the dining-room, they could hear every sound from the street, scraps of talk and of laughter, the rustle of lovers' feet, and once, clear above all other noises, the high note of a bugle at the Guards' Barracks.

Boulot saved the meal from being the ghastly function which such gatherings in a house of death are wont to be. With infinite tact and unflagging vigour he drew the two women into conversation, evading every topic that touched, even remotely, on the tragedy which overshadowed them and bridging every gap that might leave them leisure to brood over their own thoughts.

His mind was a storehouse of brilliant impressions of the cosmorama of Paris life for the past thirty years, a moving picture, unscratched and unblurred by the finger of time, of the modern history of France. Monarchs and mountebanks, actresses and adventurers, statesmen, painters, journalists—the veteran seemed to have met them all. Old King Leopold and his mistresses, Madame Humbert and her empty safe, Le Bargy and his neckties, the young lions of the Barbizon school—memories of these and of a dozen more men and women he conjured up in a delightful flow of reminiscence which sparkled with *mots* and witty epigrams. Before the dessert came he had scandalised Mrs. Harbury and, in the same breath, brought a little smile into Dolores' pale face; over the coffee an anecdote of Whistler's churlishness set them both frankly laughing.

He was entertaining them with his personal experiences of Duez, the liquidator of the religious congregations, an amusing scamp who cost the State millions, when the maid brought in an envelope on a salver. It was a Western Union cablegram. The messenger, the maid said, was waiting.

With a hasty apology Boulot pounced on the message. His face changed as he read it. His eyes snapped beneath his brows drawn together in a frown and his mouth grew hard. Then he tore a sheet from his note-book and scribbled a reply which he gave, with a couple of Treasury notes, to the maid.

“Mesdames,” he said and rose from the table, “I beg you to excuse me. I must leave you at once. I cannot say when I shall be back but I have my key and, should I be late, I shall endeavour to reach my room with as little noise as possible. . . .”

He made them a little bow.

“*A demain! . . .*”

With a grave and preoccupied face he hurried from the room.

* * * * *

As Dolores turned the handle of the morning-room door, a flash of lightning lit up the whole room. By the little lacquer clock on the mantelpiece she saw that it was half-past two. When the scene went black again, in the intense silence that followed, she heard, from the gardens without, the ceaseless swish of the rain. Then, with a loud crash, the thunder pealed through the darkened room and the melancholy rustle of water outside seemed to redouble in intensity.

At eleven o'clock she had gone to bed. But she was unable to sleep. The night was stifling, oppressive, and the curiously expectant air with which Nature awaits the coming of a storm, the unstirred leaves of the plane-tree in the garden beneath her window, the roses drooping immobile on their long stalks, made her restless, waking. Her mind was obsessed with the thought of her dead sister. Not since Carmen died had she been so vividly conscious of the sweet and gentle personality that had so tenderly, so unselfishly, watched over her childhood's years. She could not rid herself of the feeling that Carmen was near her.

A dull pain gnawed at her heart. It was as though all the sorrows of the world had suddenly been heaped upon her. She felt like one awaking from some poignant dream saturated with uncomprehended regrets, with undefined remorse. As she braided her hair at her dressing-table it came upon her as a sudden revelation that her heart-ache was not grief for Carmen's death;—for she knew that the full realisation of the tragedy would come to her only in later days;—but pity, overwhelming, suffocating pity, for her sister.

It was her talk with Boulot which haunted her, she now realised. He had suffered her to glimpse a Carmen she had never suspected to exist, a sorrowing, heart-wrung woman with a fear, a fear of something unknown,

smouldering fiercely beneath that serenely beautiful mask. This was the Carmen who was with her now; not the Carmen she had known, with her fragrant and unclouded beauty, worshipped by her husband, adored by her servants, happy in her home; but a troubled, haunted woman who seemed to be beating against the bars of the world beyond, eager yet powerless to lay bare her secret sorrow. . . .

As she lay in bed and watched, through the open window, the gathering of the storm, Dolores became slowly conscious of a growing feeling that she must go down to the morning-room. There, among Carmen's own treasures, in an atmosphere impregnated with her sister's personality, she would be nearer to Carmen. . . .

The thunder growled and the lightning spread great yellow branches of light across the night-sky. How vividly now she felt her sister's presence in the house! It was as though she were waiting for her below. . . . Swiftly the girl rose up and, slipping a black silk wrapper over her nightdress, tiptoed barefoot downstairs.

The curtains were drawn in the morning-room. But Dolores did not turn on the light. She felt in the mood for darkness, and the persistent patter of the rain outside seemed to soothe her. The room smelt stuffy. She crossed to the French window, and, pulling back the curtains, half opened it.

How it poured! The rain came straight down, hissing as it splashed on the sopping turf. Where it struck the gravel patch at the foot of the shallow stone steps leading to the garden it sent up little sparkling spurts of water like a myriad shining knives. And the night was black . . . black.

Then the lightning flamed again and Dolores, with a start, drew back into the shelter of the room just as, with growling long drawn out, the thunder clanged deafeningly.

She left the window and, crossing to the fireplace, sat down on the orange divan, her back turned to the storm, as though she would shut it out from her thoughts. Her bare feet were a little chilled with the damp from the garden, so she switched on the small electric radiator which stood in front of the empty hearth. The long glass globes sent forth a pleasant reddish glow which picked out from the dark background only her tense, pallid face, the white line of her slender neck. . . .

To be in Carmen's own room immensely comforted her. When she shut her eyes, she found she could at will transpose herself into the past. Now it was Carmen in a simple white frock standing in the early morning sunshine that poured through the French window; now it was a winter afternoon with Carmen in her sables, adjusting her veil, in the tranquil, thoughtful way in which she did everything, before her Japanese mirror.

From Carmen her thoughts slipped away to Julian. That afternoon in the studio, he had held her in his arms and crushed her face against his rough tweed coat. It seemed as though she could still smell the pleasant peaty odour of his jacket. Then she had looked up into his steady grey eyes and—she hardly knew how it had happened—her ungloved arm had stolen about his neck and her lips were pressed to his. . . .

Dear Julian! What a friend he was! So patient, so gallant in adversity, so full of the joy of life, yet so strangely sensitive! With a little pang she remembered the distress which he tried in vain to conceal at Carmen's apparent avoidance of him, at her failure to espouse his cause against Jim. Poor Julian!

She could see him as she loved best to see him—in his old painting smock, his fair hair tousled, a cigarette unlit between his lips, standing away from his easel while he talked across his shoulder to her and the friends who had first brought her to his studio. "He's got a north light in his heart," someone had said of Julian. Indeed, his whole nature radiated sunshine; there seemed to be no dusky corners in him. She could see him smiling at her now, lovingly, protectingly, perhaps a little wistfully. . . .

Her heart beating furiously, the blood pounding at her temples, she opened her eyes in terror upon Carmen's room, lit only by the dull glow from the radiator. Above the rustle of the curtains tossing in the draught from the open window, above the sibilant hiss of the rain, a sound had come to her from the garden.

It was a footstep on the gravel outside the window.

It grated once more. Then silence. . . .

In a rush the terrors which she had banished came crowding back into her brain. The darkness behind her was peopled with them. She did not dare look round. She sat bolt upright on the couch, seeing nothing, her ears strained to catch the slightest sound. . . .

Thus she sat and waited while only the melancholy gurgle of the rain pouring into the gutters outside disturbed the silence of the sleeping house. Then. . . .

A light tread on the stone steps outside the window, a slight click, a sharp rasping sound as the curtains were swiftly drawn. . . . The unbearable suspense braced up the girl's nerves to face this unknown visitant and she swung round on the couch.

A tall man stood inside the room, back to the window, hands clutching the curtains. He seemed to be straining forward to peer into the gloom. The orange glow of the radiator dimly illuminated stern, set features, a livid face with burning eyes that detached itself from the black background. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

THE DRAGON'S CLAW

HIS clothes ran water and the dark hair which protruded from beneath his sodden hat clung dank to his head. The moisture on his cheeks glistened as he stood there mustering with a slow and fascinated stare the girl who confronted him.

It was a lean, hard face. With the proud, aquiline nose and the grim and bitter mouth it would have been cruel, arrogant, but for the infinite tragedy of the haggard eyes. They were the eyes of Christ on the Cross, tragic, mournful, unsolaced, with something in their unfathomed depths of terror, of despair, that recalled the look of a hunted animal.

A hand whipped round from behind, a black hand that shone darkly in the reddish glow. As Dolores looked down at the automatic pistol that was pointed at her, she realised that the stranger was wearing black india-rubber gloves that made his hands gleam with something of the silky sleekness of a seal's flippers.

"Stand away from that couch!"

He spoke in a whisper; but his voice was harsh and commanding. With his pistol he pointed to a bookcase which stood against the wall on one side of the fireplace.

"Go over there and face the wall! If you turn round before I give the word, I shall shoot!"

She looked at him for an instant before she obeyed. Never had she seen a face that moved her as this man's. So might one of the damned have looked at Dante out of the whirling smoke of the Inferno. There was neither hope nor love nor pity in this livid mask; only despair and defiance. What horrors had those suffering eyes regarded, what memories did their tragic depths retain, to make a human being look like this?

As in a dream she stood up from the orange divan and crossed to the bookcase. She had no sensation of terror now; her sensibility was numbed. She felt as though she were watching herself go through a part in a play.

The man did not speak again. She had her face to the wall and could not see what was going forward in the room. But she heard the floor-boards creak gently as the man approached the fireplace. Then there was a squeak, as though a piece of furniture were being moved: a squeak and a soft bump. Silence. . . .

The stranger's breath came hard. There was a little grating noise—persistent, rasping, as though he were working with a tool—a tap, a muttered exclamation. . . .

Without warning the morning-room door creaked; a voice, Boulot's voice, cried sharply, "Who's there?" and the room blazed into light. But only for a fraction of a second. There was a deafening report, the tinkle of broken glass and the room was plunged into darkness again.

Dolores heard Boulot cry out at the door; there was a spurt of crimson fire, another ear-splitting crash and a great jangle of glass. Then the window swung wide and the curtains flapped wildly into the room: a heavy footstep thundered across the boards: shrill whistles sounded. . . . Feeling very weak, she staggered to a chair. . . .

Where the curtains were blowing freely into the room, a ragged patch of angry sky appeared greyly. After an interval it was obscured for an instant and a long beam of light streamed in. Dolores distinguished the silhouette of a policeman, two policemen, their flash-lamps in their hands. Their waterproof capes were running with the wet. When they saw her they stopped short, as if in embarrassment. The beams of their lamps met and crossed on her wan face.

"All right, miss?" said Policeman Number One. "We 'eard two shots. . . ."

There was the crunch of glass on the carpet.

"Shot the light out, seems like!" said Policeman Number Two. "Hullo!"

He switched his light round.

"Been a bit of a scrap, ain't there?"

The flash-lamp showed the orange divan reared up on its side.

A frightened voice called out from the stairs:

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Whatever has happened? Who's there?"

"It's the maids!" said Dolores.

Policeman Number One, who had been rooting about with his noiseless tread in the dark, now switched on a hand lamp which stood on a side-table. At the same moment Lettice Harbury, an extraordinary figure in an old Burberry, her grey hair twisted up close against her head in metal curlers, strode briskly into the room. The dishevelled figures of two frightened servants were huddled up in the background.

"Dolores!" she exclaimed on catching sight of the girl.

"I'm all right, Aunt Lettice!" said Dolores in a shaky voice. "There was a burglar. . . ."

The whirlwind entrance of Boulot created a diversion. He bounced in from the garden, soaked to the skin, muddied up to the knees. He was spluttering with rage, incoherent with abuse of himself. In fine, his appearance was so disordered, his manner so eccentric, that it required a somewhat lengthy explanation to account for his presence to the two policemen.

However, Boulot eventually produced a card from Scotland Yard which changed the attitude of the two constables from one of suspicious reserve to that of friendly collaboration. While one went to the police-station in Sloane Street to make his report, the other proceeded to the hall to telephone, at Boulot's suggestion, to Mr. Manderton's private house.

When they had left the room—

"*Grand Dieu! Grand Dieu!*" lamented Boulot. "Gone, vanished utterly! And to think that he was within my grasp, that, had I but entered the room quietly, he could not have escaped me! *Sacré type!* what daring, what finesse! . . ."

"What did this man want?" demanded Mrs. Harbury.

"What resolution!" proclaimed the detective, ignoring her question. "Not two seconds . . . *bien quoi!* not one . . . did he have to make up his mind. But *pan!* he shoots out the electric light . . . *et pan!* he ducks to avoid the shot which he rightly calculated I would fire at the window . . . *et pan, pan!* he is out of doors and clear away by the line of escape he had already spied out! *Quel type! Mon Dieu! Quel sacré. . .*"

He broke off, his eyes goggling. He was staring in stupefaction at the orange divan as it stood reared up on its side.

"You ask me, madame, what that *coquin* wanted. *Voilà!*"

He pointed a finger that trembled with suppressed excitement first at the couch, then at the floor. On the ground lay one of the four feet of the divan, the heavy black teak ball grasped in the five-clawed dragon's foot, revered emblem of the Son of Heaven's Majesty. On one of the two uppermost feet of the couch, the hollow threadway showed clearly where the ball had been unscrewed.

The detective stooped and picked up the detached ball. With an expressive gesture he showed it to the women. It was hollow. A cavity had been scraped out of the wood round the central screw, a secure, well-fashioned hiding-place.

Boulot put the foot down and grasped its fellow on the couch, twisting it powerfully in his strong hands. It resisted. He put forth all his strength, they

heard the cracking of glue and varnish, then he easily unscrewed it. Silently he held it out for them to see. It was solid all through.

M. Boulot clapped a hand to his forehead.

“Ah! *Triple âne*,” he cried, “*imbécile que je suis!* The whole story is there! . . .”

And he rushed headlong from the room.

* * * * *

Dawn was paling the street lamps when Boulot, threading a little alley communicating between two drab and narrow thoroughfares in Soho, stopped in front of a small and squalid shop. The faded red-and-white pole, which squeaked and rattled in the breeze, proclaimed the tenant to be a barber. The evidence of the sign was corroborated by divers announcements in French and Italian painted on the window.

A battered door with a rusty knocker stood beside the entrance to the shop. After a curious glance to right and left along the alley the detective gently pushed the door which swung inwards to his touch. He stepped quickly into a pitch-black passage, drawing the door to behind him. Instantly, in the stuffy darkness a hand was laid roughly on his arm.

“What do you want in this house?”

Boulot could not see the speaker; but the voice was a foreigner’s, the English imperfect.

“I am looking for Gaston, comrade!” the detective said in French.

“Gaston? There is no Gaston here. The shop is long since closed. Come back in the morning. . . .”

“*Bigre!*” ejaculated the detective. “I can’t see your dial, the bourgeois, but I ask myself what sort of a customer you can be who doesn’t know Gaston the Squirrel. . . .”

A low laugh came out of the darkness.

“One is among friends then, it seems!” said the voice. “Pass through the door at the end of the passage, *mon vieux*, and go quietly by reason of the cursed English police. . . .”

The unseen watchman mysteriously effaced himself while Boulot, stretching forth his hands to guide himself, presently came to a door. He passed through it and an oil-lamp which burnt dimly on the wall showed him a few steps leading down to another door from which a vague medley of sound proceeded.

On opening the second door which, he noticed, was heavily padded, a hot wave of smoke-laden air caught him by the throat. He found himself at the top of a steep flight of stone steps looking down into a long, narrow room, lit by oil-lamps set in sconces round the walls, and tawdrily decorated with festoons of coloured paper. With the dense cloud of tobacco smoke which mounted stagnantly aloft there ascended a babel of sound, the jingling tones of an automatic piano, snatches of song, the buzz of voices. . . .

He went down the stairs. Round the floor little tables were set and in a clear space in the centre half a dozen couples turned in rhythm. Some of the men wore their hats and one puffed a cigarette as he danced. The women seemed to be, for the most part, faded drabs off the streets.

At a table in the corner in front of a glass mug of beer, Gaston, the waiter of Poteau's, was seated alone. His mufti consisted of a shiny blue jacket buttoned across his waiter's dicky, while on his head he wore the famous blue *beret*, with its yellow embroidered bugle, of the *Chasseurs à pied*, in style resembling the flat cap of the French students.

A young girl in a light blouse and a plaid skirt stepped in front of Boulot as he made his way across to Gaston's table.

"You are alone, *hein*?" she said archly. "You will pay for me a bock, *n'est-ce pas*?"

"I join a friend, *ma petite*," replied Boulot, jerking his head in the direction of Gaston's table.

"Ah! you meet the Squirrel!" remarked the girl with a pretty pout. "It's business, then, to-night! . . ."

He noticed that at several tables heads were set close together over whispered conversations. As he picked his way through the throng Boulot's trained eye recognised many of the types with which his professional experience had brought him into contact. The Apache with his bullet head and snake-like eye, the *ex-forçat* from Cayenne with brutalised face and skull close-cropped, the drug-fiend with chalky features and extravagant, hysterical manner, and the business man of crime, hard, crafty, prosperous, a cigar between his thick lips and a bottle of champagne at his elbow—they were all to be seen in the cellar.

Boulot stopped at Gaston's table.

"A little late," said he, "but here I am! . . ."

The waiter looked blankly at him and scowled.

"What do you want with me?" he muttered. "I don't know you. . . ."

Behind the table a mirror hung on the wall. The reflection that looked out at Boulot from the glass showed a black-haired, vigorous-looking man of

forty or thereabouts with a round, good-natured face.

Boulot laughed and dropped into a chair.

“My friend,” he observed softly, “you surely did not think I would venture amongst the professionals in the self-same appearance that has confronted so many of them, at different periods of our careers, across the table in my room at the Prefecture? . . .”

With a delighted chuckle Gaston smote his thigh.

“*Nom d’un nom, patron*,” he exclaimed, “was there ever a merchant like you! Ça, par exemple. . . .”

And he was off again.

“It is not difficult, believe me, my friend,” rejoined the detective deprecatingly, “a small toupet to cover up my waxing baldness and to hide those hairs gone grey in the exercise of my profession, these little rubber cheek pads which so alter the line of the face . . . no paint, no mess, and a quick change-back in a second! A hand to the mouth, a hand to the head and the thing is done! I will now take a bock and you shall tell me your news. . . .”

A big rough hand went up to the waiter’s face.

“Come nearer, *patron*,” said he. “Our man was here last night. . . .”

“Last night? Not possible! . . .”

“It was Lolotte, who spots for Pierre Molard’s gang, who told me. Bend closer—the woman at the next table might hear. . . .”

Boulot cast a cautious glance into the mirror at his side. At the adjacent table, as he saw in the glass, a woman sat alone. She seemed moody and miserable. Her face was deathly pale and her eyes had dark lines about them. She had a mass of thick, red-brown hair worn low down on the neck. A cup of coffee stood untasted before her, a lighted cigarette burning itself out in the saucer. She appeared to take no interest in the varied scene about her but sat immobile, staring out into the room.

“He seemed out of sorts, Lolotte says,” Gaston resumed in a low voice. “She spoke to him, but he answered her gruffly and turned away. She thought he was looking for somebody. He sat for a little while with some men she does not know and then went out alone. . . .”

“This Lolotte,” asked Boulot. “Is she here to-night?”

“No. But I expect one who should bring us the information we want. . . .”

Significantly he nudged Boulot with his elbow. A young man with a pimply face and a weak chin was drifting among the tables. He passed in front of Boulot and his companion. Gaston made no sign.

Then the new-comer dropped his hat. He bent down to pick it up and as he rose whispered quickly and distinctly:

“At Levine’s, on the second floor, the first door on the right. . . .”

CHAPTER XXII

AT LEVINE'S

GASTON paid the reckoning and, rising from his chair, signed to Boulot to follow him. The cellar was beginning to empty now and Boulot noticed that the red-haired woman, who had sat at the adjoining table, was gone.

Day was breaking as they gained the street. The night's storm had washed the air and the morning smelt delicious as they hastened through the quiet streets of London's French quarter. Here and there a motor-water-cart glided with wide-flung spray over the smooth asphalt and occasionally at a street corner the solid shape of a policeman materialised mysteriously from the grey shadows of the fleeing night. But otherwise nothing stirred, and the footsteps of Boulot and his guide rang reverberatingly on the pavement as they swiftly made their way northward towards the cluster of mean streets which, like a swallow's nest under the eaves, clings to the straight edge of Oxford Street.

Presently Gaston chuckled quietly.

"Ah, *ça!*" he cried softly. "What a droll idea! The Squirrel narking for the cops. . . ."

He spoke the clipped argot of the Paris criminal class, as familiar to M. Boulot, gravely trotting along beside him, as the patois of his native Brittany.

"Who'd 'a' thought it, *patron?*" he demanded. "The Squirrel turned informer! *Bigre!* The world goes round, bringing many changes as it spins! . . ."

"*Mon ami,*" observed his companion suavely, "I am all for professional etiquette! Observe, I have asked you nothing as to the antecedents of *le beau Raymond* or the circumstances in which the Chamberlain diamonds were stolen. I would not affront your sense of the proprieties by even assuming that you might be willing to betray a . . . a . . . *enfin* . . . a colleague in the interesting career which you yourself but lately decorated. But, as I explained to you at Poteau's last night, here is a very different affair. This American has got himself involved in a senseless deed of blood. He has not come forward to explain. *Bon!* I draw no conclusions from his discretions but, *pardi!* I am mightily curious to have a little conversation with him . . . and, after all, he is nothing to you! I am asking for no confidence, for I think you do not even know him. . . ."

Gaston spat with unction.

"I care as little about him as I care about the moon!" he exclaimed fervently, using the drastic but expressive French idiom. "I know nothing of this Raymond or Ramon except by repute. And my professional days are at an end! I am at your service, *patron*, for I can trust you to keep your word to have my record-sheet at the Police Headquarters cancelled! . . ."

"It is agreed, *mon garçon*. . ."

"One thing, *patron* . . . he has the name of being the quick one to shoot. You are armed at least?"

Boulot patted his breast pocket significantly.

"Ah, well! We shall find him in bed at this hour! If I remember well that is how you policemen like to make your arrests. . . ."

They had turned into a long and narrow street of tall, old-fashioned houses long since fallen from the high estate they had known in the days of the early Georges. Brass plates of commission agents, of feather importers, of cigarette dealers now adorned the faded and blistered paintwork of the fine old front-doors surmounted still in many cases by handsome fan-lights. The brickwork was black and crumbling, the steps were worn away and series of quaint brass bells affixed to the doorposts showed that most of the former mansions of the gentry were now let out in floors.

"Levine's is at the bottom on the right," Gaston explained.

A loud and rhythmic knocking echoed down the street as they approached the house. Rat—tat-tat—rat! Rat—tat-tat—rat! A knocker was vigorously applied. The noise roused the echoes of the silent street. Rat—tat-tat—rat! Rat—tat-tat—rat! The knocking came in persistent bursts, as regular, as insistent as a telephone bell. . . .

"But," exclaimed Gaston, and looked at Boulot, "it is at Levine's that they knock thus loudly! See, it is a woman!"

With one instinct the two men hastened their pace. At the door of one of the dirtiest houses of the street, where the iron railings were rusty and broken and straw and rags gaped through holes in the window-panes, a woman stood and knocked. Her back was to them so that they could not discern her face. She hammered with the knocker feverishly, frantically, beating out her rhythmic summons, barely waiting for a pause between the beats. Rat—tat-tat—rat! Rat—tat-tat—rat! . . .

She was enveloped in a long black cloak and beneath her small hat her dark red hair descended in a thick, loose roll on the neck. Suddenly Boulot uttered a sharp exclamation and broke into a run. At the same moment the house-door opened and the woman disappeared. The detective reached the

steps in time to thrust his foot between the lintel and the door as it was violently slammed to. With a vigorous push of his shoulder he shoved the door open and strode into the house.

A stout woman who carried a lighted candle in her hand sought to bar his passage. She was a large, blowsy person with a shawl about her shoulders and the fringe of a grimy night-gown appearing above the grey flannel dressing-jacket she was wearing. Of the woman who had knocked there was no sign. The staircase mounted straight from the hall to the first floor. And she was not on the stairs.

“’Ere, wot’s this mean?” the stout woman cried. But Boulot pushed her aside. With Gaston at his heels he dashed through the narrow hall and up the bare and rickety stairs. The woman screamed shrilly. As the two men reached the first landing a big man in shirt and trousers burst out of a room. He sprang to the foot of the stairs leading to the next story to stop their progress.

“Back!” Boulot snarled at him and showed his automatic. “Back! We are the police!”

The big man promptly collapsed in a sitting position on the stair.

“’Old yer row, Mimi!” he bawled over the banisters. “It’s the p’leece! D’yer want to get us all locked up, or wot?”

Boulot and Gaston tore on up the stairs. The flimsy woodwork with the broken rails shook beneath their tread. That magic word “police” seemed to have set the whole house astir. Doors slammed and footsteps pattered mysteriously in the upper regions. The second floor was silent when they reached it. Not a mouse stirred.

Boulot sprang at the first door on the right of the staircase. It bore the number “17” on a white enamel plate. The door was locked. He rattled the handle. No reply was forthcoming. Without further ado he leant his weight against the frail match-boarding, the lock gave and the door swung back. One glance told them the whole story. The bed was all tumbled, the sheets trailing on the floor. On a chair beside it a candle flared and guttered. The window in the corner had been flung up and stood wide open. Boulot laid a hand in the bed. It was yet warm.

The window opened on a flat roof from which a lower roof gave easy access to a small yard at the back where little barrows, such as the costers use, were drawn up in rows. The yard, as they could see, had double doors of timber giving on a side-street. A simpler means of escape could not have been devised.

With an angry exclamation Boulot turned back into the bedroom.

“What now?” asked Gaston.

"*Fichtre!*" the detective burst out. "He's off again, this animal, into the vast jungle of London. Single-handed we might hunt for a week and not find him. This is a job for the English police, *mon ami*. Let us waste no time on a wild-goose chase but discover what we may from the traces left behind in the warm nest. He is but a few minutes gone from here. Let us first establish from whom he had the warning. You remarked this girl who knocked upon the door? Did you recognise her? . . ."

"*Dame!*" rejoined Gaston, "I did not look so closely, *patron*. . . ."

"It was the girl who sat next to us in the cellar just now, *mon ami*. I recognised her white face and red hair. . . ."

"And she overheard the direction! But what has become of her? Did she, too, escape by the window?"

"Impossible. We entered the house at practically the same moment as she did. The staircase was under our direct observation the whole time. From the moment the front door opened no one mounted the stairs from the hall. Of that I am positive. . . ."

"Then how did she warn him?"

"That," said the detective, "is what I ask myself without finding the answer."

He went out on the landing. The stout woman in the flannel dressing-jacket was there in frightened colloquy with the big man from the first floor.

"You there," cried Boulot truculently, addressing the woman, "where's the girl who knocked you up before we came?"

"I dunno!" retorted she sullenly.

"Don't lie to me!" Boulot menaced. "You are going to produce that girl right away, do you hear?"

"Honest to Gawd, mister, she's gorn away. . . ."

"Where? How?"

"Straight, I don't know! I never seen 'er afore jus' now! She come in, as you seen, and, afore I could arst 'er wot she meant by knocking *honest* folks up out of their beds at this time o' night, you two come in and in the 'urry, me bein' all fussed like, she 'ooked it. . . ."

"You're lying! She went upstairs to warn the man in Room 17! . . ."

"I arst yer!" the man broke in. "Wasn't you in the 'ouse as soon as she were? Did anyone go upstairs as you or I could see? No! As man to man I arst yer, guv'nor . . . could anybody 'ave gorn up them stairs and you not see 'em? . . ."

"Then what became of this girl?" persisted Boulot. "You are not going to deny, I suppose, that she warned the man in Room 17 and let him get away, and that she has vanished, too?"

"I dunno nothink about it," tartly rejoined the woman, "an', wot's more, I don't want'er know anything about it. I don't know the 'ussy: I never set eyes on 'er afore: and I dunno no more than you do w'ere she's bunked orf to. . . ."

Boulot's bright eyes narrowed as he bent a severe glance on the pair.

"My friends," he warned softly, "I advise you not to appear to know too little when I ask you questions. The police might become inquisitive as to the way in which your establishment is conducted. Do I express myself clearly? . . ."

"I ain't got nothink to fear from the p'leece"—the woman's voice wavered on a shrill note—"I'm respectable, I am. . . ."

The big man lurched forward and cut her protestations short.

"Stow it!" he bade her. "I don't want no trouble, mister," he added, addressing Boulot. "In a biz'ness like this we can't 'elp getting a wrong 'un now and then. Wot d'yer want'er know?"

"What has become of this girl?"

"'Ooked it, same as me old woman sez. Ef she'd gorn upstairs to give the bloke in 17 the orfice I'd tell yer, guv'nor! There ain't no sense in my concealin' of it! The bloke ain't nothink to me. . . ."

"Has this girl ever been here before?"

"Not likely!"

"What about the man?"

"'E come in the night afore larst and wanted a room. I told 'im to take 17 and 'e give me ten bob and sez for me to let 'im know w'en 'e'd worked it orf. . . ."

"What was he like?"

"A tall chap, pale about the face, as you might say. Talked like an American. . . ."

"Was he an old customer?"

"Strike me dead if ever I'd seen 'im afore!"

"What name did he give?"

"Never gave no name. . . ."

"And the registration of travellers? . . ."

The man shifted his gaze uneasily.

"The missus forgot to give 'im the form," he said sulkily.

“Who sent him to you? . . .”

“I dunno; never thought to arst. ’Is money was good enuf for me. . . .”

It was broad daylight now. Through the open window of the landing were plainly audible the sounds of the great city stirring to begin another day. There was a single knock at the front door which echoed through the house. The woman went down to answer the door, the man following behind her. Boulot remained in reverie on the landing and thoughtfully stroked his nose. Presently he turned to his companion:

“Gaston,” he said, “you may tell me that old Boulot is past his work. This night, my friend, I have made a tactical error which only sheer good luck can retrieve. When we entered this house we should have divided our forces. I should have gone after our quarry. But you should have marked down the red-haired girl. . . .”

“*Patron*, I still fail to see. . . .”

“*Imbécile*, her knocking was a warning, a danger signal repeated over and over again, an alarm agreed between them . . . rat—tat-tat—rat! . . . a long, two shorts and a long. . . .”

“*Ah! Par exemple! . . .*”

“The warning given, there was no need for her to stay. Probably this lying hag here let her know that our man had understood the warning and had made his escape. She quietly walked away, unheeded, unobserved. . . . *Nom d’un nom d’un nom! . . .*”

His hand strayed to an inner pocket and he produced a fragment of cotton-wool. In it reposed the single hair of dark auburn shade which he had detached from the brooch pinned on Carmen Cranmore’s breast. He slanted the strand of hair so that it caught the sunlight.

“Now where does this piece fit into the pattern?” he murmured to himself.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MAGNET

OUTSIDE LEVINE'S BOULOT parted from Gaston. "Merci, my friend," he said, holding the waiter's horny hand in his, "*merci et au revoir*. Old Boulot will not forget his promise. From to-night The Squirrel disappears from the annals of crime. But one more service I ask of you in return. Keep an eye open, if you please, for this woman of the red hair. Ramon, it seems to me, will not return to the cellar. But he may send this girl, who appears devoted to his interests, to report to him what goes forward there. It is essential, it is imperative, that she should be followed. Her trail will lead us to our man. *C'est compris?* I give you no orders; I make no suggestions; contrive only that, if this woman reappears, she is shadowed and that I am promptly notified. . . ."

They had turned the corner of the street. Boulot put up a finger to an approaching taxi-cab.

"And now," he went on, "adieu youth and vigour! Boulot becomes himself again! . . ."

He whipped off his hat.

Like lightning his two hands flashed to head and mouth and thence to his pockets. It was the old Boulot who clapped on his hat and, as he opened the cab door, turned and smiled roguishly at his companion's bewilderment. He drove to Sloane Crescent.

He found Mr. Manderton alone in the morning-room. The orange divan lay on its back on the floor, four mutilated legs pointing ceiling-wards. The feet had been removed. Manderton sat by the desk in one of Carmen's Chinese Chippendale chairs, puffing a big cigar. He was calmer and more self-confident than ever.

"Well, my friend," was his greeting to Boulot, "here's a fine piece of play-acting for you! . . ."

"*Comment?*" exclaimed the Frenchman, stopping short in surprise. "*Comment?*"

"Play-acting, theatre, funny business! What an imagination that young woman has! Dear, dear! . . ."

For the first time M. Boulot showed a little glint of temper. His eyes glinted angrily.

"I see!" he said. "You disbelieve the evidence of your own eyes now? . . ."

"I disbelieve manufactured evidence," was the rather truculent retort, ". . . at any rate until I get something firmer to go on than the hysterical statements of a young female who has already proved herself to be a perjured witness. By a curious coincidence she found herself in here at past two o'clock in the morning with the window open; by a similar curious coincidence a convenient burglar who happened to be taking the air in the gardens outside, came in by the same open window. 'A tall, dark man,' sez she, 'with sad eyes!' That's the best description she can give. Funny, isn't it? how it resembles her friend Quayre's description of *his* mysterious visitor, Ramon. . . ."

Boulot gulped.

"But the orange divan?" he said in a constrained voice.

Manderton laughed stridently.

"The young woman's working backwards. She's remembered her sister's last words, or else"—Manderton looked sharply at the Frenchman—"some one has been putting ideas into her head. . . ."

Boulot sighed gently. His signs of temper seemed to have vanished.

"But," he observed mildly, "you forget, I was here myself."

"Quite so," was Manderton's mocking answer. "And did you see our friend, Ramon?"

"No," admitted the Frenchman. "He shot the light out before I was in the room. You will scarcely contend that the girl and I imagined that?"

Manderton laughed drily.

"I have far too great a belief in the young woman's resourcefulness to imagine anything of the sort. The gentleman, who so obligingly played the rôle of Ramon, filled his part even to the extent of shooting out the light . . . unless, of course, your shot did that!"

"It is at least consoling to find that you admit such evidence as the human intelligence cannot reject," was the Frenchman's cutting rejoinder.

"Oh! we know that a man did get in by the back," retorted Manderton. "You can see the marks he made getting over the railings! Come, come, Mossoo Boulot, this has gone far enough. You must recognise the determined effort which is being made to drag outside parties into what, I venture to think, is a perfectly plain case. All of you in turn, Miss Driscoll, yourself, Mr. George Cranmore here, even Mrs. Harbury, with some cock-and-bull story about a furniture man, have tried to draw a red herring across the trail! But

I'm an old hound in the pack, and I'm not to be thrown off the scent. And that's that! . . ."

He crossed his legs ostentatiously and puffed at his cigar.

The old Frenchman took a turn up and down the room. He stopped opposite his colleague and gravely considered his face.

"Did you ever hear of the robbery of the Chamberlain necklace?" he asked.

Mr. Manderton yawned.

"Aye," he said. "At some hotel in Pittsburg, I misremember the name. Back in '14, it was,"—Manderton's memory was famous at the Yard—"just before the war. . . ."

"Can you call to mind the particulars?"

"I think so. Mrs. Chamberlain, wife of a wealthy Pittsburger, had come in to the city from their country-place for the dinner of the Iron and Steel Convention. She and her husband had arranged to spend the night at the hotel where the banquet took place. At the dinner she wore her famous diamond necklace which was reputed to have cost her husband . . . let's see . . . two hundred thousand pounds, I think the figure was. During the night the necklace mysteriously disappeared. . . ."

"A smart piece of work. I think!"

Manderton's eyes snapped.

"Brilliant!" he agreed. "Now it all comes back to me! She took the necklace off and laid it down on the dressing-table for an instant while she went into the bath-room to fetch the chamois leather she used to rub the stones over before the necklace was returned to the hotel safe. She was not out of the room above sixty seconds and in that one minute the necklace went. . . ."

"And the man?"

"They got him in New York a week later. Brady was on that . . . his greatest coup!"

"The thief's name?"

"Raymond Flagg, otherwise known as 'le beau Raymond': the flyest hotel thief in the two hemispheres. You ought to know him, Boulot. He operated in Paris. . . ."

"And the necklace?"

"It was never recovered. Ah! he was the 'cute boy, was Raymond. The insurance company spent thousands on the investigation. But they never laid hands on it. . . ."

“And ‘le beau Raymond,’ what happened to him?”

“Oh, they sent him up for a stretch! Eight years, I think he got. . . .”

“The robbery, you said, was in 1914. And this is 1922. . . .”

Boulot paused. From under his half-closed eyelids his bright little eyes shot sharp glances at his colleague’s large, plethoric face.

“Eight years!” said Boulot musingly. “From 1914 to 1922. Ah! . . .”

He broke off. Manderton was now looking at him with a keener interest.

“Is a knowledge of Spanish one of your accomplishments, monsieur?” the Frenchman asked casually.

Mr. Manderton shook his head.

“I can’t say it is! . . .”

“Then it may be news to you to hear that in Spanish the name ‘Raymond’ becomes ‘Ramon’ just as ‘bandeira’ is the Spanish for ‘flag.’ You don’t follow me? Then read this! . . .”

He thrust at him a newspaper cutting. Manderton took it and read aloud:

“TAXI SMASH IN THE EUSTON ROAD

“Shortly after four o’clock this afternoon a taxi-cab conveying Mr. Ramon de la Bandeira, a first-class passenger by the *Gigantic* special from Liverpool, was in collision with a Ford delivery van in the Euston Road. The Ford driver was badly cut and both vehicles were considerably damaged. The occupant of the taxi, who was unhurt, transferred his luggage to another cab and was driven to his hotel. . . .”

“And now that! . . .”

With a hand shaking with excitement Boulot held out a folded paper. Silently Manderton accepted it. At the first glance he flushed up. Absently, his hand went out and laid his cigar in the ash-tray on the desk at his side.

It was a Western Union cablegram which Manderton held in his hand, addressed to Boulot from New York.

“Ramon de la Bandeira,” it ran, “believed to be real name of Raymond Flagg, notorious jewel thief, released from Pittsburg Penitentiary in May after serving sentence eight years for theft Mrs. Chamberlain’s necklace Colosseum Hotel Pittsburg August 1914. Bandeira booked first-class passage *Gigantic* leaving Newyork June 12. Unable establish any connection between him and woman Carmen Cranmore who gave up apartment East 59th Street and sold furniture September 1914 proceeding England.

“That newspaper paragraph in your hand,” cried Boulot in stentorian tones with pointing finger, “is what sent this unhappy woman to her death. Peacefully sitting in her club, happy in the new life she had created for herself, her eyes fell upon this banal *fait divers* which meant the end of all her hopes. It tells her that this man Ramon, whose connection with her still remains, I must admit, a mystery, is out of prison, what is more, is in this country, having come, as she surely must believe, to find her. In her distress to whom does she turn? Not to her husband from whom she has concealed these dark pages in her life. She flies to the young artist, Julian Quayre, who had known both her and Ramon in New York, the only link in London between the two. Only one motive can have driven her to this old friend whom she had shunned for the disagreeable memories his presence awakened. *She wanted to beg him not to reveal her address, the fact that she was married, to this jewel thief, this Ramon!*”

“She goes to the studio, God knows with what furies at her heels, in a frenzy of fear. She meets there not Quayre but Ramon himself, this Ramon, monsieur, whose existence you would not credit, this fictitious personage who so excited your mirth! Ramon, no doubt, as she had perhaps foreseen, had lost no time in going to his old acquaintance of the New York student days to find out this wretched woman’s address. . . .”

He broke off, his eyes brimming with the emotion that gripped him. He made a little helpless gesture.

“Here,” he resumed in a low voice, “our groping hands once more encounter the curtain enveloping the dark crime which sprang out of this encounter. But this at least I know”—his clenched fist crashed down on the desk under Manderton’s very nose and his voice rang out through the room —“I have ascertained the motive which brought Raymond Flagg hot-foot from the prison-gates in search of this unhappy woman. . . .”

He stooped to the floor and picked up the hollow claw-foot of the orange divan.

“This,” he cried, shaking the black ball in Manderton’s face, “this was the magnet which drew this criminal three thousand miles to bring ruin on this peaceful home. Here, in this skilfully contrived hiding-place, for eight long years the Chamberlain diamonds lay concealed. From here this very night the thief who hid them has taken them. Now have I convinced you or are you doubting still?”

With a snort of anger he pitched the dragon’s claw upon the carpet and strode across the room. And there at the door stood Jim Cranmore.

Neither had noticed him come in. But a glance at his face told Boulot that his friend had heard all.

“Why didn’t she come to me?” he said in a strained voice. “Why do you say she turned, not to her husband but to this other man, this artist, who was nothing to her? . . .”

“I think,” the old detective replied, “it was to save you pain. . . .”

“Three years of married happiness,” said Cranmore as though speaking to himself, “and then . . . this!”

“Do not judge hastily, old friend!” the Frenchman put in and laid his hands on his shoulders. “And remember that a secret is the heavier to bear when one cannot share it! Ah! *la pauvre gosse!* . . .”

“She was not guilty, Boulot, never guilty. My God, to find this man Ramon! . . .”

“Patience, *mon ami!* All in good time. . . .”

Very deliberately Mr. Manderton had leaned across the desk and picked up the telephone receiver.

“Scotland Yard quickly, please!” he said. To Boulot he added, as he waited for the number:

“Where’s Flagg now?”

“He slept last night at Levine’s in Soho. A woman warned him and I missed him by seconds. He has been seen at Ognone’s, too. . . .”

The inspector had now got through to his office. Clearly, concisely he dictated a series of instructions, Flagg’s photographs and finger-prints to be looked out from the police records, his description to be circulated, enquiries to be made at Levine’s, a special watch to be kept at Ognone’s. . . .

“The ports, my friend,” Boulot put in, “watch the ports, especially Dover, Folkestone and Harwich. . . .”

“Why Harwich?” demanded Manderton, his hand over the transmitter.

“The route to Amsterdam which, with Brussels and Antwerp, as you know, is the centre of the diamond trade. . . .”

Manderton gave a few more orders in his curt, brisk way, then stepped to the fireplace and rang the bell.

“I want you, please,” he said to Jim Cranmore, “to ask Mrs. Harbury to come to us here. In view of what friend Boulot has told us, I think it would be interesting to hear more about this man who was enquiring here yesterday with a view to purchasing the orange divan. . . .”

Jim Cranmore spoke to the maid who answered the bell. Then Manderton turned to Boulot.

“I’m not a pig-headed man, friend Boulot,” he remarked chattily, “and I’m always ready to learn. I’m quite prepared to go all out on your fresh clue. I’ll even go so far as to adopt, for the present at any rate, your theory that Flagg is the murderer. . . .”

“*My theory!*” exclaimed the Frenchman with a start. “My friend, I have no theory and, until I see the motive for this senseless crime, I shall have none. You have gone on the supposition that Quayre was the last person to have seen Madame Cranmore before she was stabbed and must, therefore, be the murderer. All I have done is to bring our investigation one point more up-to-date and to have proved, I think conclusively, that, as far as our indications go at present, Ramon was the last person to speak with Madame Cranmore and is, to that extent, more implicated than the artist. When Ramon has spoken we shall doubtless know more. Let us, therefore, find Ramon. . . .”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAN AT THE AREA DOOR

THERE was a tap at the door. Manderton's man, Smith, stood there, twisting his hat round in his hands.

"Might I speak to you for a moment?" he asked Manderton.

"Well, what is it?" asked the detective irritably.

"Mother Rachel's gone! Her shop was shut up when I went by this morning so I popped in and asked the chemist about it! He says she fetched her luggage away in a taxi last night. So I thought I might as well nip over quick to her brother's at Hammersmith to see if she was still there. But he tells me he hasn't seen her since dinner-time yesterday. . . ."

"H'm . . ." said Manderton reflectively, and examined the toes of his boots. "Better call the office on the telephone there and tell them I want Mother Rachel found and not lost sight of again. They can detain her if necessary. They'd better put Leman Street on to it: most of her friends are down Houndsditch way. . . ."

It was Dolores who answered Jim Cranmore's summons. She was pale but quite composed. The plain black dress she was wearing had the effect of making her look much younger than she actually was. She seemed hardly more than a child, but there was a kind of forced repose about her manner which went to the heart of Jim, who knew the zest of life which was in her.

"Aunt Lettie is out, Jim," she said. "But I was with her when Agnes told us this morning about the man who called at the area door yesterday afternoon. I think it would be best for you to hear the story from Agnes herself. . . ."

She looked towards Manderton, a little timorously, and, on a sign from him, rang for the maid. Rather overawed by the presence of the three men, the girl told her story. The man was selling jewellery on the instalment system. She and the cook had looked at his stock. There had been some talk about the murder.

The man had said that he was also in the furniture line and hoped if, as the result of Mrs. Cranmore's death, the house were given up and the things disposed of, they would let him know. He paid good prices. He had read in the paper Mrs. Cranmore's dying words about the orange divan and wanted to know whether they (Agnes and the cook) thought "their guv'nor" would be anxious to dispose of it.

“He asked you, I suppose, in what room the divan stood?” said Manderton.

That came out, the girl thought, in the conversation.

“And whether the room was on the ground floor?”

No, Agnes replied. The man seemed to think it was in the drawing-room on the first floor at the front of the house, whereas, of course, it was in the morning-room on the ground floor, at the back.

Manderton exchanged an amused glance with Boulot.

“And, of course, you put him right?”

“Cook did, sir!” replied the maid simply.

“What sort of chap was this?”

“He was a smartly dressed young feller, sir,” replied the maid, “very talkative. In places in the West End we have a lot of his type at the back-door selling musical albums and the like. . . .”

“Had you ever seen him before?”

“No, sir!”

“And what did you reply to his suggestion?”

“Cook said as how if master wanted to sell the orange divan he’d go his own way about it and it wasn’t our place to propose it. . . .”

“Quite right, my dear! And what did he say to that?”

“He kept on pressing us. Said as how he might make a handsome offer if it was a good piece, wanted us to let him up to see it. . . .”

“And you refused, of course? . . .”

“Of course, sir. I shouldn’t dream of letting strangers into the house with all them swindlers about, dressed as telephone men and I don’t know what. Then the young feller beckoned me out in the area. He said nobody ought to work for nothing and he’d make me a nice present of a gold bangle if I could arrange for him to buy the couch. He said as how I might drop a word to the young lady or the master. I told him off properly, I can tell you! I never heard such impudence, trying to bribe me . . . and him a Jew, too! . . .”

“Ah! he was a Jew, eh? . . .”

“Well, sir, dark and Jewish-looking with a big nose. . . .”

“Then did he go away?”

“Yes, sir. But he asked me again to let him know if there was anything doing. . . .”

“Ah! Did he give you his address? . . .”

“No! He wrote down his telephone number. I’ve got it downstairs in the dresser drawer. . . .”

“Run along and fetch it, there’s a good girl! . . .”

Boulot pounded his open palm with his fist in exasperation.

“What ill-luck seems to pursue us!” he exclaimed. “If we had only known this yesterday. This explains Ramon’s visit here in the night. Now that he’s got the diamonds he’ll sever his connection with this merchant of furniture, of course. *Nom de Dieu!* . . .”

Agnes returned with a piece of paper.

“Here you are, sir,” she said. “Mr. Jack Harris, Western 9991. . . .”

Mr. Manderton pointed to the telephone.

“Ring him up at once,” he bade her. “Tell him that the orange divan is for sale and ask him to come round here immediately. And, stop! remind him not to forget your present . . . it’ll sound more natural. . . .”

In a trembling voice the girl asked for the number. They waited in silence. She asked again. Another pause. Then came word from the Exchange “No reply!” Manderton got on to the Supervisor. After a pause the oracle spoke. The number had been specially rung and there was No Reply.

“What is the address of this number?” said Manderton. Smith moved to the telephone.

“No, no!” said the detective, “they aren’t allowed to give it. Get me Official—Mr. Lefrey. . . .”

“Is that Mr. Lefrey? Detective-Inspector Manderton speaking. I want you to give me the address of telephone number Western 9991. Yes, I’ll wait. . . .”

He fixed his eyes on the ceiling and, pursing up his lips, whistled a little tune.

“Yes . . . yes . . . wait a moment, I’ll write it down. Mr. Issy Soker, 84, Arbor Road, Hammersmith. Many thanks! Good-bye!”

“But,” exclaimed Smith, shaking an excited finger at the inspector, “that’s Mother Rachel’s brother, as keeps the furniture shop. . . .”

“By George!” cried Manderton, slamming his fist on the desk, “I might have known! The old witch is in this up to the hocks! . . .”

He picked up his hat and gloves.

“May I use your car, Mr. Cranmore? Thanks. You will come with us, Boulot? Get a move on! There’s not a moment to spare. You come, too, Smith!”

Jim Cranmore, appearing greatly relieved to have something to do, hastened out to start up the car and Boulot and Smith went with him.

Manderton was preparing to follow them when Dolores stepped forward.

"Mr. Quayre," she began and cast down her eyes, "Mr. Quayre . . ." she repeated and hesitated.

"Well," retorted the detective coldly, "what about Mr. Quayre? He seems to be in a pretty pickle between the pair of you. . . ."

The girl raised her eyes, large and pleading, to his face. She was not the first woman who had looked for pity, for a spark of humanity, in that bluff, red mask and looked in vain. The detective's features were as a shield of steel, hardened in twenty-five years spent in the dark places of crime, screening any emotion from scrutiny.

"I'm sorry I tried to deceive you," she burst out. "I didn't know what I was doing. I could only see that Mr. Quayre was hopelessly implicated in this horrible crime of which he is wholly innocent. Oh! I didn't mean to hinder the clearing-up of my sister's murder, believe me, I did not! But I was distracted to find that it should be possible for anyone like Julian, so . . . so honest, so . . . clean-minded, to be even suspected of a foul thing like this. But he's cleared himself now, hasn't he, Inspector? He can be released, can't he? . . ."

Mr. Manderton had not taken his eyes off her.

"I am not aware that he has cleared himself," he observed stubbornly.

"But," exclaimed Dolores, looking at him in wonder, "Monsieur Boulot has furnished a motive which clearly fixes the guilt on this man Ramon. There is not a shade of suspicion attaching to Mr. Quayre. . . ."

"On the contrary," retorted the detective briskly. "He is quite unable to adduce any evidence in support of his alibi. . . ."

Swiftly Dolores changed her ground.

"He should be helping you," she cried. "You don't seem to realise that he's the only person in London, as far as we know, who has seen this man Ramon, the only person, with the possible exception of myself, who can identify him? He should be aiding in your investigation and you leave him locked up. . . ."

"It will be quite time enough to think of that when we have laid hands on this Ramon," began Manderton.

"Oh!" the girl flashed out in anger, "what have you got against Mr. Quayre? Why are you so down on him? . . ."

"See here, Miss Driscoll," said Mr. Manderton. "I am going solely on the facts. My line of investigation has led me to charge Mr. Quayre with the murder of your sister. My friend, Boulot, has discovered what he thinks is an important fresh clue. He's right, it *is* important. But I'm not scrapping the

result of my enquiries until I know where his trail leads me. Mr. Quayre was charged at the police-court this morning and remanded for a week! I'll bid you good day, miss!"

He picked up his hat and she heard the front door slam.

Outside George Cranmore's car stood at the kerb. It was a powerful-looking Hispano-Suiza with a long, gleaming bonnet of aluminium. Jim Cranmore was in the driving-seat and Smith sat beside him to show the way. As Manderton climbed into the tonneau alongside of Boulot, the self-starter whirred and the car slid off, almost noiseless, throbbing with the steady pulsation of the engine.

"By George!" observed Manderton, leaning over the back, "this is some 'bus, Mr. Cranmore! What do you reckon to knock out of her on the road? . . ."

"I've done seventy-seven," replied Cranmore over his shoulder.

They left the car in a side-street outside a public-house at the corner of Arbor Road, Cranmore, at Manderton's suggestion, remaining at the wheel.

"This is the happy hunting-ground of the motor thieves," the detective explained with an expert air. But when they reached the furniture shop, disappointment awaited them. The shutters were up and repeated knocking produced no result. A diminutive urchin, a torn cricket cap poised negligently on his tousled hair, watched them with that fascination of interest which the most ordinary action will arouse in the breast of the child of the London streets.

After they had knocked and rattled for the space of about ten minutes, the urchin slowly approached.

"Gorn to rices!" he piped.

"Who d'yer mean, sonny? Mr. Soker?" demanded Smith, bending down to him.

"Gorn to rices!" the child reiterated.

"W'en's 'e comin' back?"

"Gorn for the dy!" asseverated the interesting infant.

Manderton looked at his watch.

"Twelve o'clock!" he said. "Smith, you will keep observation on these premises. Our friends and I will make our headquarters in that public-house where we left the car, in the billiard-room on the first floor. You can see the windows from here! If you have anything to report, stand under that lamp and wave your handkerchief and I will come. Understand? . . ."

"If this Mr. Soker has gone to the races," remarked Mr. Manderton as they strolled back in the sunshine to the car, "it means that he has very recently done a lucrative deal. I know 'em! They're all alike. Whenever the crooks pull off anything in the racing season, we always look for 'em on the racecourse and, as often as not, dammit, we find 'em. Let's see . . . they're racing at Sandown Park to-day, aren't they? We can always put the Special Branch on to him. I daresay our friend Ramon has gone along as well. . . ."

Arrived at the public-house, they collected Cranmore and, while Mr. Manderton betook himself to the telephone, his two companions mounted to the billiard saloon on the first floor. It wore that faded and forgotten air peculiar to such places of recreation. All the windows were tightly closed as though to preserve intact the concentrated essence of stale cigar smoke and small beer with which the atmosphere was impregnated. The wall-paper was of that glazed arabesque description, apparently intended to represent Cordova leather work, relieved at intervals by fly-blown and dog-eared advertisements of whisky, beer and liqueurs. The stained and faded tables, the beer-rings on the woodwork, the scoring-boards still marking the conclusion of the last game, the memories of cast-away cigars which lingered in the air, combined to produce an atmosphere of gloom which struck chill on the light heart of Monsieur Boulot.

They lunched at a table in the bow window off partially cooked cold roast beef, biting pickles and tepid beer in mugs. From where they sat Arbor Street ran off in quiet squalor to the left. There was no sign of Smith, "but he's there, right enough," said Mr. Manderton. "Never was there such a chap for effacing himself! . . ."

All through the hot June afternoon they waited. Amateurs of billiards did not come to trouble their retreat. The bright sunshine pouring into the drab room beckoned out to the green playing fields and open spaces. Its broad beam, in which the dust specks danced, laid bare sordid details which a winter evening would mercifully obscure, with the red curtains drawn against the wind howling down the street, a pleasant fire in the now empty hearth and the balls clicking softly over the green cloth in the warm light that fell from the shaded lamps.

Cranmore posted himself in the window to watch the lamp-post where Smith should show his signal. Manderton and Boulot played interminable games of billiards enlivened by many expletives provoked by the wooden cushions and the uneven surface of the table. From time to time Manderton would be called to the telephone. Each time there was nothing to report.

A search at Levine's had disclosed no fresh development: the examination of Ramon's luggage which remained at the Niniveh Hotel had

brought nothing out of the ordinary to light: Gaston, to whom Boulot spoke in person, though he had kept in touch with Ognone's, the cellar-café, had no news of the red-haired girl.

Evening fell, warm and velvety. The bars below reawakened to life. A barrel-organ drew up outside and played its selection of tunes twice through while the children danced on the pavement to its strains. Still Smith gave no sign. . . .

They dined off partially cooked cold roast beef, biting pickles and tepid beer in mugs. It was eight o'clock. Cranmore was growing increasingly restive. He wanted to go out and reconnoitre. But Manderton would not hear of it.

"Leave it to Smith!" was his invariable reply to all suggestions of the kind.

Eight-thirty! Reports from Scotland Yard were still wholly negative. One by one the lamps of Arbor Street sprang into life. But the signal did not appear. The three men sat in the bow window and talked and smoked.

Nine o'clock! Raucous voices, the slamming of the beer-engines, bursts of noisy laughter, the metallic wheezing of a gramophone, mounted to the darkening room from the public bars below. Manderton had switched on the table lamps and was knocking the balls about, while Boulot watched him. Jim Cranmore sat in the window, as he had sat almost uninterruptedly since noon-day, gazing down the street.

Suddenly he sprang up.

"At last! . . ." he cried.

Beneath the lamp-post in front of Mr. Issy Soker's shop something white was agitated quickly. . . .

CHAPTER XXV

PURSUIT

BEHIND the closed shutters of Mr. Issy Soker's shop a yellow light moved fitfully to and fro. The little group outside caught its reflection through the fanlight above the door. The furniture dealer had returned, was Smith's whispered report. And Mr. Soker was alone.

Motioning to the others to stand aside, Manderton walked across to the shop and rapped sharply on the door. The moving light stood still, but no answer came from within. The detective knocked again. Then a fractious voice cried:

"'Ullo? . . ."

"Ith that Mither Thoker?"

Instead of the deep, incisive tones which habitually issued from Mr. Manderton's lips, his voice was now the voice of the London ghetto, a hideous lisping sing-song.

"Watcher want?"

"Pleeth, I 'ave a methage for yer from yer thither, Mrs. Amschel. . . ."

"Spit it out, then, carn't yer? . . ."

"The lidy said ath 'ow it wath private. . . ."

There came the sound of bars being shot back.

The door opened a very little way. Instantly Mr. Manderton's heavy boot was thrust into the crack.

"I want you, Soker," he said in his ordinary voice. They heard the Jew gasp as he fell back into the shop and the door opened.

In the narrow gangway between the furniture Issy Soker stood. His face was in the shadow; for the single candle which dimly illuminated the shop was behind him. But by the light of the street lamp falling through the half-open door they saw his yellow hands, with the deeply bitten nails, twisting and writhing in an agony of fear.

"Keep watch outside, Smith!" ordered Manderton, "and shut the door!"

He turned to the dealer.

"Now, Soker," he said, and stretching across, set the candle down between them, "where's Flagg?"

Issy Soker swallowed down a lump in his throat. A sickly smile appeared on his pale face.

"Flagg, mister?" he said tremulously, "Flagg? I can't say as 'ow I recollect the name. . . ."

"I don't want any play-acting from you," Manderton interrupted sternly. "I am a police inspector from Scotland Yard and I want information about Raymond Flagg, also known as Ramon de la Bandeira, in connection with the murder of. . . ."

"Murder?"

The Jew shook so violently that they thought he was about to fall.

"Come on now!" urged Manderton brusquely. "You saw him no later than yesterday. Tell us what you know. . . ."

"It ain't got nothing to do with me, mister, I swear it ain't," Issy Soker broke out. "This man come 'ere yesterday and asked for me sister. The two of 'em sent me away. Wen I come in after getting dinner me sister tells me that the gentleman is a curio dealer who knows as 'ow the orange divan up at Mrs. Cranmore's . . . you know, the one as figured in the case . . . is a rare piece and he thinks they might want to sell it. I'm to go up and make a bid for it, and if they won't sell, to find out all about it, w'ere it stands and so on, in case the gentleman wants to go to the 'ouse 'isself. . . ."

"Rot!" exclaimed Manderton. "All you had to do was to describe its position so that Flagg could break in and get what he wanted off it for himself. . . ."

"I swear to Gawd," cried the Jew in a panic, "I didn't know what he wanted with it. I went 'cos I'm in the furniture line; besides, me sister told me there was a five-pun note in it fer me. I didn't mean no 'arm, mister. . . ."

"Then why did you give a false name?"

"Rosa sez as 'ow I wasn't to drag us into it. She'd 'ad enough, she said, being mixed up with this murder already. . . ."

"Well, there was nothing doing at Cranmore's," Manderton broke in impatiently. "What happened next?"

"I met the American at the public-house up the street yesterday afternoon. I told him they wouldn't sell and that I'd left my telephone number with the gal at Cranmore's. 'E was very angry about that and said I 'ad no call to leave any address; 'owever, seein' as I 'ad done so, if I heard anything further, I was to let 'im know. I was to meet 'im again at nine o'clock this morning. . . ."

Boulot's brows contracted quickly.

"Where?" asked Manderton.

"At a caffy in Oxford Street. . . ."

“Did you go? Come on, no lying!”

“I’ll speak the trewth!” said Issy Soker in a low voice. “I’ve always kep’ meself respeckable, mister, and I didn’t know wot my sister was lettin’ me in for, straight I didn’t! I went to the caffy this mornin’. ’E was there. ’E wanted me to get ’im a car. . . .”

“A car?” cried Manderton, and looked at his watch.

“That’s right. ’E wanted a fast car to take ’im to Southampton. ’E said ’e’d buy it if needs be. But ’e wanted it quick. So I made some enquiries among friends of mine in the motor biz’ness. But this is the busy season and it wasn’t till a hour ago that I got ’im wot ’e wanted at a garridge at New Barnet. . . .”

“Has the car been delivered?”

“It was to pick him up at Turnham Green Church at half-past nine to-night. . . .”

“Damnation!” cried Manderton, “it’s that now! Mr. Cranmore, will you start your car up? We must follow him. . . . Where’s he going to in Southampton?”

“’E’s going to catch the night boat for Havre. . . .”

Again the detective looked at his watch, tapping it with his finger.

“Nine-thirty,” he murmured. “About eighty miles. And the boat leaves at midnight. . . . What is this car?” he asked suddenly.

“A racing roadster, a red two-seater. . . .”

“Fast? . . .”

“My pal sez there’s nothing on the road can pass it. . . .”

“Is your friend driving it for Flagg?”

“No! Flagg’s driving himself. . . .”

“Smith!”

Manderton opened the shop-door and called. From the roadway came the steady throb of the Hispano-Suiza, whose powerful lamps threw a long beam of light along the street.

“I detain this man! Take him along to the station!”

Mr. Soker dropped on his knees, blubbering piteously. But Mr. Manderton, shaking him off, picked up the candle and, having located the telephone, spent two busy minutes in conversation with Headquarters. Then he slammed down the receiver and hurried out to the car.

“A quarter to ten,” he remarked as they drew off. “I make no doubt but we’ve missed him. It’s likely to be a case of your car against his, Mr. Cranmore. . . .”

Jim Cranmore's face, stern and set, was dimly visible by the dashboard light.

"We shall want more petrol," he said shortly.

"If we don't catch him this side of Southampton," the detective resumed, "I hope they'll be able to hold him on the Havre boat. I've asked the Yard to wire. . . ."

"He is not going to escape me, Inspector . . ." said Cranmore between his teeth.

"He'll shoot if we run him to earth," observed Manderton. "I suppose you realise that? These high-fliers are the boys for gun-play when you get 'em in a corner. Have you got a gun?"

Cranmore shook his head grimly and put out his hand to signal to the traffic that he was about to slow down.

"Well, well," said Manderton, "we shall see what we shall see. The Chamberlain diamonds, eh? Dear, dear, a remarkable case! . . ."

Outside Turnham Green Church the road was empty. A policeman whom Manderton consulted had seen nothing of any red car. But then, he explained, he had been on the beat and it might have passed while his back was turned.

"We have to decide," said Manderton, rubbing his chin, "whether to take that chap Soker's word for it and go after our man to Southampton or make further enquiries. But we must make up our minds quickly. We haven't a moment to lose. . . ."

"Let's go on to Southampton!" said Cranmore, his fingers tapping impatiently on the steering-wheel.

"Fear put truth for once into this Jew's mouth!" remarked Boulot. "On—to Southampton!"

Just then a small boy appeared on a bicycle coming from the direction of the main road. Manderton stopped him. It was a lucky chance. About a quarter of an hour ago, the boy said, a fine big red racing-car, travelling very fast, had swung past him into Chiswick High Road. . . .

From a garage in Chiswick High Road they filled up with petrol and replenished the radiator with water. Then the busy mechanics, whom Manderton was hustling like a slave-driver, discovered that one of the tyres was "down." The car had to be backed into the garage for the compressed air tubing to be attached.

Manderton was fuming.

"Ten o'clock!" he protested. "What earthly chance have we? You'll have to average over forty miles an hour if we're to reach Southampton before midnight. . . ."

“Better five minutes’ delay now,” replied Cranmore impassively, “than tyre trouble on the road! . . .”

And he had all four tyres blown up.

At last they were ready. The self-starter whirred, the mechanics, with Cranmore’s princely tips clutched in oily palms, tipped their hats and the car slowly backed out. The two detectives scrambled in and, with a low purr, the machine glided out over the darkly shining road, Cranmore, silent and saturnine, bent over the wheel.

It was eleven minutes past ten.

CHAPTER XXVI

ON THE SOUTHAMPTON ROAD

THAT night Jim Cranmore drove like a man possessed. Action had made another man of him. In the driving-seat of his car he was, indeed, in his element. His skill as a driver was of no mean order. Habitually daring without being reckless, careful without being slow, on this June night he threw all caution to the wind of their headlong passage.

Aimless and broken as he had been while merely an onlooker, into his hands the detectives had now surrendered the fortunes of the pursuit. Vigorously, resiliently, he took up the charge. His eye was bright, his hand on the steering-wheel steady as a rock, whatever the risks he took, and when he spoke, which he did but to answer Manderton's occasional questions, his voice had a firmer ring.

Perilously they dodged in and out of the press of crawling trams and the incoming flow of cars through the bottleneck of Brentford, heading for Hounslow, beyond which the open country gave promise of a freer run.

Manderton was anxious about their road. Cranmore, a motorist since his college days, with a mind like a road map of the United Kingdom, answered him without hesitation, briefly and in jerks.

"He's a stranger . . . ten to one he'll follow the main road, that runs south-west after Bagshot, through Frimley, Aldershot and Alresford to Winchester. The better route . . . much less traffic . . . lies farther north through Basingstoke. Half an hour's start . . . we can scarcely catch him up . . . we'll have to cut him off. We're taking the northern route. . . . Both roads join in Winchester. Yes, Winchester . . . that's where we ought to meet him. . . ."

The night was warm and starry; the moon had not yet risen. Beneath their wheels the tarred road slipped away, shining black and moving as though they rode over the dark waters of a lake. Their lamps drove a great white path of light before them, fringed on either hand by trees, looking oddly green as the car's swift passage plucked them momentarily from the darkness, an oak paling, the high rhododendrons of a country estate, the flowering roses of a wayside garden scenting the night. . . .

Through little towns, where placid burgesses took the evening air in the roadway and lovers paced the lanes in silence, through tiny villages already sunk to rest, they thundered, Cranmore, resourceful, imperturbable, a thing of

steel, a piece with the car. On the open road the speedometer needle was touching 60 now. . . .

The night-wind rushed in their ears. The car travelled irresistibly forward with the steadiness of some great projectile heading for its mark. The grassy edge of the highway, whitely green in the glare of the lamps, unrolled itself like a straight, unending ribbon, so closely did Cranmore hug the marge.

At the level-crossing at Sunningdale, where they had to await the passing of a train, they asked for news of the red car of a man who sat over a cigar outside the Railway Hotel. A red car, travelling very fast, had crossed the railway half an hour before.

“He’s following the main road!” exclaimed Cranmore.

Over the smooth switchback road which runs through the quiet, dank woods they ran to Bagshot. Steadily the speedometer needle climbed or dropped back . . . 65 . . . 66 . . . 64 . . . 63 . . . 65 . . . as they swooped up and down the slopes. They roared through rural Bagshot, their lamps blazing astonishingly on the windows of the old-world shops, the engine arousing the echoes of the little main street.

“Winchester!” muttered Cranmore, as they came out of the town. “If we are to catch up with him, we must make Winchester by a quarter past eleven!”

Recklessly he stamped the accelerator down and, like a live thing, the car leapt out into the darkness of the Basingstoke road.

In the tonneau Boulot thrilled to the race through the night. Old memories flashed through his mind, headlong courses over the arrow-straight roads of France where, in many a contest with Time the Unforgiving, he had placed his life in the hands of a French chauffeur wild, like himself, with excitement. His vivid Gallic phantasy portrayed the man in the red car ahead, plunging, a stranger, into the night over unknown roads in an unfamiliar car, fancying his interrogatory glances at the signposts as they whizzed by, his nervous lookings back at those pursuers which, as Boulot knew, in the criminal’s imagination always gallop behind.

“Five minutes to eleven!”

Manderton’s voice came to him distinctly out of the noise of their passage.

“Basingstoke!” he said, pointing to a smother of lights twinkling out of the darkness before them.

Of a fussy policeman who slowed them down at a turning in the town to let a farmer in a Ford pass, they asked the question which, in their minds and

on their tongues, had journeyed with them from London. What of the red car? . . .

Again they drew blank.

“There ain’t bin no red car threw ’ere!” replied the man, with a pleasant country burr, “leastways not sence I’ve bin on dooty there ’aven’t. And I’ve bin ’ere on the point sence afore eight o’clock. . . .”

Now they were out on the Winchester road. The night was a little lighter. Through a ragged screen of pines set on a tall hog-back above a valley a great yellow moon peered down curiously at them. The country seemed asleep as they sped through the grassy chalk hills which run down to the burbling Itchen. The air was warm and scented and fireflies danced above the long, shining radiator as they swept on and on.

Presently as they quietly dropped down a precipitous hill, a distant drumming reached their ears above the throb of the Hispano-Suiza. From somewhere among the long valleys which ran between the chalk downs before them, it rose and fell insistently. Swiftly Cranmore raised his head and listened.

“That’s a racing car!” he said, and forthwith accelerated.

They roared into Winchester at forty miles an hour. The drop from seventy odd was the extent of Cranmore’s concession to the speed regulations. “Old Winton” slumbered tranquilly in the bright moonlight, its ancient cathedral tucked almost shamefacedly away behind the narrow High Street where the gabled houses trembled to the noise of the pursuers’ passage.

From the shadow of the City Cross a brawny figure stepped into the middle of the road and signalled frantically with the arms. It was a large and indignant policeman.

Cranmore slipped his foot from the accelerator to the brake, cursing audibly. The car slowed down, stopped. . . .

“Twelve mile a hour through Winchester!” said Dogberry, diving into the tail pocket of his tunic for his pocket-book. “Yew seems to ’ave gone ravin’ mad, some of yew motorists! Yew ’avin’ a race or wot? I’ll trouble yew for your licence! Yew’re the second as I’ve stopped within the last ten minnits. I don’t know wot the roads are comin’ tew. . . .”

“You say you have stopped another man?” asked Cranmore quickly.

“Aye, an’ tuk ’is name and address, same as I want from yew. . . .”

“In a red car, was he?”

“That’s right. . . .”

“Come on!” shouted Cranmore, diving for the hand-brake, “out of the way, officer. . . .”

Manderton seized his arm.

“Steady!” he said. “You can’t do things like that!”

He turned to the policeman. Indignation at the insult thus added to the affront already offered to the police of Winchester—Winchester with its thousand odd years of municipal history—had rendered Dogberry speechless.

“We are in pursuit of that red car,” said Mr. Manderton. “I am an inspector from Scotland Yard . . . here is my card. You did quite right to stop us for furious driving, officer, and if you wish to report it, of course, you must. But you must not delay us further. . . .”

With a rather dazed expression Dogberry took the card which the detective gave him and holding it down under one of the car’s side-lights, examined it suspiciously. Cranmore had, in the meantime, started the car.

“Right, sir!” presently said the policeman, straightening himself up and saluting. “That’ll be all right! I hopes yew catch ’im. My word! But ’e was travellin’!”

“Which way did he go?”

“Out by Southgate Street on to the Southampton road. . . .”

His voice died away as with a roar the car sprang forward.

They left the city, making for the picturesque village of St. Cross. Outwardly calm, Cranmore opened the car full out and it plunged and quivered as they rushed through the moonlit country. St. Cross was a mere streak of white as they whirled through the hamlet.

And presently they saw him. Round a bend in the road they glimpsed a long dark car shooting forward between the hedgerows, the driver a mere blur crouched over the wheel. The Hispano-Suiza took the curve on two wheels and they heard the gravel spurt up against the wings, for the road surface was loose. They crashed down a slope and came to a level ascent up which the red tail-light of the fugitive seemed to crawl.

They took the hill flying. But they hardly seemed to gain on the red car. Now they were running on the level and the fresh breeze blew in their faces. The speedometer marked 77. . . .

“As long as the tyres last . . .” cried Manderton, one hand grasping his hat, turning to speak to Boulot behind him. He seemed thoroughly happy and was perfectly calm.

Surely they were gaining a little on that ruby gleam ahead? Out in the open the moonlight was very bright. They could now make out the form of the driver of the red car. He wore a check cap crammed down over his ears

and he was sitting almost erect in his seat, his hands high up on the steering-wheel.

They were certainly overhauling him. When he turned his head to look behind, they could make out his profile, the high cheekbones, the long, aquiline nose. . . The speedometer marked 77. . . .

Then Cranmore spoke.

“Mallet Hill!” he said.

The crawling needle on the dial beside his knee jerked reluctantly to 78 . . . 79. . . .

The ruby light disappeared.

“Hold on . . . the hill . . .” Cranmore’s voice came fitfully, in spasms, as the car jerked and plunged, the wheel quivering in his grasp. They were rushing down a long steep descent. Now the car in front was in the beam of their head-lights. In the white glare the rear number-plate stood out legibly: CY 4098.

The man in the red car turned round completely. The light fell full on him. From beneath the peak of his cap dark, defiant eyes looked out of a livid face, teeth bared by parted lips.

Then Cranmore cried out:

“God! . . .” and tore frantically at the driving-wheel, there was a terrific crash, a cracking of branches, a smother of mud and water, as the car ahead pitched over into the high hedgerow, reared up on its bonnet and fell. . . .

As they whizzed past, their own car rocking wildly, and swung round sharply to the right, following the bend of the road, they had a vision of wheels that spun madly in the air, of leaves that floated softly down. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

“UNTIL THE DAY BREAKS . . .”

UNDER an overhanging tree at the foot of the hill Cranmore at last tugged the quivering car to a standstill. They could scarcely realise that the chase was at an end. Yet the rushing wind beat no more upon their faces, the high drumming of the engine was no more in their ears. That sudden crash in the night had snapped the tension of their breathless pursuit, the intoxicating thrill of the man-hunt which had bound these three men together throughout the night, making them, as they strained forward in their seats, almost part of the throbbing mechanism that swept them along.

Now quiet enveloped them, the soft silence of a moonlight night. It was dark under the tree where the car had stopped, but behind them the curve of the road gleamed white beneath the moon. They listened; but no sound came from that bank where the road swung round. . . .

“More than sixty he was doing! Killed himself for sure. . . .” Cranmore muttered thickly as he sat impassive at the wheel. He seemed a little breathless and his hair glistened dank with perspiration. Suddenly he straightened up, dropped over the side of the car and bolted off up the hill.

The two detectives, stolid and imperturbable, followed more slowly. To them the end of the chase was merely the end of a case. At how many *dénouements*, unexpected, violent, even as this, had they not assisted—the sudden revolver shot, the ready poison phial or the rope in some lonely room or else the deliberate swiftness of the public executioner?

As they trudged up the hill Mr. Manderton blew his nose vehemently and observed:

“Broken his neck, I shouldn’t wonder! . . .” to which Monsieur Boulot replied in all sincerity:

“*Quel dommage! . . .*”

They exchanged no remarks other than these.

High above the tall hedgerows the shapeless mass of the overturned car bulked blackly huge in the moonlight. With bonnet crushed and twisted, wheels in the air, the red body lay athwart the bushes. It had struck the low bank skirting the road, burying its forepart in the green turf and turned half a somersault into a field beyond the bank. No sound of life came from the wreckage. As the two men halted and the surrounding silence swallowed up

the ring of their feet on the hard road, they heard faintly a persistent drip! drip! from the derelict above them. The air reeked of gasoline.

They forced a way through the hedge. In the open the moon made the scene as bright as day. Before them, silhouetted black against the skyline, Cranmore stood, his back to the road, staring down at the mass of twisted metal at his feet. Not until they were right upon him did they become aware of the thing that drew his fascinated gaze. And seeing it they felt that, indeed, they had reached the end of the chase. Cranmore was looking down upon the still form of a tall dark man, even as Julian Quayre had described him.

He lay on his back beneath the capsized car, the edge of which was pressing on his chest. There was a long smear of blood across his forehead and blood upon his lips.

His eyes were closed. His cap had gone and his thick, dark hair, heavily streaked with grey, fell about his brow. His arms were flung out on either side of him, clear of the wreckage. Cranmore, his head sunk on his breast, stared with haggard eyes at that limp form.

“Is he . . . dead?”

It was Cranmore who asked the question. Manderton shook his head and pointed to the little ooze of blood that bubbled fitfully at the stranger’s mouth.

“Lungs!” he said shortly.

The detective sprang forward and, stooping to get his shoulder beneath the inverted footboard of the car, heaved with all his strength. The footboard bent beneath the strain. But the car did not move. A dull, quavering groan came from the wreckage. It was as though the tortured fragments of the red car were protesting.

The detective dropped to his knee. The stranger opened his eyes. What dark and weary eyes they were!

“Guess I missed that turn . . .” he gasped out and tried to smile. Then he murmured: “My chest! . . .” and moaned again.

Now a light flickered through the hedge. There were footsteps and voices on the road. Two men came at a trot through a gate at the end of the field, one swinging a lantern. Their hair was tossed, their shirts were thrust into their trousers and their bare feet showed through their unlaced boots. They had obviously sprung up from sleep at the noise of the accident.

“Keep that lantern clear of the wreck,” ordered Manderton peremptorily as they ran up—“the place is sodden with petrol—and lend a hand to lift the car off this man. He’s only pinned down by the chest, I fancy. The rest of his body seems to be clear. . . .”

The lantern was set down and the two men approached, yellow-haired, sun-burnt fellows, rather awestruck.

Manderton disposed the party so as to get the best possible purchase on the heavy car, while he prepared to draw that helpless form free. Cranmore took no part in the operation. He remained, as they had first found him, gazing fixedly down on that livid, blood-stained face. . . .

The yokels cried "Yo!" and the car was braced up. Manderton gently drew the limp form clear of the wreckage and, as he knelt on the grass, propped the injured man up in his arms. Boulot who knew him only in his blustering, hectoring moods, wondered to see his colleague as tender, as gentle, as a mother with her child. . . .

The stranger seemed to hover on the brink of consciousness. He moaned sobbingly at intervals and each time blood bubbled at his mouth. His breath came painfully with a curious wheezing sound. Manderton wiped his lips with his handkerchief.

The eyelids fluttered. Eyes that pleaded piteously like a wounded animal's looked into the artist's face.

"Carmen . . . *you'll* have to meet her, Julian," he panted.

His voice was very weak but quite distinct. Then he fell to muttering broken phrases, unintelligible, and after a little was still.

With a jerk of the head Manderton summoned one of the two countrymen to his side.

"Do you live near-by?" he asked in a low voice. "We ought to move him where he can rest easy till we can fetch the doctor to him. He won't last long. . . ."

"Our farm's only just across the road," the man replied. "You passed it when you coom daown the hill! Take him there and welcome, poor chap. And me or my brother'll nip over to Doctor Martin's . . . he's only over at the next village. . . ."

"My friend will drive you in his car and bring the doctor back," said the detective with a questioning look at Cranmore.

"Of course," replied the other absently. He had relapsed into his old mood of listless misery. The still figure with the bubbling breath seemed to possess some fascination for him. Cranmore scarcely took his eyes off the grey, distorted face.

"Bert'll bring a hurdle," the countryman said to Manderton and pointed out across the moon-bathed grass. "There's some stacked yonder by the rick! And I'll fetch the doctor! . . ."

He took Cranmore with him and they left the field by the gate. "Bert" carried across a hurdle which they spread with their overcoats. They lifted the injured man upon the improvised stretcher and bore him slowly to the farm.

The movement seemed to stir the still figure to consciousness.

"If I'd a-known the road!" he muttered. And then:

"God!" he moaned. "God! That this should be the end! . . ."

Through a white gate set in a high yew hedge and over a path through a narrow garden they made their way. The farm was a long, low house with a steep thatch that gleamed grey in the moon-beams. Under the low eaves the front door stood open.

They laid him on a settee in the living-room of the farm, a plain, homely place with a floor of red tiles, an oak dresser, a grandfather clock that ticked solemnly in the corner and a long diamond-paned window opening on the little garden whose roses and pinks and hollyhocks perfumed the night air. The farmer bustled into the adjoining kitchen to heat water against the arrival of the doctor.

The stranger was silent now. He lay flat on his back, his hands folded across his body, his eyes closed. The hurricane lamp on the table, throwing long shadows over the whitewashed ceiling, dimly illuminated his face.

Manderton and Boulot drew up chairs and sat down by the couch. And so they waited the coming of the doctor in a silence broken only by the sound of laboured breathing, the tick of the clock and the step of the farmer as he moved about the adjacent room.

Presently Boulot became aware that Ramon had opened his eyes and was looking from him to his companion. The injured man twisted his features into the ghost of a smile.

"Ah! *les flics!*"—in that quiet Hampshire farmhouse the argot phrase for the police sounded oddly in Boulot's ears—"Gee! How it hurts to breathe! Hasn't one of you boys gotten any morphia? . . ."

He broke off panting. The sweat stood out in little drops on his forehead.

"The doctor will be here in a minute!" said Manderton.

The sick man nodded understanding.

"Maybe he'll fix me so's I can talk without it gripping me so! Gee! But I'll make you molls sit up! Who's your buddy, Boulot? . . ."

"You know my name, Flagg?" asked the Frenchman.

Ramon moved his head weakly in assent.

"Know you all, any of you as counts. . . ."

"This is Mr. Manderton, of the English police. . . ."

Again he essayed to smile.

"Glad to know you. But I think we've met . . . too late!"

Then a footstep rang on the tiled porch, the door swung back and the throb of the car fell upon their ears. The farmer came in quickly. With him was a little man in pince-nez and a golfing suit who carried a small bag. Jim Cranmore followed after. The group withdrew to the window while the doctor, having removed his coat and washed his hands, made his examination.

When he rejoined them in the window embrasure, wiping his hands on a towel, his face was troubled.

"Not a hope," he said. "Chest badly crushed and the lung perforated. He'll hardly last the night. I've given him some morphia and they're getting him some rugs, for he complains of being cold. He'll be fairly comfortable till the end comes. If you wanted to speak to him. . . ."

The three men crossed to the settee.

"Flagg," said Manderton gently, "will you tell us what you know of the death of Carmen Cranmore? . . ."

Slowly Ramon raised his eyes, their radiance dimming like the flame of an expiring lamp, to the detective's grave face.

"Sure I will, Chief!"

His voice was scarcely above a whisper when he spoke. But it was distinct and his mind seemed clear. Feebly he fumbled at his shirt.

"Put . . . your hand inside my vest," he panted. "There's a pocket in the lining . . . a package there . . . that's it. . . ."

Manderton drew out a long narrow parcel tied up with tapes in a chamois leather cover. Obedient to the other's direction he opened it. A superb diamond necklace . . . four rows of flashing gems . . . sparkled in his hands.

A rueful smile appeared at the corners of the bitter sad mouth.

"This is the end of the road for me, Chief," said Ramon. "I've never made much account of religion and such things but I wouldn't care to die with a lie on my lips. What I tell you now is the truth! . . . Those damned stones in your hand were my trouble.

"Listen! Carmen was my wife. I met her at the Art School at Greenwich Village. I was married at the time and already known as the flyest jewel thief in the Eastern States. I'd been over in Europe for a year . . . the Riviera . . . Cowes . . . Ostend . . . Deauville . . . Paris. . . . I pulled some great stunts. In Paris I found I had a taste for painting and an artist fellow I met told me I

ought to take it up. That's how I came to attend the Greenwich Art School. . . ."

He broke off, struggling piteously for breath.

"It don't matter any how I started on the cross. I was only a college boy at the time an' it came so amazing easy. I kept that side of my life from Carmen, that and my previous marriage.

"I had counted on my wife divorcing me so's I could marry Carmen. But my wife stalled at the last moment. God knows, I meant to treat Carmen right, but when my wife refused to release me, I just couldn't give the kid up. She was the sweetest, purest thing I'd ever met! If we'd crossed each other's tracks before, all this wouldn't never have been. . . .

"She lived by herself, facing the world alone, so game, so brave. We kept our marriage secret. I told her it would harm my prospects. She believed me; she thought the world of me, poor child. We each kept on our studio and folks never guessed. From time to time I did a hotel job, a safe robbery or something of the kind. When I married Carmen I meant to cut out the crooked stuff. But gosh! once a man's in the game. . . .

"For three years we were very happy. I kept on painting because it amused me and, besides, I had to have something to show Carmen for the money I brought home. Then they grabbed me over that Pittsburg affair. . . ."

He paused again, his hands fluttering, his breath coming in quick gasps.

"Only for the sport of the thing . . . I did it; for I knew it would be mighty hard to dispose of stones like these. But some of the fellows defied me. . . . I guess I was younger then.

"No fence in New York would touch the necklace; for the insurance company were raising hell over the robbery. So, till things quieted down a bit, I put the collar away in a hiding-place I made myself in one of the feet of the old Chinese couch in Carmen's studio where she always used to sleep. Whatever happened, I knew she would never get rid of that old divan; for it was our marriage bed.

"Then Brady got me in New York. That was my first wife's doing. I might have forgiven her selling me to the police but she found out about Carmen and told my poor girl about my previous marriage. But all this I only discovered the other day when I came out of prison.

"Carmen came to see me in the Tombs. I shall never forget our meeting. I know now that she realised the way I had deceived her, but she said nothing to me. She did not reproach me for the wrong I'd done any more than she blamed me for the life I'd led. She was cool and practical as she always was

and told me of the counsel she'd hired to defend me. Then she went away. I never saw her again till the other afternoon in Quayre's studio. . . ."

His voice was growing weaker. Clearly he was ebbing fast; but in that poor, crushed body there was an unsuspected store of vitality that kept his brain clear though his bodily strength were failing.

He moved restlessly on the couch.

"How dark it grows!" he muttered and glanced fearfully around. "Will morning never come? . . ."

There was a dim greyness now in the garden where the tall hollyhocks swayed gently against the lattice window.

"Eight years they gave me," the whispering voice resumed. "I had never been in jail before. I thought I should go mad. I had only Carmen to live for. And Carmen failed me.

"She never came again. She never wrote and my letters to her were returned unopened. I could not believe she had thrown me over. I could not imagine what had become of her. For eight long years I never knew. . . . Eight years of mind torture! That's what they gave me for pinching the sparklers off of a fat society dame. . . .

"They pushed me out of prison the other day without a cent, without a job, with only my memories of the past. My mind was made up! I meant to go crooked big. And I wanted that necklace to make a fresh start with!

"My wife met me at the prison gate. It was she who told me what she had done. I cursed her for the harm she had wrought us both, Carmen and me, and left her there on the street. I had to find Carmen. I wondered if she'd take me back . . . if not there was the necklace. . . .

"I hunted New York for her. I discovered that she had gone to England. But I could find out nothing further about her. Then I heard that Quayre, who had been with us at the Art School, was painting in London. I went to England.

"Directly I arrived in London I got Quayre's address and went straightaway to his studio. The front door was open but the place was empty. And then Carmen came. . . ."

A deep sigh escaped from the pale lips. The dimming eyes were suddenly wet with tears.

"The moment I saw her I knew that she had not altogether forgotten me. I took her in my arms without a word being spoken. For a moment she did nothing but just stare at me like she was dazed or frightened. Then she broke away and began to cry. She kept saying over and over again: 'Why do you look like that? What have they done to you?' You see, I'd forgotten the

change that those eight years in the penitentiary had made in me. The Ramon that Carmen had known was a pretty smart-looking fellow with crisp black hair. But now. . . .”

A little blood frothed at his mouth. The doctor caught Manderton’s eye and shook his head gravely.

The detective bent down over the dying man.

“Why did you kill her, Flagg?” he said.

“Not me, Chief . . . if it’s my last word. When I told her about the necklace . . . and the divan . . . she turned . . . ran from the studio . . . left me there. I only knew . . . she was . . . stabbed . . . from what the newspapers printed. . . .”

His head was sinking on his chest and his voice was growing drowsy. Again the blood bubbled at his mouth. His shirt rose and fell swiftly as he strove for breath.

In a little while he turned his head and spoke again.

“I didn’t treat her right, poor girl. . . . But I never raised hand against her . . . God is my witness. . . .”

A bubbling sound burst from his throat.

“Then who killed her?”

Cranmore stooped down and spoke in the ear of the dying man.

“Who killed her? Tell me! I am her husband! . . .”

Slowly the dying man turned and looked into Cranmore’s face. He tried to speak, he tried to smile and failed. A look of infinite compassion stole into the glazing eyes. He made a very slight motion of the head. Then his hand feebly sought Cranmore’s, found it and lay still.

The lamp on the table was smoking and the doctor extinguished it. The room was flooded with the pink glow of sunrise. Every now and then that bubbling sound came from the couch. They sat in silence and watched the day break.

The morning sun was flooding the parlour with sunshine when Boulot, after a quick glance at the still figure on the settee, crossed to the window and flung the casement wide.

“A custom we have in Brittany,” he explained *sotto voce* to the doctor, “to let the departing soul go free! . . .”

They all had risen and stood about the couch contemplating the dead man. Boulot nudged Manderton.

“His hands were famous, his touch on a safe unsurpassed,” he said. “Look at them now!”

The hands that lay limp on the coverlet were horny, with fingers blackened and gnarled . . . the hands of a convict.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAST LINK

“ONE more link remains to be forged,” said Manderton brightly, tapping Boulot on the knee, “and that is the link connecting Ramon with Quayre. The enquiries I have made by cable in New York should help us there. . . .”

In the intoxicating freshness of the perfect June morning they were bowling smoothly along to Southampton. Manderton’s profound distrust of the primitive communications of the average English village had prompted this move. They had only ten miles or so to go. He desired to telephone headquarters without delay. At Southampton, he pointed out, they could get the communication easily, have a bath and breakfast and return to town at their leisure.

“What link, *mon cher*? I don’t quite understand you. . . .”

“You may not agree with me,” his colleague answered as his eye roved out over the rushing landscape, “but I am inclined to assume that Ramon spoke the truth before he died. That being so, he is cleared of the murder and we have to ask ourselves who confronted Mrs. Cranmore as she fled from the studio and stabbed her? . . .”

“Well? . . .”

“The circumstantial evidence still points to one person only,” rejoined Mr. Manderton stubbornly—“Quayre! . . .”

The old Frenchman pursed up his mouth.

“This would mean that Quayre, having seen the man and the woman together in the studio, would have left by the garden gate, gone round to the front and lain in wait in the entrance hall for the woman to come out, *hein*?”

Manderton nodded.

“That would be the way of it, I expect. . . .”

“The motive, jealousy, the echo of some old intrigue? . . .”

“Something like that, probably. . . .”

Boulot did not pursue the subject further. He closed his eyes and, leaning back in his seat, appeared to fall asleep.

On their arrival in Southampton, they drove through the clattering streets to the big red hotel opposite the docks. While Cranmore saw to the garaging

of the car, Manderton went to the telephone. He suggested that Boulot might order breakfast for the party.

It had not yet struck eight and the dining-room was almost empty. A few people were snatching a hasty meal before departing by early train or steamer. There was a large family of Brazilians, father and mother, dark-skinned, sloe-eyed, obese, and a brood of chattering children; a woman who sat alone at a table by the window; a group of officers from one of the big steamship lines; two colonials with sun-bleached faces, each silently perusing a newspaper propped up in front of his plate.

Boulot dropped into a seat at a window which looked over the dockyard wall upon a forest of masts and smoke-stacks. In the distance the trams thumped and clanged and from time to time the long hoot of a siren came wailing from the sea. While he waited for his coffee, he brought out his tobacco and fold of cigarette paper and rolled himself a cigarette.

The coffee was excellent, black and strong. He drank two cups of it, then pushed back his plate and lit his cigarette. He had scarcely realised how tired he was until he had sat down. He inhaled the acrid smoke of the Maryland tobacco and breathed it out luxuriantly. Idly he glanced around the room.

The Brazilians were preparing to depart. They were homeward bound, Boulot judged from the elegant Parisian clothes of the two slender, dark-eyed daughters. The two colonials had gone: the ship's officers were paying their bill, one of them casting up their respective shares with a pencil on the back of the menu.

The woman at the table by the window lingered over her breakfast. With her chin propped up on her hand she was gazing pensively out across the docks. As Boulot looked at her, his eyes grew puzzled, then were suddenly alive with tense interest. She sat with her back turned towards him. Beneath the white straw of her hat, her hair, which was of a rich, dark red, fell in a low knot along her slim, dead-white neck. . . .

Silently Boulot put up a finger and attracted the waiter's attention. The detective saw at a glance that the man was a Frenchman.

"My friend," he said in French, "who is this lady who sits at the window? . . ."

"*Ma foi*," the man replied. "I do not know her name. An Italian, it would seem. She came only last night. She dined late and asked me about the Havre boat which departs at midnight. She left to catch it. She must have changed her mind. . . ."

The Havre boat! Boulot motioned the man away. Rising he crossed to the table where the woman sat. So intent was she upon her own thoughts that for a moment she did not notice him.

He seized the opportunity to study her features.

She was of dainty figure, and, although she was no longer in her first youth, the perfect oval of her face, sadly thin and wasted, yet showed traces of great beauty. Her eyes, so dark-brown as to appear almost black, contrasted strangely with the russet tint of her hair. Her face was naturally pallid, the skin white and exceedingly fine, and her hands, on which her cheeks rested, were slender and shapely.

At the sound of the detective's voice she started violently and a flood of colour dyed her face.

"I think madame has lost this . . ." he said softly. Opening his hand he disclosed upon the palm the little enamel charm fashioned in the semblance of a human eye.

"*Ma mascotte!* . . ." she exclaimed with a little gasping cry, then checked herself affrighted while the colour slowly fled from her cheeks.

"You are, I think, Madame de la Bandeira?" said Boulot in the same voice of deadly suavity.

"No, you are mistaken! That is not my name!" she responded quickly.

"I have to tell you, madame,"—the detective's bright eyes never left her face—"that your husband is dead! . . ."

Her eyes opened wide with terror. Her mouth framed words but none came. For a moment Boulot thought she was going to faint. He saw her long almond-shaped nails dig pink crescents in the backs of her white hands.

"Dead!" she repeated. "Dead! And I . . .?"

Languorously she stretched her arms straight out on the table before her and let her eyes travel slowly down their white curves. Her head drooped and twice she sighed heavily.

"Would it not be best, madame, to tell me the whole truth?"

The detective paused for her reply.

"How . . ." she began and rested tremulously on the word. "How . . . did it happen?"

Her voice was low and lifeless.

"He was gravely injured in a motor-car accident last night while fleeing from arrest for the murder of Mrs. Cranmore. He died at four o'clock! . . ."

Boulot's bright eye narrowly watched the mobile face.

She moved her head proudly. Her eyes shone black and hard and her mouth set in a defiant line. She gave her shoulders a pathetic little shrug.

"I stabbed the signora!" she said at length. "I am Lucia de la Bandeira! . . ."

In the gaunt bareness of a provincial police-station, where the sunshine, falling through the barred window, chequered the shabby linoleum, she told the story of the crime. She had wept bitterly while the formalities of her arrest were complied with and her face was a mask of tragedy as she confronted her audience of four—Manderton, Boulot, Cranmore and a plump superintendent—across the inky table. Her cheeks wet with tears, defiant and despairing in turns, with nervous gesture and vibrant voice, little by little she lifted the curtain which had obscured the death of Carmen Cranmore.

“The knife should have been for him, *la canaille*,” she cried, her clenched fist raised menacingly, “but when a woman loves—and God knows, I loved him!—she is blind, a fool. *Voyons*, I was happy before I met him. He took me away from my husband. I was singing at the Costanzi Theatre in Rome. We met at a *thé dansant* at the Grand Hotel. He was young, handsome, elegant, living like a prince. And he spoke Italian beautifully, the language of lovers, my own language. No woman could resist Ramon as he was in those days. *Ma, basta! . . .*”

She broke off on a hard sob.

“I went away with him. We travelled half across Europe together, Monte Carlo, Paris, Vienna, Budapest, Abbazia . . . wherever luxury and beautiful women and fine horses and cars were to be met with. *Dio!* but I was proud of my Ramon. No one could refuse him anything. He made friends so easily.

“After my husband had obtained his divorce against me, we were married at the Consulate in Paris. Then we went to New York. It was the end of a dream. I saw less and less of Ramon, who was always out with his men friends. And then he deserted me . . . from one day to the other, walked out and left me, broken-hearted, without a centesimo! . . .

“Once or twice his lawyer wrote, suggesting that I should divorce him. But he was mine and I would not give him up. And then I heard no more.

“It was not until he was arrested for a robbery at Pittsburg that I heard of him again. I was singing then in opera at Chicago. It was no surprise to me to find out that he was a thief. Early in my life with him I discovered how he made his living. But it made no difference to me. I loved him, *per Dio . . .* I loved him, ah! *le malheureux! . . .*”

Her voice broke and she turned away her head.

“For three years,” she resumed, “he had been living *en ménage* with an artist, *le misérable!* I got her address and went to see her. It was this Carmen woman. She passionately protested that they were married, Ramon and she. Ah! but I brought her heaven crumbling about her ears! Ah! *par exemple!* I

flung my marriage certificate in the face of the poor fool. I tried to see Ramon. He would not see me. So I went away to wait—to wait for my man to come out of prison.

“I met him at the gate of the penitentiary. I had a car to meet him, rooms engaged at the best hotel, a meal ordered with all the dishes he used to like best. But when I saw him, *Dio!* his face! He looked twenty—thirty years older.

“‘If you ever have a son, Lucia,’ he said to me, ‘teach him never to put his trust in a woman!’

“I knew he thought of this Carmen girl. *I* had come to meet him but his mind was full of her.

“‘Put her out of your heart, *carissimo*,’ I told him, ‘she will never trouble you again!’

“I was wild with disappointment, with jealousy I should have guarded my tongue.

“‘You devil,’ he cried and seized my wrist, ‘what have you done?’

“I knew then that he was lost to me. He made me confess that I had opened the eyes of his pretty doll. I thought he would have killed me . . . it might have been better if he had. He turned on his heel and left me in the street.

“I was distracted. I followed him to New York. He had engaged a cabin on the *Gigantic*. I booked a second-class passage by the same steamer. I felt sure he was going to join this other woman. But I was resolved that she should never have him. I shadowed him across London to this studio. . . .

“I let him go in. I dared not follow at once. I waited in the entrance, trying to make up my mind what to do. And then a woman came!

“I knew her at once, so elegant, so beautiful, hastening on the wings of love to meet my Ramon. I drew back up the stairs out of sight to let her pass. I followed her into the studio vestibule.

“Through the curtain I saw Ramon’s face light up as she entered, saw him take her in his arms. I forced myself to remain calm. My hate was not for him but for her. Then I saw on a chest a knife. I picked it up . . . with what purpose I swear I do not know.

“I stood there by the curtain, the knife in my hand. I was afraid of myself. Ramon’s voice, low and pleading, came to me from the studio, and the sound of the woman sobbing. I turned and fled into the hall. If I listened any longer I should burst in upon them and he would insult me, abuse me, before *her*. I could not bear that! . . .

"Then suddenly she appeared running from the studio. We came face to face in the outer hall. The knife was in my hand; there was murder in my heart . . . I stabbed her. . . .

"She uttered no cry. She just stared at me and broke away, the knife in her breast, and left me there, with blood on my hands and on my dress. . . ."

Her mouth twitched pathetically but she tossed her head up proudly.

"He was mine!" she cried. "And what I have I hold! . . ."

Her recital had left her panting, breathless, but her strange eyes, blazing black out of her bloodless face, flung defiance at the grave and inexorable countenances surveying her across the table.

"And then?" asked Manderton.

"I heard a step in the studio. It seemed to bring me to my senses. I looked at the blood on my hands, on the ground. And I was afraid to go to Ramon because of what I had done. I fled in a panic up the stairs and waited, listening, on the *mezzanine*. But no one came, so I crept out of the house. . . ."

"Then Ramon, it would appear, never knew who killed Madame Cranmore?" said Boulot.

She shook her head.

"I think he did not even know that I was in London," she replied sadly. "When I read in the newspapers that the woman was dead and that the police were hunting for the murderer, I was afraid for him. I realised that he might be implicated. And though I well knew that he would be capable of denouncing me to the authorities for killing the woman he loved, I tried to find him to help him to get away. We had been in London together before . . . *tiens*, we had even had dealings with this old *recéleuse*, Mother Rachel . . . and I sought him in all the old haunts but without result.

"Then one night at Ognone's, in the cellar, where the hotel rats and jewel thieves come together, I heard you, monsieur, speak with another man of one whom you sought. Someone in Molard's gang had seen him in the cellar, it was said. Now I knew Pierre Molard for an old colleague of Ramon's . . . they had worked together on the Riviera . . . and, on looking more closely at you, I thought you might be a *policier* in disguise. . . ."

At this Boulot sat up quickly.

"Bah!" said the woman contemptuously, "one knows your type, *pas vrai*? Then came a young man who whispered to you the address of Levine's, a lodging-house where, I remember, Ramon had once stayed. I rushed away to warn him.

“But I had no time. You were too close on my heels and I could not make the people of the house hear to open the door. So I gave Ramon the danger signal which he and his friends have used for many years . . . his S.O.S., he used to call it . . . which means, wherever and whenever you hear it, ‘Get up and run! The police are here!’ . . . My man heard and understood. But he never knew that it was I who tried to save him. . . .”

Again the tears gushed from her eyes. She made no attempt to check them now, but sat and wept in silence.

The plump superintendent threw Mr. Manderton an enquiring glance. The detective gave a slight shake of the head. The superintendent struck a hand-bell on the table and a uniform constable appeared. At the sight of him the woman in the chair drew back, clutching her breast. Then in a tragic gesture which would have been theatrical in any but a Latin she threw her fine white hands forward in supplication.

“Let me go to him,” she pleaded. “Let me prepare him for the grave. *Messieurs*, he was my husband . . . I entreat you. . . .”

Across her outstretched arms the shadow of the barred window fell in broad black bands.

But Manderton shook his head and they led her, sobbing, to the cells.

CHAPTER XXIX

Q.E.D.

“FATE?” observed Monsieur Boulot, taking up a remark of his host’s, “ah! . . .”

There was a wealth of significance in the way he breathed forth the ejaculation. He tilted his glass of ’65 brandy and gazed reminiscently into its amber depths. George Cranmore, advised by wire of the death of Ramon and of Lucia de la Bandeira’s confession, had met the party at Sloane Crescent and carried off Boulot to dine in town. Neither was disposed to intrude upon the reconciliation which was to take place at the dinner-table between Jim Cranmore and Julian Quayre. Manderton had secured the artist’s immediate release and Jim Cranmore had proposed that the latter should come forthwith and dine at Sloane Crescent. The meeting was one at which, both George Cranmore and Boulot agreed, outsiders should not be present, so they parted from Jim Cranmore at his front-door. And now Monsieur Boulot found himself facing George Cranmore across a table in a quiet corner of the coffee-room at the barrister’s club.

It was Carmen Cranmore’s sad story narrated by Boulot which had prompted the barrister’s outbreak against a malignant fate.

“My brother’s unhappy wife,” he said, “deserved a better reward for her years of self-sacrifice than to fall into the power of a scoundrel like this. Yet, even after she must have believed she was rid of him for ever, Fate would not let her be. Ramon’s imprisonment, her departure from New York, the war—all these factors taken together surely justified her in feeling certain that the breach with the past was absolute. Yet all the while, by God, she was hovering on the brink of the volcano. That cursed necklace was the chain that fettered her inexorably to the past. At the appointed time Fate gives the chain a tug and drags her back into this seething crater of crime and scandal.

“Can you picture the poor girl’s horror on learning from Ramon that, for eight years, she had lived cheek by jowl with the evidence of a crime? Can you imagine her revolt at the thought that, through her instrumentality, unwitting though it was, the atmosphere of crime had permeated into her husband’s house? Oh, Boulot, it’s heartbreaking!

“If ever a woman was a saint upon earth, it was Carmen. Her only reason for withholding from my brother the story of her past was, I am convinced, to spare him pain and because she believed that the great mistake of her life

were best left buried in oblivion. Why in Heaven's name was *she* singled out? It seems to me as though some malignant fate had dogged her footsteps. . . ."

"Fate?" said Boulot, "ah! . . ."

Thoughtfully he drank up his brandy and set down the glass.

"Fate?" he repeated, "*Pouf!* A rascally fellow who loads the dice, a dishonest croupier who checks the roulette's spin, who manipulates that odd chance on which the player cannot reckon, which upsets the nicest calculations, baffles the most exact deductions. Bah! *la drôle d'affaire!* . . ."

They smoked their cigars in silence for a spell.

"Boulot," said Cranmore suddenly, "this confession—how did you obtain it? How were you able to make this woman speak?"

The old detective held up three pudgy fingers.

"Three discoveries," he answered, "gave me the certitude that it was she who had sent Carmen Cranmore to her death. And then chance brought us together in the hotel at Southampton, whither she had followed her husband.

"First, I found traces of the presence in the studio of a woman of small build, probably Italian, or at least, of Latin extraction, possibly red-haired; second, I detected a connection between her and Ramon; thirdly, I came upon a sound and plausible motive for what had up till then appeared to be a purposeless crime. . . ."

Cranmore pushed the brandy across to him.

"Explain yourself! . . ." he pleaded.

Boulot leant back in his chair and cocked his eye at the ceiling.

"You are familiar, I think," he said, "with the various stages of the investigation?"

"My brother and Manderton," replied the barrister, "kept me pretty well posted. But I have been greatly puzzled to know how you have drawn all these threads together. . . ."

"Crime," said Boulot, "falls into two classes, prepared and unprepared. In the first category are the crimes of revenge, of avarice, of cupidity, in which the assassin coldly lays his plans, endeavouring, as far as may be, to cover up his tracks. To the other category belongs the *crime passionnel*, such as the present case, in which the murderer acts on blind impulse, in which usually (but not always), the deed accomplished, he flees panic-stricken from the scene without attempting to tamper with the evidence of authorship. . . ."

"Of the two I should say the first were the easier to deal with," observed the barrister.

“Exactly my experience,” the detective rejoined. “It is a case of the criminal’s brains against the detective’s, of skill versus skill, and it requires on the part of the criminal a mind and a sang-froid of a quite superior order to avoid those minute blunders which have sent so many a murderer to his doom.

“In the second class, however, everything is a matter of chance. You must reconstruct the crime solely from such *indices* as exist on the ground. In cases such as these one’s knowledge of the working of the criminal mind is quite useless. Here the detective is not grappling with brains but with the passions. And, *mon ami*, I ask you, what is there more incalculable in life than the human passions? . . .”

He helped himself to a second glass of brandy, sipped it with a little air as though of respect for its undoubted years, and resumed.

“To me the outstanding point in this case was the weapon, the knife. . . .”

“The instrument, *par excellence*,” remarked Cranmore, “of the *crime passionnel*. . . .”

“And,” Boulot put in, “of the Latin race. Note that! The knife is not an Anglo-Saxon weapon. Your outraged husbands, your jealous lovers, your deserted women, use the revolver, the club, the fists . . . but the knife not often. When our friend Manderton wanted to associate the knife with this Quayre, this typical Englishman of your upper classes . . . *dame*, in an investigation I reject nothing, but I wished to be convinced! . . .”

“The knife itself didn’t give you much information,” Cranmore observed.

“*Mon Dieu, non!* The ownership was admitted: no clue obtainable there. We had to identify the hand that had grasped it. And the finger-prints were valueless. I looked around for enlightenment.

“The mixed upbringing of the murdered woman first engaged my attention. Irish father, Argentine mother, brought up in New York in a Bohemian milieu . . . here, said I to myself, is a setting for your knife far more convincing than this Quayre’s frigid English environment.

“And then upon the stairs of the studio I found this little charm. If you have been in Italy you must have seen these amulets against the evil eye. They are worn by men and women and children, but mainly by women and children. Here then was a hint of the Latin setting which I demanded for the knife.

“It was on the landing, at the turn of the stairs leading to the upper studio, that I picked up the charm. I might, like Manderton, have discarded it from the investigation in face of the seemingly overwhelming case against Quayre, but for another discovery I made at the same spot. On the edge of the top

stair of the landing a few crumbs of dried mortar were clinging. This took me back to the little mound of mortar which workmen, who had taken up the pavement before the studio, had spread out at the foot of the entrance steps. It was traces of this same mortar, which, I ascertained, had been freshly mixed only on the afternoon of the murder, on Mrs. Cranmore's and on Miss Driscoll's shoes that told me of their visit to the studio. You remember? *Bon!*

"I was then referred back to another indication. Where the flagstones had been removed in front of the studio there was a brown patch of soft earth which had retained various footprints. I identified the shoe-mark of either Mrs. Cranmore or of Miss Driscoll—they wore shoes of similar pattern and size—in the print of a small shoe with a high heel and a rounded toe; then, the impress of a large American-made boot; and lastly, the trace of an extremely small shoe with what, I believe, is known as a pin-point toe . . . a fashion, monsieur, that has reached Europe from the United States. This indication led back in turn to the strand of thick, dark red hair—woman's hair—which I had found on the corsage of Madame Cranmore.

"I work backwards, you observe. Such has always been my custom. One gleans a thousand indications, spreading them out as one does the pieces of a picture puzzle, looking for a colour, a join, that fits. In themselves each of these indications was probably valueless. The strand of red hair, for instance . . . the waitress who served Madame Cranmore at the club had red hair; the pin-point shoe-mark . . . left by some passer-by; the Italian charm . . . dropped by a would-be tenant of the empty studio. But taken altogether? Ah! that was something different!"

Absorbed in his narrative he had suffered his cigar to go out. He rekindled it carefully and smoked for a little while in silence.

"Manderton's contention appeared to be," said Cranmore, "that Quayre was the murderer unless the crime could be brought home more convincingly against someone else."

"It seemed so," the detective replied. "I, on the contrary, took the line that the question of Quayre's guilt might be left in abeyance until, every other possibility having been eliminated, he should stand overwhelmingly convicted on circumstantial evidence alone. I had definitely traced two visitors to the studio on the fateful afternoon, Mrs. Cranmore and her sister; I had a fairly clear indication of the presence of a third party, the man who wore a large size American-made boot and smoked cigarettes obtainable only in the United States; and now,"—he ticked off the points on his fingers—"I had this red hair on the dead woman's dress, the pin-point shoe-mark, the mortar and the charm on the stairs, to suggest to me powerfully the presence of a fourth intruder. . . ."

"Your written question to Quayre then . . ." began Cranmore.

"A shot in the dark! The young man was shielding somebody, it was obvious, perhaps the girl, perhaps her sister. A direct lead, I calculated, might break down his reserve. When he told us of the appearance of Ramon, I felt certain in my own mind that the presence of the third visitor was definitely established.

"But the fourth? A woman, Italian, perhaps, *petite*, red-haired, possibly, like Ramon, from America? Obviously she or Ramon had committed the murder. But as yet I had no connection between the two and, worse than this, I was still without a motive for the crime!"

He sipped his brandy and shook his head dubiously.

"Even when they cabled me from New York about Ramon's criminal record I could not clearly see what motive lay behind this murder. I was dimly conscious of a triangle, Madame Cranmore—Ramon—the red-haired woman of the charm; but the connecting lines between the three points were blurred. Ramon's raid on the orange divan, while it furnished the link between him and Madame Cranmore, left unexplained the presence of the red-haired woman at the studio.

"I was very puzzled—not to say baffled.

"Then came the incident at Levine's . . . you know, the lodging-house to which I traced Ramon. Ah *non!* but my luck was out in this affair, my friend. I grasped the part played by the orange divan too late to intercept Ramon when he broke into the Cranmore house and took away the necklace; it only dawned on me that the quiet, red-haired woman at the cellar-café (whom we could so easily have detained!) was identical with the fourth mysterious visitor to the studio when I was so close on the heels of Ramon that I grasped at him, the shadow, and missed the woman, the substance! Eh, *quelle guigne!*"

"*Que voulez-vous?*" he resumed. "London is full of red-haired" women. There was absolutely nothing to connect this pallid woman of the café with the mystery woman of my quest. But the moment I recognised her knocking at the lodging-house door a great light flooded my mind. Here was the definite connection with Ramon. The second side of my triangle was joined up! But in the instant in which I turned the problem over in my mind man and woman were gone, vanished. Oh, la, la! . . ."

"And the last link, the third side of the triangle?"

"It was Ramon who made everything clear to me. When he told us of his marriage and of his first wife's intervention with Carmen and its results, the whole tragedy, scene by scene, seemed to stand out at once in bold relief in my brain. Here was the motive for which I had so blindly groped, bright as

day, old as the world . . . jealousy! Ah! my friend, believe me, the fountain-head of crime is not far to seek! Jealousy, cupidity, self-protection . . . these are the springs that feed this great river!"

The old detective crushed the stump of his cigar on his plate and extinguished it. He pushed his chair back.

"The mystery of Broke Studios is solved," he said. "*L'affaire est classée*. The story of Carmen Driscoll and Ramon de la Bandeira goes on to the shelf to lie side by side with other annals of the great drama of life. *Et la séance continue!* The world goes on! Whilst I, old gossip that I am, sit here and talk and talk, on the ruins of this poor Carmen's life, two young things are planning to erect another house of happiness. It is strongly in my mind, *cher maître*, to go out to Sloane Crescent and see what has grown out of the reconciliation between your brother and the artist. What do you say? . . ."

"That a detective has no business to be a sentimentalist," retorted George and smiled. "Waiter, my bill! And ask the hall-porter to get us a taxi. . . ."

In the moonlight that bathed the quiet gardens behind the Cranmores' house, a girl and a man walked silently. Arm pressed against arm they went, hand-in-hand like children, to and fro across the soft turf, heads drawn close together, their talk so quietly intimate that no word reached the rather lonely figure that stood and watched them from the French window of Carmen's morning-room. Thus George Cranmore and Boulot came upon Jim when they sought him at his house.

A great peace had fallen upon him. He was sobered but no longer broken by his grief. It was as though from the contemplation of the two slim, eager figures, that, self-absorbed, paced the grass under the moon, he derived fresh courage to take up again the burden of his daily life.

"Look there, George," he whispered to his brother as, side by side, they stood at the open window, "she might be Carmen as I met her first. They are going to be very happy, those two, just as Carmen and I were. Perhaps my poor girl's tragedy is the price demanded by fate for the happiness of those two young things. . . ."

A sharp rap at the door, a brisk, rather strident voice and a large, firm hand that snapped on the electric light sent romance to the right-about and announced the entry of Mr. Manderton.

"I wanted a word with Boulot," he said.

He drew his colleague into a corner.

"We must have a talk," said he a little awkwardly. "There's this confession, for instance, and the way you identified the woman. If she should

come to trial. . . .”

“You think there is any doubt about it?”

“Riddled with T.B.—tuberculosis, you know. That and drugs! She’s in the infirmary now. It’s a matter of weeks, the doctors say! But about the evidence . . . I shall have to take a statement from you. . . .”

“From me?” exclaimed Boulot. “*Vous êtes fou, mon vieux!* I play no part in this case. I am an outsider, an amateur. Me to give evidence? *Jamais de la vie!* . . .”

“But your investigations, your clues. . . .”

“*Mon cher*, we worked together. Yours was the responsibility; yours be the credit. Besides, I return to Paris in the morning. . . .”

“So soon?”

Manderton’s question was echoed by Jim Cranmore and his brother who had joined the two men.

“By the first train. The day after to-morrow will witness, I trust, the apotheosis of my whole career!”

“You don’t mean to say you’re going back to the Prefecture?” asked Manderton.

“Prefecture? Never. On Thursday, my friends, I shall present to the world the discovery to which I have devoted the rare leisure of my busy life. On Thursday the world shall make the acquaintance of Dorotheé Boulot! . . .”

“You’re never going to tell us that you’re going to be married, Boulot?” cried Manderton.

“*Mon vieux*,” the old detective retorted with a twinkle in his merry blue eye, “I have seen as a spectator all the trouble I want to see in this life. No, Dorotheé Boulot is not a wife. She is the child of my declining years, an exquisite thing, fragrant, slender, sublime. . . .”

“Not a love-child?” queried Manderton rather severely.

The old Frenchman threw back his head and chuckled delightedly.

“Almost!” he exclaimed. “Dorotheé Boulot is my new rose, named after my sainted mother, which will, I am sanguine, capture the first prize at the Fête Agricole at Melun on Saturday. You will understand, therefore, that I must be present. . . .”

Manderton’s brow cleared.

“You insist on withdrawing from the case then?” he demanded with a shade of eagerness in his voice.

“Absolutely!” was the firm reply. “Keep the laurels, old friend, but leave me my roses! . . .”

THE END

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 *The Orange Divan*, by Valentine Williams.]