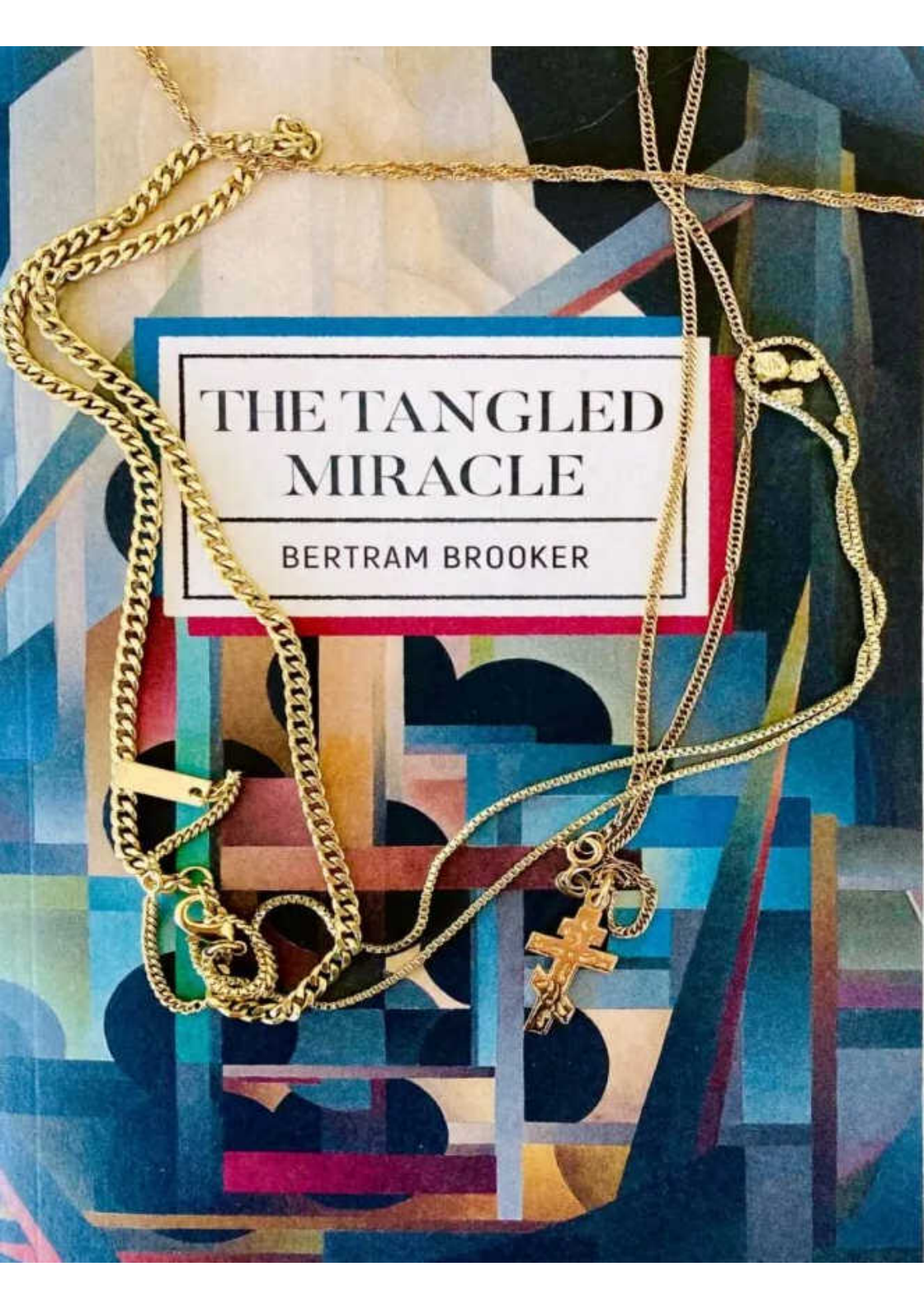




THE TANGLED MIRACLE

BERTRAM BROOKER

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: The Tangled Miracle

Date of first publication: 1936

Author: Huxley Herne (ps of Bertram Brooker) (1888-1955)

Date first posted: September 3, 2026

Date last updated: September 3, 2026

Faded Page eBook #20260907

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

Here is that rarity, a detective novel with an original setting. A miracle is expected at Port Fletcher, Connecticut. Mrs. Agatha Weir, priestess of the strange new cult of "Assumptionism," is to be some day received up into heaven as were Enoch and Elijah; and her bedroom in the temple has been specially constructed for such an eventuality. A medium prophesies the date, publicity gets to work, and all America hums with anticipation. The lady disappears. Mortimer Hood, the scientist, who was called in to vouch for the miracle, finds himself with a very pretty problem to investigate. The priestess has indubitably disappeared. But how? Had her disciples faked the miracle? If so, why? Who was the visitor who pretended to be a deaf mute? Why was there a stain of egg-nogg on the bedspread? And why was Mrs. Weir's old mother so sure she was dead? This is a first-rate and most thrilling thriller.

THE TANGLED MIRACLE

A MORTIMER HOOD MYSTERY

by
HUXLEY HERNE

THOMAS NELSON & SONS LTD
London Edinburgh Paris Melbourne
Toronto and New York

Copyright

THOMAS NELSON & SONS LTD
35-36 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.4; PARKSIDE
WORKS, EDINBURGH; 25 RUE DENFERT-ROCHEREAU,
PARIS; 312 FLINDERS STREET, MELBOURNE;
91-93 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO;
381-385 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK.

First published, September 1936

The Tangled Miracle: A Mortimer Hood Mystery

Part I

1

“What’s all this nonsense?” said Mortimer Hood. He waved the newspaper in Rhoda Groves’s direction as though she were responsible for every word it contained.

On the front page was a life-sized photo of Mrs. Agatha Weir, the notorious founder of Assumptionism—latest and queerest of American cults. Her madonna-like face was as familiar to millions of newspaper readers as the best-known beauties of Hollywood. Above the photo were two lines of heavy, black type:

NEW CULT LEADER
EXPECTS MIRACLE

Dr. Hood glared at the words again. “What sort of trick is this woman up to now?” he demanded.

He had once been eminent as a psychic investigator, and in the public mind his name was associated with Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, and Conan Doyle, although, unlike them, he had remained a convinced unbeliever. His best-known book, *The World of Spooks and Spoofs*, had been an international best seller, but he had taken up painting as a hobby late in life, and in recent years had devoted himself entirely to art, dropping out of scientific circles altogether.

His studio was a long, dim room in a remote backwater of New York’s west side. There were stacks of canvases against the walls, and three or four

easels stood in a corner like masts in a harbour. It was a big, cheerless place, and in comparison with the dwarfish figure who stood straddle-legged on the wide hearth, his grey hair standing on end—"like Einstein's," Rhoda thought—everything looked huge and inaccessible, as though maliciously designed to be out of the little man's reach.

"Don't look at me like that. I didn't write it," laughed Rhoda Groves.

"Oh, you *didn't* write it."

"No. When I wrote those articles about you a year or two ago I *was* a newspaper woman. But I've gone up in the world a bit. I'm now what they call a ghost writer."

"That sounds interesting—and right in my line," smiled Hood roguishly.

"Not the kind of ghosts you're used to," said Rhoda. "In this case—I'm the ghost."

"*You're* the ghost!" the little scientist exploded. He glanced at the close-fitting, dove-grey suit which smoothly indicated a plump, well formed body. "I only wish spirits were as substantial—and as easy to look at. I might begin to believe in them."

"D'you mean to say you've never heard of a ghost writer?" she asked, with a smile which lightly accepted his gallantry.

"Never. I can't imagine . . ."

"Well, you've read—or seen—lots of books by celebrities—written in the first person and signed with their names. In most cases they're written by somebody else—a competent journalist—whose name never appears. Hence the term 'ghost.'"

"I see—I see!" Hood glanced sharply at her and twisted the newspaper in his fingers. "And just now you're ghosting for the famous Agatha Weir—is that it?"

"Not exactly—but that's what I've come to see you about. And that's why it struck me as a coincidence—finding you in the middle of reading *that* story, just as I rang your bell."

"Oh!" said the scientist, with an even sharper glance than before. "You're a great believer in coincidences, are you?"

"No, I'm not. But . . ."

“But—you find me reading it—or just about to read it. And because you came to see me about Mrs. Weir—yes, I see.”

“If you would finish it,” suggested Rhoda, “it would cut short what I have to say.”

The scientist fumbled for his glasses, which hung from a black ribbon around his neck, perched them on his hawk-like nose, and began to read:

NEW CULT LEADER EXPECTS MIRACLE

From Port Fletcher, Conn., where Mrs. Agatha Weir founded the cult of Assumptionism some twelve years ago, come strange rumours of the probability of a spectacular twentieth-century miracle being enacted there within the next few days.

The basis of Mrs. Weir's teaching has been the belief that the human body need not be separated from the soul at death, but may ascend to heaven in its corporeal state. The “translations” of Enoch and Elijah are regarded as a reward not beyond the expectation of any one who lives a pure life.

That the Assumptionist leader will herself be miraculously “assumed” or “translated” into heaven within the present week is the astonishing belief of many adherents of the Assumptionist Temple, over which Mrs. Weir presides. It is claimed by some inhabitants of Port Fletcher, who refuse to be quoted, that the actual date of her “assumption” has been fixed. One rumour is to the effect that the announcement came to Mrs. Weir in a dream. On the other hand, it is learned on good authority that the Assumptionist leader has lately become interested in Spiritualism, and it is believed that the date was recently fixed by a spirit voice, purporting to be none other than the prophet Elijah, communicated through a well-known medium.

Efforts to interview Mrs. Weir have been met with the repeated statement that “the leader cannot be seen.” Members of the temple board will neither confirm nor deny local expectations that the strangest event in many centuries is about to take place in a little Connecticut town.

The temple, within easy reach of New York, which has become the Mecca of thousands of tourists, is a monument to the conception that “translation” by miracle is a modern possibility.

The roofless tower was designed to provide perfect facility for a physical ascension.

From a local sect, numbering not more than twenty-five people at its inception, Assumptionism has had an extraordinary growth, and now numbers thousands of adherents in every state of the Union.

The picture on this page is the latest photograph of Agatha Weir, wearing the familiar white robe and veil which she recently adopted for her temple appearances.

“Good lord—what next?” exclaimed Hood, dropping the paper and staring across the room.

“I’ve been asked to see you—by one of the directors of the temple—Theodore Garth,” said Rhoda quietly.

“The magazine publisher?”

“Yes.”

“I suppose he wants me to investigate Mrs. Weir’s venture into Spiritualism and find out if . . .”

“No. It’s really better than that.”

“*Better?*” cried Hood, holding his hands in the air in mock horror.

“Yes. You’ll probably hit the roof—but I promised to come. He found out I knew you—at least that I’d written some stuff about you—and he insisted that I might— —”

“Because I’m an artist,” interrupted Hood, with a little bow, “he thinks I can be—bribed with beauty.” He slanted his massive head on one side, and repeated the words—“bribed with beauty”—as though childishly pleased with the phrase.

“Wrong again,” said Rhoda, acknowledging his bow with a deep nod. “He thinks I’m a good business woman—and he’s right. He’s just given me an advance of a thousand dollars for what I’m going to do.”

“And what *are* you going to do? You see—you have me inquisitive already.”

“I’m going to write a book about the whole thing—from the beginning until—until Mrs. Weir’s—departure.”

“What a world!” ejaculated Hood, clasping his hands behind him and fastening an unforgiving glance on the ceiling.

“You see—at one time—two years ago,” said Rhoda, “when the new temple was in all the papers, Garth wanted me to help Mrs. Weir write an autobiography, to be published serially in one of his magazines. It would have been a sensational feature. But she wouldn’t hear of it.”

“Does this idiot *believe* in her ‘departure’—as you call it? *You* don’t, of course.”

“Of course not, and it’s unbelievable that *he* does—and yet . . .”

“And yet—what?”

“He’s going about things as though he’s swallowed the whole business. He wants you to be there on the *day*—to investigate the—the miracle—and declare it . . .”

“*Bona fide*,” said Hood.

“Exactly,” said Rhoda, amazed by the quietness of his tone and the sudden seriousness of the glance he flung at her. “I expected you would . . .”

“No, my dear,” said Hood. “The whole thing sounded mad—that newspaper story—and everything I’ve ever read or heard about her—but *this*—wanting *me* there to verify—to authenticate a miracle—that’s different. They can’t be such fools . . .” He stopped and fell into his favourite attitude of thought, his face turned to the ceiling, his hands behind him, his heel grinding the floor.

“Perhaps they are,” he decided, bringing his head down sharply and flinging out a finger. “What sort of a chap is this Garth?”

“Well, as far as I can make out,” said Rhoda, puzzled by his unexpected interest, “he got into the thing because he’s a near neighbour. His estate on Long Island Sound is close to the outskirts of Port Fletcher, and he’s built a modern plant in the town where several of his magazines are printed. It seems he tried for years to get a life story of Mrs. Weir for one of his blessed magazines—worried his editors to death about it. Finally, he went after it himself—claimed a genuine interest in ‘the new religion’—and hoped to convince Mrs. Weir that an authentic biography—or autobiography—would refute a lot of the silly rumours that got around about her. But instead of dominating her—he was dominated himself. Half hypnotized, I guess. She’s a remarkable woman—whatever you may think of her. Anyway, after a few visits to the temple, he declared himself a convert. He put up half of the

money for the new building, on a proposition that a similar sum would be contributed by other subscribers. His gift enabled him to force himself on to the board. Two years ago he dragged me into the job of trying to get a story out of Mrs. Weir. But you know what she's like. She's one of those people—like Lindbergh and Garbo—who create publicity by seeming to avoid it.”

“You’ve talked to her, have you?”

“Yes—but not for long. She asked me about my soul and sent me packing. There’s something about her—even her face—that’s almost mediæval. I mean, she doesn’t seem to belong to our world.”

“Perhaps not,” said Hood doubtfully; “but this chap Garth does. This business of getting her life story has become a sort of mania with him—is that it?”

“It certainly looks like it.”

“He joins the Church—or whatever they call it—gives them a small fortune—sits on their board—all with the idea of scooping the world—some day—with the first publication of her biography.”

“Yes—he’s the kind of man who hangs on doggedly for years, scheming and planning to get his hands on something he wants.”

“He doesn’t want *her*, does he?”

Rhoda laughed. “No. I can tell from what he said that she despises herself for accepting his money and tolerating him.”

“Perhaps he wants the leadership of the Church.”

“He talks as though he were the power behind the throne—even now—and with her gone . . .”

“Ah—ah! *That’s* more like it. It’s getting a little less mad. I didn’t mind—that *she* should be mad—but Garth, too? That’s too much of a good thing. What about this spirit message? Did he mention it?”

“No. He gave me the newspaper to read—seemed as mad as a hatter that there had been a leak.”

“Didn’t you ask him about the date—the way the date had been fixed?”

“He wouldn’t say.”

“Did you ask him about the medium Mrs. Weir has been consulting?”

“He denied the Spiritualism business. Said it was just newspaper talk—nothing to do with it.”

“But he knows the exact date, does he?”

Hood had stepped close to her and was snapping out a string of questions in a sharp, incisive tone, so unlike his usual half-playful, drawling manner, that Rhoda felt she was witnessing a resuscitation of the famous Mortimer Hood, once the terror of frauds. His fingers clutched at the black ribbon of his glasses, curling tightly like talons.

“Yes,” said Rhoda. “He said a voice had told her when it would happen—the *10th of June*.”

“To-morrow!” exclaimed Hood.

“Yes. I am to drive up with him this afternoon. There’s a special board meeting called for five o’clock. He wants *you* to come too. I have another thousand dollar cheque in my purse—a retainer—made out to you.”

“I won’t go,” said Hood decidedly, stepping back and looking into the black depths of the fireplace. His abrupt changes of attitude made Rhoda wonder what was going on in his mind.

“I was beginning to hope you would,” she said. “You looked for a minute as though you liked the idea of . . .”

“I *may* go into it—but not for Garth’s sake—or for his money—or for a clean bill of health for *them*! And it won’t be because I like it. It will be *because I don’t like it*. I don’t like it at all.”

He began rocking to and fro on his heels, clasping and unclasping his hands behind him. “It’s probably just a publicity stunt,” he said, in a slower and more deliberate tone. “Tell him I won’t accept. But if you’re going up there this afternoon—observe all you can—and if you think they are going to stage a real trick, phone me first thing in the morning. I’ll come out. It’s only about a two-hour run, isn’t it?”

“That’s all.”

“All right,” he smiled. “Tell him I’m not interested. Tell him I’m married to art.”

2

In the afternoon Rhoda drove up to Port Fletcher in Garth’s luxurious car. The publisher sat back in his corner, pompous and complacent—“like a big, self-satisfied toad,” Rhoda thought. He was excessively broad, and with an expanse of chest and paunch that made one think of a gross cartoon. Although he was well groomed and faultlessly dressed, there was something

definitely coarse and heavily ungraceful about him. He usually talked a great deal in a harsh, domineering voice, but to-day he was strangely quiet, apparently swollen up with some secret satisfaction.

Rhoda found it difficult to get anything out of him. Even her news that Mortimer Hood refused to come had disturbed him only for a moment. He had waved it aside and settled back in a heavy squatting attitude, with his eyes half closed. A peculiar smile flickered now and then across his wide, sagging mouth. A smile of anticipated triumph, Rhoda thought, noting the unpleasant curl of his lower lip.

She began to wonder if the expected “miracle” would turn out to be what Mortimer Hood had suggested—“just a publicity stunt”—of Garth’s planning. But she couldn’t see what he could get out of it to warrant the expense, the risk of exposure—“and besides, he’s not subtle enough,” she felt, “to plan a gigantic piece of trickery and carry it through. He’s nothing but a big blusterer. His only weapon is his cheque book. I wonder—perhaps somebody has tricked *him* . . .”

And then a thought popped into her mind. It made her throb all over, but she sat perfectly still, looking out of the window to conceal the excitement in her wide, transparent eyes. The thought went round and round and over and over in her mind.

“He’s been fighting with Mrs. Weir for two years—he said as much this morning. That means he’s been wanting to run things—and she won’t let him. Perhaps he has offered her a fortune to relinquish the leadership—and she has figured this way of doing it. It *sounds* like her. She’s a thoroughly theatrical person. Garth wouldn’t have the imagination to think of it—or the finesse to carry it through.”

She felt he was gloating over the cleverness of a plan which perfectly suited his purposes. And yet, if it were as simple as that, why was he so reticent? They had now been driving for an hour, but Garth had replied only with grunts or monosyllables whenever Rhoda had attempted to draw him out. She decided that her questions had been too guarded, too subtle. She suddenly turned, leaned forward and looked him straight in the eyes.

“What sort of wild-goose chase *is* this?” she demanded, assuming a manner as crude as his own.

He was startled out of his thoughts. His huge stomach quivered, and he glared at her without speaking.

“Isn’t it about time you gave me the low-down on this thing?” she went on. “You can’t expect me to believe— —”

Garth stopped her with a bark—“You don’t *have* to believe. But you can write as though you do, can’t you? That’s your *business*, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I know; but . . .”

“No buts!” he snapped, turning away. “Just do your job.”

“I wasn’t thinking about myself, really,” said Rhoda patiently. “I’m thinking about the public. I can’t see how you’ll get the public to accept this thing—even if it comes off—perfectly.”

“Exactly my idea,” grunted Garth. “That’s why I want somebody like Mortimer Hood to vouch for it.”

Rhoda could visualize just how he would handle it—like the testimonials of physicians in the advertising pages of his magazines.

“Listen,” Garth exclaimed suddenly, “when you get out here and meet these people—don’t let on that Hood isn’t coming. You don’t know anything about it—see? As a matter of fact I haven’t given up hope of getting him. You go on with your knitting as though you’d never heard of him—well, yes, you’ve *heard* of him, of course, but you’ve never met him—see? If he comes—you’ve never met him.”

Rhoda had worked for Garth before, and was used to his harsh, dictatorial manner. It disturbed her even less than usual at the moment, because she was wondering why he wanted her to conceal her acquaintance with Mortimer Hood.

“You’ll introduce him to your board, I suppose, if he *does* come?” she said, still fishing for what lay deep in his mind.

“Of course.”

“And to Mrs. Weir?”

“That depends on to-day’s meeting. I don’t know how she’s going to take it. She may hit the roof. She’s high strung—and quick as a cat. She may even blow up at the idea of bringing you into the picture again. You can’t tell. Pay no attention to her. I mean—don’t get huffy at anything she says. Just keep quiet. I’ll handle everything.”

Out of the corner of her eye Rhoda watched him swell up and sink back again into complacent silence. He wasn’t sure of Mrs. Weir—that seemed certain. Which meant that the idea she had thought so wonderful a few

moments ago was away off the track. It was too simple, too straightforward. She sensed something deeper—more tangled—something that had made Hood say, “I don’t like it—I don’t like it at all.” She remembered Hood’s look—his nostrils drawn up—as though he could *smell* something. And yet he boasted that he wasn’t psychic—made a point of it. Was it possible, she wondered, that *he might have known something* before she had even approached him?

“Do the members of your board know the kind of man he is?” she asked.

“Who?” snapped Garth.

“Mortimer Hood.”

“Heard of him, I suppose, but that’s all, as far as I know.”

“Who is on this board?” She was asking questions almost at random, just to keep him talking—hoping for a slip.

“Mrs. Weir, of course. She’s the chairman. Fellow named Spence—treasurer. He’s in the photo-engraving business up here—in a small way. I’m his biggest customer, I guess. He’s all right—easy to handle—sort of timid. You know—the accountant type. Then there’s Ogiltree. He’s a photographer in the town—good one too.”

“I met him when I was up here before, didn’t I?” said Rhoda. “Isn’t he the big, tall man. I seem to remember something about his eyes.”

“That’s the fellow. He’s a fanatic, in some ways—but with him it sort of smoulders. There’s a strong practical streak in him—well, no, not exactly practical—but he’s a good organizer.”

“I remember he struck me as quite a commanding personality,” said Rhoda; “but there was something sort of weird too—as I recall it.”

“You must be thinking of Rivers. There’s nothing weird about Ogiltree, but I can understand you thinking Rivers was a queer duck.”

“I don’t remember a Rivers. Is he on the board too?”

“Yes. Long-haired fellow. You’d remember him if you’d seen him. He’s the art director in my plant up here. Curious bird. You’ll be able to get a raft of stuff from him later on. He’s studied a lot—all the ascension myths—and that sort of thing. Knows all about comparative religions. I’ll speak to him to-night. You’ll have to simplify what he gives you—you know—popularize it—but it will make good stuff for the story. Sort of historical prologue.”

For a few minutes Garth had been talking freely, unguardedly, but now he lapsed into silence again.

“Is that the lot—the whole board?” Rhoda asked.

“Yes. Just five.”

Five, thought Rhoda. One is an employé of his—another sounds as though he might be his candidate for leadership—and another regards him as his biggest customer. Four against one. She began to wonder why—or how—a self-willed little woman like Agatha Weir had allowed herself to be manœuvred into such a position.

“Has Mrs. Weir any relatives at Port Fletcher?” she asked. “She’s divorced, isn’t she?”

“Not divorced, but the husband’s been out of the picture for years—ten years, anyway. The only relatives she’s got are her mother and a half-sister. The mother is over eighty. She married the last of the Fletchers—one of the oldest Connecticut families. The town’s named after ’em. She’s pretty old-fashioned—a solid fundamentalist—and she thinks this religion of Agatha’s is the bunk. Blasphemous, she calls it. They never see each other. The old lady’s pretty feeble, and her heart’s bad. She doesn’t get around, and Agatha won’t go to see her. You can’t blame her. The old lady only raves at her when she does.”

“And what about the sister?”

“She must be close to sixty, I suppose. Willis, her name is—Jessie Willis. Regular old maid. Bob Willis was the old lady’s first husband.”

“And what does *she* think of Assumptionism?”

“Oh, she abominates it too; but then she’s only a shadow of her mother. They’re just a couple of crabbed old gossips—you know the type.”

Garth again closed his slack mouth and half shut his eyes. Rhoda turned away and looked out of the car window at the peaceful landscape, bathed in June sunshine. She was herself absent-minded, trying to recover clearly a vague memory that was stirring in her mind—something she had seen or heard on her former brief visit to Port Fletcher. It had something to do with Ogiltree. His name had started an obscure train of thought—a hazy sense of queerness. Whatever it was, it bordered on the sinister—or perhaps the tragic. It was all very confused in her mind.

Every now and then, through a break in the trees, she could catch a glimpse of Long Island Sound. “There’s my place,” grunted Garth, as they

sped past the gates of a richly wooded estate. "You'll see the tower of the temple in a minute—over there. It wasn't built, of course, the last time you were here."

3

As soon as she saw the temple Rhoda remembered that she had seen photos of it in newspapers, associated with the elfin face and slanting eyes of De Long, who had become known as "the mad architect." She had met him once and had taken a violent dislike to him. His architectural plans had been too freakish for American taste, and after a year or two as a theatrical designer he had taken himself off—to Persia or Tibet or some such place, Rhoda remembered. It had been widely talked about at the time that he intended to take vows in some oriental monastery.

Rhoda was puzzled that a man of his type could have persuaded Garth and Mrs. Weir—who must have been the two principal people to please—that such a modernistic atrocity of a building would make an appropriate temple for "the new religion." But as Garth's car turned into the wide oval drive she reflected that, after all, De Long and Mrs. Weir were tarred with the same brush—both very theatrical, for one thing, and both infected with strange religious notions.

A group around the temple entrance caught her attention. Cameramen. Reporters. A young man jumped on the running-board as the car slowed up and leaned in the open window. "Mr. Garth," he began, but the publisher shook his head. "Nothing to say—nothing to say," he barked, and kept repeating it as they stepped from the car and made their way between swarming reporters to the enormous steel doors standing ajar under a gloomy porch.

The interior was huge and impressively lofty, but so bare that Rhoda had taken it all in before she had gone a dozen steps along the aisle. Garth had taken her in from the front so that she could see the auditorium, and while she tried to concoct an appropriate comment a man who had been praying in one of the pews just ahead rose from his knees and turned toward them. She was immediately struck by his face—a curious, pale triangle, framed in a waving mass of hair which looked too thick and black to be real.

"Rivers," whispered Garth, expecting him to wait and be introduced; but after a shy glance the monkish face was turned away, and its owner hurried between the pews toward the open vestry door.

“Funny chap,” said Garth. “Very shy—and *very* religious. But once you get him going he’ll give you a lot of stuff. I’ll fix it.”

They were approaching the chancel, which was railed off by a balustrade of black marble. Instead of a reredos or a stained-glass window there were three pillars of frosted glass, illuminated from within, which soared to the arched ceiling. The light from them sent a soft glow through the entire temple.

Rhoda was impressed at last. “Are those pillars lighted like that all the time?” she asked.

“Day and night,” said Garth, leading the way impatiently to the vestry door. It was open, and there were a number of men in an excited group at the end of a long boardroom table. Rivers was among them, and as soon as Garth and Rhoda entered he said something in a low voice and moved away to the opposite side of the room.

“Have you seen *this*?” said a smallish, spectacled man, who came almost running toward the publisher, holding a New York newspaper in his hand.

“Yes. Saw it in town,” said Garth, standing still squarely in front of him and frowning down at him.

“You didn’t—you didn’t give it to them?” the other whispered, with a half glance over his shoulder at the group he had left.

“Listen, Spence,” said the publisher in his harshest tones, “I came up here for a board meeting. Get these people out of here.” He looked over Spence’s shoulder, caught the eye of a tall man who had just glanced in his direction, and beckoned him with a jerk of his head.

“Listen, Ogiltree,” he said quietly, as Spence moved away, “you haven’t been talking to reporters, have you?”

“Only trying to get rid of ’em. We’ve been swamped with them since around noon. Spence has been doing his best—phoned me to come over and help him. Rivers has only just got here. How did this story get out—do *you* know?”

“I don’t *know*—but I have a notion.”

“You mean Spence?”

“No. What makes you think Spence would . . .”

“Spence has known something for days. He was in New York with Agatha last week. Somebody saw them. It’s all over town. Even Mrs.

Fletcher knows it. But what's *your* notion?"

Rhoda, who had stepped aside, and was pretending to occupy herself with a portrait of Mrs. Weir which hung over the fireplace, noticed the same peculiar smile flicker across Garth's mouth—the smile she had found so enigmatic in the car.

"It's *just* a hunch," Garth said, looking suspiciously at Ogiltree. "I'm keeping it to myself. But—I've *done something about it*."

Ogiltree lowered his voice; but Rhoda could just overhear his whisper: "You mean—Mortimer Hood."

"Yes."

Ogiltree pursed up his mouth and nodded his head slowly three times. Then he leaned even closer. Rhoda, backing away from the picture toward them, caught only the last few words of the sentence he murmured in the publisher's ear . . . "reply to your cable?"

"Yes," said Garth. "But don't worry about him. He's out of the picture."

The two men looked steadily at each other for a moment and then Ogiltree stepped back. Spence had succeeded in hustling the newspaper men through an open door into a corridor behind the chancel. He closed the door after them and came up to the table. Garth turned and touched Rhoda's arm.

"Miss Groves," he announced, in abrupt, business-like fashion. "One of the best journalists in America. I want to put her across to-day as the *one* person to write a sympathetic, authorized life of Mrs. Weir. It shouldn't be delayed any longer. It *mustn't* be delayed. We must persuade Mrs. Weir to sit down with Miss Groves *to-night* and tell her all she can."

Rivers, who had been standing half turned away from the table, suddenly shifted his position and seemed to be about to speak. Garth fixed him with a dominating glance and raised his voice rhetorically. "Is it right that our leader should pass from our midst without some proper record of her ministry? I say it is not. The world is hungering for a message that will renew the faith of millions. . . ."

He ranted on, as though addressing a churchful of listeners, while Rhoda Groves studied the men standing quietly around him.

Spence, she could see at once, was under his thumb, simply by the deferential slant of his head. Rivers was obviously not listening. His thoughts were turned inward, but his clasped hands and inclined body were a pretence of attention. Ogiltree, she sensed, was tolerating Garth's harangue

for some subtler reason. He was taller and in every way a more commanding figure than the squat, ponderous publisher—a big, masculine type, with powerful shoulders, a large head held erect, and liquid, magnetic eyes.

Something about him surprised her. He was connected in some way with the hazy memory which had floated in her mind in the car a little earlier. But there was nothing queer, nothing sinister, about him. He looked sane, strong-willed, and capable—the one man in the group who struck her as being of any use in a crisis.

She glanced back at Garth. A calculating light in his eyes made her realize that he wasn't spouting for the purpose of impressing anybody; he was simply talking a lot of eloquent nonsense—to keep the others from talking—from asking questions, perhaps.

She was listening with half an ear to what he was saying when the door into the corridor opened and a woman in a grey uniform came down the two or three steps. She approached the table and looked at Ogiltree. "Mrs. Weir says for you to start, sir. She's engaged with a visitor, but she'll be here in a minute or two."

"Thank you, Mrs. Coulter," said Ogiltree, moving out a chair and preparing to seat himself. "We'll go on."

Mrs. Coulter, a large, elderly woman, rustled away. A faint smile in Ogiltree's eyes as he sat down suggested to Rhoda that the message was an old trick of Mrs. Weir's to avoid the trivial, early stages of a discussion. Garth motioned Rhoda to a chair and began to outline his ideas of the sort of story he thought should be written. He avoided mention of his own magazines—making no point of how the book should be published—but he had brought along a list of chapter headings, and was about to discuss them, when Rivers suddenly stood up. The door had opened quietly and a little woman in white stood on the upper step.

4

The founder of the Assumptionist Temple was so tiny a woman that those who saw her in the flesh for the first time invariably gasped with surprise. Rhoda had seen and talked with her before, and had marvelled—for then Mrs. Weir had worn a dress of normal cut—at how beautifully formed so small a body could be. In the doorway, now, in a voluminous white robe, with the band of the veil drawn tightly across her forehead, she looked like a little girl dressed up for a pageant. She had turned forty, but the grey in her hair was concealed by the veil, and the maturity of her figure by

the ample folds of the gown. "This is something De Long did for her—to go with the temple," Rhoda thought.

As she advanced to the table, the robe swishing against her legs, her pale eyes seemed to seek out Spence, who was half hidden behind some one else. The four men had risen at her entrance. They all bowed without speaking, and when Mrs. Weir was seated, at the head of the table, they dropped into their chairs again. She looked directly at Garth. "You wanted a special meeting," she said.

It was plain that the publisher was affected by her presence. He began haltingly, introduced Rhoda with much less exaggeration of her abilities, reiterated the need for an authentic biography, and began to flounder, repeating in a flat tone what he had already said half a dozen times.

Mrs. Weir listened patiently until his voice trembled and stopped. Her glance darted for a moment in Rhoda's direction, and then settled on the publisher as she said: "You will perhaps be glad to know that I am myself writing—a—a testament—to be left to the world—when I pass on."

Something in the way she poised her head suggested that she expected this announcement would make a sensation, and she was not disappointed. Rivers slid one of his pale hands across the table, as though grasping at her. Ogiltree looked at her sharply under his brows. Garth sank back in his chair. Spence rubbed the side of his face and looked very wretched.

"It will not be at all the sort of thing *you* have in mind," Mrs. Weir said to Garth. "You have always concerned yourself about my *life*—whereas my thoughts are constantly on my *passing* from this life. It is about *that*—that I am writing."

She flung back her flowing sleeves, rested two beautiful bare elbows on the table, knitted her fingers together, and looked over all their heads. At that moment Rhoda incongruously wondered what Mrs. Weir had on under the robe. It may have been something she had read, or it may have been her remembrance of the peculiar swish of the gown, but she suddenly felt certain that the tiny, dominating woman at the head of the table was sitting there—consciously naked—the robe a mere loose drape for a body constantly exposed and offered—prepared at every moment for its passing into Paradise. It occurred to Rhoda that she had read a story somewhere to the effect that Mrs. Weir slept in the nude, on a curtained circular bed, in the tower of the church. Seeing her again, and the changes De Long had wrought in her and in the temple, it seemed quite believable. This nudity obsession—De Long's idea, too, no doubt—naturally linked itself with a

cult which looked for bodily assumption. It would account for much of the fascination which Mrs. Weir was said to exercise. “Over *men*,” thought Rhoda, quite without cynicism, as she turned her attention to what Mrs. Weir was saying.

Her voice, although warmed by emotion, sounded remote, as though she expected to be heard on another plane. “I have been ready for a long time. Every day my thoughts are fastened more and more on another existence. I am no longer a proper leader of this temple. . . .”

There was a murmur of dissent, but she raised a tiny hand three inches from the table and quelled it. “That is one reason why I think I shall be taken—soon. Assumptionism must continue—must grow—until it embraces the world—but I am not the person to bring that about. I have been brought to believe that although we speak of this temple as having been founded—twelve years ago—it is not really founded. It can only be founded on a miracle—and I look for that miracle—day and night. I cannot lead you any further. In a sense I am no longer here.”

The silence around the table was soon broken by the scrape of Garth’s chair as he leaned forward, spreading out his elbows and fixing a half-defiant glance on his leader’s face.

“Mrs. Weir,” he said ponderously, “we honour you for this confession. I take it you mean it for a confession.” The sharp stares of the other three men in the room did not stop him. “I take it you wish us to assume the leadership you have laid down.”

“No, no, no!” cried Rivers.

“You have admitted a duty to the world,” Garth went on, “the duty of converting all nations to our faith. In the same breath you have spoken of the miracle which is going to happen. Has it occurred to you that such a miracle will be hard for people to believe, unless—unless there is *proof*?”

“What do you mean by proof?” asked Ogiltree.

“I mean that—that if Mrs. Weir is taken—and there are only ourselves—perhaps only Mrs. Coulter—*interested* people, you see what I mean?—as witnesses—will the world believe us? Won’t it be said that she has . . .”

“Stop!” cried Rivers, half rising in his chair. “I can see what you’re coming to. You’re going . . .”

“Sit down—let me finish,” barked the publisher, fixing Rivers with the eye of an employer addressing an underling.

"I *won't* sit down," the other rebelled, rising to his full height. "I see what you have in your mind. You want to place this Miss—Miss Groves—you want her to stay here—as—as a sort of official observer—as though this were a—a—I don't know what."

Ogiltree glanced at him with what Rhoda took to be a hint of suspicion in his eyes. "Why do you protest so much?" he asked calmly. "From a worldly point of view—and to-day it has been indicated to us that those who are left behind must *consider* that point of view—Mr. Garth's suggestion seems to me an excellent one. If we are to convince . . ."

"Wait a minute—you've got me all wrong," said Garth breathlessly. "I wasn't going to suggest Miss Groves. I brought her here—for the other purpose. No. The thought struck me as I was sitting here that we should have a proper observer—a recognized authority . . ."

Rivers squirmed in his chair. It all sounded so familiar, so like the way Garth conducted his business. If he wanted anything written it had always to be done by the recognized authority—the person with the biggest name.

But Ogiltree was plainly interested. "You mean some sort of investigator," he said, "such as the Spiritualists invite to their seances. A man like Mortimer Hood—for instance."

"Mortimer Hood—the very man," agreed Garth enthusiastically.

"You mean to say . . ." cried Rivers, in a high-pitched, shaking voice, as he started up from his chair again.

But before he could finish his sentence he saw all their glances shift past him and fasten with something like horror on Mrs. Weir. He turned and looked at her, and was himself stricken dumb.

She was standing, and her tiny hands, clenched and trembling, were pressed against her breast. Her face was grey with anger. Her pale eyes stared at Garth as though the sight of him sickened her. Suddenly she snatched up a long, silver-mounted blotter.

"Get out of this temple," she cried. "Get out! This is a house of prayer—and you would make it a den of—of spies."

Astounded by her vehemence everybody had sprung to their feet, and Garth made some show of answering her, but she raised the blotter theatrically and started round the table in his direction. He began to retreat and the others moved away, backwards, their eyes fixed on Mrs. Weir's distorted face, fascinated by its fury.

“I’ve put up with you—and your money—and your pestering reporters—and your vulgar, hypocritical patronage—long enough—too long,” she said more calmly, but with increasing bitterness, striding after Garth with her arm still raised. “I’ll read you out of the faith. I’ll leave this tainted temple and go back to where we started. Get out—and stay out of my sight. Never let me see you again.”

Garth turned and almost ran through the vestry door. When he had vanished Mrs. Weir swept the bewildered faces of the others with a glance of freezing ferocity, and hurried up the steps to her own quarters.

Rhoda Groves watched the diminutive figure disappear through the door. It did not occur to her that she was looking at Mrs. Weir for the last time. Her thoughts were spinning furiously around the fact that this outburst had come with the rapidity of an eruption at the mention of Mortimer Hood’s name.

She wondered if it meant anything—anything more than repulsion at the idea of being spied upon—by *any one*. She recalled that Hood’s name had been suggested first by Ogiltree—casually—as an example of the sort of authority whose verdict would have weight with the public. Garth had merely seemed to agree, and yet it was on *his* head, not Ogiltree’s, that Mrs. Weir had poured out her wrath. Did *that* mean anything?

And was it just a coincidence that she had run into Mortimer Hood with a newspaper in his hands—the ink hardly dry—reading an artfully worded story, based on a rumour that had leaked out, no one knew how? Coincidence, surely. Yet it had surprised her that he was willing to entertain Garth’s proposition—which even to her had sounded fantastic. It was true he had not accepted it openly, but still he was willing to come. Did it mean that he had some knowledge of what was going on before ever the newspapers had the story?

“Does it mean,” she thought, “that Mrs. Weir *knows* that he knows—and *what* he knows?”

5

The village of Port Fletcher boasted one main street—Woodward Avenue. The usual jumble of stores, garages, and hotels lined this avenue for nearly half a mile, parallel with the Sound. By-streets sprawled away from it northward. Along the shore was a tangle of masts, wharves, sheds, yards, and small factories, reaching as far as the headland known as Haskell’s Point, at the east end of the town, which had lately been converted into an

amusement park. The better residential section was in the west end. Here stood the First Assumptionist Temple. Beyond it the shore took on the usual appearance of a New England summer resort—the haphazard succession of cottages and bungalows stretching as far as Garth’s famous estate, and beginning again on the other side of his high stone walls.

Garth had half reluctantly become possessed of at least a tenth of the property in the village, and his many investments had gradually forced him into operating a miscellany of businesses, including the Minnicog Hotel, which now held the routed members of the Assumptionist board.

Swallowing Mrs. Weir’s outburst with better grace than Rhoda had believed possible, Garth had invited them there to dinner. “Why doesn’t he want us at his house?” Rhoda wondered, as she watched Garth at the head of the table.

The publisher could not conceal the effects of the scourging Mrs. Weir had given him. His eyes looked small and bloodshot. His chin and his hands still trembled visibly. But he retained, Rhoda thought, something of the air of anticipated triumph which had puzzled her in the afternoon. He did his best, on the surface, to adopt a reasonable and even a forgiving attitude—excusing Mrs. Weir on the ground that her mind was slightly unhinged by concentration on the miraculous.

“And, anyway,” he added, “this is a culmination of a lot of things. She never believed I was sincere. I wonder if any one believes a rich man can be sincere—about anything. The more a fellow does to prove his sincerity the more he is accused of parading himself—seeking publicity. Believe me, I’ve never wanted publicity for myself—but I’ve wanted it for her and for the temple. She is turning Assumptionism into a religion for the few—for precious-minded people—ritualistic and mystical. What *I* want is a religion for the people—a popular religion. And because I want that—and am willing to spend my money on it—I’m called a vulgarian and a hypocrite.” His face flushed and he wrenched his neck free from his collar as though he were stifling.

Ogiltree said quickly, “There’s one thing I’ve been wanting to find out. How did you get to know about this date of the 10th of June? And what’s behind it? Mrs. Weir denies all knowledge of it.”

“That’s not the important thing,” said Spence anxiously. “The first question to discuss is the future leadership of the temple—the *future* of the temple, I might say. How are we to proceed?”

“The answer to my question,” said Ogiltree, looking at him suspiciously, “may have a strong bearing on that. If Garth has any real reason to believe that Mrs. Weir will be taken—to-morrow—some of our problems will be solved. We shall be able to reorganize without treading on her—susceptibilities. But have you any *knowledge*?—that’s the question.”

Spence began to stammer, but Garth cut him short. “Wait a minute,” he said. “Spence came to me in town yesterday and told me something in confidence. He told me he didn’t want to reveal his source of information. In view of what’s happened—and our uncertainty as to what Mrs. Weir is likely to do—I think Spence should tell you people what he told me. I also think he should tell us where he got his information. You can see for yourself, Spence, it’s vital.”

The treasurer paled, moistened his lips, and fidgeted in his chair. “I have reason to know that Mrs. Weir expects her assumption to-morrow. Mrs. Weir herself did not tell me. I got it in another way, from the only other person who knew—at that time.”

“This accounts for her visit to her mother,” said Ogiltree.

“Has she been to see her mother?” asked Rivers excitedly.

“Yes. She was there yesterday afternoon—for the first time in six years. I met Jessie Willis this morning on the street and she told me. It was a sort of farewell visit—although she didn’t say in so many words what she expected. The old lady . . .”

“I’m sorry, Ogiltree,” interrupted Rivers, “but I want to know where Spence got this information. It may mean a lot—and it may mean nothing at all. Where you got it makes all the difference.”

“Where I got it makes *no* difference,” said Spence stubbornly. “The important thing is that a voice told Mrs. Weir a few days ago. . . .”

He went on to tell the story he had already told Garth, while the publisher sat tapping the table impatiently with his finger-tips, as though it irked him to sit through its repetition. Suddenly he got up, made a sign to Rhoda with his brows, and walked to the door. She joined him and he said, in a low tone: “If this thing happens to-morrow—you won’t get a word out of old Mrs. Fletcher afterwards. What do you think about going to-night? I’ll get Spence to go with you—to introduce you. It’s the childhood stuff you want from the old lady. Let on you’re sceptical about the whole thing—just interested in the human side of it. You know how to do it. Eh? What do you say?”

Rhoda suspected that he was wanting to get rid of Spence—and perhaps herself. But she professed to be willing—in fact, eager—to see Mrs. Weir’s mother. Garth beckoned to Spence, and as they went out together Rhoda heard Ogiltree mention the name of Mortimer Hood.

6

Mrs. Paul Fletcher lived in the west end of the village in one of the oldest inhabited houses in Connecticut. The back part of it had been the original Fletcher farmhouse, and even the “new part,” as it was called, in the front, was more than a hundred years old. To find a grey, stony-faced, old lady in such a house seemed very fitting. In her big rocking-chair she looked shrivelled and helpless, but even in shrunken old age she was a bigger woman—almost a different breed—from the tiny daughter whose fame had spread to every state of the Union.

Spence stammered an introduction with a frightened, apologetic air. On the way to the house he had regained something of his normal manner, and Rhoda had realized that the possession of secret knowledge concerning Mrs. Weir’s expected assumption had changed him from a straightforward, capable business man into a shrinking conspirator almost overnight. He was much too transparent to be trusted with a secret, and already, before anything had happened to raise her suspicions, she had begun to wonder who could have been so foolish.

In Mrs. Fletcher’s presence he looked more guilty than ever, and almost pushed Rhoda forward so that she would take the brunt of the old lady’s attack, which he evidently expected. But Mrs. Fletcher had no eyes for Rhoda. Ignoring the introduction, she crooked a skinny finger at Spence, as though it were a hook he couldn’t escape, and rasped out, “What have you been doing with this demented daughter of mine? Eh? What were you doing with her in New York three or four days ago? Do you think goings-on like that aren’t seen and talked about? The whole town’s talking about it. The next thing you know it’ll be in the papers. Everything that crazy girl does gets in the papers. I don’t know what’s come over the world—that I don’t. And you of all people—Joseph Spence. What’s she got *you* into? You’re not the kind of man she wants—I know that. You’re too respectable. But you won’t be respectable much longer, I’ll tell you, if you keep this up—meeting her off trains and gadding about in taxis with her. What’s her game now? You might as well tell me. I’ll find out—sooner or later—or Jessie will.”

Spence shifted his weight from one foot to the other, licked his little moustache, and took a step forward.

“You mustn’t excite yourself, Mrs. Fletcher,” he said admonishingly. “You really mustn’t. It’s the reporters that make her so secretive about everything she does. It was just that she had an idea for a new kind of vestment for the 15th of August—that’s the festival of the Assumption of . . .”

“Stuff and nonsense and blasphemy!” screamed the old lady. “How the good Lord has patience with her I don’t know.”

“I wouldn’t have mentioned it, Mrs. Fletcher,” said Spence abjectly, “but you insisted on knowing . . .”

“Yes, yes, yes.”

“So I got an appointment for her with a costumier I happen to know in New York—some one she could trust not to tell the newspapers. I know you have no patience . . .”

“I haven’t—I haven’t. Here’s Jessie. *She* hasn’t any patience with her either. Well, Jessie, what did she say?”

At that moment Jessie Willis had entered the room. She was still wearing her hat and waterproof, for it had come on to rain earlier in the evening, and she looked very wet and bedraggled. She was a thin, sour spinster, a little stooped, and looked about sixty.

“What’s the matter with you, girl?” exclaimed Mrs. Fletcher anxiously.

Rhoda could see nothing in Jessie’s appearance to call for anxiety. She seemed a typical prim and prying old maid—and decidedly hard. The deliberation with which she removed her raincoat and hat before speaking exasperated her mother. “What’s come over you, Jessie? Have you lost your tongue? What did she say to you?”

Before answering, Jessie sent a sharp glance at Spence, ignored Rhoda, and began to speak with slow precision, as though every word she intended to utter was of the utmost significance.

“I told her you’d be thinking over what she said yesterday—and what she didn’t say. I said you figured she was up to something fresh—something worse than all the antics she . . .”

“Well, what *is* she up to? Did you get it out of her?” Mrs. Fletcher screamed. “Did you tell her I’ll disown her if she doesn’t stop this blasphemous foolery?”

"I told her everything you said." Jessie's tone was so bitter that Rhoda felt like shuddering.

"Yes—yes—and what did she say?"

"Just what you'd think—*just what you'd think*," Jessie repeated with venomous emphasis. "'The Lord judge between me and thee—and my mother,'" she said.

"And the Lord *will* judge her," shouted the old lady, shaking a claw-like hand in the air. "The Lord will not hold his hand for ever."

7

It was impossible to get anything out of Mrs. Fletcher in her present mood. And, in any case, Rhoda was so engrossed in all the queer facets of the crisis which seemed to be developing under her very eyes that she could feel no curiosity about the past. The old lady's violent outburst had pushed all thoughts of her own errand out of her mind. How paradoxical, she thought, that if Agatha Weir disappeared to-morrow, Rivers and Ogiltree, and perhaps even Garth, might accept it as a miracle—a recognition of her piety—while her mother and Jessie would construe it as the abolishment of a blasphemous soul.

Spence also seemed absorbed in his own thoughts as they hurried back to the hotel. It had begun to rain heavily. Rhoda looked at the sullen clouds moving ominously overhead, and experienced a vague sense of foreboding. The elements seemed to be reflecting the wrath she had just witnessed.

The meeting, when they reached the sitting-room, had been reduced to Garth and Rivers. Ogiltree, it appeared, had gone to the temple to get Mrs. Weir's endorsement of his temporary leadership. It had been decided that if she were to vanish—possibly to-morrow—without naming a successor, there might be dissension, argument, and much newspaper talk. Garth had put forward Ogiltree as the figurehead, with the reservation doubtless in his mind that he himself would remain the principal power on the board. Rivers's attitude was difficult to surmise. Something in his manner suggested that he relied on a higher influence to shape the temple's destinies.

Spence had just begun to recount what had happened at Mrs. Fletcher's when Ogiltree returned. He was pale, agitated, and so breathless that he could hardly speak. He came into the room and stood staring at the four of them grouped around the table. He tore off his dripping raincoat and flung it

on a chair, visibly taking a grip on himself. A shadow of fear and awe passed from his face, and he bowed his head.

Rivers almost flung himself across the table at him. "She is gone!" he cried in an awful voice.

"No," said Ogiltree, the words issuing calmly through quivering lips, "but she has given me her last words." He took a folded piece of paper from his inside pocket and held it tremblingly in front of him. "I'd better tell you—just what happened," he said.

No one spoke, and he went on: "When I got to the temple Mrs. Coulter looked disturbed. 'Has anything happened?' I said. 'No,' she said, 'except that Jessie Willis has been here—calling her down something awful. And then some woman came—Mrs. Smith, she called herself, from New York.'"

"Did she see her?" asked Spence anxiously.

"Yes. She saw her, and after that Agatha apparently called Mrs. Coulter and told her not to disturb her again. A man came after that with a note, but Mrs. Coulter wouldn't take it in. Told him to come back in the morning. And then I arrived. Mrs. Coulter wasn't going to let me in either, at first—she was getting ready for bed apparently—but I insisted. I went with her so as to be right there at the door, if Agatha refused to see me. I thought I might call out something that would make her let me in. 'She's been writing all evening,' Mrs. Coulter said. But when we got to the door she wasn't up. The curtains around the bed were closed. 'She can't be asleep yet,' Mrs. Coulter whispered to me, and she called to her, softly—'Mr. Ogiltree to see you—something very important.' There was no answer for a second or two, and then Agatha called 'Tell him to come back in ten minutes.' Mrs. Coulter asked me if I'd heard what she said, so I repeated it, and told her I'd wait, and for her to go to bed. I thought Agatha was probably praying—so I waited in the library—fifteen minutes—just to make sure I wouldn't disturb her, and then I went back and stood by the door and called to her."

A lump rose in Ogiltree's throat and he had to pause. He unfolded the paper in his hand and held it out to Rivers. "Because these are her last words—I've written them down. As soon as I got in my car I wrote them down, so that I wouldn't forget—and so that they can go on record. Read it, Rivers."

Dropping into a chair Rivers held the paper in front of him and looked at it with an awestruck air as though it were a sacred relic. On the paper, in Ogiltree's pencilled handwriting, were these words:

O.—I have come at the board's request to ask you to name a successor in the event of your assumption.

Mrs. W.—You yourself, Alfred, will take my place. Take my testament from the desk. It is finished. I want you to publish it. These are my last words. Cherish them. My eyes are fixed on heaven. Good-bye.

Rivers read the brief message in a trembling voice and handed it back to Ogiltree.

"The testament," said Ogiltree, "was sealed in a long envelope. Here it is. She has written on it—'To be opened three days after my assumption.' I'll keep it until then. Then we'll have another meeting and read it." He put the envelope back in his pocket.

Rivers said: "Did you see her?"

"She didn't come out," said Ogiltree. "I talked to her through the curtains—but her voice—her voice sounded as though she had lost her hold on this world."

Rivers dropped his head forward on his spread arms and sobbed.

8

Rhoda refused Garth's offer to put her up at his house. She stayed at the Minnicog. Early the next morning she was awakened by the telephone ringing beside her. She lifted the receiver and immediately recognized Garth's voice, agitated though it was.

"It's happened," he said.

"What?"

"The miracle—the assumption."

"You mean she's gone?"

"Yes—vanished—*vanished!*"

"What do you mean—vanished? She might simply have walked out in the middle of the night."

"No; she couldn't have walked out. Her gown is there on the bed, and not a thing in her wardrobe has been touched—nothing in the room—or in the whole temple. She couldn't have walked out—*naked.*"

“She *does* sleep in the nude then.”

“Yes.”

“And you think it’s a miracle?” said Rhoda cautiously.

“What *else*? What else can you think? Come out to the temple as soon as you can. We’re all here.”

Rhoda put the receiver down slowly, Garth’s words echoing in her mind — “What else can you think?”

She stretched herself in the bed and took a deep breath. I can think of all sorts of things, she said to herself. I can think of almost everything—except a miracle. And if it *isn’t* a miracle . . . ?

She turned to the telephone and called a New York number.

“This is Rhoda Groves. Did I wake you up?” she asked a minute later.

Mortimer Hood’s voice sounded sleepy. “No,” he said; “I’ve been awake a few minutes. Just had a call from Garth.”

“Are you coming?”

“I’ll be there before noon.”

Part II

1

In the early morning sunshine everything looked fresh and new after last night's rain. Even the air seemed to have been washed, so that every breath was like a draught of spring water. Rhoda sat upright in the taxi—alert, tingling, filled with a sense of impending adventure. She was a supremely healthy person, and it did not occur to her to associate anything spectral or gruesome with Mrs. Weir's disappearance. Her mind bubbled with ideas on her way to the temple; but the thoughts that came to her were somehow jubilant, edged with good-humoured mockery. She looked again through the car window. "What a fine day they have for their ascension," she thought.

But the first steps she took inside the church changed her mood immediately. She was cut off from the sparkling sunshine, and the bare, gloomy walls, closing her in, made her think at once of death and the tomb. She was impressionable, and by the time she reached the vestry she was ready to believe that Mrs. Weir had been murdered and thrown into the Sound.

Garth hurried toward her, and the frightened look on his face added a sudden chilling thought to the confusion already seething in her mind. His air of complacency had vanished completely.

"Dr. Hood is coming," he said, seizing her elbow and drawing her away from the others, who were in a little whispering group at the end of the table. "He's on his way now. Should be here in less than an hour." He stopped, clung more tightly to her arm and peered inquisitively into her face. "What do you make of this—if you don't believe in miracles?"

Rhoda shrugged her shoulders and almost summoned a smile. "All I can think of," she said, "is that it's a swell story for somebody—whatever's back of it. I guess I'm first and last a newspaper woman. *What* a scoop!"

"We're not telling the newspapers—*or* the police," whispered Garth anxiously. "Everybody's going to keep it dark until Hood gets here. We don't know what he'll want to do—don't know what sort of chap he is. What do *you* think? Is he likely to want to bring the police in? Spence seems

to think it will have to be reported to *some one*. But the rest of us are against it.”

“What’s *your* idea?” asked Rhoda.

“We are more or less agreed that we should wait twenty-four hours—just to—just to see if anything happens—and then issue a statement, signed by the board.”

“To the effect that she has—gone up?”

Garth looked sharply at Rhoda and released his grasp of her arm. “Suspicious—are you?” he asked, his eyes narrowing.

“I don’t even know whether I am or not,” she said.

Garth was shifting from one foot to the other and fidgeting with his hands behind his back. “Come on over and talk to Rivers,” he said. “He’s just in the mood.”

As she walked toward the table Rhoda noted quickly the expressions on the faces of the three other directors. Ogiltree was serious, pale, almost funereal in manner. Spence was obviously in some sort of panic which he was trying hard to conceal. Rivers was the only one of the four who looked as though he accepted the miracle. He seemed strangely elated. His lips and jaw now and then twitched with excitement, and he kept stepping backward and forward, as though he wanted to break out into a paean of praise.

The knowing, sceptical smile which often curled the corners of Rhoda’s lips flickered across her mouth, while her wide eyes stared in wonder at him. She felt his belief was simply unbelievable. There must be something behind it, she thought, and after exchanging a few sentences with the others, she determined to draw him out. She began the attack by a remark about his faith—how obvious it was, even to one like herself, who was inclined to be sceptical.

“I can think of no explanation,” she said, “except the silly one that Mrs. Weir simply walked out—which she wouldn’t do—or the hideous one, that she was—removed. . . .”

“Kidnapped?” cried Rivers in surprise.

“No,” said Rhoda, her eyes widening, “I hadn’t thought of that. That *is* possible.”

“On the contrary,” said Rivers, more calmly, “I think it is quite impossible.”

“Well—I was going to say—I can’t think of a reasonable explanation, and yet—a miracle—somehow—in these times. . . .”

“Do you think there was *ever* a time when people weren’t sceptical?” asked Rivers, in the patient tone one uses to a child. “Pharaoh didn’t think Moses was capable of performing miracles. And don’t you remember how Nebuchadnezzar marvelled when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego walked about in the burning, fiery furnace. I think the Bible word is ‘astonied.’ ‘The king was astonied.’”

“So should I have been,” said Rhoda, with a little shudder. “But seriously, Mr. Rivers—you don’t think an age of materialism and scepticism prevents miracles from happening apparently.”

“On the contrary,” said Rivers, “in such an age a miracle is more than ever necessary. Faith is at a low ebb—as it was in Egypt when Moses was given power to perform miracles—as it was in Babylon when Daniel was saved from the lions. And *this* miracle,” he went on, looking up over his head as though the ascending body of Mrs. Weir had only just passed out of sight, “is one that has recurred in a good many ages.”

“The idea—of ascension,” said Rhoda, “is very old, I suppose. Mr. Garth tells me you’ve studied up on the subject.”

“Yes,” said Rivers. “The ‘idea’—as you call it—goes back to the earliest records. Everybody knows the story of Enoch and Elijah, of course. Fewer people realize that Moses was ‘assumed’ to heaven. Josephus says that while he was conversing with Eleazar and Joshua a cloud enveloped him and he disappeared in a valley. And Abraham, too. In an old book called the *Testament of Abraham*, it is said that the archangel Michael came with chariots and took Abraham up into heaven, to show him men from the angelic point of view. We’re not told how long he was there, but he returned to earth and died shortly afterward. Then there’s another apocryphal book—the *Ascension of Isaiah*—which tells how Isaiah ascended for a short time into the seventh heaven—saw a vision of ‘the Beloved’—and came back again to mortal life. Mahomet, too, was taken by night from Mecca to Jerusalem, and then through the seven heavens. The angels who conducted him brought him back to Mecca again.”

Rhoda smiled indulgently. “It sounds like the magic carpet in *The Arabian Nights*,” she said.

“On the contrary,” said Rivers belligerently, “*The Arabian Nights* is a later work—and a very frivolous work—based on folk tales of these very happenings. The prophet Habakkuk, for instance, was lifted up by the hair of

his head and transported through the air to Babylon. And that was a long time before Bagdad was even thought of. In the Babylonian deluge story, by the way, Xisuthros—the equivalent of Noah in the Biblical account—was also *assumed* to heaven—on account of his piety. In other words, the ‘idea’ of assumption, as you call it, is as old as the flood.”

“And I suppose the Greeks had a word for it too,” said Rhoda, with a malicious twinkle.

Rivers glanced at her impatiently. “There *are* variants in Greek mythology,” he went on. “There was Proserpine, for instance, who was transported to the infernal regions by Pluto in his chariot. And there’s the story of Ganymede—a sort of Greek counterpart of the young David—who was picked by Zeus to become cup-bearer to the gods on Olympus. He was a shepherd, tending his father’s flocks and playing his flute, when Zeus sent an eagle—and Ganymede was carried up to Olympus on its back. The story goes that Zeus rewarded the boy’s father with a pair of horses.”

“A sort of divine forerunner of the Workmen’s Compensation Act,” Rhoda commented, with a controlled smile.

Her mocking mood angered Rivers she could see, and yet he seemed anxious to talk, to pour out all he knew. “Is he trying to convert me—or is he spilling all this to make me believe that *he* believes?” she wondered.

“I suppose,” Rivers said, with a militant note in his voice, “it has never occurred to you that Hercules went to heaven very much as Elijah did.”

“I thought he was burnt on a regulation funeral pyre.”

“So he was—or, at least, he was supposed to have been—but while the fire burned, Zeus sent a chariot to translate him to Olympus, and when the pyre was consumed neither the bones nor the ashes of Hercules could be found. In short, the Hercules story is a perfect example of a Greek assumption.”

“You’ve been talking about myths,” said Rhoda; “but you expect—do you, Mr. Rivers—that a great many people will *believe* in this assumption?”

“Yes—certainly—yes. They tell me that Dr. Hood is a very clever man. If he can find no other explanation than the obvious one—that Mrs. Weir has ascended into heaven in her mortal body—if *no trace of the body is found*—what else can *any one* believe?”

As she pondered this remark a thought seemed to utter itself in Rhoda’s mind, as though spoken by some one else: “Such a tiny body to get rid of.”

She glanced searchingly at Rivers, as though her face might somehow betray the thought, but he was looking at the portrait over the fireplace, and she went on thinking—"A tiny—beautiful—naked body." She tried to make herself see it alive, but it lay frighteningly still—prone and dead.

2

It was nearly noon when Mortimer Hood arrived. Garth brought him into the vestry, and the nervous tension of the long morning suddenly snapped. It was evident that Garth had been talking to him in the temple, for he introduced him in a sharp, business-like tone, and said at once: "Dr. Hood has consented to investigate. He has what I consider an excellent idea of how to proceed—excellent. Let's sit down. Go ahead, doctor."

Mortimer Hood's personality was immediately impressive, even though his figure was in no way commanding. His large head was sparsely covered with wisps of grey hair which stood up like cotton wool around a central bald spot. His body was insignificant. His legs were very short from the hips to the knees, so that he looked undersized, and, to an alert observer, misshapen. The crouch of his round shoulders, his hawk-like nose, and his short, strutting legs, gave him the appearance of a bird of ill-omen as he came in with Garth and sent a piercing glance at the assembled members of the board. At closer quarters, however, his dwarfed exterior was forgotten—lost in the charm of an urbane, twinkling, almost Puck-like personality.

"My idea," said Hood, drawling his words as though he enjoyed talking, "is not a new one. It's the basis I've always worked on. My enemies, the Spiritualists, have always been very nice to me because I go to their seances and say to them—'Let us take it for granted that genuine spirit communications *do* occur. That being so, I am only interested in proving that *this* particular instance is not a fake.'"

He smiled around the table in the most disarming manner, as much as to say: "You see how easy I am to get along with." Even Rivers, whose eyes had clouded over when the scientist entered the room, relaxed a little in his chair.

"Yours is a different case," Hood went on. "A most interesting case—otherwise, I assure you, I should not have been persuaded to come out of my retirement. In my old age I have become an artist. No one is the least bit interested in my paintings—except my granddaughter, whose taste has not yet been spoiled by going to art galleries. She thinks I'm an excellent painter. However—here I am—and, as I say, this is unusual. Instead of a

mysterious *appearance*—which can be faked, if you are clever enough—you tell me you have had a mysterious *disappearance*—which—which is very different. You accept it as a miracle—and, I assure you, I shall also accept it as—as an *innocent* disappearance—until it is proved a guilty one. If you will allow me to proceed on that assumption—I’m sorry—no pun was intended—don’t look at me like that, I mean it. . . .”

“You mean,” said Ogiltree, who could not bring himself to smile, “that you will investigate Mrs. Weir’s disappearance—and—and if you are unable to explain it by natural means, you will give us something—a report—something in writing—to the effect that it . . .”

“I’m sorry,” interrupted Hood, with a little bow of apology, “but I cannot vouch for the supernatural. All I can promise to do is to exhaust the means by which this disappearance could have occurred *naturally*. If it seems to be proved that no known natural means *could have been employed*—I shall be happy to say so, but with the proviso that, in such a case, some unknown means—presumably natural—must have been responsible.”

He looked rapidly about him and his nostrils were drawn up tensely, while his lips smiled. “Is that satisfactory?” he said.

Rivers leaned across the table. “I would like . . .” he began.

But Garth cut him short. “Wait a minute—wait a minute,” he blustered. “We are very much honoured to have Dr. Hood come here. We couldn’t possibly be in better hands. He knows much more about the spirit world than we do. He’s an expert at it.”

Rivers shuddered visibly and sank back in his chair.

“He’s an expert at it,” Garth repeated. “And he has been engaged. From now on our business is to answer questions—not ask ’em.”

Ogiltree put the tips of his fingers together and looked steadily at the ceiling, as though resigning himself to the necessity of this stranger’s presence.

“There’s one other thing,” said Garth. “There’s a lady here—Miss Groves—a journalist. She’s a friend of mine—and she’s writing a book about—about the temple—and the whole thing. If you have no objection, Dr. Hood, I’d like her to be along—so that she’ll be familiar with the investigation.”

“Ah!” drawled Hood. “The Press is always with us.”

Garth produced Rhoda from the library, where she had been awaiting Hood's arrival. The scientist greeted her curtly, as a stranger, and turning to Garth, said abruptly: "First, I would like to see the temple. Let us go outside and approach it the way any one would who comes to call on Mrs. Weir—the way *you* did last night," he added, looking at Ogiltree.

Ogiltree looked puzzled, as though the little man possessed second sight; but Hood immediately grasped his arm and said, in a chuckling voice—"I'm not psychic—don't think that. I'm not even a detective. Your friend Garth just happened to mention it, before we came in. I believe Mrs. Weir gave you her last message to the world. Ah—here we are—this is what you call the 'house' door, is it?"

Garth had taken his keys from his pocket and was about to fit one into the lock.

"Who else has a key to this door?" said Hood, signalling Garth to wait.

"We all have," said Ogiltree. "All the board members."

"That means everybody here. Let me get your names straight again—Garth, Ogiltree, Rivers, Spence. I think I'll remember you, after this. And how long have you all had these keys?"

"Since the temple was built," said Ogiltree.

"I see. You let yourselves in to the vestry this way, is that it?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now, Mr. Garth, don't unlock the door. If you ring the bell, will any one come?"

"Yes. Mrs. Coulter."

"Who is she?"

"She is a sort of housekeeper, and Mrs. Weir's personal attendant."

"How long has she been with Mrs. Weir?"

"About two years," said Ogiltree.

"I see. Any other servants?"

"A girl who comes in by the day," said Ogiltree. "She leaves about eight in the evening and gets here after breakfast."

"She has a key too, I suppose."

"Yes, I think so," said Ogiltree.

“Is she a local girl?”

“Yes. Born here. Never been away.”

“I see. All right, Mr. Garth, push the bell and let us have a look at Mrs. Coulter.”

The housekeeper looked blankly surprised at seeing the five men and Rhoda standing there, waiting to be let in.

“This is Dr. Mortimer Hood,” said Garth, raising his voice slightly. “He wants to look round.”

The whole party trooped in, and Hood said to Mrs. Coulter, “Perhaps you will show us the living quarters first.”

On the right was a spacious library which could be used for small meetings. On the left was a waiting-room where visitors were received. A corridor went past the doors of both these rooms to a hall which separated the tower room from the vestry. Beyond was a dining-room, adjoining the tower, and to the right, the service quarters.

“The tower, you see,” said Rivers, “is half built in. Half of it projects from the main block. De Long had an idea . . .”

“Did De Long build this church?” asked Hood quickly.

“Yes.”

“Did he design these doors too?”

They had returned to the main hall and stood facing two very lofty doors which, when they were swung open, gave entrance to the tower room, which Mrs. Weir had used as both bedroom and sanctum. The doors were closed, and Hood paused to scrutinize the strange modernistic design carved in the wood, representing scores of nude figures, male and female, rising from the earth and ascending into billowing clouds.

“Everything here is De Long’s,” said Rivers, quietly opening the doors. He stepped in and pointed to a circular bed in the middle of the room, from which the curtains had been drawn back. The base of the bed was of black marble. There were no bedcovers—simply a round black pillow on a black spread which covered the mattress. White curtains hung from a circular steel rod, supported by three vertical rods. They could be closed to conceal the bed entirely, or they could be drawn back—as they were now—making three apertures through which the bed could be seen.

“This is where she slept—is it?” said Hood, approaching the base and examining everything carefully. “No covers?”

He had addressed the question to nobody in particular, and no one answered, but now he turned to Mrs. Coulter. “Has this bed been touched since you first came in this morning and found Mrs. Weir gone?”

“I’m sorry, sir. I didn’t catch what you said,” Mrs. Coulter murmured, stepping closer to him.

Hood glanced quickly at her and repeated the question, but instead of raising his voice he deliberately lowered it.

“I’m sorry,” said Mrs. Coulter, reddening, “I’m a little deaf.”

Hood suddenly clasped his hands behind him and looked straight up at the ceiling. “Just how deaf are you, Mrs. Coulter?” he said loudly. “Can you hear this number?” He turned his back and whispered the word—“Sixteen.”

Mrs. Coulter shook her head and looked at the others dumbly.

“Can you hear *this*?” said Hood over his shoulder, and took three paces away from her. With his back still turned he pronounced the word “Thirty”—very clearly, and in a normal tone.

The housekeeper again shook her head and murmured: “No, I couldn’t catch it, sir.”

Hood turned abruptly round, shrugged his shoulders slightly, as though dismissing the matter, and darted another look at the ceiling. “What is this—a skylight?” he asked.

Rivers stepped forward. “Yes. The tower is open to the sky at the top. The walls get narrower inside as they go up.”

“This was De Long’s idea, too, I suppose,” said Hood, raising his head to conceal a gleam of amusement in his eyes.

“Yes. Everything in the new temple is his design,” said Rivers solemnly.

3

Hood returned to Mrs. Coulter’s side and said: “This bed shows no signs of having been slept on. Have you done anything to it—since this morning?”

“Yes, sir,” said the housekeeper. “The spread was stained—so I changed it, sir.”

“Stained!” cried Hood. “What with—do you know?”

“Well, you see, sir, Mrs. Weir went on a vegetarian diet nearly a year ago,” said the housekeeper. “Lately she’s taken nothing but milk and egg-noggs—and she must have spilled her egg-nogg last night. She had two or three during the day, as well as her milk, and always one when she retired.”

“Nothing else in it?” queried Hood abruptly. “No liquor?”

“At night, sir—just a touch of brandy.”

“And last night—how was it?—just as usual? Same time—same amount of brandy?”

“She asked for it a little earlier, sir. She was writing. She rang, and when I came in I noticed she’d finished the milk on her desk. ‘I’ll have my egg-nogg now,’ she said, ‘and then you won’t need to disturb me later on. I won’t need anything more to-night.’ So I fixed it and brought it in.”

“Did she sound quite emphatic about not wishing to be disturbed?”

“Oh no, sir. Just like she is sometimes. Otherwise I wouldn’t have bothered her about the people that came.”

“Some people came after that—did they?”

“Yes, sir. Jessie Willis. . . .”

“Her sister—a good bit older—really a half-sister,” interposed Ogiltree.

“Was it just a visit?—or did she come for a particular purpose?”

Hood addressed the question to Mrs. Coulter, who replied with some show of diffidence. “Well—yes, sir—to give her a talking to—from her mother.”

“About what—do you know?”

“About what they were all talking about in town yesterday — —”

“You see, Hood,” interrupted Garth, “it leaked out that Mrs. Weir expected . . .”

“I want Mrs. Coulter’s story,” said Hood.

“Her mother don’t like it, you see, sir,” continued Mrs. Coulter.

“Doesn’t like *what*?”

“Well—the temple, sir—and the way Mrs. Weir dressed—and—and her—her habits, sir—the bed, and everything. Even the diet—they say the old lady raved about that. And then all this talk—yesterday . . .”

"I see," said Hood thoughtfully. "I'll have to see Mrs. Fletcher—later. Did any one else come?"

"A woman, sir. Said she was Mrs. Smith from New York."

"It must have been about her new gown—a vestment for the festival . . ." began Spence.

"Did Mrs. Weir see this woman?" said Hood, calmly ignoring Spence.

"Yes, sir. For a few minutes—maybe ten minutes."

"Did she sound as though she was expecting her?"

"No, sir. I don't think she was expecting her. She seemed surprised."

Hood thought a moment and said: "Did Mrs. Smith look amused—or embarrassed—when she gave you her name?"

"Yes, sir."

"Which?"

"Both, sir."

"Both at once. Very good. I suppose you didn't hear any of the conversation."

"No, sir."

"Was Mrs. Smith carrying anything—a bag or a parcel?"

"No. Just a little purse—just an ordinary purse."

"She didn't leave it behind by any chance. You didn't find it this morning."

"No, sir."

"How big a woman, Mrs. Coulter? Very much bigger than Mrs. Weir?"

"Much bigger—and a foot taller. Kind of swarthy complexion. About *your* height, sir."

"Mrs. Weir couldn't have changed clothes with her very well, then?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see her leave?"

"No. Mrs. Weir must have let her out."

"Did you hear her go?"

“No, sir.”

“Then how do you know she stayed only ten minutes?”

“Well, it was about that time when the man came—and she was gone then.”

“You didn’t hear her go,” said Hood slowly. “You can’t hear the outside door open or shut—from where you are—from your room? Is that right?”

“No, I can’t, sir.”

“So that anybody with a key could have got in that evening—or that night—*last* night—without you hearing them. Also—Mrs. Weir could have gone out.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did Mrs. Weir know you were a little deaf when she hired you?”

“No. I didn’t tell her, sir. I’m not bad.”

Hood twisted one heel about and stared at the floor. “You say this Mrs. Smith was gone when the man came. How do you *know* that?”

“Well, when the man came with the note I let him in and went along and opened the doors quietly. . . .”

“These big doors?” He glanced at the round, unbroken wall. “No other doors,” he said, half to himself. “And only the one big window. All right. You opened the doors quietly. . . .”

“To see if I ought to disturb her again; but she was writing—so I told the man to come in the morning. . . .”

“Just a moment, Mrs. Coulter. You looked into the room—and I suppose you saw no sign of Mrs. Smith.”

“No—she’d gone—and Mrs. Weir was back at her desk.”

“Yes—yes,” said Hood; “but *if there were any reason*—Mrs. Smith might have hidden herself.”

“But there’s nowhere to hide, sir,” exclaimed Mrs. Coulter, spreading out her hands and looking around at the barely furnished room. There was literally nothing in it but the bed with its curtains, the desk and a chair. Even the two radiators were built in behind inconspicuous grilles, painted the same colour as the wall—a pale, pearly grey.

“What about the bed?” asked Hood. “Were these curtains drawn at the time?”

“No, they weren’t, sir.”

“How do you remember that so clearly?”

“Because when I looked again, sir, when Mr. Ogiltrie came—they were closed. I knew she’d gone to bed.”

“But—even if they were open—like this—she could hide herself in the folds—eh?—couldn’t she?”

“Maybe she could, sir,” said Mrs. Coulter doubtfully.

“I don’t imagine she *did*,” said Hood, rumpling his hair gently with one hand. “But, however . . . this man. What about him? What did *he* want? Did you ask him his name?”

“Yes, sir. And he gave me the note. He didn’t say anything. He gave me the note and sort of nodded, as much as to say—‘Take it in.’”

“Was it addressed to Mrs. Weir?”

“No. It was a blank envelope—sealed.”

“What did it feel like?”

“I’m sorry, sir—I didn’t catch . . .”

“What did it feel like? You say it was a note. Did you feel the thickness of a piece of paper in it?—or anything else?”

“It felt just like an ordinary note, sir.”

“So you went and looked—decided not to disturb Mrs. Weir again—and went back and told the man to come again in the morning. Is that right? What did he say?”

“He didn’t say anything, sir. Just took the note and went out.”

Hood raised his eyebrows sharply and looked around at the others. “You mean to say he didn’t speak a word—when he came in—or when he went out?”

“Not a word, sir. Didn’t open his mouth.”

“Did you think—did you wonder if he was—perhaps—a deaf mute?”

“Yes, sir—I did.”

“You did. Yes. Very good.” Hood turned and fingered the curtains. Then he swung absent-mindedly away from the group of listeners, who stood watching him curiously, and made a circuit of the room, treading close to the wall, with his hands behind him and his head down—thinking.

“He says he’s not a detective,” Rhoda thought to herself, “but—my heavens!—he’s just like a hawk.” Perhaps it was fancy, but she felt he was acting as though he already suspected something—*knew* something. It had flashed across her mind, when the visit of Mrs. Smith was mentioned, that Mrs. Smith was perhaps himself, disguised as a woman. If he had come, after all, last night . . . ! She looked at him and tried to visualize the change a woman’s wig would make in his appearance; but these speculations ended abruptly when he resumed his questions.

4

“Was this man a complete stranger to you?” Hood said, ending his walk by approaching and facing Mrs. Coulter again.

“No, sir. He was here—the day before.”

“What happened then?”

“He gave me a note—just the same—and I took it in, and Mrs. Weir said she’d see him. So he went in. I don’t know how long he stayed.”

“I suppose he didn’t speak that time either—in *your* hearing?”

“No, sir.”

“As far as you know—or could see—or hear—he might very well have been a mute. Is that right?”

“Yes.”

“And what became of the note—do you know? Did you find it in the waste basket?”

“No, I didn’t, sir.”

“You looked—did you?”

Mrs. Coulter permitted herself a tiny, self-possessed smile. “Yes,” she said. “I always look at the basket in the morning—in case Mrs. Weir has thrown away something she might want again. There was an awful fuss one day because I’d burnt something that she said must have slipped off her desk. So—well—I looked for the note. I was kind of curious. But it wasn’t there.”

“Was the envelope there?”

“No, sir—not even the envelope. I may as well tell you, sir—I made a real hunt for it—because I didn’t like the man’s looks—but there wasn’t a sign of it—anywhere.”

“What conclusion did you come to?” said Hood, with a trace of artfulness in his voice. “Where did you figure she had put it?”

Mrs. Coulter put her head on one side and shrugged one shoulder ever so slightly. “I figured she’d given it back to him.”

“Oh, you did,” said Hood, rolling his eyes at the others as one does when a child has said something precocious. “Couldn’t she have flushed it down the toilet?”

“I don’t think so, sir. It was time for the meeting—and she went right in to the vestry.”

“So you got the idea she didn’t want the note kicking around—is that it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What made you think that?”

“Because the man looked—kind of queer—and anyway, when she opened the note and read it—before she told me to bring him in—she nearly had a fit. You know what I mean, sir. Gaspd and went kind of white.”

Hood’s long, curved nostrils suddenly distended. “Did this man look made-up—disguised?”

“No, sir. Shabby—and kind of slinky. Looked as though he’d been through a lot, sir—if you know what I mean.”

“Did he wear a hat or a cap?”

“A felt hat, sir—quite old.”

“When he took his hat off, what was his hair like?”

“Just ordinary hair, sir—grey. A man about fifty—or maybe less. A kind of snarly face.”

“Not wearing a wig?”

“Couldn’t have been a wig, sir.”

Hood held his right palm open in front of his face and looked at it vacantly. “Did you ever see Mr. De Long, Mrs. Coulter?—the architect who

built this temple?"

"No, sir. Not that I know of. The temple was all built and moved into when I came here."

Rivers edged forward as though intending to say something about De Long, but Garth, who had frowned at the mention of the architect's name, silenced him with a quick, commanding look.

"So then Mr. Ogiltree came," said Hood, dropping his hand to his side as though dismissing something from his mind. "You didn't want to let him in at first, but when you found it was pressing, you came and called to Mrs. Weir and she . . ."

Mrs. Coulter finished his sentence, as he evidently had figured she would. "She said for him to come back in a few minutes."

"You mean to say you *heard* that?" Hood pounced on her.

"No, I didn't, sir. I heard her say something—and Mr. Ogiltree said that was what she said."

"Yes. I see. So then you went to bed, didn't you? You didn't hear Mr. Ogiltree leave, I suppose?"

Ogiltree moved forward from behind Garth so that he could clearly observe Mrs. Coulter's face. Hood noticed the movement and made a queer little bow in his direction. "Mr. Garth has told me part of the story, you see, and I'm just filling in the details. You didn't hear Mr. Ogiltree leave?"

"No, sir," said Mrs. Coulter. The examination was tiring her. She sighed and settled herself more firmly on her feet, preparing herself for further questioning.

"In short," said Hood, "so far as you know—Mrs. Weir might have walked out with Mr. Ogiltree."

"She *could* have—but she *wouldn't*." The housekeeper's voice trembled with sudden, indignant emphasis.

"Never mind whether she *wouldn't*," said Hood soothingly. "So far as you're concerned—she *could* have."

"No, sir. Her gown was on the bed—and not another thing was gone—not a single thing—not a handkerchief—not a towel—not a stitch of anything—has disappeared from this place."

“Ah, I see,” said Hood, drawing his brows together and swinging on his toes and heels as though balancing something in his mind. “Yes—that’s very important—*most* important.” He looked at Garth and smiled a trifle ruefully. “We have an intelligent, strong-minded woman who is quite sure that—that Mrs. Weir—well—that’s that. Very well, Mrs. Coulter. Let us suppose, for a moment, that Mrs. Weir left here—which she wouldn’t have done—with Mr. Ogiltree—and with—*with nothing on!* Quite absurd, I’ll admit, but let us *suppose* that. Which way do your windows face?”

Swallowing her surprise at the sudden question, Mrs. Coulter said: “North, sir. *That* way.”

“And the drive—which way is that?”

“The other side, sir.”

“And you left,” said Hood, looking at Ogiltree, “by the drive, I suppose. Were you driving?”

“Yes.”

“About what time was it when you left?”

“It would be a little after eleven—perhaps ten or twenty minutes after.”

“It was raining—wasn’t it?”

“Pouring.”

“Yes. I noticed that it must have rained here last night. We hadn’t a sign of it in New York. Yes. I see. Very well, Mrs. Coulter—let us come to this morning. Did you wake up as usual, or were you aroused?”

“The bell woke me when Mr. Ogiltree came.”

“What time was that?”

“It was twenty minutes past six.”

“And he told you he felt sure something had happened—or something like that—and wanted . . .”

“I said I felt sure the *miracle* had happened,” said Ogiltree in a loud voice, which seemed to be trembling with fervour.

“Just so,” said Hood, with a quick, appraising, sideways glance at him. He turned to Mrs. Coulter again. “So you went to the bed-curtains and looked—and Mrs. Weir was not there. What happened then?”

"I turned round and told Mr. Ogiltree—he was standing right there—at the doors. And he came and looked. We drew the curtains—and made sure. And just then Mr. Rivers came through the hall from . . ."

"Mr. Rivers!" exclaimed Hood, darting a look at the strange, triangular face which had suddenly assumed an expression of ecstasy. "You felt sure, too, did you?—but, never mind. One thing at a time." He closed his eyes, knitted his brows and swung to and fro on his heels. "One thing at a time," he repeated, half under his breath. Suddenly he opened his eyes, smiled in a puzzling way at Mrs. Coulter, and walked briskly across the room.

The cords which operated the skylight came down from the high ceiling and were looped tightly around a fixture over the desk. Mortimer Hood stood on tiptoe and examined the twisted cords very closely, squinting his eyes. Then he dampened the tip of his finger and touched the cords and looked at the faint film of dust on his finger-tip.

"No one seems to have noticed," he remarked, walking back to where he had been standing beside Mrs. Coulter, "*not even when I called attention to it before*—that this skylight is closed—and was closed *all last night*—on the very night—the night of nights—when it ought to have been open." He pursed his lips together and changed what might have been a smile into a grimace of exaggerated disappointment.

"But perhaps," he said, while his listeners glanced quickly about at each other, "perhaps you don't go all the way with the architect in believing a chimney—I mean, a *tower*—altogether necessary. Perhaps, with me, you are more inclined to the theory of a translation into the fourth dimension. It's a theory the Spiritualists favour—impossible to prove—but undoubtedly plausible. Plausible—at least."

5

No one spoke, and it was clear that Hood did not expect any response to his puzzling remark. He was bending over the bed again, taking short, sideways steps around it, examining every inch of the base and the tiles of the floor immediately beside it.

Rhoda looked at the four members of the board and decided that Dr. Hood had turned out to be quite unlike their expectations. His determination to carry on his own way, without interruptions or advice—his disregard of everybody's feelings—his interminable questions—the attention he paid to the minutest details—had already given the inquiry the flavour of a criminal investigation. This sort of thing, she suspected, had been far from their

thoughts, and they stood with the awkwardness of schoolboys—there was nowhere to sit—shifting about uncomfortably and occasionally glancing at each other with growing doubtfulness and displeasure.

“You say the bedspread was stained,” said Hood, suddenly looking up. “What have you done with it?”

“It’s in my room,” said Mrs. Coulter. “I was going to put in a call for the cleaners.”

“You haven’t put the call in yet?”

“No, sir.”

“Well—don’t—until I’ve seen it. And the gown—you say it was lying on the bed—where is *it*?”

“There’s nowhere to hang things in here, sir, so I hung it in the closet with the vestments—in the vestry.”

“You will be here all day, I suppose, Mrs. Coulter?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Yes. Then I’ll have a look at those things later on. Thanks for what you’ve told us. I must congratulate you on a very clear head—a very clear, coherent, and—and *straightforward* story.”

Mrs. Coulter’s eyelids flickered with some sort of embarrassment. With a little bow and an almost imperceptible glance at Rivers as she passed him, she withdrew.

“Now, Mr. Rivers,” said Hood, with his most urbane smile, “I have gathered from your manner that—possibly more than any one else—you have had, all along, the utmost faith in a complete and perfect assumption. You were overjoyed this morning, I imagine—but not in the least surprised. Has this little matter of the skylight altered your views—your conviction?”

“No, sir,” said Rivers stoutly, almost belligerently. “The tower and the skylight were a part of the stage tricks that De Long invented. No one—not even Mrs. Weir, although she—what shall I say?—*accepted* them—really believed in them—really felt they were—necessary.”

“I see. Yes. In short, long before *this* temple was built you all looked—just as confidently—for the assumption of Mrs. Weir. Is that right?”

“Not quite. The hope of an immediate miracle was not as strongly in our thoughts—in those days. We were trying to live— —”

“Pardon me if I interrupt,” said Hood, “but time may be precious. Besides, this is a detail I don’t want to overlook. Mrs. Coulter said she was wakened this morning by Mr. Ogiltrie ringing the bell. I suppose you rang the bell—instead of using your key, Mr. Ogiltrie—because of the early hour, and because . . .”

“Because I wanted to rouse Mrs. Coulter and have *her* come in and look,” said Ogiltrie.

“Exactly. Just what I thought,” said Hood. “But you, Mr. Rivers—being of a more—a more precipitate temperament—and being, also, perhaps, more convinced of what you would find—or rather what you would *not* find—used your key. So that if Mr. Ogiltrie had not arrived a few minutes— —”

“You’re quite wrong, Dr. Hood,” interrupted Rivers. “Especially about the precipitate temperament. What happened was this. After we left the meeting last night I went home. . . .”

“You are married, Mr. Rivers?”

“No. I’m a bachelor. I live in rooms.”

“Yes. Please go on.”

“I suddenly realized that it was after midnight—that it was, in fact, *the 10th of June*—the date Spence told us had been prophesied. . . .” Rivers broke off and looked at Hood as though he did not expect him to entertain the idea of such a prophecy without a smile of scepticism; but the scientist nodded gravely, and Rivers went on: “So I decided to come to the church and wait. I had a feeling that if I knelt in the church and prayed—putting myself in tune, so to speak, with the expectations of our leader—that something would be communicated to me at the moment of miracle. In other words—that I would *know* when it happened. So I came and roused Jacob and . . .”

“Who is Jacob?”

“The gardener.”

“Does he sleep in this building? I thought . . .”

“No. There’s a stone cottage just adjoining the church grounds on what we call ‘the back road.’ That’s where he lives. He has the key to the main door. . . .”

“But haven’t you a key?”

“Yes, to the ‘house door,’ but I didn’t want to come in that way. I thought that no matter how quiet I was, I might disturb Mrs. Weir—she would wonder who it was—at that hour of the night. So I got Jacob up and he let me have the key of the main door and I began my vigil.”

“Did you turn any lights on?”

“No. There are three pillars in the chancel which light the temple continuously, day and night—you may have noticed them.”

“Yes, I did. The church, then, was in every way normal. No one—who hadn’t seen you enter—would suspect that you were there.”

“I hadn’t thought of it,” said Rivers quickly, “but that’s quite true. In any case, no one disturbed me, and—I’m ashamed to confess—after praying for perhaps two hours, I fell asleep. I was awakened early—by the sound of Ogiltree’s car, I suppose—and had an immediate sense of something having happened. I went into the hall through the vestry and found him and Mrs. Coulter—almost at the moment of their discovery.”

He stopped, inhaled a deep breath and looked at Ogiltree as though for some sort of corroboration, but the new leader of the Assumptionist Temple, who had heard it all before, was obviously not listening. He was absorbed in his own thoughts, his large, magnetic eyes fastened on vacancy.

“Well, gentlemen, we have this much clear. Mrs. Weir was alive—was here—when Mr. Ogiltree left at eleven fifteen or eleven twenty. Your meeting ended soon after midnight, I understand. You broke up. Did any of you—other than Mr. Rivers—come here before going home?”

Garth and Spence shook their heads.

“You didn’t come back a second time?” Hood asked, looking at Ogiltree.

“No. Not until the early morning.”

The scientist nodded thoughtfully several times. “I think I would like to talk to the gardener,” he said. “He may have heard or seen something. Is he—a believer?”

Ogiltree suddenly looked very uncomfortable and interjected quickly, “In a way, yes. Yes. But you will see for yourself.”

But before seeking out the gardener, Mortimer Hood seemed to be interested in the marks of automobile tires on the driveway immediately

outside the house door. From these he was led off—evidently by a trail of footmarks—to the shrubbery surrounding the semicircular wall of the tower. He was moving along, bent almost double, scrutinizing the rapidly drying ground, when he suddenly straightened up and raised his head. He had reached the centre of the projecting wall of the tower, in which a tall narrow window was set in an embrasure. He looked at the window and shot out a finger. “That little ventilator window can be opened, I suppose,” he said, pointing at a small steel sash about two feet square which was set in the larger window, perhaps ten feet above his head.

Garth, Spence, and Rivers followed the direction of his finger, and one of them promptly said “yes.”

“Do you see these marks—right under the window?” Hood said, pushing aside the heavy foliage of the shrubs so that they could get a clearer view. “What do you make of them?”

“Looks like a ladder,” said Garth.

“Exactly. Some one—with very worn shoes—put a ladder up to this window, last night, in the pouring rain. Perhaps it was the shabby man with the ‘snarly’ face. He may have delivered his note—after all—through the window—or—yes—that’s a thought.” He suddenly looked around at each face and exclaimed: “Where is Mr. Ogiltree?”

“He asked to be excused for half an hour or so,” said Spence. “He has to take his wife to the train. She is going away to-day—for the summer.”

Hood’s eyes narrowed and he nodded to himself, as though something was working out as he had expected. “Let us find the gardener,” he said.

The stone cottage was at the bottom of a slope of land which ran down from the temple to the ‘back road.’ It was outside the fence and lay half concealed in a small orchard of twisted apple trees. As Hood drew closer to it he looked back at the temple. “Not much good,” he grumbled. “From here he wouldn’t be able to hear anything—not even a car starting. And at night he wouldn’t see a thing. Is this the man?”

At that moment a tall, slightly stooped, but powerful figure appeared behind the cottage, coming towards them. As he approached he looked up obliquely from under thick, black brows, without raising his head.

“Good-morning, Jacob,” called Garth, as the man plodded to the gate and opened it.

“Morning, gentlemen,” the gardener mumbled, his lips curling away from stained teeth in an imbecile smile.

“He’s not quite all there, you know,” Garth whispered to Hood.

“Oh—is that why Ogiltree hesitated?”

“Yes—and also because—but I’ll tell you afterwards.”

The man had stopped in front of them and was looking from one face to another as though seeking something. “This is Dr. Hood, Jacob,” said Garth. “He wants to ask you some questions about last night.”

“Last night,” said the gardener dully. “Ay—a grand rain it was. Jus’ what we needed.”

“What time did it stop—do you know?” asked Hood.

“I’d say about midnight—a little before, maybe.”

“Mr. Rivers got the key to the temple from you last night, I believe,” said Hood.

“Yes, sir. I wondered who on earth ’twas—knocking me up at all hours.”

“After you’d given him the key did you go right back to bed?”

“I sure did—and bang off to sleep again.”

“Did you hear anything else during the night?”

“Did I hear anything?—not me, sir.” There was a crazy twist to his mouth as he shook his head slowly, and yet Rhoda, looking at him intently, felt that there was something familiar about his face, and especially about the large, humid eyes.

“Have you a ladder around here?” Hood was asking.

“Sure I have, sir. Right there, sir.” He pointed through the fence.

Hood stooped and glanced under the low boughs of the apple trees. A ladder was lying longways on the ground beside an old unpainted shed.

“You didn’t hear anybody come in the night and borrow it, I suppose,” said Hood.

“I did not, sir. Far as I know it ain’t been moved since I pruned them trees a few weeks back.”

“Let’s go and look at it,” said Hood. They went through the gate. “You don’t keep a dog—eh?” he added, glancing around the yard.

“Not now, sir. The mistress—she didn’t like it howling of a night—kind of bothered her. Had to let him go. He’s over with them Bretts, the other side of Haskell’s Point.”

“How long ago was this?” asked Hood.

“That I let him go?”

“Yes.”

“Maybe six months.”

Hood bent over the ladder, raised it at one end and examined the drying mud on the uprights and the first two or three rungs. He broke off some of the caked mud and rubbed his finger into the dampness on the rungs. His finger-tip came away moist and muddy.

“This was the ladder he used,” the scientist murmured, half to himself. “But you didn’t hear it taken away or returned?” he asked, turning to Jacob again.

“No, sir. That I did not,” said the gardener, rolling his head from side to side and looking at Hood with a puzzled gleam in his dark eyes.

“Just leave it there,” said Hood. “Don’t touch it. Don’t move it.”

The gardener nodded stupidly.

“D’you suppose he understands?” Hood said to Garth. “I don’t want it touched.”

“Don’t let anybody touch the ladder,” Garth bellowed at the gardener, as though he were deaf. “Don’t let anybody touch it.”

Jacob nodded again, sullenly, and Hood turned away to the gate. Garth stopped close beside him, waited until they were out of earshot, and said: “He hasn’t been right since he was a kid. Never had any education to speak of. We don’t often mention it—in fact, we just don’t think of it any more—but he is Ogiltree’s brother.”

Rhoda just caught the words and Hood’s quick repetition: “*Ogiltree’s brother!*”—and the vague memory in her mind suddenly cleared up. It was simply the knowledge of their relationship. On her last visit she had seen them together in the grounds, talking together, and some one had told her they were brothers. It was the pitifulness of the contrast which had impressed her—the one erect, masterful, and magnetic—the other stooped, shuffling, with the eyes and bearing of a slave.

“Now we must see this bedspread,” said Hood, as they crossed the grass. “You know, it strikes me as peculiar that Mrs. Weir would take her egg-nogg to bed with her. Especially *last* night. Why didn’t she drink it and leave the glass on the desk?”

Garth, who was walking on one side of him, simply shook his head. Spence, on the other side, murmured in a low voice: “Very curious—very.”

“Of course—the stains may not be the egg-nogg,” said Hood, glancing out of the corners of his eyes at Spence. “They may be something worse.”

They had reached the house door and were just entering the corridor which led to the tower room, when Mrs. Coulter came hurrying toward them. In her eyes could be read an excited mixture of doubt, suspicion, and dread.

“What has happened?” cried Garth.

“The spread—the bedspread,” said Mrs. Coulter.

“What about it? What have you found?” asked Hood impatiently.

Mrs. Coulter spread out empty palms and said in a breathless voice: “It’s gone.”

Part III

1

The disappearance of the stained bedspread produced a marked change in Mortimer Hood's manner. Throughout the morning he had grown steadily keener, as though clearly on the scent of some rational explanation of the mystery. His questions, Rhoda felt, had been spread like a net in a definite direction as though he had some pre-knowledge of what had happened. The directors of the temple were evidently disturbed by his scepticism.

Mrs. Coulter's announcement, suggesting that evidence of a suspicious character was being anxiously concealed, seemed to confirm the view he had taken. And yet Hood, after one sharp glance at her, dismissed the matter with surprising lightness.

"Gone?" he said. "Lost, you mean? Oh well, no doubt it will turn up. If it does, I should like to look at it, although it's probably not important."

With that he turned to the directors, and said in a conciliatory tone, "I hope I haven't worried you unduly, gentlemen, but you can see—there are several little complications—coincidences, no doubt—that need to be cleared up. These things may have nothing whatever to do with—the miracle. Probably not. And yet, you see, it will be so much better if we are sure. I think you've told me all I want to know for the present. Later on—this evening, perhaps—we might get together again. By that time I may have a theory. . . ." He stopped to smile, as though at himself. "You'll find I'm very fond of theorizing. At present I lean toward the idea of some sort of fourth-dimensional phenomenon, but that's a very abstruse subject. It will bear thinking about—a good deal. There have been a lot of unexplained occurrences which might—ah! here's Gifford."

Three men had just appeared unannounced through the vestry door. They had evidently come through the temple. Although they were in plain clothes, two of them looked very much like detectives—tall, heavily built men, with a look of blank unconcern on their faces. The third came forward and shook hands with Hood, who immediately introduced him as Sergeant Gifford of the New York Missing Persons Bureau. He was a tall, loose-jointed man, with a broad, good-humoured face. His unpressed, ill-fitting clothes and rumpled hair gave him a countrified appearance.

“Sergeant Gifford,” said Hood quickly, “is an old friend of mine. Worked with me once on a very curious case. I suppose you’ve been asked to look into this—by the local police.”

“Got a call this morning,” said Gifford. He closed his mouth firmly and avoided everybody’s eyes by gazing at the walls and ceiling as though the architecture of the place particularly interested him.

“These gentlemen were just leaving,” said Hood, “after quite a long session. . . .”

“What have the police got to do with this?” interrupted Rivers, with a scowl. “How do they *know* about it? Nobody has . . .”

Hood smiled patiently. “After that story in the papers yesterday—and all the reporters I saw around outside this morning,” he said, “you surely don’t expect to—and, in any case, Mr. Gifford is not really the police. Actually, you’re out of your jurisdiction here, I suppose, Gifford. Sort of unofficial call, isn’t it?”

“Police didn’t want to butt in, I guess,” said Gifford. “Figured it was a Missing Persons job.”

“You dropped in on the Chief, I suppose, before you came over,” said Hood. “What’s his name? I imagine you gentlemen know him?”

“Hewlett, his name is,” said Gifford. “Member of your congregation, ain’t he? Seemed to want to keep his hands off.”

“Not exactly a member,” said Spence doubtfully, “but he comes to our services occasionally.”

“Another spy!” Rivers blurted out vehemently. “Thinks we’re all mad. I tell you, Garth—we don’t have to stand for this—this . . .”

“Wait a minute!” the publisher barked. “Dr. Hood is a gentleman. More than that, he’s a well-known man—a famous man. There’s going to be no indignity about this investigation. Just a scientific—unbiased . . .”

“Exactly,” said Hood. “To me it’s a scientific problem. There are a number of possible explanations. A physical body might conceivably pass from three dimensions into four—and consequently disappear. That’s one theory. Then, we must remember, that under certain conditions all solids can be turned into gases. It was thought for a long time that such a change took place only under conditions of terrific heat. I am beginning to wonder . . .” he smiled, as though pleased with himself, “I’m wondering if the story of

the chariot of fire—in Elijah’s case—may be an ancient way of describing what we call ‘spontaneous combustion.’ A sudden burning up of the body.”

Rivers was shifting about, impatient and suspicious.

“I’m quite serious, gentlemen,” Hood went on more weightily. “The ancients were puzzled for centuries by the fact that the products of combustion invariably weigh more than the original combustibles. They held that some extraneous substance was mysteriously added. Clement of Alexandria, in the third century, came very near the truth when he suggested that this substance might be simply air. Mayow, in the seventeenth century, pushed our knowledge a little further by perceiving the similarity in the processes of combustion and respiration. Something in the air we breathe—something he called *spiritus nitro-aereus*—was essential, he claimed, both for combustion and for life. Then Stahl came along with his phlogiston theory, but it was soon exploded. Lavoisier found what we still accept as the real explanation—in short, oxidation—simply the oxygen of the atmosphere combining with the substance burnt. That’s what happens—or what we think happens—when a coal-pile begins to smoulder and finally breaks into flames, without the application of heat. A heap of cotton waste, soaked in oil, will do the same thing. Why not a human body? D’you see the possibility? You would call it a miracle, I imagine, whereas I invariably look behind such occurrences for a natural cause. But Nature . . .” He raised his eyes and lifted his hands in the air, as though helplessly confronting an invisible and inexplicable source of power.

The Assumptionist board members were obviously impressed. He noted the expression on their faces, then quickly shrugged his shoulders and said: “However, I shouldn’t weary you with this sort of thing until I’m much clearer about it. We’ll get together later. In the meantime, it will save your waiting if I pass on to Mr. Gifford what I have learned so far. Is that satisfactory to you, Gifford? No need to keep these gentlemen?”

The lanky sergeant kept his mouth shut. He simply shook his head.

2

“Get rid of your two men,” Hood said to Gifford as soon as the others had left. “Keep them out of sight. These people must be made to think we’re a pack of fools with skin over our eyes an inch thick. When I called you this morning I figured you would come up alone.”

“*You* called him?” exclaimed Rhoda in astonishment, as Gifford disappeared down the corridor. She was hoping that now they were alone he

would confide in her whatever it was he seemed to have known all along.

“Yes,” said Hood. “We may need to establish relationships with the local police, and it wouldn’t do for me to get mixed up in that. Garth figured I would be a doddering old professor with only the interests of science at stake. He wouldn’t have pressed me into this thing otherwise. I was to be a sort of buffer between their little conspiracy and the police. I wouldn’t be surprised if Garth went to Hewlett and told him to keep out of it—told him they’d engaged an investigator from New York. Garth’s the big man of the town. Has the police chief under his thumb—you can count on that. It’s all been carefully worked out, but . . .”

“You think it’s a conspiracy?” demanded Rhoda.

“I think it *was* a conspiracy,” said Hood, with a little smile. “But—you know?—‘the best laid schemes o’ mice and men . . .’” He snapped his fingers in the air. “Something went wrong with it—you can see that. Evidently they weren’t all in it—and now they’re all suspicious of each other.”

Rhoda’s great blue eyes widened at him. “But what went wrong with it?” she asked. “From *their* point of view, it seems to me, it’s gone off perfectly.”

“Very nearly—yes,” said Hood; “but don’t you see they’re all at sixes and sevens—they don’t know where they are—*because it happened a day too soon!*”

Rhoda stared at him so hard that the little man almost laughed out loud. He restrained the chuckle which bubbled in his throat, and added: “I know almost nothing about it yet—and maybe I’m only guessing—but I’m almost prepared to swear that it happened—whatever *did* happen—before midnight last night. Which means the *9th*—not the *10th*.”

“Then you attach a lot of importance to this business of the date,” said Rhoda, peering inquisitively at him. “You think . . .?”

“I think the date—and *why* it was fixed—might have been very important—originally. But it may not matter much now. *Somebody either didn’t know about it—or they didn’t stick to it.*”

Hood paused and glanced at Rhoda with a twinkle in his eyes. It was the first sign, since he had arrived, that they were not complete strangers.

“You know what I think about these people who claim to be psychic,” he said, lightly tapping her sleeve. “I’m not the least bit psychic—but I *do* jump

to conclusions. I like to theorize. I like to put things together and see if they won't fall into a pattern."

Gifford returned. Hood nodded as he came up to them, and went on talking. "A good many scientists are like that. After all, a *theory* is often ninety per cent. imagination. A man like Einstein, for instance—when you know how he works—is a sort of poet. He observes, he calculates, he tabulates, and finally he produces a new set of facts—but they are only facts! Then his mind *jumps*—he suddenly *sees* what the facts mean. It's the kind of mental jump a poet makes when he sees or feels—and *expresses*—something that nobody has thought or felt before. But what was I talking about? Oh yes. I was going to say—I *have* jumped to a conclusion about this—whatever it was—that happened last night. I'm only guessing about *what* was done—but I have a decided feeling that whoever did it—*was the wrong person!*"

"Too deep for me," said Rhoda, smiling, and Gifford echoed her feeling with a puzzled grunt.

"I don't wonder," mused Hood. "It's not at all clear to *me* either—except *that*. The *wrong person* is mixed up in this."

"You people are talking a lot of blah as far as I'm concerned," said Gifford gruffly. "Hadn't you better wise me up, doctor?"

"Quite right, sergeant. Let's sit down in the library. First of all I'll give you a rough sketch—and then I want Miss Groves to tell us what *she* saw and heard last night."

"Do we never eat?" said Rhoda. "It's away past lunch time."

"We do *not* eat—*yet*. Something's likely to happen—and I want to be right here—I want Mrs. Coulter to be able to find me. You go along to the library. I'll join you in a moment."

"You *expect* something to happen?" Rhoda asked in a puzzled tone.

"Yes—all sorts of things," said Hood over his shoulder as he went along to Mrs. Coulter's door.

Rhoda and Sergeant Gifford sauntered into the library. The big detective, who looked a little like Abraham Lincoln, interested himself at once in the titles of the books in the cases.

"You've worked with Dr. Hood before?" said Rhoda, addressing his back as she dropped into a low, comfortable chair. But she found she had to do most of the talking. Gifford would hardly open his mouth.

Hood was away longer than she had expected, but he came in at last, latched the door, closed the transom, and stepped briskly toward them.

“She’s hard to make out—that woman. I can’t believe she’s as honest as she seems. And this bedspread business looks—however, never mind that, for the minute. Let’s see where we stand—or rather, let’s *sit*, Gifford. Pull that chair over. I’m a little tired. It’s been a strenuous sort of day for me. Not used to it. Now—before we get Miss Groves’s ideas, I’d like you to see this thing, Gifford, the way it looked this morning—*after it happened*. I purposely haven’t asked her a thing. As a matter of fact we were both told to act as though we had never met.”

“Yes,” said Rhoda, “and for twenty-four hours I’ve been wondering why.”

Hood glanced at her quickly. “Nothing very suspicious about that, is there? Garth, I suppose, wanted to avoid an appearance of too much collusion. That was *yesterday*. At that time he was trying to give these people the impression that all he wanted was *proof*—whereas what he really wanted was whitewash. You see—we keep coming back to that. Yesterday the thing was moving in a certain direction—the date was fixed—everything was running smoothly. The scheme—whatever it was—may have been quite—well, innocent is hardly the word—but *uncriminal*. And then—bingo!—something went wrong. The *wrong person* stepped in at the wrong time. However, here we are back at the same place. Sorry, Gifford. What I was getting at was that I haven’t asked Miss Groves anything. I didn’t want to have any preconceived notions of what to look for. I wanted to look for *everything*.”

3

“In the first place,” Hood went on, thoughtfully fingering a wisp of his whitening hair, “you’d better get out your little book, Gifford, and put down these names. These are the people we know something about—up-to-date—who may have been—shall we say—in the conspiracy.”

At the scientist’s dictation Gifford made the following notes:

Mrs. Coulter.—Either deaf, or assuming deafness for a purpose. What purpose?

Emma.—Girl who helps Mrs. Coulter—has key to house door.

Ogiltree.—Possibly last person to see Mrs. Weir last night—first person to call this morning. Possesses Mrs. Weir’s last testament. Wife left town to-day.

Jacob.—Gardener—Ogiltree's brother. Didn't hear ladder taken away or returned. Pretended to accept Rivers's visit in middle of night as matter of course.

Rivers.—Art director at Garth's plant—yet seems antagonistic to Garth. Doesn't like investigation. Spent night in temple on slim pretext. Appeared at psychological moment this morning.

Garth.—Knew about date in advance—engaged Miss Groves and Dr. Hood—perhaps as means of keeping off police and reporters—hoped to dictate story that would whitewash Mrs. Weir's disappearance. Quarrelled with Mrs. Weir yesterday. May have come to temple after midnight.

Spence.—First knew of date from original informant—told Garth—now worried because miracle happened too soon. Where did he go after the meeting broke up?

Mrs. Smith.—Apparently known to Spence—may be his original informant—if so, she is perhaps the medium who prophesied the date—may have worn clothes under her own for Mrs. Weir to put on.

Snarly Face.—Acting like deaf mute. What did note contain? What happened at interview day before? Did he use the ladder? What for?

Jessie Willis.—Came with message from mother—upset by talk of miracle. Unexpected visit may have hurried somebody's plans.

De Long.—Whereabouts unknown. Planned building for just such a miracle. May be involved.

Mrs. Weir.—Where is she?

"Yes," said Hood, when he had finished dictating, "where is *she*? Is she alive or dead? Was she one of the conspirators? Or was she conspired against? Did she know the exact date and beat them to it by twenty-four hours or less—or *did she herself spread rumours about the 10th because she planned to slip away on the 9th?*"

He raised his head and looked steadily at the ceiling. "I also wonder," he said, bringing his head down quickly, "whether it would have happened last night—if it hadn't rained."

"I don't see . . ." began Rhoda.

"I don't either. But this rain—it may have accounted for a lot—for the skylight being closed—for the need to borrow the ladder—for the stains on the bedspread. I don't know. But somehow I *suspect* that shower. Rain causes people to change their plans. Don't you remember the fuss Victor Hugo makes in his famous chapter—or whatever it is—about Waterloo—to the effect that if it hadn't rained the night before, the artillery could have

manœuvred earlier, Blücher wouldn't have had time to come up, and Napoleon might have won. However—it *did* rain, and the skylight was left closed. Whoever planned this miracle would certainly want the skylight open when it occurred—or, at any rate, when it was discovered. De Long provided the tower and the skylight for a purpose. It had been 'advertised,' you might say—the roofless tower, I mean—as one of the architectural features of the building. The perfect ascension demanded it. And yet, what happens? To-day—of all days—we find it closed. What does *that* mean? It means, I think, that things didn't go according to schedule. It means, I think, that when Ogiltree and Rivers and Mrs. Coulter discovered she was gone this morning, they were too excited to think about the skylight. They must have been quite excited to forget a detail as important as that, and it seems to me their excitement permits of only two explanations. Either they weren't in on the planning at all, and were utterly astounded that the miracle had really happened—or—something had gone wrong with the plan, and they were excited and worried, wondering what *did* happen."

"You said a little while ago," said Rhoda, "that you felt certain it happened before midnight. I've been trying to figure out what you *saw* this morning that made you think that."

Hood smiled. "I *saw* that the skylight was closed. Also, I learned from that brother of Ogiltree's that the rain stopped a little before midnight. My theory is—for the minute, at least—that whoever carried out the disappearance abduction—or whatever it was—*murder*, perhaps—who knows?—didn't open the skylight at the time because it was raining. He—or she—figured, perhaps, that they would open it in the morning. But—either they couldn't get back here—or they were under observation at the time—or—in the excitement of a plan gone awley—they forgot about it."

"You've no clear notion yet who this person was—the 'wrong person' as you say—have you?—or have you?" said Rhoda.

"Well, let's see. How many possible theories are there? Suppose we jot them down, Gifford:"

1. Mrs. Weir walked out herself, without connivance of any kind.

"That would mean, Gifford, that she would have to provide herself with clothes and money, in advance. Shouldn't be hard to check up. There's something for your men to do. Have them go to the stores. Find out where she banks, and see if she drew out an unusual sum of money lately. And,

while they're at it, get them to find out if any of the other people you've got listed drew out unusual sums in the last few days. All right? Let's go on."

2. Mrs. Weir conspired with her board to stage a miraculous disappearance.

"Let's say that the whole board, and perhaps even Mrs. Coulter, was in on it. I don't believe it, but where does it lead to? In the first place—*why* do it? Would Garth, for instance, put up the money to send her into permanent hiding? Just to create a miracle? Or did they want to get rid of her? Did somebody else—Garth, for instance—want the leadership of the cult very badly? Or does she figure on reappearing one of these days—with a revelation of some kind? *That's* worth thinking about—isn't it, Miss Groves?—what's your name—Rhoda?"

"That's better," said Rhoda. "Sounds chummier."

"What's *your* idea?" asked Hood. "Do you think she'll stage a comeback? That last testament of hers may tell us something? We'll have to get it from Ogiltree and disregard the three-day time limit. It looks funny to me—that three days business. May be something behind it."

He took out a small notebook of his own. "I'd better make a note or two myself," he said. "Mrs. Weir's last testament. That's one thing we want. The bedspread is another. I want the finger-prints on that ladder. One of your men can do that, Gifford, eh? And also on Mrs. Weir's desk. That's enough for now. Let's get on with our theories."

3. Mrs. Weir eloped with some one—leaving behind the appearance of a physical ascension.

"We needn't dwell on that—except—yes, Gifford. Wire New York headquarters and get what you can on this madman De Long—past history—present whereabouts. And I'll make a note to look into Mrs. Weir's correspondence. All right. What's next?"

4. Mrs. Weir was forcibly abducted by some one with the object of faking a miracle.

"And *that* opens up all sorts of possibilities. Any of the board members may have done it—single-handed or together. Our friend Mrs. Smith may be an outside accomplice. May have chloroformed her."

“But Mrs. Coulter saw her at the desk, writing, after Mrs. Smith’s visit,” put in Rhoda.

“So she *says*,” chuckled Hood. “But in the first place I don’t believe anything she says; and, in the second place, Mrs. Smith may have come back again later. And the same holds true of the man with the note—old Snarly-face. He may have been the person who used the ladder—may have flung in his note, if he really was a mute—or may have told Mrs. Weir something through the window that made her let him in. Once in—well—who can tell? But how would he get her out? You know, this nudity business is really too good. I mean it makes their miracle look so nice and air-tight. So much so that I have a feeling it was part of the plan—possibly thought out months in advance. Maybe this whole thing has been hatching for two years—ever since De Long built the new temple. In any case, it would have been easy enough to supply some clothes—something to wrap her in. Ah! There comes our rainstorm again. I keep suspecting that rain.”

“How—now?” asked Rhoda.

“Well, suppose some one gets his chance to abduct her—a day ahead of schedule. Suppose he’s not quite prepared for it, but wants to seize his chance. He wants to get her out of the tower and have everybody think it was the miracle they’d been looking for. But he figures he must leave her gown behind, and if he takes anything else, to cover her, it will look suspicious. But the rain, my dear, saves him.”

“How?”

“*The chances are he was wearing a raincoat.* If it *hadn’t* been raining—you see? She was a tiny, little woman, they say. He could have made a bundle of her—in his raincoat—out to a waiting car—and away. But that’s just imagination. Perhaps I’ve got that rainstorm on the brain.”

“But the motive,” said Rhoda.

“For abduction? First of all—love. Second—hate. Third—jealousy. And so on. Plenty of motives, my dear. Can’t you imagine it? I suppose that’s why I foresook science for art. If there is one thing—besides egotism, perhaps—that I possess in abundance—it’s imagination. This person—a man, let us say—abducts her, locks her up, intending later to show her the newspapers—the hurrah that’s been made all over the country—all over the world, maybe—about *her* miracle. D’you see? Does it sound too much like a thriller? He has her in his power—as they say. She won’t want to make herself known after all the fuss that’s been made. She’ll be discredited. He figures she’ll keep quiet and let millions of people believe . . .”

"I think you've hit it," cried Rhoda excitedly. "That's just the sort of thing this curious bird Rivers might do."

"Hush, hush!" chuckled Hood, amused at her staring eyes. "I was only half spoofing. As a matter of fact I was thinking of Rivers; but I'm afraid it's another of those things that's too good to be true. Let's get on."

5. Mrs. Weir was kidnapped with the object of collecting a fat ransom from the temple or from Garth.

"Now you're talking," said Gifford, speaking for the first time since he had begun his note-taking. "There *is* sump'n!"

"I don't put much stock in it," said Hood, shaking his great head slowly. "Too much of a coincidence—that it should happen the day before a scheduled miracle—unless some one had been planning it ahead and suddenly learned that she might be out of his reach the following day. It's a possibility. But I don't think much of it. Let's see,"

6. Mrs. Weir was murdered.

"And the minute you say that," Hood murmured thoughtfully, "you want to say—'by whom?' I can't see any of these men murdering her—to produce a miracle—or to get her out of the way. If there had been some sort of bust-up—a row . . ."

"But there was," cried Rhoda. "Yesterday. Garth."

"All right," Hood interjected quickly. "Now tell us your story. I guess I'm through with my catalogue of theories. But tell us what happened—*as* it happened. Begin at the beginning. I'm cursed with an orderly mind, my dear. I have a brother who calls me an old woman—he thinks I'm so fussy. But that's what science does for you. Go ahead."

At first breathlessly, but with increasing calmness, Rhoda told what she had seen and heard the previous day. She was frequently interrupted by Hood, who asked innumerable questions. Sergeant Gifford said nothing, but wrote down a good deal.

"Let's see where that lands us," said Hood, when she had finished. "We have our theories as to *what* took place. Now let's try to figure *who* may have taken part—in whatever did take place. We have a lot of unknown quantities to deal with—but, after all, it *is* possible to get somewhere—working from *x*."

“The more I think about it,” said Rhoda, “and the more we go over things, the more certain I feel that Garth is the—well, the key to the whole situation.”

“You mean the row—the blow to his pride—the threat of excommunication?” queried Hood.

“No. Even before that. Mrs. Weir blew up very suddenly—but something’s been smouldering between them for a long time. And don’t let’s forget what caused her to blow up—the exact cause.”

“What?” asked Hood.

“*The mention of your name!*”

“Yes. I’ve been thinking about that,” said Hood calmly. “I think it confirms the newspaper story—that the lady has been dabbling in Spiritualism. The voice Spence has been talking about—the announcement of an exact date—it all sounds like their hocus-pocus. And the fact that she wouldn’t discuss it—wouldn’t admit it. She *wouldn’t*. It would be a sort of admission that Assumptionism wasn’t a complete religion. And then, as you say, the mention of *me* sends her into a tantrum. As far as the public is concerned I’m a back number. They’ve forgotten me. But the Spiritualists haven’t.”

“And Garth may have known,” said Rhoda, “or guessed—that she was monkeying with Spiritualism. Perhaps that’s why he thought of you. He may have suspected some sort of mediumistic trick that would make a laughing-stock of everybody concerned in it—including himself?”

“You’re a bright girl, my dear. Maybe you’re right. He’s put a lot of money into this cult. He’s identified with it—in what he would call ‘a big way.’ And when he hears of a definite date set for the lady’s assumption—he smells Spiritualism—trickery—some sort of hoax. Perhaps he went to her and warned her, and when she wouldn’t listen he proposed bringing me into the picture. *That* may have scared her. She may have long-distanced the so-called Mrs. Smith—who looks to me like the medium—to come and consult with her. Mrs. Smith may have urged her to vanish that night—a day ahead of schedule.”

“On the other hand, doctor, she may *not* have been scared. She didn’t *act* scared—just angry—furious. If I’m any judge, she didn’t sound afraid of what you might find out—just furious at the indignity of having a sort of official referee on the job—as though it were a big sporting event. That was Rivers’s attitude too. Of course it may have been faked. Every move Rivers

makes strikes me as false. But let's get back to Garth. Let's say he figured she wasn't scared, and was going right on with her miracle. Supposing he went to the temple after the meeting last night—after Ogiltree came back—to deliver some sort of ultimatum to her. They have another row. She may have struck him. She was ready to beat him with that blotter in the afternoon."

"You mean," said Hood, looking at the ugly light which glinted in her usually beautiful eyes, "*he may have killed her?*"

"Yes. I don't know—I don't know *why*—but I've had a feeling all along that the poor little thing was sincere—trying hard to be a saint—doing her darnedest to get to heaven—and somebody killed her. I guess it sounds like one of these mind-readers on the stage with a bandage over their eyes—*but I can see her—somewhere—dead.*"

Mortimer Hood waited for the quiver to vanish from Rhoda's lips. Then he patted her hand, his eyes twinkled, and he said softly: "You're very impressionable, aren't you? *And* emotional." His glance veered around at Gifford. "We'll have to be careful what we tell this lady, sergeant."

The Missing Persons man kept his mouth closed, but a quick glance at Hood told a lot about what he thought of having a woman mixed up in any sort of investigation.

"It's just an idea," said Rhoda petulantly. "*You* had one just now—about an abduction—somebody having her 'in his power.'"

"Certainly," said Hood soothingly. "The great American hunch."

"And you see," Rhoda hurried on, "if he *did* kill her it all fits in so beautifully with—with your idea. The idea of the plan gone blooey. He kills her—takes the body away—and in the morning—lo and behold, a miracle. A *real* one, so to speak, instead of a trick. And the tricksters don't know what to make of it."

"Very good. Lovely. But there's always that bedspread. If there *was* a murder, the bedspread becomes even more important—and I can't see . . ."

"You mean you can't see how Garth could have got hold of it?"

Hood grasped her hand and squeezed it, while he flung his head in the air, frowning grimly. "Ah!" he exclaimed, releasing her hand, "perhaps I've been wrong all the time. I've been figuring that no one knew the bedspread *was* stained until Mrs. Coulter told us so—in front of everybody—and then somebody took it—*after that*. D'you see what happens when you *believe*

people. The moment you doubt you begin to see things. *Perhaps the bedspread wasn't stained at all.*"

"But why would she lie?"

Hood looked at her in astonishment. "You don't see—yet? That shows how plausible it sounded. She tells us she changed the spread. I ask her where it is. She says it's outside—she was going to send it to the cleaners. *Going* to send it—that's what threw me off—made me feel I could look at it any time. But when I come back—looking for it—it's gone."

"I'm sorry, doctor. I still don't see," said Rhoda regretfully.

"I'm beginning to think—now—that it was gone all the time. She had never seen it. It was a made-up story. When they looked at the bed in the morning—it was gone—then. *The murderer wrapped the body in it.*"

"Then you think . . . ?"

"I'm just thinking out loud, but I notice—perhaps you've infected me—I notice I'm thinking about murder. And up to now I hadn't. Up to now I've been thinking one thing—one name—Ogiltree."

"Ogiltree!" cried Rhoda in amazement, "Ogiltree—a murderer!"

"No—a conspirator. The man who comes down from the mountain with the tables of stone—the last testament. The man who last saw her alive. I've been figuring all along—good lord—perhaps I *am* getting old."

"I wish you'd been here last night—when he came back. If you'd seen him. . . ."

"What?"

"I think you'd have felt that if there's one man in this whole crowd who is genuine—he's the one. He struck me as being a really religious man—not so fanatical as Rivers—and perhaps a little impatient of Mrs. Weir's eccentricities even. A real priest—if you know what I mean. A man capable of doing anything to provide doubters with some sort of faith."

"Capable of anything?" queried Hood sharply. "Capable of murder, you mean?"

"No—not that. I suppose you'll say I'm impressionable again—and today it *does* sound crazy—but for a while last night he had me believing that it *could* happen—and *would* happen. He sounded so moved—like a man who had seen something."

“The burning bush sort of thing—ah!—another case of spontaneous combustion,” laughed Hood. “First thing you know I’ll be believing my own theories.”

“You should have seen him,” Rhoda began again. But Hood raised a finger under her mouth.

“Two things impressed me about his—his evidence,” he said. “First, that business about the ten minutes’ delay. If it didn’t happen, I can’t see why he would put it in. And if it is true, perhaps his whole story is true. It reminds me of a sermon I heard once, a long time ago, on the Resurrection. This pastor started out by saying how incredible a story it was. ‘It sounds like sheer invention,’ he said, ‘until you look into it very closely—the story itself. Then you find little details that weren’t worth inventing—that sound like the realistic touches only an eye-witness would put in.’ I can still remember a couple of the things he mentioned—the fact that ‘the other disciple outran Peter’ on the way to the sepulchre—and the fact that the napkin was not lying with the linen clothes, but was in a place by itself. Curious. I wasn’t much more than a boy when I heard that, but somehow—it’s stuck.”

Rhoda leaned forward eagerly. “And right in line with that, there’s the fact that he *wrote down* her last words. It made me feel, at once, that there was something deeply conscientious about him. Rivers would have come back and raved, if he had been the last to see her. But Ogiltree—I’ve felt all along that he’s a man you could depend on. He seems to have a sense of responsibility. . . .”

“Or he’s deeply deceptive—an inspired liar. Inspired, perhaps, by thinking of the effect such a miracle may have on millions. I was watching him closely this morning. He’s a deep one. You’re right about that. But—ah, you see, something *has* happened. Here comes Mrs. Coulter.”

4

There was a knock at the door. Hood called “Come,” and Mrs. Coulter stood in the doorway.

“The man who brought the note, sir,” she said, in an excited tone.

Hood sprang up. “What about him?”

“Outside, sir. There’s a bunch of photographers out there taking pictures—and a crowd around. I was watching them for a minute and all of a sudden

I recognized that man who came—you know—with the note. He looks just the same—as though he'd like to bite your leg."

"Priceless!" murmured Hood under his breath, and then aloud: "Come along, Mrs. Coulter. Can you point him out to us from a window?"

He waved a beckoning hand to the others and hurried beside the housekeeper into the living quarters at the back of the vestry.

"That's him!" cried Mrs. Coulter, keeping back from the window and nodding her head at the fringe of the crowd. "The one with his hat a bit on one side."

"The man in the brown suit?" said Hood quietly.

"Yes—a sort of dirty tan colour," said Mrs. Coulter.

Mortimer Hood looked at her sharply, and his face relaxed in a slow, pleased smile. "How much better you hear me this afternoon, Mrs. Coulter," he said. He waited a second to watch the colour mounting into her cheeks, and then turned to the others. "You'd better not come, Gifford. He might mistake you for a detective," he said, with one of his merriest twinkles. "Go over to the Minnicog and hang around, in case we need you later on. Be handy, if we phone. You come with me, Miss Groves. He'll take us for a nice old gentleman strolling with his niece. We'll go out by the house door and saunter around, as though we're sightseers."

Hurrying until they turned the corner of the temple, Hood dropped into a loitering gait and offered his arm to Rhoda. Affecting the walk and manner of an enfeebled old man, leaning slightly on Rhoda's arm, Hood drew her off the gravel of the drive, around behind the crowd, until they could see the man with the shabby, crushed hat, standing with his back to them, watching the photographers.

"I think we'll separate after all," whispered Hood presently, when the crowd began to thin out. "I'll follow *him*, and you follow *me*. Keep well behind. Then, if he gets wise to me, we can use you for a shadow. Just keep me in sight."

It was not long before the man wandered from the edge of the lessening crowd. He went to one side of the temple and then the other, scanning the paths which wound about it, but evidently he was not interested in any of the people who were strolling aimlessly up and down. After showing signs of indecision, he walked off at a brisk pace and made towards the town.

Hood followed him at a considerable distance, walking on the other side of the street, until they reached Woodward Avenue. The sidewalks outside the stores were thick with hurrying pedestrians. Hood looked at his watch. It was nearly six o'clock. People were going home.

He lessened the distance between himself and his quarry, keeping within half a dozen paces, but sheltering himself from observation behind some person taller than himself hurrying in the same direction. The man in the tan suit did not once look back. He evidently had no thought or fear of being followed. Near the corner of Washington Street he slowed down quickly, glanced at the signs in a restaurant window, and after a moment's hesitation passed through the revolving door. Hood dodged into a doorway and looked around for Rhoda. He caught sight of her at last on the opposite side of the street, nearly half a block away. She was keeping her eye on him through the windows of a parked automobile.

"A good girl," Hood said to himself, as he crossed the street and went towards her. "She'll be useful before we're through with this thing."

Rhoda came up. "Did you lose him?" she asked eagerly.

"No. He's gone into that restaurant over there. I'm going to go in and have a sandwich or something. You get hold of Gifford at the hotel and bring him along here. Wait around until Snarly-face comes out, and then trail him. I'll join you; but I don't want to take any chances of getting tied up at the cash desk and missing him. You'd better wait about here—in this doorway—why, look at this—this is our friend Ogiltree's place. Alfred Ogiltree—Portrait Photographer. And what does this little sign say?"

Between the glass of the door and the gathered curtains inside it was pinned a letter head, on which some one had written in ink, in a bold, artistic hand:

*Closed for three days
in memory of
Mrs. Agatha Weir
beloved leader of
the First Assumptionist
Temple.*

"For three days," said Hood. "These people insist on being symbolic, don't they? I suppose he got the idea from the note on the package she gave him—if she *did* give it to him—'To be opened three days after'—what was it?—'after my assumption'?"

“Yes; I think that was it,” said Rhoda.

Hood clasped his hands behind him and stared at the windows, in which a number of photographs were displayed. “Three days,” he repeated. “Do you suppose something’s going to happen in three days—or is it just . . . however, we can think about that later. Will you get hold of Gifford? Get yourself a chocolate bar, or something. And after a while I’ll buy you a bang-up dinner.”

He hurried across the street, his heavy head bobbing, and pushed through the door into the hot, close-smelling cafeteria. In a few minutes he was sitting with a sandwich and coffee behind a white-tiled pillar. The man Mrs. Coulter had pointed out was at a table near the front of the restaurant, facing the windows. He bolted his meal, glancing frequently at the clock over the cash desk, as though he had an appointment in mind. Hood let him pay his bill and get through the door; then he walked over and picked up the menu card from the table where the man had been sitting. He examined it, folded it carefully, and put it in his breast pocket.

He quickly overtook Rhoda and Gifford, who had already taken up the chase. The three walked along together briskly, as though on a definite errand. The man ahead was hurrying, and presently turned off Woodward on to one of the oldest streets in the town. The windows of many of the houses were ticketed with signs advertising “Furnished Rooms.”

“There he goes,” breathed Hood, as the man entered one of the shabbiest of the three-storey rooming houses. “Come on, Gifford. We’re going to barge in and ask Mr. Snarly-face a few polite questions. You hang around, Rhoda Groves, but keep out of sight. It looks to me as though our friend expects a visitor. Go up to the corner there and stand in the doorway of that store.”

A short, fat woman with a large hairy mole on her chin opened the door to Hood and Gifford. “Was that Mr. Wells who just came in?” said Hood quickly, putting his foot on the door-sill.

“No. His name’s Thomas,” said the landlady. “There’s no Mr. Wells here.”

“Thomas, I *mean*,” said Hood. “I got him mixed with that other chap,” he added in a loud aside to Gifford. Then, as he stepped into the hall, he said to the woman: “He’s wanted at the hotel right away. Which room?”

“Next floor. Down at the back. Last door on the right.”

“Thanks.”

Hood led the way up the stairs. “Whatever I do—play up,” he whispered to Gifford over his shoulder.

5

He knocked loudly on the last door and as soon as it was opened thrust out his hand. “Hallo, there,” he said, smiling into the puzzled face which looked out at them. “Just caught sight of you on the street—saw you turn in here. Where have you been hiding yourself? Meet Mr. Gifford. Well, well—and how’ve you been making out? Long time, isn’t it?”

An ugly scowl brought the man’s thick brows suddenly together. He kept one hand on the knob of the door and barred their way into the room. “What are you giving us?” he said in a suspicious, half-frightened tone.

“Well, well, well,” laughed Hood, assuming a coarse, jocular manner, “he doesn’t remember me.”

“Never saw you before,” came in a sharp growl through an unpleasant array of clenched yellow teeth.

“You’re kidding, Charlie. What’s the idea?”

“My name’s not Charlie, and I’m not kidding. What do you want?”

“You mean to tell me you’re not Charlie Wells, who used to be around here—how long ago was it?—eight?—ten years?”

“Never heard of him.”

“You’re kidding.”

“I tell you I’m not kidding.”

“Weren’t you out at the Assumptionist temple yesterday—or the day before, was it? About the middle of the afternoon. We were driving past and I said to Giff here—‘If that doesn’t look like Charlie Wells.’ Wasn’t that *you*, coming away from the temple day before yesterday?”

“Maybe it was. But my name ain’t Charlie Wells, and I never saw *you* before in my life.”

Hood stepped back and looked at the man from head to toe. “I can’t believe it,” he exclaimed. “I said to myself—‘There’s Charlie. Looks kind of down on his luck. Guess he’s been to see Mrs. Weir. Looking for a job, maybe.’” He frowned at Gifford suddenly and said, “Doesn’t this beat the Dutch.”

"I'll say it does," said the man in the doorway gruffly. "You've got the wrong guy."

"Listen, Charlie," whispered Hood, stepping closer. "The lady downstairs says you call yourself Thomas. What's the idea? In a jam—or something?"

"You're on the wrong track," said the other. "My name's Thomas, and I'm a stranger in this burg. Don't know a soul. I'm in a hurry to get out of here. Forget it."

He started to close the door, and just at that moment there were sounds of heavy footsteps on the stairs. Hood moved into the doorway and lifted his mouth near the man's ear. At the same time he looked intently into his face. "You can't kid me this way, Charlie," he whispered. "Don't you think I can keep my mouth shut? You're in a jam—that's a cinch. *Not mixed up in this kidnapping, are you?*"

"You're a couple of Dicks. I thought so from the start," muttered Thomas, his teeth showing hideously. "But you're barking up the wrong tree."

Hood drew his head back out of the doorway to see who was coming. The heavy steps were now very close in the hall.

"As I live, here's Mr. Ogiltree!" he exclaimed, stepping back and smiling at the photographer in a knowing way. "So you're acquainted with our friend Thomas, too, are you?"

"Known him for years," said Ogiltree, glancing quickly at the man in the doorway.

"Do *you* know these fellows?" demanded Thomas surlily. "They're detectives, aren't they?"

"You don't know Dr. Hood?" queried Ogiltree in return.

"Never saw him before."

"If you know this man," said Hood, looking intently at Ogiltree, "you may be able to tell us why he called twice on Mrs. Weir in the last few days—and why he acted so that Mrs. Coulter thought he was deaf and dumb."

The scientist noted carefully that Ogiltree betrayed no surprise. Instead he glanced meaningfully at Thomas in a way which looked like a warning to him to keep quiet. "Mr. Thomas," he said slowly, "is an old friend of mine. He's down on his luck—trying to scrape up enough money to get to San

Francisco. He thinks he can get a job out there—get started again.” He took a long envelope from his pocket and handed it to the man in the tan suit. There was an air of dignity and deliberation about the action which did not escape Hood’s watchful eyes. “There’s the hundred,” he said. “That—with what Mrs. Weir gave you—ought to get you to the coast.” He leaned into the doorway to shake hands with Thomas—his face hidden from Hood for a second—and said: “Good luck. I have something important to discuss with these gentlemen. Hope you make out all right.”

With that he stepped back and touched Mortimer Hood’s arm, as though to draw him away. The man who called himself Thomas quickly closed the door.

“I’ll tell you all about him,” Ogiltree whispered, leading Hood down the corridor. “It was a little embarrassing—with him right there. He used to work in Garth’s plant here—years ago—and left town under a cloud. As a matter of fact, he stole—or embezzled—some money. Garth never laid a charge against him, but Thomas is afraid if he runs into him he might. That’s why I came here with the money. He wanted to keep under cover.”

“Keep under cover!” exclaimed Hood. “He went twice to see Mrs. Weir, and . . .”

“She used to know him—in fact she helped him when he got into trouble originally. She was notoriously generous. It was only natural.”

“To-day,” said Hood, “he was nosing around there again—in broad daylight.”

“Probably looking for me,” said Ogiltree. He was edging all the time toward the stairs. “You see I had to go to the bank, and I was delayed. It’s been a busy day for me. I had to see my wife off, and one thing and another. But don’t worry about Thomas. He’s not a very nice character—to tell the truth—but it was sheer coincidence that he turned up just—just now. He knows nothing about—about what happened this morning. But, say—I’m glad I ran into you. You haven’t seen Spence, I suppose.”

He began to descend the stairs, talking over his shoulder.

“Not since morning,” said Hood, plucking at Gifford’s trouser leg and following Ogiltree down.

“I saw him a few minutes ago on the street. He says he got a telephone message this afternoon—didn’t pay much attention to it. As a matter of fact he thinks it was from some crank. But I told him he ought to pass it on to

you anyway. I'm absolutely with you, Dr. Hood. I think everything should be traced down—even if it *does* sound silly. Then we can rest assured . . .”

“What was the message?”

They had reached the downstairs hall. Ogiltree put a finger to his lip, opened the street door and stepped out. Hood and Gifford followed, and Ogiltree closed the door behind them.

“I don't want anybody to hear this,” he whispered. “The chances are a million to one that it's just crazy—but there's an old wreck that was beached last winter just beyond Haskell's Point. They're talking about burning it on the 4th of July—you know—just for a spectacle. There's been a controversy about it in the local paper. Well—this voice on the phone . . .”

“Man's voice?” asked Hood.

“No—a woman's—and disguised, Spence said. Sort of *falsetto* . . .”

“Might have been a man's at that.”

“Well, yes—it might have been. But, anyway, this person said—‘Is that you, Mr. Spence? You'd better look for Mrs. Weir's body in the old wreck. *Do it quick—before somebody burns it.*’” And then she hung up.

Mortimer Hood planted his feet wide apart and screwed up his eyes at Ogiltree. “And you say that Spence thought it was a crank. How would a crank know about it?”

“Oh, the paper's out. It's all over town.”

“But Spence has done nothing about it.”

“No—he was in a hurry—just stopped and told me. Said he guessed we'd have a lot of phoney stuff like that happening.”

“But *you* think it's worth investigation?” asked Hood, eyeing him closely.

“Well—I was thinking of what you said this morning about . . .”

“Yes. I see. Is this your car? Would you mind driving us around to see Mr. Spence?”

“Why, yes—if you like. But Spence told me the whole thing. I don't . . .”

“I'm rather anxious to see Mr. Spence.” As he spoke Hood raised his hand and beckoned to Rhoda, who was standing faithfully in the doorway, half out of sight. “Let's get in,” he said, and moved toward the car parked at the curb.

Ogiltree walked around to get in the driver's seat, and Hood at once drew Gifford back toward the door. "He wants to get us away from here. Go back up and take that fellow down to the station. Get him finger-printed. Find out if he has a record. Hold him—on some pretext—till I get there."

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Miss Groves," he said as Rhoda came up. "We're going round to see Mr. Spence. Will you come?"

"You're not satisfied—about Thomas," said Ogiltree, looking over his shoulder at Gifford, who had again gone up to the door.

"No," replied Hood, helping Rhoda into the back seat. "I'm wondering why you didn't admit knowing him this morning."

"This morning?" echoed Ogiltree in a puzzled tone.

"Yes. When Mrs. Coulter mentioned his two visits."

"Oh—at that time I didn't even know he was in town—hadn't the faintest notion who she was talking about."

"I see—I see," said Hood, getting into the car.

6

Spence lived in a quiet side street. The house was unpretentious, and the door was opened almost before they rang, as though somebody had been sitting inside—watching. The woman—who was greeted immediately by Ogiltree as Mrs. Spence—was handsome in a florid way, a little under forty, with auburn hair, a voluptuous mouth, and bold, sparkling eyes.

"Looking for Dave?" she said at once, glancing from one to the other. She seemed agitated and eager to talk to somebody.

"Yes," said Ogiltree.

"He's gone off to New York—on the 5.33. Claims it's a sudden business call—very important." She looked darkly at Ogiltree and shook her head. "After all the goings-on in the last few weeks, Alfred—I don't believe it. That woman has him hypnotized. He's not the same man."

"Let me introduce Dr. Hood—Mrs. Spence," broke in Ogiltree quickly. "And Miss—Miss Groves—also from New York. Dr. Hood is investigating the—or perhaps I should say—verifying—Mrs. Weir's assumption. Came to town to-day. He would like to have a chat with Dave—but I suppose to-morrow will do, doctor? No doubt he'll get back by midnight—does usually, doesn't he?"

Hood was giving most of his attention to Ogiltree. His air of casualness and sincerity awakened the scientist's admiration. "Rhoda was right," he thought. "He's clever—deep. He'll make a miracle of this yet—if there's half a chance."

"Don't worry, Annie," Ogiltree was saying. "Dave's had a lot on his mind lately—but it'll all . . ."

"You bet he has," said Mrs. Spence sullenly. "Gadding off to New York like this every day or two—and never saying a word. And if you think he'll be back to-night, Alfred Ogiltree—you're an optimist. *He'll never be back.* I could see it in his eye when he left."

"Mrs. Spence has a vivid imagination," remarked Ogiltree in a tone of gentle apology. "As a matter of fact, Dave Spence is the solidest of citizens. You're giving Dr. Hood the wrong impression, Annie. Garth will tell you, though. Garth's known him for years."

"I wouldn't trust Garth as far as I could see him," Mrs. Spence blurted out belligerently. "Nor any one of you. *You're* in it too—whatever it is you're cooking up. What did you send your wife away for?"

"You know what Esther's like," said Ogiltree soothingly. "Likes to get up to her sister's as soon as the weather gets warm. She feels a little like you do about—about what's happened—too. I guess that helped her make up her mind. Decided to go, all of a sudden, just last night."

"Took the train, too, eh? Didn't even wait for you to drive her up."

"Quite right," said Ogiltree amiably. "I was going to be busy to-day, so she said she'd take the train."

He looked sideways at Hood as much as to say—"You can see the kind of woman she is."

Hood had been listening attentively to everything that had been said. He now moved a step forward and asked: "Did your husband mention a phone call he'd had?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Spence contemptuously. "Some looney phoned up and said they'd find *her* body in the wreck out there by Haskell's Point." She used the pronoun deliberately and bitterly, as though Mrs. Weir's name was utterly distasteful to her.

"Your husband didn't take it seriously."

"Him?—he knows right enough where she is, I'll bet you."

"I take it you're not simply a jealous woman, Mrs. Spence," said Hood in a diplomatic tone. "You have cause to think . . ."

"Pardon me, Dr. Hood," interrupted Ogiltree reproachfully. "It's your business to be suspicious, I suppose—but this is really a personal matter. It's something between . . ."

He sounded so much in earnest that Rhoda looked at Hood uncomfortably, and the scientist gave a little bow, indicating that he would not press his questions further.

"If you don't mind I'd like to speak to Mrs. Spence—privately," said Ogiltree, and without waiting for a reply he took her arm and drew her into the house, leaving the door open.

"You still think he's a cross between Moses and Apollo," Hood whispered to Rhoda mischievously.

She made a wry face and was about to answer, but Ogiltree came hurrying out and closed the door behind him. "Shall we go out to the wreck now?" he said, leading the way to the car. "We can talk on the way."

"This lady's had nothing to eat since breakfast—and here it is night," said Hood, with deliberate hesitancy. The street lights had come on while they had been standing there. It was rapidly growing dark.

"Never mind me," said Rhoda eagerly. "It'll be good for my figure to miss a few meals."

"Shall we go, then?" pressed Ogiltree.

Hood straddled his legs and looked at the darkening sky. Rhoda suddenly realized that he was testing Ogiltree's anxiety to go. "It'll be dark by the time we get out there," said Hood. "Better leave it till the morning."

"I've a flashlight in the car," said Ogiltree quickly, "and I can borrow another one from Annie. Won't be a second." He was already on his way up the walk to the house.

"We'd better go, don't you think?" Rhoda whispered. "He's anxious."

"Anxious to pull the wool over my eyes—that's all, I think. He's clever. He'll bear a lot of watching."

Ogiltree came out carrying a flashlight, and they all three got into the car. "There's another in the back seat," Ogiltree said as he drove off without consulting Hood again.

“How far is it?” said Rhoda.

“Oh, not very far. About a mile and a quarter. By the way, doctor, I hope you didn’t mind me butting in there. You don’t know any of us, you see, and you’re naturally suspicious of everything, but Annie Spence is—well, I think she has the worst jealous streak I ever saw. And yet I’d bet my last nickel that Dave’s never given her the slightest cause. You’ve met him. He’s not the type.”

“I’ve studied the human species for forty years,” said Hood dryly, “and I’ve yet to find a type that isn’t interested in women—somewhere—some time. I daresay Miss Groves can confirm my opinion—from more practical experience.”

“I don’t know,” said Rhoda, smiling and opening her eyes at him. “I don’t know when I’ve spent a day when so little attention was paid to *me*.”

“Yes—shocking. I can understand these gentlemen being very much excited and disturbed—but certainly I should have bought you some lunch or some dinner or something. But Mr. Ogiltree is so anxious to find the body. . . .”

The photographer did not take his eyes from the road. “If you ever find the body, Dr. Hood,” he said, “I shall be the most surprised and disappointed man in New England.”

“Ah! Then I take it—you simply want to see the wreck by moonlight.”

This time Ogiltree veered his eyes around at him. “You’re a little hard to please, aren’t you?” he said serenely. “One minute you suspect me of concealing all sorts of things. And the next—when I offer to help you track something down—you suspect that too.”

“Yes, my friend,” said the scientist thoughtfully. “I’m suspecting all the time that you want me to track down the wrong things.” He turned his head and looked closely at Ogiltree. “For instance—you don’t seem to attach the importance I do to the disappearance of the bedspread.”

“You haven’t even mentioned it.”

“No; I was wondering if you knew it had gone. Apparently you do.”

Ogiltree kept his eye on the road and said nothing.

“And yet you weren’t there this morning,” said Hood, “when Mrs. Coulter told us it had vanished.”

“Spence told me. And you’re right. I don’t attach much importance to it. *I think it was stolen by somebody who wants to throw doubt on the miracle.*” He said this very distinctly and deliberately.

Hood raised his brows at Rhoda. “That’s an idea we hadn’t thought of,” he said with equal distinctness.

“I don’t understand that,” said Ogiltree. “It seems quite obvious to me. Somebody hears there was nothing missing that Mrs. Weir could have wrapped herself in—so they steal the bedspread. Without it our evidence is weakened—even though Mrs. Coulter swears it was there this morning—*after the assumption.*”

“You think there are people who would like to disprove the miracle?”

“I don’t think, Dr. Hood. *I know—only too well.*”

“Do you suspect any particular person—or persons?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Do you object to revealing their names?”

“I wouldn’t open my mouth. No evidence.”

He brought the car to a stop. “Here we are,” he said.

Hood glanced out of the window and saw the black hulk of a battered old steamer silhouetted against the water of the Sound, which still gleamed in the afterglow of the sunset. “I’ll get the other flash,” said Ogiltree, rummaging in the back seat. He found the torch and handed it to Rhoda.

“You want to go aboard and look around—is that it?” said Hood.

“Yes. I want to nail a rumour like this before it spreads. Do you think Miss Groves had better stay here. It’s pretty mucky.”

He was leading the way across a soft, swampy piece of ground.

“No. I want to come,” said Rhoda.

“Come along then—wait!—did you see that?” exclaimed Hood.

“A light!—a light in the ship!” Ogiltree cried, coming to a sudden standstill. “It’s gone. Maybe there’s something to this rumour after all.”

“Let’s go quietly,” whispered Hood. “We may surprise somebody—pardon me—I’m sorry.”

Hood had stumbled and bumped against Ogiltree, and at the same time ran one hand lightly over his hip-pocket. “Sorry. I turned my ankle.”

“Hurt yourself?”

“No. I’m all right.”

They were now almost under the curving sides of the wreck, which was leaning toward the water. A rough wooden ladder, such as a boy might make, gave easy access to the slanting deck. Again the light startled them, gleaming through a crack in the hull, in the forepart of the ship. Somebody was moving about inside. Creaking footfalls could be heard.

“There’s somebody here all right,” whispered Ogiltree. “Shall I go first?”

“Go ahead,” said Hood. “You stay here,” he murmured in Rhoda’s ear. He took the flashlight from her and clambered up after the photographer. It was dark on the deck. Broken masts and spars creaked in the wind, which was blowing off the Sound.

“There’s the light again,” breathed Ogiltree. “Somebody’s coming up from the cabin.”

“Step in here behind this,” said Hood, dragging the other close to him against the broken stump of a mast which hid them both. “Keep your flash out till I say.”

The light from the companionway grew brighter. A moment later it went out and a head appeared—a round dark form which showed clearly against the deck beyond. It was not more than five yards away. The head was thrust upward, and in a second the whole figure was silhouetted against the sky.

“Now!” cried Hood.

Two beams of light flashed through the darkness . . . wavered . . . steadied . . . and the white, startled face of a woman was framed in the blinding glare.

“What on earth . . . !” Ogiltree gasped, in a whisper of amazement.

Part IV

1

Although it was dark and he could not see clearly the expression on Ogiltree's face, Hood decided that the surprise in the other's voice was genuine.

"Who is it?" the woman cried in a frightened voice, as in turn her torch flickered over their faces.

"It's all right, Jessie," said Ogiltree, moving toward her. "It's me—Ogiltree."

"Do you know her?" the scientist whispered.

"Of course. It's Jessie Willis."

"Thank goodness," the woman breathed in a tone of relief, lowering her flashlight. "And who is that with you?"

"Dr. Hood—an investigator from New York."

"A detective?"

"No—not a detective. What on earth are *you* doing here?"

"It's mother. She's in an awful state. When she saw the paper she went into a kind of fit. She kept saying, 'She's dead. It's the wrath of God! Somebody's killed her. They wouldn't get her out of that temple any other way. One of those blasphemers has killed her.'"

Jessie Willis was on the way to being an old lady herself. She stood before them, stooped and trembling, and her voice shook with excitement and feebleness.

"But what are you doing here, of all places?" demanded Ogiltree again in a stern tone.

"She made me come. 'They've killed my Aggie and hidden her body,' she kept saying."

"What made her think of that?" said Ogiltree. "Why was *that* the first thing to come to her mind?"

“That’s *it!*” cried Jessie in a wailing voice. “But it *was*—the first thing she thought of. ‘They’ve hidden my poor girl’s body—to blaspheme abominably in the Lord’s sight—to make a miracle out of my little girl’—that’s what she said, right away. And all day she’s kept saying to me—like as though she’d gone crazy—‘Where d’you suppose they’ve hid her; Where d’you suppose they’ve hid her;’ And to-night, all of a sudden—she was reading the paper again—all about it—and on the front page, right beside all that about Aggie, she saw something about them burning the old wreck next month, and she kind of screamed out to me, ‘Come here, Jessie’—and she pointed to the paper. ‘*That’s* where they’ve hid her,’ she said. She made me phone to Spence. ‘Make your voice sound different, so he doesn’t know you,’ she said, ‘and tell him to go out there and look.’ He sounded as though he thought I was just a crank, and I figured he wouldn’t bother, so just to pacify her I said I’d come myself. But Aggie isn’t here—I knew she wouldn’t be. And now—when I go home—I don’t know what she’ll say.”

She began to sob wildly, then suddenly stopped and lifted her wrinkled, distorted face to the sky. “That wicked girl,” she moaned. “That wicked girl—if she’d only known what she’d bring us all to.”

Ogiltree reached out to touch her shoulder and comfort her, but she shrank away, glaring at him. “You’re one of them—you’re one that’s in it,” she screamed. “But I’ll find her. You’ll never make a miracle of her—as long as I have eyes to see and legs to carry me.”

“Jessie—Jessie!” pleaded Ogiltree in a broken voice. “She’s *gone!*—I tell you she’s gone! Why can’t you believe?”

“I’ll never believe. I am as sure as mother is—and, somehow or other, we’ll find her. I’d sooner die—I’d sooner see mother in her grave—than let people believe such blasphemy.”

She began to sob again, and Ogiltree said: “Did you *walk* away out here? I’ve got my car. Let me take you home.”

“Home!” she wailed, and before they could catch her she had crumpled to the slanting deck.

Hood swiftly slipped off his coat and made a pillow of it under her head. “She’ll come round in a minute. She’s exhausted. You stay with her, will you? I want to make sure she’s made a thorough search.” He hurried to the companionway, switched on his torch, and disappeared below.

Rats scuttled into hiding when Hood flung the beam of his flashlight into the yawning black hold. It was empty, except for a litter of straw, tin cans,

and newspapers, where tramps had slept. Everything removable had been ripped out of the cabins. The few doors that were left had been defaced by innumerable carvings of initials and grotesque faces. In the engine-room all but the heaviest parts of the machinery had been carried away.

The little scientist darted about, searching every corner, peering up ventilator shafts, crawling under the heavy mechanism of pumps and engines, checking the width of bulkheads between the cabins to make sure there was no space he had not investigated, but in the end there was nothing—nothing but accumulated filth.

Hood returned to the bottom of the companionway and switched off his torch. He waited for a lull in the wind and listened. For a moment or two he could distinguish no sounds from the deck, but suddenly he realized that what he had mistaken for the rustle of the wind in the cordage was actually Ogiltree's voice lowered to a murmur. He climbed the stairs quietly, kept his head just below the deck line, and held his breath.

"But you wouldn't come away out here, Jessie," Ogiltree was saying, "unless—unless you'd heard something—you or your mother. What makes her so sure Agatha is dead?"

"She isn't sure. It's just a notion she's got. But I feel just the same. I just *know* she's dead—that's all."

"Have you been talking to anybody from the temple?"

"No."

"Listen, Jessie—before Dr. Hood comes back—I've got to get to the *bottom of this*. Who's been talking to your mother?"

"Nobody. Nobody."

"You've seen nobody you didn't expect—the last day or two?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Hurry. Hood will be coming up in a minute. *You haven't seen somebody lately that we all thought was dead?*"

"Who do you mean?"

"You can't guess?"

"No. Who do you mean?"

"That's all I want to know," whispered Ogiltree, with a curious note of finality. "I guess you haven't seen him. Are you all right now? Think you

can get down that ladder?"

Hood crept quietly down the companionway, turned on his flashlight, and came up with a good deal of clatter. He began to breathe heavily as soon as he stepped out on the deck, as though he had been hurrying.

"Ah! you're feeling better—all right again?" he said, stepping quickly forward to help raise Jessie to her feet.

"Just came round," Ogiltree explained.

He and Hood supported her to the twisted rail, and she managed to get down the ladder alone. Rhoda, who had been sitting on a rock near by, smoking a cigarette, ran forward to see who it was. "Miss Willis!" she exclaimed.

Ogiltree clambered down the ladder, muttering something about scaring her. The two men supported her to the car, where she sat huddled in the back seat, as though in a daze.

2

"Eats, at last!" Rhoda exclaimed, flashing a grateful glance across the table at Hood. Ogiltree had dropped them at a restaurant on his way to take Jessie Willis home.

"Order anything you see," said Hood. "I want to get hold of Gifford."

He went to the telephone booth and came back in a minute or two looking puzzled. He plucked at an upright wisp of hair above one ear and began twisting it in his fingers as he sat down.

"That's queer," he said. "The chief says Gifford hasn't turned in our friend Thomas. Wonder what's happened?"

"Who is 'our friend Thomas'?"

"Oh, of course you don't know. The man we traced to that rooming house calls himself Thomas. I told Gifford to take him down to the station and check up on his record—if he has any. But they haven't turned up."

"Did you get anything out of him?"

"Not a thing—but Ogiltree was very much surprised to see us—although he played the innocent superbly—superbly. I envy him. I get engrossed and show my hand too plainly. Look at this afternoon. I had those people all worked up—wondering what I was going to jump on next. Bad—bad!" He screwed up his eyes and began fiddling with the salt shaker beside his plate.

“What did Ogiltree want with Snarly-face?”

“Said he was an old friend—down on his luck—brought him a hundred dollars to help him get out of town. I’d like to know what was in that envelope. Had it all ready in an envelope and handed it to him, and came away with us as though that was the end of the thing—wished him luck and so on. It just doesn’t go—especially after what I heard him say to the old lady—what’s her name?—up there on the deck, when they thought I wasn’t listening.”

“What was that?”

“He asked her if somebody had been talking to her mother, and then he said: *‘Have you seen somebody lately that we all thought was dead?’*”

Rhoda Groves’s eyes shone with sudden inspiration. “De Long!” she exclaimed in a sort of gasp, and then, clapping her hand to her mouth, she hurriedly looked about her at the near-by tables, afraid she might have been overheard.

Mortimer Hood flung up his head, and Rhoda thought he was about to burst into laughter at her suggestion; but he contented himself with a stifled chuckle. “My dear—you looked exactly like a goldfish gasping for air—or whatever it is they gasp for. I was always weak on biology.”

Rhoda leaned across the table and held her napkin close to her mouth. “You don’t think he meant De Long?” she whispered. “You remember what I overheard—about the cable.”

“I do—but I don’t care—for the moment—whether De Long is a Buddhist monk on the top of Mount Everest or a truck driver in Hoboken. I think I’ve got hold of something at last. Listen, young lady. First of all, Ogiltree said to—what’s her name?—Willis?”

“Jessie Willis.”

“Yes. ‘What makes your mother so sure that Agatha is dead?’ Then—when the Willis woman said something about a hunch or a mania—Ogiltree said, ‘Who’s been talking to your mother?’ All right. Then, a little later still, he said, ‘Haven’t you seen somebody lately that we all thought was dead?’ *Now!*—what does that add up to?”

Rhoda’s big eyes widened at him. “Ogiltree wonders why the mother . . .”

Hood raised a finger. “D’you remember what I was saying this afternoon about the mental jump? Take a jump. Say ‘how’ instead of ‘why’—then

you've got it."

"I guess I must be terribly dense," lamented Rhoda.

"Say it like this: Ogiltree wonders *how* the mother knows that Agatha is dead."

"But I don't see—the mother *can't* know—nobody knows—you say Jessie herself said it was just a hunch."

"Certainly. Jessie and her mother are only guessing—but Ogiltree *knows*! That's why he's so anxious. Listen. '*What makes your mother so sure?*'—and then, '*Who's been talking to your mother?*'—and then, '*Somebody we all thought was dead.*' Now, put all three in one sentence. Twist it around. '*Your mother is sure because she's been talking to some one we all thought was dead.*' Ergo, the supposedly defunct person knows that Agatha is dead—and Ogiltree knows that he knows—and suspects he has told the Willis woman's mother. In short, it looks to me as though we can take the first step out of all this chaos. Of course, there may be another construction that could be put on Ogiltree's words and Ogiltree's anxiety—but I don't think so. I think we can get to work, now, from a new starting-point. *I think we can say that Agatha Weir is dead!*"

Rhoda pursed up her lips as though she were about to whistle. But she noticed that Hood's head had suddenly drooped, and she watched him excitedly. His eyes were fixed on the tablecloth and his fingers were winding in his fluffy hair. "That's it!" he exclaimed suddenly. "It fits." And then, looking up, he drawled, "You know, there was a Russian chemist named Mendeleeff—remarkable chap."

Rhoda knew by his tone that this was going to be another of his reminiscent digressions. He had the exasperating habit of dragging them in at moments when she was most eager to know what was going on in his mind. They usually had some point, it was true, but . . .

"Remarkable chap," Hood reiterated slowly. "I'll tell you what he did. It had been discovered—before his time—that certain chemical elements—hydrogen and oxygen, for instance—are related in weight in much the same way that high C and low C—on the piano—are related in tone. D'you know what I mean? Every eighth note on the piano echoes the tone of the octavo above or below it. Well, all right, this chap Mendeleeff arranged all the *known* elements in order of weight—in a sort of keyboard—so that each weight was a multiple of some element higher or lower in the scale. At least he tried to. But he found that certain multiples were missing. The octaves weren't all there. All right. I suppose some chaps would have said, 'Too bad.

It doesn't work.' But not Mr. Mendeleeff. He announced to the world that these gaps in his keyboard would some day be filled in. Not only that, but he told the world *what they would be like*. He prophesied what their properties would be, and he even gave them names—ekaboron, eka-aluminium, and ekasilicon. And within fifteen years all three were discovered. *And they fitted the gaps!*"

He paused, smiled at the patient look in Rhoda's eyes, and dropped his drawl. "D'you see what I'm getting at?" he went on quickly. "What we have to do is to rearrange our facts—our motives—our people—in some sort of order. Then we can see the gaps. And when we've seen the gaps it's possible to prophesy what—or *who*—will fill them. Let's get things in order again. Ogiltree is afraid somebody supposedly defunct has told—what's the mother's name?"

"Mrs. Fletcher."

"Fletcher—Fletcher—Port Fletcher—*that* shouldn't be hard to remember. But when I'm among a lot of unfamiliar people I always get their names mixed up—the way you do when you start a Russian novel—you know what I mean?—you start out with somebody called Nikolay Pavelovitch, and then, a few pages later, you run into a person called Bolkonsky. After a while you discover it's the chap's surname. Very confusing—but you manage to connect them—and *then*—as I live—when you're all settled down to read about Bolkonsky, somebody comes along and starts calling him Sasha!"

He stopped, his eyes twinkled and he waggled his fingers in the air, as though seeking something.

"You were saying that Ogiltree . . ." began Rhoda.

"Oh yes—yes. Ogiltree was afraid that our somebody-from-the-grave had been talking to Mrs. Fletcher. The very fact that Ogiltree was anxious suggests that this somebody might have good reason to visit her. But apparently he hasn't. It's a small town, and yet neither the old lady nor Jessie Willis has seen or heard of him. Looks, doesn't it, as though he doesn't want to be seen or heard of? All right. You didn't hear this—but Ogiltree, when he explained who Thomas was, said he was keeping under cover—on account of some embezzlement, or something or other. All right. Let us say then—that Thomas is the person Ogiltree suspects of knowing that Agatha Weir is dead. Then—*then!*—you see?—we do a little suspecting ourselves—and wonder if the money our friend Ogiltree gave our friend Thomas was . . ."

“Blackmail!” whispered Rhoda.

Hood glanced absent-mindedly at the little hat she wore tilted over one eye. “‘The price of silence’—as the novelists used to say in the nineties,” he murmured.

Rhoda tapped her nose with a bent finger and stared over the scientist’s head. Hood shifted impatiently in his chair. “If we’re anywhere near right,” he said, “I’m more than ever disturbed that Gifford hasn’t shown up with our man at the station. I think I’ll phone again.”

3

“Bad—bad!” exclaimed Hood, when he returned from the telephone booth. He was frowning, and began drumming the table-top with his fingers.

“No word of either of them?” asked Rhoda.

“They’ve heard from Gifford. He’s got the whole police force out—searching the town. During those few minutes while we were coming downstairs with Ogiltree, and standing on the sidewalk—Thomas got out of the window, slid down a roof, and disappeared. That was—what?—nearly two hours ago. They’ve lost him. I’ve left a message at the hotel that if Gifford inquires for me they’re to send him here. Go ahead and eat. You’ve hardly touched a thing.”

Rhoda picked up her fork and poked at the cold food on her plate. “Don’t you get a strong whiff of De Long somewhere at the back of all this?” she asked.

“Not yet,” said Hood. He shook off a frown and glanced at her. “What makes you think of *him*?”

“That phrase of Ogiltree’s—‘somebody we all thought was dead.’”

“Yes, but, my dear— isn’t it pretty clear that he was talking about Thomas?”

“I don’t think it is. I mean, I don’t think it’s certain. You’ve put two or three twos together—and you figure that because Thomas is trying to keep under cover—he is the ‘somebody we all thought was dead.’”

“And also, remember,” cautioned Hood, “because Mrs. Weir was startled when—ah!—as I live, another gap!—and something to fill it. Maybe we can even *name* the gentleman.”

“Which gentleman?”

Hood ignored the question. "I wouldn't be surprised if we find that his name is Weir. Garth, or somebody, told me in an offhand sort of way that the husband was 'out of the picture'—had been for years. No divorce, apparently. This 'somebody we all thought was dead' may be Weir!" He nodded and moved his jaws as though he were chewing a cud. "*That's* more like it."

"But why would he suddenly turn up? How does he fit in?"

"Ah!—that's something we *don't* know. Perhaps he *doesn't* fit in. That's why he interests me. He interests me much more—*much* more—if his name is Weir. He doesn't look like the sort of person who *would* 'fit in'—as you say—with Ogiltree, or Rivers, or Garth—with *any* of them. He looks like a rank outsider—who has barged into something at the wrong moment. In other words, he may be . . ."

"The 'wrong person' you've been talking about?" suggested Rhoda doubtfully.

"Go to the head of the class, my dear."

Rhoda looked puzzled. "But if he had killed her," she whispered, leaning across the table, "surely Ogiltree wouldn't be afraid of him telling people she was dead."

"At the moment I don't suspect him of killing her—whether he turns out to be Weir—or whether he doesn't. I think I know who killed her."

"You know—already?"

"No, I don't know. I just *think*—so far. I suppose it sounds like an Irish bull—but I was going to say—*because I think I know who killed her*, I feel all the more sure that she's dead. Not a bit like a detective story—is it? In these thrillers everybody knows from the start that the victim is dead, and the only problem is to find out *who* did the killing. But in this business we have three major problems. . . ." His voice had an incisive quality which seemed to inscribe his words on the air.

“. . . *first—is the late Agatha Weir dead?*"

He smiled across the table at his use of the word "late."

“. . . *second—if so, who killed the lady?*"

This time he paused to raise a finger in additional emphasis.

“. . . *third—where is the body?*”

Rhoda couldn't control her eagerness. “Who do you think killed her?” she whispered.

“Even if I were sure,” said Hood, his fingers curling like claws on the tablecloth beside his plate, “I wouldn't tell you—at *this* stage.”

“Then it *is* like a detective story,” laughed Rhoda. “The detective always *knows* about half-way through the book, but he never tells anybody till the last page.”

“Quite true—and sometimes, even outside of a book, it's better not to. In this case—especially so. If I'm right in my suspicions, it's of tremendous importance that I conceal them—even from you.”

Rhoda looked across at him challengingly. “Why?” she said.

“Because in this case the murderer—the murder, even—doesn't matter so much. We shall be able to deal with that when we've found the body. The first thing—the important thing—is to find out who is conspiring to make a murder look like a miracle.”

“Then you think there may be . . .”

“Ah! Here's Gifford.”

“You haven't found him,” said Hood as Gifford slumped into a chair beside him.

“No.”

“No traces?”

“Yes.”

“Ah! How about a cup of coffee, Gifford?”

“Don't mind if I do, and get 'em to throw in a grilled steak, French fried, green beans, a hunk of apple pie, and cheese—and a bowl of soup while I'm waiting.”

The waitress took the order while Hood fidgeted with the salt shaker.

“You got on his tracks, then?” said the scientist impatiently.

“Thought we had him cornered in Ogiltree's studio.”

“In Ogiltree's studio—that's good, Gifford. What happened?”

“He was there all right. The place is closed—sign on the door. . . .”

“Yes. We saw it. What did you do—break in?”

“Forced one of the back windows. Had a man at the front, of course. But he heard us and beat it into the basement. Thought we had him cornered, but all them basements are connected under the stores there. Searched right through—darn near half a block. No sign of the bird. Must have got up through one of the other stores.”

“H-m! Did he leave anything behind in the other place?”

“Finger-prints.”

“I suppose you’ve had no time to . . .”

“Yes, I have. Same as on the ladder.”

“Ah! That’s something.”

“That’s *nothing*, doctor. D’you know who he is?”

“I have a suspicion.”

“His name is . . .”

Hood stopped him with a raised finger. “Weir?” he suggested, with a sly glance at Rhoda.

Gifford’s mouth opened. “How did you know?” he exploded.

“See, Rhoda,” Hood observed quietly, “I was right.”

Gifford looked disgruntled. “Mean to say you just *figured* it? I got it from the police chief. He recognized him on the street yesterday.”

“Did he try to arrest him?”

“No charge against him.”

Between his clipped sentences Gifford was swallowing hot spoonfuls of soup.

“What I’d like to know, Gifford,” said Hood thoughtfully, “is why he was playing mute. Obviously he didn’t want Mrs. Coulter to recognize his voice. But since Mrs. Coulter had never seen him, and wouldn’t have the faintest idea who he was, he must have been figuring on another call—later. It means, I think, that he didn’t want her to recognize his voice the next time he came. And *that* suggests—do you see what I’m getting at?”

He addressed the question to Rhoda, who wrinkled her brow and then shook her head.

"It suggests to me," said Hood, "that he intended coming back—later—or at another time—in *some sort of disguise*! I can't see any other reason. It seems to me he wanted to make certain that when he came again—in disguise—Mrs. Coulter wouldn't connect him with the man who had come with the note."

"Gee!—you're a wizard!" grunted Gifford, attacking his steak, which had just arrived.

"On the contrary," said Hood, "I'm the enemy of wizards."

"Your idea is very ingenious," said Rhoda soberly, and then she laughed.

"You mean you have a simpler explanation?"

"It seems to me so. I'm wondering if Mr. Weir has some sort of impediment in his speech—or a conspicuous gold tooth—something that would identify him easily."

"Excellent!" cried Hood. "Or a blue tooth like that awful wife of Schomberg's in Conrad's *Victory*. An excellent suggestion—but, unfortunately, though it sounds simpler—and more likely—it isn't likely at all."

"Why?"

"Because Gifford and I talked to the chap, and if there had been anything conspicuous about him—*when he opened his mouth*—we would have noticed it. No. He doesn't lisp even. But I thought you were going to suggest an even simpler explanation."

"For instance," said Rhoda.

"Simply—that Mrs. Coulter lied. You see—but look who's coming in," said Hood in a smothered tone.

Rhoda turned and watched Ogiltree approach the table diffidently.

"I'm not disturbing you, am I?" he asked.

"Not a bit," cried Hood heartily. "Sit down. Have some coffee? Gifford was just telling us about ransacking your basement."

He looked steadily at Ogiltree as he spoke, but there was not the faintest hint of surprise in the other's face. On the contrary, he smiled knowingly. "That's why I dropped in," he said. "I looked for you at the hotel. You weren't there, so I figured you were still eating. I hope you don't mind. I thought . . ."

“Not a bit—not a bit. Your friend Thomas has been in touch with you again apparently.”

“Yes. He’s disturbed, of course. Your police chase has him thoroughly scared. He phoned me—wondered if he’d better give himself up and tell you his whole story. He thinks you suspect him of kidnapping—or murder even. I told him I’d see you—and, first of all, I’m going to tell you who he is.”

Gifford, who had laid down his knife and fork, was about to interject something, but Hood kicked a warning under the table.

“He is Mrs. Weir’s husband,” said Ogiltree in a low voice, glancing about him as he spoke.

“Wouldn’t it have been better to have told us this—this afternoon—or even this morning?” queried Hood reprovingly.

“I wonder if I could tell you *anything* you would believe,” said Ogiltree with great dignity; but his big magnetic eyes were beginning to blaze. “I told you that when Mrs. Coulter mentioned a man with a snarl on his face this morning I didn’t know who she was referring to. I didn’t even know Weir was in town. I repeat that. You can believe it or not—as you like. You’re a professional unbeliever, of course. *You’re being paid not to believe.*”

His tone was challenging. A flush had spread over his face and he was leaning forward, looking at Hood with flashing, passionate eyes.

“That is *my* business,” said the scientist quietly. “And I’m attending to it. Your business—it appears—is to keep me from finding out anything that might upset your miracle. And you are attending to *that*—very cleverly—and very well. Your attitude convinces me that we are on opposing sides—which rather surprises me. If I were as much of a *believer* as you would like to appear—I think I should welcome investigation.”

“Investigation—yes,” said Ogiltree in a trembling voice; “but you doubt my word—and nobody likes that.”

“True—but, you see, even if I accept your statement that you didn’t know Weir was in town—this morning—there is still the fact that you *did* know who he was—at the rooming house—this afternoon.”

“I did—but I didn’t think it was necessary to tell you. I left that out—but everything else I told you was the truth. He *did* work in Garth’s plant—he embezzled some money. Mrs. Weir and I both helped him to get out of town. He came back—through sheer coincidence—just at—just at this time. And he approached the same two people for help again. So far as I know there’s

nothing against him—except bad luck—and that old mistake. I want him to get away, or his name will get into the papers, and his past will be raked up and coupled with Mrs. Weir's. I don't want this miracle sullied with gossip and scandal. I'll do everything in my power to prevent that. And to that extent you're right—we stand on opposite sides—because your job is to rake up *everything*. But if you have any respect whatever for the beliefs of others—you will not give the newspapers anything until it has been thoroughly threshed out. You've already stumbled on two or three coincidences. I assure you they *are* coincidences—and minor ones at that. You may stumble on others, but if you thresh them out you'll find they have no bearing on the miracle. This business about Spence, for instance. His wife is half mad with the most ill-founded jealousy I've ever seen. Of course, there's no use denying that Spence has been up to something. I think it's Spiritualism. I think he must have got Mrs. Weir interested in it somehow, just in the last week or two. But even *that*—even this business about the date—whether Mrs. Weir put any stock in the date, or whether she didn't—I am ready to swear that *none of all that business had anything to do with the miracle*. Just because somebody—some medium apparently—made a wild guess that happened to come within a day or two of being true—perhaps by sensing the state of mind Mrs. Weir was in—that's no reason for dragging Spiritualism into this—to sully the perfection of a miracle with the odour of quackery."

He had grown eloquent, forgetting his surroundings, and people at neighbouring tables were looking around, trying to catch what he was saying. He checked himself, blushed, and drove the passionate, hypnotic glare from his eyes.

"You see where I stand," he lowered his voice to say, leaning toward Hood. "The faith of thousands of people—perhaps millions—is now in my hands. I must protect and maintain that faith. You'll find, Dr. Hood, if you go through with this, that I am thinking only of that—only of them."

Hood sat perfectly still, his heavy head on one side, staring at the crumpled napkin he had put beside his plate. When Ogiltree stopped he did not move.

"You still don't believe me?" There was a deep note of entreaty in Ogiltree's voice.

"I *do* believe you," cried Hood, looking sharply up. "It's because I believe you that I—well—I don't feel very happy."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that if *you* were happier—if you were less anxious—I should be happier."

"I am anxious," said Ogiltree quickly, "because I'm afraid. . . ."

"So am I," interrupted Hood. "I'm very much afraid."

"But not of the same thing. I'm thinking of scandal—newspaper talk."

"Let us hope," said Hood solemnly, "that you're thinking of no worse than that."

4

The next morning Hood, who had taken a small suite in the Minnicog Hotel, telephoned Rhoda's room a little before ten o'clock. "Have you had your breakfast?" he demanded as soon as her voice came on the wire.

"An hour ago," she said. "I didn't like to disturb you."

Hood grunted. "I didn't put a call in last night, and I might have slept till noon if it hadn't been for Gifford. He just phoned. Meet me in the dining-room, if you're ready. I'll grab a mouthful of something, and then we'd better get out to the temple—quick—before Gifford has it all torn down."

The scientist had started his breakfast when Rhoda walked into the dining-room. "More like a bride than ever," he smiled, jumping up and surveying the summery, pale-green dress she was wearing. "If I weren't so busy with these Assumptionists I should be paying a lot of attention to the much deeper mystery of why you aren't a *Mrs. Somebody*."

She rolled her eyes in acknowledgment of his banter, but immediately sat down and asked if Gifford had discovered anything.

"Not much—but he has a theory—which is new for him. Gifford talks very little—and rarely theorizes. He's a great chap to work. That's why I wanted him on this case. He's great at turning things upside down—tearing things apart. A little like a fireman, sometimes—you know what I mean?—smashing up everything with his axe. He's been going over the temple since early this morning—poking into everything—and he's arrived at the notion that somebody connected wires to Mrs. Weir's bed—from below, somehow—electrocuted her—and then removed the body and the wires and hid them somewhere in the bowels of the temple. He wants to tear up the floors, and I guess he'd like to dynamite the walls, but instead of that he's phoned to New York headquarters for their architectural expert to come up. Wants every foot of the building checked over to see if there isn't a built-in crypt somewhere,

or a subterranean passage from the bed out to that gardener's cottage. Apparently he's turned the gardener's cottage upside down. What's the chap's name—Jacob? Thinks he's very suspicious—because he's half-witted, I suppose. And he's found out that he's Ogiltree's brother. He seems to have it in for the Ogiltree brothers."

"Whew!" whistled Rhoda as Hood finished his account of what Gifford had been doing. "Goodness! I thought he was the slow, plodding kind."

"Only when it comes to oratory," said Hood. "In action—he's a whirlwind. He rips things open and finds what he's looking for in the time it takes a good many detectives to get on their shoes. He's a marvel. Of course, he never thinks—in the sense of putting two and two together, I mean. In fact, he never arrives at *two*. One thing at a time—but *fast*. He can think of the most devastating things—one after the other—and without the slightest connection—faster than any man I ever saw. And the more devastating they are—literally—the better he likes it. We'd better get out there, or there won't be one stone left on another."

Hood gulped down the rest of his breakfast, and in a few minutes they were in a taxi, headed for the temple.

"Before I forget it again," said Rhoda, opening her purse, "I've got something here I intended showing you last night. It may mean nothing at all—but on the other hand it might. I found it in Ogiltree's car—in the back seat." She spoke in a low tone, so that the driver wouldn't hear, as she handed the scientist a piece of broken amber glass.

"You remember," she went on, "when I got into the back seat he picked up his raincoat—to get it out of my way—and threw it into the front. I noticed something roll out of it when he lifted it—something shiny. It must have fallen out of a pocket, or maybe out of the cuff of the sleeve. I didn't say anything—thought I'd wait and see what it was. At first I was disappointed—just a bit of broken glass—and then I began to wonder. Anyway, I thought you might make something of it—so I slipped it in my purse."

Hood was twisting the fragment of glass about in his fingers. "It's part of the neck of a squarish bottle," he said. "A fairly large bottle. And there's a dark stain, where some liquid has dried." He put the glass to his nose and sniffed. "Pyro," he said.

"What's pyro?" asked Rhoda eagerly.

“It’s a photographic developer—quite common—pyrogalllic acid. It’s in crystals when you buy it. It comes in good-sized squarish bottles, usually amber, like this. But they make it up in liquid form for use in the darkroom, and when it’s oxidized by coming in contact with the air it leaves a dark brown stain. Maybe you’ve noticed photographers’ fingers. They’re frequently stained—like nicotine stains, only darker. It has a sweetish smell. Smell it.”

Rhoda sniffed at it and frowned. “Is it poisonous?” she whispered.

“I should say it is. Very strong. It’s a metamer of phenol—which is just the scientific way of saying that it’s closely related to carbolic acid—one of the most powerful poisons.”

“Then—perhaps . . .”

“It *may* be important—but not as an indication that Mr. Ogiltree is a poisoner. If he were going to poison anybody he wouldn’t carry around a big square bottle of pyro. The point about this is that he’s somehow broken the bottle—presumably in his darkroom. He would hardly keep it anywhere else. And the question that occurs to me is—why would a photographer be working in his darkroom *in his raincoat*? Evidently he broke the bottle and a piece of the neck lodged—as you say—in a pocket or in the cuff of the sleeve—without his noticing it. All right. He threw the raincoat into the back of the car—and when he picked it up—ah!—perhaps when *you* got into the car, he picked it up for the first time since—since the *last* rain. And the last rain was on the night of the—Whatever It Was.”

Rhoda frowned. “No,” she said thoughtfully.

“No what?”

“The night before last he was with the rest of us at the hotel all evening. He left to go to the temple to see Mrs. Weir, and came back to the meeting in a state of ecstasy almost. He seemed to feel that the miracle might happen at any minute. He even communicated the feeling to the rest of us. I can’t imagine that after that he would go back to his darkroom to work.”

Hood glanced again at the piece of glass and handed it back to Rhoda. “Keep it in your purse,” he said. “It doesn’t seem to fit at the moment—but it suggests something—something I’ve been groping for.”

“You don’t mean—poison?”

“No, no,” said Hood impatiently. “You couldn’t get anybody to drink anything with pyrogalllic acid in it. They’d smell it and taste it. No. But it

suggests—it makes me wonder if the fact that Ogiltree happens to be a photographer has anything to do with—you see, I keep coming back to that bedspread. It was black—something like the cloth a photographer uses. No, no. That can't be it. Well—never mind now. Here we are.”

5

They found Gifford in the library with all the bookcases pulled out at haphazard angles in the centre of the floor. The two plain clothes men and Gifford himself were going carefully over every inch of the panelled walls, rapping with their knuckles and listening for hollow sounds that would betray a secret door. The room looked as though a hurricane had struck it. Rugs had been rolled up, the cushions of the chesterfield and chairs had been turned upside down, the drawers of the desk were heaped one on top of the other—everything movable had been moved—not a square inch of space, covered or uncovered, had been left unscrutinized.

“Now you know why they call him ‘Kansas,’” exclaimed Hood, standing beside Rhoda in the doorway surveying the wreckage.

“Kansas?”

“Where the cyclones come from. Hello, Gifford.”

The big detective, looking very solemn, rose from his knees, dusted himself off and came toward them rather sheepishly. He was already lukewarm about his electrocution theory. A thorough search of the basement had failed to reveal any evidence that holes could have been bored and wires run up under the floor of the tower bedroom. There was still hope of finding a hidden crypt or a secret passageway, however, and while he waited for the architectural expert from the city, he wasn't leaving any stone unturned.

“Any news of Weir?” asked Hood.

The police had been on the look-out for him throughout the night, Gifford reported dolefully, and his description had been broadcasted, but, so far, no one had set eyes on him.

“Anything on De Long?” The scientist seemed to mimic Gifford's curt brevity whenever he conversed with him.

New York had wired a condensed biography which had almost no bearing on the Port Fletcher mystery. “They cabled Calcutta last night,” Gifford added. “Ought to get something in a few hours.”

“Have time to check up the banks?” said Hood.

“Yes,” said the sergeant, taking out his notebook and displaying a page scribbled with figures. “Withdrawals in last few days. On June 4th—that was last Friday—Mrs. Weir drew fifty dollars—cheque made out to ‘cash.’ The day before—June 3rd—Spence drew the same amount. That jibes with the rumour they were seen together in New York last week. Mrs. Weir drew two hundred dollars on June 9th—the day before she disappeared. Spence drew a hundred dollars the day *after* she disappeared—a few hours before he beat it for the city. Ogiltree drew two hundred dollars the same day—yesterday.”

“That bears thinking about,” said Hood. He copied the figures into his own notebook.

“Checked up the stores—questioned Mrs. Coulter—but no trace of Mrs. Weir buying any articles of clothing in the last thirty days,” said Gifford.

“Good work. How about finger-prints in the tower room—especially on the desk?”

“Several unidentified—none of Weir’s—and none of the gardener’s.”

“You have it in for the gardener, Gifford, it seems to me.”

“Looks queer—turned his place upside down—but nothing doing.”

“I think I’ll borrow his ladder,” said Hood. He turned to Rhoda. “Will you go into the tower and open the little window—you know the one I mean—well, there’s only the one. And then sit down at the desk and wait for me.”

Rhoda followed his instructions, and a few minutes later the scientist’s head appeared, thrust through the lower sash. He was standing on the topmost rung of the borrowed ladder and could just see in.

“Close the bed-curtains, Rhoda, will you?” he called down.

When she had pulled the three strings which closed them, Rhoda looked up at him inquiringly.

“Please stand inside—stand on top of the bed,” called Hood. “I want to see if I can see you.”

“No,” he exclaimed a moment later. “*That’s* out. From this window you couldn’t see anything going on inside those curtains.”

He craned his neck and looked down at the top of the desk immediately below the window. “There’s a thought,” he ejaculated. “Will you be a good girl and ask Mrs. Coulter to bring in a glass and tray and set it down on the desk in the position she usually placed Mrs. Weir’s egg-nogg?”

Rhoda disappeared and presently returned with Mrs. Coulter, carrying the tray. There was a vexed expression about the housekeeper's mouth, as though the prying and questioning of the last two days had affected her nerves.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Coulter," sang out Hood from the window. The housekeeper stopped dead and flung a startled glance upward, first at the skylight and then around the ceiling, until she finally caught sight of the scientist's huge head framed in the window.

The glass rattled on the tray. "My goodness, you startled me, Dr. Hood!" she exclaimed, catching a quick breath. "I couldn't make out where the voice was coming from."

"Please put the glass down where you usually put it, Mrs. Coulter. I want to see if it could be—tampered with—from here."

"Ah!—you see," he added, when she had put down the tray. "A person standing on this ladder could drop a pellet in that glass quite easily—or even a few drops of poison, I imagine. There would be a little noise of a splash—but the pelting rain that night would—you see, Miss Groves, there's our rain again. Not a providential rain—but—well, what would you call the *opposite* of a providential rain?"

Even on the top of a ladder, Rhoda thought, he must have his little digressions.

"Sit down at the desk, Miss Groves—do you mind?—and bend over as though you were writing. There. All right. Is that the way Mrs. Weir was sitting—*when you saw her last?*" he added, looking intently at the housekeeper.

"Yes, sir. Just about like that." A shudder quivered across her mouth as she looked up.

"Your head is right over the blotter, Miss Groves. Just sit back now, and watch this." He thrust his arm through the window, poised a pencil over the blotter, and let it drop. It turned in the air as it fell and dropped almost flat on the desk. Even Rhoda hunched her shoulders nervously at the thud it made. Mrs. Coulter rubbed her hands together as though she were cold.

"No, that won't do," said Hood, and added with a smile, "but he might have blown a poison dart like that Andaman islander in *The Sign of Four*. Would you mind staying there a minute, Mrs. Coulter? I'll get down and come right in. There are one or two things I want to see."

He joined them in a surprisingly short time, picked up his pencil from the desk, and said: "What about Mrs. Weir's private papers—correspondence—where did she keep that sort of thing?"

"She hadn't any—never kept anything of that sort," said the housekeeper. A hint of stubborn finality in her voice made Hood glance up from the desk which he had begun to examine.

"But surely she must have received thousands of letters from all over the country. What used to happen . . . ?"

"Oh, the fan mail," exclaimed Mrs. Coulter irreverently. "As often as not she never even read it. It was always turned over to Mr. Ogiltree. He has a very smart secretary, sir—at his studio—a Miss Pilcher. She used to answer the out-of-town letters. Sometimes she'd come out here and take dictation—ever since Miss Turnbull left."

"Who was Miss Turnbull?"

"Mrs. Weir's secretary, sir. But you see, sir, about a year ago Mrs. Weir changed a lot. That's when she started the vegetarian diet. She let Miss Turnbull go—didn't want anybody around her. I don't know where she got her notions, sir, but one day—about that time—she had me in here talking for about an hour, all about wanting to be alone more. 'Keep people away,' she kept saying. And then she talked a lot of funny stuff about 'possessions.' I never could make head or tail of it, sir. I guess there was something kind of deep—you know what I mean, sir?—religious—behind it. But all I could make out was that she didn't want to own anything—or keep anything. She had a cleaning-up spell, and got me to burn all the knick-knacks and things she'd had for years—and I had to give her jewellery and clothes and stuff to the poor. And then she cleaned out this desk here, sir. I remember as well as anything—her standing there, just about where you are, sir. 'There, Coulter,' she said, 'now I have nothing in the world except the gown I stand in—and that belongs to the temple.' And she looked at the skylight—it was a fine day, and it was open. 'And not even a roof over my head,' she said. And that's the way she's been living, sir, this last year."

It had been a long speech for Mrs. Coulter. Her large bosom rose with the intake of a deep breath.

"You mean, then," said Hood gently, "that there's literally nothing here that belongs to her?"

"Not a thing, sir."

"Not even a bank book?"

“No, sir. Look for yourself, sir. Every drawer in that desk is empty.”

Hood pulled them out and closed them mechanically. “But she had a bank account.”

“Maybe she had. I wouldn’t know about that, sir. Mr. Ogiltree or Miss Pilcher would know—but I never knew of her spending anything in the last twelve months. Mr. Spence made out the cheque for the housekeeping money to me, sir. Every Saturday I get it.”

Mortimer Hood looked away, staring steadily but absent-mindedly at the floor. “Mrs. Weir possessed a toothbrush, I suppose,” he said suddenly, and before the housekeeper could answer, added: “How many bathrooms are there?”

“Two, sir. There’s hers, next to the little waiting-room—and then there’s one in our quarters.”

“I’d like to see them both,” said Hood. He lifted a brow at Rhoda and the three of them went out into the corridor. The scientist glanced quickly round Mrs. Weir’s bathroom and then opened the medicine cabinet. The collection of jars and bottles, very neatly arranged, included only the barest toilet essentials. There were no cosmetics—no medicines.

Hood nodded to himself, closed the door, and followed the two women into the service quarters. The medicine chest in Mrs. Coulter’s bathroom was a very different matter. One glance at the array of bottles of all shapes and sizes, squeezed against each other on all three shelves, pointed to a woman who was always trying some patent remedy for a multitude of ailments. Hood picked up the bottles one by one and examined their labels. Rhoda noticed that several were marked with a skull and crossbones.

“Tincture of Strophanthus,” said the scientist quietly. “You have heart trouble, Mrs. Coulter?”

“Yes, sir. I have a bad turn now and then. Mrs. Weir told me about those drops. Her mother’s had a weak heart for years, and that’s what she takes.”

Hood placed the bottle back on its shelf, glanced at two or three others, and then slowly closed the door as though he had not found what he was looking for.

When they came out into the corridor again the heavy figure of Garth was framed in the outer doorway. He was just coming in.

Hood and Rhoda had reached the double doors into the tower room, which they were about to re-enter. The scientist stood still and waited for Garth to approach him.

"I dropped in on my way in to town—wondering if I'd find you here," the publisher said, in a curious, guarded tone. "Haven't seen you since early yesterday afternoon. Wondered how you are getting along?"

Hood eyed him steadily. "Splendidly," he said; "and you? How are your own inquiries coming?"

"My inquiries?" exclaimed Garth, puffing himself out. "I don't understand."

"You sent a cable the other day. I thought, perhaps . . ."

The publisher's enormous paunch seemed to deflate with a quick gasp. "That had nothing to do with this," he blurted out quickly. "I mean—it was prior—I hadn't any notion then that . . ."

"That what?" asked Hood relentlessly.

Garth did not answer. He was breathing deeply—pulling himself together. Finally he erected his head, drawing himself up to his full height. The glint of power shone again in his eyes.

"You're getting off on to some queer tracks, Dr. Hood," he said coldly. "Ogiltree tells me you're all worked up about Weir. And now it looks as though you've got some notion about me in your mind. I'll tell you. Here's the way I feel about it. You've had over twenty-four hours to look into this thing. Apparently you haven't found out anything of any importance—or you'd have got in touch with me, I imagine. You've unearthed a few minor things—unfortunate coincidences—but nothing that has any real bearing on the miracle. I'll be perfectly frank. There's a new factor in the situation—something I hadn't expected when I—when I asked Miss Groves to get in touch with you. And—well, here's what I was going to say. The newspapers have spread it all over that you're in Port Fletcher—investigating. Until you drop the—the case—and go back to New York—there'll be doubt—suspicion—unrest."

The publisher was regarding Hood with a cautious air, evidently expecting some sort of explosion, but the scientist was standing straddle-legged, with his hands behind him, listening patiently.

"You see what I mean," Garth went on. "Now, of course, at the outset, the idea was that you would give us some sort of statement—and I'm not

suggesting that—at this time—you are prepared to give us a statement—of *any* kind. I don't expect it. But I've come to the conclusion that it would be better all round if you withdrew—without any sort of verdict. The papers will pester you, no doubt—but I shall be glad to give you a further sum, equal to the retainer which you have so far refused to accept, if you will simply tell them—well, *anything*.”

The word “anything” popped out of his wide mouth in a way that suggested that he was surprised by it. It was evident that he had intended to say—“nothing”—and had suddenly taken the view that he didn't care what the scientist said to reporters—so long as he was out of the way.

“Never mind the money part of it, Mr. Garth,” said Hood. “This has been an interesting experience for me. A few curious things have happened, but, as you say, they throw no light on the miracle. *I'm satisfied of that*. In other words, the fourth dimension idea has been—ripening, so to speak—in my mind. I'm almost ready to give the newspapers an interview—along that line. Before I do, though, I would like very much to know whether Mrs. Weir—in the testament she left—has made any reference to the manner—the *means*, shall we say—of her assumption. If she *has*—if her explanation is contrary to my theory—but turns out to be something that I can accept scientifically—then—then, naturally, I wouldn't want to have rushed into print with something quite contrary. Suppose you get hold of Ogiltree and ask him to bring it out here. I can't see that the ‘three days’ business is especially binding. If you are anxious to put an end to doubt and suspicion, the sooner some official statement is made the better.”

Garth seemed surprised and relieved by the scientist's attitude. “I'll phone Ogiltree and see what he says,” he snapped out, and wheeled around toward the library.

“Sergeant Gifford is in there,” said Hood quickly, “having a little conference with his men. Perhaps you wouldn't mind using Mrs. Coulter's phone.”

As soon as the publisher's back was turned, Hood hurried to the library. The door was closed. The three detectives were just completing the task of putting the room in order. Hood called Gifford aside and began to whisper a suggestion to him as he drew him out into the corridor. Rhoda heard the scientist's parting injunctions as Gifford, evidently eager for fresh activity, opened the outside door.

“Replace everything,” Hood was saying. “He mustn't know any one's been there. And if you find it—get an analysis made—right way—and have

them phone me at the hotel. They'll have to move fast. I'll stay at the hotel until I hear."

The big detective whisked out of the door, and Hood returned down the corridor to rejoin Rhoda.

"What now?" she asked inquisitively.

Hood answered by laying a finger on his lip. He stood smiling at her silently until they heard Garth coming through Mrs. Coulter's door.

"Ogiltree says he'll leave right away—be here in a few minutes," said the publisher.

7

An hour later Hood and Rhoda walked back slowly to the hotel. It was well past lunch time and very hot, but, although Hood seemed to be dragging his short legs, he did not appear in the least chagrined or disturbed by what had happened. Ogiltree had turned up in a belligerent mood—without the testament—refusing point-blank to produce it until the three days were up, and had intimated that even then it would be opened only by the temple directors. He heartily concurred in Garth's view that Mortimer Hood should drop his investigation. The little scientist, however, had aroused his interest by talking of a fourth dimensional explanation of Mrs. Weir's disappearance, and when Hood finally proposed that the directors should meet him at dinner that night to discuss his theory, Garth promptly suggested that the dinner should be at his house. He included Rhoda in the invitation, and with forced graciousness apologized for neglecting her, on the ground that he had been "tied up—quite unexpectedly."

"What do you suppose this 'new factor' is—that he talks about?" Rhoda said to Hood as they left the temple.

"It may be just a bluff—or, on the other hand—you know, I'm wondering if Garth is smarter than I've been figuring all along," commented Hood, with a slow shake of his head. "It's barely possible that he planned it just this way—got me out here for twenty-four hours—to keep off the police—and then figured on firing me off the job before I could really get my toes in. He's the kind who thinks his cheque book can get him anything. But it's more likely that Ogiltree is insisting I should be called off. Ogiltree is in this thing pretty deep. I've got to move very carefully. I've handled it badly so far. Shown my hand too much. I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to give them a stiff dose of fourth dimensional stuff to-night, and then tell them

that I think I'll go in to New York and consult with Professor—well—Weaver.”

“Who is Professor Weaver?”

“There's no such person—but I'll explain that he is the greatest authority on the fourth dimension in America, and . . .”

“Who *is* the greatest authority?”

Hood shot a twinkling sideways glance at her. “*I am*,” he said with mock bombast. “And *that*, you see, will appear to get me out of the way for a while.”

“Appear to—you mean you're not really going?”

“Certainly not. If Gifford finds what I think he'll find—things should move very fast.”

“Am I allowed to ask what you expect him to find—and where?”

“You're allowed to ask—and I'm allowed not to answer. If and when I get the phone call I expect—I'll have some real news. In the meantime we must lunch. I can't have you accusing me of starving you again.”

The expected telephone call came late in the afternoon. Rhoda had settled down in Hood's sitting-room, trying to dull the edge of her impatience by glancing at a magazine. The scientist was lying back in a chair, his short legs stretched out and his arms dangling. While his body was completely relaxed his furrowed brow indicated that he was concentrating on some phase of the mystery which he was not prepared to discuss.

There was a buzz, and Hood sprang up. “Yes—yes—Hood,” he said into the phone. And then, after listening for several seconds: “Yes—ah!—enough to cause death?—yes. Thanks.”

Rhoda threw down her magazine.

“Gifford found the bedspread,” Hood announced as he hung up the receiver.

“Where?”

“Where I expected he would. And we've had the stains analysed. We know now that Mrs. Weir was poisoned.”

“What with—pyro?”

“No—no—no. I told you nobody would use pyro. No. She was poisoned with tincture of Strophanthus!”

Part V

1

“We’ll start early and drop in on Mrs. Fletcher on our way out to Garth’s,” Hood had told Rhoda when she left his suite to dress. “I’d like to see the old lady.”

They got out of the taxi at the street corner and told the driver to wait. “Now, remember, we’re out for a stroll and just dropped in,” Hood said to Rhoda as they approached the rambling, old stone house.

Jessie Willis opened the door. She recognized them at once. Stepping forward on the sill, she half closed the door behind her, and whispered: “Have you found her?”

Hood shook his head, and spoke in a loud, carrying tone: “Miss Groves just pointed out your house to me as we were passing. We’d like to have a chat with Mrs. Fletcher, if she feels up to it. Is she better to-day?”

“Come in. I’ll see what she says,” Jessie answered as she stepped back. “She had one of her bad turns last night. I expected she would. Always does when she gets excited. But she’s better to-day. I don’t remember your names. Who will I say it is?”

“Dr. Hood and Miss Groves. Tell her we’re interested in Mrs. Weir’s disappearance and would like to talk to her about it—if she thinks she can stand it.” He said this loudly as he stepped into the hall, so that his voice would carry through the open door of the living-room.

Jessie left them standing, but returned after a whispered consultation and ushered them in.

“I’m from New York, Mrs. Fletcher,” Hood began, addressing the aged woman who sat rocking by the window. “I came up here because your daughter’s disappearance struck me as very peculiar. I’ll confess to you that I don’t believe in miracles—that is to say, *this* sort of miracle. And last night we ran into your daughter—your *other* daughter . . .”

He turned round and noticed that Jessie had gone.

“Jessie, you mean,” said the old lady impatiently.

"Yes. She told us—Mr. Ogiltree was with us at the time—that you were convinced Mrs. Weir was dead. I believe she . . ."

"We're sure of it," Mrs. Fletcher interrupted in her usual vehement way. "Jessie and I haven't seen much of her these last few years—but we know what's been going on. There isn't a thing we don't hear—one way or another. And . . ."

"You've been talking to somebody who's quite sure she's dead, is that it?" Hood flung at her quickly.

The old lady held her mouth wide open and stared. "What's all this about somebody talking to us?" she demanded. "Jessie said Alf Ogiltree was badgering her about the same thing. We haven't been talking to anybody—except Annie Spence. And that wasn't until this morning."

"Mrs. Spence came to see you—did she?" said Hood in a solicitous tone. "I'm told you don't get about much, Mrs. Fletcher. I was very sorry to hear from Mrs. Coulter this morning that you're troubled with your heart."

"That demented girl," cried the old lady, her eyes blazing, "has nearly been the death of me—nothing but a worry since she was a sliver of a child—an eternal torment from the day she was born." She stopped suddenly, but her head went on jerking, as though her thoughts were too violent to be expressed. She pressed her hand against her heart and sighed deeply. A look of intense curiosity came into her little eyes. "Who is it Ogiltree thinks we've been talking to?" she leaned forward to ask.

"I couldn't say," replied Hood. "I don't know that he had any one in particular in mind—unless he meant Mr. Weir."

"Weir—you don't mean to say that scoundrel's back in town."

"You haven't seen him then—or heard that . . ."

Mrs. Fletcher jerked in her chair and set it rocking. "More gossip, I suppose. I never knew such a place. I wonder Annie Spence hasn't got hold of *that* too."

"Would you mind telling us what Mrs. Spence *has* got hold of?"

"Just a crazy notion of her own—that's all." The old lady snorted, and almost flung herself out of her chair. "She always was a fool—long before she was married. Never *should* have been married—chasing her husband around—a quiet little rabbit like him—expecting to find him under some woman's bed any time he isn't at home. And now she thinks he's run off with Agatha. As though that proud little doll would ever look at *him*."

“He didn’t come back last night, then?” said Hood slyly.

“What on earth he’s up to—goodness only knows. But I’ll wager the five acres this house stands on that he isn’t with Agatha. He sent Annie a wire last night—too scared of her tongue to phone, I suppose—that he’d been held over on some business. Maybe it *is* business—but it isn’t Agatha. One of those blasphemers has put her out of the way. I wouldn’t put anything past that big scoundrel—Garth. They’ve killed her and got rid of her somehow. It’s God’s judgment on her—to be killed by one of her own sort. Always talking about a miracle, she was—and now they’ve made one—faked it—got her out of the way somehow. I’m as sure of it as I’m sure I’m sitting here.”

“Yes; but it’s just a guess of yours, Mrs. Fletcher—just a hunch?” said the scientist challengingly.

“Call it a hunch if you like,” the old lady exploded, “but if you keep looking long enough, Dr.—Dr. Hood, is it?—I’ll wager the five acres that’s left me—you’ll find her—dead or alive—*somewhere*. But if you ask me—it’ll be her corpse you’ll find. She wouldn’t walk out of that temple for any man—or any reason. Why, that’s what she *lived* for.”

“Yes,” said Hood with a gentle nod; “but the miracle—the assumption—was her real mania—and you see . . .”

“Stuff and nonsense and blasphemy!” the old lady screamed. She waved her hands in front of her as though shooing the two visitors out of her sight. “Don’t you think I know my own daughter?—even though she *was* mad—mad as a hare in March—and a wanton in the Lord’s sight. There. Tell ’em that. Tell the reporters that. Tell ’em . . .”

“Mother—mother!” Jessie had hurried in at the sound of the old lady’s screams. She shook her finger at her as she went quickly across the room to her chair. “You mustn’t—you mustn’t do it. You’ll have another attack—sure as fate.”

“We’d better be running along,” said Hood, rising. “We shouldn’t have disturbed your mother. I’m sorry. I didn’t realize . . .”

“I should have known better,” said Jessie contritely. “I never should have let Annie Spence in—either. The minute she gets talking about Aggie she . . .”

“Never say her name again—in this house,” Mrs. Fletcher burst out again, twitching violently in her chair.

“Mother!” warned Jessie softly, but in a commanding tone.

“Don’t think you can boss me, my girl, at *my* age,” the old lady mumbled, the fire sinking in her eyes.

2

“It looks to me as though all we got out of that,” commented Rhoda glumly as she settled into the taxi again, “is an idea of where Agatha Weir got some of her craziness.”

Hood held his hat on his knees, squeezing it in and out like an accordion. “Is that all you made of it?” he murmured.

“Why? What did you . . . ?” She looked at his screwed-up eyes and stopped.

“I learned a good deal,” said Hood thoughtfully. “I’m sure of one thing now at any rate. Neither of those women know anything about whatever has been going on at the temple. They’ve been trying to find out—but they can’t. That’s what Jessie went to the temple for the other night. They say that they get to hear of everything—but they don’t. They didn’t even know that Weir is in town. And they haven’t been talking to anybody—anybody from the temple—*who knows she is dead*—which is what Ogiltree suspected.”

“What makes you so sure of that?”

“Their curiosity. I think they’re telling everybody she’s dead in the hope that some one who knows will tell them what’s really happened to her. You can see they’re both first-class village gossips. When Ogiltree started quizzing Jessie out there at the wreck, she went right back at him—badgering him to find out who the person was—the person he said ‘they all thought was dead.’ And the old lady—didn’t you notice how inquisitive she was? ‘Who is it Ogiltree thinks we’ve been talking to?’ she went at me, almost at once. They’re the kind of women who will pry and pry until they’ve found out everything. It amazes me that they haven’t learned a good deal more than they have. The answer is that everybody who knows anything is avoiding them like the plague. They haven’t seen Ogiltree again. They haven’t seen Weir. I mentioned Mrs. Coulter—purposely—but they haven’t been talking to *her*. If they had, Mrs. Fletcher would have blurted it out. She’s a champion blurter.”

“As you say,” said Rhoda thoughtfully, “everybody has avoided them—*except Mrs. Spence!*”

"I suppose she thought they might know something."

"It may be," said Rhoda doubtfully. "She may have gone there—looking for gossip. On the other hand, she may have gone there—to spread some!"

"But surely a woman doesn't . . ."

"Exactly. A woman normally doesn't go around scandalizing her husband's name. That's why it looks queer to me. She goes deliberately to two of the worst gossips in town—and tells them she thinks Mrs. Weir has run away with her husband." She stared excitedly into the scientist's eyes, "You don't suspect her?"

"Of what?"

"You see," said Rhoda. "You *don't* suspect her—and perhaps that's just what she's out for. As long as she goes around—worried sick about an elopement—even if it is preposterous—*no one will suspect her of having poisoned Mrs. Weir herself!*"

"My dear girl," chuckled Hood, "you're a little slow to jump sometimes, but—good lord!—when you *do* jump . . .!"

"Ogiltree himself said how jealous she was—and Mrs. Fletcher just now . . ."

"Yes. If we were to find . . ." Hood looked steadily at the toe of his shoe. "But I don't think we shall."

Rhoda watched him pushing dints in the side of his hat and smoothing them out again. She had a host of questions she wanted to ask him, but there were times when she knew it was useless. The remaining few minutes of their drive passed in silence.

The entrance to Garth's house was under a massive stone porch at the side. As they drew up at the door, the lawns at the back of the house, sloping down to the shore of the Sound, came into view. At a considerable distance, in the shadow of great trees at the cliff's edge, four people were sitting—three men and a woman. Rhoda thought she recognized one of them—simply by his size—as their host.

The butler evidently expected them and ushered them at once into a long, airy room at the front. "Mr. Garth is in the garden," he said. "I'll tell him you're here, sir. Dr. Hood, isn't it?—and . . ."

"And Miss Groves."

“What’s this?” exclaimed Hood before the butler was scarcely out of hearing. “As I live, the man has a Rubens.” He was examining a small painting of a religious subject hanging between two windows, and during the few minutes which elapsed before Garth appeared he scurried about the room making sharp comments on the numerous prints and canvases on the walls.

“We came a little early—purposely,” said Hood as the publisher came in. “I hope it doesn’t inconvenience you.”

“Not in the least.” The publisher’s tone was gracious but cold. He motioned them to chairs and sat down himself.

“A few inquiries I made this morning from Mrs. Coulter,” said Hood, “incline me more than ever to the belief that in the testament Mrs. Weir left behind we shall find confirmation of the view I’ve been forming.”

“It’s no use pressing for that,” declared Garth quickly, “it will not be opened until . . .”

“I’m not pressing for it, but I was going to say this. It seems that about a year ago Mrs. Weir began to change her manner of life—quite considerably. Mrs. Coulter was rather vague as to what had prompted it—very vague, in fact—but quite clear as to the actual change. First of all—a vegetarian diet—and then a sudden shedding of everything she owned. She dispensed with her secretary—burned her treasured possessions, or gave them away—and finally stripped herself until all that was left was a gown—and her vestments—which belonged, as she said, to the temple. All right. All these changes she made in her life point in the same direction. I imagine you are aware of what I mean?”

“Can’t say I am,” said Garth curtly.

“You’re not familiar with what is called ‘the doctrine of non-attachment’?”

“Never heard of it.”

“The idea that the less one is attached to earth—to things and possessions—the nearer one is to heaven.”

Garth moved uncomfortably in his chair. “You mean that old business about the camel and the rich man. . . .”

“No. I wasn’t thinking about Christianity.” Hood paused and looked significantly at the publisher. “I was thinking about Buddhism!”

Garth blinked, looked up sharply, and then swivelled his eyes away from the scientist's penetrating stare. "What's that got to do with it?" he demanded, apparently interested in something out of the window.

"Everything. The doctrine of non-attachment is a Buddhist doctrine. And it seems to me that I heard—some time ago—that De Long had gone to India or Tibet—the stronghold of Buddhism. It may be they've been corresponding. You haven't heard, I suppose. Mrs. Weir, perhaps, would keep it quiet."

At the mention of De Long's name Rhoda noticed a quick shadow pass over the publisher's face. "Well," he exclaimed, swinging around and facing Hood's questioning glance, "suppose they *did* correspond. What of it?"

The scientist seemed to be satisfied with something he had read in Garth's manner. He crossed one knee over the other easily, and his voice lost its keenness. "Simply this," he drawled, "that she may have learned from—from Buddhism—how to bring about this miracle. The Hindus, you know, are adepts at practices that *we* really know little about. You've heard, I imagine, of these fakirs who allow themselves to be buried alive—for weeks. They know how to put themselves into a state of trance. I've heard it said that they can even kill themselves—simply by *willing* their own death. All right. It seems to me only a step from that—to willing a complete disappearance—a complete translation into what they call Nirvana."

Garth looked curiously across the room at the little scientist, trying to read what was in his mind.

"You see the way my thoughts are drifting," Hood said guilelessly. "It is a strange event. We're not used to this sort of thing, but in the Orient . . ." He broke off, uncrossed his legs, and shook his head. "It's too bad that two or three things should have happened—simultaneously—to suggest doubt—suspicion. If you were not so impatient to have—well, a verdict of some sort—I would have liked to clear them up. It seems strange, for instance, that Spence should have run away to New York last night. His wife is very disturbed about it—going around telling everybody he . . ."

"Telling everybody *what*?" demanded Garth, sitting up straight.

"It's ridiculous—but that's just the trouble, you see—these rumours get around, and people are likely to believe them. She went to see Mrs. Fletcher this morning and told her she was convinced that Mrs. Weir and Spence have gone off somewhere together. . . ."

"What an idiot!" exploded Garth.

"It may not be idiotic," Hood cautioned, "it may be . . ."

"I tell you it's idiocy—idiotic jealousy—the woman ought to be locked up. Spence! Spence!" The publisher threw up his head and almost laughed at the thought. "I don't believe Spence has ever once deceived his wife—even by a word."

"You think he really had business in New York last night?"

"Certainly. I *know* he did."

"You mean he told you—or have you heard from him?"

"Certainly I've heard from him. He's back. He's right out there on my lawn."

He smiled exultantly at Hood's surprise. "And another thing—another person—you suspected," he said in a mocking tone, "Mrs. Smith."

"Yes," said Hood, lifting one eyebrow, "has she turned up too?"

"She's the medium who told Mrs. Weir the date of her assumption. That's all there was to that. She's out there now—with—with Spence. Wants to have a séance in the temple and see if she can't get a message through from Agatha."

"I see," said Hood thoughtfully. "But she must have told Mrs. Weir the date several days ago. I wonder why she called on her—the night of the—the miracle."

"She was just telling us about that. She says it occurred to her that a message—after the assumption—might be possible. So she came out to talk to Mrs. Weir about it—sort of put the idea in her head—so she would try to send a message back from the other side."

The scientist nodded gravely several times, as though it all sounded very familiar. "What is this woman's name?" he asked.

"Mrs. Leckie."

Hood's eyes opened wide. "Mrs. Leckie. Well!"

"You know her?" queried Garth suspiciously.

"I haven't seen her for years. There's something foreign looking about her, isn't there?"

"Yes, there is. Very swarthy skin—and big, dark eyes."

“Yes—that’s the woman. She used to do a vaudeville act years ago—billed as Madame Ides—the Egyptian Hypnotist. Very good name—Ides. Makes you think of Julius Cæsar. I think she claimed to be the only practising woman hypnotist in the world—or something like that. And then she turned up in New York as Mrs. Leckie—landed on Park Avenue in no time. She’s probably developed a French accent and a descent from Abyssinian princes—to account for her mulatto colouring.”

“Mulatto!” Garth ejaculated.

“Don’t take me too seriously,” the scientist murmured. “I really know very little about her—except the hypnotism business. I believe she’s very highly regarded. Quite one of the best-known mediums. I was reading only the other day . . .”

The butler entered the room and announced: “Mr. Rivers, sir.”

3

Garth seized on the interruption to draw Rhoda Groves aside, leaving Hood to converse with Rivers.

“I’ve been wanting a word or two with you,” Garth said, looking her up and down. His manner suggested that he was dubious as to whether she had definitely lined herself up with the scientist or was still willing to take instructions from him. There was no mistaking his intention to have a definite split.

“How’ve you been getting along?” asked Garth, attempting a conciliatory tone.

“Not very well,” said Rhoda bluntly. She thought she would let him worry about that.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, my dear man, you bring me out here to write reams of stuff about this miracle—you suggest that I nose around with your special investigator—and then you all shut up like clams and duck into hiding—and just as the man’s getting somewhere, you fire him off the job. Is that nice?”

The tone she adopted when she talked to Garth seemed to please him. He patted her shoulder. “Never mind, my girl,” he said consolingly, “we got off on the wrong foot. This idea of having Hood investigate was all wet. It was my idea—but I can see now that it’s created the wrong impression. You’ve seen the papers, of course.”

“Just glanced at them. I’ve been so busy chasing out to wrecks, and climbing ladders, and trailing long-lost husbands that I haven’t had time to powder my nose even.”

“That’s just it,” grumbled Garth. “Your friend Hood has turned out to be a regular Nick Carter. The whole thing lacks dignity. I thought . . .”

Rhoda’s knowing smile had a hint of contempt in it. “You thought he would sit down ponderously in your old temple, ask a few mysterious questions in a professorial tone of voice, and then give you his blessing—pronounced solemnly in Latin with two fingers tucked in, like a bishop. I don’t know why you’ve suddenly changed your mind, but he’s done exactly what he said he would do. He’s tracked down a lot of loose ends that may not mean anything—and yet might look funny to prying reporters—or the police. He’s satisfied himself that they are just loose ends—and is on the point of outlining a scientific explanation of your blessed miracle—and you come along and insult him—fire him off the job as though he was a plumber at a dollar an hour.”

The publisher’s mouth twisted in a smile that was appreciative of Rhoda’s impudence. It was a quality he could admire in women. “It’s no insult, surely, to terminate . . .” he said.

“Yes it is,” Rhoda snapped at him. “And Ogiltrie insulted him last night. If you want to make an enemy of the man . . .”

“Ogiltrie did?”

“Yes. Told him he was being *paid* not to believe. I suppose it’s too much to expect a rich man to understand an artist or a scientist.”

“Wait a minute—wait a minute!” blustered Garth. “You remember I said this afternoon—there’s a new factor in the situation. Well, not exactly new—but new to *you*. I’ll let you in on it as soon as Hood’s out of the way. It’ll surprise you—and it’ll give you some real stuff for the book. You’ll eat it up.”

“What’s it all about?”

“I’ll tell you to-morrow. We’re going to have a séance in the temple to-morrow night. Mrs. Leckie expects to get a message from Agatha—we’re going to open the testament she left—and we’re going to—well, you’ll get the whole thing to-morrow night. Just hold your horses—hold your horses.”

To conceal the curiosity and suspicion in her eyes, Rhoda glanced across the room at Hood and Rivers.

The scientist had greeted Rivers with a remark about his having kept out of sight for twenty-four hours or more. "Or perhaps it is I," Hood added somewhat mischievously.

"No," said Rivers, "I've been up the Sound. After we left you yesterday afternoon at the temple I decided I wanted quiet—solitude. I sailed my dinghy as far as Tranton's Island—camped there last night—and got back rather late this afternoon."

"You wanted to meditate—is that it?" said Hood sympathetically.

"Yes. This is a tremendous thing—an epoch-making thing. I wanted . . ."

"You went alone, of course."

"Certainly."

Hood smiled at him and shook his head half reprovingly. "I never met such a man."

"What do you mean?"

"You come out with the most innocent stories about the most suspicious actions—so unexpectedly. Somehow or other the stories sound *too* innocent—and yet—if you were trying to conceal something—you see what I mean—you would make up much better stories—stories that people could believe."

There was something so ingenuous in Hood's own manner that Rivers could not help smiling. "You don't believe I went up to Tranton's Island?" he asked, without a trace of umbrage.

"Of course I do. And I believe you slept all night in the temple the night before last. You see, I was a boy once, and I soon found out that the truth always sounded more incredible to my mother than some slick story I made up. Your stories aren't the least bit slick—so I believe them. I was never more ready to believe anybody in my life."

Hood smiled at him guilelessly, benevolently, like an old gentleman talking to a favourite nephew. "So you took a holiday—or is the plant closed?"

"The plant's closed."

"For three days?"

"Yes. What made you think . . . ?"

"I noticed the card in Ogiltree's studio. So I figured Garth might have closed his place for three days too. And then there's the 'three days' on the envelope Mrs. Weir left behind. It makes one almost look for a—a reappearance—in three days' time."

"No," said Rivers positively. "You needn't look for that. It won't happen."

"I feel quite sure it won't," said Hood meaningfully. "If there were any chance of it your board would not be so anxious to get rid of me."

"Get rid of you?"

"You didn't know?"

"Garth phoned and said you were ready to give us some sort of report—or state your theory—or something like that. Gave me the impression your investigation was closed."

"Well—that's true too—that's what this dinner is for; but, nevertheless . . ." The scientist stopped abruptly and stepped very close. "I take it, Mr. Rivers," he said, in a tone that would not carry across the room, "that you're entirely satisfied—I mean, you're *certain* it was a miracle."

Rivers looked sharply at him. "I have no reason to doubt—none whatever."

"If you *should* have—in the next day or two—here's my phone number." He wrote the number on a pad he took from his pocket, tore off the slip and handed it to Rivers. "I'm going back to New York to-night. And, you see, I believe you're more convinced it's a miracle than anybody. So that if a doubt should arise in *your* mind—I'd like to hear from you."

Rivers fingered the paper with a puzzled air and was about to speak, but Ogiltree was announced. A second or two later Spence came in. There was a buzz of conversation—about the newspaper reports—very cautiously steered by Ogiltree, and a movement was made to the dining-room.

"I wonder where Mrs. Leckie Smith has gone," Rhoda thought as Garth placed her at the table. "And who was the third man on the lawn?"

Coffee was served on a long, stone-flagged veranda overlooking the wide lawns at the back of the house. Behind the guests, as they sat facing the Sound, were the open windows of the morning-room, and Rhoda thought she heard a muffled noise inside as they settled down in a semicircle.

“It’s been arranged this way,” she thought, turning her chair a little in the hope of observing the windows, “so that somebody inside can hear what Hood is going to say. Is it Mrs. Leckie Smith they’re keeping out of sight?”

But her speculations were halted by a sudden hush in the chatter around her. They were listening to Hood, who was sitting next to Rivers, and had drifted into conversation with him on the topic which had been the reason for the gathering. “Go right on—go right on,” Garth whispered to him.

“Well, I was just asking Mr. Rivers,” Hood began in a louder tone, “if he remembered the old trick movies—twenty years ago. There was one in particular—a comedy—in which a man was being chased all over the place. You remember they nearly always had some sort of chase in the comedies in those days—well, and in the more serious pictures too. The chase,” he digressed, with a hint of deeper significance in his manner, “possesses universal appeal. To hunt—to capture—to *find something that has been lost*—it’s a great lure! However, I was going to say—the man in this comedy escaped his pursuers by all sorts of clever stunts, done with trick photography. He got on a roof, I remember, and when the crowd was within reaching distance, he jumped over—but instead of landing in a heap, he broke up into cubes as he went down. The cubes were strewn over the sidewalk like kiddies’ blocks, but they were suddenly jerked together, and there was the man again—alive—and he darted off in a fresh sprint. And then he ran through a lot of rooms and passages—flinging doors open—and when he came to one that was locked he reduced himself to the thickness of a piece of paper and slid under the door—the way you’d slide a letter through. I’ve often wished I had that picture. It would make an excellent introduction to a lecture on the fourth dimension. Audiences find it hard to *get in* to the subject. What I usually do is this.”

He took a letter from one pocket and a pencil from another. He unfolded the letter and spread it flat.

“This paper has only two dimensions—length and breadth. It has a little thickness, of course, but let us pretend, for the moment, that it hasn’t. And let’s pretend that it is a sheet of paper thousands of miles in extent—a flat world. On this world you could draw a picture of a man—like the one who slipped under the door—a man of only two dimensions—a flat man. Suppose that this man is you, Mr. Rivers. If you were really flat—living in a two-dimensional world—you would have no experience of thickness or height. Let me show you what I mean.”

He pulled a table toward him and rapidly drew something on the paper. Holding it up, he displayed a crude, childish picture of a man's figure and a square.

"In a flat world there could be no such thing as a room—with walls, I mean. There would be no height. A square would be the equivalent of a room—and the four lines that enclose it *would be sufficient to keep the man out*. The lines are merely the thickness of a pencil mark on paper—but that is also the thickness of the man. To *him* the lines are as thick as himself. He can't get over them or under them. In a perfectly flat world the words 'under' and 'over' would have no meaning."

Hood paused and smiled. "Don't get this mixed up with the old notion that the earth is flat. The world I'm talking about is utterly fictitious—merely to provide an analogy. Here it is. If a three-dimensional object—like this pencil—which has length, breadth, *and* thickness—were to enter this flat world—you see what would happen."

As he spoke he punctured the paper with the point of the pencil and pushed it through.

"It's impossible for you to look at this the way a flat person would. You see the pencil sticking out above the surface of the paper and below it. But the flat person—only able to see *flatness*—or, in other words, *lines*—would see only the tiny portion of the pencil which *goes through* his world. He would see it as a line. Is this clear, so far?"

There was a murmur which indicated that one or two of Hood's listeners had not been able to follow.

"Look," cried the scientist. "In your mind's eye—cut off the pencil above and below the paper—cut it off so that all you have left is the part that *goes through* the paper—which is the thickness of the paper—which is the thickness of a line. *That* is all the flat person would see—not a pencil at all—but a strange line which has suddenly appeared in his world, apparently out of nowhere—not made with hands, so to speak. In other words—a miracle!"

There was a stir of new interest as Hood used the word which had been in all their minds so frequently in the last few days. Rivers leaned forward and fixed his glance on the pencil as though hypnotized by it.

"Now," went on Hood, "let's carry the idea a step farther. Suppose this pencil were blue from the point to the centre, and red from the centre to the rubber at the other end—half blue—half red. If I were to push the blue end

through the flat world—the flatlanders would see a blue line, wouldn't they? If I kept on pushing until the red portion went through—they would see a red line. In other words, they would think that the blue line *had become* red, without anybody touching it. It would never occur to them that anything had *gone through* their world. They would say that the line had *appeared* in their world—*out of another*. And if I were to withdraw the pencil—like this—they would say that the line had *disappeared*—into another world, which they would not be able to grasp or understand. Either the appearance or the disappearance would be a mystery—a miracle.”

Rivers and Ogiltree nodded as Hood paused again. They were following his argument with concentrated attention. Garth and Spence looked blank. Garth was nearly asleep.

“You may have heard,” Hood went on, “that in some quarters *time* is regarded as the fourth dimension. If we go back to our red and blue lines, you will see how such an idea arises. When the red part of the pencil follows the blue portion through Flatland—the change from blue to red would not seem to occur in space. In other words, there would not be an appearance of two lines succeeding one another—one above the other. There would be no *above*. The pencil would be the thickness of a line—and the line would change from blue to red *in time*—it would *become red* the way a sunset changes colour while you sit and look at it. In other words, the flatlanders would say that the blue was in the past—and the red in the present. It would be inconceivable to them that the blue and the red could exist *at the same time*—*outside of their world*. And yet, you see, that *is* the explanation. The blue half of the pencil and the red half *exist together* in our world—and *they don't get in each other's way*. We can see the two halves as one pencil—as *one body*.”

“As one body,” repeated Rivers in a reverential whisper.

“Yes,” said Hood. “The analogy is really very clear. We are hazy about what the fourth dimension *is*—it's *direction*—so to speak. But if there is a fourth dimension—the bodies in it would *go through* our world the way this pencil goes through this piece of paper. But we wouldn't say they had *gone through*. We can't understand how a person could step through a brick wall, for instance. If any one did, we would say it was a miracle.”

“It *is* a miracle,” cried Rivers, flashing a look of triumph around at the others. “It *is* a miracle. *It has happened to us*.”

Rhoda felt satisfied, as she glanced at the faces of the four directors, that Mortimer Hood had made a deep impression on them. Rivers had evidently grasped more of the scientist's discourse than any of the others, and his enthusiastic acceptance of Hood's theory—although it was only half sketched—made them feel that they could accept it too, without properly understanding it.

There was a sudden flurry of talk—very hazy and disjointed—but one thing emerged very clearly. The attitude of hostility toward Hood had completely disappeared. He was regarded as their ally, and a powerful one, able to convince the world—by scientific demonstration—that their leader's physical assumption *could* have taken place.

But, if they were satisfied, Hood was not. Once having started on his favourite subject, he was not going to let them off so easily. He managed to stem the flow of talk and launched into another phase of his explanation, quoting such writers as Fechner, Zollner, Morosoff, Ouspensky, Hinton, Bragdon, and others. As soon as he dropped the analogy of Flatland, and attempted to hint at the possibilities of existence in four dimensions, his hearers found it difficult to follow him. Finally, after excursions into alchemy, theosophy, spiritualism, and metaphysics, he made an effort to sum up in simple language.

"It looks very much as though the normal, three-dimensional world that we see and know so well," he continued gravely, "is only a partial, distorted reflection or mirage of reality—falling as short of reality as a man's conception of this world would be if he could see nothing but shadows—like the man in Plato's cave. We all have our different ideas of eternity—but let me suggest this. If there is such a thing as eternity it must be a world where there is *less matter*—and *more time*. I wonder if I can make that clear. Our ideas about matter have changed a great deal in recent years. To-day scientists are leaning to the view that there is no such thing as 'dead' matter—or what we used to call 'substance.' Instead of thinking that force acts on matter—moving it or changing it—it is now generally recognized that the matter and the force are the same thing. It is *all* force. The only thing in the universe that isn't force, so to speak, is time. Motion in time is what produces—for us—the illusion of matter. In this table, for example, the illusion of solidity is caused by the motion of millions of molecules, whirling around like miniature solar systems, but very close together. When they are so close that their movements interlock, we say that they make up a 'substance' which is *hard*—solid. When their motion is freer—when we can see more force at work—more motion—we are not so conscious of what we

call hardness—and we call such substances fluids. When the motion is still freer—the illusion of matter disappears entirely—and we have what we call a gas—invisible to the naked eye. But there is still another possible step. Force can be rarefied still further, until it becomes practically *all motion*—and one of our names for such a state—is *light*. One scientist declared not long ago that if he knew how to devise the tools he could break up all matter into light waves—there would be nothing but light—a universe of light. If such a state could be achieved, all motion would be at the same rate, and there would be no slower or faster movements to permit the measurement of time. Time would no longer be cut up. It would be all together in one endless moment—in short, eternity.”

Rivers was about to burst out again into some rhapsodic utterance, but Hood checked him with a gentle movement of his hand. “I’m almost finished,” he said. “There is one more step to be taken to link all this with what has happened in your temple. The founders of many religions have used the word ‘light’ as a symbol of the supreme being or of the heavenly regions. When a person is converted he is said to have seen the light. Perhaps, after all, it may be more than a metaphor. It may be that a person who turns away from matter—from the material world—with all his soul and with all his strength—learns the secret of motion *through* matter into a world of light—which exists under and above our world, just as this pencil exists under and above the sheet of paper. In other words, this world of light may be something like the sea—fluid and continuous—whereas our world is like a solid net that is dragged through it. Clairvoyance may be explained, possibly, by the ability to see through the net—or even to pass through it. And, from a scientific point of view, that must be the explanation of what has happened to Mrs. Weir. In some way she must have learned the secret of passing through the net of matter into the fluid, fourth-dimensional world which is invisible to material eyes. It sounds rather poetical—but then I was never an orthodox scientist—it seems to me that the nearest approach to an explanation of this miracle of yours, in the language of science, would be to say that Mrs. Weir has been dissolved in light.”

“Marvellous! masterly!” exclaimed Rivers, jumping up and pacing to and fro in his excitement.

“I haven’t been able to follow you all the way,” said Ogiltrie more calmly, but with an air of deep conviction, “and yet—I can see—I mean you’ve made it sound somehow very simple—very believable. . . .”

“And scientific!—that’s the point,” blared Garth, who was evidently visualizing the thing in print, illustrated with diagrams and astronomical

photographs of whirling nebulae.

Spence shrank into his chair, scratching his jaw, as though the whole discourse had been miles over his head.

“Yes—as a publisher, Mr. Garth,” said Hood, rising, “you can appreciate the value of an explanation of this sort—and Miss Groves, too, of course. I’ve no doubt Miss Groves will be able to make it thoroughly intelligible to the great mass of the public.” He paused, folded up his piece of paper, and put it in his pocket.

“I hope you’ll overlook—er—our attitude—our impatience,” Garth stammered.

“I understand very well,” said Hood, smiling magnanimously. “You felt I was so much concerned with the visible that I would never get around to the invisible. But, you see, I wanted to satisfy myself that visible explanations were out of the question. Now—*since I haven’t found a single trace of Mrs. Weir’s body*—I can comfortably propound—well, I say comfortably; but, to tell you the truth, I intend to consult a colleague before putting my ideas into final shape. I’m going to New York to-night and will probably spend most of to-morrow with my friend Professor Weaver—who is perhaps the outstanding authority on the fourth dimension in America. I’m sure he will be able to help me to clarify my ideas. And to-morrow night—if I may I should like to attend your séance. It’s a long time since I’ve interested myself in that sort of thing. If you succeed in getting something through from Mrs. Weir it will be the best kind of confirmation of my—my verdict—or whatever you like to call it. And now—if you don’t mind—I’d like to run away and catch an early train in. At my age a good night’s sleep is very—desirable. Imperative, in fact, if I’m to have a clear head the next day.”

“I’ll get my chauffeur to take you in,” said Garth promptly.

“The train will really suit me better. I can think better on a train. But if he would take me to the hotel . . .”

“Certainly,” said Garth.

While arrangements were being made, Rivers plied Hood with questions. The car was driven up, and Rhoda, who had been talking to Garth, stepped into it.

“Ah, I’m to have company?” exclaimed Hood.

“I’m afraid you’ve tired Miss Groves out,” said the publisher. “She feels like a good rest too.”

The big car swung out of the grounds on to the highway.

“They wanted to get rid of me,” whispered Rhoda. “Having a meeting, or something. I had a feeling all the time that somebody—Mrs. Leckie, I imagine—was listening to everything you said—through the windows.”

Hood nodded. “Quite likely. You’ll probably hear echoes of my talk in the message they get from Mrs. Weir to-morrow night. That’s the way these people work. Really, you know, it couldn’t be better. Their séance is going to come in very handily. I couldn’t have thought of anything better if I’d planned it myself.”

“How do you mean?”

“By to-morrow night we should have enough evidence to—to point to the murderer. Enough even to convict, perhaps.”

Rhoda sighed impatiently. “There are simply millions of questions I want to ask you,” she grumbled. “Where did Gifford find the bedspread? And who . . . ?”

“Yes,” interrupted the scientist meditatively, “and why did Garth blink and splutter when I mentioned Buddhism and De Long? Do you suppose De Long has come down from the top of Mount Everest?” He looked abstractedly out of the window.

6

Garth’s chauffeur had been instructed to wait at the hotel and take the scientist to the station.

“This is fine,” said Hood as he and Rhoda entered the hotel. “I think it would look well if you came to see me off. Let’s get a time-table. Ah! here’s the faithful Gifford. What have you been doing with yourself?” he asked as the detective got up from a chair near the desk and strode up to them quickly. “You look like the cat who swallowed the canary. What’s . . . ?”

“Can’t talk here,” grunted Gifford.

“Wait till I get a time-table and we’ll go up. I’m off to New York to-night.”

“New York?” gasped the detective, glancing first at Hood and then at Rhoda. “What’s on?”

“Wait till we get upstairs.”

As they walked to the elevators Gifford said: "I was around at the morgue for a while. Man killed by a hit-and-run driver on the highway last night—just the other side of Garth's estate—you know the hill there near the cemetery. Thought I'd better look into it. These hit-and-run accidents turn out to be phoney sometimes. Remember that case where the woman ran over her husband five times, and then—well, just because this happened near Garth's place I got a little suspicious—but it's okey-doke. Feller was a tramp. Got a bad bump. Dead when they picked him up. Police can't trace him. Thought maybe we'd got hold of Weir for a while—but nothing doing. He's an eel, that . . ."

He looked quickly at Rhoda and stifled the epithet. "Had the boys up and down the shore all day," he went on, as they stepped out of the elevator and went along to the suite. "Another blank. No sign of Weir—*or* his wife. No boats stolen—or hired by anybody who would interest us. This feller Rivers owns a dinghy, we found. Went up to Tranton's Island yesterday—got back to-day—but a fellow down there saw him—going and coming—says it's a natural—goes up there often. She's not in the Sound, I guess."

"You said something about the morgue," said Hood. "They've got a morgue here, have they? Where is it?"

"Not a regular one. Bateman's undertaking parlours."

Hood unlocked his door and the three of them walked in, Gifford swinging his shoulders with an air of triumph.

"Better get it off your chest, Gifford," said the scientist, dropping his hat and pulling forward a chair for Rhoda.

"Well," drawled the lanky detective, strolling about the room and looking into the corners of the ceiling, "a little third degree stuff on Mrs. David Spence—and there's your case."

"There you are!" exclaimed Rhoda. "Didn't I say . . ."

"My dear girl," cautioned Hood. He turned to Gifford. "You have 'the goods' on Mrs. Spence, have you?"

"Yes, doctor—and how? Wha'd'you think of this? Mrs. Coulter says that on the night—of the murder—during the early part of the evening—Mrs. Spence was sitting in her room. Wha'd'you think of that? She was trying to find out if Mrs. Coulter knew anything about the trip her husband had made to New York with Mrs. Weir."

"And did she find out anything?" said Hood calmly.

“No; but that’s not it. She . . .”

“You mean she was there at the time Mrs. Leckie and the others called?” asked Rhoda eagerly.

“She was there before any of them came,” said Gifford triumphantly. “She was there *while Mrs. Coulter was preparing the egg-nogg that killed her*. Wha’d you think of that? Isn’t that hot?”

“Then you think Mrs. Spence . . .” Rhoda began, but she caught an odd half smile in Hood’s eye and held her tongue.

“Did you ask her,” asked the scientist, “if she left Mrs. Spence alone with the egg-nogg, so that . . .”

“I sure did. And she . . .”

“I was afraid you would,” said Hood, shaking his head. “That’s bad—bad!”

“Why? What’s the trouble?”

“I didn’t want her to know we suspected the egg-nogg,” Hood began.

“But you yourself,” cried Rhoda, “got up on the ladder and talked about dropping poison into it.”

“Exactly,” smiled Hood. “And I also talked about dropping a dagger through the window. Anything to confuse her. Surely you weren’t taken in by all those tricks.”

Rhoda looked blank, and almost blushed. “I don’t—I don’t understand,” she stammered. “What was the purpose . . .”

“Well, it’s done now, Gifford. What did she tell you?” said the scientist with a sigh.

“She *did* leave Mrs. Spence alone in the kitchen—with the drink half prepared on the table. Went into the pantry to get an egg. Time enough for the Spence woman to drop something in the glass.”

“Something—yes!” exclaimed Hood. “But the something was tincture of Strophanthus—not just anything!—not prussic acid—or . . .”

“Sure thing!” snorted Gifford. “That’s what got me going on this line. Soon as you told me you found the poison in old Coulter’s bathroom I got wind of something—and not the old dame either. She’s looked okey-doke to me, right from the start. But I figured she ought to know something—and by gad she did.”

"I suppose you asked her questions about the bottle of Strophanthus in her medicine cupboard," said Hood wearily.

"Sure thing."

"Yes; you would. My dear Gifford, I've been bad enough, goodness knows. I've got them so excited that they want to fire me off the job—but at least I haven't let them know what I definitely suspect. Don't you realize that Mrs. Coulter . . ."

"She's all right. It's the Spence woman. I wanted to see you before I . . ."

"Gifford! Gifford! This is a long, tedious, slow business. I know you don't like it. You like action. But any sort of move—now—on our part—will make it impossible. . . ." He drew his hand slowly across his brow. "You see, Gifford, I'm not worrying—really—in a way—about the murderer. I'm quite sure who the murderer was. The trouble is to prove it. What I'm after is the body. Now, look—I'm going to New York. . . ."

"What for?" demanded Gifford in a disgruntled tone.

"To throw these people off. I think you and Miss Groves should come to the station and make a sort of farewell ceremony of it, in case they—no—on second thoughts you'd better come with me, Gifford. That will leave the coast clear. If there are any reporters there we'll tell them we're going back to New York. Then we'll get off at the first station and take a taxi back."

"Take a taxi back!" echoed Gifford.

"Yes. Let's see. I want a train that stops at all the stations."

"But—what . . . ?"

"We can talk on the train. I've got to pack," said Hood, hurrying into the bedroom.

7

Hood was in a discouraged, disgruntled mood when he met Rhoda in the morning. They were in the restaurant where they had eaten their first meal together in Port Fletcher. Hood smiled wearily.

"Gifford and I have been up all night," he grumbled. "I thought this trick of going to New York might throw them off their guard. We had them all watched—had operators listening in on all their telephone conversations—what few there were. And literally nothing happened. Nobody made a move. Not a suspicious move—all night. The only one in the crowd that we

weren't able to watch was Weir. Haven't dug him up yet. Of course he may have gone. Ogiltrie, Rivers, and Spence went to their homes after the meeting at Garth's—it lasted till just before midnight. They all went home and went to bed, and apparently stayed there. Nobody went near the temple. Mrs. Coulter's light went out before eleven. The gardener's earlier than that. We couldn't find Mrs. Smith. Probably staying at Garth's place. The lights were on downstairs for half an hour or so after the meeting broke up, but the curtains were drawn—couldn't see anything, or hear anything, either."

He smiled again ruefully. "Goodness only knows what they've done with that body. Perhaps I was right. She must have dissolved into thin air. Maybe one of these people knows how to split atoms."

He picked up his knife and fork and stabbed his bacon viciously.

"Maybe they shipped the body away in a trunk—like that English murder," Rhoda suggested, half facetiously. "She was small enough to get in a suitcase, almost."

Hood went on with his breakfast, shaking his head from time to time and then smiling across the table helplessly. They were drinking their coffee when Gifford came in. There was a gloomy scowl on his face. He simply grunted and slumped down in a chair.

"I tell you, Gifford, we've got to think this out," said Hood, pushing back his chair and flinging down his napkin challengingly. "We haven't got things in the right order yet—or we'd see through it. There's something missing—but we don't even know what it is. We don't even know where the gap is, but there must be a gap. There *must* be a gap. If there weren't . . ."

Gifford did not raise his head.

"Let's look at this 'three days' business again," said Hood in a muffled voice, half to himself. "Is it simply symbolism?—or has it anything to do with hiding the body? I thought for a while that they planned on a reappearance in three days' time. Maybe they did, and the murder—of course—washed it out. If it *was* that, it doesn't help us. On the other hand, it may have been a device to give somebody three days to get rid of the body. Let's consider that. Where did it originate? Did Ogiltrie think of closing his place for three days because Mrs. Weir didn't want her testament opened until three days after her assumption?"

"The fact that it was on the envelope," said Rhoda, "suggests that it *was* part of a plan—and a plan that Mrs. Weir was a party to. And, if that's so, it

could hardly have had anything to do with the murder—or with hiding the body.”

“You say ‘the fact’ that it was on the envelope,” cautioned Hood, “but we don’t know that it was on the envelope. Nobody has seen it. Gifford couldn’t find it when he searched Ogiltree’s house for the bedspread.”

Rhoda swung around in her chair and stared at Gifford.

“Is *that* where he found the bedspread?” she exclaimed.

“Yes,” said Hood with an innocent air. “Didn’t I tell you?”

“You know very well you didn’t. You didn’t intend telling me. It just slipped out.” Her eyes rounded with excitement. “But that means—that means that you *know* . . .”

“There you are, you see,” groaned Hood.

“That’s not a ‘jump,’ surely. If he was so anxious to hide the bedspread . . .”

“He may have been anxious simply on general principles—anxious to hide *anything* that might ‘sully’ the miracle. Do you remember the speech he made to us? The fact that he didn’t destroy it makes me feel that he isn’t the murderer. He is the man who has taken it on himself to make the murder look like a miracle. It’s true he hid it where he expected nobody would find it—and *may* have figured on destroying it later. But he reckoned without Gifford. . . .”

“Where *did* you find it?” asked Rhoda eagerly.

“In the flush-box of a toilet in the basement,” grunted Gifford.

“Well, of all things. . . .”

“Let’s get back to this envelope,” said Hood. “He’s probably carrying it around in his pocket.”

“Maybe there never was an envelope at all,” cried Rhoda.

“Perhaps not an envelope—but there must have been a testament. We have two evidences of that. There is Mrs. Weir’s statement that she was working on it, and there is Mrs. Coulter’s statement that she was writing all evening. If she finished it and sealed it that night it looks as though she either *believed* in the date—believed she would *go up* during the night or the next day—or, that she had *planned* on some sort of disappearance. I think it was probably finished before she went to bed—in other words, before

Ogiltree got there. Her outburst against Garth in the afternoon suggests that the testament may have contained some sort of denunciation of the management of the temple. Called it a ‘tainted temple,’ didn’t she? Ogiltree may have read it on his way back to your meeting at the hotel. He couldn’t deny its existence. Too many people knew she had been writing it, and would wonder where it had gone. Perhaps he invented the ‘three days’ business so that during that time he could contrive a plausible loss, or a theft—or even a fire—to account for its disappearance. In other words, Ogiltree—all through this thing—may be quite innocent. He may only have been hushing up evidences of dissension. On the other hand, let’s see what happens if we take the view that Ogiltree was the murderer. If he is I’ve been wrong from the beginning, but . . .”

“I can’t believe it,” said Rhoda hastily. “I just can’t believe he’s the sort of person . . . and, anyway, poison is a woman’s weapon, isn’t it?”

“There have been plenty of male poisoners, my dear. However, I agree. I think Mrs. Weir was poisoned either before his visit or after.”

“Before?” Rhoda ejaculated.

“Possibly—in which case the problem is really the same. If he found her dead . . .”

“But she spoke to him—told him to come back in a few minutes.”

“He *says* so—but there’s where Mrs. Coulter’s deafness comes in again. She didn’t hear—or *says* she didn’t hear. Let us suppose for a moment that when the two of them went into the tower and Mrs. Coulter called to her—there was no answer. She was dead. All right. Ogiltree would have been as anxious to hide the body—or almost as anxious—as he would have been if he’d committed the murder himself. He would swear Mrs. Coulter to secrecy—invent a story for her—which she has been intelligent enough to stick to—yes—as I live, it’s falling together at last. I’m beginning to see. . . .”

He tugged at his hair and stared at the ceiling almost directly above his head. Rhoda and Gifford looked at each other and sat up straight. There was an expression of sudden discovery on the scientist’s face.

“Add these things together,” he shot at them, his glance still fixed on the ceiling. “Ogiltree invents the ‘three days’ closing—to give him time to get rid of the body. Then he invents the ‘three days’ on the envelope—and springs that on the meeting before they know he intends closing his store—or studio, or whatever he calls it. Makes it sound innocent and all of a piece,

you see. All right. Then there's our famous rain. Ogiltree was wearing his raincoat—wrapped her in it. Then there's the bit of glass—the broken bottle. He broke the bottle in his darkroom—*while he was wearing the raincoat.*"

Hood leapt out of his chair. "Come on, Gifford. Just because you chased Weir out of Ogiltree's store—that first night—we've been overlooking it."

"Overlooking what?" demanded Gifford, grabbing his hat.

"The darkroom, man—the darkroom. He carried her in there—knocked the bottle over—and . . ." He was already at the door.

"May I come?" cried Rhoda.

"No," said Hood sharply. "You go to the hotel and wait for us. Get those rooms for me again. We'll have to do this cautiously. I suppose the best way will be to get in the way Weir got out—through one of the other stores."

Ogiltree's place was on the opposite side of the street, not more than half a block away. "How far along are those basements connected?" Hood said to Gifford.

"We can get down through this Greek's place," the detective suggested. "Tell him we've got something on him. Leave it to me. I'll fix it."

They went into the fruit store and Gifford had the little Greek terrorized in a few seconds. He wanted to go down with them and show them what he had in his basement, but Gifford barked at him and he slunk behind a counter, trembling.

The lanky Missing Persons man led the way through a sort of underground lane heaped with debris.

"How will you know Ogiltree's place when you get to it?" asked Hood when they had passed through two or three doors.

"There's a lot of old demijohns and a heap of broken photographic plates in his cellar—we'll find it all right."

"We'd better be quiet, Gifford. He may be up there—or somebody may be."

They reached the door, listened, and Gifford swept his flashlight around. "O.K.," he whispered, and they crept like cats up the stairs. There was no sign or sound of anybody being there. On a door near the head of the stairs were the printed words—DARKROOM. KEEP OUT.

Hood walked on tiptoe and listened at the closed door. With a glance over his shoulder at Gifford he turned the handle and stepped aside. Gifford flung the beam of his torch along the littered bench, over trays and frames and bottles, and then swept the circle of light over the floor into every corner.

“No body here,” he grunted.

Hood snatched the flashlight from the detective’s hand and dropped to his knees. “But it has been. Look. Here’s where the bottle of pyro fell—see that stain—he’s mopped it up a little, but—look!—look at this—get down here, you lanky—d’you see the edge of the stain—it spread across the floor into this corner until it was stopped by her arm. . . .”

“What’s that?” muttered Gifford, bending close.

“Her body was lying in this corner—covered over with something probably—maybe a box or something—but the pyro spread under it—see—there’s the shape of the arm and two fingers—tiny little fingers.”

“Stung!” Gifford growled, getting up from his knees. “Means we’ve got to start all over again.”

Hood slowly got to his feet. “Yes,” he said thoughtfully, “and he’s had time—now—to get rid of the body.”

“For keeps,” grunted Gifford.

Hood stared at the stain on the floor, shaking his head ruefully.

Part VI

1

Rhoda Groves was reading the newspapers in Hood's sitting-room when the scientist returned. She had re-engaged his suite. At the sound of the door she glanced quickly over her shoulder. The scientist was alone.

"Where's Gifford?" she cried, jumping up. "Did you find . . . ?"

"One of his men was waiting for us downstairs. He'll be up in a minute, I imagine."

He spoke in a listless tone, standing in the middle of the room with his hat held awkwardly in his hands as though he was at a loss to know where to put it. Rhoda had never seen him look so insignificant and helpless. "No one would ever think he was a celebrated man," she thought. He might have been taken for a timid, retired little man of business who had strayed into the wrong room.

Rhoda walked over and took the hat firmly out of his hands. "False alarm?" she asked, turning away from him to put it down.

Hood's short legs carried him mechanically to a big chair in which he curled himself, tucking up his legs and letting his head fall back to stare at the ceiling. "He looks like a tailor," Rhoda thought, "with eleven children."

"No, it wasn't a false alarm," the scientist drawled, fixing his glance on the old-fashioned chandelier. "I was right—but I wasn't quick enough. The body's been taken away." He passed his hand wearily across his eyes. "I'm getting old—slowing up. I had all the facts necessary to that deduction yesterday—but I didn't see. It's really not in my line—this sort of thing."

There was a knock at the door and Gifford came in. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "They've got Weir bottled up," he announced. "Smelled him out by his cigarette smoke. In that gardener's cottage."

Hood's feet dropped to the floor and he sat forward. "What's that about cigarette smoke?"

The lanky detective propped his long body against a pseudo-antique tallboy opposite the scientist's chair. "I told Turnquist to keep a special eye on that goofy gardener. He's been hanging around there—him and Proctor—

the two of them. Just now they saw the nit-wit come out and start to work—poking about in his yard. While they was watching him they saw a puff of smoke coming from the root cellar behind the house—cigarette smoke—blue. There’s a sort of shoot down into the root-house—covered over with old planks. We was down in there when we searched the nut’s place yesterday, but there was nobody hiding there then. Turnquist is sure it was cigarette smoke—just a wisp of it coming up through the planks every minute or two. The wind would catch it and blow it away, almost before you could see it, he says. Figures it’s Weir down in there—hiding.”

“Good boys!” exclaimed Hood, rubbing his hands.

“And that ain’t all,” said Gifford, talking with his chin drawn back against his neck. “A guy of Weir’s height and description was seen last night hanging around in the lane at the back of Bateman’s.”

“The undertaker’s?” interjected Rhoda.

“Yes, ma’am, the undertaker’s.”

Hood stood up and put his hands behind him. “That’s where the body was that you were checking-up—the man who was killed on the highway. D’you suppose . . . ? Let’s see. Either there’s some connection—I mean, either he was interested in the corpse—or else he may have been snooping around—since they use the place as a morgue—to see if his wife’s body had been brought there.” He paused and drew down his eyebrows thoughtfully. “No. Mrs. Weir’s body was undoubtedly in that darkroom at the time he was hiding in the studio. He must have known it was there. He probably knows where it is now. May even have helped Ogiltree move it. It looks, doesn’t it, as though he was curious about this other corpse?”

Gifford shook his long head. “Don’t think so. This guy was just a hobo. Nothing on him. They’re going to plant him this morning in the bum’s burying ground, back of the cemetery.”

“Nothing on him?” queried Hood sharply. “That may mean . . .”

“Don’t get me wrong. He had a lot of stuff in his pockets—usual mess of stuff—but nothing you could identify him by. Don’t worry about him. I know a hobo when I see one—dead or alive.”

“All right, Gifford,” said Hood, marching up and down the room. “What do you propose to do about Weir—if it is Weir?”

“Who else would it be?”

The scientist looked roguishly at Rhoda and smiled. "Well—I've forgotten the exact population of the United States. . . ." He stopped, and immediately grew serious. "No. It probably *is* Weir. *But don't try to find out*—until he moves. If you arrested him now, he might possibly be able to tell us a good deal—with persuasion—but he may tell us more by what he does—or where he goes—in the next twenty-four hours. *We've got to find that body*, Gifford—we *must* find it. And he may lead us to it—some way—I don't know how. Have him watched—and followed—the minute he moves. Suppose you go out there and phone back to me here as soon as he steps out of that shoot. Put one of your men shadowing him while you do the phoning. Get his direction first. Maybe I'll be able to pick you up. You can phone from the temple—and there's a chance I may be there. Ask Mrs. Coulter if I'm there, and if she says not, phone here. All right?"

"Right." The big detective made a mock salute and ambled out.

Hood had regained his sharp, concentrated manner. He looked across the room at Rhoda, who had sunk into a chair by the window, and waggled a finger at her.

"Gifford's wrong," he pronounced, but in a doubtful tone. "I'm sure he's wrong. I feel certain Weir is interested in that other corpse."

"Why?" asked Rhoda in the curt, challenging tone she sometimes used in the hope of drawing him out.

"D'you mean—why am I certain?—or why is Weir interested?"

"Both."

"All right. I'll ask *you* a question. Why is Weir here? Why didn't he leave town when Ogiltree gave him the money?"

"Perhaps it wasn't enough."

"But, my dear girl, if he's blackmailing Ogiltree he could get money out of him quite as well at a distance. It would certainly be to Ogiltree's advantage to have him out of the way. Why is he here, then? Does Ogiltree *want* him here? Is there something Ogiltree wants him to *do*?"

"If so—what?"

"Exactly. Is it—or was it—to get rid of the body? But the body's gone. Of course it's possible they didn't get rid of it until last night. No, it couldn't have been *they*—because Ogiltree was watched all last night. Weir, then. All right. Let us say that he didn't dispose of the body until last night. Even then, why risk being seen in daylight to-day? Why didn't he sneak out of

town last night? It must be that *he still has something to do*. He was seen—or somebody like him—hanging around the lane. . . .”

“Who’s this?” said Rhoda, as somebody knocked at the door.

It was Gifford. He came in grinning with a telegram in his hand which he handed to Hood. The scientist glanced at the first few words and then, turning to Rhoda, read it aloud:

DE LONG LEFT INDIA FOR EUROPE IN APRIL STOP
SCOTLAND YARD REPORTS ACTIVE IN LONDON
THEOSOPHICAL CIRCLES DURING MAY STOP
CROSSED TO CONTINENT STOP PARIS SÛRETÉ REPORT MAN SAME
DESCRIPTION SAILED ON FRANCONIA UNDER NAME OF
RONSARD STOP PURSER OF FRANCONIA AT NEW YORK
DOCKS THINKS RONSARD MAY BE DE LONG STOP
RONSARD REGISTERED AT BREVOORT STAYED ONE
NIGHT CHECKED OUT NEXT DAY JUNE EIGHTH STOP NO
FURTHER TRACE

“June eighth!” exploded Rhoda.

“Kind of thickening up, ain’t it, doctor?” chuckled Gifford.

“It won’t mean very much?” said Rhoda slowly, “until we know definitely that De Long is travelling as Ronsard. Why would he do that?”

“He shook the dust of America off his feet,” suggested Rhoda. “Perhaps he doesn’t want to have the newspapers laugh at him—until . . .”

“Until what?”

Rhoda shrugged. “I don’t know. I’m just thinking out loud. The chances are he knew nothing about this miracle business until he landed in New York. Wouldn’t he have been here earlier if he’d been in on any sort of conspiracy? If he was in on it at all he’d want to run it—trust *him*. He’s a prize egotist.”

Hood glanced under his brows at her. “Perhaps he’s ‘the new factor’ that Garth’s been talking about. Anyway, Gifford—Weir’s the man we’re after at the moment.”

The detective took it as a dismissal. He waved aside the telegram which Hood was going to return to him, and hurried out.

"You order Abe Lincoln around as though you were the head of the Missing Persons Bureau," commented Rhoda, when the door was closed. "And, what's more, you make him like it."

Hood stared at her. "He's not a Missing Persons man. I thought you guessed it right away—as soon as I introduced him. Didn't you say . . .?"

"I thought it was queer that *you* had called him. Who is he, then, for goodness' sake?"

"Belongs to a private agency—Fullerton's. Came to me a few days ago for advice. I've known him quite a while. Did a very thorough job for me one time when I—well, never mind about that. He said he'd been engaged to look into the antecedents of our friend Mrs. Leckie."

"Then you've known all along."

"Just a moment, my dear. He said he'd been engaged by a gentleman named Spence, and seeing . . ."

"Spence?"

"Spence. And seeing that I was supposed to know all about mediums, he came to me—to see if I had ever heard of the lady. I had. When I'd told him what I knew, I asked about Spence—found he was on this Assumptionist board—an engraver in Port Fletcher who sold most of his output to Garth, the magazine publisher. So you see . . ."

Rhoda nodded emphatically. "Yes," she smiled, "I'm beginning to see."

"When I read that newspaper report about Mrs. Weir taking a sudden interest in Spiritualism—and then when you came along and started talking about Garth—I scented something underground—underhand—or whatever you . . ."

Rhoda nodded again, two or three times. "I was certain you knew something before you ever came up here. I couldn't figure out what it was—or where you'd got it. I suppose Spence wanted to make sure Mrs. Leckie was reliable before he took Mrs. Weir to see her."

"No," said Hood. "When I learned about the date business, I figured that Spence must have consulted Fullerton's *after* the date had been prophesied—in other words, *after* Mrs. Weir had paid at least one visit—possibly more—to the notorious Mrs. Leckie."

"Then it looks," Rhoda plunged, "as though Mrs. Weir may have commissioned Spence to investigate Mrs. Leckie before she took the date

too seriously.”

“I didn’t think of that,” said Hood, screwing up one eye thoughtfully.

“You didn’t think of it!” exclaimed Rhoda.

“No. I had an idea—and I still have it—that Spence wanted to dig into Mrs. Leckie’s past in order to ‘get something on her’—as they say—something to hold against her—so that he—or they—the whole crowd, I mean—could control . . .” He opened the screwed-up eye and stared at the tip of Rhoda’s shoe which she was swinging to and fro. “Then,” he went on, “then when they tell me she is here for a séance—is going to get a message through from the late lamented—*then*—well, I may be wrong, but it looks, doesn’t it—as though they want to dictate what Mrs. Weir is going to say.”

“Then you think . . .”

“I think that Mrs. Smith, *alias* Mrs. Leckie, *alias* Madame Ides, is much smarter than they are—any of them—very much smarter. And I think that if I were Mrs. Leckie—with public interest in Spiritualism definitely on the wane—if I were Mrs. Leckie, and I saw an opportunity to control the destinies of a wealthy sect by means of faked messages from a defunct leader—I might . . .” He stopped, shrugged, and threw his arms in the air in a gesture that somehow accentuated his gnomelike appearance.

Rhoda stared at him for a moment, impressed with the fact that there was something inhuman about him—something penetratingly sharp and yet mischievous—like the knowing air of a goblin who has learned secrets underground.

“Then you think . . .” she began again.

“Don’t tell me what I think,” laughed Hood roguishly. “Tell me what *you* think.”

Rhoda smiled. “You’re not going to catch me making any more ‘mental jumps’ in the dark. All I’m going to do is to classify Mrs. Leckie under the heading of what you call ‘the wrong person.’ We’re getting quite a number of ‘wrong persons’—aren’t we?”

“Yes—too many tangents,” said Hood impatiently. “Too many tangents. We should be worrying about where the body is—we’ve got to think out all over again where they’ve hidden it. The body first—the murderer second. When we’ve got the body—we’ve got the murderer. A little thought—a little trick—and we’ll have a confession. *That* won’t be difficult—but finding the

body—you know, it makes me think of the way they discovered Neptune. Do you know how they did it?”

“By accident?”

“Quite the reverse. It was discovered almost simultaneously by two astronomers—one in France and one in England—but before it was actually seen they had both calculated *where it ought to be*. It’s a marvellous story, but I’ll cut it short.”

“He says we shouldn’t get off on tangents,” thought Rhoda with amusement, “and yet here he is plunging into astronomy.”

“A man named Leverrier in France, and a man named Couch Adams at Cambridge,” said Hood dreamily, “were studying the eccentricities in the orbit of Uranus—another of the planets. The motion of Uranus was being disturbed, every now and then, by some unknown factor. In other words, it was being pulled out of place. These two chaps—working independently of each other—figured that it was being pulled out of place by the attraction of a hitherto unknown planet. They began to calculate where such a planet would have to be—its size, its orbit, and the time of its revolution around the sun. They did it mathematically, and then—as I say, almost at the same time—they swept the heavens with their telescopes and *there it was*. Neptune, you see, is invisible to the naked eye, and even in a telescope it looks like a fixed star. And if it hadn’t been for the eccentric wanderings of Uranus—causing some one to *think*—we might still be ignorant of the real position of Neptune, revolving around the sun every hundred and sixty-five years. You see what I am getting at. It’s no use *looking* for Mrs. Weir’s body. We’ve got to think—we’ve got to calculate—so that we can say, before we start anywhere, that *we know it will be there*.”

“But how . . .” murmured Rhoda, her mind dulled by the problem.

“Well,” said Hood, smiling at his thoughts, “when you come to think of it, that little story is almost a parable. Maybe the eccentric wanderings of Mr. Weir will help us. This other corpse—in Bateman’s morgue—seems to have pulled *him* out of his orbit. Why?—why? Maybe this highway accident isn’t the fixed star that Gifford thinks it is. . . .”

“You mean it may be another murder?”

Hood jumped up. “Where are the newspapers? Is the local paper here? What do they say about it?”

The Port Fletcher *Times-Gazette* was an enterprising newspaper. It was making the most of the local nine days’ wonder. The death of an unknown

man on the highway, which might have received a good deal of attention at another time, was hard to find among the columns of news devoted to Mrs. Weir's disappearance. Dispatches from all over the United States were featured on the front page. She was reported to have been seen in a dozen different places. A truck driver in northern Michigan had given her a lift. A nurse in a Vermont hospital had recognized her as a mysterious patient brought in for a dressing and spirited away again. A tramp had seen her hiding under a bridge on the coast of Maine. A woman in New Jersey had gone to a doctor and complained that Mrs. Weir's soul had entered her body and driven out her own personality.

Amongst all this was an item about Dr. Mortimer Hood having left Port Fletcher to consult a colleague in New York about the case.

"Garth gave them that, I suppose," said the scientist.

"There's what you want," pointed Rhoda, "UNKNOWN KILLED BY HIT-AND-RUN DRIVER NEAR HASKELL'S POINT."

The item was brief but conclusive. The injuries, according to the Coroner's verdict, were produced by the impact of a car driven at high speed which had hurled the deceased man a distance of twenty feet. There seemed to be no doubt that the man had come to his death accidentally, and his description suggested that he could not be associated with the disappearance at the temple.

"That seems to settle it, doesn't it?" asked Rhoda, but with a shade of doubt in her tone as she glanced at Hood's drawn-up nostrils.

"No," said he gruffly. "There's something queer about Weir's orbit. He ought to have left town two days ago at least—but he didn't. His rotation is wobbly. It's what the astronomers call a 'perturbation.' No, I'm not satisfied. I'd like to talk to that Coroner." He ran his finger down the news item again. "Dr. H. J. Parkinson. Look, Rhoda, get him on the phone and ask him if he will come over here. Tell him I can't leave the hotel. Give him the room number and ask him to come right up without mentioning to anybody where he's going. I won't keep him long—but it's important."

3

While they were waiting for Dr. Parkinson, who had promised to drop in within half an hour, Hood had fallen into the position which he seemed to favour as an aid to thinking—his legs thrust out and his arms dangling over the arms of his chair.

He broke a silence of several minutes by saying in a muffled tone, which startled Rhoda by its resemblance to a thin voice on the radio coming from a distant station, “. . . when? . . . when? . . . that’s the question. *When* did she drink the egg-nogg? *When* did Ogiltree find her dead? And—*and*—when did he—or somebody else—remove the body from the darkroom? The time—the times . . .”

His voice trailed off. He closed his eyes, and then, opening them and looking fixedly at Rhoda, as though seeing through her, he began again in a more audible voice: “Presumably the egg-nogg was drunk before the curtains were drawn around the bed. Presumably! Of course, the story about Mrs. Weir calling out from behind the curtains may have been cooked up by Ogiltree and Mrs. Coulter—in cahoots. She may have been writing much later than we’ve been led to believe. There may be some reason for making it appear that she went to bed early. If she was alive—and still writing—after Ogiltree’s official visit. . . .”

“But he brought the testament away.”

“You were there when he came back,” said Hood doubtfully. “He didn’t show it to you. He *said* he had it—and he said he had her last words—but—she may have asked him to come back later—not ten minutes later—but two hours later, perhaps. All right. If he didn’t go back until two hours later—long after the meeting had broken up—anybody could have done it—you could have done it, even—you see what I mean?”

“But the *Strophanthus*, or whatever you call it,” interjected Rhoda excitedly. “If it was in Mrs. Coulter’s bathroom—no one could have taken it and put it back unless they had access to the temple.”

Hood looked at her queerly, as though she had overlooked something important. Rhoda tried to interpret the glance, but his eyes were unfathomable. A smile lifted the corners of his mouth. “*Strophanthus* is very commonly prescribed as a heart stimulant. At least, it used to be. It wouldn’t be difficult for anybody to get it—at any drugstore.”

“What *is Strophanthus*?” asked Rhoda. “How does it work?”

“It’s a poisonous drug extracted from the seeds of a plant which grows principally in Africa and Asia. Explorers in Africa found it in use among certain tribes for poisoning their arrows—a good old tribal custom—nothing like as vile a business as our poison gas. On analysis it proved to have properties which made it fashionable for a long time as a cardiac tonic—a heart stimulant. Nowadays most physicians prescribe *digitalis*—but an old-fashioned practitioner would still stick to *Strophanthus*, I suppose. People

with heart trouble take three or four drops as a stimulant. A teaspoonful would kill—pretty quickly. I saw a man die in hospital once who had been given a teaspoonful by mistake.”

Morbid curiosity shone for a moment in Rhoda’s eyes. “What happened?” she demanded. “What did he do?”

“He just gasped and gagged and clutched at his heart. He was dead before anything could be done. I doubt if the—the victim—would feel very much pain. Mrs. Weir, for instance, may have experienced little more than a suffocating feeling—may have felt it was the miracle coming on—just her heart stopping. You see, it’s nearly colourless. In an egg-nogg, especially if she had chocolate in it—and brandy—she wouldn’t notice it. Of course, there would be a slightly bitter taste. Practically all poisons are bitter. But in a flavoured drink, like a chocolate egg-nogg, she might not have noticed it—in fact, she *couldn’t* have noticed it—until it was too late.”

Rhoda leaned forward and said in a level, challenging voice: “You must know more, Dr. Hood—much more—than I even suspect. You seem absolutely sure that Mrs. Weir is dead—that she was poisoned—with Strophanthus. You’ve been sure—how long?—I’ve lost all track of the days. Since the bedspread was found, anyway. But so far as you’ve told me—that’s the only evidence you have—a stain on the bedspread that proves that the egg-nogg was poisoned. You haven’t mentioned any evidence which proves that she *drank* the poison. It might have been spilt—*all* of it. It may not have been a murder—it may . . .”

“You forget the body,” said Hood, regarding her thoughtfully.

“But you haven’t found the body,” said Rhoda curtly.

“No; but we found sufficient trace of it to know it had *been* there.”

“What sort of trace?”

“That’s right, I didn’t tell you, did I?” said Hood, beginning to laugh. “The pyro you got so excited about left a stain on the floor—a mark where her arm had been lying.”

“Ah?” breathed Rhoda, and then she smiled. “The tricks I have to resort to—to get anything out of you.”

“You’re a smart girl, Rhoda Groves. Just as a reward I’ll tell you something else. *All* of the egg-nogg was *not* spilt on the bedspread—only a very little. And that’s something I’ve given a lot of thought to. Why was even that much spilt? Let’s look at this thing—as though we had been on the

ladder—observing everything that went on. Mrs. Weir is sitting at the desk—writing her testament. The poisoned egg-nogg is on a tray beside her. She finishes her writing. She has been too absorbed to think of anything else, but now she picks up the glass and takes a long draught. It tastes queer. She takes another sip—and sets it down. A strange feeling comes over her—a tightness at the heart. She thinks it's the miracle. She hurries to the bed, draws the curtains, throws off her robe and lies down—gasps—and dies!—thinking, all the time, perhaps, that this is her translation. Let's hope so. In a little while Ogiltree comes in—finds her dead. He is horrified—he doesn't know what has killed her—but his immediate thought is to make a miracle out of it. He looks around. He sees the rest of the egg-nogg left in the glass. He smells it—touches it to his lips—knows she has been poisoned. All right. He wonders . . .”

Rhoda suddenly got up and stared at him. “You *saw* it!” she exclaimed. “You were here—that night! It was *you* who borrowed the ladder!”

“No, no, no,” laughed Hood, shaking his head. “It's the *mind's* eye I'm using. Don't bother me. Perhaps I'm getting to something. Ogiltree wonders how he'll dispose of the rest of the poison, so that in the morning no one will suspect. He couldn't break the glass—let it fall off the desk. The stains could be analysed. Besides, the noise might bring Mrs. Coulter into the tower. He couldn't reach the window to pour it out. How could he get rid of it—in that room—no other window, no fireplace, a perfectly circular wall . . . ? So he carried it behind the curtains. What for? How could he get rid of it there? Perhaps he tried to pour it into his fountain pen or a cigarette case—or even into his pocket. Evidently, whatever he did, he thought he'd got rid of it all. And that's what I can't understand. If he had poured it into a cigarette case—or anything like that—he would have noticed it spilling—surely. No. There's something else. Something I can't get. He didn't know he had spilled any. If he had known he would have taken the bedspread with him that night. He didn't know there were stains on the bedspread until Mrs. Coulter told us the next morning. . . .”

“If all this is right,” put in Rhoda quickly, “he can't be in cahoots with Mrs. Coulter.”

“Right. Quite right. If he *had* been he could have got rid of the glass very easily. I must ask her about that glass. It may not be important—finally—but there's a little mystery about that spilling—and mysteries are made to be . . .”

There was a sharp double knock an the door.

“Dr. Parkinson, I imagine,” said Hood, rising and walking swiftly across the room.

4

The Coroner was a pale, obsequious little man, flattered at being called into any kind of consultation with the famous Dr. Hood. It distressed him that the information he was able to give about the man killed on the highway seemed disappointing and not at all what Hood was looking for. A few incisive questions satisfied the scientist that the supposed hobo really was a hobo, and that the accident really was an accident.

“It looks as though we are on the wrong track,” said Hood, when Dr. Parkinson had reluctantly departed. “It may turn out that Weir—well, that’s the next thing—to find out what Weir’s been up to.” He glanced about for his hat, which Rhoda had placed on the tallboy. “I’m going out to the temple. How would you like to stay in your own room for a while—in case Garth should want you. On my way out I’ll tell them to put any calls for me through to you. If Gifford phones—tell him I’m on my way out there.”

A taxi delivered him to the house door of the temple in a very few minutes. His ring was answered by a short, red-faced girl who stood and looked at him awkwardly.

“I suppose you are Emma,” said Hood, stepping in.

“Yes, sir,” answered the girl, closing the door in an undecided manner.

“My name is Hood—Dr. Hood. Is Mrs. Coulter in?”

The girl looked over her shoulder in a worried way, and at that moment Mrs. Coulter’s head appeared, thrust out of the library door.

“Good-morning,” she said, holding the door almost closed. “Take Dr. Hood into the tower, Emma. I’ll be there in a moment, sir.”

She did not wait for a reply of any sort, but promptly closed the library door. The latch clicked quietly.

Mortimer Hood followed Emma into the tower and took the opportunity of asking her a few questions, explaining that he was a friend of Mr. Garth’s who was looking into Mrs. Weir’s disappearance. The girl seemed dazed by the events of the past day or two. Her answers were ready enough, but she obviously knew nothing at all about what had been going on.

“Mrs. Coulter has a visitor in the library?” Hood asked abruptly.

“Yes, sir.”

“Anybody you know?”

“No, sir.”

“You saw him come in, did you? You’d have recognized him if . . .”

“I answered the door, sir. I’ve never seen the gentleman before.”

“Did he look like a salesman or an agent for something or other?”

A look of repugnance passed over Emma’s face. “No, sir. A queer-looking man. Kind of dead eyes—like a fish.”

Hood was about to ask something more, but Mrs. Coulter’s step could be heard in the corridor. She looked pale and disturbed as she came into the tower and dismissed Emma with a nod.

“You’re busy with some one,” said Hood immediately. “I’m in no hurry. When you’re finished will be quite all right.”

“It’s all right, sir,” Mrs. Coulter answered, rubbing her hands together nervously. “Is there something you wanted?”

“There were one or two questions—but I can wait. Don’t let me disturb you.”

Mrs. Coulter reddened and took a step or two into the room. “It’s just a friend of mine, sir—a private matter. There’s no hurry about it at all. Please go ahead, sir.”

“Well,” said Hood, adopting an easy, unsuspecting tone, “I was a little curious about the glass—the glass the egg-nogg was in. When you came in—that morning—the morning after, you know—where did you find the glass?”

“On the tray, sir. Right there on the desk.”

“Just about where you’d left it?”

“Yes.”

“And what was in it?”

“Nothing, sir. It was empty.”

“Quite empty?”

“Yes.”

“Not even a drop or two left in the bottom?”

“No, sir.”

“And wasn’t there a little dried sediment even in the bottom of the glass?”

“No, sir. It was clean.”

“Did it look, perhaps, as though somebody had wiped it out?”

“Well, I don’t know about that; but I remember sort of noticing, when I washed it, how clean it was. I remember thinking to myself, ‘She certainly drank every drop of it.’ I suppose it was because she was gone, and I was thinking about her—and sort of wondering how it—how it took her, sir.”

Hood put his hands behind him and looked at the ceiling. He spoke with his head still in the air. “Do you remember making this particular egg-nogg, Mrs. Coulter?”

“Yes, sir. Quite well.”

“You must have made hundreds of ’em. How do you come to remember this particular one?”

“Well—it was the last one—you see, sir.”

“Yes—yes—it certainly was—*the last one*. The ingredients were exactly the same as usual, were they? You didn’t have an accident with it—or change anything—or . . .”

“I was just going to say, sir—I remember exactly what happened—on account of—you know, on account of wondering the next day—all about it. I used to mix the milk and chocolate syrup first and then beat up the egg separately. And that night, sir, when I cracked the egg it didn’t smell quite fresh, so I washed out the mixing-bowl and went to the pantry for another egg. . . .”

“Leaving the milk and chocolate—already mixed—on the kitchen table—is that it?”

“Yes, sir. Then I beat up the . . .”

“Have you any way of proving, Mrs. Coulter, that you left the drink partly prepared on the kitchen table while you went into the pantry?”

The housekeeper gave him a puzzled look. “Why, yes, sir. I was telling Mr. Gifford yesterday—Mrs. Spence was sitting in the kitchen with me while I was getting it ready. She’d remember. . . .”

“Of course—of course. I just wanted to make sure that your—your story—is quite straight, Mrs. Coulter. It would be very bad if you were to vary it. Did you carry the glass right in after that—or were you interrupted by the door bell or the telephone? Can you remember?”

“I took it right in, sir.”

Hood nodded, straddled his legs and looked at Mrs. Coulter studiously. “Were you telling me the truth the other day,” he said quietly, “when you said you’d never seen Mr. De Long, the architect?”

Mrs. Coulter drew herself up. Offended dignity and a little flare of defiance appeared in her eyes. “I’ve told you nothing that isn’t true, sir. When you first came, sir, I figured I’d better tell you anything you asked—just as it happened. I had an uncle once who got into trouble with the police—because he tried to do a friend a good turn—lying about something. . . .”

At that moment a bell rang somewhere.

“There’s the door, sir,” said Mrs. Coulter. “I’ll get Emma to go.”

“I’d rather you went yourself,” suggested Hood quickly. “I’ll step into the—the waiting-room. I’d rather not be seen at the moment.”

He followed her along the corridor, and when they came to where it widened to form the entrance hall, he paused. The library door on the left was closed. The door of the waiting-room, on the right, stood half open. He nodded to Mrs. Coulter and took a step toward the waiting-room, but the moment she turned her back to open the outer door he took three quick steps in the opposite direction, turned the handle of the library door very quietly, and walked in.

Mrs. Coulter heard him, turned, and muttered something as he closed the door behind him.

5

Hood had purposely entered the library with his head turned over his shoulder, as though listening to something Mrs. Coulter was saying to him. He closed the door with a preoccupied air, as though he did not expect to find anybody in the room. But when he faced about he gaped in astonishment. He had expected to find the room occupied. All the while he had been talking to Mrs. Coulter he had been listening carefully for the sound of doors opening and closing. He was certain that the visitor in the

library had not left it while they had been conversing in the tower. But the room was empty.

Hood stood perfectly still, his glance roving about as though he could not believe his eyes. It was a good-sized room, and at the end farthest from the door was a small fireplace. Drawn up to the fireplace was one of the massive upholstered chairs. Hood looked at the back of it for a moment and then glanced quickly sideways at the glass doors of the bookcases ranged against the wall. In the glass he could see reflected a man's foot. A man was sitting in the chair, crouched low, with his knees crossed—invisible, except for the reflection of one projecting foot, which was not enclosed in a shoe but in a sandal.

The scientist cleared his throat, and drawing a chair out from the table in the centre of the room he noisily picked up a book. He turned its leaves with one hand while he perched his glasses on his nose with the other. At that moment he heard Garth's voice in the hall. The transom over the library door was open, and he could hear the publisher's voice quite clearly saying, "Where's De Long?" He spoke loudly, as though he were repeating the question a second time. There was no sound from Mrs. Coulter. She was evidently saying something in a whisper. Then Garth's voice sounded again, raised above an ordinary tone, "Oh, Dr. Hood is here. I'd like to see him." The handle of the door turned and Garth strode in.

Hood looked up from the book, glancing with an absent-minded air over his glasses. He saw the publisher look anxiously past him all around the room, and then glance back over his shoulder with a puzzled expression at Mrs. Coulter, who stood open-mouthed in the doorway.

"Looking for De Long?" inquired the scientist softly, before Garth could swallow his surprise. "He appears to be meditating in the chair there—or perhaps he's asleep." He nodded in the direction of the fireplace and dropped the book carelessly on the table.

Garth's eyes darkened in a sort of scowl. "I thought you'd gone to New York," he barked disagreeably, advancing into the room.

As he did so a man rose out of the chair and turned slowly toward them. Hood was impressed by the curious shape of his head. It was very narrow, and the pointed ears, flattened against the skull, were unusually long. Receding hair, cropped very close, gave the impression of a very high forehead. The nose was long and aquiline, and, above it, like two flat grey buttons, were the ash-coloured eyes which Emma had described as 'kind of dead—like a fish.' They seemed to be drained, not merely of lustre and

vitality, but of any interest in the physical world. They were the eyes of a man who had lived a long time alone, his thoughts turned inward, contemplating some problem or mystery within himself.

“There you are—De Long,” exclaimed Garth. *“This is Dr. Mortimer Hood.”*

“I came back from New York on purpose to consult you,” the scientist observed. “When I heard you were here I thought . . .”

“How on earth did you hear that?” demanded Garth truculently.

Hood drew his fingers down his sharp nose slowly. A patient smile came into his eyes. “You don’t seem to realize, Mr. Garth, that while I may be satisfied—with an explanation which sounds like Greek to a policeman—the police are not. That’s another reason for me coming back so soon; but I’ll speak of that in a minute. I am very glad that Mr. De Long is here.”

At the word “police” there was a stir in De Long’s ash-coloured eyes. He sent a smouldering glance in Garth’s direction. “Police!” he echoed, in a thin, throaty, unearthly voice.

“There’s no need to worry about it—especially after to-night,” said Hood quickly. “I think the séance you propose—if successful—and I see no reason why it shouldn’t be—will settle all—all the doubts that any one may have about Mrs. Weir’s disappearance. I have a feeling that you can help a good deal, Mr. De Long. I was saying to Mr. Garth only yesterday that occurrences—such as we have had here—instances, that is to say, of the influence of mind upon matter—are much more common in the Orient. My own theory—which my colleague Weaver feels is quite adequate, with some minor qualifications—is perhaps too scientific, too abstruse—to be readily understood by the great mass of the public. It occurred to me that your studies of the occult might give me a twist—even if it is only a matter of phraseology—that will . . .”

The sound of a bell, which Hood recognized as the house-door bell, caused him to break off. “In the East,” he began again, “they have a genius for stating these things simply—with the charm of a parable. I shall be glad to be guided by any suggestion that you can make.”

Mrs. Coulter, who had disappeared when Garth entered the library, passed the door.

De Long said nothing. He looked steadily and yet vacantly at Garth, as though determined not to open his mouth. The publisher, who had made no pretence of concealing his annoyance at finding Mortimer Hood on the

premises, seemed to be placated by the scientist's manner toward De Long. He turned to Hood, and in a more congenial tone said: "I was surprised to learn last night, after you'd gone, that you were acquainted with Mrs. Weir. I had the impression . . ."

"Very slightly," said Hood, with a curious glance at De Long's ashen eyes. "I met her four or five years ago. I don't suppose Mr. De Long remembers it—or rather, I don't suppose he remembers *me*. I believe we both met Mrs. Weir for the first time—the same night—at a séance at the home of Madame—a Madame Something-or-other—I've forgotten the name. I've also forgotten the name Mrs. Weir used on that occasion. She came—incognito."

De Long drew a delicate hand down his long jaw, but the expression in his dead eyes did not change.

"Then she'd been interested in Spiritualism for years," said Garth, an astonished and puzzled glance passing over his wide face.

"As a matter of fact . . ." began Hood, but at that moment Mrs. Coulter appeared.

"Somebody to see *you*, sir," she said, addressing the scientist.

"It's Gifford, I imagine." He looked at the housekeeper with a slightly amused expression. "The big detective, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thanks. If you gentlemen will excuse me, I'll run away. I asked Gifford to meet me here. I was going to tell you, just now—the police have been interrogating *me*." A smile of amusement at his own thoughts twinkled in his eyes. "They suspect everybody, of course—of everything—including myself. I want to satisfy this Missing Persons Bureau man that I didn't run away—or do away—with Mrs. Weir. Also I want to invite him to your séance to-night. It will do more to convince him than . . ."

"Mrs. Leckie will have to decide that," said Garth brusquely. "She insists on the final say as to what people are present. She can't work in a sceptical atmosphere."

"That's quite understandable—quite. But I think when she realizes the importance—however, we can talk about that later." Hood picked up his hat from the table and walked briskly across the room. At the door he slowed up, turned, and raising his hand in a beckoning gesture, said, "By the way, Mr. Garth . . ."

The publisher glanced uncomfortably at De Long, who stood aloof and silent, as though in a trance. "Excuse me," he said, and went over to join Hood in the doorway. The scientist had taken half a step into the hall, and as Garth approached he glanced over his shoulder at Gifford, who stood waiting near the outer door.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. Won't be a minute," he called. Then turning to Garth, whose attention he had purposely drawn to the detective, Hood leaned close and said: "You've made more than one reference to my refusing your cheque—the retainer you spoke of." He paused significantly, removed his glasses and focused an aimless glance through them at the floor. "It occurred to me—this morning—that I might find a use for it. If your very generous proposition still stands." He broke off and looked meaningfully at the publisher, as though there was no need to say anything more.

"Certainly—certainly," grunted Garth, glancing up the hall at Gifford. "Miss Groves gave me back the cheque, but it's there—in my desk—at the house. You're welcome."

"Could I trouble you to send it to me—at the Minnicog—some time today. Before the banks close, if you don't mind." He coughed, tucked his glasses in his pocket, and whispered: "You see what I mean. It would be better if your name didn't appear. . . ."

Garth threw him a shrewd glance and nodded two or three times.

"Well, I'll see you this evening," said Hood, and left him to join Gifford at the door.

6

"The rat has come out of his hole, has he?" asked the scientist as he and Gifford went down the steps to the drive.

"What the hell d'you think?" exclaimed the detective in a low voice, touching Hood's arm and drawing him behind a spreading shrub which shielded them from the back road. "*He's following that hobo's funeral.*"

"You mean . . . ?"

"We noticed this gardener feller acting funny—wandering around the grounds—and every once in a while he'd go to the big gate and look down the highway towards town. Then we seen him spot something and beat it back to his yard. It was Bateman's hearse—going out to the cemetery—about half a mile west of here. This gardener feller goes back to his yard and

gives Weir a signal—after looking all round. Starts chopping—just two or three swings of his axe—and off he goes—pretends to be fixing the fence along the road at the back there—so's he could give Weir a warning, I guess, if he saw any of us around. But he didn't. There's plenty of cover down there. So out sneaks this Weir guy and hoofs it down the back road towards the cemetery. What the hell d'you think of that?"

"Are your men after him?"

"Right on his tail."

"Along the back road, I suppose."

"Sure."

"Then we'll go by the highway. Let's hurry."

The two men started out, walking briskly west. "Well, this settles it," said Hood thoughtfully. "He *is* interested in that other corpse. And yet—I had a talk with the Coroner after you left. The thing looks straight enough—the accident, I mean. I can't see the connection."

He hurried along in silence for several minutes. They passed the pillars of Garth's estate, and the highway, following a bend in the shore-line of the Sound, twisted sharply to the north and sloped uphill. The woods on either side of the road thinned out. On their left they had a clear view of the bay, with cottages scattered along the shore. To the right was a farm, and beyond it, on the crest of a low, rounded hill, tombstones shone in the sun. A good gravel road went into the cemetery on the other side of the farm. It was flanked on either side with a grove of Lombardy poplars, which enabled them to approach without being seen. A little-used road ran to the westward outside the white wooden fence which enclosed the cemetery. The hearse had been parked opposite a plot of ground beyond.

"You stay here," said Hood. "You're too tall. I can dodge among these tombstones without being seen."

Leaving Gifford at the entrance where a group of trees afforded cover, the scientist moved warily among the graves until he reached a rise which gave him a view of the Potter's Field. The undertaker's men had just lowered the rough-box and were gathering up their equipment. An old gravedigger in a tattered sweater was standing with a spade in his hand talking to one of the men. At the north end of the field, in a hedge of wild shrubbery, Hood caught sight of a head thrust through the foliage. Some one, obviously in hiding, was watching the scene. He was too far away to be

recognized, but Hood surmised that it was Weir. The two detectives were nowhere to be seen.

In a very few minutes the undertaker's men had left the plot, the hearse drove off, and the gravedigger began throwing earth into the hole. The slow, regular thud of the earth falling on the rough-box echoed in the trees on the farther side of the hill.

Hood kept his eye on the face which still peered out from the thick branches. It did not move for some time. He shifted his glance to the gravedigger. The heap of earth around the grave was fast diminishing.

When Hood swung his head again the face had disappeared, but a second or two later a man emerged from the shrubbery, glanced about, ran with head down along the fence, climbed it, and then came along the path toward the spot where Hood was hidden, walking with a casual step and pausing now and then to read the inscriptions on the headstones. The man wore a tan suit and a faded felt hat. It was Weir. His gait was so leisurely that Hood was able to rejoin Gifford near the entrance and take up a position in the trees near by long before Weir strolled into view.

Then began a walk back to the town along the highway. Turnquist and Proctor were instructed to keep well in the rear. Hood and Gifford, taking advantage of every bit of cover the road afforded, and employing all the tricks which Gifford had learned in many years of shadowing criminals, kept as close as they dared.

Weir had quickened his pace as soon as he left the cemetery. His stride was strong and confident, and his shoulders swung easily, almost jauntily, as though he had thrown off all his cares and fears. He did not once look behind him.

"I can't fathom this at all," said Hood, his short legs throwing him constantly out of step with Gifford's long strides. "He hides away in holes like a rat and comes out sneaking and crouching—and then, all of a sudden, he throws caution to the winds and promenades along the highway as though he were lord of the manor. It makes you feel that this funeral meant a lot to him—the end of his troubles."

"Not so sure," grunted Gifford. "Maybe he's seen us."

"Would that make him change his attitude like this?"

"Sure," growled the lanky detective omnisciently, as though speaking out of a fund of knowledge of the underworld which was beyond the scientist's ken.

"Perhaps you're right," commented Hood doubtfully. "But it really comes to the same thing. He acts as though he doesn't care whether he's seen or not—which means, I think, that this something he has been hanging around to do—is done. The 'something,' so far as I can see, must be the disposal of Mrs. Weir's body. It seems to follow, then, that this funeral to-day had something to do with *that*. And yet—I don't see. He couldn't have substituted Mrs. Weir's body for the corpse of that tramp. She was a tiny woman who probably weighed less than ninety pounds, whereas this tramp—according to the Coroner—was a pretty big fellow—weighed probably a hundred and eighty or ninety. The undertaker's men would certainly have noticed a difference of nearly a hundred pounds when they lifted the casket this morning. And the same would be true if he had managed somehow to put Mrs. Weir's corpse in the box with the other one. Those chaps would have noticed the excess weight surely. . . ."

"If he got a chance to put *her* in that box," asserted Gifford confidently, "he'd throw in rocks or something to make up the weight. There was a case like that once—in Harlem."

"Yes—you're right—I remember it. There's a chance of that. We'll have to check up with the undertaker—make sure whether it could or couldn't have been done. But there may be another explanation. The tramp might have . . ."

"Listen, doctor—let's close up on this guy," urged Gifford, increasing the length of his stride. "He's going to pull a fast one—I can feel it in my bones. Did you see him slow up in front of that sedan there at the corner. I'll bet he was looking for us in the windshield. Believe me, he's not going to get away this time."

They had reached the heart of the town, and although the sidewalks were not crowded, it would have been difficult to catch up if Weir had decided to make a dash for it. They were now within a block of the Minnicog Hotel, and on the same side of the avenue. Weir was still swinging along at a brisk pace, and Hood and Gifford had lessened their distance behind him to a very few yards. A truck swung slowly into a side street with a clash of gears. Weir dodged in front of it and gained the sidewalk. Hood and Gifford were held up for a few seconds. When they caught sight of their man again he was well ahead.

Gifford broke into a run and Hood pattered along beside him.

"Well, what the hell d'you know about that?" exclaimed the detective.

Without turning his head, Weir had stepped into the revolving door of the hotel, and as they approached they could see him walking up to the desk. Gifford grasped the scientist's arm and watched. Weir seemed to be asking a question at the room clerk's wicket. After a moment or two he nodded and went toward the elevators.

"Come on," snapped Gifford, pushing violently through the door. "What did that guy ask you?" he demanded of the room clerk, who stared and straightened himself haughtily. "Come on—make it snappy—we're the police!"

The man blinked, looked about for the manager, and leaned forward. By this time Hood had joined Gifford at the wicket. "Why, he asked for the number of your suite, Dr. Hood," gasped the clerk.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exploded Gifford. "Didn't I say he was going to pull a fast one—but what the . . ." He dashed for the elevators, Hood following. A door closed in their faces, but not before Gifford had caught a glimpse of Weir standing close to the operator, muttering and thrusting something in his pocket against the man's side.

"You stay here," the detective said to Hood, holding his thumb against the button. "If he comes down in one of the other cars—yell 'Stop, thief!' or something—and get one of these bozos around here to help you hold him."

A door opened and Gifford almost leapt into the empty car. "Up! up!" he shouted, flashing a badge in the operator's face. "Third floor—fast!"

7

It was a maddened, crestfallen Gifford who stepped out of an elevator a few minutes later and looked down at Mortimer Hood from under glowering brows. "The little runt!" he spat out. "Just playing us. Got off at the second floor, I guess, and dropped out on the fire escape. What's the number of that dame's room? There's just a chance."

"Miss Groves, you mean. She's in 488."

"Fourth floor," snapped the detective, grasping Hood's arm and dragging him into a waiting car.

But Rhoda Groves had seen no sign of Weir. She stood in the doorway of her room, dazed by the string of questions Gifford shot at her. The detective swung round. "Going to stay here?" he blared at Hood. "Think you'd better. That rat is armed—may go to your suite. I'll be back."

He ran with heavy, thudding steps down the hall to the elevators.

“What’s been going on?” inquired Rhoda, looking curiously at the little scientist who stood outside her door with a subdued expression on his broad face. “Come in.”

“Won’t they want to know who the man is in your room?” he asked, his eyes regaining their twinkle as he stepped in.

“Tell me all about it,” said Rhoda eagerly. “I’m sick of being cooped up here like a prisoner.” She pointed to a chair and flung herself on the bed.

“Any calls?” asked Hood.

“Nothing important. Tell me *your* news first.”

Hood quickly recounted what had happened. “You remember what I said—that Weir was hanging around here because he had something to do. It looks as though this funeral was a part of it—perhaps *all* of it. Wait till I talk to this undertaker.”

He snatched up the telephone book, called Bateman, and asked him if another corpse could possibly have been substituted for the one he was supposed to have buried. The undertaker was at first certain that it couldn’t have been done, but grew doubtful under Hood’s acute questioning.

“There’s something wrong about that funeral,” the scientist declared. “I want the grave opened—right away. Can you do it without exhumation papers?”

There was an argument. Bateman said something about the Coroner.

“The Coroner will be all right,” Hood snapped. “I want him there. I’ll phone him now to meet us. Say nothing about this. Drive your hearse out there—just as usual. Take your equipment along to raise the box. I’ve got to make sure what’s in it.”

He dropped the receiver on the hook and turned to Rhoda. “Who called?” he asked, picking up his hat.

“Your friend Mrs. Leckie.”

“Ah ha!” cried Hood. “The fish rises before we’ve even got the bait. I’ve found a use for Garth’s retainer. No message from him, I suppose—a note?—an envelope?”

“They wouldn’t send it here, I imagine. It may be downstairs.”

“Where did she phone from? Did she leave a number?”

“Yes. She’s at Garth’s house.”

“Fine. Excellent. I’ll call her when I get back. When Gifford comes tell him . . .”

There was a knock at the door, obviously Gifford’s.

“You haven’t phoned the Coroner,” Rhoda reminded him.

“Right. How you do look after me. Let Gifford in, like a good girl.”

He picked up the telephone again and arranged with Dr. Parkinson to meet him at the cemetery at once. Gifford, in the doorway, said that his two men were seeking Weir. Hood joined him and they left Rhoda chafing in the room.

Hood and Gifford were the first to arrive at the cemetery. “Where’s that gravedigger, I wonder?” Hood exclaimed as soon as they stepped from the taxi. “Will you look him up while I take a squint at this grave?”

The scientist hurried to the freshly filled hole and made a slow circuit of it, bending over and examining the earth, the spade marks, the broken sod which had been replaced. Gifford found him on his knees, peering through his glasses at a piece of turf which lay in his palm.

“What’s the idea?” the detective exclaimed as he came up with the stooped old man in a tattered sweater who looked after the cemetery.

“I really don’t know,” said Hood, glancing up abstractedly. “I don’t know what I’m looking for. But there must be *something* here that connects with—with what we’re looking for.” He rose to his feet and looked intently at the old man who was regarding him in a bewildered way through his puckered, aged eyes.

“I suppose you know Mr. Garth?” said Hood.

“Yup,” replied the gravedigger.

“Been talking to him lately?”

“No, sir. Not for a couple o’ years.”

“Do you know Thomas Weir who used to live here—Mrs. Weir’s husband?”

“Used to. But he ain’t been around these ten years or more.”

“When did you dig this grave? This morning?”

“Nope. Last night. Overtime I gets for that. Got orders for it jest at six o’clock—jest as I was a-quittin’. Got it done afore dark.”

“Here’s the Coroner,” said Gifford.

Dr. Parkinson was walking across the plot. Along the road, between the poplars, the hearse was approaching. After a few minutes’ discussion it was agreed to open the grave and settle Mortimer Hood’s doubts as to what was in the rough-box. The old man threw off his sweater, spat on his hands, and began throwing out the earth he had so recently filled in. It was loose and dry, and the job was a comparatively light one. The undertaker’s men brought apparatus from the hearse to haul up the box, and stood at the graveside waiting. The sun blazed down unmercifully, and with every toss of his spade the old gravedigger flung drops of sweat from his brow. Mortimer Hood paced up and down impatiently, his hands locked behind his back, his fingers fidgeting. Gifford, with a disgruntled look on his face, stood like a statue, supporting his long chin in one hand.

At last the old man’s spade could be heard scraping on the wood of the box. Hood came up and looked into the hole. Bateman and his men lowered ropes, which the gravedigger placed under both ends of the coffin. It was pulled up quickly, the old man sitting astride it, and Bateman attacked the lid with an iron bar as soon as it was placed on the ground, prying up the creaking boards one by one. Hood, Gifford, and the Coroner crowded close. With an impatient gesture Gifford ripped off one of the boards with his hands and bent over.

“Just what I thought!” he growled, flinging his arms up and letting them fall flapping against his sides.

“Wait, now,” cried Hood, staring at the disfigured head of the corpse. “This is unquestionably the man you held the inquest on?” he asked the Coroner, who murmured a quick assent. “And there is nothing changed in the coffin since you nailed it up this morning?” he said to Bateman.

“Not a thing,” said the undertaker.

“Stung again!” blared Gifford, swinging in circles on his heels to work off his exasperation.

“Wait, Gifford, wait! There must be something.”

“It’s crazy! The whole thing’s crazy!”

“He came out here for something—to *watch* something—to make sure something was done—ended—finished,” exclaimed the scientist, his eyes

furious with thought. "There's something here."

He threw off his hat, turned his back on them and strode away. Suddenly he wheeled about and almost ran up to the gravedigger. "You say you dug this grave last night. Then it was open all night. *That's* it. That's where it is. *Under* the coffin. Jump down in there, man, and dig!"

"What are ye lookin' for?" gasped the old man in amazement.

"Never mind. You'll see," said Hood nervously. "Get down there and dig." He leaned over the grave, and Gifford grasped his arm to keep him from falling in. "Is the earth soft?" he called to the old man as soon as he had clambered down.

"Yes, sir. It's been fresh dug."

"Dig carefully then. Just throw the earth to one side."

Hood stood watching the thrust and swing of the spade. Suddenly the gravedigger raised his perspiring face, his eyes goggling with horror. "You're right, sir," he yelled up. "There's a body here. Look. There's the foot."

A naked foot could be seen, half cleared of earth.

"Uncover the face," cried Hood. "Go easily."

The old man turned about in the grave, bent down and began throwing the earth aside with his hands. A black cloth concealed the head. He loosened it and shrank back. "Good God!" he groaned, "it's Agatha Weir!"

The others, leaning over, could see the tiny face.

"At last!" breathed Hood, stretching his arms wide.

"Well, I'll be go to hell!" muttered Gifford solemnly, staring down into the grave.

Part VII

1

The body, covered with the black photographer's cloth in which it had been found, lay on a slab in the embalming-room of Bateman's undertaking parlours. The Coroner had gone for his instruments, with the intention of performing an autopsy immediately. Gifford was already scouring the town in search of Ogiltree.

"Don't arrest him," had been Hood's parting injunction. "We'll get a warrant later. Tell him that something's happened to Weir. Let him ask all the questions he likes—don't answer them. Tell him I'm waiting for him at Bateman's—and don't let him get in touch with anybody—by telephone, or any other way. Don't leave him for a second, once you've got him. If he resists—or wants to talk to his lawyer—you'll have to tell him he's under arrest—but that I'm anxious *it shouldn't look like an arrest*. Try to avoid an argument. Make him think it's something to do with Weir. And don't come through the town. Get a taxi and drive round the back streets."

The door of the embalming-room was closed. Bateman and his two helpers stood outside, talking in low tones, gesticulating nervously.

Hood, who had been pacing up and down in the display room, filled with caskets, went back through the office and laid his hand on Bateman's shoulder. "I want you and your men to forget all about this—at least until the morning," he said forcefully. "There mustn't be a whisper of it outside. If you so much as mention it—even to your wives—you may be defeating justice. It's of the utmost importance that the murderer *should not know the body's been found*. Also the Assumptionist directors should be given an opportunity to—well, to consider the tragedy—and its effect on . . . I mean, they will no doubt want to make some public statement. I'm going to break the news to Mr. Ogiltree first. He is the leader now. Mr. Gifford has gone to find him. When he comes I would like to talk to him here in the office."

Bateman and his helpers promised to observe Hood's wishes. They went through into the display room, Bateman lingering for a moment to say: "This will be a terrible blow—to the whole town. It's horrible, doctor—horrible! A marvellous woman like her. I can't get over it."

He stroked one temple nervously and withdrew his shining, bald head from the doorway, leaving the scientist in possession of the office.

Hood sat down at the desk and beat a tattoo with his finger-tips on the arm of the chair. He suddenly realized that he was hungry. It was mid-afternoon. He jumped up and went to the door.

“Could I get some sandwiches and coffee sent in?” he called out to Bateman.

One of the men went out to get what he wanted, and soon returned with a tray. Hood had only half finished the first sandwich when he heard Gifford’s voice. In a moment his heavy steps could be heard crossing the floor of the display room, accompanied by some one with almost as heavy a tread. Hood picked up his coffee cup and had his head bent, taking a sip, when Ogiltree walked into the office with the big detective close behind him.

“I’ve had no lunch,” said Hood, setting down the cup. “Sit down, Mr. Ogiltree, won’t you? I’ll finish this, if you don’t mind, while you’re talking. Perhaps you’ll be good enough to tell us what you know about Mr. Weir’s doings during the past few days—and nights!”

Ogiltree stood very erect, but the veins on his temples throbbed visibly with the effort he was making to conceal his alarm. When he spoke his voice was hoarse, as though his throat were very dry. “Has Weir been killed?” he asked, sitting down opposite Hood at the desk and clasping his hands tightly.

“We want answers, Mr. Ogiltree—not questions,” insisted Hood, frowning.

“I have nothing to say. If you want to know what Weir’s been doing, why don’t you ask him?”

“Very well. We’ll come nearer home,” said Hood severely. “What have *you* been doing?”

The photographer flushed and jumped up; but he was hardly on his feet before Gifford clapped a heavy hand on his shoulder. “Sit down!” he blared.

Ogiltree’s eyes were blazing. He swung himself out of the detective’s grasp and leaned over the desk. “Is this a police investigation?” he shot at Hood. “You’re not a policeman, are you?”

“No, I’m not,” said the scientist calmly, picking up the second half of his sandwich. “If you would prefer to talk to the police, Gifford will be glad to escort you to the station. Won’t you, sergeant?”

“You’re damn hootin’.”

Hood held the sandwich close to his mouth. “I thought you would much prefer to talk to me—before the police and the whole town know—that your miracle is not quite so holy an event as . . .” He raised his hand and held it open in the air.

Ogiltree sat down again and leaned toward the scientist. “You’ve discovered something, Dr. Hood?” he said, with a tremendous effort to control the shake in his voice. “But until I know what information you want from me I can’t tell whether I can answer—or not. If you’d tell me where your suspicions rest.”

Hood dropped the half-eaten sandwich on the plate and pushed it away. “All right,” he said sharply, “I’ll tell you what I suspect. I gave you your chance to talk. You wouldn’t take it.” He wiped his mouth on the napkin and threw it aside. “I suspect that Mrs. Weir was murdered. Whether you murdered her—or some one else—is not of vital importance at the moment. I suspect you of removing the body from the tower room.”

“What’s the use of suspecting if you have no evidence?” demanded Ogiltree.

“Keep quiet!” Gifford blared.

“I *have* the evidence,” said Hood gravely. “I will come to that presently. In the meantime I’ll tell you what I suspect. I suspect that you wrapped Mrs. Weir’s body in your raincoat—I suspect that you carried it out to your car and placed it in your darkroom. I suspect that you then gave a great deal of thought to the location of a final hiding-place. You were in no great hurry. You had closed your place of business for three days. While you were thinking it out *a tramp was killed on the highway. . . .*”

Hood paused, and watched the colour go out of Ogiltree’s face.

“I suspect,” he went on, “that you—or Weir—Weir, more likely—waited until the grave was dug—went out there last night—dug it a little deeper—put your body in it, and covered it over with an inch or two of earth. The tramp was buried this morning. The grave was filled up. No one would ever have suspected! It was a stroke of genius, almost—and if Weir hadn’t gone there this morning, to make sure it would all go off as you’d figured—well, no—if he hadn’t been *seen* there—which was due to a few puffs of cigarette smoke—you might have had your astonishing miracle!”

Hood sat back in the swivel chair and looked fixedly at Ogiltree’s shifting eyes.

"I suppose you'd like to know on what evidence I base all this," he added when the photographer did not speak.

"Yes," said the other in a changed tone, his head sinking and his hands slipping into his lap. "Yes, Dr. Hood, I would."

"My first suspicion rested on you when the bedspread disappeared so quickly—a few minutes after Mrs. Coulter said it was stained. The bedspread was found in your house. We had it."

"You found it?" Ogiltree gasped.

"Yes. And we left it there, except for the stained portion, which we had analysed. The analysis showed that the egg-nogg had been poisoned with tincture of Strophanthus."

Ogiltree raised a shaking hand. "I swear I knew nothing about that. I knew she'd been poisoned, but I didn't know . . ."

"You had your chance to talk. Now it's my turn. If you hadn't broken the pyro bottle when you carried Mrs. Weir's body into your darkroom—but, you see, it's always these little accidents that spoil the neatest plans. A piece of the bottle lodged somehow in your raincoat and was found in your car. The deduction was obvious. You had last used your raincoat on the night of the murder—evidently you had gone into your darkroom with it on. And since a photographer doesn't work in his darkroom in his raincoat except under some very special emergency—we decided what the emergency was. We went to your studio. The pyro had stained the floor. You had mopped up a good deal of it, but some of it spread into the corner of the darkroom where you had placed the body. Without a strong flashlight you wouldn't notice it, but it had left a mark of a hand and arm—the outline of two fingers and the lower arm—a tiny arm."

Ogiltree shuddered. "And is Weir dead too?" he breathed out.

"What makes you think Weir is dead?"

Ogiltree raised his head and gazed wildly about him. "Why are you here, then?"

"I'll show you," said Hood, solemnly rising and opening the door.

"No, no! I won't look—I won't look!" Ogiltree cried, as Hood raised the black cloth and revealed the dead discoloured face. He covered his eyes with

his hands and swung away; but Gifford was standing in the doorway of the embalming-room, blocking his exit.

“This body must be identified beyond question,” said Hood sternly, “before anything else is done.”

“There’s no need. You can tell—any one can tell—the size—just the size. . . .” But as he spoke he dragged himself forward, glanced quickly at the face, and turned away again, shivering violently. “Yes, yes—it is Agatha Weir,” he whispered.

“All right,” said Hood, “let’s go back to the office.”

“Perhaps you’ll talk now,” he added when they were seated again. Gifford was in a chair placed with its back against the office door. He had his notebook on his knee.

“I didn’t poison her,” Ogiltrie began in a broken voice. “If you know all this, surely you know who poisoned her. . . .”

“*You* don’t know,” said Hood peremptorily. “Would you swear to that?”

“Certainly—yes—I haven’t asked a question of any one. I’ve hardly dared to think about it—for fear I’d betray what I knew. That’s why—but I’ll tell you—I’ll tell you from the beginning. Garth wanted me to go to the temple that night and get Agatha’s consent to my becoming leader—temporarily—until . . .”

“Did he make a point of it—that it was only temporary?” said Hood.

“Yes; it was understood between us. He was keeping De Long in the background. You knew that, didn’t you? The way you asked about him that next morning made me think . . .”

“How long has De Long been—in the background, as you say?”

“The night before—what day was that?—my God, what days these have been? The eighth, wouldn’t it be?—the night before she died.”

“*The night before she died!*—have you got that, Gifford?” said Hood. “You mean,” he added, turning to Ogiltrie again, “that he was here in Port Fletcher. Staying at Garth’s house, I suppose.”

“Yes. It was a coincidence that he came back—just then—just when the date of the miracle was fixed. At first I didn’t believe it. It looked too much as though it had been planned—but they convinced me. . . .”

“You’re still convinced?”

“Yes. Of course, he and Garth *did* start to plan as soon as he came on the scene—but that’s another part of it. You want *my* story.”

“I do, but—briefly; what was their plan?”

“Simply to get rid of Agatha. She’d been talking about giving up the temple—to go into—a retreat, I think she called it. Anyway—isolate herself, and wait for the miracle. If Spence hadn’t persuaded her to see this medium she’d have done it, I think. But when they prophesied the date—so close—I suppose she thought she’d wait—at least till then. Garth butted into the thing—just when she was all wrought up. Thought his money would help persuade her to give up the leadership. He had De Long up his sleeve—knew enough to keep him out of it until he could get it all settled; but, of course, he never got it settled. She evidently convinced him that the miracle—or something like it—was going to happen on the tenth, and that after that he could do what he liked. I can’t figure out yet whether he believed her, and wanted you and Miss Groves on hand to make the most of a sensational story—or whether he thought it was some sort of bluff, and wanted you here to catch her at it. You may know more about that than I do.”

“You and Garth are not very close, I take it,” said Hood.

“We’re not. We’ve had to tolerate him—right along—because Agatha made the mistake of accepting his money. She admitted it was a mistake—lamented it—as much, or more than we did.”

Mortimer Hood leaned back in the swivel chair and clasped his hands behind his head. “You know, Ogiltree, I wish I could believe you. You’ve been hiding something from the first moment I saw you, and you’re probably hiding something still. However, go on. Tell me what happened at the temple. You’ve told one set of lies about it—let’s hear the new ones. And get it all down, Gifford. Stop him if he goes too fast.”

Ogiltree glanced from one to the other despairingly, as though for the first time in his life he did not expect to be believed. “I *did* lie about my visit to the temple,” he began in a toneless voice. “The moment Mrs. Coulter opened the doors into the tower I knew something was wrong. Agatha was behind the curtains—she was gasping—groaning. I thought she was in the throes of her miracle. I was about to drag Mrs. Coulter back, but there was something so horrible about the way—it was like a shudder, only loud enough to carry across the room. Before I could speak, Mrs. Coulter turned to me and asked, ‘Did you catch what she said?’ I looked at her in amazement. I knew she was a little deaf, but it seemed incredible that she had mistaken Agatha’s groaning for—for speech. But her face . . .”

“Yes,” said Hood quickly, “what was her face like?”

“Perfectly unconcerned—and, you know the way a deaf person looks—sort of worried and puzzled.”

“Wait—this is important—did you get that, Gifford?—‘perfectly unconcerned’—and yet ‘worried and puzzled.’ Can’t you describe more clearly . . .”

“What I mean is that she didn’t look startled by the sounds coming from the bed—simply worried because she thought she hadn’t heard what Agatha said.”

“All right. Tell me: was this look of concern almost *too* perfect to be believable? Could it have been put on?”

Ogiltree jerked himself upright and stared. “You don’t mean you think—Mrs. Coulter . . .”

“There is more than one explanation for Mrs. Coulter feigning deafness at that moment—if it *were* feigned.”

“I can’t believe it was. If she had heard she must have shown some horror in her eyes.”

“Did Mrs. Coulter see any horror in yours?”

Ogiltree licked his lips. “She wasn’t looking at me. She had her head on one side—listening. I had time to think. It never occurred to me that she’d been murdered—but I was sure she was dying. I heard a shuddering rattle like that once in a hospital. ‘Perhaps she has to die,’ I thought, ‘before her body is translated.’ And my next thought was to get Mrs. Coulter out of the room.”

“Why?”

Again Ogiltree stared, but his eyes shifted before the scientist’s penetrating glance. He raised both hands in the air helplessly, almost imploringly. “I might as well tell you. It turned out I was right, but I mightn’t have been. There might have been a miracle if some one hadn’t . . .” He shook his head tragically, with the air of a man wounded to the core. “Anyway, I doubted. After all these years—I couldn’t believe. It flashed through my mind that—that she had tempted God—and that she was dying—in some sort of hysteria. And—right then—the idea came to me—to hide her body—and let the world think . . .”

Hood leaned forward with the inexorable manner of a judge. "You would like us to believe that this 'idea' came to you then—in a flash—in the moment that intervened between Mrs. Coulter's question—'Did you catch what she said?'—and *your* answer—'She says for me to come back in ten minutes.' You ask us to believe that?"

"Yes," said Ogiltrie simply.

"You expect us to believe that the idea of hiding her body came to you before she was dead. She might have been in some sort of fit. You say yourself you thought it might be hysteria—but you didn't trouble to find out—you invented this business of 'ten minutes' on the spur of the moment—in a moment of horror—and you left her there to die!"

3

Tears of vexation and grief trembled in Ogiltrie's eyes. "I don't suppose you can understand," he mumbled brokenly. "I thought it was a miracle—but not the miracle she expected. I thought it was a miracle—of punishment. And I couldn't stand it. I couldn't stay in that room. I said the first thing that came into my mind that would get us both out, and then I waited—hoping I don't know what."

"All right," said Hood, watching the other keenly. "And after a while you went back—hoping, I suppose, that she was dead."

"I waited fifteen minutes—in the library. Then I went into the tower and stood in the doorway and called. There was no answer—not a sound. I screwed up my courage to look through the curtains around the bed. It wasn't only courage—I was embarrassed. I called again as loudly as I dared, and then I looked in. She was lying twisted on that black spread—naked—and I knew she was dead—her eyes were staring and her jaw had dropped. I shall never forget it." He closed his eyes and pressed one hand against his brow. "I stepped outside of the curtains and thought it all out—what I would do. I figured I would leave her gown lying there, where she'd left it, on the edge of the bed. I had my raincoat on, and I thought I could wrap her in that. Then I looked around the room to see if everything was the way it should be—if they were to think, in the morning, that it was a miracle. I walked over to the desk and there was the testament. I'd forgotten all about it. It was finished and signed, and beside it on the desk was a glass with part of her egg-nogg left in it."

"How much?"

“A little more than an inch. At first I thought I’d leave it, and then I said to myself—‘Why didn’t she drink it all? Will any one wonder?’ Even then I didn’t think, but for some reason—I don’t know why—I picked it up and smelt it. Honestly, it was just a feeling that somehow it might look suspicious—but it smelt queer—like a chemical of some kind in it—as well as the brandy. I dipped my finger in it and touched a drop of it on my tongue—and then I knew—it was bitter. I knew she’d been poisoned.”

“All right,” said Hood, his eyes glowing with interest. “So what did you do with it? That’s something I’ve been wondering about.”

“Well, I looked around and couldn’t find any place where I could pour it away—without leaving a trace. I was standing there wondering if I’d take it out to the bathroom—and just then I heard something—somebody moving, I thought. The sound didn’t come from the hall. It seemed to come from outside. I looked up at the window, and the little window was open. It seemed crazy, but I thought—‘Some one might see me.’ My nerves were jumping. So I took the glass behind the curtains, figuring I’d pour the stuff into the pocket of my raincoat and try to soak it up. There wasn’t much more than a mouthful. And then I noticed her mouth hanging open . . .” He stopped, shuddered, but pulled himself together. “I poured the rest of it in her mouth. I forgot—it didn’t strike me—that she couldn’t swallow it. But the next day, when Mrs. Coulter spoke about the stains, I figured it had spilled out of her mouth when I lifted her to wrap her in the raincoat. It was sort of half dark inside the curtains. . . .”

“There was a light on in the room when you first went in?”

“Yes. Just a little lamp on the desk. She’d left it on.”

“Yes. Go on.”

“Well, I wiped out the glass with . . .”

The telephone on the desk buzzed and Hood promptly lifted the receiver. “It’s for you, Gifford,” he said.

The detective rose, laid his notebook down, and took a revolver from his coat pocket. He looked at Ogiltree and walked across the office, picking up the receiver in his left hand.

“It’s Turnquist,” he said, looking at Hood. “They’ve turned up Weir, by gad, at last. What’ll they do with him?”

“Bring him here. Just one of them, and don’t make a show of it. No handcuffs. Tell him to come right through to the office.”

Gifford relayed the instructions and resumed his seat near the door.

“You wiped the glass, you say,” said Hood, nodding across the desk.

“With my handkerchief,” Ogiltree went on in a lifeless monotone. “Then I wrapped her in the raincoat, carried her out to the car—pouring with rain, it was—and drove to the studio. You know the rest of it.”

“Most of it. The noise you heard *was* somebody at the window—Weir, I suppose.”

“Yes. He was just coming away when I drove up. He was out on the highway by that time, but he recognized me, saw me turn in. He says he ran after me, hoping to catch me before I went in—but he didn’t. So he got the ladder, put it to the window, and climbed up. Says he was curious to know what business I had with his wife at that time of night. It was after eleven. Well, he saw me—carrying her out.”

“He stood on that ladder for fifteen minutes in the pelting rain, did he?”

“I don’t know. But he came up behind me when I laid her in the back of the car—nearly scared me out of my wits. ‘Is she dead?’ he said. I told him to get into the car and I’d tell him all about it. . . .”

“You recognized him, I suppose? Did you know him—years ago?”

“Yes.”

“You lied to us about him too. Of course, it was all part . . .”

“Yes. But I’ll tell you something—now—now that it’s all up. If I ever felt like murdering anybody—I felt like murdering him. . . .”

“But you didn’t. You drew two hundred dollars from the bank to keep his mouth shut—on top of the money Mrs. Weir had given him—and no doubt promised him more.”

Ogiltree looked at Hood and shook his head despairingly. “You know everything I’ve done,” he groaned. “Don’t you know who poisoned her?”

The scientist steadily scrutinized the other’s face for several seconds. “I’ve known for two days—as nearly as any one can without absolute proof. My trouble is to prove it. I *can’t* prove it. Because it was done with so little premeditation—so crudely—and with apparent callousness—just because it’s so simple—I can’t prove it. If it had been planned in some complicated way, with a lot of clever tricks, it would have been comparatively easy. I’m very familiar with tricks. I’ve exposed a lot of them. But there was no trick about this. Which means—ah!—is this Weir, d’you suppose?”

Gifford sprang up and was about to open the door into the display room. “Don’t do that!” warned Hood in a sharp whisper. “Take Ogiltree out to the back and look after him for a while—until I call you. I want to see this blackmailer alone.”

4

“You will be arrested on two charges,” Hood said sternly to Weir when he stood before him. “One of blackmail—and the other of being an accessory after the fact—in the murder of your wife. You are not yet under arrest—and anything you say now will not be used at your trial. You’ll probably get a more lenient sentence if you tell me all you know. *Who poisoned your wife?*”

“I don’t know, sir,” said Weir, drooping dejectedly beside the desk.

“You saw nothing—that night—except the removal of the body?”

Weir looked up with a sideways leer of astonishment. “No, sir,” he answered.

“Have you reason to suspect anybody?”

“Only Rivers, sir—and yet I don’t see . . .”

“Why Rivers?”

“Well, he’s been sort of sweet on her for years—sort of worshipped the ground she walked on.”

“Then why would he kill her?”

“That’s it, sir. Unless because he couldn’t get her. There’s been murders like that.”

“Did you suggest this to Ogiltree?”

“Yes, sir. He doesn’t believe it.”

“Does *he* suspect anybody?”

“Hasn’t he told you, sir?”

“I haven’t asked him.”

“He thinks it was this architect—Mr. De Long.”

“Oh, he *does*!” Hood looked at Turnquist, who had brought Weir in. “Tell Gifford to bring Ogiltree back here.”

The photographer entered the office, and the two conspirators exchanged glances. Weir visibly shrank from the look of hate which burned in Ogiltree's eyes.

"Do you suspect De Long?" asked Hood abruptly.

Ogiltree's eyelids narrowed. "Yes, I do. That perverted devil was keeping out of the way—in Garth's house. He might have borrowed Garth's key—on some pretext—and got in there—any time. Might have engaged Agatha in conversation and dropped the poison in her glass when she wasn't looking."

"But wouldn't he have made some attempt to dispose of the body?"

For a second something of the old fire blazed in Ogiltree's eyes. "That's it. I think they used me as a tool. I don't know whether Garth was in on it or not. Perhaps De Long suggested that I should be sent out there to the temple—at the right time—so that I would find the body. No doubt he figured I would get rid of it. Perhaps he watched me. He was a free agent all that evening. If I hadn't done it on my own, maybe he would have come in—maybe he *was* in—hiding in the library—maybe he would have arrived on the scene casually, before I could call Mrs. Coulter, and suggest that we should get rid of the body together. Anyway, I took it on myself. . . ."

Ogiltree bowed his head, as though the weight of his responsibility had worn him out.

"Have you no suspicions of any one else?" asked Hood in a penetrating tone.

"No. None. I can't figure who else would have done it."

"Not Rivers?"

"No. Certainly not Rivers. Too sensitive. Couldn't have harmed a hair of her head. That's Weir's idea. Ridiculous."

Hood sat for a few moments staring at the top of the desk. "All right," he said, concluding a chain of thought. "You two men will stay here—with Gifford and Turnquist to look after you—until the séance to-night. Nobody will think of looking for you here. To-night you will be taken to the temple and held outside until the sitting has started, so that nobody is likely to ask where you've been. If they *do* ask, you'll tell them you'll explain later—after the séance. It's to your advantage to keep quiet and look as innocent as possible."

He rose from his chair and glanced searchingly at the two prisoners.

“Neither of you know anything else—not even a detail—that will help to solve this murder.”

Both men shook their heads.

Hood left the office, told Bateman what he had planned, and left the establishment.

5

“Are you going to tell me who the murderer is—before we go to this pow-wow?” asked Rhoda Groves as she and Mortimer Hood sat at dinner in his suite at the hotel an hour later.

“I certainly am not. There’s no way of proving it—yet! The person I suspect had the opportunity to poison—but so had several others. The person I suspect could easily have got the poison—but so could several others. The person I suspect had a definite motive for murder—but so had some of the others. The person I suspect has acted suspiciously since—not very—not so much as some of the others; but, you see, a confession is absolutely necessary. If the murderer had had to get rid of the body it would have been different. Poor Ogiltree looked after that. If he hadn’t—well—it would have been a different story.”

Hood wagged his head and went on with his dinner.

“Who will be there to-night?” asked Rhoda.

“Well, there’ll be quite a crowd. Suppose you make a list, just to make sure we haven’t forgotten anybody. First of all, there’ll be the directors . . .

GARTH
RIVERS
SPENCE
OGILTREE

“. . . we shall keep Ogiltree out of sight until the meeting is started, so that nobody can ask him any questions. Then there’s . . .

WEIR
DE LONG
MRS. LECKIE.”

“I suppose Mrs. Leckie will run the show,” said Rhoda.

“I’ve seen the lady—and made my own arrangements with her. I’ve been to a number of places—quite a busy afternoon. Let me see what you’ve got

down. Oh yes—everybody connected with the temple is to be there. That's Rivers's suggestion, I believe. Thinks it will help to stop gossip and rumours. So you can put down . . .

MRS. COULTER
EMMA
JACOB OGILTREE

“. . . that's ten. And our two selves and Gifford—thirteen—that will never do . . .

DR. MORTIMER HOOD
RHODA GROVES
GIFFORD

“. . . oh yes, I've asked Mrs. Fletcher and Jessie Willis to come. Garth didn't like it. Afraid the old lady may make a scene, I suppose. But I pointed out that if he wanted to stop gossip he had overlooked the two most prolific sources of it.”

“But what's *your* reason for wanting them there?” said Rhoda curiously.

“I'm very anxious for the old lady to be there. You'll see why if it goes as I hope and expect. I want her there—*for her moral effect on the murderer!* To get this confession we shall need a strong emotional tension—and the old lady will help to provide it. That will be fifteen . . .

MRS. FLETCHER
JESSIE WILLIS.”

“What about Mrs. Spence?—won't she be there?” inquired Rhoda.

“Certainly. That's right. Put her down . . .

MRS. SPENCE.”

“Has any one asked her?” Rhoda asked, looking at him searchingly.

“I don't think so. But she'll be there.”

“Why are you so sure?”

“Wild horses wouldn't keep her away. You're a woman. You ought to be able to understand that. Your list is complete, I guess.”

Rhoda ran her eye down the names. “I'm all at sea,” she complained. “It seems to me that the people who have the most motive are the people who hadn't the opportunity—and the people who had the opportunity don't seem to have any motive. . . .”

“Ah!—yes—that’s the way it *looks*. But you’ll find, I think, that the opportunity wasn’t the kind of opportunity you’ve been thinking about all along. And the motive—I don’t believe you’ve even thought of it. You haven’t mentioned it certainly. Ogiltree hasn’t guessed it either, and yet he knows these people better than either of us. He heard what I heard too—just three words—three words—spoken that first day. They put me on the right track. What has looked all along like the right track has really been the wrong one. Those three words gave me the clue to a motive that is perhaps—well, I’ve never heard of it before—I’ve never heard before of a person being killed for—no, I’d better not go any further. I may want you to do something to-night, and if you knew—you might not be able to do it. You can ask me afterwards what those three words were. They were what a novelist would call ‘fateful words.’ And—whatever happens—*they’ll come true!*”

6

It was a few minutes after nine when Mrs. Coulter opened the door to Garth, De Long, and Mrs. Leckie, who had driven over together from Garth’s house.

“Is any one here yet?” asked the publisher.

“No, sir.”

The trio went along the hall to the tower room and Garth swung open the doors.

“Have you seen or heard anything of Mr. Ogiltree since this morning?” he said to the housekeeper before he went in.

“No, sir.” Something in Mrs. Coulter’s tone made him turn and regard her sharply.

“You’re not scared, Mrs. Coulter, are you? Never been at a sitting, I s’pose.”

“No, sir.”

“You kept Emma, did you? And what about Jacob? Did you tell him to be on hand?”

“They’re both in the kitchen, sir.”

“Good. We’ll let you know when we’re ready. Wait a minute—wait a minute. How many chairs have you got here?”

“Fifteen, sir. There’s more in the vestry if they’re needed.”

“Perhaps that’s enough. All right.”

Mrs. Leckie strolled into the tower while this conversation was in progress. The curtains had been drawn back from the bed and a table from the library had been placed between the bed and the doors. There was an armchair behind the table, and one at each end. On the table were two or three cushions, and a quantity of writing-paper and pencils. Facing the table, in a double semicircle, were a dozen or more chairs.

Mrs. Leckie inspected everything with the air of a tightrope walker examining his apparatus before trusting himself on the wire. She was a tall woman, inclined to stoutness, with bluish-black hair and a very dark skin. Her mouth, in spite of the artful use of lipstick, appeared wide, slack, and at the same time, cruel. Her large eyes contained mysterious, sinister depths. She walked to and fro in front of the table, swinging her hips slightly and craning her neck every now and then, as though smelling the air above her head. She was obviously preoccupied, nervous, and full of importance.

Meanwhile De Long had walked over to the desk under the window, and stood there with his back to the room, resting his knuckles on the top of the desk and drooping his head.

When Garth came in they drew together at the table and began discussing the sitting in low tones.

In a few minutes Rivers arrived. He walked in quickly, frowned in a puzzled way and said at once to Garth: “Where’s Ogiltree? Do *you* know? I phoned him twice this afternoon, hoping he’d drive me out.”

“He seems to have gone off somewhere,” said the publisher. “I’ve been trying to locate him too.”

“No. He’s in town. His car’s parked outside his studio, but there was no one there. The sign’s still in the window.”

“Oh, he’ll turn up.”

“I saw Spence this afternoon. He said his wife insisted on coming to-night—and he didn’t know what to do about it.”

“He phoned me. I told him I guessed there was nothing he could do but bring her along.”

“Is Mortimer Hood going to be here?”

“Yes,” said Garth, his face clouding. “He and Mrs. Leckie had a little conference to-day, and Mrs. Leckie is satisfied that he won’t bother her.”

Mrs. Leckie turned her mysterious eyes on Rivers, as though looking through him. “Dr. Hood is a sceptic, of course,” she said in a deep contralto voice, “but he recognizes the possibility of spirit communications. He seems to be looking for a genuine message to-night—as much as anybody.”

“You’d think he’d be here,” said Garth, glancing toward the doors.

Mrs. Coulter passed in the hall and presently ushered in Mr. and Mrs. Spence. Beside his wife, Spence looked more insignificant than ever. She possessed a striking, almost flaming personality, which burned in her eyes and her auburn hair, and seemed to flicker continually across her voluptuous mouth. She came in with a strong, lithe tread, her eyes roving about the room in a gaze of catlike intensity.

“Is *that* Spence’s wife?” De Long murmured to Rivers.

“Yes,” said Rivers. “They’re an ill-assorted couple. It’s a surprise to me they haven’t split up long ago.”

De Long looked out of the corners of his eyes at Rhoda Groves, who had just walked up to Garth and was talking to him familiarly, with a trace of sophisticated contempt for the proceedings. “That’s Miss Groves, I suppose,” he commented softly. “Does she always dress in that provocative fashion?”

But Rivers was not listening. He was watching Mortimer Hood, who had entered just behind Rhoda and had now joined her in a three-cornered conversation with Garth. Rivers went over, and was just in time to hear Garth whisper to Hood: “This man coming in is Foster—the editor of the *Times-Gazette*. Quite an enterprising fellow—writes shorthand—and I thought he could draft a report—if the sitting goes as we hope—which we can edit and give to the New York papers in the morning.”

He beckoned Foster to come over and introduced him. “This is Miss Groves—a New York writer—who is going to do a book on the Assumptionist movement. You can both be of help to each other, I imagine. And this is Dr. Mortimer Hood—you know all about him, I suppose. Dr. Hood will probably have something to say—after the sitting—in the nature of a—a scientific verdict—I suppose you’d call it. I believe your intention to-night, doctor, is to summarize the ideas you outlined at my house—and possibly to-morrow you’ll elaborate them for the Press—isn’t that it?”

“Yes, I rather feel that the séance,” said Hood weightily, “is likely to bring out something that will supplement—and perhaps clarify—what I’ve believed all along might be the scientific explanation of this unusual event.”

Rhoda knew he was being deliberately ponderous, and tried to catch his eye, but he was looking thoughtfully at the local editor. “I have to confess that I’ve been so busy since I came here,” he was saying, “that I’ve hardly done more than glance at your paper. I imagine you’ve taken some sort of view—some sort of stand, so to speak—in respect to Mrs. Weir’s assumption—or have you still an open mind about it?”

“Well, to tell you the truth, Dr. Hood,” Foster began, but he was interrupted by the scientist, who raised his hand and said apologetically, “Pardon me a minute. Here’s Miss Willis. Her mother may need some help. Miss Groves—would you mind . . .”

He drew Rhoda with him to the doors, where Jessie Willis was standing with Mrs. Coulter glancing about with shrinking curiosity at the assembled Assumptionists.

“Is Mrs. Fletcher here?” said Hood anxiously. “Does she need any help to . . .”

“She can’t come,” said Jessie abruptly. “And it’s just as well. What she’d hear to-night would put her in her grave. I only came because you were anxious to have the family represented. Mother had another of her turns this afternoon—and, anyway, it would be bad for her. She thinks . . .” Jessie dropped her voice to a whisper, but the vibration of stubborn intolerance could be heard in it. “She thinks it’s all a lot of blasphemy—the whole business. But *you’ve* heard her.”

“You feel strange here, I suppose,” said Hood. “Would you like Miss Groves to sit with you? She doesn’t *belong*—either. You can keep each other company. I’m sorry your mother couldn’t come, but I hope you’ll stay to the end. There’s a special reason. If Mrs. Leckie succeeds in getting a message through from your sister, I think you’ll see for yourself why I wanted your mother to be here. I think you’ll be surprised. Will you sit down here?”

He shepherded Jessie and Rhoda to the back row of chairs and rejoined Garth, who was standing with Mrs. Leckie and De Long, fidgeting impatiently and throwing anxious glances at the door.

“I can’t think what’s happened to Ogiltree,” said the publisher in an exasperated tone. “Perhaps we’d better get started.”

“Is every one else here?” said Hood innocently.

"I'll get Mrs. Coulter and her people to come in," Garth muttered, striding importantly to the open doors.

He stepped into the hall and beckoned. Emma, Jacob Ogiltrie, and Mrs. Coulter walked in awkward single file into the tower. As the gardener passed Garth, the latter said in a low tone: "Have you seen your brother to-day, Jacob?"

The dumb eyes of the half-wit veered around and searched the publisher's face, as though he sought there the answer to some problem that was troubling him. "No, sir, Mr. Garth," he mumbled, shaking his head.

Rhoda felt a chill pass over her as the pitiful figure slumped into a chair a few feet away. Mrs. Coulter sat down beside him. She looked tired and haggard, Rhoda thought, as though the events of the past few days had been a severe strain.

While they were getting seated Garth began to close the double doors. Mortimer Hood, watching him from under his brows, waited until he had brought the two doors together and then walked over hurriedly and whispered: "I'd forgotten all about that chap Gifford—the Missing Persons man, you know. He'll be a good man to have at the door here. Mrs. Leckie won't want to be disturbed—once she goes into her trance. Go ahead and get them seated. I'll fetch Gifford. He's in the waiting-room."

Hood went out, closing the doors behind him. A few seconds later he returned with the tall detective, who took up a post inside the doors. Hood went forward and sat down at the end of the table. Garth motioned Foster to take the chair at the other end, and Mrs. Leckie moved to the chair in the middle. At a glance from Garth she sat down, fluttered her eyelids, and stared over the heads of the little audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Garth, and at that moment Hood sat upright and thrust two fingers through his hair.

Gifford, who was watching for the signal, put one hand behind him and knocked on the door, then promptly opened it, stuck his head out, nodded, and admitted Ogiltrie.

"Ah, there you are," called Garth in a vexed voice. "You're late. We were just about to start."

"I'm sorry," said Ogiltrie, standing just inside the door and speaking in a firm tone. "I'll explain later. I've brought some one with me—Mr. Weir—shall I bring him in?"

Several people gasped. Every head was turned in Ogiltree's direction, and he had difficulty in meeting their gaze. His eyes shifted from one face to another and finally rested on Garth, who, having glanced quickly at De Long and Rivers, glared back and said curtly: "No objections."

Ogiltree turned, opened the doors, and beckoned to Weir. They came in together, drew two chairs away from the back row and sat down, their heads drooping in an attitude that could be mistaken for prayer. Gifford stood behind them, a few feet away, lolling against the wall beside the closed doors. His right hand was thrust into the side pocket of his coat.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Garth again. . . .

7

The publisher ended a lengthy harangue in which he traced the history of the Assumptionist movement from its beginnings to what he called its "logical conclusion" in the physical translation of the founder.

He explained that he did not mean a "final conclusion," but "a culmination in miracle," which would mean a still greater future for the already widespread gospel of Assumptionism. He hinted that after the sitting an announcement of extreme importance regarding the future policies of the temple would be made. He then called on Dr. Hood to say a few words about the "celebrated medium" who had prophesied the exact date of their leader's translation, and who had every hope of conveying a message from the spirit world which would prove conclusively that a miracle, "of a kind unheard of in many centuries, occurred a few nights ago in this very room."

As he uttered these final words with a declamatory flourish, Jessie Willis half rose in her chair. Rhoda glanced at her quickly and saw that her face was twitching, like her mother's, in a paroxysm of impotent rage. "Blasphemy! blasphemy!" she muttered, turning her head and glaring at Rhoda, and then dropping like a stone into her chair. As Hood rose to speak she leaned close to Rhoda and in a feverish whisper asked: "Do *you* believe it?"

"Let's listen," said Rhoda quietly. "I want to hear what they're going to say." Her own nerves were on edge, keyed-up by uncertainty. She was furiously wondering how Hood expected to draw a confession from one of the innocent-looking people who were now shifting about to get a better view of the little scientist standing at the table ready to speak.

“I have known Mrs. Leckie a good many years,” he began in the slow drawl which always exasperated Rhoda. “She is one of the most celebrated mediums in America. In a few minutes Mrs. Leckie will go into a state of trance. During the trance she will endeavour to get answers to questions which I shall put to her. It has been found that questions frequently stimulate a flow of communication between the spirit world and our own. It is unlikely that we shall get a message through directly from Mrs. Weir. In the first place, most mediums work through what are called ‘controls’—spirits who for some reason are especially attuned to the medium. For several years now Mrs. Leckie has been ‘controlled’ by a person who calls herself Ida. It will probably be Ida’s voice that we shall hear. Through Ida it is hoped to reach Mrs. Weir. There is, of course, in this case, an unusual possibility of failure. We do not know whether a person who has passed from this earth in her physical body is likely to inhabit the same regions as those who die in the normal way. However, an attempt at communication will be made. The lights can now be turned out, except the lamp for Mr. Foster, who will take notes for publication in to-morrow’s papers.”

Before Hood had finished, Mrs. Leckie had arranged the cushions in front of her on the table. Her eyelids began to flutter, and as soon as the lights were switched off she placed her hands on the cushions. The reading-lamp at the end of the table gave enough light so that her movements could be dimly seen. In the intense silence the medium’s heavy breathing reverberated, like the sighs of a dying person, around the circular wall of the tower. She began to mutter unintelligently and her head drooped forward until it touched her hands. She then turned her face to the left, resting the full weight of her head on her cushioned hands. A long, low groan echoed against the glass of the skylight.

“Oh-h-h-h! . . . my soul . . . my soul is taking flight . . . I am leaving everything behind . . . let me go . . . it is lovely . . . I feel so free . . . who is this? . . . who is taking my hand? . . . look at her . . . isn’t it Ida? . . . isn’t it you, Ida? . . . speak to me. . . .”

She raised her head an inch or two and breathed loudly as though in rapture. So far she had spoken in her normal voice, a deep contralto, but now, as her head sank forward again, a high-pitched voice issued from her half closed lips:

“Is it Dr. Hood who wants to talk to Ida . . . Ida can’t get very clear what you want . . . there are so many here to-night . . . perhaps if Dr. Hood would speak. . . .”

“Ida, three nights ago a friend passed over from this very room,” said Hood. “We would like to talk with her if you can reach her.”

“There are so many here to-night . . . but have patience . . . Ida will find her . . . is it a very little woman? . . . there is a very little woman coming to speak to Ida now . . . she wears only a veil . . . she is so beautiful and yet so small . . . she says her name is Agatha . . . is her mother there?”

“No,” said Hood. “Tell her that her mother was too ill to come. But her sister Jessie is here.”

“Agatha says there is a man there from a long distance . . . from across the ocean . . . she will speak to him.”

“Ask her what the name is.”

“De Long.”

Hood motioned De Long to come and sit beside him. They whispered together for a moment, and then De Long, in his thin, sepulchral voice, spoke very distinctly: “I am here, Agatha. Have you anything to tell us? We are anxious to know about your experience.”

“She is telling Ida what happened to her . . . it is very hard to put it in earth language, but Ida will try . . . she says that a few minutes after midnight she was wakened by an unearthly light above her head . . . she felt the room she was in and the whole world slipping away from under her . . . it was like being lifted up by a strong wind, she says . . . Ida describes it badly . . . not like a storm . . . very gentle . . . Agatha herself admits it can’t be described . . . she wants me to tell the man from across the ocean that he can publish to the world that she passed over by miracle . . . the breath of corruption did not touch her . . . there was some one there in that town who bore her ill-will . . . some one who hated her and everything she did and said. . . .”

“Ask her who the person was,” said Hood in a loud tone.

“Ida keeps asking her, but she won’t say . . . she says that it doesn’t matter now . . . the person’s evil thoughts did not prevent the miracle . . . it happened on the day prophesied . . . her soul and body were lifted up together . . . as a sign to the world. . . .”

There was a sharp noise at the back of the room, and heads were suddenly turned.

“It’s a lie!—it’s a fake!” screamed a woman’s voice.

“Who on earth is that?” whispered Garth to Rivers.

“Jessie Willis,” Rivers said through clenched teeth. “I *knew* she’d make a scene.”

“It’s a fake!” Jessie cried out again. She was on her feet, pointing a trembling finger at Mrs. Leckie, who stirred on her cushions. “You’ve hired that woman to make up more lies. You’re a lot of liars and cheaters. Agatha’s dead. You all know she’s dead. Alfred Ogiltree knew it three days ago. You’ve hidden her body—and you think you’re going to trick *everybody* into believing—but you won’t. I killed her—I poisoned her—so that you couldn’t say this very thing. She was a wicked woman.”

The room was suddenly full of noise—whispers, murmurs, the scraping and creaking of chairs—as one after another the audience turned and peered through the darkness at Jessie’s defiant figure.

Garth sprang to his feet. “The woman’s mad!” he blared. “Turn on the lights!”

“No she’s not,” said Hood sharply. “Did you get it all down, Gifford?” he called over the heads of the breathless gathering.

The big detective had dropped to the floor. He was holding a flashlight in one hand and writing furiously in his notebook with the other.

“I’ve got it, anyway,” cried Foster excitedly. “Every word.”

The lights went on. A dozen pairs of eyes, staring aghast at Jessie’s quivering face, suddenly blinked, and were turned upon each other with expressions of amazement and horror.

Annie Spence, rising quickly, ran between the chairs, crying out: “Jessie! Jessie! you don’t know what you’re saying.”

“I know what I’m saying!” screamed the older woman, shrinking from the other’s arms, which were reaching out to support her. “Let ’em take it down. That’s what I want. I want the police and the papers to get it. I don’t care what happens to me. She was a wicked woman. She was leading people astray. She was driving her mother into the grave with her nakedness and her miracles. Mother sent me here that night to stop it—to frighten her out of her wickedness—but I knew there was only one way—and I did it. I poisoned her. I’ll go to the police and tell them. I expected they’d find me out—but you’ve hidden her body—to cheat people into thinking she was taken to heaven. But you won’t do it. I’ll tell the police—and *they’ll* find her

—I'll tell them how I did it. I've got the bottle. I've got the rest of it at home. I don't care—I'd sooner die—I'd sooner die. . . ."

She began to sob violently, and dropped into her chair in a heaving, shuddering heap.

8

"I'm glad you didn't tell me. That was the biggest thrill I've had in years," said Rhoda Groves as she and Mortimer Hood drove back through Port Fletcher to their hotel. "It's too bad there won't be any book—because the drama of that last scene was immense. A fanatic of the old-time, fundamentalist type fighting a new kind of fanaticism with . . ."

The little scientist, his eyes twinkling with triumph, sat curled in the car, listening absent-mindedly while Rhoda worked off her excitement.

The séance had ended in hubbub. In a few words Hood had told the meeting of the charges that would be laid against Ogiltree and Weir. Rivers, with tears in his eyes—appreciating Ogiltree's motive for everything he had done—had begged the temporary leader to say something, then and there, in his own defence: but Ogiltree, demoralized by the crumbling of his faith and hopes, had been unable to speak. De Long, who had fallen under the spell of Garth's money, and was to have been nominated by the spirit voice of Mrs. Weir as the new leader, had quietly slipped out of the temple, ashamed of the trickery which had ended in a fiasco so tragic and complete. Garth and Mrs. Leckie had managed to keep up some sort of front, the publisher's little eyes glinting with the crafty inception of some new scheme which might somehow save Assumptionism from expiring in a storm of adverse publicity.

"What were the three words that made you suspect Jessie from the first?" asked Rhoda, leaning eagerly toward Hood with wide-open, inquiring eyes.

"She repeated them to-night. You were right beside her. You didn't notice?—didn't connect . . . ?"

"No. I guess I'm just a news woman. I can dig—like your friend Gifford—but when it comes . . ."

"You just now put your finger on it yourself—remember?—remember what you said about her fanaticism? *That* was what struck me—that first night. Of course you didn't hear. It was up on the deck of that old boat. 'I'd sooner die,' she said. 'I'd sooner die—and see my mother in her grave—than let people believe such blasphemy.'"

“Yes,” murmured Rhoda incredulously; “but surely that alone . . .”

“Ah!—but it wasn’t alone. I’d already made up my mind that whatever had happened—had happened a day too soon—which meant that it wasn’t according to anybody’s plan—anybody connected with the temple, I mean. It was done by somebody outside the temple—a person opposed to the temple and all its works. You remember I always insisted that ‘the wrong person’ was mixed up in it. When Ogiltree tried so hard to hush up something about the unknown man who turned out to be Weir—I suspected the unknown man. He was an outsider. But as soon as we found Jessie out there at that wreck—so sure that Agatha was dead—and so fanatical—you didn’t hear her—she turned on Ogiltree and said: ‘You’ll never make a miracle of her so long as I have eyes to see and legs to carry me.’ At that time, of course, I didn’t even know she’d been murdered. D’you remember I said, after we’d left the wreck—‘because I think I know who killed her, I feel pretty sure that she’s dead.’”

“You suspected her even then?”

“Yes. But it was only a suspicion. I didn’t know how she’d been killed. Of course I thought of poison immediately, on account of the stained bedspread which Ogiltree was anxious to have out of the way. As a matter of fact I had pretty well reconstructed the crime that night before I went to bed. I figured *forward* from Jessie and *backward* from Ogiltree. I figured that Ogiltree was definitely hiding something. I never could see him as the murderer. There wasn’t sufficient motive. And besides, I felt from the first—as you did—that he was sincere—a fanatic, certainly, but sincere. All right. If he was merely trying to make a miracle out of a murder, the murder must have occurred before he left the meeting to go to the temple. All right. Who had been there before him who could have committed the murder? The visitors that night were Jessie Willis, Weir—who didn’t get in—and the so-called Mrs. Smith. I figured at once that Mrs. Smith was Mrs. Leckie because Spence knew about her—called her a costumier or something—which was all of a piece with the news I had, in advance, that Mrs. Weir had been having sittings with her but wanted to conceal them. All right. Weir was out of it—Mrs. Leckie was out of it—I couldn’t see why she’d want to commit a murder—and that meant—if we eliminated Mrs. Coulter—again for lack of motive—there was only the one person left—Jessie Willis.”

“But you dug into so many things after that.”

“What things?”

“Oh, all sorts of things. The bottle in Mrs. Coulter’s bathroom, for instance.”

“Ah!—that was the final stroke. You remember she told me that Mrs. Fletcher took the same drops. That really closed the case, as the lawyers say. It meant that Jessie had a supply of *Strophanthus* right in her own house.”

“I’ve been very dumb, I know,” laughed Rhoda ruefully, “but you must admit you deliberately threw me off—several times. All that talk about Jessie and Mrs. Fletcher being just a couple of old gossips.”

“So they are. The murder didn’t change Jessie’s nature—it was the outcome of it—and, of course, the mother was utterly in the dark. They were both trying to find out what had happened to Agatha—the one *knowing* she was dead, and the other—with a mother’s instinct, perhaps—quite certain of it.”

“Well,” said Rhoda thoughtfully, trying to think of other details she would like to clear up, “it certainly was a tangle.”

“Yes. Now that you’re not going to write a book about Assumptionism, you might write a book about a miracle that didn’t come off—and make me the hero—only don’t mention my white hair. Give me a long, intellectual face—and don’t forget the inevitable pince-nez. No up-to-date detective can get along without them.”

“It *would* be fun—wouldn’t it?” mused Rhoda.

Hood stretched his arms with the air of a man who has done a good day’s work. Before curling himself up again he let one hand drop on Rhoda’s shoulder.

“I’ll even give you a title for it.”

“Yes. What is it?”

“‘The Tangled Miracle.’”

“Bully! If you’re not careful I’ll really do it.”

“If you do—you’ll have to change my name. Mortimer is a good-sounding name—how about—Mortimer Hood?”

“Excellent!” exclaimed Rhoda jubilantly. “And I’ll use my own name for once—instead of everybody else’s.”

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT
THE PRESS OF THE PUBLISHERS

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 Tangled Miracle: A Mortimer Hood mystery* by Bertram
Brooker]