The Treasure−Train

Arthur B. Reeve

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I. THE TREASURE−TRAIN

"I am not by nature a spy, Professor Kennedy, but—well, sometimes one is forced into something like that." Maude Euston, who had sought out Craig in his laboratory, was a striking girl, not merely because she was pretty or because her gown was modish. Perhaps it was her sincerity and artlessness that made her attractive.

She was the daughter of Barry Euston, president of the Continental Express Company, and one could readily see why, aside from the position her father held, she should be among the most−sought− after young women in the city.

Miss Euston looked straight into Kennedy's eyes as she added, without waiting for him to ask a question:

"Yesterday I heard something that has made me think a great deal. You know, we live at the St. Germaine when we are in town. I've noticed for several months past that the lobbies are full of strange, foreign−looking people.

"Well, yesterday afternoon I was sitting alone in the tea−room of the hotel, waiting for some friends. On the other side of a huge palm I heard a couple whispering. I have seen the woman about the hotel often, though I know that she doesn't live there. The man I don't remember ever having seen before. They mentioned the name of Granville Barnes, treasurer of father's company—"

"Is that so?" cut in Kennedy, quickly. "I read the story about him in the papers this morning."

As for myself, I was instantly alive with interest, too.

Granville Barnes had been suddenly stricken while riding in his car in the country, and the report had it that he was hovering between life and death in the General Hospital. The chauffeur had been stricken, too, by the same incomprehensible malady, though apparently not so badly.

How the chauffeur managed to save the car was a miracle, but he brought it to a stop beside the road, where the two were found gasping, a quarter of an hour later, by a passing motorist, who rushed them to a doctor, who had them transferred to the hospital in the city. Neither of them seemed able or willing to throw any light on what had happened.

"Just what was it you overheard?" encouraged Kennedy.

"I heard the man tell the woman," Miss Euston replied, slowly, "that now was the chance—when any of the great warring powers would welcome and wink at any blow that might cripple the other to the slightest degree. I heard him say something about the Continental Express Company, and that was enough to make me listen, for, you know, father's company is handling the big shipments of gold and securities that are coming here from abroad by way of Halifax. Then I heard her mention the names of Mr. Barnes and of Mr. Lane, too, the general manager." She paused, as though not relishing the idea of having the names bandied about. "Last night the—the attack on him—for that is all that I can think it was—occurred."

As she stopped again, I could not help thinking what a tale of strange plotting the casual conversation suggested. New York, I knew, was full of high−class international crooks and flimflammers who had flocked there because the great field of their operations in Europe was closed. The war had literally dumped them on us. Was some one using a band of these crooks for ulterior purposes? The idea opened up wide possibilities.

"Of course," Miss Euston continued, "that is all I know; but I think I am justified in thinking that the two things—the shipment of gold here and the attack—have some connection. Oh, can't you take up the case and look into it?"

She made her appeal so winsomely that it would have been difficult to resist even if it had not promised to prove important.

"I should be glad to take up the matter," replied Craig, quickly, adding, "if Mr. Barnes will let me."

"Oh, he must!" she cried. "I haven't spoken to father, but I know that he would approve of it. I know he thinks I haven't any head for business, just because I wasn't born a boy. I want to prove to him that I can protect the companies interests. And Mr. Barnes— why, of course he will approve."

She said it with an assurance that made me wonder. It was only then that I recollected that it had been one of the excuses for printing her picture in the society columns of the Star so often that the pretty daughter of the president of the Continental was being ardently wooed by two of the company's younger officials. Granville

Barnes himself was one. The other was Rodman Lane, the young general manager. I wished now that I had paid more attention to the society news. Perhaps I should have been in a better position to judge which of them it was whom she really had chosen. As it was, two questions presented themselves to me. Was it Barnes? And had Barnes really been the victim of an attack—or of an accident?

Kennedy may have been thinking the problems over, but he gave no evidence of it. He threw on his hat and coat, and was ready in a moment to be driven in Miss Euston's car to the hospital.

There, after the usual cutting of red tape which only Miss Euston could have accomplished, we were led by a white−uniformed nurse through the silent halls to the private room occupied by Barnes.

"It's a most peculiar case," whispered the young doctor in charge, as we paused at the door. "I want you to notice his face and his cough. His pulse seems very weak, almost imperceptible at times. The stethoscope reveals subcrepitant sounds all over his lungs. It's like bronchitis or pneumonia—but it isn't either."

We entered. Barnes was lying there almost in a state of unconsciousness. As we stood watching him he opened his eyes. But he did not see us. His vision seemed to be riveted on Miss Euston. He murmured something that we could not catch, and, as his eyes closed again, his face seemed to relax into a peaceful expression, as though he were dreaming of something happy.

Suddenly, however, the old tense lines reappeared. Another idea seemed to have been suggested.

"Is—Lane—hiring the men—himself?" he murmured.

The sight of Maude Euston had prompted the thought of his rival, now with a clear field. What did it mean? Was he jealous of Lane, or did his words have a deeper meaning? What difference could it have made if Lane had a free hand in managing the shipment of treasure for the company?

Kennedy looked long and carefully at the face of the sick man. It was blue and cyanosed still, and his lips had a violet tinge. Barnes had been coughing a great deal. Now and then his mouth was flecked with foamy blood, which the nurse wiped gently away. Kennedy picked up a piece of the blood−soaked gauze.

A moment later we withdrew from the room as quietly as we had entered and tiptoed down the hall, Miss Euston and the young doctor following us more slowly. As we reached the door, I turned to see where she was. A distinguished−looking elderly gentleman, sitting in the waiting−room, had happened to glance up as she passed and had moved quickly to the hall.

"What—you here, Maude?" we heard him say.

"Yes, father. I thought I might be able to do something for Granville."

She accompanied the remark with a sidelong glance and nod at us, which Kennedy interpreted to mean that we might as well keep in the background. Euston himself, far from chiding her, seemed rather to be pleased than otherwise. We could not hear all they said, but one sentence was wafted over.

"It's most unfortunate, Maude, at just this time. It leaves the whole matter in the hands of Lane."

At the mention of Lane, which her father accompanied by a keen glance, she flushed a little and bit her lip. I wondered whether it meant more than that, of the two suitors, her father obviously preferred Barnes.

Euston had called to see Barnes, and, as the doctor led him up the hall again, Miss Euston rejoined us.

"You need not drive us back," thanked Kennedy. "Just drop us at the Subway. I'll let you know the moment I have arrived at any conclusion."

On the train we happened to run across a former classmate, Morehead, who had gone into the brokerage business.

"Queer about that Barnes case, isn't it?" suggested Kennedy, after the usual greetings were over. Then, without suggesting that we were more than casually interested, "What does the Street think of it?"

"It is queer," rejoined Morehead. "All the boys down−town are talking about it—wondering how it will affect the transit of the gold shipments. I don't know what would happen if there should be a hitch. But they ought to be able to run the thing through all right."

"It's a pretty ticklish piece of business, then?" I suggested.

"Well, you know the state of the market just now—a little push one way or the other means a lot. And I suppose you know that the insiders on the Street have boosted Continental Express up until it is practically one of the 'war stocks,' too. Well, good−by— here's my station."

We had scarcely returned to the laboratory, however, when a car drove up furiously and a young man bustled in to see us.

"You do not know me," he introduced, "but I am Rodman Lane, general manager of the Continental Express. You know our company has had charge of the big shipments of gold and securities to New York. I suppose you've read about what happened to Barnes, our treasurer. I don't know anything about it—haven't even time to find out. All I know is that it puts more work on me, and I'm nearly crazy already."

I watched him narrowly.

"We've had little trouble of any kind so far," he hurried on, "until just now I learned that all the roads over which we are likely to send the shipments have been finding many more broken rails than usual."

Kennedy had been following him keenly.

"I should like to see some samples of them," he observed.

"You would?" said Lane, eagerly. "I've a couple of sections sawed from rails down at my office, where I asked the officials to send them."

We made a hurried trip down to the express company's office. Kennedy examined the sections of rails minutely with a strong pocket−lens.

"No ordinary break," he commented. "You can see that it was an explosive that was used—an explosive well and properly tamped down with wet clay. Without tamping, the rails would have been bent, not broken."

"Done by wreckers, then?" Lane asked.

"Certainly not defective rails," replied Kennedy. "Still, I don't think you need worry so much about them for the next train. You know what to guard against. Having been discovered, whoever they are, they'll probably not try it again. It's some new wrinkle that must be guarded against."

It was small comfort, but Craig was accustomed to being brutally frank.

"Have you taken any other precautions now that you didn't take before?"

"Yes," replied Lane, slowly; "the railroad has been experimenting with wireless on its trains. We have placed wireless on ours, too. They can't cut us off by cutting wires. Then, of course, as before, we shall use a pilot−train to run ahead and a strong guard on the train itself. But now I feel that there may be something else that we can do. So I have come to you."

"When does the next shipment start?" asked Kennedy.

"To−morrow, from Halifax."

Kennedy appeared to be considering something.

"The trouble," he said, at length, "is likely to be at this end. Perhaps before the train starts something may happen that will tell us just what additional measures to take as it approaches New York."

While Kennedy was at work with the blood−soaked gauze that he had taken from Barnes, I could do nothing but try to place the relative positions of the various actors in the little drama that was unfolding. Lane himself puzzled me. Sometimes I felt almost sure that he knew that Miss Euston had come to Kennedy, and that he was trying, in this way, to keep in touch with what was being done for Barnes.

Some things I knew already. Barnes was comparatively wealthy, and had evidently the stamp of approval of Maude Euston's father. As for Lane, he was far from wealthy, although ambitious.

The company was in a delicate situation where an act of omission would count for as much as an act of commission. Whoever could foresee what was going to happen might capitalize that information for much money. If there was a plot and Barnes had been a victim, what was its nature? I recalled Miss Euston's overheard conversation in the tea−room. Both names had been mentioned. In short, I soon found myself wondering whether some one might not have tempted Lane either to do or not to do something.

"I wish you'd go over to the St. Germaine, Walter," remarked Kennedy, at length, looking up from his work. "Don't tell Miss Euston of Lane's visit. But ask her if she will keep an eye out for that woman she heard talking—and the man, too. They may drop in again. And tell her that if she hears anything else, no matter how trivial, about Barnes, she must let me know."

I was glad of the commission. Not only had I been unable to arrive anywhere in my conjectures, but it was something even to have a chance to talk with a girl like Maude Euston.

Fortunately I found her at home and, though she was rather disappointed that I had nothing to report, she received me graciously, and we spent the rest of the evening watching the varied life of the fashionable hostelry in the hope of chancing on the holders of the strange conversation in the tea−room.

Once in a while an idea would occur to her of some one who was in a position to keep her informed if

anything further happened to Barnes, and she would despatch a messenger with a little note. Finally, as it grew late and the adventuress of the tea−room episode seemed unlikely to favor the St. Germaine with her presence again that night, I made my excuses, having had the satisfaction only of having delivered Kennedy's message, without accomplishing anything more. In fact, I was still unable to determine whether there was any sentiment stronger than sympathy that prompted her to come to Kennedy about Barnes. As for Lane, his name was scarcely mentioned except when it was necessary.

It was early the next morning that I rejoined Craig at the laboratory. I found him studying the solution which he had extracted from the blood−soaked gauze after first removing the blood in a little distilled water.

Before him was his new spectroscope, and I could see that now he was satisfied with what the uncannily delicate light−detective had told him. He pricked his finger and let a drop of blood fall into a little fresh distilled water, some of which he placed in the spectroscope.

"Look through it," he said. "Blood diluted with water shows the well−known dark bands between D and E, known as the oxyhemoglobin absorption." I looked as he indicated and saw the dark bands. "Now," he went on, "I add some of this other liquid."

He picked up a bottle of something with a faint greenish tinge.

"See the bands gradually fade?"

I watched, and indeed they did diminish in intensity and finally disappear, leaving an uninterrupted and brilliant spectrum.

"My spectroscope," he said, simply, "shows that the blood−crystals of Barnes are colorless. Barnes was poisoned—by some gas, I think. I wish I had time to hunt along the road where the accident took place." As he said it, he walked over and drew from a cabinet several peculiar arrangements made of gauze.

He was about to say something more when there came a knock at the door. Kennedy shoved the gauze arrangements into his pocket and opened it. It was Maude Euston, breathless and agitated.

"Oh, Mr. Kennedy, have you heard?" she cried. "You asked me to keep a watch whether anything more happened to Mr. Barnes. So I asked some friends of his to let me know of anything. He has a yacht, the Sea Gull, which has been lying off City Island. Well, last night the captain received a message to go to the hospital, that Mr. Barnes wanted to see him. Of course it was a fake. Mr. Barnes was too sick to see anybody on business. But when the captain got back, he found that, on one pretext or another, the crew had been got ashore—and the Sea Gull is gone—stolen! Some men in a small boat must have overpowered the engineer. Anyhow, she has disappeared. I know that no one could expect to steal a yacht—at least for very long. She'd be recognized soon. But they must know that, too."

Kennedy looked at his watch.

"It is only a few hours since the train started from Halifax," he considered. "It will be due in New York early to−morrow morning— twenty million dollars in gold and thirty millions in securities— a seven−car steel train, with forty armed guards!"

"I know it," she said, anxiously, "and I am so afraid something is going to happen—ever since I had to play the spy. But what could any one want with a yacht?"

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders non−committally.

"It is one of the things that Mr. Lane must guard against," he remarked, simply. She looked up quickly.

"Mr. Lane?" she repeated.

"Yes," replied Kennedy; "the protection of the train has fallen on him. I shall meet the train myself when it gets to Worcester and come in on it. I don't think there can be any danger before it reaches that point."

"Will Mr. Lane go with you?"

"He must," decided Kennedy. "That train must be delivered safely here in this city."

Maude Euston gave Craig one of her penetrating, direct looks.

"You think there is danger, then?"

"I cannot say," he replied.

"Then I am going with you!" she exclaimed.

Kennedy paused and met her eyes. I do not know whether he read what was back of her sudden decision. At least I could not, unless there was something about Rodman Lane which she wished to have cleared up. Kennedy seemed to read her character and know that a girl like Maude Euston would be a help in any emergency.

"Very well," he agreed; "meet us at Mr. Lane's office in half an hour. Walter, see whether you can find Whiting."

Whiting was one of Kennedy's students with whom he had been lately conducting some experiments. I hurried out and managed to locate him.

"What is it you suspect?" I asked, when we returned. "A wreck— some spectacular stroke at the nations that are shipping the gold?"

"Perhaps," he replied, absently, as he and Whiting hurriedly assembled some parts of instruments that were on a table in an adjoining room.

"Perhaps?" I repeated. "What else might there be?"

"Robbery."

"Robbery!" I exclaimed. "Of twenty million dollars? Why, man, just consider the mere weight of the metal!"

"That's all very well," he replied, warming up a bit as he saw that Whiting was getting things together quickly. "But it needs only a bit of twenty millions to make a snug fortune—"He paused and straightened up as the gathering of the peculiar electrical apparatus, whatever it was, was completed. "And," he went on quickly, "consider the effect on the stock−market of the news. That's the big thing."

I could only gasp.

"A modern train−robbery, planned in the heart of dense traffic!"

"Why not?" he queried. "Nothing is impossible if you can only take the other fellow unawares. Our job is not to be taken unawares. Are you ready, Whiting?"

"Yes, sir," replied the student, shouldering the apparatus, for which I was very thankful, for my arms had frequently ached carrying about some of Kennedy's weird but often weighty apparatus.

We piled into a taxicab and made a quick journey to the office of the Continental Express. Maude Euston had already preceded us, and we found her standing by Lane's desk as he paced the floor.

"Please, Miss Euston, don't go," he was saying as we entered.

"But I want to go," she persisted, more than ever determined, apparently.

"I have engaged Professor Kennedy just for the purpose of foreseeing what new attack can be made on us," he said.

"You have engaged Professor Kennedy?" she asked. "I think I have a prior claim there, haven't I?" she appealed.

Kennedy stood for a moment looking from one to the other. What was there in the motives that actuated them? Was it fear, hate, love, jealousy?

"I can serve my two clients only if they yield to me," Craig remarked, quietly. "Don't set that down, Whiting. Which is it—yes or no?"

Neither Lane nor Miss Euston looked at each other for a moment.

"Is it in my hands?" repeated Craig.

"Yes," bit off Lane, sourly.

"And you, Miss Euston?"

"Of course," she answered.

"Then we all go," decided Craig. "Lane, may I install this thing in your telegraph−room outside?"

"Anything you say," Lane returned, unmollified.

Whiting set to work immediately, while Kennedy gave him the final instructions.

Neither Lane nor Miss Euston spoke a word, even when I left the room for a moment, fearing that three was a crowd. I could not help wondering whether she might not have heard something more from the woman in the tea−room conversation than she had told us. If she had, she had been more frank with Lane than with us. She must have told him. Certainly she had not told us. It was the only way I could account for the armed truce that seemed to exist as, hour after hour, our train carried us nearer the point where we were to meet the treasure−train.

At Worcester we had still a long wait for the argosy that was causing so much anxiety and danger. It was long after the time scheduled that we left finally, on our return journey, late at night.

Ahead of us went a dummy pilot−train to be sacrificed if any bridges or trestles were blown up or if any new attempts were made at producing artificially broken rails. We four established ourselves as best we could in a car in the center of the treasure− train, with one of the armed guards as company. Mile after mile we reeled off, ever

southward and westward.

We must have crossed the State of Connecticut and have been approaching Long Island Sound, when suddenly the train stopped with a jerk. Ordinarily there is nothing to grow alarmed about at the mere stopping of a train. But this was an unusual train under unusual circumstances.

No one said a word as we peered out. Down the track the signals seemed to show a clear road. What was the matter?

"Look!" exclaimed Kennedy, suddenly.

Off a distance ahead I could see what looked like a long row of white fuses sticking up in the faint starlight. From them the fresh west wind seemed to blow a thick curtain of greenish−yellow smoke which swept across the track, enveloping the engine and the forward cars and now advancing toward us like the "yellow wind" of northern China. It seemed to spread thickly on the ground, rising scarcely more than sixteen or eighteen feet.

A moment and the cloud began to fill the air about us. There was a paralyzing odor. I looked about at the others, gasping and coughing. As the cloud rolled on, inexorably increasing in density, it seemed literally to grip the lungs.

It flashed over me that already the engineer and fireman had been overcome, though not before the engineer had been able to stop the train.

As the cloud advanced, the armed guards ran from it, shouting, one now and then falling, overcome. For the moment none of us knew what to do. Should we run and desert the train for which we had dared so much? To stay was death.

Quickly Kennedy pulled from his pocket the gauze arrangements he had had in his hand that morning just as Miss Euston's knock had interrupted his conversation with me. Hurriedly he shoved one into Miss Euston's hands, then to Lane, then to me, and to the guard who was with us.

"Wet them!" he cried, as he fitted his own over his nose and staggered to a water−cooler.

"What is it?" I gasped, hoarsely, as we all imitated his every action.

"Chlorin gas," he rasped back, "the same gas that overcame Granville Barnes. These masks are impregnated with a glycerin solution of sodium phosphate. It was chlorin that destroyed the red coloring matter in Barnes's blood. No wonder, when this action of just a whiff of it on us is so rapid. Even a short time longer and death would follow. It destroys without the possibility of reconstitution, and it leaves a dangerous deposit of albumin. How do you feel?"

"All right," I lied.

We looked out again. The things that looked like fuses were not bombs, as I had expected, but big reinforced bottles of gas compressed at high pressure, with the taps open. The supply was not inexhaustible. In fact, it was decidedly limited. But it seemed to have been calculated to a nicety to do the work. Only the panting of the locomotive now broke the stillness as Kennedy and I moved forward along the track.

Crack! rang out a shot.

"Get on the other side of the train—quick!" ordered Craig.

In the shadow, aside from the direction in which the wind was wafting the gas, we could now just barely discern a heavy but powerful motor−truck and figures moving about it. As I peered out from the shelter of the train, I realized what it all meant. The truck, which had probably conveyed the gas−tanks from the rendezvous where they had been collected, was there now to convey to some dark wharf what of the treasure could be seized. There the stolen yacht was waiting to carry it off.

"Don't move—don't fire," cautioned Kennedy. "Perhaps they will think it was only a shadow they saw. Let them act first. They must. They haven't any too much time. Let them get impatient."

For some minutes we waited.

Sure enough, separated widely, but converging toward the treasure− train at last, we could see several dark figures making their way from the road across a strip of field and over the rails. I made a move with my gun.

"Don't," whispered Kennedy. "Let them get together."

His ruse was clever. Evidently they thought that it had been indeed a wraith at which they had fired. Swiftly now they hurried to the nearest of the gold−laden cars. We could hear them, breaking in where the guards had either been rendered unconscious or had fled.

I looked around at Maude Euston. She was the calmest of us all as she whispered:

"They are in the car. Can't we DO something?"

"Lane," whispered Kennedy, "crawl through under the trucks with me. Walter, and you, Dugan," he added, to the guard, "go down the other side. We must rush them—in the car."

As Kennedy crawled under the train again I saw Maude Euston follow Lane closely.

How it happened I cannot describe, for the simple reason that I don't remember. I know that it was a short, sharp dash, that the fight was a fight of fists in which guns were discharged wildly in the air against the will of the gunner. But from the moment when Kennedy's voice rang out in the door, "Hands up!" to the time that I saw that we had the robbers lined up with their backs against the heavy cases of the precious metal for which they had planned and risked so much, it is a blank of grim death−struggle.

I remember my surprise at seeing one of them a woman, and I thought I must be mistaken. I looked about. No; there was Maude Euston standing just beside Lane.

I think it must have been that which recalled me and made me realize that it was a reality and not a dream. The two women stood glaring at each other.

"The woman in the tea−room!" exclaimed Miss Euston. "It was about this—robbery—then, that I heard you talking the other afternoon."

I looked at the face before me. It was, had been, a handsome face. But now it was cold and hard, with that heartless expression of the adventuress. The men seemed to take their plight hard. But, as she looked into the clear, gray eyes of the other woman, the adventuress seemed to gain rather than lose in defiance.

"Robbery?" she repeated, bitterly. "This is only a beginning."

"A beginning. What do you mean?"

It was Lane who spoke. Slowly she turned toward him.

"You know well enough what I mean."

The implication that she intended was clear. She had addressed the remark to him, but it was a stab at Maude Euston.

"I know only what you wanted me to do—and I refused. Is there more still?"

I wondered whether Lane could really have been involved.

"Quick—what DO you mean?" demanded Kennedy, authoritatively.

The woman turned to him:

"Suppose this news of the robbery is out? What will happen? Do you want me to tell you, young lady?" she added, turning again to Maude Euston. "I'll tell you. The stock of the Continental Express Company will fall like a house of cards. And then? Those who have sold it at the top price will buy it back again at the bottom. The company is sound. The depression will not last—perhaps will be over in a day, a week, a month. Then the operators can send it up again. Don't you see? It is the old method of manipulation in a new form. It is a war−stock gamble. Other stocks will be affected the same way. This is our reward—what we can get out of it by playing this game for which the materials are furnished free. We have played it—and lost. The manipulators will get their reward on the stock−market this morning. But they must still reckon with us—even if we have lost." She said it with a sort of grim humor.

"And you have put Granville Barnes out of the way, first?" I asked, remembering the chlorin. She laughed shrilly.

"That was an accident—his own carelessness. He was carrying a tank of it for us. Only his chauffeur's presence of mind in throwing it into the shrubbery by the road saved his life and reputation. No, young man; he was one of the manipulators, too. But the chief of them was—" She paused as if to enjoy one brief moment of triumph at least. "The president of the company," she added.

"No, no, no!" cried Maude Euston.

"Yes, yes, yes! He does not dare deny it. They were all in it."

"Mrs. Labret—you lie!" towered Lane, in a surging passion, as he stepped forward and shook his finger at her. "You lie and you know it. There is an old saying about the fury of a woman scorned." She paid no attention to him whatever.

"Maude Euston," she hissed, as though Lane had been as inarticulate as the boxes of gold about, "you have saved your lover's reputation—perhaps. At least the shipment is safe. But you have ruined your father. The deal will go through. Already that has been arranged. You may as well tell Kennedy to let us go and let the thing go

through. It involves more than us."

Kennedy had been standing back a bit, carefully keeping them all covered. He glanced a moment out of the corner of his eye at Maude Euston, but said nothing.

It was a terrible situation. Had Lane really been in it? That question was overshadowed by the mention of her father. Impulsively she turned to Craig.

"Oh, save him!" she cried. "Can't anything be done to save my father in spite of himself?"

"It is too late," mocked Mrs. Labret. "People will read the account of the robbery in the papers, even if it didn't take place. They will see it before they see a denial. Orders will flood in to sell the stock. No; it can't be stopped."

Kennedy glanced momentarily at me.

"Is there still time to catch the last morning edition of the Star, Walter?" he asked, quietly. I glanced at my watch.

"We may try. It's possible."

"Write a despatch—an accident to the engine—train delayed—now proceeding—anything. Here, Dugan, you keep them covered. Shoot to kill if there's a move."

Kennedy had begun feverishly setting up the part of the apparatus which he had brought after Whiting had set up his.

"What can you do?" hissed Mrs. Labret. "You can't get word through. Orders have been issued that the telegraph operators are under no circumstances to give out news about this train. The wireless is out of commission, too—the operator overcome. The robbery story has been prepared and given out by this time. Already reporters are being assigned to follow it up."

I looked over at Kennedy. If orders had been given for such secrecy by Barry Euston, how could my despatch do any good? It would be held back by the operators.

Craig quickly slung a wire over those by the side of the track and seized what I had written, sending furiously.

"What are you doing?" I asked. "You heard what she said."

"One thing you can be certain of," he answered, "that despatch can never be stolen or tapped by spies."

"Why—what is this?" I asked, pointing to the instrument.

"The invention of Major Squier, of the army," he replied, "by which any number of messages may be sent at the same time over the same wire without the slightest conflict. Really it consists in making wireless electric waves travel along, instead of inside, the wire. In other words, he had discovered the means of concentrating the energy of a wireless wave on a given point instead of letting it riot all over the face of the earth.

"It is the principle of wireless. But in ordinary wireless less than one−millionth part of the original sending force reaches the point for which it is intended. The rest is scattered through space in all directions. If the vibrations of a current are of a certain number per second, the current will follow a wire to which it is, as it were, attached, instead of passing off into space.

"All the energy in wireless formerly wasted in radiation in every direction now devotes itself solely to driving the current through the ether about the wire. Thus it goes until it reaches the point where Whiting is—where the vibrations correspond to its own and are in tune. There it reproduces the sending impulse. It is wired wireless."

Craig had long since finished sending his wired wireless message. We waited impatiently. The seconds seemed to drag like hours.

Far off, now, we could hear a whistle as a train finally approached slowly into our block, creeping up to see what was wrong. But that made no difference now. It was not any help they could give us that we wanted. A greater problem, the saving of one man's name and the re−establishment of another, confronted us.

Unexpectedly the little wired wireless instrument before us began to buzz. Quickly Kennedy seized a pencil and wrote as the message that no hand of man could interfere with was flashed back to us.

"It is for you, Walter, from the Star," he said, simply handing me what he had written on the back of an old envelope.

I read, almost afraid to read:

Robbery story killed. Black type across page−head last edition, "Treasure−train safe!"

McGRATH.

"Show it to Miss Euston," Craig added, simply, gathering up his wired wireless set, just as the crew from the train behind us ran up. "She may like to know that she has saved her father from himself through misunderstanding her lover."

I thought Maude Euston would faint as she clutched the message. Lane caught her as she reeled backward.

"Rodman—can you—forgive me?" she murmured, simply, yielding to him and looking up into his face.

II. THE TRUTH DETECTOR

"You haven't heard—no one outside has heard—of the strange illness and the robbery of my employer, Mr. Mansfield—'Diamond Jack' Mansfield, you know."

Our visitor was a slight, very pretty, but extremely nervous girl, who had given us a card bearing the name Miss Helen Grey.

"Illness—robbery?" repeated Kennedy, at once interested and turning a quick glance at me.

I shrugged my shoulders in the negative. Neither the Star nor any of the other papers had had a word about it.

"Why, what's the trouble?" he continued to Miss Grey.

"You see," she explained, hurrying on, "I'm Mr. Mansfield's private secretary, and—oh, Professor Kennedy, I don't know, but I'm afraid it is a case for a detective rather than a doctor." She paused a moment and leaned forward nearer to us. "I think he has been poisoned!"

The words themselves were startling enough without the evident perturbation of the girl. Whatever one might think, there was no doubt that she firmly believed what she professed to fear. More than that, I fancied I detected a deeper feeling in her tone than merely loyalty to her employer.

"Diamond Jack" Mansfield was known in Wall Street as a successful promoter, on the White Way as an assiduous first−nighter, in the sporting fraternity as a keen plunger. But of all his hobbies, none had gained him more notoriety than his veritable passion for collecting diamonds.

He came by his sobriquet honestly. I remembered once having seen him, and he was, in fact, a walking De Beers mine. For his personal adornment, more than a million dollars' worth of gems did relay duty. He had scores of sets, every one of them fit for a king of diamonds. It was a curious hobby for a great, strong man, yet he was not alone in his love of and sheer affection for things beautiful. Not love of display or desire to attract notice to himself had prompted him to collect diamonds, but the mere pleasure of owning them, of associating with them. It was a hobby.

It was not strange, therefore, to suspect that Mansfield might, after all, have been the victim of some kind of attack. He went about with perfect freedom, in spite of the knowledge that crooks must have possessed about his hoard.

"What makes you think he has been poisoned?" asked Kennedy, betraying no show of doubt that Miss Grey might be right.

"Oh, it's so strange, so sudden!" she murmured.

"But how do you think it could have happened?" he persisted.

"It must have been at the little supper−party he gave at his apartment last night," she answered, thoughtfully, then added, more slowly, "and yet, it was not until this morning, eight or ten hours after the party, that he became ill." She shuddered. "Paroxysms of nausea, followed by stupor and such terrible prostration. His valet discovered him and sent for Doctor Murray— and then for me."

"How about the robbery?" prompted Kennedy, as it became evident that it was Mansfield's physical condition more than anything else that was on Miss Grey's mind.

"Oh yes"—she recalled herself—"I suppose you know something of his gems? Most people do." Kennedy nodded. "He usually keeps them in a safe−deposit vault downtown, from which he will get whatever set he feels like wearing. Last night it was the one he calls his sporting−set that he wore, by far the finest. It cost over a hundred thousand dollars, and is one of the most curious of all the studies in personal adornment that he owns. All the stones are of the purest blue−white and the set is entirely based on platinum.

"But what makes it most remarkable is that it contains the famous M−1273, as he calls it. The M stands for Mansfield, and the figures represent the number of stones he had purchased up to the time that he acquired this huge one."

"How could they have been taken, do you think?" ventured Kennedy. Miss Grey shook her head doubtfully.

"I think the wall safe must have been opened somehow," she returned.

Kennedy mechanically wrote the number, M−1273, on a piece of paper.

"It has a weird history," she went on, observing what he had written, "and this mammoth blue−white diamond

in the ring is as blue as the famous Hope diamond that has brought misfortune through half the world. This stone, they say, was pried from the mouth of a dying negro in South Africa. He had tried to smuggle it from the mine, and when he was caught cursed the gem and every one who ever should own it. One owner in Amsterdam failed; another in Antwerp committed suicide; a Russian nobleman was banished to Siberia, and another went bankrupt and lost his home and family. Now here it is in Mr. Mansfield's life. I—I hate it!" I could not tell whether it was the superstition or the recent events themselves which weighed most in her mind, but, at any rate, she resumed, somewhat bitterly, a moment later: "M−1273! M is the thirteenth letter of the alphabet, and 1, 2, 7, 3 add up to thirteen. The first and last numbers make thirteen, and John Mansfield has thirteen letters in his name. I wish he had never worn the thing—never bought it!"

The more I listened to her the more impressed I was with the fact that there was something more here than the feeling of a private secretary.

"Who were in the supper−party?" asked Kennedy.

"He gave it for Madeline Hargrave—the pretty little actress, you know, who took New York by storm last season in 'The Sport' and is booked, next week, to appear in the new show, 'The Astor Cup.'"

Miss Grey said it, I thought, with a sort of wistful envy. Mansfield's gay little bohemian gatherings were well known. Though he was not young, he was still somewhat of a Lothario.

"Who else was there?" asked Kennedy.

"Then there was Mina Leitch, a member of Miss Hargrave's new company," she went on. "Another was Fleming Lewis, the Wall Street broker. Doctor Murray and myself completed the party."

"Doctor Murray is his personal physician?" ventured Craig.

"Yes. You know when Mr. Mansfield's stomach went back on him last year it was Doctor Murray who really cured him."

Kennedy nodded.

"Might this present trouble be a recurrence of the old trouble?"

She shook her head. "No; this is entirely different. Oh, I wish that you could go with me and see him!" she pleaded.

"I will," agreed Kennedy.

A moment later we were speeding in a taxicab over to the apartment.

"Really," she remarked, nervously, "I feel lost with Mr. Mansfield so ill. He has so many interests downtown that require constant attention that just the loss of time means a great deal. Of course, I understand many of them—but, you know, a private secretary can't conduct a man's business. And just now, when I came up from the office, I couldn't believe that he was too ill to care about things until I actually saw him."

We entered the apartment. A mere glance about showed that; even though Mansfield's hobby was diamonds, he was no mean collector of other articles of beauty. In the big living−room, which was almost like a studio, we met a tall, spare, polished−mannered man, whom I quickly recognized as Doctor Murray.

"Is he any better?" blurted out Miss Grey, even before our introductions were over. Doctor Murray shook his head gravely.

"About the same," he answered, though one could find little reassurance in his tone.

"I should like to see him," hinted Kennedy, "unless there is some real reason why I should not."

"No," replied the doctor, absently; "on the contrary, it might perhaps rouse him."

He led the way down the hall, and Kennedy and I followed, while Miss Grey attempted to busy herself over some affairs at a huge mahogany table in the library just off the living−room.

Mansfield had shown the same love of luxury and the bizarre even in the furnishing of his bedroom, which was a black−and−white room with furniture of Chinese lacquer and teakwood.

Kennedy looked at the veteran plunger long and thoughtfully as he lay stretched out, listless, on the handsome bed. Mansfield seemed completely indifferent to our presence. There was something uncanny about him. Already his face was shrunken, his skin dark, and his eyes were hollow.

"What do you suppose it is?" asked Kennedy, bending over him, and then rising and averting his head so that Mansfield could not hear, even if his vagrant faculties should be attracted. "His pulse is terribly weak and his heart scarcely makes a sound."

Doctor Murray's face knit in deep lines.

"I'm afraid," he said, in a low tone, "that I will have to admit not having been able to diagnose the trouble, I was just considering whom I might call in."

"What have you done?" asked Kennedy, as the two moved a little farther out of ear−shot of the patient.

"Well," replied the doctor, slowly, "when his valet called me in, I must admit that my first impression was that I had to deal with a case of diphtheria. I was so impressed that I even took a blood smear and examined it. It showed the presence of a tox albumin. But it isn't diphtheria. The antitoxin has had no effect. No; it isn't diphtheria. But the poison is there. I might have thought it was cholera, only that seems so impossible here in New York." Doctor Murray looked at Kennedy with no effort to conceal his perplexity. "Over and over I have asked myself what it could be," he went on. "It seems to me that I have thought over about everything that is possible. Always I get back to the fact that there is that tox albumin present. In some respects, it seems like the bite of a poisonous animal. There are no marks, of course, and it seems altogether impossible, yet it acts precisely as I have seen snake bites affect people. I am that desperate that I would try the Noguchi antivenene, but it would have no more effect than the antitoxin. No; I can only conclude that there is some narcotic irritant which especially affects the lungs and heart."

"Will you let me have one of the blood smears?" asked Kennedy.

"Certainly," replied the doctor, reaching over and taking a glass slide from several lying on a table.

For some time after we left the sick−room Craig appeared to be considering what Doctor Murray had said.

Seeking to find Miss Grey in the library, we found ourselves in the handsome, all−wood−paneled dining−room. It still showed evidences of the late banquet of the night before.

Craig paused a moment in doubt which way to go, then picked up from the table a beautifully decorated menu−card. As he ran his eye down it mechanically, he paused.

"Champignons," he remarked, thoughtfully. "H−m!—mushrooms."

Instead of going on toward the library, he turned and passed through a swinging door into the kitchen. There was no one there, but it was in a much more upset condition than the dining−room.

"Pardon, monsieur," sounded a voice behind us.

It was the French chef who had entered from the direction of the servants' quarters, and was now all apologies for the untidy appearance of the realm over which he presided. The strain of the dinner had been too much for his assistants, he hastened to explain.

"I see that you had mushrooms—creamed," remarked Kennedy.

"Oui, monsieur," he replied; "some that Miss Hargrave herself sent in from her mushroom−cellar out in the country."

As he said it his eye traveled involuntarily toward a pile of ramekins on a table. Kennedy noticed it and deliberately walked over to the table. Before I knew what he was about he had scooped from them each a bit of the contents and placed it in some waxed paper that was lying near by. The chef watched him curiously.

"You would not find my kitchen like this ordinarily," he remarked. "I would not like to have Doctor Murray see it, for since last year, when monsieur had the bad stomach, I have been very careful."

The chef seemed to be nervous.

"You prepared the mushrooms yourself?" asked Kennedy, suddenly.

"I directed my assistant," came back the wary reply.

"But you know good mushrooms when you see them?"

"Certainly," he replied, quickly.

"There was no one else in the kitchen while you prepared them?"

"Yes," he answered, hurriedly; "Mr. Mansfield came in, and Miss Hargrave. Oh, they are very particular! And Doctor Murray, he has given me special orders ever since last year, when monsieur had the bad stomach," he repeated.

"Was any one else here?"

"Yes—I think so. You see, I am so excited—a big dinner—such epicures—everything must be just so—I cannot say."

There seemed to be little satisfaction in quizzing the chef, and Kennedy turned again into the dining−room, making his way back to the library, where Miss Grey was waiting anxiously for us.

"What do you think?" she asked, eagerly.

"I don't know what to think," replied Kennedy. "No one else has felt any ill effects from the supper, I suppose?"

"No," she replied; "at least, I'm sure I would have heard by this time if they had."

"Do you recall anything peculiar about the mushrooms?" shot out Kennedy.

"We talked about them some time, I remember," she said, slowly. "Growing mushrooms is one of Miss Hargrave's hobbies out at her place on Long Island."

"Yes," persisted Kennedy; "but I mean anything peculiar about the preparation of them."

"Why, yes," she said, suddenly; "I believe that Miss Hargrave was to have superintended them herself. We all went out into the kitchen. But it was too late. They had been prepared already."

"You were all in the kitchen?"

"Yes; I remember. It was before the supper and just after we came in from the theater−party which Mr. Mansfield gave. You know Mr. Mansfield is always doing unconventional things like that. If he took a notion, he would go into the kitchen of the Ritz."

"That is what I was trying to get out of the chef—Francois," remarked Kennedy. "He didn't seem to have a very clear idea of what happened. I think I'll see him again—right away."

We found the chef busily at work, now, cleaning up. As Kennedy asked him a few inconsequential questions, his eye caught a row of books on a shelf. It was a most complete library of the culinary arts. Craig selected one and turned the pages over rapidly. Then he came back to the frontispiece, which showed a model dinner− table set for a number of guests. He placed the picture before Francois, then withdrew it in, I should say, about ten seconds. It was a strange and incomprehensible action, but I was more surprised when Kennedy added:

"Now tell me what you saw."

Francois was quite overwhelming in his desire to please. Just what was going on in his mind I could not guess, nor did he betray it, but quickly he enumerated the objects on the table, gradually slowing up as the number which he recollected became exhausted.

"Were there candles?" prompted Craig, as the flow of Francois's description ceased.

"Oh yes, candles," he agreed, eagerly.

"Favors at each place?"

"Yes, sir."

I could see no sense in the proceeding, yet knew Kennedy too well to suppose, for an instant, that he had not some purpose.

The questioning over, Kennedy withdrew, leaving poor Francois more mystified than ever.

"Well," I exclaimed, as we passed through the dining−room, "what was all that?"

"That," he explained, "is what is known to criminologists as the 'Aussage test.' Just try it some time when you get a chance. If there are, say, fifty objects in a picture, normally a person may recall perhaps twenty of them."

"I see," I interrupted; "a test of memory."

"More than that," he replied. "You remember that, at the end, I suggested several things likely to be on the table. They were not there, as you might have seen if you had had the picture before you. That was a test of the susceptibility to suggestion of the chef. Francois may not mean to lie, but I'm afraid we'll have to get along without him in getting to the bottom of the case. You see, before we go any further we know that he is unreliable—to say the least. It may be that nothing at all happened in the kitchen to the mushrooms. We'll never discover it from him. We must get it elsewhere."

Miss Grey had been trying to straighten out some of the snarls which Mansfield's business affairs had got into as a result of his illness; but it was evident that she had difficulty in keeping her mind on her work.

"The next thing I'd like to see," asked Kennedy, when we rejoined her, "is that wall safe." She led the way down the hall and into an ante−room to Mansfield's part of the suite. The safe itself was a comparatively simple affair inside a closet. Indeed, I doubt whether it had been seriously designed to be burglar−proof. Rather it was merely a protection against fire.

"Have you any suspicion about when the robbery took place?" asked Kennedy, as we peered into the empty compartment. "I wish I had been called in the first thing when it was discovered. There might have been some chance to discover fingerprints. But now, I suppose, every clue of that sort has been obliterated."

"No," she replied; "I don't know whether it happened before or after Mr. Mansfield was discovered so ill by

his valet."

"But at least you can give me some idea of when the jewels were placed in the safe."

"It must have been before the supper, right after our return from the theater."

"So?" considered Kennedy. "Then that would mean that they might have been taken by any one, don't you see? Why did he place them in the safe so soon, instead of wearing them the rest of the evening?"

"I hadn't thought of that way of looking at it," she admitted. "Why, when we came home from the theater I remember it had been so warm that Mr. Mansfield's collar was wilted and his dress shirt rumpled. He excused himself, and when he returned he was not wearing the diamonds. We noticed it, and Miss Hargrave expressed a wish that she might wear the big diamond at the opening night of 'The Astor Cup.' Mr. Mansfield promised that she might and nothing more was said about it."

"Did you notice anything else at the dinner—no matter how trivial?" asked Kennedy.

Helen Grey seemed to hesitate, then said, in a low voice, as though the words were wrung from her:

"Of course, the party and the supper were given ostensibly to Miss Hargrave. But—lately—I have thought he was paying quite as much attention to Mina Leitch."

It was quite in keeping with what we knew of "Diamond Jack." Perhaps it was this seeming fickleness which had saved him from many entangling alliances. Miss Grey said it in such a way that it seemed like an apology for a fault in his character which she would rather have hidden. Yet Sending Completed Page, Please Wait ... out of the corner of my eye at Kennedy. Involuntarily his hand which held the telltale sequin had sought his waistcoat pocket, as though to hide it. Then I saw him check the action and deliberately examine the piece of tinsel between his thumb and forefinger.

Doctor Murray saw it, too, and his eyes were riveted on it, as though instantly he saw its significance.

"What do you think—Jack as sick as a dog, and robbed, too, and yet Murray says I oughtn't to see him!" complained Lewis, for the moment oblivious to the fact that all our eyes were riveted on the spangle between Kennedy's fingers. And then, slowly it seemed to dawn on him what it was. "Madeline's!" he exclaimed, quickly. "So Mina did tear it, after all, when she stepped on the train."

Kennedy watched the faces before us keenly. No one said anything. It was evident that some such incident had happened. But had Lewis, with a quick flash of genius, sought to cover up something, protect somebody?

Miss Grey was evidently anxious to transfer the scene at least to the living−room, away from the sick−room, and Kennedy, seeing it, fell in with the idea.

"Looks to me as though this robbery was an inside affair," remarked Lewis, as we all stood for a moment in the living−room. "Do you suppose one of the servants could have been 'planted' for the purpose of pulling it off?"

The idea was plausible enough. Yet, plausible as the suggestion might seem, it took no account of the other circumstances of the case. I could not believe that the illness of Mansfield was merely an unfortunate coincidence.

Fleming Lewis's unguarded and blunt tendency to blurt out whatever seemed uppermost in his mind soon became a study to me as we talked together in the living−room. I could not quite make out whether it was studied and astute or whether it was merely the natural exuberance of youth. There was certainly some sort of enmity between him and the doctor, which the remark about the spangle seemed to fan into a flame.

Miss Grey manoeuvered tactfully, however, to prevent a scene. And, after an interchange of remarks that threw more heat than light on the matter, Kennedy and I followed Lewis out to the elevator, with a parting promise to keep in touch with Miss Grey.

"What do you think of the spangle?" I queried of Craig as Lewis bade us a hasty good−by and climbed into his car at the street− entrance. "Is it a clue or a stall?"

"That remains to be seen," he replied, noncommittally. "Just now the thing that interests me most is what I can accomplish at the laboratory in the way of finding out what is the matter with Mansfield."

While Kennedy was busy with the various solutions which he made of the contents of the ramekins that had held the mushrooms, I wandered over to the university library and waded through several volumes on fungi without learning anything of value. Finally, knowing that Kennedy would probably be busy for some time, and that all I should get for my pains by questioning him would be monosyllabic grunts until he was quite convinced that he was on the trail of something, I determined to run into the up−town office of the Star and talk over the affair as well as I could without violating what I felt had been given us in confidence.

I could not, it turned out, have done anything better, for it seemed to be the gossip of the Broadway cafes and

cabarets that Mansfield had been plunging rather deeply lately and had talked many of his acquaintances into joining him in a pool, either outright or on margins. It seemed to be a safe bet that not only Lewis and Doctor Murray had joined him, but that Madeline Hargrave and Mina Leitch, who had had a successful season and some spare thousands to invest, might have gone in, too. So far the fortunes of the stock−market had not smiled on Mansfield's schemes, and, I reflected, it was not impossible that what might be merely an incident to a man like Mansfield could be very serious to the rest of them.

It was the middle of the afternoon when I returned to the laboratory with my slender budget of news. Craig was quite interested in what I had to say, even pausing for a few moments in his work to listen.

In several cages I saw that he had a number of little guinea−pigs. One of them was plainly in distress, and Kennedy had been watching him intently.

"It's strange," he remarked. "I had samples of material from six ramekins. Five of them seem to have had no effect whatever. But if the bit that I gave this fellow causes such distress, what would a larger quantity do?"

"Then one of the ramekins was poisoned?" I questioned.

"I have discovered in it, as well as in the blood smear, the tox albumin that Doctor Murray mentioned," he said, simply, pulling out his watch. "It isn't late. I think I shall have to take a trip out to Miss Hargrave's. We ought to do it in an hour and a half in a car."

Kennedy said very little as we sped out over the Long Island roads that led to the little colony of actors and actresses at Cedar Grove. He seemed rather to be enjoying the chance to get away from the city and turn over in his mind the various problems which the case presented.

As for myself, I had by this time convinced myself that, somehow, the mushrooms were involved. What Kennedy expected to find I could not guess. But from what I had read I surmised that it must be that one of the poisonous varieties had somehow got mixed with the others, one of the Amanitas, just as deadly as the venom of the rattler or the copperhead. I knew that, in some cases, Amanitas had been used to commit crimes. Was this such a case?

We had no trouble in finding the estate of Miss Hargrave, and she was at home.

Kennedy lost no time introducing himself and coming to the point of his visit. Madeline Hargrave was a slender, willowy type of girl, pronouncedly blond, striking, precisely the type I should have imagined that Mansfield would have been proud to be seen with.

"I've just heard of Mr. Mansfield's illness," she said, anxiously. "Mr. Lewis called me up and told me. I don't see why Miss Grey or Doctor Murray didn't let me know sooner."

She said it with an air of vexation, as though she felt slighted. In spite of her evident anxiety to know about the tragedy, however, I did not detect the depth of feeling that Helen Grey had shown. In fact, the thoughtfulness of Fleming Lewis almost led me to believe that it was he, rather than Mansfield, for whom she really cared.

We chatted a few minutes, as Kennedy told what little we had discovered. He said nothing about the spangle.

"By the way," remarked Craig, at length, "I would very much like to have a look at that famous mushroom−cellar of yours."

For the first time she seemed momentarily to lose her poise.

"I've always had a great interest in mushrooms," she explained, hastily. "You—you do not think it could be the mushrooms—that have caused Mr. Mansfield's illness, do you?"

Kennedy passed off the remark as best he could under the circumstances. Though she was not satisfied with his answer, she could not very well refuse his request, and a few minutes later we were down in the dark dampness of the cellar back of the house, where Kennedy set to work on a most exhaustive search.

I could see by the expression on his face, as his search progressed, that he was not finding what he had expected. Clearly, the fungi before us were the common edible mushrooms. The upper side of each, as he examined it, was white, with brownish fibrils, or scales. Underneath, some were a beautiful salmon−pink, changing gradually to almost black in the older specimens. The stem was colored like the top. But search as he might for what I knew he was after, in none did he find anything but a small or more often no swelling at the base, and no "cup," as it is called.

As he rose after his thorough search, I saw that he was completely baffled.

"I hardly thought you'd find anything," Miss Hargrave remarked, noticing the look on his face. "I've always been very careful of my mushrooms."

"You have certainly succeeded admirably," he complimented.

"I hope you will let me know how Mr. Mansfield is," she said, as we started back toward our car on the road. "I can't tell you how I feel. To think that, after a party which he gave for me, he should be taken ill, and not only that but be robbed at the same time! Really, you must let me know—or I shall have to come up to the city."

It seemed gratuitous for Kennedy to promise, for I knew that he was by no means through with her yet; but she thanked him, and we turned back toward town.

"Well," I remarked, as we reeled off the miles quickly, "I must say that that puts me all at sea again. I had convinced myself that it was a case of mushroom poisoning. What can you do now?"

"Do?" he echoed. "Why, go on. This puts us a step nearer the truth, that's all."

Far from being discouraged at what had seemed to me to be a fatal blow to the theory, he now seemed to be actually encouraged. Back in the city, he lost no time in getting to the laboratory again.

A package from the botanical department of the university was waiting there for Kennedy, but before he could open it the telephone buzzed furiously.

I could gather from Kennedy's words that it was Helen Grey.

"I shall be over immediately," he promised, as he hung up the receiver and turned to me. "Mansfield is much worse. While I get together some material I must take over there, Walter, I want you to call up Miss Hargrave and tell her to start for the city right away—meet us at Mansfield's. Then get Mina Leitch and Lewis. You'll find their numbers in the book—or else you'll have to get them from Miss Grey."

While I was delivering the messages as diplomatically as possible Kennedy had taken a vial from a medicine−chest, and then from a cabinet a machine which seemed to consist of a number of collars and belts fastened to black cylinders from which ran tubes. An upright roll of ruled paper supported by a clockwork arrangement for revolving it, and a standard bearing a recording pen, completed the outfit.

"I should much have preferred not being hurried," he confessed, as we dashed over in the car to Mansfield's again, bearing the several packages. "I wanted to have a chance to interview Mina Leitch alone. However, it has now become a matter of life or death."

Miss Grey was pale and worn as she met us in the living−room.

"He's had a sinking−spell," she said, tremulously. "Doctor Murray managed to bring him around, but he seems so much weaker after it. Another might—" She broke off, unable to finish.

A glance at Mansfield was enough to convince any one that unless something was done soon the end was not far.

"Another convulsion and sinking−spell is about all he can stand," remarked Doctor Murray.

"May I try something?" asked Kennedy, hardly waiting for the doctor to agree before he had pulled out the little vial which I had seen him place in his pocket.

Deftly Kennedy injected some of the contents into Mansfield's side, then stood anxiously watching the effect. The minutes lengthened. At least he seemed to be growing no worse.

In the next room, on a table, Kennedy was now busy setting out the scroll of ruled paper and its clockwork arrangement, and connecting the various tubes from the black cylinders in such a way that the recording pen just barely touched on the scroll.

He had come back to note the still unchanged condition of the patient when the door opened and a handsome woman in the early thirties entered, followed by Helen Grey. It was Mina Leitch.

"Oh, isn't it terrible! I can hardly believe it!" she cried, paying no attention to us as she moved over to Doctor Murray.

I recalled what Miss Grey had said about Mansfield's attentions. It was evident that, as far as Mina was concerned, her own attentions were monopolized by the polished physician. His manner in greeting her told me that Doctor Murray appreciated it. Just then Fleming Lewis bustled in.

"I thought Miss Hargrave was here," he said, abruptly, looking about. "They told me over the wire she would be."

"She should be here any moment," returned Kennedy, looking at his watch and finding that considerably over an hour had elapsed since I had telephoned.

What it was I could not say, but there was a coldness toward Lewis that amounted to more than latent hostility. He tried to appear at ease, but it was a decided effort. There was no mistaking his relief when the tension

was broken by the arrival of Madeline Hargrave.

The circumstances were so strange that none of them seemed to object while Kennedy began to explain, briefly, that, as nearly as he could determine, the illness of Mansfield might be due to something eaten at the supper. As he attached the bands about the necks and waists of one after another of the guests, bringing the little black cylinders thus close to the middle of their chests, he contrived to convey the impression that he would like to determine whether any one else had been affected in a lesser degree.

I watched most intently the two women who had just come in. One would certainly not have detected from their greeting and outward manner anything more than that they were well acquainted. But they were an interesting study, two quite opposite types. Madeline, with her baby−blue eyes, was of the type that craved admiration. Mina's black eyes flashed now and then imperiously, as though she sought to compel what the other sought to win.

As for Fleming Lewis, I could not fail to notice that he was most attentive to Madeline, though he watched, furtively, but none the less keenly, every movement and word of Mina.

His preparations completed, Kennedy opened the package which had been left at the laboratory just before the hasty call from Miss Grey. As he did so he disclosed several specimens of a mushroom of pale−lemon color, with a center of deep orange, the top flecked with white bits. Underneath, the gills were white and the stem had a sort of veil about it. But what interested me most, and what I was looking for, was the remains of a sort of dirty, chocolate− colored cup at the base of the stem.

"I suppose there is scarcely any need of saying," began Kennedy, "that the food which I suspect in this case is the mushrooms. Here I have some which I have fortunately been able to obtain merely to illustrate what I am going to say. This is the deadly Amanita muscaria, the fly−agaric."

Madeline Hargrave seemed to be following him with a peculiar fascination.

"This Amanita," resumed Kennedy, "has a long history, and I may say that few species are quite so interesting. Macerated in milk, it has been employed for centuries as a fly−poison, hence its name. Its deadly properties were known to the ancients, and it is justly celebrated because of its long and distinguished list of victims. Agrippina used it to poison the Emperor Claudius. Among others, the Czar Alexis of Russia died of eating it.

"I have heard that some people find it only a narcotic, and it is said that in Siberia there are actually Amanita debauchees who go on prolonged tears by eating the thing. It may be that it does not affect some people as it does others, but in most cases that beautiful gossamer veil which you see about the stem is really a shroud.

"The worst of it is," he continued, "that this Amanita somewhat resembles the royal agaric, the Amanita caesarea. It is, as you see, strikingly beautiful, and therefore all the more dangerous."

He ceased a moment, while we looked in a sort of awe at the fatally beautiful thing.

"It is not with the fungus that I am so much interested just now, however," Kennedy began again, "but with the poison. Many years ago scientists analyzed its poisonous alkaloids and found what they called bulbosine. Later it was named muscarin, and now is sometimes known as amanitin, since it is confined to the mushrooms of the Amanita genus.

"Amanitin is a wonderful and dangerous alkaloid, which is absorbed in the intestinal canal. It is extremely violent. Three to five one−thousandths of a gram, or six one−hundredths of a grain, are very dangerous. More than that, the poisoning differs from most poisons in the long time that elapses between the taking of it and the first evidences of its effects.

"Muscarin," Kennedy concluded, "has been chemically investigated more often than any other mushroom poison and a perfect antidote has been discovered. Atropin, or belladonna, is such a drug."

For a moment I looked about at the others in the room. Had it been an accident, after all? Perhaps, if any of the others had been attacked, one might have suspected that it was. But they had not been affected at all, at least apparently. Yet there could be no doubt that it was the poisonous muscarin that had affected Mansfield.

"Did you ever see anything like that?" asked Kennedy, suddenly, holding up the gilt spangle which he had found on the closet floor near the wall safe.

Though no one said a word, it was evident that they all recognized it. Lewis was watching Madeline closely. But she betrayed nothing except mild surprise at seeing the spangle from her dress. Had it been deliberately placed there, it flashed over me, in order to compromise Madeline Hargrave and divert suspicion from some one

else?

I turned to Mina. Behind the defiance of her dark eyes I felt that there was something working. Kennedy must have sensed it even before I did, for he suddenly bent down over the recording needle and the ruled paper on the table.

"This," he shot out, "is a pneumograph which shows the actual intensity of the emotions by recording their effects on the heart and lungs together. The truth can literally be tapped, even where no confession can be extracted. A moment's glance at this line, traced here by each of you, can tell the expert more than words."

"Then it was a mushroom that poisoned Jack!" interrupted Lewis, suddenly. "Some poisonous Amanita got mixed with the edible mushrooms?"

Kennedy answered, quickly, without taking his eyes off the line the needle was tracing:

"No; this was a case of the deliberate use of the active principle itself, muscarin—with the expectation that the death, if the cause was ever discovered, could easily be blamed on such a mushroom. Somehow—there were many chances—the poison was slipped into the ramekin Francois was carefully preparing for Mansfield. The method does not interest me so much as the fact—"

There was a slight noise from the other room where Mansfield lay. Instantly we were all on our feet. Before any of us could reach the door Helen Grey had slipped through it.

"Just a second," commanded Kennedy, extending the sequin toward us to emphasize what he was about to say. "The poisoning and the robbery were the work of one hand. That sequin is the key that has unlocked the secret which my pneumograph has recorded. Some one saw that robbery committed—knew nothing of the contemplated poisoning to cover it. To save the reputation of the robber—at any cost—on the spur of the moment the ruse of placing the sequin in the closet occurred."

Madeline Hargrave turned to Mina, while I recalled Lewis's remark about Mina's stepping on the train and tearing it. The defiance in her black eyes flashed from Madeline to Kennedy.

"Yes," she cried; "I did it! I—"

As quickly the defiance had faded. Mina Leitch had fainted.

"Some water—quick!" cried Kennedy.

I sprang through the door into Mansfield's room. As I passed I caught sight of Helen Grey supporting the head of Mansfield—both oblivious to actresses, diamonds, everything that had so nearly caused a tragedy.

"No," I heard Kennedy say to Lewis as I returned; "it was not Mina. The person she shielded was wildly in love with her, insanely jealous of Mansfield for even looking at her, and in debt so hopelessly in Mansfield's ventures that only the big diamond could save him—Doctor Murray himself!"

III. THE SOUL−ANALYSIS

"Here's the most remarkable appeal," observed Kennedy, one morning, as he tossed over to me a letter. "What do you make of that?" It read:

MONTROSE, CONN.

MY DEAR PROFESSOR KENNEDY:

You do not know me, but I have heard a great deal about you. Please, I beg of you, do not disregard this letter. At least try to verify the appeal I am making.

I am here at the Belleclaire Sanatorium, run by Dr. Bolton Burr, in Montrose. But it is not a real sanatorium. It is really a private asylum.

Let me tell my story briefly. After my baby was born I devoted myself to it. But, in spite of everything, it died. Meanwhile my husband neglected me terribly. After the baby's death I was a nervous wreck, and I came up here to rest.

Now I find I am being held here as an insane patient. I cannot get out. I do not even know whether this letter will reach you. But the chambermaid here has told me she will post it for me.

I am ill and nervous—a wreck, but not insane, although they will tell you that the twilight−sleep treatment affected my mind. But what is happening here will eventually drive me insane if some one does not come to my rescue.

Cannot you get in to see me as a doctor or friend? I will leave all to you after that.

Yours anxiously,

JANET (MRS. ROGER) CRANSTON.

"What do you make of it yourself?" I returned, handing back the letter. "Are you going to take it up?" He slowly looked over the letter again.

"Judging by the handwriting," he remarked, thoughtfully, "I should say that the writer is laboring under keen excitement—though there is no evidence of insanity on the face of it. Yes; I think I'll take up the case."

"But how are you going to get in?" I asked. "They'll never admit you willingly."

Kennedy pondered a minute. "I'll get in, all right," he said, at length; "come on—I'm going to call on Roger Cranston first."

"Roger Cranston?" I repeated, dumfounded. "Why, he'll never help you! Ten to one he's in on it."

"We'll have to take a chance," returned Kennedy, hurrying me out of the laboratory.

Roger Cranston was a well−known lawyer and man about town. We found him in his office on lower Broadway. He was young and distinguished−looking, which probably accounted for the fact that his office had become a sort of fashionable court of domestic relations.

"I'm a friend of Dr. Bolton Burr, of Montrose," introduced Kennedy. Cranston looked at him keenly, but Kennedy was a good actor. "I have been studying some of the patients at the sanatorium, and I have seen Mrs. Cranston there."

"Indeed!" responded Cranston. "I'm all broken up by it myself."

I could not resist thinking that he took it very calmly, however.

"I should like very much to make what we call a psychanalysis of Mrs. Cranston's mental condition," Kennedy explained.

"A psychanalysis?" repeated Cranston.

"Yes; you know it is a new system. In the field of abnormal psychology, the soul−analysis is of first importance. To−day, this study is of the greatest help in neurology and psychiatry. Only, I can't make it without the consent of the natural guardian of the patient. Doctor Burr tells me that you will have no objection."

Cranston thoughtfully studied the wall opposite.

"Well," he returned, slowly, "they tell me that without treatment she will soon be hopelessly insane—perhaps dangerously so. That is all I know. I am not a specialist. If Doctor Burr—" He paused.

"If you can give me just a card," urged Kennedy, "that is all Doctor Burr wishes."

Cranston wrote hastily on the back of one of his cards what Kennedy dictated.

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Please allow Doctor Kennedy to make a psychanalysis of my
 wife's mental condition.
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"You will let me know—if there is—any hope?" he asked.

"As soon as I can," replied Kennedy, "I'll let you have a copy of my report."

Cranston thanked us and bowed us to the door suavely.

"Well," I remarked, as we rode down in the elevator, "that was clever. He fell for it, too. You're an artist. Do you think he was posing?"

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders.

We lost no time in getting the first train for Montrose, before Cranston had time to reconsider and call up Doctor Burr.

The Belleclaire Sanatorium was on the outskirts of the town. It was an old stone house, rather dingy, and surrounded by a high stone wall surmounted by sharp pickets.

Dr. Bolton Burr, who was at the head of the institution, met us in the plainly furnished reception−room which also served as his office. Through a window we could see some of the patients walking or sitting about on a small stretch of scraggly grass between the house and the wall.

Doctor Burr was a tall and commanding−looking man with a Vandyke beard, and one would instinctively have picked him out anywhere as a physician.

"I believe you have a patient here—Mrs. Roger Cranston," began Kennedy, after the usual formalities. Doctor Burr eyed us askance. "I've been asked by Mr. Cranston to make an examination of his wife," pursued Craig, presenting the card which he had obtained from Roger Cranston.

"H'm!" mused Doctor Burr, looking quickly from the card to Kennedy with a searching glance.

"I wish you would tell me something of the case before I see her," went on Kennedy, with absolute assurance.

"Well," temporized Doctor Burr, twirling the card, "Mrs. Cranston came to me after the death of her child. She was in a terrible state. But we are slowly building up her shattered nerves by plain, simple living and a tonic."

"Was she committed by her husband?" queried Kennedy, unexpectedly.

Whether or not Doctor Burr felt suspicious of us I could not tell. But he seemed eager to justify himself.

"I have the papers committing her to my care," he said, rising and opening a safe in the corner.

He laid before us a document in which appeared the names of Roger Cranston and Julia Giles.

"Who is this Julia Giles?" asked Kennedy, after he had read the document.

"One of our nurses," returned the doctor. "She has had Mrs. Cranston under observation ever since she arrived."

"I should like to see both Miss Giles and Mrs. Cranston," insisted Kennedy. "It is not that Mr. Cranston is in any way dissatisfied with your treatment, but he thought that perhaps I might be of some assistance to you."

Kennedy's manner was ingratiating but firm, and he hurried on, lest it should occur to Doctor Burr to call up Cranston. The doctor, still twirling the card, finally led us through the wide central hall and up an old−fashioned winding staircase to a large room on the second floor.

He tapped at the door, which was opened, disclosing an interior tastefully furnished.

Doctor Burr introduced us to Miss Giles, conveying the impression, which Kennedy had already given, that he was a specialist, and I his assistant.

Janet Cranston was a young and also remarkably beautiful girl. One could see traces of sorrow in her face, which was exceedingly, though not unpleasingly, pale. The restless brilliancy of her eyes spoke of some physical, if not psychical, disorder. She was dressed in deep mourning, which heightened her pallor and excited a feeling of mingled respect and interest. Thick brown coils of chestnut hair were arranged in such a manner as to give an extremely youthful appearance to her delicate face. Her emotions were expressed by the constant motion of her slender fingers.

Miss Giles was a striking woman of an entirely different type. She seemed to be exuberant with health, as though nursing had taught her not merely how to take care of others, but had given her the secret of caring, first of all, for herself.

I could see, as Doctor Burr introduced us to his patient, that Mrs. Cranston instantly recognized Kennedy's

interest in her case. She received us with a graceful courtesy, but she betrayed no undue interest that might excite suspicion, nor was there any hint given of the note of appeal. I wondered whether that might not be an instance of the cunning for which I had heard that the insane are noted. She showed no sign of insanity, however.

I looked about curiously to see if there were evidences of the treatment which she was receiving. On a table stood a bottle and a glass, as well as a teaspoon, and I recalled the doctor's remark about the tonic.

"You look tired, Mrs. Cranston," remarked Kennedy, thoughtfully. "Why not rest while we are here, and then I will be sure my visit has had no ill effects."

"Thank you," she murmured, and I was much impressed by the sweetness of her voice.

As he spoke, Kennedy arranged the pillows on a chaise lounge and placed her on it with her head slightly elevated. Having discussed the subject of psychanalysis with Kennedy before, I knew that this was so that nothing might distract her from the free association of ideas.

He placed himself near her head, and motioned to us to stand farther back of him. where she could not see us.

"Avoid all muscular exertion and distraction," he continued. "I want you to concentrate your attention thoroughly. Tell me anything that comes into your mind. Tell all you know of your symptoms. Concentrate, and repeat all you think of. Frankly express all the thoughts that you have, even though they may be painful and embarrassing."

He said this soothingly, and she seemed to understand that much depended upon her answers and the fact of not forcing her ideas.

"I am thinking of my husband," Mrs. Cranston began, finally, in a dreamy tone.

"What of him?" suggested Kennedy.

"Of how the baby—separated us—and—" She paused, almost in tears.

From what I knew of the method of psychanalysis, I recalled it was the gaps and hesitations which were most important in arriving at the truth regarding the cause of her trouble.

"Perhaps it was my fault; perhaps I was a better mother than wife. I thought I was doing what he would want me to do. Too late I see my mistake."

It was easy to read into her story that there had been other women in his life. It had wounded her deeply. Yet it was equally plain that she still loved him.

"Go on," urged Kennedy, gently.

"Oh yes," she resumed, dreamily; "I am thinking about once, when I left him, I wandered through the country. I remember little except that it was the country through which we had passed on an automobile trip on our honeymoon. Once I thought I saw him, and I tried to get to him. I longed for him, but each time, when I almost reached him, he would disappear. I seemed to be so deserted and alone. I tried to call him, but my tongue refused to say his name. It must have been hours that I wandered about, for I recall nothing after that until I was found, disheveled and exhausted."

She paused and closed her eyes, while I could see that Kennedy considered this gap very important.

"Don't stop," persisted Kennedy. "Once we quarreled over one of his clients who was suing for a divorce. I thought he was devoting too much time and attention to her. While there might not have been anything wrong, still I was afraid. In my anger and anxiety I accused him. He retorted by slamming the door, and I did not see him for two or three days. I realized my nervous condition, and one day a mutual friend of ours introduced me to Doctor Burr and advised me to take a rest−cure at his sanatorium. By this time Roger and I were on speaking−terms again. But the death of the baby and the quarrel left me still as nervous as before. He seemed anxious to have me do something, and so I came here."

"Do you remember anything that happened after that?" asked Craig, for the first time asking a mildly leading question.

"Yes; I recall everything that happened when I came here," she went on. "Roger came up with me to complete the necessary arrangements. We were met at the station by Doctor Burr and this woman who has since been my nurse and companion. On the way up from the station to the sanatorium Doctor Burr was very considerate of me, and I noticed that my husband seemed interested in Miss Giles and the care she was to take of me."

Kennedy flashed a glance at me from a note−book in which he was apparently busily engaged in jotting down her answers. I did not know just what interpretation to put on it, but surmised that it meant that he had struck what the new psychologists call a "complex," in the entrance of Miss Giles into the case.

Before we realized it there came a sudden outburst of feeling.

"And now—they are keeping me here by force!" she cried.

Doctor Burr looked at us significantly, as much as to say, "Just what might be expected, you see." Kennedy nodded, but made no effort to stop Mrs. Cranston.

"They have told Roger that I am insane, and I know he must believe it or he would not leave me here. But their real motive, I can guess, is mercenary. I can't complain about my treatment here—it costs enough."

By this time she was sitting bolt upright, staring straight ahead as though amazed at her own boldness in speaking so frankly before them.

"I feel all right at times—then—it is as though I had a paralysis of the body, but not of the mind—not of the mind," she repeated, tensely. There was a frightened look on her face, and her voice was now wildly appealing.

What would have followed I cannot guess, for at that instant there came a noise outside from another of the rooms as though pandemonium had broken loose. By the shouting and confusion, one might easily have wondered whether keepers and lunatics might not have exchanged places.

"It is just one of the patients who has escaped from his room," explained Doctor Burr; "nothing to be alarmed about. We'll soon have him quieted."

Doctor Burr hurried out into the corridor while Miss Giles was looking out of the door.

Quickly Kennedy reached over and abstracted several drops from a bottle of tonic on the table, pouring it into his handkerchief, which he rolled up tightly and stuffed into his pocket. Mrs. Cranston watched him pleadingly, and clasped her hands in mute appeal, with a hasty glance at Miss Giles.

Kennedy said nothing, either, but rapidly folded up a page of the note−book on which he had been writing and shoved it into Mrs. Cranston's hand, together with something he had taken from his pocket. She understood, and quickly placed it in her corsage.

"Read it—when you are absolutely alone," he whispered, just as Miss Giles shut the door and turned to us.

The excitement subsided almost as quickly as it had arisen, but it had been sufficient to put a stop to any further study of the case along those lines. Miss Giles's keen eyes missed no action or movement of her patient.

Doctor Burr returned shortly. It was evident from his manner that he wished to have the visit terminated, and Kennedy seemed quite willing to take the hint. He thanked Mrs. Cranston, and we withdrew quietly, after bidding her good−by in a manner as reassuring as we could make it under the circumstances.

"You see," remarked Doctor Burr, as we walked down the hall, "she is quite unstrung still. Mr. Cranston comes up here once in a while, and we notice that after these visits she is, if anything, worse."

Down the hall a door had been left open, and we could catch a glimpse of a patient rolled in a blanket, while two nurses forced something down his throat. Doctor Burr hastily closed the door as we passed.

"That is the condition Mrs. Cranston might have got into if she had not come to us when she did," he said. "As it is, she is never violent and is one of the most tractable patients we have."

We left shortly, without finding out whether Doctor Burr suspected us of anything or not. As we made our way back to the city, I could not help the feeling of depression such as Poe mentioned at seeing the private madhouse in France.

"That glimpse we had into the other room almost makes one recall the soothing system of Doctor Maillard. Is Doctor Burr's system better?" I asked.

"A good deal of what we used to think and practise is out of date now," returned Kennedy. "I think you are already familiar with the theory of dreams that has been developed by Dr. Sigmund Freud, of Vienna. But perhaps you are not aware of the fact that Freud's contribution to the study of insanity is of even greater scientific value than his dream theories taken by themselves.

"Hers, I feel sure now, is what is known as one of the so−called 'border−line cases,'" he continued. "It is clearly a case of hysteria—not the hysteria one hears spoken of commonly, but the condition which scientists know as such. We trace the impulses from which hysterical conditions arise, penetrate the disguises which these repressed impulses or wishes must assume in order to appear in the consciousness. Such transformed impulses are found in normal people, too, sometimes. The hysteric suffers mostly from reminiscences which, paradoxically, may be completely forgotten,

"Obsessions and phobias have their origin, according to Freud, in sexual life. The obsession represents a compensation or substitute for an unbearable sexual idea and takes its place in consciousness. In normal sexual

life, no neurosis is possible, say the Freudists. Sex is the strongest impulse, yet subject to the greatest repression, and hence the weakest point of our cultural development. Hysteria arises through the conflict between libido and sex−repression. Often sex−wishes may be consciously rejected but unconsciously accepted. So when they are understood every insane utterance has a reason. There is really method in madness.

"When hysteria in a wife gains her the attention of an otherwise inattentive husband it fills, from the standpoint of her deeper longing, an important place, and, in a sense, may be said to be desirable. The great point about the psychanalytic method, as discovered by Breuer and Freud, is that certain symptoms of hysteria disappear when the hidden causes are brought to light and the repressed desires are gratified."

"How does that apply to Mrs. Cranston?" I queried.

"Mrs. Cranston," he replied, "is suffering from what the psychanalysts call a psychic trauma—a soul−wound, as it were. It is the neglect, in this case, of her husband, whom she deeply loves. That, in itself, is sufficient to explain her experience wandering through the country. It was the region which she associated with her first love−affair, as she told us. The wave of recollection that swept over her engulfed her mind. In other words, reason could no longer dominate the cravings for a love so long suppressed. Then, when she saw, or imagined she saw, one who looked like her lover the strain was too great."

It was the middle of the afternoon when we reached the laboratory. Kennedy at once set to work studying the drops of tonic which had been absorbed in the handkerchief. As Kennedy worked, I began thinking over again of what we had seen at the Belleclaire Sanatorium. Somehow or other, I could not get out of my mind the recollection of the man rolled in the blanket and trussed up as helpless as a mummy. I wondered whether that alone was sufficient to account for the quickness with which he had been pacified. Then I recalled Mrs. Cranston's remark about her mental alertness and physical weakness. Had it anything to do with the "tonic"?

"Suppose, while I am waiting," I finally suggested to Craig, "I try to find out what Cranston does with his time since his wife has been shut off from the world."

"That's a very good idea," acquiesced Kennedy. "Don't take too long, however, for I may strike something important here any minute."

After several inquiries over the telephone, I found that since his wife had been in Montrose Cranston had closed his apartment and was living at one of his clubs. Having two or three friends who were members, I did not hesitate to drop around.

Unfortunately, none of my friends happened to be there, and I was forced, finally, to ask for Cranston himself, although all that I really wanted to know was whether he was there or not. One of the clerks told me that he had been in, but had left in a taxicab only a short time before.

As there was a cab−stand outside the club, I determined to make an inquiry and perhaps discover the driver who had had him. The starter knew him, and when I said that it was very important business on which I wanted to see him he motioned to a driver who had just pulled up.

A chance for another fare and a generous tip were all that was necessary to induce him to drive me to the Trocadero, a fashionable restaurant and cabaret, where he had taken Cranston a short time before. It was crowded when I entered, and, avoiding the headwaiter, I stood by the door a few minutes and looked over the brilliant and gay throng. Finally, I managed to catch a glimpse of Cranston's head at a table in a far corner. As I made my way down the line of tables, I was genuinely amazed to see that he was with a woman. It was Julia Giles!

She must have come down on the next train after we did, but, at any rate, it looked as though she had lost no time in seeking out Cranston after our visit. I took a seat at a table next them.

They were talking about Kennedy, and, during a lull in the music, I overheard him asking her just what Craig had done.

"It was certainly very clever in him to play both you and Doctor Burr the way he did. He told Doctor Burr that you had sent him, and told you that Doctor Burr had sent him. By whom do you suppose he really was sent?"

"Could it have been my wife?"

"It must have been, but how she did it is more than I can imagine."

"How is she, anyway?" he asked.

"Sometimes she seems to be getting along finely, and then, other days, I feel quite discouraged about her. Her case is very obstinate."

"Perhaps I had better go out and see Burr," he considered. "It is early in the evening. I'll drive you out in my

car. I'll stay at the sanatorium tonight, and then, perhaps, I'll know a little better what we can do."

It was his tone rather than his words which gave me the impression that he was more interested in being with Miss Giles than with Mrs. Cranston. I wondered whether it was a plot of Cranston's and Miss Giles's. Had he been posing before Kennedy, and were they really trying to put Mrs. Cranston out of the way?

As the music started up again, I heard her say, "Can't we have just one more dance?" A moment later they were lost in the gay whirl on the dancing−floor. They made a handsome couple, and it was evident that it was not the first time that they had dined and danced together. The music ceased, and they returned to their places reluctantly, while Cranston telephoned for his car to be brought around to the cabaret.

I hastened back to the laboratory to inform Craig what I had seen. As I told my story he looked up at me with a sudden flash of comprehension.

"I am glad to know where they will all be tonight," he said. "Some one has been giving her henbane—hyoscyamin. I have just discovered it in the tonic."

"What's henbane?" I asked.

"It is a drug derived from the hyoscyamus plant, much like belladonna, though more distinctly sedative. It is a hypnotic used often in mania and mental excitement. The feeling which Mrs. Cranston described is one of its effects. You recall the brightness of her eyes? That is one of the effects of the mydriatic alkaloids, of which this is one. The ancients were familiar with several of its peculiar properties, as they knew of the closely allied poison hemlock.

"Many of the text−books at the present time fail to say anything about the remarkable effect produced by large doses of this terrible alkaloid. This effect can be described technically so as to be intelligible, but no description can convey, even approximately, the terrible sensation produced in many insane patients by large doses. In a general way, it is the condition of paralysis of the body without the corresponding paralysis of the mind."

"And it's this stuff that somebody has been putting into her tonic?" I asked, startled. "Do you suppose that is part of Burr's system, or did Miss Giles lighten her work by putting it into the tonic?"

Kennedy did not betray his suspicion, but went on describing the drug which was having such a serious effect on Mrs. Cranston.

"The victim lies in an absolutely helpless condition sometimes with his muscles so completely paralyzed that he cannot so much as move a finger, cannot close his lips or move his tongue to moisten them. This feeling of helplessness is usually followed by unconsciousness and then by a period of depression. The combined feeling of helplessness and depression is absolutely unlike any other feeling imaginable, if I may judge from the accounts of those who have experienced it. Other sensations, such as pain, may be judged, in a measure, by comparison with other painful sensations, but the sensation produced by hyoscyamin in large doses seems to have no basis for comparison. There is no kindred feeling. Practically every institution for the insane used it a few years ago for controlling patients, but now better methods have been devised."

"The more I think of what I saw at the Trocadero," I remarked, "the more I wonder if Miss Giles has been seeking to win Cranston herself."

"In large−enough doses and repeated often enough," continued Kennedy, "I suppose the toxic effect of the drug might be to produce insanity. At any rate, if we are going to do anything, it might better be done at once. They are all out there now. If we act to−night, surely we shall have the best chance of making the guilty person betray himself."

Kennedy telephoned for a fast touring−car, and in half an hour, while he gathered some apparatus together, the car was before the door. In it he placed a couple of light silk−rope ladders, some common wooden wedges, and an instrument which resembled a surveyor's transit with two conical horns sticking out at the ends.

We made the trip out of New York and up the Boston post−road, following the route which Cranston and Miss Giles must have taken some hours before us. In the town of Montrose, Kennedy stopped only long enough to get a bite to eat and to study up in the roads in the vicinity.

It was long after midnight when we struck up into the country. The night was very dark, thick, and foggy. With the engine running as muffled as possible and the lights dimmed, Kennedy quietly jammed on the brakes as we pulled up along the side of the road.

A few rods farther ahead I could make out the Belleclaire Sanatorium surrounded by its picketed stone wall. Not a light was visible in any of the windows.

"Now that we're here," I whispered, "what can we do?"

"You remember the paper I gave Mrs. Cranston when the excitement in the hall broke loose?"

"Yes," I nodded, as we moved over under the shadow of the wall.

"I wrote on a sheet from my note−book," said Kennedy, "and told her to be ready when she heard a pebble strike the window; and I gave her a piece of string to let down to the ground."

Kennedy threw the silk ladder up until it caught on one of the pickets; then, with the other ladder and the wedges, he reached the top of the wall, followed by me. We pulled the first ladder up as we clung to the pickets, and let it down again inside. Noiselessly we crossed the lawn.

Above was Mrs. Cranston's window. Craig picked up some bits of broken stone from a walk about the house and threw them gently against the pane. Then we drew back into the shadow of the house, lest any prying eyes might discover us. In a few minutes the window on the second floor was stealthily opened. The muffled figure of Mrs. Cranston appeared in the dim light; then a piece of string was lowered.

To it Kennedy attached a light silk ladder and motioned in pantomime for her to draw it up. It took her some time to fasten the ladder to one of the heavy pieces of furniture in the room. Swaying from side to side, but clinging with frantic desperation to the ladder while we did our best to steady it, she managed to reach the ground. She turned from the building with a shudder, and whispered:

"This terrible place! How can I ever thank you for getting me out of it?"

Kennedy did not pause long enough to say a word, but hurried her across to the final barrier, the wall.

Suddenly there was a shout of alarm from the front of the house under the columns. It was the night watchman, who had discovered us.

Instantly Kennedy seized a chair from a little summer−house.

"Quick, Walter," he cried, "over the wall with Mrs. Cranston, while I hold him! Then throw the ladder back on this side. I'll join you in a moment, as soon as you get her safely over."

A chair is only an indifferent club, if that is all one can think of using it for. Kennedy ran squarely at the watchman, holding it out straight before him. Only once did I cast a hasty glance back. There was the man pinned to the wall by the chair, with Kennedy at the other end of it and safely out of reach.

Mrs. Cranston and I managed to scramble over the wall, although she tore her dress on the pickets before we reached the other side. I hustled her into the car and made everything ready to start. It was only a couple of minutes after I threw the ladder back before Craig rejoined us.

"How did you get away from the watchman?" I demanded, breathlessly, as we shot away.

"I forced him back with the chair into the hall and slammed the door. Then I jammed a wedge under it," he chuckled. "That will hold it better than any lock. Every push will jam it tighter."

Above the hubbub, inside now, we could hear a loud gong sounding insistently. All about were lights flashing up at the windows and moving through the passageways. Shouts came from the back of the house as a door was finally opened there. But we were off now, with a good start.

I could imagine the frantic telephoning that was going on in the sanatorium. And I knew that the local police of Montrose and every other town about us were being informed of the escape. They were required by the law to render all possible assistance, and, as the country boasted several institutions quite on a par with Belleclaire, an attempt at an escape was not an unusual occurrence.

The post−road by which we had come was therefore impossible, and Kennedy swung up into the country, in the hope of throwing off pursuit long enough to give us a better chance.

"Take the wheel, Walter," he muttered. "I'll tell you what turns to make. We must get to the State line of New York without being stopped. We can beat almost any car. But that is not enough. A telephone message ahead may stop us, unless we can keep from being seen."

I took the wheel, and did not stop the car as Kennedy climbed over the seat. In the back of the car, where Mrs. Cranston was sitting, he hastily adjusted the peculiar apparatus.

"Sounds at night are very hard to locate," he explained. "Up this side road, Walter; there is some one coming ahead of us."

I turned and shot up the detour, stopping in the shadow of some trees, where we switched off every light and shut down the engine. Kennedy continued to watch the instrument before him.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"A phonometer," he replied. "It was invented to measure the intensity of sound. But it is much more valuable as an instrument that tells with precision from what direction a sound comes. It needs only a small dry battery and can be carried around easily. The sound enters the two horns of the phonometer, is focused at the neck, and strikes on a delicate diaphragm, behind which is a needle. The diaphragm vibrates and the needle moves. The louder the sound the greater the movement of this needle.

"At this end, where it looks as though I were sighting like a surveyor, I am gazing into a lens, with a tiny electric bulb close to my eye. The light of this bulb is reflected in a mirror which is moved by the moving needle. When the sound is loudest the two horns are at right angles to the direction whence it comes. So it is only necessary to twist the phonometer about on its pivot until the sound is received most loudly in the horns and the band of light is greatest. I know then that the horns are at right angles to the direction from which the sound proceeds, and that, as I lift my head, I am looking straight toward the source of the sound. I can tell its direction to a few degrees."

I looked through it myself to see how sound was visualized by light.

"Hush!" cautioned Kennedy.

Down on the main road we could see a car pass along slowly in the direction of Montrose, from which we had come. Without the phonometer to warn us, it must inevitably have met us and blocked our escape over the road ahead.

That danger passed, on we sped. Five minutes, I calculated, and we should cross the State line to New York and safety.

We had been going along nicely when, "Bang!" came a loud report back of us.

"Confound it!" muttered Kennedy; "a blowout always when you least expect it."

We climbed out of the car and had the shoe off in short order.

"Look!" cried Janet Cranston, in a frightened voice, from the back of the car.

The light of the phonometer had flashed up. A car was following us.

"There's just one chance!" cried Kennedy, springing to the wheel. "We might make it on the rim."

Banging and pounding, we forged ahead, straining our eyes to watch the road, the distance, the time, and the phonometer all at once.

It was no use. A big gray roadster was overtaking us. The driver crowded us over to the very edge of the road, then shot ahead, and, where the road narrowed down, deliberately pulled up across the road in such a way that we had to run into him or stop.

Quickly Craig's automatic gleamed in the dim beams from the side lights.

"Just a minute," cautioned a voice. "It was a plot against me, quite as much as it was against her—the nurse to lead me on, while the doctor got a rich patient. I suspected all was not right. That's why I gave you the card. I knew you didn't come from Burr. Then, when I heard nothing from you, I let the Giles woman think I was coming to Montrose to be with her. But, really, I wanted to beat that fake asylum—"

Two piercing headlights shone down the road back of us. We waited a moment until they, too, came to a stop.

"Here they are!" shouted the voice of a man, as he jumped out, followed by a woman.

Kennedy stepped forward, waving his automatic menacingly.

"You are under arrest for conspiracy—both of you!" he cried, as we recognized Doctor Burr and Miss Giles.

A little cry behind me startled me, and I turned. Janet Cranston had flung herself into the arms of the only person who could heal her wounded soul.

IV. THE MYSTIC POISONER

"It's almost as though he had been struck down by a spirit hand, Kennedy."

Grady, the house detective of the Prince Edward Charles Hotel, had routed us out of bed in the middle of the night with a hurried call for help, and now met us in the lobby of the fashionable hostelry. All that he had said over the wire was that there had been a murder—"an Englishman, a Captain Shirley."

"Why," exclaimed Grady, lowering his voice as he led us through the lobby, "it's the most mysterious thing, I think, that I've ever seen!"

"In what way?" prompted Kennedy.

"Well," continued Grady, "it must have been just a bit after midnight that one of the elevator−boys heard what sounded like a muffled report in a room on the tenth floor. There were other employees and some guests about at the time, and it was only a matter of seconds before they were on the spot. Finally, the sound was located as having come probably from Captain Shirley's room. But the door was locked—on the inside. There was no response, although some one had seen him ride up in the elevator scarcely five minutes before. By that time they had sent for me. We broke in. There was Shirley, alone, fully dressed, lying on the floor before a writing−table. His face was horribly set, as though he had perhaps seen something that frightened and haunted him—though I suppose it might have been the pain that did it. I think he must have heard something, jumped from the chair, perhaps in fear, then have fallen down on the floor almost immediately.

"We hurried over to him. He was still alive, but could not speak. I turned him over, tried to rouse him and make him comfortable. It was only then that I saw that he was really conscious. But it seemed as if his tongue and most of his muscles were paralyzed. Somehow he managed to convey to us the idea that it was his heart that troubled him most.

"Really, at first I thought it was a case of suicide. But there was no sign of a weapon about and not a trace of poison—no glass, no packet. There was no wound on him, either—except a few slight cuts and scratches on his face and hands. But none of them looked to be serious. And yet, before we could get the house physician up to him he was dead."

"And with not a word?" queried Kennedy.

"That's the strangest part of it. No; not a word spoken. But as he lay there, even in spite of his paralyzed muscles, he was just able to motion with his hands. I thought he wanted to write, and gave him a pencil and a piece of paper. He clutched at them, but here is all he was able to do."

Grady drew from his pocket a piece of paper and handed it to us. On it were printed in trembling, irregular characters, "G A D," the "D" scarcely finished and trailing off. into nothing.

What did it all mean? How had Shirley met his death, and why?

"Tell me something about him," said Kennedy, studying the paper with a frown. Grady shrugged his shoulders.

"An Englishman—that's about all I know. Looked like one of the younger sons who so frequently go out to seek their fortunes in the colonies. By his appearance, I should say he had been in the Far East—India, no doubt. And I imagine he had made good. He seemed to have plenty of money. That's all I know about him."

"Is anything missing from his room?" I asked. "Could it have been a robbery?"

"I searched the room hastily," replied Grady. "Apparently not a thing had been touched. I don't think it was robbery."

By this time we had made our way through the lobby and were in the elevator.

"I've kept the room just as it was," went on Grady to Kennedy, lowering his voice. "I've even delayed a bit in notifying the police, so that you could get here first."

A moment later we entered the rooms, a fairly expensive suite, consisting of a sitting−room, bedroom, and bath. Everything was in a condition to indicate that Shirley had just come in when the shot, if shot it had been, was fired.

There, on the floor, lay his body, still in the same attitude in which he had died and almost as Grady had found him gasping. Grady's description of the horrible look on his face was, if anything, an understatement.

As I stood with my eyes riveted on the horror−stricken face on the floor, Kennedy had been quietly going over the furniture and carpet about the body.

"Look!" he exclaimed at last, scarcely turning to us. On the chair, the writing−table, and even on the walls were little pitted marks and scratches. He bent down over the carpet. There, reflecting the electric light, scattered all about, were little fine pieces of something that glittered.

"You have a vacuum cleaner, I suppose?" inquired Craig, rising quickly.

"Certainly—a plant in the cellar."

"No; I mean one that is portable."

"Yes; we have that, too," answered Grady, hurrying to the room telephone to have the cleaner sent up.

Kennedy now began to look through Shirley's baggage. There was, however, nothing to indicate that it had been rifled.

I noted, among other things, a photograph of a woman in Oriental dress, dusky, languorous, of more than ordinary beauty and intelligence. On it something was written in native characters.

Just then a boy wheeled the cleaner down the hall, and Kennedy quickly shoved the photograph into his pocket.

First, Kennedy removed the dust that was already in the machine. Then he ran the cleaner carefully over the carpet, the upholstery, everything about that corner of the room where the body lay. When he had finished he emptied out the dust into a paper and placed it in his pocket. He was just finishing when there came a knock at the door, and it was opened.

"Mr. Grady?" said a young man, entering hurriedly.

"Oh, hello, Glenn! One of the night clerks in the office, Kennedy," introduced the house detective.

"I've just heard of the—murder," Glenn began. "I was in the dining−room, being relieved for my little midnight luncheon as usual, when I heard of it, and I thought that perhaps you might want to know something that happened just before I went off duty."

"Yes; anything," broke in Kennedy.

"It was early in the evening," returned the clerk, slowly, "when a messenger left a little package for Captain Shirley—said that Captain Shirley had had it sent himself and asked that it be placed in his room. It was a little affair in a plain, paper− wrapped parcel. I sent one of the boys up with it and a key, and told him to put the package on the writing−desk tip here."

Kennedy looked at me. That, then, was the way something, whatever it might be, was introduced into the room.

"When the captain came in," resumed the night clerk, "I saw there was a letter for him in the mailbox and handed it to him. He stood before the office desk while he opened it. I thought he looked queer. The contents seemed to alarm him."

"What was in it?" asked Kennedy. "Could you see?"

"I got one glimpse. It seemed to be nothing but a little scarlet bead with a black spot on it. In his surprise, he dropped a piece of paper from the envelope in which the bead had been wrapped up. I thought it was strange, and, as he hurried over to the elevator, I picked it up. Here it is."

The clerk handed over a crumpled piece of notepaper. On it was scrawled the word "Gadhr," and underneath, "Beware!" I spelled out the first strange word. It had an ominous sound—"Gadhr." Suddenly there flashed through my mind the letters Shirley had tried to print but had not finished, "G A D."

Kennedy looked at the paper a moment.

"Gadhr!" he exclaimed, in a low, tense tone. "Revolt—the native word for unrest in India, the revolution!"

We stared at each other blankly. All of us had been reading lately in the despatches about the troubles there, hidden under the ban of the censorship. I knew that the Hindu propaganda in America was as yet in its infancy, although several plots and conspiracies had been hatched here.

"Is there any one in the hotel whom you might suspect?" asked Kennedy.

Grady cleared his throat and looked at the night clerk significantly.

"Well," he answered, thoughtfully, "across the hall there is a new guest who came to−day—or, rather, yesterday—a Mrs. Anthony. We don't know anything about her, except that she looks like a foreigner. She did not come directly from abroad, but must have been living in New York for some time. They tell me she asked for a

room on this floor, at this end of the hall."

"H'm!" considered Kennedy. "I'd like to see her—without being seen."

"I think I can arrange that," acquiesced Grady. "You and Jameson stay in the bedroom. I'll ask her to come over here, and then you can get a good look at her."

The plan satisfied Kennedy, and together we entered the bedroom, putting out the light and leaving the door just a trifle ajar.

A moment later Mrs. Anthony entered. I heard a suppressed gasp from Kennedy.

"The woman in the photograph!" he whispered to me.

I studied her face minutely from our coign of vantage. There was, indeed, a resemblance, too striking to be mere coincidence.

In the presence of Grady, she seemed to be nervous and on guard, as though she knew, intuitively, that she was suspected.

"Did you know Captain Shirley?" shot out Grady.

Kennedy looked over at me and frowned. I knew that something more subtle than New York police methods would be necessary in order to get anything from a woman like this.

"No," she replied, quietly. "You see, I just came here to−day." Her voice had an English accent.

"Did you hear a shot?"

"No," she replied. "The voices in the hall wakened me, though I did not know what was the matter until just now."

"Then you made no effort to find out?" inquired Grady, suspiciously.

"I am alone here in the city," she answered, simply. "I was afraid to intrude."

Throughout she gave the impression that she was strangely reticent about herself. Evidently Kennedy had not much faith that Grady would elicit anything of importance. He tiptoed to the door that led from the bedroom to the hall and found that it could be opened from the inside.

While Grady continued his questioning, Craig and I slipped out into the hall to the room which Mrs. Anthony occupied.

It was a suite much plainer than that occupied by Shirley. Craig switched on the light and looked about hastily and keenly.

For a moment he stood before a dressing−table on which were several toilet articles. A jewel−case seemed to attract his attention, and he opened it. Inside were some comparatively trifling trinkets. The thing that caused him to exclaim, however, was a necklace, broken and unstrung. I looked, too. It was composed of little crimson beads, each with a black spot on it!

Quickly he drew from his pocket the photograph he had taken from Shirley's baggage. As I looked at it again there could be no doubt now in my mind of the identity of the original. It was the same face. And about the neck, in the picture, was a necklace, plainly the same as that before us.

"What are the beads?" I asked, fingering them. "I've never seen anything like them."

"Not beads at all," he replied. "They are Hindu prayer−beans, sometimes called ruttee, jequirity beans, seeds of the plant known to science as Abrus precatorius. They produce a deadly poison— abrin." He slipped four or five of them into his pocket. Then he resumed his cursory search of the room. There, on a writing−pad, was a note which Mrs. Anthony had evidently been engaged in writing. Craig pored over it for some time, while I fidgeted. It was nothing but a queer jumble of letters:

SOWC FSSJWA EKNLFFBY WOVHLX IHWAJYKH 101MLEL EPJNVPSL WCLURL GHIHDA ELBA.

"Come," I cautioned; "she may return any moment."

Quickly he copied off the letters.

"It's a cipher," he said, simply, "a new and rather difficult one, too, I imagine. But I may be able to decipher it."

Kennedy withdrew from the room and, instead of going back to Shirley's, rode down in the elevator to find the night clerk.

"Had Captain Shirley any friends in the city?" asked Craig.

Glenn shrugged his shoulders.

"He was out most of the time," he replied. "He seemed to be very occupied about something. No, I don't think

I ever saw him speak to a soul here, except a word to the waiters and the boys. Once, though," he recollected, "he was called up by a Mrs. Beekman Rogers."

"Mrs. Beekman Rogers," repeated Kennedy, jotting the name down and looking it up in the telephone−book. She lived on Riverside Drive, and, slender though the information was, Kennedy seemed glad to get it.

Grady joined us a moment later, having been wondering where we had disappeared.

"You saw her?" he asked. "What did you think of her?"

"Worth watching," was all Kennedy would say. "Did you get anything out of her?"

Grady shook his head.

"But I am convinced she knows something," he insisted.

Kennedy was about to reply when he was interrupted by the arrival of a couple of detectives from the city police, tardily summoned by Grady.

"I shall let you know the moment I have discovered anything," he said, as he bade Grady good−by. "And thank you for letting me have a chance at the case before all the clues had been spoiled."

Late though it was, in the laboratory Kennedy set to work examining the dust which he had swept up by the vacuum cleaner, as well as the jequirity beans he had taken from Mrs. Anthony's jewel−case.

I do not know how much sleep he had, but I managed to snatch a few hours' rest, and early in the morning I found him at work again, examining the cipher message which he had copied.

"By the way," he said, scarcely looking up as he saw me again, "there is something quite important which you can do for me." Rather pleased to be of some use, I waited eagerly. "I wish you'd go out and see what you can find out about that Mrs. Beekman Rogers," he continued. "I've some work here that will keep me for several hours; so come back to me here."

It was such a commission as he had often given me before, and, through my connection with the Star, I found no difficulty in executing it.

I found that Mrs. Rogers was well known in a certain circle of society in the city. She was wealthy and had the reputation of having given quite liberally to many causes that had interested her. Just now, her particular fad was Oriental religions, and some of her bizarre beliefs had attracted a great deal of attention. A couple of years before she had made a trip around the world, and had lived in India for several months, apparently fascinated by the life and attracted to the mysteries of Oriental faiths.

With my budget of information I hastened back again to join Kennedy at the laboratory. I could see that the cipher was still unread. From that, I conjectured that it was, as he had guessed, constructed on some new and difficult plan.

"What do you think of Mrs. Rogers?" I asked, as I finished reciting what I had learned. "Is it possible that she can be in this revolutionary propaganda?" He shook his head doubtfully.

"Much of the disaffection that exists in India to−day," he replied, "is due to the encouragement and financial assistance which it has received from people here in this country, although only a fraction of the natives of India have ever heard of us. Much of the money devoted to the cause of revolution and anarchy in India is contributed by worthy people who innocently believe that their subscriptions are destined to promote the cause of native enlightenment. I prefer to believe that there is some such explanation in her case. At any rate, I think that we had better make a call on Mrs. Rogers."

Early that afternoon, accordingly, we found ourselves at the door of the large stone house on Riverside Drive in which Mrs. Rogers lived. Kennedy inquired for her, and we were admitted to a large reception−room, the very decorations of which showed evidence of her leaning toward the Orient. Mrs. Rogers proved to be a widow of baffling age, good−looking, with a certain indefinable attractiveness.

Kennedy's cue was obvious. It was to be an eager neophyte in the mysteries of the East, and he played the part perfectly without overdoing it.

"Perhaps you would like to come to some of the meetings of our Cult of the Occult," she suggested.

"Delighted, I am sure," returned Kennedy. She handed him a card.

"We have a meeting this afternoon at four," she explained. "I should be glad to welcome you among us."

Kennedy thanked her and rose to go, preferring to say nothing more just then about the problems which vexed us in the Shirley case, lest it should make further investigation more difficult.

Nothing more had happened at the hotel, as we heard from Grady a few minutes later, and, as there was some

time before the cult met, we returned to the laboratory.

Things had evidently progressed well, even in the few hours that he had been studying his meager evidence. Not only was he making a series of delicate chemical tests, but, in cases, he had several guinea−pigs which he was using also.

He now studied through a microscope some of the particles of dust from the vacuum cleaner.

"Little bits of glass," he said, briefly, taking his eye from the eyepiece. "Captain Shirley was not shot."

"Not shot?" I repeated. "Then how was he killed?"

Kennedy eyed me gravely.

"Shirley was murdered by a poisoned bomb!"

I said nothing, for the revelation was even more startling than I had imagined.

"In that package which was placed in his room," he went on, "must have been a little infernal machine of glass, constructed so as to explode the moment the wrapper was broken. The flying pieces of glass injected the poison as by a myriad of hypodermic needles— the highly poisonous toxin of abrin, product of the jequirity, which is ordinarily destroyed in the stomach but acts powerfully if injected into the blood. Shirley died of jequirity poisoning, or rather of the alkaloid in the bean. It has been used in India for criminal poisoning for ages. Only, there it is crushed, worked into a paste, and rolled into needle−pointed forms which prick the skin. Abrin is composed of two albuminous bodies, one of which resembles snake−venom in all its effects, attacking the heart, making the temperature fall rapidly, and leaving the blood fluid after death. It is a vegetable toxin, quite comparable with ricin from the castor−oil bean."

In spite of my horror at the diabolical plot that had been aimed at Shirley, my mind ran along, keenly endeavoring to piece together the scattered fragments of the case. Some one, of course, had sent the package while he was out and had it placed in his room. Had it been the same person who had sent the single jequirity bean? My mind instantly reverted to the strange woman across the hall, the photograph in his luggage, and the broken necklace in the jewel−case.

Kennedy continued looking at the remainder of the jequirity beans and a liquid he had developed from some of them. Finally, with a glance at his watch, he placed a tube of the liquid in a leather case in his pocket.

"This may not be the only murder," he remarked, sententiously. "It is best to be prepared. Come; we must get up to that meeting."

We journeyed up−town and arrived at the little private hall which the Cult of the Occult had hired somewhat ahead of the time set for the meeting, as Kennedy had aimed to do. Mrs. Rogers was already there and met us at the door.

"So glad to see you," she welcomed, leading us in.

As we entered we could breathe the characteristic pervading odor of sandalwood. Rich Oriental hangings were on the walls, interspersed with cabalistic signs, while at one end was a raised dais.

Mrs. Rogers introduced us to a rather stout, middle−aged, sallow− faced individual in a turban and flowing robes of rustling purple silk. His eyes were piercing, small, and black. The plump, unhealthy, milk−white fingers of his hands were heavy with ornate rings. He looked like what I should have imagined a swami to be, and such, I found, was indeed his title.

"The Swami Rajmanandra," introduced Mrs. Rogers.

He extended his flabby hand in welcome, while Kennedy eyed him keenly. We were not permitted many words with the swami, however, for Mrs. Rogers next presented us to a younger but no less interesting−looking Oriental who was in Occidental dress.

"This is Mr. Singh Bandematarain," said Mrs. Rogers. "You know, he has been sent here by the nizam of his province to be educated at the university."

Mrs. Rogers then hastened to conduct us to seats as, one by one, the worshipers entered. They were mostly women of the aristocratic type who evidently found in this cult a new fad to occupy their jaded craving for the sensational. In the dim light, there was something almost sepulchral about the gathering, and their complexions seemed as white as wax.

Again the door opened and another woman entered. I felt the pressure of Kennedy's hand on my arm and turned my eyes unobtrusively. It was Mrs. Anthony.

Quietly she seemed to glide over the floor toward the swami and, for a moment, stood talking to him. I saw

Singh eye her with a curious look. Was it fear or suspicion?

I had come expecting to see something weird and wild, perhaps the exhibition of an Indian fakir—I know not what. In that, at least, I was disappointed. The Swami Rajmanandra, picturesque though he was, talked most fascinatingly about his religion, but either the theatricals were reserved for an inner circle or else we were subtly suspected, for I soon found myself longing for the meeting to close so that we could observe those whom we had come to watch.

I had almost come to the conclusion that our mission had been a failure when the swami concluded and the visitors swarmed forward to talk with the holy man from the East. Kennedy managed to make his way about the circle to Mrs. Rogers and soon was in an animated conversation.

"Were you acquainted with a Captain Shirley?" he asked, finally, as she opened the way for the question by a remark about her life in Calcutta.

"Y−yes," she replied, hesitating; "I read in the papers this morning that he was found dead, most mysteriously. Terrible, wasn't it? Yes, I met him in Calcutta while I was there. Why, he was on his way to London, and came to New York and called on me."

My eye followed the direction of Mrs. Rogers's. She was talking to us, but really her attention was centered on Mrs. Anthony and the swami together. As I glanced back at her I caught sight of Singh, evidently engaged in watching the same two that I was. Did he have some suspicion of Mrs. Anthony? Why was he watching Mrs. Rogers? I determined to study the two women more closely. I saw that Kennedy had already noticed what I had seen.

"One very peculiar thing," he said, deliberately modulating his voice so that it could be heard by those about us, "was that, just before he was killed, some one sent a prayer−bean from a necklace to him."

At the mention of the necklace I saw that Mrs. Rogers was all attention. Involuntarily she shot a glance at Mrs. Anthony, as if she noted that she was not wearing the necklace now.

"Is that Englishwoman a member of the cult?" queried Kennedy, a moment later, as, quite naturally, he looked over at Mrs. Anthony. "Who is she?"

"Oh," replied Mrs. Rogers, quickly, "she isn't an Englishwoman at all. She is a Hindu—I believe, a former nautch−girl, daughter of a nautch−girl. She passes by the name of Mrs. Anthony, but really her name is Kalia Dass. Every one in Calcutta knew her."

Kennedy quietly drew his card−case from his pocket and handed a card to Mrs. Rogers.

"I should like to talk to you about her some time," he said, in a careful whisper. "If anything happens—don't hesitate to call on me."

Before Mrs. Rogers could recover from her surprise Kennedy had said good−by and we were on our way to the laboratory.

"That's a curious situation," I observed. "Can you make it out? How does Shirley fit into this thing?"

Craig hesitated a moment, as though debating whether to say anything, even to me, about his suspicions.

"Suppose," he said, slowly, "that Shirley was a secret agent of the British government, charged with the mission of finding out whether Mrs. Rogers was contributing—unknowingly, perhaps—to hatching another Indian mutiny? Would that suggest anything to you?"

"And the nautch−girl whom he had known in Calcutta followed him, hoping to worm from him the secrets which he—"

"Not too fast," he cautioned. "Let us merely suppose that Shirley was a spy. If I am not mistaken, we shall see something happen soon, as a result of what I said to Mrs. Rogers."

Excited now by the possibilities opened up by his conjecture regarding Shirley, which I knew must have amounted to a certainty in his mind, I watched him impatiently, as he calmly set to work cleaning up the remainder of the laboratory investigation in the affair.

It was scarcely half an hour later that a car drove up furiously to our door and Mrs. Rogers burst in, terribly agitated.

"You remember," she cried, breathlessly, "you said that a jequirity bean was sent to Captain Shirley?"

"Yes," encouraged Kennedy.

"Well, after you left, I was thinking about it. That Kalia Dass used to wear a necklace of them, but she didn't have it on to−day. I began thinking about it. While she was talking to the swami I went over. I've noticed how

careful she always is of her hand−bag. So I managed to catch my hand in the loop about her wrist. It dropped on the floor. We both made a dive for it, but I got it. I managed, also, to open the catch and, when I picked it up to hand to her, with an apology, what should roll out but a score of prayer−beans! Some papers dropped out, too. She almost tore them from my hands; in fact, one of them did tear. After it was over I had this scrap, a corner torn off one of them."

Kennedy took the scrap which she handed to him and studied it carefully, while we looked over his shoulder. On it was a queer alphabetical table. Across the first line were the letters singly, each followed by a dash. Then, in squares underneath, were pairs of letters—AA, BA, CA, DA, and so on, while, vertically, the column on the left read: AA, AB, AC, AD, and so on.

"Thank you, Mrs. Rogers," Craig said, rising. "This is very important."

She seemed reluctant to go, but, as there was no excuse for staying longer, she finally left. Kennedy immediately set to work studying the scrap of paper and the cipher message he had copied, while I stifled my impatience as best I could.

I could do nothing but reflect on the possibility of what a jealous woman might do. Mrs. Rogers had given us one example. Did the same explanation shed any light on the mystery of the nautch− girl and the jequirity bean sent to Shirley? There was no doubt now that Shirley had known her in Calcutta—intimately, also. Perhaps the necklace had some significance. At least, he must have remembered it, as his agitation over the single bean and the word "Gadhr" seemed to indicate. If she had sent it to him, was it as a threat? To all appearance, he had not known that she was in New York, much less that she was at the same hotel and on the same floor. Why had she followed him? Had she misinterpreted his attentions to Mrs. Rogers?

Longing to ask Kennedy the myriad questions that flashed through my mind, I turned to him as he scowled at the scrap of paper and the cipher before him.

Presently he glanced up at me, still scowling.

"It's no use, Walter," he said; "I can't make it out without the key—at least, it will take so long to discover the key that it may be useless."

Just then the telephone−bell rang and he sprang to it eagerly. As I listened I gathered that it was another hurried call from Grady.

"Something has happened to Mrs. Anthony!" cried Craig, as he hooked up the receiver and seized his hat.

A second time we posted to the Prince Edward Charles, spurred by the mystery that surrounded the case. No one met us in the lobby this time, and we rode up directly in the elevator to Mrs. Anthony's room.

As we came down the hall and Grady met us at the door, he did not need to tell us that something was wrong. One experience like that with Shirley had put the hotel people on guard, and the house physician was already there, administering stimulants to Mrs. Anthony, who was lying on the bed.

"It's just like the other case," whispered Grady. "There are the same scratches on her face and hands."

The doctor glanced about at us. By the look on his face, I read that it was a losing fight. Kennedy bent down. The floor about the door was covered with little glittering slivers of glass. On Mrs. Anthony's face was the same drawn look as on Shirley's.

Was it a suicide? Had we been getting too close on her trail, or had Mrs. Anthony been attacked? Had some one been using her, and now was afraid of her and sought to get her out of the way for safety?

What was the secret locked in her silent lips? The woman was plainly dying. Would she carry the secret with her, after all?

Kennedy quickly drew from his pocket the vial which I had seen him place there in the laboratory early in the day. From the doctor's case he selected a hypodermic and coolly injected a generous dose of the stuff into her arm.

"What is it?" asked the doctor, as we all watched her face anxiously.

"The antitoxin to abrin," he replied. "I developed some of it at the same time that I was studying the poison. If an animal that is immune to a toxin is bled and the serum collected, the antitoxin in it may be injected into a healthy animal and render it immune. Ricin and abrin are vegetable protein toxins of enormous potency and exert a narcotic action. Guinea−pigs fed on them in proper doses attain such a degree of immunity that, in a short time, they can tolerate four hundred times the fatal dose. The serum also can be used to neutralize the toxin in another animal, to a certain extent."

We crowded about Kennedy and the doctor, our eyes riveted on the drawn face before us. Would the antitoxin work?

Meanwhile, Kennedy moved over to the writing−table which he had examined on our first visit to the room. Covered up in the writing−pad was still the paper which he had copied. Only, Mrs. Anthony had added much more to it. He looked at it desperately. What good would it do if, after hours, his cleverness might solve the cipher—too late?

Mrs. Anthony seemed to be struggling bravely. Once I thought she was almost conscious. Glazed though her eyes looked, she saw Kennedy vaguely, with the paper in his hand. Her lips moved. Kennedy bent down, though whether he heard or read her lip movements I do not know.

"Her pocket−book!" he exclaimed.

We found it crushed under her coat which she had taken off when she entered. Craig opened it and drew forth a crumpled sheet of paper from which a corner had been torn. It exactly fitted the scrap that Mrs. Rogers had given us. There, contained within twenty−seven horizontal and twenty−seven vertical lines, making in all six hundred and seventy−six squares, was every possible combination of two letters of the alphabet.

Kennedy looked up, still in desperation. It did him no good. He could have completed the table himself.

"In—the—lining." Her lips managed to frame the words.

Kennedy literally tore the bag apart. There was nothing but a plain white blank card. With a superhuman effort she moved her lips again.

"Smelling−salts," she seemed to say.

I looked about. On the dressing−table stood a little dark−green bottle. I pulled the ground−glass stopper from it and a most pungent odor of carbonate of ammonia filled the room. Quickly I held it under her nose, but she shook her head weakly.

Kennedy seemed to understand. He snatched the bottle from me and held the card directly over its mouth. As the fumes of the ammonia poured out, I saw faintly on the card the letters HR.

We turned to Mrs. Anthony. The effort had used up her strength. She had lapsed again into unconsciousness as Craig bent over her.

"Will she live?" lasted.

"I think so," he replied, adding a hasty word to the doctor.

"What's that? Look!" I exclaimed, pointing to the card from which the letters HR had already faded as mysteriously as they had appeared, leaving the card blank again.

"It is the key!" he cried, excitedly. "Written in sympathetic ink. At last we have it all."

On the queer alphabetical table which the two pieces of paper made, he now wrote quickly the alphabet again, horizontally across the top, starting with H, and vertically down the side, starting with R, thus:

```
  H  I  J  K  L  M  N  O  P  Q  R  S  T  U  V  W  X  Y  Z  A  B  C  D  E  F  G
R a− b− c− d− e− f− g− h− i− j− k− l− m− n− o− p− q− r− s− t− u− v− w− x− y− z−
S aa ba ca da ea fa ga ha ia ja ka la ma na oa pa qa ra sa ta ua va wa xa ya za
T ab bb cb db eb fb gb hb ib jb kb lb mb nb ob pb qb rb sb tb ub vb wb xb yb zb
U ac bc cc dc ec fc gc hc ic jc kc lc mc nc oc pc qc rc sc tc uc vc wc xc yc zc
V ad bd cd dd ed fd gd hd id jd kd ld md nd od pd qd rd sd td ud vd wd xd yd zd
W ae be ce de ee fe ge he ie je ke le me ne oe pe qe re se te ue ve we xe ye ze
X af bf cf df ef ff gf hf if jf kf lf mf nf of pf qf rf sf tf uf vf wf xf yf zf
Y ag bg cg dg eg fg gg hg ig jg kg lg mg ng og pg qg rg sg tg ug vg wg xg yg zg
Z ah bh ch dh eh fh gh hh ih jh kh lh mh nh oh ph qh rh sh th uh vy wh xh yh zh
ai bi ci di ei fi gi hi ii ji ki li mi ni oi pi qi ri si ti ui vi wi xi yi zi
A aj bj cj dj ej fj gj hj ij jj kj lj mj nj oj pj qj rj sj tj uj vj wj xj yj zj
B ak bk ck dk ek fk gk hk ik jk kk lk mk nk ok pk qk rk sk tk uk vk wk xk yk zk
C al bl cl dl el fl gl hl il jl kl ll ml nl ol pl ql rl sl tl ul vl wl xl yl zl
D am bm cm dm em fm gm hm im jm km lm mm nm om pm qm rm sm tm um vm wm xm ym zm
E an bn cn dn en fn gn hn in jn kn ln mn nn on pn qn rn sn tn un vn wn xn yn zn
F ao bo co do eo fo go ho io jo ko lo mo no oo po qo ro so to uo vo wo xo yo zo
G ap bp cp dp ep fp gp hp ip jp kp lp mp np op pp qp rp sp tp up vp wp xp yp zp
H aq bq cq dq eq fq gq hq iq jq kq lq mq nq oq pq qq rq sq tq uq vq wq xq yq zq
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I ar br cr dr er fr gr hr ir jr kr lr mr nr or pr qr rr sr tr ur vr wr xr yr zr
J as bs cs ds es fs gs hs is js ks ls ms ns os ps qs rs ss ts us vs ws xs ys zs
K at bt ct dt et ft gt ht it jt kt lt mt nt ot pt qt rt st tt ut vt wt xt yt zt
L au bu cu du eu fu gu hu iu ju ku lu mu nu ou pu qu ru su tu uu vu wu xu yu zu
M av bv cv dv ev fv gv hv iv jv kv lv mv nv ov pv qv rv sv tv uv vv wv xv yv zv
N aw bw cw dw ew fw gw hw iw jw kw lw mw nw ow pw qw rw sw tw uw vw ww xw yw zw
O ax bx cx dx ex fx gx hx ix jx kx lx mx nx ox px qx rx sx tx ux vx wx xx yx zx
P ay by cy dy ey fy gy hy iy jy ky ly my ny oy py qy ry sy ty uy vy wy xy yy zy
Q az bz cz dz ez fz gz hz iz jz kz lz mz nz oz pz qz rz sz tz uz vz wz xz yz zz
```

"See!" exclaimed Kennedy, triumphantly, working rapidly. "Take the word 'war' for instance. The square which contains WA is in line S, column D. So I put down SD. The odd letter R, with a dash, is in line R, column Y. So I put down RY. WAR thus becomes SDRY. Working it backward from SDRY, I take the two letters SD. In line S, column D, I find WA in the square, and in line R, column Y, I find just R—making the translation of the cipher read 'War.' Now," he went on, excitedly, "take the message we have:

```
"SOWC FSSJWA EKNLFFBY WOVHLX IHWAJYKH 101MLEL EPJNVPSL WCLURL
GHIHDA ELBA.
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"I translate each pair of letters as I come to them." He was writing rapidly. There was the message:

Have located New York headquarters at 101 Eveningside Avenue, Apartment K. Kennedy did not pause, but dashed from the room, followed by Grady and myself.

As our taxi pulled up on the avenue, we saw that the address was a new but small apartment−house. We entered and located Apartment K.

Casting about for a way to get in, Craig discovered that the fire− escape could be reached from a balcony by the hall window. He swung himself over the gap, and we followed. It was the work of only a minute to force the window−latch. We entered. No one was there.

As we pressed after him, he stopped short and flashed his electric bull's−eye about with an exclamation of startled surprise. There was a fully equipped chemical and electrical laboratory. There were explosives enough to have blown not only us but a whole block to kingdom come. More than that, it was a veritable den of poisons. On a table stood beakers and test−tubes in which was crushed a paste that still showed parts of the red ruttee beans.

"Some one planned here to kill Shirley, get him out of the way," reconstructed Kennedy, gazing about; "some one working under the cloak of Oriental religion."

"Mrs. Anthony?" queried Grady. Kennedy shook his head.

"On the contrary, like Shirley, she was an agent of the Indian Secret Service. The rest of the cipher shows it. She was sent to watch some one else, as he was sent to watch Mrs. Rogers. Neither could have known that the other was on the case. She found out, first, that the package with the prayer−bean and the word 'Gadhr' was an attempt to warn and save Shirley, whom she had known in Calcutta and still loved, but feared to compromise. She must have tried to see him, but failed. She hesitated to write, but finally did. Then some one must have seen that she was dangerous. Another poisoned bomb was sent to her. No; the nautch−girl is innocent."

"'Sh!" cautioned Grady.

Outside we could hear the footsteps of some one coming along the hall. Kennedy snapped off his light. The door opened.

"Stand still! One motion and I will throw it!"

As Kennedy's voice rang out from the direction of the table on which stood the half−finished glass bombs, Grady and I flung ourselves forward at the intruder, not knowing what we would encounter.

A moment later Kennedy had found the electric switch and flashed up the lights.

It was Singh, who had used both Mrs. Rogers's money and Raimanandra's religion to cover his conspiracy of revolt.

V. THE PHANTOM DESTROYER

"Guy Fawkes himself would shudder in that mill. Think of it—five explosions on five successive days, and not a clue!"

Our visitor had presented a card bearing the name of Donald MacLeod, chief of the Nitropolis Powder Company's Secret Service. It was plain that he was greatly worried over the case about which he had at last been forced to consult Kennedy.

As he spoke, I remembered having read in the despatches about the explosions, but the accounts had been so meager that I had not realized that there was anything especially unusual about them, for it was at the time when accidents in and attacks on the munitions−plants were of common occurrence.

"Why," went on MacLeod, "the whole business is as mysterious as if there were some phantom destroyer at work! The men are so frightened that they threaten to quit. Several have been killed. There's something strange about that, too. There are ugly rumors of poisonous gases being responsible, quite as much as the explosions, though, so far, I've been able to find nothing in that notion."

"What sort of place is it?" asked Kennedy, interested at once.

"Well, you see," explained MacLeod, "since the company's business has increased so fast lately, it has been forced to erect a new plant. Perhaps you have heard of the Old Grove Amusement Park, which failed? It's not far from that."

MacLeod looked at us inquiringly, and Kennedy nodded to go on, though I am sure neither of us was familiar with the place.

"They've called the new plant Nitropolis—rather a neat name for a powder−works, don't you think?" resumed MacLeod. "Everything went along all right until a few days ago. Then one of the buildings, a storehouse, was blown up. We couldn't be sure that it was an accident, so we redoubled our precautions. It was of no use. That started it. The very next day another building was blown up, then another, until now there have been five of them. What may happen to−day Heaven only knows! I want to get back as soon as I can."

"Rather too frequent, I must admit, to be coincidences," remarked Kennedy.

"No; they can't all be accidents," asserted MacLeod, confidently. "There's too great regularity for that. I think I've considered almost everything. I don't see how they can be from bombs placed by workmen. At least, it's not a bit likely. Besides, the explosions all occur in broad daylight, not at night. We're very careful about the men we employ, and they're watched all the time. The company has a guard of its own, twenty−five picked men, under me—all honorably discharged United States army men."

"You have formed no theory of your own?" queried Kennedy.

MacLeod paused, then drew from his pocket the clipping of a despatch from the front in which one of the war correspondents reported the destruction of wire entanglements with heat supposed to have been applied by the use of reflecting mirrors.

"I'm reduced to pure speculation," he remarked. "To−day they seem to be reviving all the ancient practices. Maybe some one is going at it like Archimedes."

"Not impossible," returned Craig, handing back the clipping. "Buffon tested the probability of the achievement of Archimedes in setting fire to the ships of Marcellus with mirrors and the sun's rays. He constructed a composite mirror of a hundred and twenty− eight plane mirrors, and with it he was able to ignite wood at two hundred and ten feet. However, I shrewdly suspect that, even if this story is true, they are using hydrogen or acetylene flares over there. But none of these things would be feasible in your case. You'd know it."

"Could it be some one who is projecting a deadly wireless force which causes the explosions?" I put in, mindful of a previous case of Kennedy's. "We all know that inventors have been working for years on the idea of making explosives obsolete and guns junk. If some one has hit on a way of guiding an electric wave through the air and concentrating power at a point, munitions−plants could be wiped out."

MacLeod looked anxiously from me to Kennedy, but Craig betrayed nothing by his face except his interest.

"Sometimes I have imagined I heard a peculiar, faint, whirring noise in the air," he remarked, thoughtfully. "I thought of having the men on the watch for air−ships, but they've never seen a trace of one. It might be some

power either like this," he added, shaking the clipping, "or like that which Mr. Jameson suggests."

"It's something like that you meant, I presume, when you called it a 'phantom destroyer' a moment ago?" asked Kennedy.

MacLeod nodded.

"If you're interested," he pursued, hastily, "and feel like going down there to look things over, I think the best place for you to go would be to the Sneddens'. They're some people who have seen a chance to make a little money out of the boom. Many visitors are now coming and going on business connected with the new works. They have started a boarding−house—or, rather, Mrs. Snedden has. There's a daughter, too, who seems to be very popular." Kennedy glanced whimsically at me.

"Well, Walter," he remarked, tentatively, "entirely aside from the young lady, this ought to make a good story for the Star."

"Indeed it ought!" I replied, enthusiastically.

"Then you'll go down to Nitropolis?" queried MacLeod, eagerly. "You can catch a train that will get you there about noon. And the company will pay you well."

"MacLeod, with the mystery, Miss Snedden, and the remuneration, you are irresistible," smiled Kennedy.

"Thank you," returned the detective. "You won't regret it. I can't tell you how much relieved I feel to have some one else, and, above all, yourself, on the case. You can get a train in half an hour. I think it would be best for you to go as though you had no connection with me—at least for the present."

Kennedy agreed, and MacLeod excused himself, promising to be on the train, although not to ride with us, in case we should be the target of too inquisitive eyes.

For a few moments, while our taxicab was coming, Kennedy considered thoughtfully what the company detective had said. By the time the vehicle arrived he had hurriedly packed up some apparatus in two large grips, one of which it fell to my lot to carry.

The trip down to Nitropolis was uninteresting, and we arrived at the little station shortly after noon. MacLeod was on the train, but did not speak to us, and it was perhaps just as well, for the cabmen and others hanging about the station were keenly watching new arrivals, and any one with MacLeod must have attracted attention. We selected or were, rather, selected by one of the cabmen and driven immediately to the Snedden house. Our cover was, as Craig and I had decided, to pose as two newspaper men from New York, that being the easiest way to account for any undue interest we might show in things.

The powder−company's plant was situated on a large tract of land which was surrounded by a barbed−wire fence, six feet high and constructed in a manner very similar to the fences used in protecting prison−camps in war−times. At various places along the several miles of fence gates were placed, with armed guards. Many other features were suggestive of war−times. One that impressed us most was that each workman had to carry a pass similar, almost, to a passport. This entire fence, we learned, was patrolled day and night by armed guards.

A mile or so from the plant, or just outside the main gate, quite a settlement had grown up, like a mushroom, almost overnight—the product of a flood of new money. Originally, there had been only one house for some distance about—that of the Sneddens. But now there were scores of houses, mostly those of officials and managers, some of them really pretentious affairs. MacLeod himself lived in one of them, and we could see him ahead of us, being driven home.

The workmen lived farther along the line, in a sort of company town, which at present greatly resembled a Western mining−camp, though ultimately it was to be a bungalow town.

Just at present, however, it was the Snedden house that interested us most, for we felt the need of getting ourselves established in this strange community. It was an old−fashioned farm−house and had been purchased very cheaply by Snedden several years before. He had altered it and brought it up to date, and the combination of old and new proved to be typical of the owner as well as of the house.

Kennedy carried off well the critical situation of our introduction, and we found ourselves welcomed rather than scrutinized as intruders.

Garfield Snedden was much older than his second wife, Ida. In fact, she did not seem to be much older than Snedden's daughter Gertrude, whom MacLeod had already mentioned—a dashing young lady, never intended by nature to vegetate in the rural seclusion that her father had sought before the advent of the powder−works. Mrs. Snedden was one of those capable women who can manage a man without his knowing it. Indeed, one felt that

Snedden, who was somewhat of both student and dreamer, needed a manager.

"I'm glad your train was on time," bustled Mrs. Snedden. "Luncheon will be ready in a few moments now."

We had barely time to look about before Gertrude led us into the dining−room and introduced us to the other boarders.

Knowing human nature, Kennedy was careful to be struck with admiration and amazement at everything we had seen in our brief whirl through Nitropolis. It was not a difficult or entirely assumed feeling, either, when one realized that, only a few short months before, the region had been nothing better than an almost hopeless wilderness of scrub−pines.

We did not have to wait long before the subject uppermost in our minds was brought up—the explosions.

Among the boarders there were at least two who, from the start, promised to be interesting as well as important. One was a tall, slender chap named Garretson, whose connection with the company, I gathered from the conversation, took him often on important matters to New York. The other was an older man, Jackson, who seemed to be connected with the management of the works, a reticent fellow, more given to listening to others than to talking himself.

"Nothing has happened so far to−day, anyhow," remarked Garretson, tapping the back of his chair with his knuckle, as a token of respect for that evil spirit who seems to be exorcised by knocking wood.

"Oh," exclaimed Gertrude, with a little half−suppressed shudder, "I do hope those terrible explosions are at last over!"

"If I had my way," asserted Garretson, savagely, "I'd put this town under martial law until they WERE over."

"It may come to that," put in Jackson, quietly.

"Quite in keeping with the present tendency of the age," agreed Snedden, in a tone of philosophical disagreement.

"I don't think it makes much difference how you accomplish the result, Garfield," chimed in his wife, "as long as you accomplish it, and it is one that should be accomplished."

Snedden retreated into the refuge of silence. Though this was only a bit of the conversation, we soon found out that he was an avowed pacifist. Garretson, on the other hand, was an ardent militarist, a good deal of a fire−eater. I wondered whether there might not be a good deal of the poseur about him, too.

It needed no second sight to discover that both he and Gertrude were deeply interested in each other. Garretson was what Broadway would call "a live one," and, though there is nothing essentially wrong in that, I fancied that I detected, now and then, an almost maternal solicitude on the part of her stepmother, who seemed to be watching both the young man and her husband alternately. Once Jackson and Mrs. Snedden exchanged glances. There seemed to be some understanding between them.

The time to return to the works was approaching, and we all rose. Somehow, Gertrude and Garretson seemed naturally to gravitate toward the door together.

Some distance from the house there was a large barn. Part of it had been turned into a garage, where Garretson kept a fast car. Jackson, also, had a roadster. In fact, in this new community, with its superabundant new wealth, everybody had a car.

Kennedy and I sauntered out after the rest. As we turned an angle of the house we came suddenly upon Garretson in his racer, talking to Gertrude. The crunch of the gravel under our feet warned them before we saw them, but not before we could catch a glimpse of a warning finger on the rosy lips of Gertrude. As she saw us she blushed ever so slightly.

"You'll be late!" she cried, hastily. "Mr. Jackson has been gone five minutes."

"On foot," returned Garretson, nonchalantly. "I'll overtake him in thirty seconds." Nevertheless, he did not wait longer, but swung up the road at a pace which was the admiration of all speed−loving Nitropolitans.

Craig had ordered our taxicab driver to stop for us after lunch, and, without exciting suspicion, managed to stow away the larger part of the contents of our grips in his car.

Still without openly showing our connection with MacLeod, Kennedy sought out the manager of the works, and, though scores of correspondents and reporters from various newspapers had vainly applied for permission to inspect the plant, somehow we seemed to receive the freedom of the place and without exciting suspicion. Craig's first move was to look the plant over. As we approached it our attention was instantly attracted to the numerous one−story galvanized−iron buildings that appeared to stretch endlessly in every direction. They seemed to be of a

temporary nature, though the power−plants, offices, and other necessary buildings were very substantially built. The framework of the factory−buildings was nothing but wood, covered by iron sheathing, and even the sides seemed to be removable. The floors, however, were of concrete.

"They serve their purpose well," observed Kennedy, as we picked our way about. "Explosions at powder−mills are frequent, anyhow. After an explosion there is very little debris to clear away, as you may imagine. These buildings are easily repaired or replaced, and they keep a large force of men for these purposes, as well as materials for any emergency."

One felt instinctively the hazard of the employment. Everywhere were signs telling what not and what to do. One that stuck in my mind was, "It is better to be careful than sorry." Throughout the plant at frequent intervals were first−aid stations with kits for all sorts of accidents, including respirators, for workmen were often overcome by ether or alcohol fumes. Everything was done to minimize the hazard, yet one could not escape the conviction that human life and limb were as much a cost of production in this industry as fuel and raw material.

Once, in our wanderings about the plant, I recall we ran across both Garretson and Jackson in one of the offices. They did not see us, but seemed to be talking very earnestly about something. What it was we could not guess, but this time it seemed to be Jackson who was doing most of the talking. Kennedy watched them as they parted.

"There's something peculiar under the surface with those people at the boarding−house," was all he observed. "Come; over there, about an eighth of a mile, I think I see evidences of the latest of the explosions. Let's look at it."

MacLeod had evidently reasoned that, sooner of later, Kennedy would appear in this part of the grounds, and as we passed one of the shops he joined us.

"You mentioned something about rumors of poisonous gases," hinted Craig, as we walked along.

"Yes," assented MacLeod; "I don't know what there is in it. I suppose you know that there is a very poisonous gas, carbon monoxide, or carbonic oxide, formed in considerable quantity by the explosion of several of the powders commonly used in shells. The gas has the curious power of combining with the blood and refusing to let go, thus keeping out the oxygen necessary for life. It may be that that is what accounts for what we've seen— that it is actual poisoning to death of men not killed by the immediate explosion."

We had reached the scene of the previous day's disaster. No effort had yet been made to clear it up. Kennedy went over it carefully. What it was he found I do not know, but he had not spent much time before he turned to me.

"Walter," he directed, "I wish you would go back to the office near the gate, where I left that paraphernalia we brought down. Carry it over—let me see—there's an open space there on that knoll. I'll join you there."

Whatever was in the packages was both bulky and heavy, and I was glad to reach the hillside he had indicated.

Craig was waiting for me there with MacLeod, and at once opened the packages. From them he took a thin steel rod, which he set up in the center of the open space. To it he attached a frame and to the frame what looked like four reversed megaphones. Attached to the frame, which was tubular, was an oak box with a little arrangement of hard rubber and metal which fitted into the ears. For some time Kennedy's face wore a set, far−away expression, as if he were studying something.

"The explosions seem always to occur in the middle of the afternoon," observed MacLeod, fidgeting apprehensively.

Kennedy motioned petulantly for silence. Then suddenly he pulled the tubes out of his ears and gazed about sharply.

"There's something in the air!" he cried. "I can hear it!"

MacLeod and I strained our eyes. There was nothing visible.

"This is an anti−aircraft listening−post, such as the French use," explained Craig, hurriedly. "Between the horns and the microphone in the box you can catch the hum of an engine, even when it is muffled. If there's an aeroplane or a Zeppelin about, this thing would locate it."

Still, there was nothing that we could see, though now the sound was just perceptible to the ear if one strained his attention a bit. I listened. It was plain in the detector; yet nothing was visible. What strange power could it be that we could not see or feel in broad daylight?

Just then came a low rumbling, and then a terrific roar from the direction of the plant. We swung about in time

to see a huge cloud of debris lifted literally into the air above the tree−tops and dropped to earth again. The silence that succeeded the explosion was eloquent. The phantom destroyer had delivered his blow again.

"The distillery—where we make the denatured alcohol!" cried MacLeod, gazing with tense face as from other buildings, we could see men pouring forth, panic−stricken, and the silence was punctured by shouts. Kennedy bent over his detector.

"That same mysterious buzzing," he muttered, "only fainter."

Together we hastened now toward the distillery, another of those corrugated−iron buildings. It had been completely demolished. Here and there lay a dark, still mass. I shuddered. They were men!

As we ran toward the ruin we crossed a baseball−field which the company had given the men. I looked back for Kennedy. He had paused at the wire backstop behind the catcher. Something caught in the wires interested him. By the time I reached him he had secured it—a long, slender metal tube, cleverly weighted so as to fall straight.

"Not a hundred per cent. of hits, evidently," he muttered. "Still, one was enough."

"What is it?" asked MacLeod.

"An incendiary pastille. On contact, the nose burns away anything it hits, goes right through corrugated iron. It carries a charge of thermit ignited by this piece of magnesium ribbon. You know what thermit will penetrate with its thousands of degrees of heat. Only the nose of this went through the netting and never touched a thing. This didn't explode anything, but another one did. Thousands of gallons of alcohol did the rest."

Kennedy had picked up his other package as we ran, and was now busily unwrapping it. I looked about at the crowd that had collected, and saw that there was nothing we could do to help. Once I caught sight of Gertrude's face. She was pale, and seemed eagerly searching for some one. Then, in the crowd, I lost her. I turned to MacLeod. He was plainly overwhelmed. Kennedy was grimly silent and at work on something he had jammed into the ground.

"Stand back!" he cautioned, as he touched a match to the thing. With a muffled explosion, something whizzed and shrieked up into the air like a sky−rocket.

Far above, I could now see a thing open out like a parachute, while below it trailed something that might have been the stick of the rocket. Eagerly Kennedy followed the parachute as the wind wafted it along and it sank slowly to the earth. When, at last, he recovered it I saw that between the parachute and the stick was fastened a small, peculiar camera.

"A Scheimpflug multiple camera," he explained as he seized it almost ravenously. "Is there a place in town where I can get the films in this developed quickly?"

MacLeod, himself excited now, hurried us from the scene of the explosion to a local drug−store, which combined most of the functions of a general store, even being able to improvise a dark− room in which Kennedy could work.

It was some time after the excitement over the explosion had quieted down that MacLeod and I, standing impatiently before the drug−store, saw Snedden wildly tearing down the street in his car. He saw us and pulled up at the curb with a jerk.

"Where's Gertrude?" he shouted, wildly. "Has any one seen my daughter?"

Breathlessly he explained that he had been out, had returned to find his house deserted, Gertrude gone, his wife gone, even Jackson's car gone from the barn. He had been to the works. Neither Garretson nor Jackson had been seen since the excitement of the explosion, they told him. Garretson's racer was gone, too. There seemed to have been a sort of family explosion, also.

Kennedy had heard the loud talking and had left his work to the druggist to carry on and joined us. There was no concealment now of our connection with MacLeod, for it was to him that every one in town came when in trouble.

In almost no time, so accurately did he keep his fingers on the fevered pulse of Nitropolis, MacLeod had found out that Gertrude had been seen driving away from the company's grounds with some one in Garretson's car, probably Garretson himself. Jackson had been seen hurrying down the street. Some one else had seen Ida Snedden in Jackson's car, alone.

Meanwhile, over the wire, MacLeod had sent out descriptions of the four people and the two cars, in the hope of intercepting them before they could be plunged into the obscurity of any near−by city. Not content with that,

MacLeod and Kennedy started out in the former's car, while I climbed in with Snedden, and we began a systematic search of the roads out of Nitropolis.

As we sped along, I could not help feeling, though I said nothing, that, somehow, the strange disappearances must have something to do with the mysterious phantom destroyer. I did not tell even Snedden about the little that Kennedy had discovered, for I had learned that it was best to let Craig himself tell, at his own time and in his own way. But the man seemed frantic in his search, and I could not help the impression that there was something, perhaps only a suspicion, that he knew which might shed some light.

We were coming down the river, or, rather, the bay, after a fruitless search of unfrequented roads and were approaching the deserted Old Grove Amusement Park, to which excursions used, years ago, to come in boats. No one could make it pay, and it was closed and going to ruin. There had been some hint that Garretson's racer might have disappeared down this unfrequented river road.

As we came to a turn in the road, we could see Kennedy and MacLeod in their car, coming up. Instead of keeping on, however, they turned into the grove, Kennedy leaning far over the running−board as MacLeod drove slowly, following his directions, as though Craig were tracing something.

With a hurried exclamation of surprise, Snedden gave our car the gas and shot ahead, swinging around after them. They were headed, following some kind of tire−tracks, toward an old merry−go−round that was dismantled and all boarded up. They heard us coming and stopped.

"Has any one told you that Garretson's car went down the river road, too?" called Snedden, anxiously.

"No; but some one thought he saw Jackson's car come down here," called back MacLeod.

"Jackson's?" exclaimed Snedden.

"Maybe both are right," I ventured, as we came closer. "What made you turn in here?"'

"Kennedy thought he saw fresh tire−tracks running into the grove."

We were all out of our cars by this time, and examining the soft roadway with Craig. It was evident to any one that a car had been run in, and not so very long ago, in the direction of the merry− go−round.

We followed the tracks on foot, bending about the huge circle of a building until we came to the side away from the road. The tracks seemed to run right in under the boards.

Kennedy approached and touched the boards. They were loose. Some one had evidently been there, had taken them down, and put them up. In fact, by the marks on them, it seemed as though he had made a practice of doing so.

MacLeod and Kennedy unhooked the boarding, while Snedden looked on in a sort of daze. They had taken down only two or three sections, which indicated that that whole side might similarly be removed, when I heard a low, startled exclamation from Snedden.

We peered in. There, in the half−light of the gloomy interior, we could see a car. Before we knew it Snedden had darted past us. An instant later I distinguished what his more sensitive eye had seen—a woman, all alone in the car, motionless.

"Ida!" he cried.

There was no answer.

"She—she's dead!" he shouted.

It was only too true. There was Ida Snedden, seated in Jackson's car in the old deserted building, all shut up—dead.

Yet her face was as pink as if she were alive and the blood had been whipped into her cheeks by a walk in the cold wind.

We looked at one another, at a loss. How did she get there—and why? She must have come there voluntarily. No one had seen any one else with her in the car.

Snedden was now almost beside himself.

"Misfortunes never come singly," he wailed. "My daughter Gertrude gone—now my wife dead. Confound that young fellow Garretson—and Jackson, too! Where are they? Why have they fled? The scoundrels— they have stolen my whole family. Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

Trying to quiet Snedden, at the same time we began to look about the building. On one side was a small stove, in which were still the dying coals of a fire. Near by were a work−bench, some tools, pieces of wire, and other material. Scattered about were pieces of material that looked like celluloid. Some one evidently used the place as

a secret workshop. Kennedy picked up a piece of the celluloid−like stuff and carefully touched a match to it. It did not burn rapidly as celluloid does, and Craig seemed more than ever interested. MacLeod himself was no mean detective. Accustomed to action, he had an idea of what to do.

"Wait here!" he called back, dashing out. "I'm going to the nearest house up the road for help. I'll be back in a moment."

We heard him back and turn his car and shoot away. Meanwhile, Kennedy was looking over carefully Jackson's roadster. He tapped the gas−tank in the rear, then opened it. There was not a drop of gas in it. He lifted up the hood and looked inside at the motor. Whatever he saw there, he said nothing. Finally, by siphoning some gas from Snedden's tank and making some adjustments, he seemed to have the car in a condition again for it to run. He was just about to start it when MacLeod returned, carrying a canary−bird in a cage.

"I've telephoned to town," he announced. "Some one will be here soon now. Meanwhile, an idea occurred to me, and I borrowed this bird. Let me see whether the idea is any good."

Kennedy, by this time, had started the engine. MacLeod placed the bright little songster near the stove on the work−bench and began to watch it narrowly.

More than ever up in the air over the mystery, I could only watch Kennedy and MacLeod, each following his own lines.

It might, perhaps, have been ten minutes after MacLeod returned, and during that time he had never taken his eyes off the bird, when I began to feel a little drowsy. A word from MacLeod roused me.

"There's carbon monoxide in the air, Kennedy!" he exclaimed. "You know how this gas affects birds."

Kennedy looked over intently. The canary had begun to show evident signs of distress over something.

"It must be that this stove is defective," pursued MacLeod, picking up the poor little bird and carrying it quickly into the fresh air, where it could regain its former liveliness. Then, when he returned, he added, "There must be some defect in the stove or the draught that makes it send out the poisonous gas."

"There's some gas," agreed Kennedy. "It must have cleared away mostly, though, or we couldn't stand it ourselves."

Craig continued to look about the car and the building, in the vain hope of discovering some other clue. Had Mrs. Snedden been killed by the carbonic oxide? Was it a case of gas poisoning? Then, too, why had she been here at all? Who had shut her up? Had she been overcome first and, in a stupor, been unable to move to save herself? Above all, what had this to do with the mysterious phantom slayer that had wrecked so much of the works in less than a week?

It was quite late in the afternoon when, at last, people came from the town and took away both the body of Mrs. Snedden and Jackson's car. Snedden could only stare and work his fingers, and after we had seen him safely in the care of some one we could trust Kennedy, MacLeod, and I climbed into MacLeod's car silently.

"It's too deep for me," acknowledged MacLeod. "What shall we do next?"

"Surely that fellow must have my pictures developed by this time," considered Kennedy. "Shoot back there."

"They came out beautifully—all except one," reported the druggist, who was somewhat of a camera fiend himself. "That's a wonderful system, sir."

Kennedy thanked him for his trouble and took the prints. With care he pieced them together, until he had several successive panoramas of the country taken from various elevations of the parachute. Then, with a magnifying−glass, he went over each section minutely.

"Look at that!" he pointed out at last with the sharp tip of a pencil on one picture.

In what looked like an open space among some trees was a tiny figure of a man. It seemed as if he were hacking at something with an ax. What the something was did not appear in the picture.

"I should say that it was half a mile, perhaps a mile, farther away than that grove," commented Kennedy, making a rough calculation.

"On the old Davis farm," considered MacLeod. "Look and see if you can't make out the ruins of a house somewhere near−by. It was burned many years ago."

"Yes, yes," returned Kennedy, excitedly; "there's the place! Do you think we can get there in a car before it's dark?"

"Easily," replied MacLeod.

It was only a matter of minutes before we three were poking about in a tangle of wood and field, seeking to

locate the spot where Kennedy's apparatus had photographed the lone axman.

At last, in a large, cleared field, we came upon a most peculiar heap of debris. As nearly as I could make out, it was a pile of junk, but most interesting junk. Practically all of it consisted in broken bits of the celluloid−like stuff we had seen in the abandoned building. Twisted inextricably about were steel wires and bits of all sorts of material. In the midst of the wreckage was something that looked for all the world like the remains of a gas−motor. It was not rusted, either, which indicated that it had been put there recently.

As he looked at it, Craig's face displayed a smile of satisfaction.

"Looks as though it might have been an aeroplane of the tractor type," he vouchsafed, finally.

"Surely there couldn't have been an accident," objected MacLeod. "No aviator could have lived through it, and there's no body."

"No; it was purposely destroyed," continued Craig. "It was landed here from somewhere else for that purpose. That was what the man in the picture was doing with the ax. After the last explosion something happened. He brought the machine here to destroy the evidence."

"But," persisted MacLeod, "if there had been an aeroplane hovering about we should have seen it in the air, passing over the works at the time of the explosion."

Kennedy picked the pieces, significantly.

"Some one about here has kept abreast of the times, if not ahead. See; the planes were of this non−inflammable celluloid that made it virtually transparent and visible only at a few hundred feet in the air. The aviator could fly low and so drop those pastilles accurately—and unseen. The engine had one of those new muffler− boxes. He would have been unheard, too, except for that delicate air−ship detector."

MacLeod and I could but stare at each other, aghast. Without a doubt it was in the old merry−go−round building that the phantom aviator had established his hangar. What the connection was between the tragedy in the Snedden family and the tragedy in the powder−works we did not know, but, at least, now we knew that there was some connection.

It was growing dark rapidly, and, with some difficulty, we retraced our steps to the point where we had left the car. We whirled back to the town, and, of course, to the Snedden house.

Snedden was sitting in the parlor when we arrived, by the body of his wife, staring, speechless, straight before him, while several neighbors were gathered about, trying to console him. We had scarcely entered when a messenger−boy came up the path from the gate. Both Kennedy and MacLeod turned toward him, expecting some reply to the numerous messages of alarm sent out earlier in the afternoon.

"Telegram for Mrs. Snedden," announced the boy.

"MRS. Snedden?" queried Kennedy, surprised, then quickly: "Oh yes, that's all right. I'll take care of it."

He signed for the message, tore it open, and read it. For a moment his face, which had been clouded, smoothed out, and he took a couple of turns up and down the hall, as though undecided. Finally he crumpled the telegram abstractedly and shoved it into his pocket. We followed him as he went into the parlor and stood for several moments, looking fixedly on the strangely flushed face of Mrs. Snedden. "MacLeod," he said, finally, turning gravely toward us, and, for the present, seeming to ignore the presence of the others, "this amazing series of crimes has brought home to me forcibly the alarming possibilities of applying modern scientific devices to criminal uses. New modes and processes seem to bring new menaces."

"Like carbon−monoxide poisoning?" suggested MacLeod. "Of course it has long been known as a harmful gas, but—"

"Let us see," interrupted Kennedy. "Walter, you were there when I examined Jackson's car. There was not a drop of gasolene in the tank, you will recall. Even the water in the radiator was low. I lifted the hood. Some one must have tampered with the carburetor. It was adjusted so that the amount of air in the mixture was reduced. More than that, I don't know whether you noticed it or not, but the spark and gas were set so that, when I did put gasolene in the tank, I had but to turn the engine over and it went. In other words, that car had been standing there, the engine running, until it simply stopped for want of fuel." He paused while we listened intently, then resumed. "The gas−engine and gas− motor have brought with them another of those unanticipated menaces of which I spoke. Whenever the explosion of the combustible mixture is incomplete or of moderated intensity a gas of which little is known may be formed in considerable quantities.

"In this case, as in several others that have come to my attention, vapors arising from the combustion must

have emitted certain noxious products. The fumes that caused Ida Snedden's death were not of carbon monoxide from the stove, MacLeod. They were splitting−products of gasolene, which are so new to science that they have not yet been named.

"Mrs. Snedden's death, I may say for the benefit of the coroner, was due to the absorption of some of these unidentified gaseous poisons. They are as deadly as a knife−thrust through the heart, under certain conditions. Due to the non−oxidation of some of the elements of gasolene, they escape from the exhaust of every running gas−engine. In the open air, where only a whiff or two would be inhale now and then, they are not dangerous. But in a closed room they may kill in an incredibly short time. In fact, the condition has given rise to an entirely new phenomenon which some one has named 'petromortis.'"

"Petromortis?" repeated Snedden, who, for the first time, began to show interest in what was going on about him. "Then it was an accident?"

"I did not say it was an accident," corrected Craig. "There is an old adage that murder will out. And this expression of human experience is only repeated in what we modern scientific detectives are doing. No man bent on the commission of a crime can so arrange the circumstances of that crime that it will afterward appear, point by point, as an accident."

Kennedy had us all following him breathlessly now.

"I do not consider it an accident," he went on, rapidly piecing together the facts as we had found them. "Ida Snedden was killed because she was getting too close to some one's secret. Even at luncheon, I could see that she had discovered Gertrude's attachment for Garretson. How she heard that, following the excitement of the explosion this afternoon, Gertrude and Garretson had disappeared, I do not pretend to know. But it is evident that she did hear, that she went out and took Jackson's car, probably to pursue them. If we have heard that they went by the river road, she might have heard it, too.

"In all probability she came along just in time to surprise some one working on the other side of the old merry−go−round structure. There can be no reason to conceal the fact longer. From that deserted building some one was daily launching a newly designed invisible aeroplane. As Mrs. Snedden came along, she must have been just in time to see that person at his secret hangar. What happened I do not know, except that she must have run the car off the river road and into the building. The person whom she found must have suddenly conceived a method of getting her out of the way and making it look like an accident of some kind, perhaps persuaded her to stay in the car with the engine running, while he went off and destroyed the aeroplane which was damning evidence now."

Startling as was the revelation of an actual phantom destroyer, our minds were more aroused as to who might be the criminal who had employed such an engine of death.

Kennedy drew from his pocket the telegram which had just arrived, and spread it out flat before us on a table. It was dated Philadelphia, and read:

MRS. IDA SNEDDEN, Nitropolis:

Garretson and Gertrude were married to−day. Have traced them to the Wolcott. Try to reconcile Mr. Snedden.

HUNTER JACKSON.

I saw at once that part of the story. It was just a plain love− affair that had ended in an elopement at a convenient time. The fire−eating Garretson had been afraid of the Sneddens and Jackson, who was their friend. Before I could even think further, Kennedy had drawn out the films taken by the rocket−camera.

"With the aid of a magnifying−glass," he was saying, "I can get just enough of the lone figure in this picture to identify it. These are the crimes of a crazed pacifist, one whose mind had so long dwelt on the horrors of—"

"Look out!" shouted MacLeod, leaping in front of Kennedy.

The strain of the revelation had been too much. Snedden—a raving maniac—had reeled forward, wildly and impotently, at the man who had exposed him.

VI. THE BEAUTY MASK

"Oh, Mr. Jameson, if they could only wake her up—find out what is the matter—do something! This suspense is killing both mother and myself."

Scenting a good feature story, my city editor had sent me out on an assignment, my sole equipment being a clipping of two paragraphs from the morning Star.

GIRL IN COMA SIX DAYS—SHOWS NO SIGN OF REVIVAL

Virginia Blakeley, the nineteen−year−old daughter of Mrs. Stuart Blakeley, of Riverside Drive, who has been in a state of coma for six days, still shows no sign of returning consciousness.

Ever since Monday some member of her family has been constantly beside her. Her mother and sister have both vainly tried to coax her back to consciousness, but their efforts have not met with the slightest response. Dr. Calvert Haynes, the family physician, and several specialists who have been called in consultation, are completely baffled by the strange malady.

Often I had read of cases of morbid sleep lasting for days and even for weeks. But this was the first case I had ever actually encountered and I was glad to take the assignment.

The Blakeleys, as every one knew, had inherited from Stuart Blakeley a very considerable fortune in real estate in one of the most rapidly developing sections of upper New York, and on the death of their mother the two girls, Virginia and Cynthia, would be numbered among the wealthiest heiresses of the city.

They lived in a big sandstone mansion fronting the Hudson and it was with some misgiving that I sent up my card. Both Mrs. Blakeley and her other daughter, however, met me in the reception−room, thinking, perhaps, from what I had written on the card, that I might have some assistance to offer

Mrs. Blakeley was a well−preserved lady, past middle−age, and very nervous.

"Mercy, Cynthia!" she exclaimed, as I explained my mission, "it's another one of those reporters. No, I cannot say anything—not a word. I don't know anything. See Doctor Haynes. I—"

"But, mother," interposed Cynthia, more calmly, "the thing is in the papers. It may be that some one who reads of it may know of something that can be done. Who can tell?"

"Well, I won't say anything," persisted the elder woman. "I don't like all this publicity. Did the newspapers ever do anything but harm to your poor dear father? No, I won't talk. It won't do us a bit of good. And you, Cynthia, had better be careful."

Mrs. Blakeley backed out of the door, but Cynthia, who was a few years older than her sister, had evidently acquired independence. At least she felt capable of coping with an ordinary reporter who looked no more formidable than myself.

"It is quite possible that some one who knows about such cases may learn of this," I urged.

She hesitated as her mother disappeared, and looked at me a moment, then, her feelings getting the better of her, burst forth with the strange appeal I have already quoted.

It was as though I had come at just an opportune moment when she must talk to some outsider to relieve her pent−up feelings.

By an adroit question here and there, as we stood in the reception−hall, I succeeded in getting the story, which seemed to be more of human interest than of news. I even managed to secure a photograph of Virginia as she was before the strange sleep fell on her.

Briefly, as her sister told it, Virginia was engaged to Hampton Haynes, a young medical student at the college where his father was a professor of diseases of the heart. The Hayneses were of a fine Southern family which had never recovered from the war and had finally come to New York. The father, Dr. Calvert Haynes, in addition to being a well−known physician, was the family physician of the Blakeleys, as I already knew. "Twice the date of the marriage has been set, only to be postponed," added Cynthia Blakeley. "We don't know what to do. And Hampton is frantic."

"Then this is really the second attack of the morbid sleep?" I queried.

"Yes—in a few weeks. Only the other wasn't so long—not more than a day."

She said it in a hesitating manner which I could not account for. Either she thought there might be something

more back of it or she recalled her mother's aversion to reporters and did not know whether she was saying too much or not.

"Do you really fear that there is something wrong?" I asked, significantly, hastily choosing the former explanation.

Cynthia Blakeley looked quickly at the door through which her mother had retreated.

"I—I don't know," she replied, tremulously. "I don't know why I am talking to you. I'm so afraid, too, that the newspapers may say something that isn't true."

"You would like to get at the truth, if I promise to hold the story back?" I persisted, catching her eye.

"Yes," she answered, in a low tone, "but—" then stopped.

"I will ask my friend, Professor Kennedy, at the university, to come here," I urged.

"You know him?" she asked, eagerly. "He will come?"

"Without a doubt," I reassured, waiting for her to say no more, but picking up the telephone receiver on a stand in the hall.

Fortunately I found Craig at his laboratory and a few hasty words were all that was necessary to catch his interest.

"I must tell mother," Cynthia cried, excitedly, as I hung up the receiver. "Surely she cannot object to that. Will you wait here?"

As I waited for Craig, I tried to puzzle the case out for myself. Though I knew nothing about it as yet, I felt sure that I had not made a mistake and that there was some mystery here.

Suddenly I became aware that the two women were talking in the next room, though too low for me to catch what they were saying. It was evident, however, that Cynthia was having some difficulty in persuading her mother that everything was all right.

"Well, Cynthia," I heard her mother say, finally, as she left the room for one farther back, "I hope it will be all right—that is all I can say."

What was it that Mrs. Blakeley so feared? Was it merely the unpleasant notoriety? One could not help the feeling that there was something more that she suspected, perhaps knew, but would not tell. Yet, apparently, it was aside from her desire to have her daughter restored to normal. She was at sea, herself, I felt.

"Poor dear mother!" murmured Cynthia, rejoining me in a few moments. "She hardly knows just what it is she does want−except that we want Virginia well again."

We had not long to wait for Craig. What I had told him over the telephone had been quite enough to arouse his curiosity.

Both Mrs. Blakeley and Cynthia met him, at first a little fearfully, but quickly reassured by his manner, as well as my promise to see that nothing appeared in the Star which would be distasteful.

"Oh, if some one could only bring back our little girl!" cried Mrs. Blakeley, with suppressed emotion, leading the way with her daughter up−stairs.

It was only for a moment that I could see Craig alone to explain the impressions I had received, but it was enough.

"I'm glad you called me," he whispered. "There is something queer."

We followed them up to the dainty bedroom in flowered enamel where Virginia Blakeley lay, and it was then for the first time that we saw her. Kennedy drew a chair up beside the little white bed and went to work almost as though he had been a physician himself.

Partly from what I observed myself and partly from what he told me afterward, I shall try to describe the peculiar condition in which she was.

She lay there lethargic, scarcely breathing. Once she had been a tall, slender, fair girl, with a sort of wild grace. Now she seemed to be completely altered. I could not help thinking of the contrast between her looks now and the photograph in my pocket.

Not only was her respiration slow, but her pulse was almost imperceptible, less than forty a minute. Her temperature was far below normal, and her blood pressure low. Once she had seemed fully a woman, with all the strength and promise of precocious maturity. But now there was something strange about her looks. It is difficult to describe. It was not that she was no longer a young woman, but there seemed to be something almost sexless about her. It was as though her secondary sex characteristics were no longer feminine, but—for want of a better

word—neuter.

Yet, strange to say, in spite of the lethargy which necessitated at least some artificial feeding, she was not falling away. She seemed, if anything, plump. To all appearances there was really a retardation of metabolism connected with the trance−like sleep. She was actually gaining in weight!

As he noted one of these things after another, Kennedy looked at her long and carefully. I followed the direction of his eyes. Over her nose, just a trifle above the line of her eyebrows, was a peculiar red mark, a sore, which was very disfiguring, as though it were hard to heal.

"What is that?" he asked Mrs. Blakeley, finally.

"I don't know," she replied, slowly. "We've all noticed it. It came just after the sleep began."

"You have no idea what could have caused it?"

"Both Virginia and Cynthia have been going to a face specialist," she admitted, "to have their skins treated for freckles. After the treatment they wore masks which were supposed to have some effect on the skin. I don't know. Could it be that?"

Kennedy looked sharply at Cynthia's face. There was no red mark over her nose. But there were certainly no freckles on either of the girls' faces now, either.

"Oh, mother," remonstrated Cynthia, "it couldn't be anything Doctor Chapelle did."

"Doctor Chapelle?" repeated Kennedy.

"Yes, Dr. Carl Chapelle," replied Mrs. Blakeley. "Perhaps you have heard of him. He is quite well known, has a beauty−parlor on Fifth Avenue. He—"

"It's ridiculous," cut in Cynthia, sharply. "Why, my face was worse than Virgie's. Car—He said it would take longer."

I had been watching Cynthia, but it needed only to have heard her to see that Doctor Chapelle was something more than a beauty specialist to her.

Kennedy glanced thoughtfully from the clear skin of Cynthia to the red mark on Virginia. Though he said nothing, I could see that his mind was on it. I had heard of the beauty doctors who promise to give one a skin as soft and clear as a baby's—and often, by their inexpert use of lotions and chemicals, succeed in ruining the skin and disfiguring the patient for life. Could this be a case of that sort? Yet how explain the apparent success with Cynthia?

The elder sister, however, was plainly vexed at the mention of the beauty doctor's name at all, and she showed it. Kennedy made a mental note of the matter, but refrained from saying any more about it.

"I suppose there is no objection to my seeing Doctor Haynes?" asked Kennedy, rising and changing the subject.

"None whatever," returned Mrs. Blakeley. "If there's anything you or he can do to bring Virginia out of this—anything safe—I want it done," she emphasized.

Cynthia was silent as we left. Evidently she had not expected Doctor Chapelle's name to be brought into the case.

We were lucky in finding Doctor Haynes at home, although it was not the regular time for his office hours. Kennedy introduced himself as a friend of the Blakeleys who had been asked to see that I made no blunders in writing the story for the Star. Doctor Haynes did not question the explanation.

He was a man well on toward the sixties, with that magnetic quality that inspires the confidence so necessary for a doctor. Far from wealthy, he had attained a high place in the profession.

As Kennedy finished his version of our mission, Doctor Haynes shook his head with a deep sigh.

"You can understand how I feel toward the Blakeleys," he remarked, at length. "I should consider it unethical to give an interview under any circumstances—much more so under the present."

"Still," I put in, taking Kennedy's cue, "just a word to set me straight can't do any harm. I won't quote you directly."

He seemed to realize that it might be better to talk carefully than to leave all to my imagination.

"Well," he began, slowly, "I have considered all the usual causes assigned for such morbid sleep. It is not auto−suggestion or trance, I am positive. Nor is there any trace of epilepsy. I cannot see how it could be due to poisoning, can you?"

I admitted readily that I could not.

"No," he resumed, "it is just a case of what we call narcolepsy— pathological somnolence—a sudden, uncontrollable inclination to sleep, occurring sometimes repeatedly or at varying intervals. I don't think it hysterical, epileptic, or toxemic. The plain fact of the matter, gentlemen, is that neither myself nor any of my colleagues whom I have consulted have the faintest idea what it is—yet."

The door of the office opened, for it was not the hour for consulting patients, and a tall, athletic young fellow, with a keen and restless face, though very boyish, entered.

"My son," the doctor introduced, "soon to be the sixth Doctor Haynes in direct line in the family."

We shook hands. It was evident that Cynthia had not by any means exaggerated when she said that he was frantic over what had happened to his fiancee.

Accordingly, there was no difficulty in reverting to the subject of our visit. Gradually I let Kennedy take the lead in the conversation so that our position might not seem to be false.

It was not long before Craig managed to inject a remark about the red spot over Virginia's nose. It seemed to excite young Hampton.

"Naturally I look on it more as a doctor than a lover," remarked his father, smiling indulgently at the young man, whom it was evident he regarded above everything else in the world. "I have not been able to account for it, either. Really the case is one of the most remarkable I have ever heard of."

"You have heard of a Dr. Carl Chapelle?" inquired Craig, tentatively.

"A beauty doctor," interrupted the young man, turning toward his father. "You've met him. He's the fellow I think is really engaged to Cynthia."

Hampton seemed much excited. There was unconcealed animosity in the manner of his remark, and I wondered why it was. Could there be some latent jealousy?

"I see," calmed Doctor Haynes. "You mean to infer that this—er— this Doctor Chapelle—" He paused, waiting for Kennedy to take the initiative.

"I suppose you've noticed over Miss Blakeley's nose a red sore?" hazarded Kennedy.

"Yes," replied Doctor Haynes, "rather refractory, too. I—"

"Say," interrupted Hampton, who by this time had reached a high pitch of excitement, "say, do you think it could be any of his confounded nostrums back of this thing?"

"Careful, Hampton," cautioned the elder man.

"I'd like to see him," pursued Craig to the younger. "You know him?"

"Know him? I should say I do. Good−looking, good practice, and all that, but—why, he must have hypnotized that girl! Cynthia thinks he's wonderful."

"I'd like to see him," suggested Craig.

"Very well," agreed Hampton, taking him at his word. "Much as I dislike the fellow, I have no objection to going down to his beauty−parlor with you."

"Thank you," returned Craig, as we excused ourselves and left the elder Doctor Haynes.

Several times on our journey down Hampton could not resist some reference to Chapelle for commercializing the profession, remarks which sounded strangely old on his lips.

Chapelle's office, we found, was in a large building on Fifth Avenue in the new shopping district, where hundreds of thousands of women passed almost daily. He called the place a Dermatological Institute, but, as Hampton put it, he practised "decorative surgery."

As we entered one door, we saw that patients left by another. Evidently, as Craig whispered, when sixty sought to look like sixteen the seekers did not like to come in contact with one another.

We waited some time in a little private room. At last Doctor Chapelle himself appeared, a rather handsome man with the manner that one instinctively feels appeals to the ladies.

He shook hands with young Haynes, and I could detect no hostility on Chapelle's part, but rather a friendly interest in a younger member of the medical profession.

Again I was thrown forward as a buffer. I was their excuse for being there. However, a newspaper experience gives you one thing, if no other—assurance.

"I believe you have a patient, a Miss Virginia Blakeley?" I ventured.

"Miss Blakeley? Oh yes, and her sister, also."

The mention of the names was enough. I was no longer needed as a buffer.

"Chapelle," blurted out Hampton, "you must have done something to her when you treated her face. There's a little red spot over her nose that hasn't healed yet."

Kennedy frowned at the impetuous interruption. Yet it was perhaps the best thing that could have happened.

"So," returned Chapelle, drawing back and placing his head on one side as he nodded it with each word, "you think I've spoiled her looks? Aren't the freckles gone?"

"Yes," retorted Hampton, bitterly, "but on her face is this new disfigurement."

"That?" shrugged Chapelle. "I know nothing of that—nor of the trance. I have only my specialty."

Calm though he appeared outwardly, one could see that Chapelle was plainly worried. Under the circumstances, might not his professional reputation be at stake? What if a hint like this got abroad among his rich clientele?

I looked about his shop and wondered just how much of a faker he was. Once or twice I had heard of surgeons who had gone legitimately into this sort of thing. But the common story was that of the swindler—or worse. I had heard of scores of cases of good looks permanently ruined, seldom of any benefit. Had Chapelle ignorantly done something that would leave its scar forever? Or was he one of the few who were honest and careful?

Whatever the case, Kennedy had accomplished his purpose. He had seen Chapelle. If he were really guilty of anything the chances were all in favor of his betraying it by trying to cover it up. Deftly suppressing Hampton, we managed to beat a retreat without showing our hands any further.

"Humph!" snorted Hampton, as we rode down in the elevator and hopped on a 'bus to go up−town. "Gave up legitimate medicine and took up this beauty doctoring—it's unprofessional, I tell you. Why, he even advertises!"

We left Hampton and returned to the laboratory, though Craig had no present intention of staying there. His visit was merely for the purpose of gathering some apparatus, which included a Crookes tube, carefully packed, a rheostat, and some other paraphernalia which we divided. A few moments later we were on our way again to the Blakeley mansion.

No change had taken place in the condition of the patient, and Mrs. Blakeley met us anxiously. Nor was the anxiety wholly over her daughter's condition, for there seemed to be an air of relief when Kennedy told her that we had little to report.

Up−stairs in the sick−room, Craig set silently to work, attaching his apparatus to an electric−light socket from which he had unscrewed the bulb. As he proceeded I saw that it was, as I had surmised, his new X−ray photographing machine which he had brought. Carefully, from several angles, he took photographs of Virginia's head, then, without saying a word, packed up his kit and started away.

We were passing down the hall, after leaving Mrs. Blakeley, when a figure stepped out from behind a portiere. It was Cynthia, who had been waiting to see us alone.

"You—don't think Doctor Chapelle had anything to do with it?" she asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"Then Hampton Haynes has been here?" avoided Kennedy.

"Yes," she admitted, as though the question had been quite logical. "He told me of your visit to Carl."

There was no concealment, now, of her anxiety. Indeed, I saw no reason why there should be. It was quite natural that the girl should worry over her lover, if she thought there was even a haze of suspicion in Kennedy's mind.

"Really I have found out nothing yet," was the only answer Craig gave, from which I readily deduced that he was well satisfied to play the game by pitting each against all, in the hope of gathering here and there a bit of the truth. "As soon as I find out anything I shall let you and your mother know. And you must tell me everything, too."

He paused to emphasize the last words, then slowly turned again toward the door. From the corner of my eye I saw Cynthia take a step after him, pause, then take another.

"Oh, Professor Kennedy," she called.

Craig turned.

"There's something I forgot," she continued. "There's something wrong with mother!" She paused, then resumed: "Even before Virginia was taken down with this—illness I saw a change. She is worried. Oh, Professor Kennedy, what is it? We have all been so happy. And now—Virgie, mother—all I have in the world. What shall I do?"

"Just what do you mean?" asked Kennedy, gently.

"I don't know. Mother has been so different lately. And now, every night, she goes out."

"Where?" encouraged Kennedy, realizing that his plan was working.

"I don't know. If she would only come back looking happier." She was sobbing, convulsively, over she knew not what.

"Miss Blakeley," said Kennedy, taking her hand between both of his, "only trust me. If it is in my power I shall bring you all out of this uncertainty that haunts you."

She could only murmur her thanks as we left.

"It is strange," ruminated Kennedy, as we sped across the city again to the laboratory. "We must watch Mrs. Blakeley."

That was all that was said. Although I had no inkling of what was back of it all, I felt quite satisfied at having recognized the mystery even on stumbling on it as I had.

In the laboratory, as soon as he could develop the skiagraphs he had taken, Kennedy began a minute study of them. It was not long before he looked over at me with the expression I had come to recognize when he found something important. I went over and looked at the radiograph which he was studying. To me it was nothing but successive gradations of shadows. But to one who had studied roentgenography as Kennedy had each minute gradation of light and shade had its meaning.

"You see," pointed out Kennedy, tracing along one of the shadows with a fine−pointed pencil, and then along a corresponding position on another standard skiagraph which he already had, "there is a marked diminution in size of the sella turcica, as it is called. Yet there is no evidence of a tumor." For several moments he pondered deeply over the photographs. "And it is impossible to conceive of any mechanical pressure sufficient to cause such a change," he added.

Unable to help him on the problem, whatever it might be, I watched him pacing up and down the laboratory.

"I shall have to take that picture over again—under different circumstances," he remarked, finally, pausing and looking at his watch. "To−night we must follow this clue which Cynthia has given us. Call a cab, Walter."

We took a stand down the block from the Blakeley mansion, near a large apartment, where the presence of a cab would not attract attention. If there is any job I despise it is shadowing. One must keep his eyes riveted on a house, for, once let the attention relax and it is incredible how quickly any one may get out and disappear.

Our vigil was finally rewarded when we saw Mrs. Blakeley emerge and hurry down the street. To follow her was easy, for she did not suspect that she was being watched, and went afoot. On she walked, turning off the Drive and proceeding rapidly toward the region of cheap tenements. She paused before one, and as our cab cruised leisurely past we saw her press a button, the last on the right− hand side, enter the door, and start up the stairs.

Instantly Kennedy signaled our driver to stop and together we hopped out and walked back, cautiously entering the vestibule. The name in the letter−box was "Mrs. Reba Rinehart." What could it mean?

Just then another cab stopped up the street, and as we turned to leave the vestibule Kennedy drew back. It was too late, however, not to be seen. A man had just alighted and, in turn, had started back, also realizing that it was too late. It was Chapelle! There was nothing to do but to make the best of it.

"Shadowing the shadowers?" queried Kennedy, keenly watching the play of his features under the arc−light of the street.

"Miss Cynthia asked me to follow her mother the other night," he answered, quite frankly. "And I have been doing so ever since."

It was a glib answer, at any rate, I thought.

"Then, perhaps you know something of Reba Rinehart, too," bluffed Kennedy.

Chapelle eyed us a moment, in doubt how much we knew. Kennedy played a pair of deuces as if they had been four aces instead.

"Not much," replied Chapelle, dubiously. "I know that Mrs. Blakeley has been paying money to the old woman, who seems to be ill. Once I managed to get in to see her. It's a bad case of pernicious anemia, I should say. A neighbor told me she had been to the college hospital, had been one of Doctor Haynes's cases, but that he had turned her over to his son. I've seen Hampton Haynes here, too."

There was an air of sincerity about Chapelle's words. But, then, I reflected that there had also been a similar ring to what we had heard Hampton say. Were they playing a game against each other? Perhaps—but what was

the game? What did it all mean and why should Mrs. Blakeley pay money to an old woman, a charity patient?

There was no solution. Both Kennedy and Chapelle, by a sort of tacit consent, dismissed their cabs, and we strolled on over toward Broadway, watching one another, furtively. We parted finally, and Craig and I went up to our apartment, where he sat for hours in a brown study. There was plenty to think about even so far in the affair. He may have sat up all night. At any rate, he roused me early in the morning.

"Come over to the laboratory," he said. "I want to take that X−ray machine up there again to Blakeley's. Confound it! I hope it's not too late."

I lost no time in joining him and we were at the house long before any reasonable hour for visitors.

Kennedy asked for Mrs. Blakeley and hurriedly set up the X−ray apparatus. "I wish you would place that face mask which she was wearing exactly as it was before she became ill," he asked.

Her mother did as Kennedy directed, replacing the rubber mask as Virginia had worn it.

"I want you to preserve that mask," directed Kennedy, as he finished taking his pictures. "Say nothing about it to any one. In fact, I should advise putting it in your family safe for the present."

Hastily we drove back to the laboratory and Kennedy set to work again developing the second set of skiagraphs. I had not long to wait, this time, for him to study them. His first glance brought me over to him as he exclaimed loudly.

At the point just opposite the sore which he had observed on Virginia's forehead, and overlying the sella turcica, there was a peculiar spot on the radiograph.

"Something in that mask has affected the photographic plate," he explained, his face now animated.

Before I could ask him what it was he had opened a cabinet where he kept many new things which he studied in his leisure moments. From it I saw him take several glass ampules which he glanced at hastily and shoved into his pocket as we heard a footstep out in the hall. It was Chapelle, very much worried. Could it be that he knew his society clientele was at stake, I wondered. Or was it more than that?

"She's dead!" he cried. "The old lady died last night!"

Without a word Kennedy hustled us out of the laboratory, stuffing the X−ray pictures into his pocket, also, as we went.

As we hurried down−town Chapelle told us how he had tried to keep a watch by bribing one of the neighbors, who had just informed him of the tragedy.

"It was her heart," said one of the neighbors, as we entered the poor apartment. "The doctor said so."

"Anemia," insisted Chapelle, looking carefully at the body.

Kennedy bent over, also, and examined the poor, worn frame. As he did so he caught sight of a heavy linen envelope tucked under her pillow. He pulled it out gently and opened it. Inside were several time−worn documents and letters. He glanced over them hastily, unfolding first a letter.

"Walter," he whispered, furtively, looking at the neighbors in the room and making sure that none of them had seen the envelope already. "Read these. That's her story."

One glance was sufficient. The first was a letter from old Stuart Blakeley. Reba Rinehart had been secretly married to him—and never divorced. One paper after another unfolded her story.

I thought quickly. Then she had had a right in the Blakeley millions. More than that, the Blakeleys themselves had none, at least only what came to them by Blakeley's will.

I read on, to see what, if any, contest she had intended to make. And as I read I could picture old Stuart Blakeley to myself— strong, direct, unscrupulous, a man who knew what he wanted and got it, dominant, close−mouthed, mysterious. He had understood and estimated the future of New York. On that he had founded his fortune.

According to the old lady's story, the marriage was a complete secret. She had demanded marriage when he had demanded her. He had pointed out the difficulties. The original property had come to him and would remain in his hands only on condition that he married one of his own faith. She was not of the faith and declined to become so. There had been other family reasons, also. They had been married, with the idea of keeping it secret until he could arrange his affairs so that he could safely acknowledge her.

It was, according to her story, a ruse. When she demanded recognition he replied that the marriage was invalid, that the minister had been unfrocked before the ceremony. She was not in law his wife and had no claim, he asserted. But he agreed to compromise, in spite of it all. If she would go West and not return or intrude, he

would make a cash settlement. Disillusioned, she took the offer and went to California. Somehow, he understood that she was dead. Years later he married again.

Meanwhile she had invested her settlement, had prospered, had even married herself, thinking the first marriage void. Then her second husband died and evil times came. Blakeley was dead, but she came East. Since then she had been fighting to establish the validity of the first marriage and hence her claim to dower rights. It was a moving story.

As we finished reading, Kennedy gathered the papers together and took charge of them. Taking Chapelle, who by this time was in a high state of excitement over both the death and the discovery, Kennedy hurried to the Blakeley mansion, stopping only long enough to telephone to Doctor Haynes and his son.

Evidently the news had spread. Cynthia Blakeley met us in the hall, half frightened, yet much relieved.

"Oh, Professor Kennedy," she cried, "I don't know what it is, but mother seems so different. What is it all about?"

As Kennedy said nothing, she turned to Chapelle, whom I was watching narrowly. "What is it, Carl?" she whispered.

"I—I can't tell," he whispered back, guardedly. Then, with an anxious glance at the rest of us, "Is your sister any better?"

Cynthia's face clouded. Relieved though she was about her mother, there was still that horror for Virginia.

"Come," I interrupted, not wishing to let Chapelle get out of my sight, yet wishing to follow Kennedy, who had dashed up−stairs.

I found Craig already at the bedside of Virginia. He had broken one of the ampules and was injecting some of the extract in it into the sleeping girl's arm. Mrs. Blakeley bent over eagerly as he did so. Even in her manner she was changed. There was anxiety for Virginia yet, but one could feel that a great weight seemed to be lifted from her.

So engrossed was I in watching Kennedy that I did not hear Doctor Haynes and Hampton enter. Chapelle heard, however, and turned.

For a moment he gazed at Hampton. Then with a slight curl of the lip he said, in a low tone, "Is it strictly ethical to treat a patient for disease of the heart when she is suffering from anemia—if you have an interest in the life and death of the patient?"

I watched Hampton's face closely. There was indignation in every line of it. But before he could reply Doctor Haynes stepped forward.

"My son was right in the diagnosis," he almost shouted, shaking a menacing finger at Chapelle. "To come to the point, sir, explain that mark on Miss Virginia's forehead!"

"Yes," demanded Hampton, also taking a step toward the beauty doctor, "explain it—if you dare."

Cynthia suppressed a little cry of fear. For a moment I thought that the two young men would forget everything in the heat of their feelings.

"Just a second," interposed Kennedy, quickly stepping between them. "Let me do the talking." There was something commanding about his tone as he looked from one to the other of us.

"The trouble with Miss Virginia," he added, deliberately, "seems to lie in one of what the scientists have lately designated the 'endocrine glands'—in this case the pituitary. My X−ray pictures show that conclusively.

"Let me explain for the benefit of the rest. The pituitary is an oval glandular body composed of two lobes and a connecting area, which rest in the sella turcica, enveloped by a layer of tissue, about under this point." He indicated the red spot on her forehead as he spoke. "It is, as the early French surgeons called it, l'organe enigmatique. The ancients thought it discharged the pituita, or mucus, into the nose. Most scientists of the past century asserted that it was a vestigial relic of prehistoric usefulness. To−day we know better.

"One by one the functions of the internal secretions are being discovered. Our variously acquired bits of information concerning the ductless glands lie before us like the fragments of a modern picture puzzle. And so, I may tell you, in connection with recent experimental studies of the role of the pituitary, Doctor Cushing and other collaborators at Johns Hopkins have noticed a marked tendency to pass into a profoundly lethargic state when the secretion of the pituitary is totally or nearly so removed."

Kennedy now had every eye riveted on him as he deftly led the subject straight to the case of the poor girl before us.

"This," he added, with a wave of his hand toward her, "is much like what is called the Frohlich syndrome—the lethargy, the subnormal temperature, slow pulse, and respiration, lowered blood pressure, and insensitivity, the growth of fat and the loss of sex characteristics. It has a name—dystrophia adiposogenitalis."

He nodded to Doctor Haynes, but did not pause. "This case bears a striking resemblance to the pronounced natural somnolence of hibernation. And induced hypopituitarism—under activity of the gland—produces a result just like natural hibernation. Hibernation has nothing to do with winter, or with food, primarily; it is connected in some way with this little gland under the forehead.

"As the pituitary secretion is lessened, the blocking action of the fatigue products in the body be−comes greater and morbid somnolence sets in. There is a high tolerance of carbohydrates which are promptly stored as fat. I am surprised, Doctor Haynes, that you did not recognize the symptoms."

A murmur from Mrs. Blakeley cut short Doctor Haynes's reply. I thought I noticed a movement of the still face on the white bed.

"Virgie! Virgie!" called Mrs. Blakeley, dropping on her knee beside her daughter.

"I'm here—mother!"

Virginia's eyes opened ever so slightly. Her face turned just an inch or two. She seemed to be making a great effort, but it lasted only a moment. Then she slipped back into the strange condition that had baffled skilled physicians and surgeons for nearly a week.

"The sleep is being dispelled," said Kennedy, quietly placing his hand on Mrs. Blakeley's shoulder. "It is a sort of semi− consciousness now and the improvement should soon be great."

"And that?" I asked, touching the empty ampule from which he had injected the contents into her.

"Pituitrin—the extract of the anterior lobe of the pituitary body. Some one who had an object in removing her temporarily probably counted on restoring her to her former blooming womanhood by pituitrin—and by removing the cause of the trouble."

Kennedy reached into his pocket and drew forth the second X−ray photograph he had taken. "Mrs. Blakeley, may I trouble you to get that beauty mask which your daughter wore?"

Mechanically Mrs. Blakeley obeyed. I expected Chapelle to object, but not a word broke the death−like stillness.

"The narcolepsy," continued Kennedy, taking the mask, "was due, I find, to something that affected the pituitary gland. I have here a photograph of her taken when she was wearing the mask." He ran his finger lightly over the part just above the eyes. "Feel that little lump, Walter," he directed.

I did so. It was almost imperceptible, but there was something.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Located in one of the best protected and most inaccessible parts of the body," Kennedy considered, slowly, "how could the pituitary be reached? If you will study my skiagraph, you will see how I got my first clue. There was something over that spot which caused the refractory sore. What was it? Radium—carefully placed in the mask with guards of lead foil in such a way as to protect the eyes, but direct the emission full at the gland which was to be affected, and the secretions stopped."

Chapelle gave a gasp. He was pale and agitated.

"Some of you have already heard of Reba Rinehart," shot out Kennedy, suddenly changing the subject.

Mrs. Blakeley could not have been more astounded if a bomb had dropped before her. Still kneeling before Virginia's bed, she turned her startled face at Kennedy, clasping her hands in appeal.

"It was for my girls that I tried to buy her off—for their good name—their fortune—their future," she cried, imploringly.

Kennedy bent down, "I know that is all," he reassured, then, facing us, went on: "Behind that old woman was a secret of romantic interest. She was contemplating filing suit in the courts to recover a widow's interest in the land on which now stand the homes of millionaires, hotel palaces, luxurious apartments, and popular theaters—millions of dollars' worth of property."

Cynthia moved over and drew her arms about the convulsed figure of her mother.

"Some one else knew of this old marriage of Stuart Blakeley," proceeded Kennedy, "knew of Reba Rinehart, knew that she might die at any moment. But until she died none of the Blakeleys could be entirely sure of their fortune."

It flashed over me that Chapelle might have conceived the whole scheme, seeking to gain the entire fortune for Cynthia.

"Who was interested enough to plot this postponement of the wedding until the danger to the fortune was finally removed?" I caught sight of Hampton Haynes, his eyes riveted on the face on the bed before us.

Virginia stirred again. This time her eyes opened wider. As if in a dream she caught sight of the face of her lover and smiled wanly.

Could it have been Hampton? It seemed incredible.

"The old lady is dead," pursued Kennedy, tensely. "Her dower right died with her. Nothing can be gained by bringing her case back again—except to trouble the Blakeleys in what is rightfully theirs."

Gathering up the beauty mask, the X−ray photographs, and the papers of Mrs. Rinehart, Kennedy emphasized with them the words as he whipped them out suddenly.

"Postponing the marriage, at the possible expense of Chapelle, until Reba Rinehart was dead, and trusting to a wrong diagnosis and Hampton's inexperience as the surest way of bringing that result about quickly, it was your inordinate ambition for your son, Doctor Haynes, that led you on. I shall hold these proofs until Virginia Blakeley is restored completely to health and beauty."

VII. THE LOVE METER

"Since we brought him home, my brother just tosses and gasps for air. Oh, I think Eulalie and I shall both go mad!"

The soft, pleading voice of Anitra Barrios and her big, appealing brown eyes filled with tears were doubly affecting as, in spite of her own feelings, she placed her hand on that of a somewhat younger girl who had accompanied her to the laboratory.

"We were to have been married next month," sobbed Eulalie Sandoval. "Can't you come and see Jose, Professor Kennedy? There must be something you can do. We fear he is dying—yes, dying."

"Poor little girl!" murmured Anitra, still patting her hand affectionately, then to us, "You know, Eulalie is the sister of Manuel Sandoval, who manages the New York business of my brother." She paused. "Oh, I can't believe it, myself. It's all so strange, so sudden."

For the moment her own grief overwhelmed Anitra, and both sister and sweetheart of Jose Barrios clung to each other.

"What is the trouble?" soothed Craig. "What has happened? How can I help you?"

"Everything was so happy with us," cried Anitra, "until Jose and I came to New York—and—now—" She broke down again.

"Please be calm," encouraged Kennedy. "Tell me everything— anything."

With an effort Anitra began again. "It was last night—quite late− −at his office at the foot of Wall Street—he was there alone," she strove to connect her broken thoughts. "Some one—I think it must have been the janitor—called me up at home and said that my brother was very ill. Eulalie was there with me. We hurried down to him. When we got there Jose was on the floor by his desk, unconscious, struggling for breath, just as he is now." "Did you observe anything peculiar?" queried Kennedy. "Was there anything that might give you a hint of what had happened?"

Anitra Barrios considered. "Nothing," she replied, slowly, "except that the windows were all closed. There was a peculiar odor in the room. I was so excited over Jose, though, that I couldn't tell you just what it was like."

"What did you do?" inquired Craig.

"What could we do, just two girls, all alone? It was late. The streets were deserted. You know how they are down−town at night. We took him home, to the hotel, in a cab, and called the hotel physician, Doctor Scott."

Both girls were again weeping silently in each other's arms. If there was anything that moved Kennedy to action it was distress of this sort. Without a word he rose from his desk, and I followed him. Anitra and Eulalie seemed to understand. Though they said nothing, they looked their gratitude as we four left the laboratory.

On the way down to the hotel Anitra continued to pour out her story in a fragmentary way. Her brother and she, it seemed, had inherited from their father a large sugar−plantation in Santa Clara, the middle province of Cuba.

Jose had not been like many of the planters. He had actually taken hold of the plantation, after the revolution had wrecked it, and had re−established it on modern, scientific lines. Now it was one of the largest independent plantations on the island.

To increase its efficiency, he had later established a New York office to look after the sale of the raw sugar and had placed it in charge of a friend, Manuel Sandoval. A month or so before he had come to New York with his sister to sell the plantation, to get the high price that the boom in sugar had made it worth. It was while he had been negotiating for the sale that he had fallen in love with Eulalie and they had become engaged.

Doctor Scott met us in the sitting−room of the suite which Anitra and her brother occupied, and, as she introduced us, with an anxious glance in the direction of the door of the sick−room, he shook his head gravely, though he did his best to seem encouraging.

"It's a case of poisoning of some kind, I fear," he whispered aside to us, at the first opportunity. "But I can't quite make out just what it is."

We followed the doctor into the room. Eulalie had preceded us and had dropped down on her knees by the bed, passing her little white hand caressingly over the pale and distorted face of Jose.

He was still unconscious, gasping and fighting for breath, his features pinched and skin cold and clammy. Kennedy examined the stricken man carefully, first feeling his pulse. It was barely perceptible, rapid, thready, and irregular. Now and then there were muscular tremblings and convulsive movements of the limbs. Craig moved over to the side of the room away from the two girls, where Doctor Scott was standing.

"Sometimes," I heard the doctor venture, "I think it is aconite, but the symptoms are not quite the same. Besides, I don't see how it could have been administered. There's no mark on him that might have come from a hypodermic, no wound, not even a scratch. He couldn't have swallowed it. Suicide is out of the question. But his nose and throat are terribly swollen and inflamed. It's beyond me."

I tried to recall other cases I had seen. There was one case of Kennedy's in which several deaths had occurred due to aconite. Was this another of that sort? I felt unqualified to judge, where Doctor Scott himself confessed his inability. Kennedy himself said nothing, and from his face I gathered that even he had no clue as yet.

As we left the sick−room, we found that another visitor had arrived and was standing in the sitting−room. It was Manuel Sandoval.

Sandoval was a handsome fellow, tall, straight as an arrow, with bushy dark hair and a mustache which gave him a distinguished appearance. Born in Cuba, he had been educated in the United States, had taken special work in the technology of sugar, knew the game from cane to centrifugal and the ship to the sugar trust. He was quite as much a scientist as a business man.

He and Eulalie talked for a moment in low tones in Cuban Spanish, but it needed only to watch his eyes to guess where his heart was. He seemed to fairly devour every move that Anitra made about the apartment.

A few minutes later the door opened again and a striking−looking man entered. He was a bit older than Sandoval, but still young. As he entered he bowed to Sandoval and Eulalie but greeted Anitra warmly.

"Mr. Burton Page," introduced Anitra, turning to us quickly, with just the trace of a flush on her face. "Mr. Page has been putting my brother in touch with people in New York who are interested in Cuban sugar−plantations." A call from Doctor Scott for some help took both girls into the sick−room for a moment.

"Is Barrios any better?" asked Page, turning to Sandoval.

Sandoval shook his head in the negative, but said nothing. One could not help observing that there seemed to be a sort of antipathy between the two, and I saw that Craig was observing them both closely.

Page was a typical, breezy Westerner, who had first drifted to New York as a mining promoter. Prom that he had gone into selling ranches, and, by natural stages, into the promotion of almost anything in the universe.

Sugar being at the time uppermost in the mind of the "Street," Page was naturally to be found crammed with facts about that staple. One could not help being interested in studying a man of his type, as long as one kept his grip on his pocket−book. For he was a veritable pied piper when it came to enticing dollars to follow him, and in his promotions he had the reputation of having amassed an impressive pile of dollars himself.

No important change in the condition of Barrios had taken place, except that he was a trifle more exhausted, and Doctor Scott administered a stimulant. Kennedy, who was eager to take up the investigation of the case on the outside in the hope of discovering something that might be dignified into being a clue, excused himself, with a nod to Anitra to follow into the hall

"I may look over the office?" Craig ventured when we were alone with her.

"Surely," she replied, frankly, opening her handbag which was lying on a table near the door. "I have an equal right in the business with my brother. Here are the keys. The office has been closed to−day."

Kennedy took the keys, promising to let her know the moment he discovered anything important, and we hurried directly down−town.

The office of the Barrios Company was at the foot of Wall Street, where the business of importing touched on the financial district. From the window one could see freighters unloading their cargoes at the docks. In the other direction, capital to the billions was represented. But in all that interesting neighborhood nothing just at present could surpass the mystery of what had taken place in the lonely little office late the night before.

Kennedy passed the rail that shut the outer office off from a sort of reception space. He glanced about at the safe, the books, papers, and letter−files. It would take an accountant and an investigator days, perhaps weeks, to trace out anything in them, if indeed it were worth while at all.

Two glass doors opened at one end to two smaller private offices, one belonging evidently to Sandoval, the other to Barrios. What theory Craig formed I could not guess, but as he tiptoed from the hall door, past the rail, to

the door of Jose's office, I could see that first of all he was trying to discover whether it was possible to enter the outer office and reach Jose's door unseen and unheard by any one sitting at the desk inside. Apparently it was easily possible, and he paused a moment to consider what good that knowledge might do.

As he did so his eye rested on the floor. A few feet away stood one of the modern "sanitary" desks. In this case the legs of the desk raised the desk high enough from the floor so that one could at least see where the cleaning−woman had left a small pile of unsanitary dust near the wall.

Suddenly Kennedy bent down and poked something out of the pile of dust. There on the floor was an empty shell of a cartridge. Kennedy picked it up and looked at it curiously.

What did it mean? I recalled that Doctor Scott had particularly said that Barrios had not been wounded.

Still regarding the cartridge shell, Kennedy sat down at the desk of Barrios.

Looking for a piece of paper in which to wrap the shell, he pulled out the middle drawer of the desk. In a back corner was a package of letters, neatly tied. We glanced at them. The envelopes bore the name of Jose Barrios and were in the handwriting of a woman. Some were postmarked Cuba; others, later, New York. Kennedy opened one of them.

I could not restrain an exclamation of astonishment. I had expected that they were from Eulalie Sandoval. But they were signed by a name that we had not heard—Teresa de Leon!

Hastily Kennedy read through the open letter. Its tone seemed to be that of a threat. One sentence I recall was, "I would follow you anywhere—I'll make you want me."

One after another Kennedy ran through them. All were vague and veiled, as though the writer wished by some circumlocution to convey an idea that would not be apparent to some third, inquisitive party.

What was back of it all? Had Jose been making love to another woman at the same time that he was engaged to Eulalie Sandoval? As far as the contents of the letters went there was nothing to show that he had done anything wrong. The mystery of the "other woman" only served to deepen the mystery of what little we already knew.

Craig dropped the letters into his pocket along with the shell, and walked around into the office of Sandoval. I followed him. Quickly he made a search, but it did not seem to net him anything.

Meanwhile I had been regarding a queer−looking instrument that stood on a flat table against one wall. It seemed to consist of a standard on each end of which was fastened a disk, besides several other arrangements the purpose of which I had not the slightest idea. Between the two ends rested a glass tube of some liquid. At one end was a lamp; the other was fitted with an eyepiece like a telescope. Beside the instrument on the table lay some more glass− capped tubes and strewn about were samples of raw sugar.

"It is a saccharimeter," explained Kennedy, also looking at it, "an instrument used to detect the amount of sugar held in solution, a form of the polariscope. We won't go into the science of it now. It's rather abstruse."

He was about to turn back into the outer office when an idea seemed to occur to him. He took the cartridge from his pocket and carefully scraped off what he could of the powder that still adhered to the outer rim. It was just a bit, but he dissolved it in some liquid from a bottle on the table, filled one of the clean glass tubes, capped the open end, and placed this tube in the saccharimeter where the first one I noticed had been.

Carefully he lighted the lamp, then squinted through the eyepiece at the tube of liquid containing what he had derived from the cartridge. He made some adjustments, and as he did so his face indicated that at last he began to see something dimly. The saccharimeter had opened the first rift in the haze that surrounded the case.

"I think I know what we have here," he said, briefly, rising and placing the tube and its contents in his pocket with the other things he had discovered. "Of course it is only a hint. This instrument won't tell me finally. But it is worth following up."

With a final glance about to make sure that we had overlooked nothing, Kennedy closed and locked the outside door.

"I'm going directly up to the laboratory, Walter," decided Kennedy. "Meanwhile you can help me very much if you will look up this Teresa de Leon. I noticed that the New York letters were written on the stationery of the Pan−America Hotel. Get what you can. I leave it to you. And if you can find out anything about the others, so much the better. I'll see you as soon as you finish."

It was rather a large contract. If the story had reached the newspaper stage, I should have known how to go about it. For there is no detective agency in the world like the Star, and even on the slender basis that we had, with

a flock of reporters deployed at every point in the city, with telephones, wires, and cables busily engaged, I might have gathered priceless information in a few hours. But, as it was, whatever was to be got must be got by me alone.

I found Teresa de Leon registered at the Pan−America, as Craig had surmised. Such inquiries as I was able to make about the hotel did not show a trace of reason for believing that Jose Barrios had been numbered among her visitors. While that proved nothing as to the relations of the two, it was at least reassuring as far as Anitra and Eulalie were concerned, and, after all, as in such cases, this was their story.

Not having been able to learn much about the lady, I decided finally to send up my card, and to my satisfaction she sent back word that she would receive me in the parlor of the hotel.

Teresa de Leon proved to be a really striking type of Latin− American beauty. She was no longer young, but there was an elusiveness about her personality that made a more fascinating study than youth. I felt that with such a woman directness might be more of a surprise than subtlety.

"I suppose you know that Senor Barrios is very seriously ill?" I ventured, in answer to her inquiring gaze that played from my card to my face.

For a fleeting instant she looked startled. Yet she betrayed nothing as to whether it was fear or surprise.

"I have called his office several times," she replied, "but no one answered. Even Senor Sandoval was not there."

I felt that she was countering as cleverly as I might lead. "Then you know Mr. Sandoval also?" I asked, adding, "and Mr. Page?"

"I have known Senor Barrios a long time in Cuba," she answered, "and the others, too—here."

There was something evasive about her answers. She was trying to say neither too much nor too little. She left one in doubt whether she was trying to shield herself or to involve another. Though we chatted several minutes, I could gain nothing that would lead me to judge how intimately she knew Barrios. Except that she knew Sandoval and Page, her conversation might have been a replica of the letters we had discovered. Even when she hinted politely, but finally, that the talk was over she left me in doubt even whether she was an adventuress. The woman was an enigma. Had revenge or jealousy brought her to New York, or was she merely a tool in the hands of another?

I was not ready to return to Kennedy merely with another unanswered question, and I determined to stop again at the hotel where Barrios and his sister lived, in the hope of picking up something there.

The clerk at the desk told me that no one had called since we had been there, adding: "Except the tall gentleman, who came back. I think Senorita Barrios came down and met him in the tea−room."

Wondering whether it was Page or Sandoval the clerk meant, I sauntered down the corridor past the door of the tea−room. It was Page with whom Anitra was talking. There was no way in which I could hear what was said, although Page was very earnest and Anitra showed plainly that she was anxious to return to the sick− room up−stairs.

As I watched, I took good care that I should not be seen. It was well that I did, for once when I looked about I saw that some one else in another doorway was watching them, too, so intently that he did not see me. It was Sandoval. Jealousy of Page was written in every line of his face.

Studying the three, while I could not escape the rivalry of the two men, I was unable to see now or recollect anything that had happened which would convey even an inkling of her feelings toward them. Yet I was convinced that that way lay a problem quite as important as relations between the other triangle of Eulalie, Teresa, and Barrios. I was not psychologist enough to deal with either triangle. There was something that distinctly called for the higher mathematics of Kennedy.

Determined not to return to him entirely empty−mouthed, I thought it would be a good opportunity to see Eulalie alone, and hurried to the elevator, which whisked me up to the Barrios apartment.

Doctor Scott had not left his patient, though he seemed to realize that Eulalie was a most efficient nurse.

"No change," whispered the doctor, "except that he is reaching a crisis."

Interested as I was in the patient, it had been for the purpose of seeing Eulalie that I had come, and I was glad when Doctor Scott left us a moment.

"Has Mr. Kennedy found out anything yet?" she asked, in a tremulous whisper.

"I think he is on the right track now," I encouraged. "Has anything happened here? Remember—it is quite as

important that you should tell him all as it is for him to tell you."

She looked at me a moment, then drew from a fold of her waist a yellow paper. It was a telegram. I took it and read:

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Beware of Teresa de Leon, Hotel Pan−America.

 A FRIEND.
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"You know her?" I asked, folding the telegram, but not returning it.

Eulalie looked at me frankly and shook her head. "I have no idea who she is."

"Or of who sent the telegram?"

"None at all."

"When did you receive it?"

"Only a few minutes ago."

Here was another mystery. Who had sent the anonymous telegram to Eulalie so soon after it had been evident that Kennedy had entered the case? What was its purpose?

"I may keep this?" I asked, indicating the telegram.

"I was about to send it to Professor Kennedy," she replied. "Oh, I hope he will find something Won't you go to him and tell him to hurry?"

I needed no urging, not only for her sake, but also because I did not wish to be seen or to have the receipt of the telegram by Kennedy known so soon.

In the hotel I stopped only long enough to see that Anitra was now hurrying toward the elevator, eager to get back to her brother and oblivious to every one around. What had become of Page and the sinister watcher whom he had not seen I did not know, nor did I have time to find out.

A few moments later I rejoined Kennedy at the laboratory. He was still immersed in work, and, scarcely stopping, nodded to me to tell what I had discovered. He listened with interest until I came to the receipt of the anonymous telegram.

"Did you get it?" he asked, eagerly.

He almost seized it from my hands as I pulled it out of my pocket and studied it intently.

"Strange," he muttered. "Any of them might have sent it."

"Have you discovered anything?" I asked, for I had been watching him, consumed by curiosity, as I told my story. "Do you know yet how the thing was done?"

"I think I do," he replied, abstractedly.

"How was it?" I prompted, for his mind was now on the telegram.

"A poison−gas pistol," he resumed, coming back to the work he had just been doing. "Instead of bullets, this pistol used cartridges charged with some deadly powder. It might have been something like the anesthetic pistol devised by the police authorities in Paris some years ago when the motor bandits were operating."

"But who could have used it?" I asked.

Kennedy did not answer directly. Either he was not quite sure yet or did not feel that the time was ripe to hazard a theory. "In this case," he continued, after a moment's thought, "I shouldn't be surprised if even the wielder of the pistol probably wore a mask, doubly effective, for disguise and to protect the wielder from the fumes that were to overcome the victim."

"You have no idea who it was?" I reiterated.

Before Kennedy could answer there came a violent ring at the laboratory bell, and I hurried to the door. It was one of the bell−boys from the hotel where the Barrioses had their apartment, with a message for Kennedy.

Craig tore it open and read it hurriedly. "From Doctor Scott," he said, briefly, in answer to my anxious query. "Barrios is dead."

Even though I had been prepared for the news by my last visit, death came as a shock, as it always does. I had felt all along that Kennedy had been called in too late to do anything to save Barrios, but I had been hoping against hope. But I knew that it was not too late to catch the criminal who had done the dastardly, heartless deed.

A few hours and perhaps all clues might have been covered up. But there is always something that goes wrong with crime, always some point where murder cannot be covered up. I think if people could only be got to realize it, as my experience both on the Star and with Kennedy have impressed it on me, murder would become a lost art.

Without another word Kennedy seized his hat and together we hurried to the hotel.

We found Anitra crying softly to herself, while near her sat Eulalie, tearless, stunned by the blow, broken−hearted. In the realization of the tragedy everything had been forgotten, even the mysterious anonymous telegram signed, Judas−like, "A Friend."

Sandoval, we learned, had been there when the end came, and had now gone out to make what arrangements were necessary. I had nothing against the man, but I could not help feeling that, now that the business was all Anitra's, might he not be the one to profit most by the death? The fact was that Kennedy had expressed so little opinion on the case so far that I might be pardoned for suspecting any one—even Teresa de Leon, who must have seen Jose slipping away from her in spite of her pursuit, whatever actuated it.

It was while I was in the midst of these fruitless speculations that Doctor Scott beckoned us outside, and we withdrew quietly.

"I don't know that there is anything more that I can do," he remarked, "but I promised Senor Sandoval that I would stay here until he came back. He begged me to, seems scarcely to know how to do enough to comfort his sister and Senorita Barrios."

I listened to the doctor keenly. Was it possible that Sandoval had one of those Jekyll−Hyde natures which seem to be so common in some of us? Had his better nature yielded to his worse? To my mind that has often been an explanation of crime, never an adequate defense.

Kennedy was about to say something when the elevator door down the hall opened. I expected that it was Sandoval returning, but it was Burton Page.

"They told me you were here," he said, greeting us. "I have been looking all over for you, down at your laboratory and at your apartment. Would you mind stepping down around the bend in the hall?"

We excused ourselves from Doctor Scott, wondering what Page had to reveal.

"I knew Sandoval had not returned," he began as soon as we were out of ear−shot of the doctor, "and I don't want to see him— again—not after what happened this afternoon. The man is crazy." We had reached an alcove and sank down into a soft settee.

"Why, what was that?" I asked, recalling the look of hate on the man's face as he had watched Page talking to Anitra in the tea− room.

"I'm giving you this for what it may be worth," began Page, turning from me to Kennedy. "Down in the lobby this afternoon, after you had been gone some time, I happened to run into Sandoval. He almost seized hold of me. 'You have been at the office,' he said. 'You've been rummaging around there.' Well, I denied it flatly. 'Who took those letters?' he shot back at me. All I could do was to look at him. 'I don't know about any letters. What letters?' I asked. Oh, he's a queer fellow all right. I thought he was going to kill me by the black look he gave me. He cooled down a bit, but I didn't wait for any apology. The best thing to do with these hot−headed people is to cut out and let them alone."

"How do you account for his strange actions?" asked Kennedy. "Have you ever heard anything more that he did?"

Page shrugged his shoulders as if in doubt whether to say anything, then decided quickly. "The other day I heard Barrios and Sandoval in the office. They were quite excited. Barrios was talking loudly. I didn't know at first what it was all about. But I soon found out. Sandoval had gone to him, as the head of the family, following their custom, I believe, to ask whether he might seek to win Anitra."

"Have you ever heard of Teresa de Leon?" interrupted Kennedy suddenly.

Page looked at him and hesitated. "There's some scandal, there, I'm afraid," he nodded, combining his answers. "I heard Sandoval say something about her to Barrios that day—warn him against something. That was when the argument was heated. It seemed to make Barrios angry. Sandoval said something about Barrios refusing to let him court Anitra while at the same time Barrios was engaged to Eulalie. Barrios retorted that the cases were different. He said he had decided that Anitra was going to marry an American millionaire."

There could be no doubt about how Page himself interpreted the remark. It was evident that he took it to mean himself.

"Sandoval had warned against this De Leon?" asked Kennedy, evidently having in mind the anonymous telegram.

"Something—I don't know what it was all about," returned Page, then added, in a burst of confidence: "I never heard of the lady until she came to New York and introduced herself to me. For a time she was interesting. But I'm too old for that sort of thing. Besides, she always impressed me as though she had some ulterior motive, as though she was trying to get at something through me. I cut it all out."

Kennedy nodded, but for a moment said nothing.

"I think I'll be getting out," remarked Page, with a half smile. "I don't want a knife in the back. I thought you ought to know all this, though. And if I hear anything else I'll let you know."

Kennedy thanked him and together we rode down in the next elevator, parting with Page at the hotel entrance.

It was still early in the evening, and Kennedy had no intention now of wasting a moment. He beckoned for a cab and directed the man to drive immediately to the Pan−America.

This time Teresa de Leon was plainly prepared for a visit, though I am not sure that she was prepared to receive two visitors.

"I believe you were acquainted with Senior Barrios, who died to− night?" opened Kennedy, after I had introduced him.

"He was acquainted with me," she corrected, with a purr in her voice that suggested claws.

"You were not married to him," shot out Kennedy; then before she could reply, "nor even engaged."

"He had known me a long time. We were intimate—"

"Friends," interrupted Kennedy, leaving no doubt as to the meaning of his emphasis.

She colored. It was evident that, at least to her, it was more than friendship.

"Senor Sandoval says," romanced Kennedy, in true detective style, "that you wrote—"

It was her turn to interrupt. "If Senor Sandoval says anything against me, he tells what is not—the truth."

In spite of Kennedy's grilling she was still mistress of herself.

"You introduced yourself to Burton Page, and—"

"You had better remember your own proverb," she retorted. "Don't believe anything you hear and only half you see."

Kennedy snapped down the yellow telegram before her. It was a dramatic moment. The woman did not flinch at the anonymous implication. Straight into Kennedy's eyes she shot a penetrating glance.

"Watch both of THEM," she replied, shortly, then turned and deliberately swept out of the hotel parlor as though daring us to go as far as we cared.

"I think we have started forces working for us," remarked Kennedy, coolly consulting his watch. "For the present at least let us retire to the laboratory. Some one will make a move. My game is to play one against the other—until the real one breaks."

We had scarcely switched on the lights and Kennedy was checking over the results he had obtained during his afternoon's investigations, when the door was flung open and a man dashed in on us unexpectedly. It was Sandoval, and as he advanced furiously at Kennedy I more than feared that Page's idea was correct.

"It was you, Kennedy," he hissed, "who took those letters from Jose's desk. It is you—or Page back of you—who are trying to connect me with that woman, De Leon. But let me tell you—"

A sharp click back of Sandoval caused him to cut short the remark and look about apprehensively. Kennedy's finger, sliding along the edge of the laboratory table, had merely found an electric button by which he could snap the lock on the door.

"We are two to one," returned Kennedy, nonchalantly. "That was nothing but the lock on the door closing. Mr. Jameson has a revolver in the top drawer of his desk over there. You will pardon me if I do a little telephoning—through the central office of the detective bureau? Some of our friends may not be overanxious to come here, and it may be necessary to compel their attendance."

Sandoval subsided into a sullen silence as Kennedy made arrangements to have Burton Page, Anitra, Eulalie, and Teresa de Leon hurried to us at once.

There was nothing for me to do but watch Sandoval as Kennedy prepared a little instrument with a scale and dial upon which rested an indicator resembling a watch hand, something like the new horizontal clocks which have only one hand to register seconds, minutes, and hours. In them, like a thermometer held sidewise, the hand

moves along from zero to twenty−four. In this instrument a little needle did the same thing. Pairs of little wire−like strings ran to the instrument.

Kennedy had finished adjusting another instrument which was much like the saccharimeter, only more complicated, when the racing of an engine outside announced the arrival of the party in one of the police department cars.

Between us, Craig and I lost no time in disposing the visitors so that each was in possession of a pair of the wire−like strings, and then disdaining to explain why he had gathered them together so unceremoniously, Kennedy turned and finished adjusting the other apparatus.

"Most people regard light, so abundant, so necessary, so free as a matter of course," he remarked, contemplatively. "Not one person in ten thousand ever thinks of its mysterious nature or ever attempts to investigate it. In fact, most of us are in utter darkness as to light."

He paused, tapped the machine and went on, "This is a polarimeter− −a simple polariscope—a step beyond the saccharimeter," he explained, with a nod at Sandoval. "It detects differences of structure in substances not visible in ordinary light.

"Light is polarized in several ways—by reflection, by transmission, but most commonly through what I have here, a prism of calcite, or Iceland spar, commonly called a Nicol prism. Light fully polarized consists of vibrations transverse to the direction of the ray, all in one plane. Ordinary light has transverse vibrations in all planes. Certain substances, due to their molecular structure, are transparent to vibrations in one plane, but opaque to those at right angles.

"Here we have," he explained, tapping the parts in order, "a source of light, passing in through this aperture, here a Nicol polarizer, next a liquid to be examined in a glass−capped tube; here on this other side an arrangement of quartz plates with rotary power which I will explain in a moment, next an analyzer, and finally the aperture for the eye of an observer."

Kennedy adjusted the glass tube containing the liquid which bore the substance scraped from the cartridge—he had picked up in the office of Jose. "Look through the eyepiece, Walter," he directed.

The field appeared halved. He made an adjustment and at once the field of vision appeared wholly the same tint. When he removed the tube it was dark.

"If a liquid has not what we call rotary power both halves of the double disk appear of the same tint," he explained. "If it has rotary power, the halves appear of different tints and the degree of rotation is measured by the alteration of thickness of this double quartz plate necessary to counteract it. It is, as I told Mr. Jameson early to−day, a rather abstruse subject, this of polarized light. I shall not bore you with it, but I think you will see in a moment why it is necessary, perhaps why some one who knew thought it would never be used.

"What I am getting at now is that some substances with the same chemical formula rotate polarized light to the right, are dextro− rotary, as, for instance, what is known as dextrose. Others rotate it to the left, are levo−rotary, as the substance called levose. Both of them are glucose. So there are substances which give the same chemical reactions which can only be distinguished by their being left or right rotary."

Craig took a bit of crystalline powder and dissolved it in ether. Then he added some strong sulphuric acid. The liquid turned yellow, then slowly a bright scarlet. Beside the first he repeated the operation with another similar−looking powder, with the identical result.

"Both of those," he remarked, holding up the vials, "were samples of pure veratrine, but obtained from different sources. You see the brilliant reaction—unmistakable. But it makes all the difference in the world in this case what was the source of the veratrine. It may mean the guilt or innocence of one of you."

He paused, to let the significance of his remark sink in. "Veratrine," he resumed, "is a form of hellebore, known to gardeners for its fatal effect on insects. There are white and green hellebore, Veratrum alba and Veratrum viride. It is the pure alkaloid, or rather one of them, that we have to deal with here— veratrine.

"There are various sources of veratrine. For instance, there is the veratrine that may be derived from the sabadilla seeds which grow in the West Indies and Mexico. It is used, I am informed, by the Germans in their lachrymatory and asphyxiating bombs."

The mention of the West Indies brought, like a flash, to my mind Sandoval and Senorita de Leon.

"Then, too," continued Kennedy, "there is a plant out in our own Western country, of which you may have heard, known as the death camas, very fatal to cattle when they eat it. The active principle in this is also

veratrine."

I began to see what Kennedy was driving at. If it were veratrine derived from death camas it would point toward Page.

"Abderhalden, the great German physiological chemist, has discovered that substances that once get into the blood produce specific ferments. Not long ago, in a case, I showed it by the use of dialyzing membranes. But Abderhalden has found that the polariscope can show it also. And in this case only the polariscope can show what chemistry cannot show when we reach the point of testing Senor Barrios's blood—if that becomes necessary."

It was plain that Kennedy was confident. "There are other sources of drugs of the nature used in this case to asphyxiate and kill, but the active principle of all is veratrine. The point is, veratrine from what source? The sabadilla is dextro−rotary; the death camas is levo−rotary. Which is it here?"

As I tried to figure out the ramifications of the case, I could see that it was a cruel situation for one or the other of the girls. Was one of her lovers the murderer of Anitra's brother? Or was her own brother the murderer of Eulalie's lover? I looked at the faces before me, now tensely watching Kennedy, forgetful of the wire−like strings which they held in their hands. I studied Teresa de Leon intently for a while. She was still the enigma which she had been the first time I saw her.

Kennedy paused long enough to look through the eyepiece again as if to reassure himself finally that he was right. There was a tantalizing suspense as we waited for the verdict of science on this intensely human tragedy. Then he turned to the queer instrument over which the needle−hand was moving.

"Though some scientists would call this merely a sensitive form of galvanometer," he remarked, "it is, to me, more than that. It registers feelings, emotions. It has been registering your own every moment that I have been talking.

"But most of all it registers the grand passion. I might even call it a love meter. Love might seem to be a subject which could not be investigated. But even love can be attributed to electrical forces, or, perhaps better, is expressed by the generation of an electric current, as though the attraction between men and women were the giving off of electrons or radiations of one to the other. I have seen this galvanometer stationary during the ordinary meeting of men and women, yet exhibit all sorts of strange vibrations when true lovers meet."

Not used to Kennedy's peculiar methods, they were now on guard, ignorant of the fact that that alone was sufficient to corroborate unescapably any evidence they had already given of their feelings toward each other.

Kennedy passed lightly over the torn and bleeding heart of Eulalie. But, much as he disliked to do so, he could not so quickly pass Anitra. In spite of her grief, I could see that she was striving to control herself. A quick blush suffused her face and her breath came and went faster.

"This record," went on Kennedy, lowering his voice, "tells me that two men are in love with Anitra Barrios. I will not say which exhibits the deeper, truer passion. You shall see for yourself in a moment. But, more than that, it tells me which of the two she cares for most—a secret her heart would never permit her lips to disclose. Nor will I disclose it.

"One of them, with supreme egotism, was so sure that he would win her heart that he plotted this murder of her brother so that she would have the whole estate to bring to him—a terrible price for a dowry. My love meter tells me, however, that Anitra has something to say about it yet. She does not love this man.

"As for Teresa de Leon, it was jealousy that impelled her to follow Jose Barrios from Cuba to New York. The murderer, in his scheming, knew it, saw a chance to use her, to encourage her, perhaps throw suspicion on her, if necessary. When I came uncomfortably close to him he even sent an anonymous telegram that might point toward her. It was sent by the same person who stole in Barrios's office and shot him with an asphyxiating pistol which discharged a fatal quantity of pure veratrine full at him.

"My love meter, in registering hidden emotions, supplements what the polarimeter tells me. It was the levo−rotary veratrine of the fatal death camas which you used, Page," concluded Craig, as again the electric attachment clicked shut the lock on the laboratory door.

VIII. THE VITAL PRINCIPLE

"That's the handwriting of a woman—a jealous woman," remarked Kennedy, handing to me a dainty note on plain paper which had come in the morning mail.

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I did not stop to study the writing, for the contents of the
letter were more fascinating than even Kennedy's new science
of graphology.

You don't know me [the note read], but I know of your work
of scientific investigation.

Let me inform you of something that ought to interest you.

In the Forum Apartments you will find that there is some
strange disease affecting the Wardlaw family. It is a queer
disease of the nerves. One is dead. Others are dying.

Look into it.

A FRIEND.
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As I read it I asked myself vainly what it could mean. There was no direct accusation against any one, yet the implication was plain. A woman had been moved by one of the primal passions to betray—some one.

I looked up from the note on the table at Craig. He was still studying the handwriting.

"It's that peculiar vertical, angular hand affected by many women," he commented, half to himself. "Even at a glance you can see that it's written hastily, as if under the stress of excitement and sudden resolution. You'll notice how those capitals—" The laboratory door opened, interrupting him.

"Hello, Kennedy," greeted Doctor Leslie, our friend, the coroner's physician, who had recently been appointed Health Commissioner of the city.

It was the first time we had seen him since the appointment and we hastened to congratulate him. He thanked us absently, and it was evident that there was something on his mind, some problem which, in his new office, he felt that he must solve if for no other purpose than to justify his reputation. Craig said nothing, preferring to let the commissioner come to the point in his own way.

"Do you know, Kennedy," he said, at length, turning in his chair and facing us, "I believe we have found one of the strangest cases in the history of the department."

The commissioner paused, then went on, quickly, "It looks as if it were nothing less than an epidemic of beriberi—not on a ship coming into port as so often happens, but actually in the heart of the city."

"Beriberi—in New York?" queried Craig, incredulously.

"It looks like it," reiterated Leslie, "in the family of a Doctor Wardlaw, up−town here, in the Forum—"

Kennedy had already shoved over the letter he had just received. Leslie did not finish the sentence, but read the note in amazement.

"What are the symptoms?" inquired Craig.

"What makes you think it is beriberi, of all things?"

"Because they show the symptoms of beriberi," persisted Leslie, doggedly. "You know what they are like. If you care to go into the matter I think I can convince you."

The commissioner was still holding the letter and gazing, puzzled, from it to us. It seemed as if he regarded it merely as confirming his own suspicions that something was wrong, even though it shed no real light on the matter.

"How did you first hear of it?" prompted Kennedy.

Leslie answered frankly. "It came to the attention of the department as the result of a reform I have

inaugurated. When I went in office I found that many of the death certificates were faulty, and in the course of our investigations we ran across one that seemed to be most vaguely worded. I don't know yet whether it was ignorance—or something worse. But it started an inquiry. I can't say that I'm thoroughly satisfied with the amended certificate of the physician who attended Mrs. Marbury, the mother of Doctor Wardlaw's wife, who died about a week ago—Doctor Aitken."

"Then Wardlaw didn't attend her himself?" asked Kennedy.

"Oh no. He couldn't, under the circumstances, as I'll show you presently, aside from the medical ethics of the case. Aitken was the family physician of the Marburys."

Kennedy glanced at the note. "One is dead. Others are dying," he read. "Who are the others? Who else is stricken?"

"Why," continued Leslie, eager to unburden his story, "Wardlaw himself has the marks of a nervous affection as plainly as the eye can see it. You know what it is in this disease, as though the nerves were wasting away. But he doesn't seem half as badly affected as his wife. They tell me Maude Marbury was quite a beauty once, and photographs I have seen prove it. She's a wreck now. And, of course, the old lady must have been the most seriously affected of them all."

"Who else is there in the household?" inquired Kennedy, growing more and more interested.

"Well," answered Leslie, slowly, "they've had a nurse for some time, Natalie Langdale. Apparently she has escaped."

"Any servants?"

"Some by the day; only one regularly—a Japanese, Kato. He goes home at night, too. There's no evidence of the disease having affected him."

I caught Leslie's eye as he gave the last information. Though I did not know much about beriberi, I had read of it, and knew that it was especially prevalent in the Orient. I did not know what importance to attach to Kato and his going home at night.

"Have you done any investigating yourself?" asked Kennedy.

Leslie hesitated a moment, as though deprecating his own efforts in that line, though when he spoke I could see no reason why he should, except that it had so often happened that Kennedy had seen the obvious which was hidden from most of those who consulted him.

"Yes," he replied, "I thought perhaps there might be some motive back of it all which I might discover. Possibly it was old Mrs. Marbury's fortune—not a large one, but substantial. So it occurred to me that the will might show it. I have been to the surrogate."

"And?" prompted Kennedy, approvingly.

"Mrs. Marbury's will has already been offered for probate. It directs, among other things, that twenty−five thousand dollars be given by her daughter, to whom she leaves the bulk of her fortune, to Doctor Aitken, who had been Mr. Marbury's physician and her own."

Leslie looked at us significantly, but Kennedy made no comment.

"Would you like to go up there and see them?" urged the commissioner, anxious to get Craig's final word on whether he would co−operate in the affair.

"I certainly should," returned Kennedy, heartily, folding up the letter which had first attracted his interest. "It looks as if there were more to this thing than a mere disease, however unusual."

Doctor Leslie could not conceal his satisfaction, and without delaying a moment more than was necessary hurried us out into one of the department cars, which he had left waiting outside, and directed the driver to take us to the Forum Apartments, one of the newest and most fashionable on the Drive.

Miss Langdale met us at the door and admitted us into the apartment. She was a striking type of trained nurse, one of those who seem bubbling over with health and vivacity. She seemed solicitous of her patients and reluctant to have them disturbed, yet apparently not daring to refuse to admit Doctor Leslie. There was nothing in her solicitude, however, that one could take exception to.

Miss Langdale conducted us softly down a hallway through the middle of the apartment, and I noted quickly how it was laid out. On one side we passed a handsomely furnished parlor and dining− room, opposite which were the kitchen and butler's pantry, and, farther along, a bedroom and the bath. On down the hall, on the right, was Doctor Wardlaw's study, or rather den, for it was more of a library than an office.

The nurse led the way, and we entered. Through the windows one caught a beautiful vista of the Drive, the river, and the Jersey shore. I gazed about curiously. Around the room there were bookcases and cabinets, a desk, some easy−chairs, and in the corner a table on which were some of Wardlaw's paraphernalia, for, although he was not a practising physician, he still specialized in his favorite branches of eye and ear surgery.

Miss Langdale left us a moment, with a hasty excuse that she must prepare Mrs. Wardlaw for the unexpected visit. The preparation, however, did not take long, for a moment later Maude Wardlaw entered, supported by her nurse.

Her lips moved mechanically as she saw us, but we could not hear what she said. As she walked, I could see that she had a peculiar gait, as though she were always lifting her feet over small obstacles. Her eyes, too, as she looked at us, had a strange squint, and now and then the muscles of her face twitched. She glanced from Leslie to Kennedy inquiringly, as Leslie introduced us, implying that we were from his office, then dropped into the easy−chair. Her breathing seemed to be labored and her heart action feeble, as the nurse propped her up comfortably.

As Mrs. Wardlaw's hand rested on the arm of the chair I saw that there was a peculiar flexion of her wrist which reminded me of the so−called "wrist−drop" of which I had heard. It was almost as if the muscles of her hands and arms, feet and legs, were weak and wasting. Once she had been beautiful, and even now, although she seemed to be a wreck of her former self, she had a sort of ethereal beauty that was very touching.

"Doctor is out—just now," she hesitated, in a tone that hinted at the loss of her voice. She turned appealingly to Miss Langdale. "Oh," she murmured, "I feel so badly this morning—as if pins and needles were sticking in me—vague pains in all my limbs—"

Her voice sank to a whisper and only her lips moved feebly. One had only to see her to feel sympathy. It seemed almost cruel to intrude under the circumstances, yet it was absolutely necessary if Craig were to accomplish anything. Maude Wardlaw, however, did not seem to comprehend the significance of our presence, and I wondered how Kennedy would proceed.

"I should like to see your Japanese servant, Kato," he began, directly, somewhat to my surprise, addressing himself rather to Miss Langdale than to Mrs. Wardlaw.

The nurse nodded and left the room without a word, as though appreciating the anomalous position in which she was placed as temporary mistress of the household.

A few moments later Kato entered. He was a typical specimen of the suave Oriental, and I eyed him keenly, for to me East was East and West was West, and I was frankly suspicious, especially as I saw no reason to be otherwise in Kennedy's manner. I waited eagerly to see what Craig would do.

"Sit here," directed Kennedy, indicating a straight−backed chair, on which the Japanese obediently sat. "Now cross your knees."

As Kato complied, Kennedy quickly brought his hand, held flat and palm upward, sharply against the Jap's knee just below the kneecap. There was a quick reflex jerk of the leg below the knee in response.

"Quite natural," Kennedy whispered, turning to Leslie, who nodded.

He dismissed Kato without further questioning, having had an opportunity to observe whether he showed any of the symptoms that had appeared in the rest of the family. Craig and the Health Commissioner exchanged a few words under their breath, then Craig crossed the room to Mrs. Wardlaw. The entrance of Kato had roused her momentarily and she had been watching what was going on.

"It is a simple test," explained Kennedy, indicating to Miss Langdale that he wished to repeat it on her patient.

Mrs. Wardlaw's knee showed no reflex! As he turned to us, we could see that Kennedy's face was lined deeply with thought, and he paced up and down the room once or twice, considering what he had observed.

I could see that even this simple interview had greatly fatigued Mrs. Wardlaw. Miss Langdale said nothing, but it was plainly evident that she objected strongly to the strain on her patient's strength.

"That will be sufficient," nodded Craig, noticing the nurse. "Thank you very much. I think you had better let Mrs. Wardlaw rest in her own room."

On the nurse's arm Mrs. Wardlaw withdrew and I looked inquiringly from Kennedy to Doctor Leslie. What was it that had made this beautiful woman such a wreck? It seemed almost as though the hand of fate had stretched out against one who had all to make her happy—wealth, youth, a beautiful home—for the sullen purpose of taking away what had been bestowed so bounteously.

"It is polyneuritis, all right, Leslie," Craig agreed, the moment we were alone.

"I think so," coincided Leslie, with a nod. "It's the CAUSE I can't get at. Is it polyneuritis of beriberi—or something else?" Kennedy did not reply immediately.

"Then there are other causes?" I inquired of Leslie.

"Alcohol," he returned, briefly. "I don't think that figures in this instance. At least I've seen no evidence."

"Perhaps some drug?" I hazarded at a venture.

Leslie shrugged.

"How about the food?" inquired Craig. "Have you made any attempt to examine it?"

"I have," replied the commissioner. "When I came up here first I thought of that. I took samples of all the food that I could find in the ice−box, the kitchen, and the butler's pantry. I have the whole thing, labeled, and I have already started to test them out. I'll show you what I have done when we go down to the department laboratory."

Kennedy had been examining the books in the bookcase and now pulled out a medical dictionary. It opened readily to the heading, "Polyneuritis—multiple neuritis."

I bent over and read with him. In the disease, it seemed, the nerve fibers themselves in the small nerves broke down and the affection was motor, sensory, vasomotor, or endemic. All the symptoms described seemed to fit what I had observed in Mrs. Wardlaw.

"Invariably," the article went on, "it is the result of some toxic substance circulating in the blood. There is a polyneuritis psychosis, known as Korsakoff's syndrome, characterized by disturbances of the memory of recent events and false reminiscences. the patient being restless and disorientated."

I ran my finger down the page until I came to the causes. There were alcohol, lead, arsenic, bisulphide of carbon, diseases such as diabetes, diphtheria, typhoid, and finally, much to my excitement, was enumerated beriberi, with the added information, "or, as the Japanese call it, kakke."

I placed my finger on the passage and was about to say something about my suspicions of Kato when we heard the sound of footsteps in the hall, and Craig snapped the book shut, returning it hastily to the bookcase. It was Miss Langdale who had made her patient comfortable in bed and now returned to us.

"Who is this Kato?" inquired Craig, voicing what was in my own mind. "What do you know about him?"

"Just a young Japanese from the Mission downtown," replied the nurse, directly. "I don't suppose you know, but Mrs. Wardlaw used to be greatly interested in religious and social work among the Japanese and Chinese; would be yet, but," she added, significantly, "she is not strong enough. They employed him before I came here, about a year ago, I think."

Kennedy nodded, and was about to ask another question, when there was a slight noise out in the hall. Thinking it might be Kato himself, I sprang to the door.

Instead, I encountered a middle−aged man, who drew back in surprise at seeing me, a stranger.

"Oh, good morning, Doctor Aitken!" greeted Miss Langdale, in quite the casual manner of a nurse accustomed to the daily visit at about this hour.

As for Doctor Aitken, he glanced from Leslie, whom he knew, to Kennedy, whom he did not know, with a very surprised look on his face. In fact, I got the impression that after he had been admitted he had paused a moment in the hall to listen to the strange voices in the Wardlaw study.

Leslie nodded to him and introduced us, without quite knowing what to say or do, any more than Doctor Aitken.

"A most incomprehensible case," ventured Aitken to us. "I can't, for the life of me, make it out." The doctor showed his perplexity plainly, whether it was feigned or not.

"I'm afraid she's not quite so well as usual," put in Miss Langdale, speaking to him, but in a manner that indicated that first of all she wished any blame for her patient's condition to attach to us and not to herself.

Doctor Aitken pursed up his lips, bowed excusingly to us, and turned down the hall, followed by the nurse. As they passed on to Mrs. Wardlaw's room, I am sure they whispered about us. I was puzzled by Doctor Aitken. He seemed to be sincere, yet, under the circumstances, I felt that I must be suspicious of everybody and everything.

Alone again for a moment, Kennedy turned his attention to the furniture of the room, and finally paused before a writing−desk in the corner. He tried it. It was not locked and he opened it. Quickly he ran through a pile of papers carefully laid under a paper−weight at the back.

A suppressed exclamation from him called my attention to something that he had discovered. There lay two

documents, evidently recently drawn up. As we looked over the first, we saw that it was Doctor Wardlaw's will, in which he had left everything to his wife, although he was not an especially wealthy man. The other was the will of Mrs. Wardlaw.

We devoured it hastily. In substance it was identical with the first, except that at the end she had added two clauses. In the first she had done just as her mother had directed. Twenty−five thousand dollars had been left to Doctor Aitken. I glanced at Kennedy, but he was reading on, taking the second clause. I read also. Fifty thousand dollars was given to endow the New York Japanese Mission.

Immediately the thought of Kato and what Miss Langdale had just told us flashed through my mind.

A second time we heard the nurse's footsteps on the hardwood floor of the hall. Craig closed the desk softly.

"Doctor Aitken is ready to go," she announced. "Is there anything more you wish to ask?"

Kennedy spoke a moment with the doctor as he passed out, but, aside from the information that Mrs. Wardlaw was, in his opinion, growing worse, the conversation added nothing to our meager store of information.

"I suppose you attended Mrs. Marbury?" ventured Kennedy of Miss Langdale, after the doctor had gone.

"Not all the time," she admitted. "Before I came there was another nurse, a Miss Hackstaff."

"What was the matter? Wasn't she competent?"

Miss Langdale avoided the question, as though it were a breach of professional etiquette to cast reflections on another nurse, although whether that was the real reason for her reticence did not appear. Craig seemed to make a mental note of the fact.

"Have you seen anything—er—suspicious about this Kato?" put in Leslie, while Kennedy frowned at the interruption.

Miss Langdale answered quickly, "Nothing."

"Doctor Aitken has never expressed any suspicion?" pursued Leslie.

"Oh no," she returned. "I think I would have known it if he had any. No, I've never heard him even hint at anything." It was evident that she wished us to know that she was in the confidence of the doctor.

"I think we'd better be going," interrupted Kennedy, hastily, not apparently pleased to have Leslie break in in the investigation just at present.

Miss Langdale accompanied us to the door, but before we reached it it was opened from the outside by a man who had once been and yet was handsome, although one could see that he had a certain appearance of having neglected himself.

Leslie nodded and introduced us. It was Doctor Wardlaw.

As I studied his face I could see that, as Leslie had already told us, it plainly bore the stigma of nervousness.

"Has Doctor Aitken been here?" he inquired, quickly, of the nurse. Then, scarcely waiting for her even to nod, he added: "What did he say? Is Mrs. Wardlaw any better?"

Miss Langdale seemed to be endeavoring to make as optimistic a report as the truth permitted, but I fancied Wardlaw read between the lines. As they talked it was evident that there was a sort of restraint between them. I wondered whether Wardlaw might not have some lurking suspicion against Aitken, or some one else. If he had, even in his nervousness he did not betray it.

"I can't tell you how worried I am," he murmured, almost to himself. "What can this thing be?"

He turned to us, and, although he had just been introduced, I am sure that our presence seemed to surprise him, for he went on talking to himself, "Oh yes—let me see—oh yes, friends of Doctor—er—Leslie."

I had been studying him and trying to recall what I had just read of beriberi and polyneuritis. There flashed over my mind the recollection of what had been called Korsakoff's syndrome, in which one of the mental disturbances was the memory of recent events. Did not this, I asked myself, indicate plainly enough that Leslie might be right in his suspicions of beriberi? It was all the more apparent a moment later when, turning to Miss Langdale, Wardlaw seemed almost instantly to forget our presence again. At any rate, his anxiety was easy to see.

After a few minutes' chat during which Craig observed Wardlaw's symptoms, too, we excused ourselves, and the Health Commissioner undertook to conduct us to his office to show us what he had done so far. As for me, I could not get Miss Langdale out of my mind, and especially the mysterious letter to Kennedy. What of it and what of its secret sender?

None of us said much until, half an hour later, in the department laboratory, Leslie began to recapitulate what he had already done in the case.

"You asked whether I had examined the food," he remarked, pausing in a corner before several cages in which were a number of pigeons, separated and carefully tagged. With a wave of his hand at one group of cages he continued: "These fellows I have been feeding exclusively on samples of the various foods which I took from the Wardlaw family when I first went up there. Here, too, are charts showing what I have observed up to date. Over there are the 'controls'—pigeons from the same group which have been fed regularly on the usual diet so that I can check my tests."

Kennedy fell to examining the pigeons carefully as well as the charts and records of feeding and results. None of the birds fed on what had been taken from the apartment looked well, though some were worse than others.

"I want you to observe this fellow," pointed out Leslie at last, singling out one cage. The pigeon in it was a pathetic figure. His eyes seemed dull and glazed. He paid little or no attention to us; even his food and water did not seem to interest him. Instead of strutting about, he seemed to be positively wabbly on his feet. Kennedy examined this one longer and more carefully than any of the rest.

"There are certainly all the symptoms of beriberi, or rather, polyneuritis, in pigeons, with that bird," admitted Craig, finally, looking up at Leslie.

The commissioner seemed to be gratified. "You know," he remarked, "beriberi itself is a common disease in the Orient. There has been a good deal of study of it and the cause is now known to be the lack of something in the food, which in the Orient is mostly rice. Polishing the rice, which removes part of the outer coat, also takes away something that is necessary for life, which scientists now call 'vitamines.'"

"I may take some of these samples to study myself?" interrupted Kennedy, as though the story of vitamines was an old one to him.

"By all means," agreed Leslie.

Craig selected what he wanted, keeping each separate and marked, and excused himself, saying that he had some investigations of his own that he wished to make and would let Leslie know the result as soon as he discovered anything.

Kennedy did not go back directly to the laboratory, however. Instead, he went up−town and, to my surprise, stopped at one of the large breweries. What it was that he was after I could not imagine, but, after a conference with the manager, he obtained several quarts of brewer's yeast, which he had sent directly down to the laboratory.

Impatient though I was at this seeming neglect of the principal figures in the case, I knew, nevertheless, that Kennedy had already schemed out his campaign and that whatever it was he had in mind was of first importance.

Back at last in his own laboratory, Craig set to work on the brewer's yeast, deriving something from it by the plentiful use of a liquid labeled "Lloyd's reagent," a solution of hydrous aluminum silicate.

After working for some time, I saw that he had obtained a solid which he pressed into the form of little whitish tablets. He had by no means finished, but, noticing my impatience, he placed the three or four tablets in a little box and handed them to me.

"You might take these over to Leslie in the department laboratory, Walter," he directed. "Tell him to feed them to that wabbly− looking pigeon over there—and let me know the moment he observes any effect."

Glad of the chance to occupy myself, I hastened on the errand, and even presided over the first feeding of the bird.

When I returned I found that Kennedy had finished his work with the brewer's yeast and was now devoting himself to the study of the various samples of food which he had obtained from Leslie.

He was just finishing a test of the baking−powder when I entered, and his face showed plainly that he was puzzled by something that he had discovered.

"What is it?" I asked. "Have you found out anything?"

"This seems to be almost plain sodium carbonate," he replied, mechanically.

"And that indicates?" I prompted.

"Perhaps nothing, in itself," he went on, less abstractedly. "But the use of sodium carbonate and other things which I have discovered in other samples disengages carbon dioxide at the temperature of baking and cooking. If you'll look in that public− health report on my desk you'll see how the latest investigations have shown that bicarbonate of soda and a whole list of other things which liberate carbon dioxide destroy the vitamines Leslie was talking about. In other words, taken altogether I should almost say there was evidence that a concerted effort was being made to affect the food—a result analogous to that of using polished rice as a staple diet—and

producing beriberi, or, perhaps more accurately, polyneuritis. I can be sure of nothing yet, but—it's worth following up."

"Then you think Kato—"

"Not too fast," cautioned Craig. "Remember, others had access to the kitchen, too."

In spite of his hesitancy, I could think only of the two paragraphs we had read in Mrs. Wardlaw's will, and especially of the last. Might not Kato have been forced or enticed into a scheme that promised a safe return and practically no chance of discovery? What gruesome mystery had been unveiled by the anonymous letter which had first excited our curiosity?

It was late in the afternoon that Commissioner Leslie called us up, much excited, to inform us that the drooping pigeon was already pecking at food and beginning to show some interest in life. Kennedy seemed greatly gratified as he hung up the receiver.

"Almost dinner−time," he commented, with a glance at his watch. "I think we'll make another hurried visit to the Wardlaw apartment."

We had no trouble getting in, although as outsiders we were more tolerated than welcome. Our excuse was that Kennedy had some more questions which we wished to ask Miss Langdale.

While we waited for her we sat, not in the study, but in the parlor. The folding−doors into the dining−room were closed, but across the hall we could tell by the sound when Kato was in the kitchen and when he crossed the hall.

Once I heard him in the dining−room. Before I knew it Kennedy had hastily tiptoed across the hall and into the kitchen. He was gone only a couple of minutes, but it was long enough to place in the food that was being prepared, and in some unprepared, either the tablets he had made or a powder he had derived from them crushed up. When he returned I saw from his manner that the real purpose of the visit had been accomplished, although when Miss Langdale appeared he went through the form of questioning her, mostly on Mrs. Marbury's sickness and death. He did not learn anything that appeared to be important, but at least he covered up the reason for his visit. Outside the apartment, Kennedy paused a moment. "There's nothing to do now but await developments," he meditated. "Meanwhile, there is no use for us to double up our time together. I have decided to watch Kato to−night. Suppose you shadow Doctor Aitken. Perhaps we may get a line on something that way."

The plan seemed admirable to me. In fact, I had been longing for some action of the sort all the afternoon, while Kennedy had been engaged in the studies which he evidently deemed more important.

Accordingly, after dinner, we separated, Kennedy going back to the Forum Apartments to wait until Kato left for the night, while I walked farther up the Drive to the address given in the directory as that of Doctor Aitken.

It happened to be the time when the doctor had his office hours for patients, so that I was sure at least that he was at home when I took my station just down the street, carefully scrutinizing every one who entered and left his house.

Nothing happened, however, until the end of the hour during which he received office calls. As I glanced down the street I was glad that I had taken an inconspicuous post, for I could see Miss Langdale approaching. She was not in her nurse's uniform, but seemed to be off duty for an hour or two, and I must confess she was a striking figure, even in that neighborhood which was noted for its pretty and daintily gowned girls. Almost before I knew it she had entered the English−basement entrance of Doctor Aitken's.

I thought rapidly. What could be the purpose of her visit? Above all, how was I, on the outside, to find out? I walked down past the house. But that did no good. In a quandary, I stopped. Hesitation would get me nothing. Suddenly an idea flashed through my mind. I turned in and rang the bell.

"It's past the doctor's office hours," informed a servant who opened the door. "He sees no one after hours."

"But," I lied, "I have an appointment. Don't disturb him. I can wait."

The waiting−room was empty, I had seen, and I was determined to get in at any cost. Reluctantly the servant admitted me.

For several moments I sat quietly alone, fearful that the doctor might open the double doors of his office and discover me. But nothing happened and I grew bolder. Carefully I tiptoed to the door. It was of solid oak and practically impervious to sound. The doors fitted closely, too. Still, by applying my ear, I could make out the sound of voices on the other side. I strained my ears both to catch a word now and then and to be sure that I might hear the approach of anybody outside.

Was Aitken suspiciously interested in the pretty nurse—or was she suspiciously interested in him?

Suddenly their voices became a trifle more distinct. "Then you think Doctor Wardlaw has it, too?" I heard her ask. I did not catch the exact reply, but it was in the affirmative.

They were approaching the door. In a moment it would be opened. I waited to hear no more, but seized my hat and dashed for the entrance from the street just in time to escape observation. Miss Langdale came out shortly, the doctor accompanying her to the door, and I followed her back to the Forum.

What I had heard only added to the puzzle. Why her anxiety to know whether Wardlaw himself was affected? Why Aitken's solicitude in asserting that he was? Were they working together, or were they really opposed? Which might be using the other?

My queries still unanswered, I returned to Aitken's and waited about some time, but nothing happened, and finally I went on to our own apartment.

It was very late when Craig came in, but I was still awake and waiting for him. Before I could ask him a question he was drawing from me what I had observed, listening attentively. Evidently he considered it of great importance, though no remark of his betrayed what interpretation he put on the episode.

"Have you found anything?" I managed to ask, finally.

"Yes, indeed," he nodded, thoughtfully. "I shadowed Kato from the Forum. It must have been before Miss Langdale came out that he left. He lives down−town in a tenement−house. There's something queer about that Jap."

"I think there is," I agreed. "I don't like his looks."

"But it wasn't he who interested me so much to−night," Craig went on, ignoring my remark, "as a woman."

"A woman?" I queried, in surprise. "A Jap, too?"

"No, a white woman, rather good−looking, too, with dark hair and eyes. She seemed to be waiting for him. Afterward I made inquiries. She has been seen about there before."

"Who was she?" I asked, fancying perhaps Miss Langdale had made another visit while she was out, although from the time it did not seem possible.

"I followed her to her house. Her name is Hackstaff—"

"The first trained nurse!" I exclaimed.

"Miss Hackstaff is an enigma," confessed Kennedy. "At first I thought that perhaps she might be one of those women whom the Oriental type fascinated, that she and Kato might be plotting. Then I have considered that perhaps her visits to Kato may be merely to get information—that she may have an ax to grind. Both Kato and she will bear watching, and I have made arrangements to have it done. I've called on that young detective, Chase, whom I've often used for the routine work of shadowing. There's nothing more that we can do now until to−morrow, so we might as well turn in."

Early the next day Kennedy was again at work, both in his own laboratory and in that of the Health Department, making further studies of the food and the effect it had on the pigeons, as well as observing what changes were produced by the white tablets he had extracted from the yeast.

It was early in the forenoon when the buzzer on the laboratory door sounded and I opened the door to admit Chase in a high state of excitement.

"What has happened?" asked Craig, eagerly.

"Many things," reported the young detective, breathlessly. "To begin with, I followed Miss Hackstaff from her apartment this morning. She seemed to be worked up over something—perhaps had had a sleepless night. As nearly as I could make out she was going about aimlessly. Finally, however, I found that she was getting into the neighborhood of Doctor Aitken and of the Forum. Well, when we got to the Forum she stopped and waited in front of it— oh, I should say almost half an hour. I couldn't make out what it was she wanted, but at last I found out."

He paused a moment, then raced on, without urging. "Miss Langdale came out—and you should have seen the Hackstaff woman go for her." He drew in his breath sharply at the reminiscence. "I thought there was going to be a murder done—on Riverside Drive. Miss Langdale screamed and ran back into the apartment. There was a good deal of confusion. The hall−boys came to the rescue. In the excitement, I managed to slip into the elevator with her. No one seemed to think it strange then that an outsider should be interested. I went up with her—saw Wardlaw, as she poured out the story. He's a queer one. Is he RIGHT?" "Why?" asked Craig, indulgently.

"He seems so nervous; things upset him so easily. Yet, after we had taken care of Miss Langdale and matters had quieted down, I thought I might get some idea of the cause of the fracas and asked him if he knew of any reason. Why, he looked at me kind of blankly, and I swear he acted as though he had almost forgotten it already. I tell you, he's not RIGHT."

Remembering our own experience, I glanced significantly at Craig. "Korsakoff's syndrome?" I queried, laconically. "Another example of a mind confused even on recent events?"

Kennedy, however, was more interested in Chase. "What did Miss Hackstaff do?" he asked.

"I don't know. I missed her. When I got out again she was gone."

"Pick her up again," directed Craig. "Perhaps you'll get her at her place. And see, this time, if you can get what I asked you."

"I'll try," returned Chase, much pleased at the words of commendation which Craig added as he left us again.

On what errand Chase had gone I could not guess, except that it had something to do with this strange woman who had so unexpectedly entered the case. Nor was Craig any more communicative. There were evidently many problems which only events could clear up even in his mind. Though he did not say anything, I knew that he was as impatient as I was, and as Leslie, too, who called up once or twice to learn whether he had discovered anything. There was nothing to do but wait.

It was early in the afternoon that the telephone rang and I answered it. It was Chase calling Kennedy. I heard only half the conversation and there was not much of that, but I knew that something was about to happen. Craig hastily summoned a cab, then in rapid succession called up Doctor Aitken and Leslie, for whom we stopped as our driver shot us over to the Forum Apartments.

There was no ceremony or unnecessary explanation about our presence, as Kennedy entered and directed Miss Langdale to bring her patients into the little office−study of Doctor Wardlaw.

Miss Langdale obeyed reluctantly. When she returned I felt that it was appreciable that a change had taken place. Mrs. Wardlaw, at least, was improved. She was still ill, but she seemed to take a more lively interest in what was going on about her. As for Doctor Wardlaw, however, I could not see that there had been any improvement in him. His nervousness had not abated. Kato, whom Kennedy summoned at the same time, preserved his usual imperturbable exterior. Miss Langdale, in spite of the incident of the morning, was quite as solicitous as ever of her charges.

We had not long to wait for Doctor Aitken. He arrived, inquiring anxiously what had happened, although Kennedy gave none of us any satisfaction immediately as to the cause of his quick action. Aitken fidgeted uneasily, glancing from Kennedy to Leslie, then to Miss Langdale, and back to Kennedy, without reading any explanation in the faces. I knew that Craig was secretly taking his time both for its effect on those present and to give Chase a chance.

"Our poisons and our drugs," he began, leisurely, at length, "are in many instances the close relatives of harmless compounds that represent the intermediate steps in the daily process of metabolism. There is much that I might say about protein poisons. However, that is not exactly what I want to talk about—at least first."

He stopped to make sure that he had the attention of us all. As a matter of fact, his manner was such that he attracted even the vagrant interest of the Wardlaws.

"I do not know how much of his suspicions Commissioner Leslie has communicated to you," he resumed, "but I believe that you have all heard of the disease beriberi so common in the Far East and known to the Japanese as kakke. It is a form of polyneuritis and, as you doubtless know, is now known to be caused, at least in the Orient, by the removal of the pericarp in the polishing of rice. Our milling of flour is, in a minor degree, analogous. To be brief, the disease arises from the lack in diet of certain substances or bodies which modern scientists call vitamines. Small quantities of these vital principles are absolutely essential to normal growth and health and even to life itself. They are nitrogenous compounds and their absence gives rise to a class of serious disorders in which the muscles surrender their store of nitrogen first. The nerves seems to be the preferred creditors, so to speak. They are affected only after the muscles begin to waste. It is an abstruse subject and it is not necessary for me to go deeper into it now."

I controlled my own interest in order to watch those about me. Kato, for one, was listening attentively, I saw.

"In my studies of the diet of this household," continued Kennedy, "I have found that substances have been used in preparing food which kill vitamines. In short, the food has been denatured. Valuable elements, necessary

elements, have been taken away."

"I, sir, not always in kitchen, sir," interrupted Kato, still deferential. "I not always know—"

With a peremptory wave of his hand Kennedy silenced the Jap.

"It has long been a question," he hurried on, "whether these vitamines are tangible bodies or just special arrangements of molecules. Recently government investigators have discovered that they are bodies that can be isolated by a special process from the filtrate of brewer's yeast by Lloyd's reagent. Five grams of this"—he held up some of the tablets he had made—"for a sixty− kilogram person each day are sufficient. Unknown to you, I have introduced some of this substance into the food already deficient in vitamines. I fancy that even now I can detect a change," he nodded toward Mrs. Wardlaw.

There was a murmur of surprise in the room, but before Craig could continue further the door opened and Mrs. Wardlaw uttered a nervous exclamation. There stood Chase with a woman. I recognized her immediately from Kennedy's description as Miss Hackstaff.

Chase walked deliberately over to Kennedy and handed him something, while the nurse glanced calmly, almost with pity, at Mrs. Wardlaw, ignoring Wardlaw, then fixing her gaze venomously on Miss Langdale. Recalling the incident of the morning, I was ready to prevent, if necessary, a repetition now. Neither moved. But it was a thrilling, if silent, drama as the two women glared at each other.

Kennedy was hastily comparing the anonymous note he had received with something Chase had brought.

"Some one," he shot out, suddenly, looking up and facing us, "has, as I have intimated, been removing or destroying the vital principle in the food—these vitamines. Clearly the purpose was to make this case look like an epidemic of beriberi, polyneuritis. That part has been clear to me for some time. It has been the source of this devilish plot which has been obscure. Just a moment, Kato, I will do the talking. My detective, Chase, has been doing some shadowing for me, as well as some turning over of past history. He has found a woman, a nurse, more than a nurse, a secret lover, cast off in favor of another. Miss Hackstaff—you wrote that letter—it is your hand—for revenge—on Miss Langdale and—"

"You shan't have him!" almost hissed Helen Hackstaff. "If I cannot—no one shall!"

Natalie Langdale faced her, defiant. "You are a jealous, suspicious person," she cried. "Doctor Aitken knows—"

"One moment," interrupted Craig. "Mrs. Marbury is gone. Mrs. Wardlaw is weakened. Yet all who are affected with nerve troubles are not necessarily suffering from polyneuritis. Some one here has been dilettanting with death. It is of no use," he thundered, turning suddenly on a cowering figure. "You stood to win most, with the money and your unholy love. But Miss Hackstaff, cast off, has proved your Nemesis. Your nervousness is the nervousness not of polyneuritis, but of guilt, Doctor Wardlaw!"

IX. THE RUBBER DAGGER

"Hypnotism can't begin to accomplish what Karatoff claims. He's a fake, Kennedy, a fake."

Professor Leslie Gaines of the Department of Experimental Psychology at the university paced excitedly up and down Craig's laboratory.

"There have been complaints to the County Medical Society," he went on, without stopping, "and they have taken the case up and arranged a demonstration for this afternoon. I've been delegated to attend it and report."

I fancied from his tone and manner that there was just a bit more than professional excitement involved. We did not know Gaines intimately, though of course Kennedy knew of him and he of Kennedy. Some years before, I recollected, he had married Miss Edith Ashmore, whose family was quite prominent socially, and the marriage had attracted a great deal of attention at the time, for she had been a student in one of his courses when he was only an assistant professor.

"Who is Karatoff, anyhow?" asked Kennedy. "What is known about him?"

"Dr. Galen Karatoff—a Russian, I believe," returned Gaines. "He claims to be able to treat disease by hypnotism−suggestion, he calls it, though it is really something more than that. As nearly as I can make out it must almost amount to thought transference, telepathy, or some such thing. Oh, he has a large following; in fact, some very well−known people in the smart set are going to him. Why," he added, facing us, "Edith—my wife—has become interested in his hypnotic clinics, as he calls them. I tell her it is more than half sham, but she won't believe it."

Gaines paused and it was evident that he hesitated over asking something.

"When is the demonstration?" inquired Kennedy, with unconcealed interest.

The professor looked at his watch. "I'm going over there now; in fact, I'm just a bit late—only, I happened to think of you and it occurred to me that perhaps if you could add something to my report it might carry weight. Would you like to come with me? Really, I should think that it might interest you."

So far Kennedy had said little besides asking a question or two. I knew the symptoms. Gaines need not have hesitated or urged him. It was just the thing that appealed to him.

"How did Mrs. Gaines become interested in the thing?" queried Craig, a moment later, outside, as we climbed into the car with the professor.

"Through an acquaintance who introduced her to Karatoff and the rest. Carita Belleville, the dancer, you know?"

Kennedy glanced at me and I nodded that I had heard of her. It was only a few nights before that I had seen Carita at one of the midnight revues, doing a dance which was described as the "hypnotic whirl," a wild abandon of grace and motion. Carita Belleville had burst like a meteor on the sky of the "Great White Way," blazing a gorgeous trail among the fixed stars of that gay firmament. She had even been "taken up" by society, or at least a certain coterie of it, had become much sought after to do exhibition dancing at social affairs, and now was well known in the amusement notes of the newspapers and at the fashionable restaurants. She had hosts of admirers and I had no doubt that Mrs. Gaines might well have fallen under the spell of her popularity.

"What is Miss Belleville's interest in Karatoff?" pursued Craig, keenly.

Gaines shrugged his shoulders. "Notoriety, perhaps," he replied. "It is a peculiar group that Karatoff has gathered about him, they tell me."

There was something unsatisfactory about the answer and I imagined that Gaines meant purposely to leave it so as not to prejudice the case. Somehow, I felt that there must be something risque in the doings of Karatoff and his "patients." At any rate, it was only natural with anything that Carita Belleville was likely to be concerned with.

There was little time for further questions, for our destination was not far down the Drive from the university, and the car pulled up before one of the new handsome and ornate "studio apartments" up−town.

We followed Gaines into the building, and the hall−boy directed us to a suite on the first floor.

A moment later we were admitted by Karatoff himself to what had become known as his "hypnotic clinic," really a most artistically furnished studio.

Karatoff himself was a tall, dark−haired fellow, bearded, somewhat sallow. Every feature of his remarkable

face, however, was subordinate to a pair of wonderful, deep−set, piercing eyes. Even as he spoke, greeting Gaines on the rather ticklish mission he had come, and accepting us with a quick glance and nod, we could see instantly that he was, indeed, a fascinating fellow, every inch a mystic.

His clinic, or, as I have said, studio, carried out well the impression of mysticism that one derived from the strange personality who presided over it. There were only two or three rooms in the apartment, one being the large room down the end of a very short hall to which he conducted us. It was darkened, necessarily, since it was on the first floor of the tall building, and the air seemed to be heavy with odors that suggested the Orient. Altogether there was a cultivated dreaminess about it that was no less exotic because studied. Doctor Karatoff paused at the door to introduce us, and we could see that we were undergoing a close scrutiny from the party who were assembled there.

On a quaint stand tea was brewing and the whole assemblage had an atmosphere of bohemian camaraderie which, with the professions of Karatoff, promised well that Kennedy was not wasting time.

I watched particularly the exchange of greetings between Professor Gaines and Edith Gaines, who was already there. Neither of them seemed to be perfectly at ease, though they betrayed as little as they could. However, one could not help noticing that each was watching the other, naturally.

Edith Gaines was a pretty little woman, petite, light of hair, dainty, the very type of woman who craved for and thrived on attention. Here at least there seemed to be no lack of it. There was only one other woman in the room who attracted the men equally, Carita Belleville herself. Carita was indeed a stunning woman, tall, slender, dark, with a wonderful pair of magnetic eyes.

As I watched, I could see that both women were quite friendly with Doctor Karatoff—perhaps even rivals for his attentions. I saw Gaines watching Carita attentively, never in the mean time failing for long to lose sight of Mrs. Gaines. Was he trying to estimate the relative popularity of the two in this strange group? If so, I failed to see any approval of either.

Introductions were now coming so fast that neither Kennedy nor I had much opportunity except for the most cursory observation of the people. Among the men, however, I noticed two especially who proved worth observation. One was Armand Marchant, well known as a broker, not so much for his professional doings as for his other activities. Though successful, he was better known as one of those who desert Wall Street promptly at the hour of closing, to be found late in the afternoon at the tea dances up−town.

Another was Cyril Errol, a man of leisure, well known also in the club world. He had inherited an estate, small, perhaps, but ample to allow him to maintain appearances. Errol impressed you as being one to whom the good things of the world appealed mightily, a hedonist, and, withal, very much attracted to and by the ladies.

It was fortunate that the serving of tea enabled us to look about and get our bearings. In spite of the suppressed excitement and obvious restraint of the occasion, we were able to learn much over the tea−cups.

Errol seemed to vibrate between the group about Mrs. Gaines and that about Miss Belleville, welcome wherever he went, for he was what men commonly call a "good mixer." Marchant, on the other hand, was almost always to be found not far from Edith Gaines. Perhaps it was the more brilliant conversation that attracted him, for it ran on many subjects, but it was difficult to explain it so to my satisfaction. All of which I saw Gaines duly noting, not for the report he had to make to the Medical Society, but for his own information. In fact, it was difficult to tell the precise degree of disapproval with which he regarded Karatoff, Errol, and Marchant, in turn, as he noted the intimacy of Edith Gaines with them. I wished that we might observe them all when they did not know it, for I could not determine whether she was taking pleasure in piquing the professor or whether she was holding her admirers in leash in his presence. At any rate, I felt I need lay no claim to clairvoyance to predict the nature of the report that Gaines would prepare.

The conversation was at its height when Karatoff detached himself from one of the groups and took a position in a corner of the room, alone. Not a word was said by him, yet as if by magic the buzz of conversation ceased. Karatoff looked about as though proud of the power of even his silence. Whatever might be said of the man, at least his very presence seemed to command respect from his followers.

I had expected that he would make some reference to Gaines and ourselves and the purpose of the meeting, but he avoided the subject and, instead, chose to leap right into the middle of things.

"So that there can be no question about what I am able to do," he began, "I wish each of you to write on a piece of paper what you would like to have me cause any one to do or say under hypnotism. You will please fold

the paper tightly, covering the writing. I will read the paper to myself, still folded up, will hypnotize the subject, and will make the subject do whatever is desired. That will be preliminary to what I have to say later about my powers in hypnotic therapeutics."

Pieces of paper and little lead−pencils were distributed by an attendant and in the rustling silence that followed each cudgeled his brain for something that would put to the test the powers of Karatoff.

Thinking, I looked about the room. Near the speaker stood a table on which lay a curious collection of games and books, musical instruments, and other things that might suggest actions to be performed in the test. My eye wandered to a phonograph standing next the table. Somehow, I could not get Mrs. Gaines and Carita Belleville out of my head.

Slowly I wrote, "Have Mrs. Gaines pick out a record, play it on the phonograph, then let her do as she pleases."

Some moments elapsed while the others wrote. Apparently they were trying to devise methods of testing Doctor Karatoff's mettle. Then the papers were collected and deposited on the table beside him.

Apparently at random Karatoff picked out one of the folded papers, then, seemingly without looking at it and certainly without unfolding it, as far as I could determine, he held it up to his forehead.

It was an old trick, I knew. Perhaps he had palmed a sponge wet with alcohol or some other liquid, had brushed it over the paper, making the writing visible through it, and drying out rapidly so as to leave the paper opaque again long before any of us saw it a second time. Or was he really exercising some occult power? At any rate, he read it, or pretended to read it, at least.

"I am asked to hypnotize Mrs. Gaines," he announced, dropping the paper unconcernedly on the table beside the other pile, as though this were mere child's play for his powers. It was something of a shock to realize that it was my paper he had chanced to pick up first, and I leaned forward eagerly, watching.

Mrs. Gaines rose and every eye was riveted on her as Karatoff placed her in an easy−chair before him. There was an expectant silence, as Karatoff moved the chair so that she could concentrate her attention only on a bright silver globe suspended from the ceiling. The half−light, the heavy atmosphere, the quiet, assured manner of the chief actor in the scene, all combined to make hypnotization as nearly possible as circumstances could. Karatoff moved before her, passing his hands with a peculiar motion before her eyes. It seemed an incredibly short time in which Edith Gaines yielded to the strange force which fascinated the group.

"Quite susceptible," murmured Kennedy, beside me, engrossed in the operation.

"It is my test," I whispered back, and he nodded.

Slowly Edith Gaines rose from the chair, faced us with unseeing eyes, except as Karatoff directed. Karatoff himself was a study. It seemed as if he had focused every ounce of his faculties on the accomplishment of the task in hand. Slowly still the woman moved, as if in a dream walk, over toward the phonograph, reached into the cabinet beneath it and drew forth a book of records. Karatoff faced us, as if to assure us that at that point he had resigned his control and was now letting her act for her subconscious self.

Her fingers passed over page after page until finally she stopped, drew forth the record, placed it on the machine, wound it, then placed the record on the revolving disk.

My first surprise was quickly changed to gratification. She had picked out the music to the "Hypnotic Whirl." I bent forward, more intent. What would she do next?

As she turned I could see, even in the dim light, a heightened color in her cheeks, as though the excitement of the catchy music had infected her. A moment later she was executing, and very creditably, too, an imitation of Carita herself in the Revue. What did it mean? Was it that consciously or unconsciously she was taking the slender dancer as her model? The skill and knowledge that she put into the dance showed plainly.

Next to Kennedy, I saw Gaines leaning far forward, looking now at his wife, now at the little group. I followed his eyes. To my surprise, I saw Marchant, his gaze riveted on Edith Gaines as if she had been the star performer in a play. Evidently my chance request to Karatoff had been builded better than I knew. I ran my gaze over the others. Errol was no less engrossed than Marchant. Quickly I glanced at Carita, wondering whether she might be gratified by the performance of a pupil. Whether it was natural grace or real hypnotism in the "Hypnotic Whirl," I was surprised to see on Carita's face something that looked strangely akin to jealousy. It was as though some other woman had usurped her prerogative. She leaned over to speak to Errol with the easy familiarity of an old admirer. I could not hear what was said and perhaps it was inconsequential. In fact, it must have been the very

inconsequentiality of his reply that piqued her. He glanced at Marchant a moment, as if she had said something about him, then back at Edith Gaines. On his part, Professor Gaines was growing more and more furious.

I had just about decided that the little drama in the audience was of far more importance and interest than even the dance, when the music ceased. Karatoff approached, took Mrs. Gaines by the hand, led her back to the chair, and, at a word, she regained her normal consciousness. As she rose, still in a daze it seemed, it was quite evident that she had no waking realization of what had happened, for she walked back and sat down beside her husband, quite as though nothing had happened.

As for me, I could not help wondering what had actually happened. What did it all mean? Had Mrs. Gaines expressed her own self—or was it Karatoff—or Marchant—or Errol? What was the part played by Carita Belleville? Gaines did not betray anything to her, but their mutual attitude was eloquent. There was something of which he disapproved and she knew it, some lack of harmony. What was the cause?

As for Karatoff's exhibition, it was all truly remarkable, whether in his therapeutics the man was a faker or not.

Karatoff seemed to realize that he had made a hit. Without giving any one a chance to question him, he reached down quickly and picked up another of the papers, repeating the process through which he had gone before.

"Mr. Errol," he summoned, placing the second folded paper on the table with the first.

Errol rose and went forward and Karatoff placed him in the chair as he had Mrs. Gaines. There seemed to be no hesitation, at least on the part of Karatoff's followers, to being hypnotized.

Whatever it was written on the paper, the writer had evidently not trusted to chance, as I had, but had told specifically what to do.

At the mute bidding of Karatoff Errol rose. We watched breathlessly. Deliberately he walked across the room to the table, and, to the astonishment of all save one, picked up a rubber dagger, one of those with which children play, which was lying in the miscellaneous pile on the table. I had not noticed it, but some one's keen eye had, and evidently it had suggested a melodramatic request.

Quickly Errol turned. If he had been a motion−picture actor, he could not have portrayed better the similitude of hate that was written on his face. A few strides and he had advanced toward our little audience, now keyed up to the highest pitch of excitement by the extraordinary exhibition.

"Of course," remarked Karatoff, as at a word Errol paused, still poising the dagger, "you know that under hypnotism in the psychological laboratory a patient has often struck at his 'enemy' with a rubber dagger, going through all the motions of real passion. Now!"

No word was said by Karatoff to indicate to Errol what it was that he was to do. But a gasp went up from some one as he took another step and it was evident that it was Marchant whom he had singled out. For just a moment Errol poised the rubber dagger over his "victim," as if gloating. It was dramatic, realistic. As Errol paused, Marchant smiled at the rest of us, a sickly smile, I thought, as though he would have said that the play was being carried too far.

Never for a moment did Errol take from him the menacing look. It was only a moment in the play, yet it was so unexpected that it seemed ages. Then, swiftly, down came the dagger on Marchant's left side just over the breast, the rubber point bending pliantly as it descended.

A sharp cry escaped Marchant. I looked quickly. He had fallen forward, face down, on the floor.

Edith Gaines screamed as we rushed to Marchant and turned him over. For the moment, as Kennedy, Karatoff, and Gaines bent over him and endeavored to loosen his collar and apply a restorative, consternation reigned in the little circle. I bent over, too, and looked first at Marchant's flushed face, then at Kennedy. Marchant was dead!

There was not a mark on him, apparently. Only a moment before he had been one of us. We could look at one another only in amazement, tinged with fear. Killed by a rubber dagger? Was it possible?

"Call an ambulance—quick!" directed Kennedy to me, though I knew that he knew it was of no use except as a matter of form.

We stood about the prostrate form, stunned. In a few moments the police would be there. Instinctively we looked at Karatoff. Plainly he was nervous and overwrought now. His voice shook as he brought Errol out of the trance, and Errol, dazed, uncomprehending, struggled to take in the horribly unreal tragedy which greeted his return to consciousness.

"It—it was an accident," muttered Karatoff, eagerly trying to justify himself, though trembling for once in his life. "Arteriosclerosis, perhaps, hardening of the arteries, some weakness of the heart. I never—"

He cut the words short as Edith Gaines reeled and fell into her husband's arms. She seemed completely prostrated by the shock. Or was it weakness following the high mental tension of her own hypnotization? Together we endeavored to revive her, waiting for the first flutter of her eyelids, which seemed an interminable time.

Errol in the mean time was pacing the floor like one in a, dream. Events had followed one another so fast in the confusion that I had only an unrelated series of impressions. It was not until a moment later that I realized the full import of the affair, when I saw Kennedy standing near the table in the position Karatoff had assumed, a strange look of perplexity on his face. Slowly I realized what was the cause. The papers on which were written the requests for the exhibitions of Karatoff's skill were gone!

Whatever was done must be done quickly, and Kennedy looked about with a glance that missed nothing. Before I could say a word about the papers he had crossed the room to where Marchant had been standing in the little group about Edith Gaines as we entered. On a side−table stood the teacup from which he had been sipping. With his back to the rest, Kennedy drew from his breast pocket a little emergency case he carried containing a few thin miniature glass tubes. Quickly he poured the few drops of the dregs of the tea into one of the tubes, then into others tea from the other cups.

Again he looked at the face of Marchant as though trying to read in the horrified smile that had petrified on it some mysterious secret hidden underneath. Slowly the question was shaping in my mind, was it, as Karatoff would have us believe, an accident?

The clang of a bell outside threw us all into worse confusion, and a moment later, almost together, a white−coated surgeon and a blue−coated policeman burst into the room. It seemed almost no time, in the swirl of events, before the policeman was joined by a detective assigned by the Central Office to that district.

"Well, doctor," demanded the detective as he entered, "what's the verdict?"

"Arteriosclerosis, I think," replied the young surgeon. "They tell me there was some kind of hypnotic seance going on. One of them named Errol struck at him with a rubber dagger, and—"

"Get out!" scoffed the Central Office man. "Killed by a rubber dagger! Say, what do you think we are? What did you find when you entered, sergeant?"

The policeman handed the detective the rubber dagger which he had picked up, forgotten, on the floor where Errol had dropped it when he came out from the hypnotization.

The detective took it gingerly and suspiciously, with a growl. "I'll have the point of this analyzed. It may be—well—we won't say what may be. But I can tell you what is. You, Doctor Karatoff, or whatever your name is, and you, Mr. Errol, are under arrest. It's a good deal easier to take you now than it will be later. Then if you can get a judge to release you, we'll at least know where you are."

"This is outrageous, preposterous!" stormed Karatoff.

"Can't help it," returned the officer, coolly.

"Why," exclaimed Carita Belleville, excitedly projecting herself before the two prisoners, "it's ridiculous! Even the ambulance surgeon says it was arteriosclerosis, an accident. I—"

"Very well, madam," calmed the sergeant. "So much the better. They'll get out of our hands that much quicker. Just at present it is my duty."

Errol was standing silent, his eyes averted from the hideous form on the floor, not by word or action betraying a feeling. The police moved to the door.

Weak and trembling still from the triple shock she had received, Edith Gaines leaned heavily on the arm of her husband, but it was, as nearly as I could make out, only for physical support.

"I told you, Edith, it was a dangerous business," I heard him mutter. "Only I never contemplated that they'd carry it this far. Now you see what such foolishness can lead to."

Weak though she was, she drew away and flashed a glance at him, resenting his man's "I−told−you−so" manner. The last I saw of them in the confusion was as they drove off in the car, still unreconciled.

Kennedy seemed well contented, for the present at least, to allow the police a free hand with Errol and Karatoff. As for me, Mrs. Gaines and Carita Belleville presented a perplexing problem, but I said nothing, for he was hurrying back now to his laboratory.

At once he drew forth the little tube containing the few drops of tea and emptied a drop or two into a beaker of freshly distilled water as carefully as if the tea had been some elixir of life. As he was examining the contents of the beaker his face clouded with thought.

"Do you find anything?" I asked, eagerly.

Kennedy shook his head. "There's something wrong," he hazarded. "Perhaps it's only fancy, but I am sure that there is something with a slight odor in the tea, something tea−like, but with a more bitter taste, something that would be nauseous if not concealed in the tea. There's more than tannin and sugar here."

"Then you think that some one present placed something in the tea?" I inquired, shuddering at the thought that we had run some unknown danger.

"I can't just say, without further investigation of this and the other samples I took."

"Still, you have eliminated that ridiculous dagger theory," I ventured.

"The police can never appreciate the part it played," Craig answered, non−committally, laying out various chemicals preparatory to his exhaustive analysis. "I began to suspect something the moment I noticed that those notes which we all wrote were gone. When we find out about this tea we may find who took them. Perhaps the mystery is not such a mystery after all, then."

There seemed to be nothing that I could do, in the mean time, except to refrain from hindering Kennedy in his investigations, and I decided to leave him at the laboratory while I devoted my time to watching what the police might by chance turn up, even if they should prove to be working on the wrong angle of the case.

I soon found that they were showing energy, if nothing else. Although it was so soon after the death of Marchant, they had determined that there could not have been anything but rubber on the end of the toy dagger which had excited the doubts of the detective.

As for the autopsy that was performed on Marchant, it did, indeed, show that he was suffering from hardening of the arteries, due to his manner of living, as Karatoff had asserted. Indeed, the police succeeded in showing that it was just for that trouble that Marchant was going to Karatoff, which, to my mind, seemed quite sufficient to establish the therapeutic hypnotist as all that Gaines had accused him of being. Even to my lay mind the treatment of arteriosclerosis by mental healing seemed, to say the least, incongruous.

Yet the evidence against Karatoff and Errol was so flimsy that they had little trouble in getting released on bail, though, of course, it was fixed very high.

My own inquiries among the other reporters on the Star who might know something offered a more promising lead. I soon found that Errol had none too savory a reputation. His manner of life had added nothing to his slender means, and there was a general impression among his fellow club−members that unfortunate investments had made serious inroads into the principal of his fortune. Still, I hesitated to form even an opinion on gossip.

Quite unsatisfied with the result of my investigation, I could not restrain my impatience to get back to the laboratory to find out whether Kennedy had made any progress in his tests of the tea.

"If you had been five minutes earlier," he greeted me, "you would have been surprised to find a visitor."

"A visitor?" I repeated. "Who?"

"Carita Belleville," he replied, enjoying my incredulity.

"What could she want?" I asked, at length.

"That's what I've been wondering," he agreed "Her excuse was plausible. She said that she had just heard why I had come with Gaines. I suppose it was half an hour that she spent endeavoring to convince me that Karatoff and Errol could not possibly have had any other connection than accidental with the death of Marchant."

"Could it have been a word for them and half an hour for herself?" I queried, mystified.

Kennedy shrugged. "I can't say. At any rate, I must see both Karatoff and Errol, now that they are out. Perhaps they did send her, thinking I might fall for her. She hinted pretty broadly at using my influence with Gaines on his report. Then, again. she may simply have been wondering how she herself stood."

"Have you found anything?" I asked, noticing that his laboratory table was piled high with its usual paraphernalia.

"Yes," he replied, laconically, taking a bottle of concentrated sulphuric acid and pouring a few drops in a beaker of slightly tinged water.

The water turned slowly to a beautiful green. No sooner was the reaction complete than he took some bromine and added it. Slowly again the water changed, this time from the green to a peculiar violet red. Adding more water

restored the green color

"That's the Grandeau test," he nodded, with satisfaction. "I've tried the physiological test, too, with frogs from the biological department, and it shows the effect on the heart that I—"

"What shows the effect?" I interrupted, somewhat impatiently.

"Oh, to be sure," he smiled. "I forgot I hadn't told you what I suspected. Why, digitalis—foxglove, you know. I suppose it never occurred to the police that the rubber dagger might have covered up a peculiar poisoning? Well, if they'll take the contents of the stomach, in alcohol, with a little water acidulated, strain off the filtrate and try it on a dog, they will see that its effect is the effect of digitalis. Digitalis is an accumulative poison and a powerful stimulant of arterial walls, by experimental evidence an ideal drug for the purpose of increasing blood pressure. Don't you see it?" he added, excitedly. "The rubber dagger was only a means to an end. Some one who knew the weakness of Marchant first placed digitalis in his tea. That was possible because of the taste of the tea. Then, in the excitement of the act pantomimed by Errol, Marchant's disease carried him off, exactly as was to be expected under the circumstances. It was clever, diabolically clever. Whoever did it destroyed the note in which the act was suggested and counted that no one would ever stop to search for a poison in the tangle of events."

Slowly but clearly I began to realize how certainly Kennedy was reconstructing the strange case. But who was it? What was the motive back of this sinister murder that had been so carefully planned that no one would ever suspect a crime?

I had hardly framed the queries when our telephone rang. It was the Central Office man. The detective had anticipated my own line of inquiry, only had gone much further with it. He had found a clear record of the business relations existing between Errol and Marchant. One episode consisted of a stock deal between them in which Errol had invested in a stock which Marchant was promoting and was known to be what brokers call "cats and dogs." That, I reasoned, must have been the basis of the gossip that Errol had suffered financial losses that seriously impaired his little fortune. It was an important item and Kennedy accepted it gladly, but said nothing of his own discovery. The time had not arrived yet to come out into the open.

For a few moments after the talk with the detective Kennedy seemed to be revolving the case, as though in doubt whether the new information cleared it up or added to the mystery. Then he rose suddenly.

"We must find Karatoff," he announced.

Whatever might have been the connection of the hypnotist with this strange case, he was far too clever to betray himself by any such misstep as seeming to avoid inquiry. We found him easily at his studio apartment, nor did we have any difficulty in gaining admittance. He knew that he was watched and that frankness was his best weapon of defense.

"Of course," opened Kennedy, "you know that investigation has shown that you were right in your diagnosis of the trouble with Marchant. Was it arteriosclerosis for which you were treating him?"

"It would be unprofessional to discuss it," hastily parried Karatoff, "but, since Mr. Marchant is now dead, I think I may say that it was. In fact, few persons, outside of those whom I have associated about me, realize to what a wonderful extent hypnotism may be carried in the treatment of disease. Why, I have even had wonderful success with such disorders as diabetes mellitus. We are only on the threshold of understanding what a wonderful thing is the human mind in its effect on the material body."

"But another patient might have known what Marchant was being treated for?" interrupted Kennedy, ignoring the defense of Karatoff, which was proceeding along the stereotyped lines of such vagaries which seem never to be without followers.

Karatoff looked at him a moment in surprise. Evidently he was doing some hasty mental calculation to determine what was Craig's ulterior motive. And, in spite of his almost uncanny claims and performances, I could see that he was able to read Kennedy's mind no whit better than myself.

"I suppose so," he admitted. "No doctor was ever able to control his patients' tongues. Sometimes they boast of their diseases."

"Especially if they are women?" hinted Kennedy, watching the effect of the remark keenly. "I have just had the pleasure of a visit from Carita Belleville in my laboratory."

"Indeed?" returned Karatoff, with difficulty restraining his curiosity. "Miss Belleville has been very kind in introducing me to some of her friends and acquaintances, and I flatter myself that I have been able to do them much good."

"Then she was not a patient?" pursued Kennedy, studiously avoiding enlightening Karatoff on the visit.

"Rather a friend," he replied, quickly. "It was she who introduced Mr. Errol."

"They are quite intimate, I believe," put in Kennedy at a chance.

"Really, I knew very little about it," Karatoff avoided.

"Did she introduce Mr. Marchant?"

"She introduced Mrs. Gaines, who introduced Mr. Marchant," the hypnotist replied, with apparent frankness.

"You were treating Mrs. Gaines?" asked Craig, again shifting the attack unexpectedly.

"Yes," admitted Karatoff, stopping.

"I imagine her trouble was more mental than physical," remarked Kennedy, in a casual tone, as though feeling his way.

Karatoff looked up keenly, but was unable to read Kennedy's face. "I think," he said, slowly, "that one trouble was that Mrs. Gaines liked the social life better than the simple life."

"Your clinic, Mr. Marchant, and the rest better than her husband and the social life at the university," amplified Kennedy. "I think you are right. She had drifted away from her husband, and when a woman does that she has hosts of admirers—of a certain sort. I should say that Mr. Errol was the kind who would care more for the social life than the simple life, as you put it, too."

I did not gather in what direction Kennedy was tending, but it was evident that Karatoff felt more at ease. Was it because the quest seemed to be leading away from himself?

"I had noticed something of the sort," he ventured. "I saw that they were alike in that respect, but, of course, Mr. Marchant was her friend."

Suddenly the implication flashed over me, but before I could say anything Kennedy cut in, "Then Mr. Errol might have been enacting under hypnotism what were really his own feelings and desires?"

"I cannot say that," replied Karatoff, seeking to dodge the issue. "But under the influence of suggestion I suppose it is true that an evil−minded person might suggest to another the commission of a crime, and the other, deprived of free will, might do it. The rubber dagger has often been used for sham murders. The possibility of actual murder cannot be denied. In this case, however, there can be no question that it was an unfortunate accident."

"No question?" demanded Kennedy, directly.

If Karatoff was concealing anything, he made good concealment. Either to protect himself or another he showed no evidence of weakening his first theory of the case.

"No question as far as I know," he reiterated.

I wondered whether Kennedy planned to enlighten him on the results of his laboratory tests, but was afraid to look at either for fear of betraying some hint. I was glad I did not. Kennedy's next question carried him far afield from the subject.

"Did you know that the Medical Society were interested in you and your clinic before the demonstration before Professor Gaines was arranged?"

"I suspected some one was interested," answered Karatoff, quickly, "But I had no idea who it might be. As I think it over now, perhaps it was Professor Gaines who instigated the whole inquiry. He would most likely be interested. My work is so far in advance of any that the conservative psychologists do that he would naturally feel hostile, would he not?"

"Especially with the added personal motive of knowing that his wife was one of your patients, along with Carita Belleville, Marchant, Errol, and the rest," added Kennedy.

Karatoff smiled. "I would not have said that myself. But since you have said it, I cannot help admitting its truth. Don't you suppose I could predict the nature of any report he would make?"

Karatoff faced Kennedy squarely. There was an air almost of triumph in his eyes. "I think I had better say no more, except under the advice of my lawyer," he remarked, finally. "When the police want me, they can find me here."

Quite evident to me now, as we went out of the studio, was the fact that Karatoff considered himself a martyr, that he was not only the victim of an accident, but of persecution as well.

"The fishing was good," remarked Kennedy, tersely, as we reached the street. "Now before I see Errol I should like to see Gaines again."

I tried to reason it out as we walked along in silence. Marchant had known Edith Gaines intimately. Carita Belleville had known Errol as well. I recalled Errol hovering about Mrs. Gaines at the tea and the incident during the seance when Carita Belleville had betrayed her annoyance over some remark by Errol. The dancing by Edith Gaines had given a flash of the jealous nature of the woman. Had it been interest in Errol that had led her to visit the laboratory? Kennedy was weaving a web about some one, I knew. But about whom?

As we passed a corner, he paused, entered a drugstore and called up several numbers at a pay−station telephone booth. Then we turned into the campus and proceeded rapidly toward the laboratory of the psychological department. Gaines was there, sitting at his desk, writing, as we entered.

"I'm glad to see you," he greeted, laying down his work. "I am just finishing the draft of my report on that Karatoff affair. I have been trying to reach you by telephone to know whether you would add anything to it. Is there anything new?"

"Yes," returned Kennedy, "there is something new. I've just come from Karatoff's and on the way I decided suddenly that it was time we did something. So I have called up, and the police will bring Errol here, as well as Miss Belleville. Karatoff will come—he won't dare stay away; and I also took the liberty of calling Mrs. Gaines."

"To come here?" repeated Gaines, in mild surprise. "All of them?"

"Yes. I hope you will pardon me for intruding, but I want to borrow some of your psychological laboratory apparatus, and I thought the easiest way would be to use it here rather than take it all over to my place and set it up again."

"I'm sure everything is at your service," offered Gaines. "It's a little unexpected, but if the others can stand the chaotic condition of the room, I guess we can."

Kennedy had been running his eye over the various instruments which Gaines and his students used in their studies, and was now examining something in a corner on a little table. It was a peculiar affair, quite simple, but conveying to me no idea of its use. There seemed to be a cuff, a glass chamber full of water into which it fitted, tubes and wires that attached various dials and recording instruments to the chamber, and what looked like a chronograph.

"That is my new plethysmograph," remarked Gaines, noting with some satisfaction how Kennedy had singled it out.

"I've heard the students talk of it," returned Kennedy. "It's an improved apparatus, Walter, that records one's blood flow." I nodded politely and concealed my ignorance in a discreet silence, hoping that Gaines would voluntarily enlighten us.

"One of my students is preparing an exhaustive table," went on Gaines, as I had hoped, "showing the effects on blood distribution of different stimuli—for instance, cold, heat, chloroform, arenalin, desire, disgust, fear; physical conditions, drugs, emotions—all sorts of things can be studied by this plethysmograph which can be set to record blood flow through the brain, the extremities, any part of the body. When the thing is charted I think we shall have opened up a new field."

"Certainly a very promising one for me," put in Kennedy. "How has this machine been improved? I've seen the old ones, but this is the first time I've seen this. How does it work?"

"Well," explained Gaines, with just a touch of pride, "you see, for studying blood flow in the extremities, I slip this cuff over my arm, we'll say. Suppose it is the effect of pain I want to study. Just jab that needle in my other arm. Don't mind. It's in the interest of science. See, when I winced then, the plethysmograph recorded it. It smarts a bit and I'm trying to imagine it smarts worse. You'll see how pain affects blood flow."

As he watched the indicator, Kennedy asked one question after another about the working of the machine, and the manner in which the modern psychologist was studying every emotion.

"By the way, Walter," he interrupted, glancing at his watch, "call up and see if they've started with Errol and the rest yet. Don't stop, Gaines. I must understand this thing before they get here. It's just the thing I want."

"I should be glad to let you have it, then," replied Gaines.

"I think I'll need something new with these people," went on Kennedy. "Why, do you know what I've discovered?"

"No, but I hope it's something I can add to my report?"

"Perhaps. We'll see. In the first place, I found that digitalis had been put in Marchant's tea."

"They'll be here directly," I reported from the telephone, hanging it up and joining them again.

"It couldn't have been an accident, as Karatoff said," went on Kennedy, rapidly. "The drug increased the blood pressure of Marchant, who was already suffering from hardening of the arteries. In short, it is my belief that the episode of the rubber dagger was deliberately planned, an elaborate scheme to get Marchant out of the way. No one else seems to have noticed it, but those slips of paper on which we all wrote have disappeared. At the worst, it would look like an accident, Karatoff would be blamed, and—" There was a noise outside as the car pulled up.

"Here, let me take this off before any of them see it," whispered Gaines, removing the cuff, just as the door opened and Errol and Karatoff, Carita Belleville and Edith Gaines entered.

Before even a word of greeting passed, Kennedy stepped forward. "It was NOT an accident," he repeated. "It was a deliberately planned, apparently safe means of revenge on Marchant, the lover of Mrs. Gaines. Without your new plethysmograph, Gaines, you might have thrown it on an innocent person!"

X. THE SUBMARINE MINE

"Here's the bullet. What I want you to do, Professor Kennedy, is to catch the crank who fired it."

Capt. Lansing Marlowe, head of the new American Shipbuilding Trust, had summoned us in haste to the Belleclaire and had met us in his suite with his daughter Marjorie. Only a glance was needed to see that it was she, far more than her father, who was worried.

"You must catch him," she appealed. "Father's life is in danger. Oh, you simply MUST."

I knew Captain Marlowe to be a proverbial fire−eater, but in this case, at least, he was no alarmist. For, on the table, as he spoke, he laid a real bullet.

Marjorie Marlowe shuddered at the mere sight of it and glanced apprehensively at him as if to reassure herself. She was a tall, slender girl, scarcely out of her teens, whose face was one of those quite as striking for its character as its beauty. The death of her mother a few years before had placed on her much of the responsibility of the captain's household and with it a charm added to youth.

More under the spell of her plea than even Marlowe's vigorous urging, Kennedy, without a word, picked up the bullet and examined it. It was one of the modern spitzer type, quite short, conical in shape, tapering gradually, with the center of gravity back near the base.

"I suppose you know," went on the captain, eagerly, "that our company is getting ready to−morrow to launch the Usona, the largest liner that has ever been built on this side of the water— the name is made up of the initials of the United States of North America.

"Just now," he added, enthusiastically, "is what I call the golden opportunity for American shipping. While England and Germany are crippled, it's our chance to put the American flag on the sea as it was in the old days, and we're going to do it. Why, the shipyards of my company are worked beyond their capacity now."

Somehow the captain's enthusiasm was contagious. I could see that his daughter felt it, that she was full of fire over the idea. But at the same time something vastly more personal weighed on her mind.

"But, father," she interrupted, anxiously, "tell them about the BULLET."

The captain smiled indulgently as though he would say that he was a tough old bird to wing. It was only a mask to hide the fighting spirit underneath.

"We've had nothing but trouble ever since we laid the keel of that ship," he continued, pugnaciously, "strikes, a fire in the yard, delays, about everything that could happen. Lately we've noticed a motor−boat hanging about the river−front of the yards. So I've had a boat of my own patrolling the river."

"What sort of craft is this other?" inquired Kennedy, interested at once.

"A very fast one—like those express cruisers that we hear so much about now."

"Whose is it? Who was in it? Have you any idea?"

Marlowe shook his head doubtfully. "No idea. I don't know who owns the boat or who runs it. My men tell me they think they've seen a woman in it sometimes, though. I've been trying to figure it out. Why should it be hanging about? It can't be spying. There isn't any secrecy about the Usona. Why is it? It's a mystery."

"And the shot?" prompted Craig, tapping the bullet.

"Oh yes, let me tell you. Last night, Marjorie and I arrived from Bar Harbor on my yacht, for the launching. It's anchored off the yard now. Well, early this morning, while it was still gray and misty, I was up. I'll confess I'm worried over to−morrow. I hadn't been able to forget that cruiser. I was out on the deck, peering into the mist, when I'm sure I saw her. I was just giving a signal to the boat we have patrolling, when a shot whistled past me and the bullet buried itself in the woodwork of the main saloon back of me. I dug it out of the wood with my knife—so you see I got it almost unflattened. That's all I have got, too. The cruiser made a getaway, clean."

"I'm sure it was aimed at him," Marjorie exclaimed. "I don't think it was chance. Don't you see? They've tried everything else. Now if they could get my father, the head of the company, that would be a blow that would cripple the trust."

Marlowe patted his daughter's hand reassuringly and smiled again, as though not to magnify the incident.

"Marjorie was so alarmed," he confessed, "that nothing would satisfy her but that I should come ashore and stay here at the Belleclaire, where we always put up when we are in town."

The telephone rang and Marjorie answered it. "I hope you'll pardon me," she excused, hanging up the receiver. "They want me very much down−stairs." Then appealing, she added: "I'll have to leave you with father. But, please, you must catch that crank who is threatening him."

"I shall do my level best," promised Kennedy. "You may depend on that."

"You see," explained the captain as she left us, "I've invited quite a large party to attend the launching, for one reason or another. Marjorie must play hostess. They're mostly here at the hotel. Perhaps you saw some of them as you came in."

Craig was still scanning the bullet. "It looks almost as if some one had dum−dummed it," he remarked, finally. "It's curiously done, too. Just look at those grooves."

Both the captain and I looked. It had a hard jacket of cupro− nickel, like the army bullet, covering a core of softer metal. Some one had notched or scored the jacket as if with a sharp knife, though not completely through it. Had it been done for the purpose of inflicting a more frightful wound if it struck the captain?

"There've been other shots, too," went on Marlowe. "One of my watchmen was wounded the night before. It didn't took like a serious wound, in the leg. Yet the poor fellow seems to be in a bad way, they tell me."

"How is that?" asked Craig, glancing up quickly from studying the bullet.

"The wound seems to be all puffed up, and very painful. It won't heal, and he seems to be weak and feverish. Why, I'm afraid the man will die."

"I'd like to see that case," remarked Kennedy, thoughtfully.

"Very well. I'll have you driven to the hospital where we have had to take him."

"I'd like to see the yards, too, and the Usona," he added.

"All right. After you go to the hospital I'll meet you at the yards at noon. Now if you'll come down−stairs with me, I'll get my car and have you taken to the hospital first."

We followed Marlowe into the elevator and rode down. In the large parlor we saw that Marjorie Marlowe had joined a group of the guests, and the captain turned aside to introduce us.

Among them I noticed a striking−looking woman, somewhat older than Marjorie. She turned as we approached and greeted the captain cordially.

"I'm so glad there was nothing serious this morning," she remarked, extending her hand to him.

"Oh, nothing at all, nothing at all," he returned, holding the hand, I thought, just a bit longer than was necessary. Then he turned to us, "Miss Alma Hillman, let me present Professor Kennedy and Mr. Jameson."

I was not so preoccupied in taking in the group that I did not notice that the captain was more than ordinarily attentive to her. Nor can I say that I blamed him, for, although he might almost have been her father in age, there was a fascination about her that youth does not often possess.

Talking with her had been a young man, slender, good−looking, with almost a military bearing.

"Mr. Ogilvie Fitzhugh," introduced Marjorie, seeing that her father was neglecting his duties.

Fitzhugh bowed and shook hands, murmured something stereotyped, and turned again to speak to Marjorie.

I watched the young people closely. If Captain Marlowe was interested in Alma, it was more than evident that Fitzhugh was absolutely captivated by Marjorie, and I fancied that Marjorie was not averse to him, for he had a personality and a manner which were very pleasing.

As the conversation ran gaily on to the launching and the gathering party of notables who were expected that night and the next day, I noticed that a dark−eyed, dark−haired, olive− complexioned young man approached and joined us.

"Doctor Gavira," said Marlowe, turning to us, his tone indicating that he was well acquainted about the hotel. "He is our house physician."

Gavira also was welcomed in the party, chatting with animation. It was apparent that the physician also was very popular with the ladies, and it needed only half an eye to discern that Fitzhugh was jealous when he talked to Marjorie, while Marlowe but ill concealed his restlessness when Gavira spoke to Alma. As for Alma, she seemed to treat all men impartially, except that just now it pleased her to bestow the favor of her attention on the captain.

Just then a young lady, all in white, passed. Plainly she did not belong to the group, though she was much interested in it. As his eye roved over the parlor, Gavira caught her glance and bowed. She returned it, but her look did not linger. For a moment she glanced sharply at Fitzhugh, still talking to Marjorie, then at Marlowe and Alma Hillman. She was a very pretty girl with eyes that it was impossible to control. Perhaps there was somewhat

of the flirt in her. It was not that that interested me. For there was something almost akin to jealousy in the look she gave the other woman. Marlowe was too engrossed to see her and she passed on slowly. What did it mean, if anything?

The conversation, as usual at such times, consisted mostly of witticisms, and just at present we had a rather serious bit of business in hand. Kennedy did not betray any of the impatience that I felt, yet I knew he was glad when Marlowe excused himself and we left the party and passed down the corridor while the captain called his car.

"I don't know how you are going to get at this thing," he remarked, pausing after he had sent a boy for his driver. "But I'll have to rely on you. I've told you all I know. I'll see you at noon, at the yards. My man will take you there."

As he turned and left us I saw that he was going in the direction of the barber−shop. Next to it and in connection with it, though in a separate room, was a manicure. As we passed we looked in. There, at the manicure's table, sat the girl who had gone by us in the parlor and had looked so sharply at Marlowe and Alma.

The boy had told us that the car was waiting at a side entrance, but Kennedy seemed now in no haste to go, the more so when Marlowe, instead of going into the barber−shop, apparently changed his mind and entered the manicure's. Craig stopped and watched. Prom where we were we could see Marlowe, though his back was turned, and neither he nor the manicure could see us.

For a moment the captain paused and spoke, then sat down. Quite evidently he had a keen eye for a pretty face and trim figure. Nor was there any mistaking the pains which the manicure took to please her rich and elderly customer. After watching them a moment Kennedy lounged over to the desk in the lobby.

"Who is the little manicure girl?" he asked.

The clerk smiled. "Seems as if she was a good drawing−card for the house, doesn't it?" he returned. "All the men notice her. Why, her name is Rae Melzer." He turned to speak to another guest before Kennedy could follow with another inquiry.

As we stood before the desk, a postman, with the parcel post, arrived. "Here's a package addressed to Dr. Fernando Gavira," he said, brusquely. "It was broken in the mail. See?"

Kennedy, waiting for the clerk to be free again, glanced casually at the package at first, then with a sudden, though concealed, interest. I followed his eye. In the crushed box could be seen some thin broken pieces of glass and a wadding of cotton−wool.

As the clerk signed for another package Craig saw a chance, reached over and abstracted two or three of the broken pieces of glass, then turned with his back to the postman and clerk and examined them.

One I saw at once had a rim around it. It was quite apparently the top of a test−tube. The other, to which some cotton−wool still adhered, was part of the rounded bowl. Quickly Craig dropped the pieces into one of the hotel envelopes that stood in a rack on the desk, then, changing his mind about asking more now about the little manicure, strode out of the side entrance where Marlowe's car was waiting for us.

Hurriedly we drove across town to the City Hospital, where we had no difficulty in being admitted and finding, in a ward, on a white cot, the wounded guard. Though his wound was one that should not have bothered him much, it had, as Marlowe said, puffed up angrily and in a most peculiar manner. He was in great pain with it and was plainly in a bad way.

Though he questioned the man, Craig did not get anything out of him except that the shot had come from a cruiser which had been hanging about and was much faster than the patrol boat. The nurse and a young intern seemed inclined to be reticent, as though we might imply that the mail's condition reflected on the care he had received, which they were at pains to convince us had been perfect.

Puzzled himself, Craig did not say much, but as he pondered the case, shook his head gravely to himself and finally walked out of the hospital abstractedly.

"We have almost an hour before we are to meet Marlowe at the yard," he considered, as we came to the car. "I think I'll go up to the laboratory first."

In the quiet of his own workshop, Kennedy carefully examined again the peculiar grooves on the bullet. He was about to scrape it, but paused. Instead, he filled a tube with a soapy solution, placed the bullet in it, and let it stand. Next he did the same with the pieces of glass from the envelope.

Then he opened a drawer and from a number of capillary pipettes selected a plain capillary tube of glass. He

held it in the flame of a burner until it was red hot. Then carefully he drew out one end of the tube until it was hair fine. Again he heated the other end, but this time he let the end alone, except that he allowed it to bend by gravity, then cool. It now had a siphon curve. Another tube he treated in the same way.

By this time he was ready to proceed with what he had in mind. He took a glass slide and on it placed a drop from each of the tubes containing the bullet and the glass. That done, he placed the bent, larger end of the capillary tubes in turn on each of the drops on the slide. The liquid ascended the tubes by capillary attraction and siphoned over the curve, running as he turned the tubes up to the finely pointed ends.

Next in a watch glass he placed some caustic soda and in another some pyrogallic acid, from each of which he took just a drop, as he had done before, inclining the tubes to let the fluid gravitate to the throttle end. Finally in the flame he sealed both the tip and butt of the tubes.

"There's a bubble of air in there," he remarked. "The acid and the soda will absorb the oxygen from it. Then I can tell whether I'm right. By the way, we'll have to hurry if we're to be on time to meet Marlowe in the yard," he announced, glancing at his watch as he placed the tubes in his little electric incubator.

We were a little late as the chauffeur pulled in at the executive offices at the gate of the shipyard, and Marlowe was waiting impatiently for us. Evidently he wanted action, but Kennedy said nothing yet of what he suspected and appeared now to be interested only in the yard.

It was indeed something to interest any one. Everywhere were tokens of feverish activity, in office, shop, and slip. As we picked our way across, little narrow and big wide gauge engines and trains whistled and steamed about. We passed rolling−mills, forging−machines, and giant shearing−machines, furnaces for heating the frames or ribs, stone floors on which they could be pegged out and bent to shape, places for rolling and trimming the plates, everything needed from the keel plates to the deck.

In the towering superstructure of the building slip we at last came to the huge steel monster itself, the Usona. As we approached, above us rose her bow, higher than a house, with poppets both there and at the stern, as well as bracing to support her. All had been done up to the launching, the stem and stern posts set in place, her sides framed and plated up, decks laid, bulkheads and casings completed, even much of her internal fitting done.

Overhead and all about the huge monster was a fairy network of steel, the vast permanent construction of columns and overhead girders. Suspended beneath was a series of tracks carrying traveling and revolving cranes capable of handling the heaviest pieces. We climbed to the top and looked down at the vast stretch of hundreds of feet of deck. It was so vast that it seemed rather the work of a superman than of the puny little humans working on her.

As I looked down the slip where the Usona stood inclined about half an inch to the foot, I appreciated as never before what a task it was merely to get her into the water.

Below again, Marlowe explained to us how the launching ways were composed of the ground ways, fastened to the ground as the name implied, and the sliding ways that were to move over them. The sliding ways, he said, were composed of a lower course and an upper course, on which rested the "cradle," fitting closely the side of the ship.

To launch her, she must be lifted slightly by the sliding ways and cradle from the keel blocks and bilge blocks, and this was done by oak wedges, hundreds of which we could see jammed between the upper and lower courses of sliding ways. Next he pointed out the rib−bands which were to keep the sliding ways on the ground ways, and at the bow the points on either side where the sliding and ground ways were bolted together by two huge timbers known as sole pieces.

"You see," he concluded, "it is a gigantic task to lift thousands of tons of steel and literally carry it a quarter of a mile to forty feet of water in less than a minute. Everything has to be calculated to a nicety. It's a matter of mathematics—the moment of weight, the moment of buoyancy, and all that. This launching apparatus is strong, but compared to the weight it has to carry it is really delicate. Why, even a stray bolt in the ways would be a serious matter. That's why we have to have this eternal vigilance."

As he spoke with a significant look at Kennedy, I felt that it was no wonder that Marlowe was alarmed for the safety of the ship. Millions were at stake for just that minute of launching.

It was all very interesting and we talked with men whom it was a pleasure to see handling great problems so capably. But none could shed any light on the problem which it was Kennedy's to solve. And yet I felt sure, as I watched Craig, that unsatisfactory as it appeared to Marlowe and to myself, he was slowly forming some kind of

theory, or at least plan of action, in his head.

"You'll find me either here or at the hotel—I imagine," returned Marlowe to Kennedy's inquiry as we parted from him. "I've instructed all the men to keep their eyes open. I hope some of us have something to report soon."

Whether or not the remark was intended as a hint to Kennedy, it was unnecessary. He was working as fast and as surely as he could, going over in hours what others had failed to fathom in weeks.

Late in the afternoon we got back to the laboratory and Craig began immediately by taking from the little electric incubator the two crooked tubes he had left there. Breaking off the ends with tweezers, he began examining on slides the two drops that exuded, using his most powerful microscope. I was forced to curb my impatience as he proceeded carefully, but I knew that Craig was making sure of his ground at each step.

"I suppose you're bursting with curiosity," he remarked at last, looking up from his examination of one of the slides. "Well, here is a drop that shows what was in the grooves of that bullet. Just take a look."

I applied my eye to the microscope. All I could see was some dots and rods, sometimes something that looked like chains of dots and rods, the rods straight with square ends, sometimes isolated, but more usually joined end to end in long strings.

"What is it?" I asked, not much enlightened by what he had permitted me to see. "Anaerobic bacilli and spores," he replied, excitedly. "The things that produce the well−known 'gas gangrene' of the trenches, the gas phlegmon bacilli—all sorts, the bacillus aerogenes capsulatus, bacillus proteus, pyogenic cocci, and others, actively gas−forming microbes that can't live in air. The method I took to develop and discover them was that of Col. Sir Almroth Wright of the British army medical corps."

"And that is what was on the bullet?" I queried.

"The spores or seeds," he replied. "In the tubes, by excluding the air, I have developed the bacilli. Why, Walter," he went on, seriously, "those are among the microbes most dreaded in the infection of wounds. The spores live in the earth, it has been discovered, especially in cultivated soil, and they are extraordinarily long−lived, lying dormant for years, waiting for a chance to develop. These rods you saw are only from five to fifteen thousandths of a millimeter long and not more than one− thousandth of a millimeter broad.

"You can't see them move here, because the air has paralyzed them. But these vibrios move among the corpuscles of the blood just as a snake moves through the grass, to quote Pasteur. If I colored them you would see that each is covered with fine vibrating hairs three or four times as long as itself. At certain times an oval mass forms in them. That is the spore which lives so long and is so hard to kill. It was the spores that were on the bullet. They resist any temperature except comparatively high and prolonged, and even resist antiseptics for a long time. On the surface of a wound they aren't so bad; but deep in they distil minute gas bubbles, puff up the surrounding tissues, and are almost impossible to combat."

As he explained what he had found, I could only stare at him while the diabolical nature of the attack impressed itself on my mind. Some one had tried to murder Marlowe in this most hideous way. No need to be an accurate marksman when a mere scratch from such a bullet meant ultimate death anyhow.

Why had it been done and where had the cultures come from? I asked myself. I realized fully the difficulty of trying to trace them. Any one could purchase germs, I knew. There was no law governing the sale.

Craig was at work again over his microscope. Again he looked up at me. "Here on this other film I find the same sort of wisp−like anaerobes," he announced. "There was the same thing on those pieces of glass that I got."

In my horror at the discovery, I had forgotten the broken package that had come to the hotel desk while we stood there.

"Then it was Gavira who was receiving spores and cultures of the anaerobes!" I exclaimed, excitedly.

"But that doesn't prove that it was he who used them," cautioned Craig, adding, "not yet, at least."

Important as the discoveries were which he had made, I was not much farther along in fixing the guilt of anybody in particular in the case. Kennedy, however, did not seem to be perturbed, though I wondered what theory he could have worked out.

"I think the best thing for us to do will be to run over to the Belleclaire," he decided as he doffed his laboratory coat and carefully cleansed his hands in an antiseptic almost boiling hot. "I should like to see Marlowe again, and, besides, there we can watch some of these people around him."

Whom he meant other than Gavira I had no idea, but I felt sure that with the launching now only a matter of hours something was bound to happen soon.

Marlowe was out when we arrived; in fact, had not yet returned from the yard. Nor had many of the guests remained at the hotel during the day. Most of them had been out sightseeing, though now they were returning, and as they began to gather in the hotel parlor Marjorie was again called on to put them at their ease.

Fitzhugh had returned and had wasted no time dressing and getting down−stairs again to be near Marjorie. Gavira also appeared, having been out on a case.

"I wish you would call up the shipyard, Walter," asked Kennedy, as we stood in the lobby, where we could see best what was going on. "Tell him I would like to see him very urgently."

I found the number and entered a booth, but, as often happens, the telephone central was overwhelmed by the rush of early−evening calls, and after waiting some time the only satisfaction I got was that the line was busy.

Meanwhile I decided to stick about the booth so that I could get the yard as soon as possible. From where I stood I could see that Kennedy was closely watching the little manicure, Rae Melzer. A moment later I saw Alma Hillman come out of the manicure shop, and before any one else could get in to monopolize the fascinating little manicure I saw Craig saunter over and enter.

I was so interested in what he was doing that for the moment I forgot about my call and found myself unconsciously moving over in that direction, too. As I looked in I saw that he was seated at the little white table, in much the same position as Marlowe had been, deeply in conversation with the girl, though of course I could not make out what they were talking about.

Once she turned to reach something on a shelf back of her. Quick as a flash Kennedy abstracted a couple of the nearest implements, one being a nail file and the other, I think, a brush. A moment later she resumed her work, Kennedy still talking and joking with her, though furtively observing.

"Where is my nail file—and brush?" I could imagine her saying, as she hunted for them in pretty confusion, aided by Kennedy who, when he wanted to, could act the Fitzhugh and Gavira as well as they. The implements were not to be found and from a drawer she took another set.

Just then Gavira passed on his way to his office in the front of the building, saw me, and smiled. "Kennedy's cut you out," he laughed, catching a glimpse through the door. "Never mind. I used to think I had some influence there myself—till the captain came along. I tell you these oldsters can give us points."

I laughed, too, and joined him down the hall, not because I cared what he thought, but because his presence had reminded me of my original mission to call up Marlowe. However, I decided to postpone calling another moment and take advantage of the chance to talk to the house physician.

"Yes," I agreed, as long as he had opened the subject. "I fancy the captain likes young people. He seems to enjoy being with them− −Miss Hillman, for instance."

Gavira shot a sidelong glance at me. "The Belleclaire's a dangerous place for a wealthy widower," he returned. "I had some hopes in that direction myself—in spite of Fitzhugh—but the captain seems to leave us all at the post. Still, I suppose I may still be a brother to her—and physician. So, I should worry."

The impression I got of Gavira was that he enjoyed his freedom too much ever to fall in love, though an intimacy now and then with a clever girl like Alma Hillman was a welcome diversion.

"I'm sorry I sha'n't be able to be with you until late to−night," he said, as he paused at his office door. "I'm in the medical corps of the Guard and I promised to lecture to−night on gunshot wounds. Some of my material got smashed up, but I have my lantern slides, anyhow. I'll try to see you all later, though."

Was that a clever attempt at confession and avoidance on his part? I wondered. But, then, I reflected he could not possibly know that we knew he had anaerobic microbes and spores in his possession. I had cleared up nothing and I hastened to call up the shipyard, sure that the line could not be busy still.

Whatever it was that was the matter, central seemed unable to get me my number. Instead, I found myself cut right into a conversation that did not concern me, evidently the fault of the hotel switchboard operator. I was about to protest when the words I heard stopped me in surprise. A man and a woman were talking, though I could not recognize the voices and no names were used.

"I tell you I won't be a party to that launching scheme," I heard the man's voice. "I wash my hands of it. I told you that all along."

"Then you're going to desert us?" came back the woman's voice, rather tartly. "It's for that girl. Well, you'll regret it. I'll turn the whole organization on you—I will—you—you—" The voices trailed off, and, try as I could to get the operator to find out who it was, I could not.

Who was it? What did it mean?

Kennedy had finished with the manicure some time before and was waiting for me impatiently.

"I haven't been able to get Marlowe," I hastened, "but I've had an earful." He listened keenly as I told him what I had heard, adding also the account of my encounter with Gavira.

"It's just as I thought—I'll wager," he muttered, excitedly, under his breath, taking a hurried turn down the corridor, his face deeply wrinkled.

"Well! Anything new? I expected to hear from you, but haven't," boomed the deep voice of Marlowe, who had just come in from an entrance in another direction from that which we were pacing. "No clue yet to my crank?"

Without a word, Kennedy drew Marlowe aside into a little deserted alcove. Marlowe followed, puzzled at the air of mystery.

Alone, Craig leaned over toward him. "It's no crank," he whispered, in a low tone. "Marlowe, I am convinced that there is a concerted effort to destroy your plans for American commerce building. There isn't the slightest doubt in my mind that it is more serious than you think—perhaps a powerful group of European steamship men opposed to you. It is economic war! You know they have threatened it at meetings reported in the press all along. Well, it's here!"

Half doubting, half convinced, Marlowe drew back. One after another he shot a rapid fire of questions. Who, then, was their agent who had fired the shot? Who was it who had deserted, as I had heard over the wire? Above all, what was it they had planned for the launching? The deeper he got the more the beads of perspiration came out on his sunburnt forehead. The launching was only eighteen hours off, too, and ten of them were darkness. What could be done?

Kennedy's mind was working rapidly in the crisis as Marlowe appealed to him, almost helplessly.

"May I have your car to−night?" asked Craig, pausing.

"Have it? I'll give it to you if it'll do any good."

"I'll need it only a few hours. I think I have a scheme that will work perfectly—if you are sure you can guard the inside of the yard to−morrow."

"I'm sure of that. We spent hours to−day selecting picked men for the launching, going over everything."

Late as it was to start out of town, Craig drove across the bridge and out on Long Island, never stopping until we came to a small lake, around the shores of which he skirted, at last pausing before a huge barn−like structure.

As the door swung open to his honking the horn, the light which streamed forth shone on a sign above, "Sprague Aviation School." Inside I could make out enough to be sure that it was an aeroplane hangar.

"Hello, Sprague!" called Kennedy, as a man appeared in the light.

The man came closer. "Why, hello, Kennedy! What brings you out here at such an hour?"

Craig had jumped from the car, and together the two went into the hangar, while I followed. They talked in low tones, but as nearly as I could make out Kennedy was hiring a hydro−aeroplane for to− morrow with as much nonchalance as if it had been a taxicab.

As Kennedy and his acquaintance, Sprague, came to terms, my eye fell on a peculiar gun set up in a corner. It had a tremendous cylinder about the barrel, as though it contained some device to cool it. It was not a machine−gun of the type I had seen, however, yet cartridges seemed to be fed to it from a disk on which they were arranged radially rather than from a band. Kennedy had risen to go and looked about at me.

"Oh, a Lewis gun!" he exclaimed, seeing what I was looking at. "That's an idea. Sprague, can you mount that on the plane?"

Sprague nodded. "That's what I have it here for," he returned. "I've been testing it. Why, do you want it?"

"Indeed I do! I'll be out here early in the morning, Sprague."

"I'll be ready for you, sir," promised the aviator.

Speeding back to the city, Kennedy laid out an extensive program for me to follow on the morrow. Together we arranged an elaborate series of signals, and that night, late as it was, Craig returned to the laboratory, where he continued his studies with the microscope, though what more he expected to discover I did not know.

In spite of his late hours, it was Craig who wakened me in the morning, already prepared to motor out to the aviation school to meet Sprague. Hastily he rehearsed our signals, which consisted mostly of dots and dashes in the Morse code which Craig was to convey with a flag and I to receive with the aid of a powerful glass.

I must admit that I felt somewhat lost when, later in the morning, I took my place alone on the platform that

had been built for the favored few of the launching party at the bow of the huge Usona, without Craig. Already, however, he had communicated at least a part of his plan to Marlowe, and the captain and Marjorie were among the first to arrive. Marjorie never looked prettier in her life than she did now, on the day when she was to christen the great liner, nor, I imagine, had the captain ever been more proud of her.

They had scarcely greeted me when we heard a shout from the men down at the end of the slip that commanded a freer view of the river. We craned our necks and in a moment saw what it was. They had sighted the air−boat coming down the river.

I turned the glass on the mechanical bird as it soared closer. Already Kennedy had made us on the platform and had begun to signal as a test. At least a part of the suspense was over for me when I discovered that I could read what he sent.

So fixed had my attention been that I had not noticed that slowly the members of the elect launching party had arrived, while other thousands of the less favored crowded into the spaces set apart for them. On the stand now with us were Fitzhugh and Miss Hillman, while, between glances at Kennedy, I noticed little Rae Melzer over at the right, and Doctor Gavira, quite in his element, circulating about from one group to another.

Every one seemed to feel that thrill that comes with a launching, the appreciation that there is a maximum of risk in a minimum of time.

Down the slip the men were driving home the last of the huge oak wedges which lifted the great Usona from the blocks and transferred her weight to the launching ways as a new support. All along the stationary, or ground, ways and those which were to glide into the water with the cradle and the ship, trusted men were making the final examination to be as sure as human care can be that all was well.

As the clock neared noon, which was high water, approximately, all the preparatory work was done. Only the sole pieces before us held the ship in place. It was as though all bridges had been burned.

High overhead now floated the hydro−aeroplane, on which I kept my eye fixed almost hypnotically. There was still no signal from Kennedy, however. What was it he was after? Did he expect to see the fast express cruiser, lurking like a corsair about the islands of the river? If so, he gave no sign.

Men were quitting now the work of giving the last touches to the preparations. Some were placing immense jack−screws which were to give an initial impulse if it were needed to start the ship down the ways. Others were smearing the last heavy dabs of tallow, lard oil, and soft soap on the ways, and graphite where the ways stretched two hundred feet or so out into the water, for the ship was to travel some hundreds of feet on the land and in the water, and perhaps an equal distance out beyond the end of the ways.

Late comers still crowded in. Men now reported that everything was ready. Steadily the time of high water approached.

"Saw the sole pieces!" finally rang out the order.

That was a thing that must be done by two gangs, one on each side, and evenly, too. If one gang got ahead of the other, they must stop and let the second catch up.

"Zip—zip—zip," came the shrill singing tone of the saws.

Was everything all right? Kennedy and Sprague were still circling overhead, at various altitudes. I redoubled my attention at the glass.

Suddenly I saw Craig's flag waving frantically. A muffled exclamation came from my lips involuntarily. Marlowe, who had been watching me, leaned closer.

"What is it—for God's sake?" he whispered, hoarsely.

"Stop them!" I shouted as I caught Kennedy's signal. At a hurried order from Marlowe the gangs quit. A hush fell over the crowd.

Kennedy was circling down now until at last the air−boat rested on the water and skimmed along toward the ways.

Out on the ways, as far as they were not yet submerged, some men ran, as if to meet him, but Kennedy began signaling frantically again. Though I had not been expecting it, I made it out.

"He wants them to keep back," I called, and the word was passed down the length of the ship.

Instead of coming to rest before the slip, the plane turned and went away, making a complete circle, then coming to rest. To the surprise of every one, the rapid staccato bark of the Lewis gun broke the silence. Kennedy was evidently firing, but at what? There was nothing in sight.

Suddenly there came a tremendous detonation, which made even the launching−slip tremble, and a huge column of water, like a geyser, rose in the air about eight hundred feet out in the river, directly in front of us.

The truth flashed over us in an instant. There, ten feet or so in the dark water out in the river, Craig had seen a huge circular object, visible only against a sandy bottom from the hydro− aeroplane above, as the sun−rays were reflected through the water. It was a contact submarine mine.

Marlowe looked at me, his face almost pale. The moment the great hulk of the Usona in its wild flight to the sea would have hit that mine, tilting it, she would have sunk in a blast of flame.

The air−boat now headed for the shore, and a few moments later, as Craig climbed into our stand, Marlowe seized him in congratulation too deep for words.

"Is it all right?" sang out one of the men in the gangs, less impressionable than the rest.

"If there is still water enough," nodded Craig.

Again the order to saw away the sole pieces was given, and the gangs resumed. "Zip—zip," again went the two saws.

There were perhaps two inches more left, when the hull quivered. There was a crashing and rending as the timbers broke away.

Marjorie Marlowe, alert, swung the bottle of champagne in its silken net on a silken cord and it crashed on the bow as she cried, gleefully, "I christen thee Usona!"

Down the ship slid, with a slow, gliding motion at first, rapidly gathering headway. As her stern sank and finally the bow dipped into the water, cheers broke forth. Then a cloud of smoke hid her. There was an ominous silence. Was she wrecked, at last, after all? A puff of wind cleared the smoke.

"Just the friction of the ways—set the grease on fire," shouted Marlowe. "It always does that."

Wedges, sliding ways, and other parts of the cradle floated to the surface. The tide took her and tugs crept up and pulled her to the place selected for temporary mooring. A splash of a huge anchor, and there she rode—safe!

In the revulsion of feeling, every eye on the platform turned involuntarily to Kennedy. Marlowe, still holding his hand, was speechless. Marjorie leaned forward, almost hysterical.

"Just a moment," called Craig, as some turned to go down. "There is just one thing more."

There was a hush as the crowd pressed close.

"There's a conspiracy here," rang out Craig's voice, boldly, "a foreign trade war. From the start I suspected something and I tried to reason it out. Having failed to stop the work, failed to kill Marlowe—what was left? Why, the launching. How? I knew of that motor−boat. What else could they do with it? I thought of recent tests that have been made with express cruisers as mine− planters. Could that be the scheme? The air−boat scheme occurred to me late last night. It at least was worth trying. You see what has happened. Now for the reckoning. Who was their agent? I have something here that will interest you."

Kennedy was speaking rapidly. It was one of those occasions in which Kennedy's soul delighted. Quickly he drew a deft contrast between the infinitely large hulk of the Usona as compared to the infinitely small bacteria which he had been studying the day before. Suddenly he drew forth from his pocket the bullet that had been fired at Marlowe, then, to the surprise of even myself, he quietly laid a delicate little nail file and brush in the palm of his hand beside the bullet.

A suppressed cry from Rae Melzer caused me to recollect the file and brush she had missed.

"Just a second," raced on Kennedy. "On this file and brush I found spores of those deadly anaerobes—dead, killed by heat and an antiseptic, perhaps a one−per−cent. solution of carbolic acid at blood heat, ninety−eight degrees—dead, but nevertheless there. I suppose the microscopic examination of finger−nail deposits is too minute a thing to appeal to most people. But it has been practically applied in a number of criminal cases in Europe. Ordinary washing and even cleaning doesn't alter microscope findings. In this case this trifling clue is all that leads to the real brain of this plot, literally to the hand that directed it." He paused a moment.

"Yesterday I found that anaerobe cultures were being received by some one in the Belleclaire, and—"

"They were stolen from me. Some one must have got into my office, where I was studying them." Doctor Gavira had pressed forward earnestly, but Craig did not pause again.

"Who were these agents sent over to wage this secret war at any cost?" he repeated. "One of them, I know now, fell in love with the daughter of the man against whom he was to plot." Marjorie cast a furtive glance at Fitzhugh.

"Love has saved him. But the other? To whom do these deadly germs point? Who dum−dummed and poisoned the bullet? Whose own fingers, in spite of antiseptics and manicures, point inexorably to a guilty self?"

Rae Melzer could restrain herself no longer. She was looking at the file and brush, as if with a hideous fascination. "They are mine—you took them," she cried, impulsively. "It was she—always having her nails manicured—she who had been there just before— she—Alma Hillman!"

XI. THE GUN−RUNNER

"With the treaty ratified, if the deal goes through we'll all be rich."

Something about the remark which rose over the babel of voices arrested Kennedy's attention. For one thing, it was a woman's voice, and it was not the sort of remark to be expected from a woman, at least not in such a place.

Craig had been working pretty hard and began to show the strain. We had taken an evening off and now had dropped in after the theater at the Burridge, one of the most frequented midnight resorts on Broadway.

At the table next to us—and the tables at the Burridge were so close that one almost rubbed elbows with those at the next—sat a party of four, two ladies in evening gowns and two men in immaculate black and white.

"I hope you are right, Leontine," returned one of the men, with an English accent. "The natural place for the islands is under the American flag, anyway."

"Yes," put in the other; "the people have voted for it before. They want it."

It was at the time that the American and Danish governments were negotiating about the transfer of the Danish West Indies, and quite evidently they were discussing the islands. The last speaker seemed to be a Dane, but the woman with him, evidently his wife, was not. It was a curious group, worth more than a passing glance. For a moment Craig watched them closely.

"That woman in blue," he whispered, "is a typical promoter."

I recognized the type which is becoming increasingly frequent in Wall Street as the competition in financial affairs grows keener and women enter business and professional life.

There were plenty of other types in the brilliantly lighted dining−room, and we did not dwell long on the study of our neighbors. A few moments later Kennedy left me and was visiting another table. It was a habit of his, for he had hundreds of friends and acquaintances, and the Burridge was the place to which every one came.

This time I saw that he had stopped before some one whom I recognized. It was Captain Marlowe of the American Shipping Trust, to whom Kennedy had been of great assistance at the time of the launching of his great ship, the Usona. Marlowe's daughter Marjorie was not with him, having not yet returned from her honeymoon trip, and he was accompanied by a man whose face was unfamiliar to me.

As I recognized who it was to whom Kennedy was speaking, I also rose and made my way over to the table. As I approached, the captain turned from Kennedy and greeted me cordially.

"Mr. Whitson," he introduced the man with him. "Mr. Whitson is sailing to−morrow for St. Thomas on the Arroyo. We're preparing to extend our steamship lines to the islands as soon as the formalities of the purchase are completed."

Marlowe turned again to Kennedy and went on with the remark he had evidently been making.

"Of course," I heard him say, "you know we have Mexico practically blockaded as far as arms and munitions go. Yet, Kennedy, through a secret channel I know that thousands of stands of arms and millions of rounds of ammunition are filtering in there. It's shameful. I can't imagine anything more traitorous. Whoever is at the bottom of it ought to swing. It isn't over the border that they are going. We know that. The troops are there. How is it, then?"

Marlowe looked at us as if he expected Kennedy to catch some one by pure reason. Kennedy said nothing, but it was not because he was not interested.

"Think it over," pursued Marlowe, who was a patriot above everything else. "Perhaps it will occur to you how you can be of the greatest service to the country. The thing is damnable— damnable."

Neither Kennedy nor I having anything definite to contribute to the subject, the conversation drifted to the islands and Whitson's mission. Whitson proved to be very enthusiastic about it. He knew the islands well and had already made a trip there for Marlowe.

A few moments later we shook hands and returned to our own table. It was getting late and the only type that was left to study was the common Broadway midnight−life genus. We paid our check and were about to leave. For an instant we stopped at the coat−room to watch the late arrivals and the departing throng.

"Hello!" greeted a familiar voice beside us. "I've been looking all over town for you. They told me you had gone to the theater and I thought I might possibly find you here."

We turned. It was our old friend Burke, of the Secret Service, accompanied by a stranger.

"I'd like you to meet Mr. Sydney, the new special consular agent whom the government is sending to the Danish West Indies to investigate and report on trade conditions," he introduced. "We're off for St. Thomas on the Arroyo, which sails to−morrow noon."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Kennedy. "Is everybody daffy over those little islands? What takes you down there, Burke?" Burke looked about hastily, then drew us aside into a recess in the lobby.

"I don't suppose you know," he explained, lowering his voice, "but since these negotiations began, the consular service has been keenly interested in the present state and the possibilities of the islands. The government sent one special agent there, named Dwight. Well, he died a few days ago. It was very suspicious, so much so that the authorities in the island investigated. Yet the doctors in the island have found no evidence of anything wrong, no poison. Still, it is very mysterious—and, you know," he hinted, "there are those who don't want us down there."

The Secret Service man paused as though he had put the case as briefly and pointedly as he could, then went on: "I've been assigned to accompany the new consul down there and investigate. I've no particular orders and the chief will honor any reasonable expense account—but—" He hesitated and stopped, looking keenly at Kennedy's face. I saw what he was driving at.

"Well—to come to the point—what I wanted to see you about, Kennedy, is to find out whether you would go with me. I think," he added, persuasively, "it would be quite worth your while. Besides, you look tired. You're working too hard. The change will do you good. And your conscience needn't trouble you. You'll be working, all right."

Burke had been quick to note the haggard expression on Kennedy's face and turn it into an argument to carry his point. Kennedy smiled as he read the other's enthusiasm. I would have added my own urging, only I knew that nothing but a sense of duty would weigh with Craig.

"I'd like to think the proposal over," he conceded, much to my surprise. "I'll let you know in the morning."

"Mind," wheedled Burke, "I won't take no for an answer. We need you."

The Secret Service man was evidently delighted by the reception Kennedy had given his scheme.

Just then I caught sight of the party of four getting their hats and wraps preparatory to leaving, and Kennedy eyed them sharply.

Marlowe and Whitson passed. As they did so I could not help seeing Whitson pause and shoot a quick glance at the four. It was a glance of suspicion and it was not lost on Craig. Did they know more of this Mexican gun−running business than Marlowe had hinted at? I watched Kennedy's face. Evidently his mind was at work on the same idea as mine.

Burke accompanied us almost all the way home, with Sydney adding his urging. I could tell that the whole combination of circumstances at the Burridge had had an effect on Kennedy.

I went to bed, tired, but through the night I knew Craig was engaged on some work about which he seemed to be somewhat secretive. When I saw him again in the laboratory, in the morning, he had before him a large packing−case of stout wood bound with steel bands.

"What's that?" I asked, mystified. He opened the lid, a sort of door, on which was a strong lock, and I looked inside.

"My traveling laboratory," he remarked, with pride.

I peered in more closely. It was a well−stocked armamentarium, as the doctors would have called it. I shall not make any attempt to describe its contents. They were too varied and too numerous, a little bit of everything, it seemed. In fact, Craig seemed to have epitomized the sciences and arts. It was not that he had anything so wonderful, or even comparable to the collection of his laboratory. But as I ran my eye over the box I would have wagered that from the contents he might have made shift to duplicate in some makeshift form almost anything that he might need. It was truly amazing, representing in miniature his study of crime for years.

"Then you are going with Burke to St. Thomas?" I queried, realizing the significance of it.

Kennedy nodded. "I've been thinking of what I would do if an important case ever called me away. Burke's proposal hurried me, that's all. And you are going, also," he added. "You have until noon to break the news to the Star."

I did not say anything more, fearful lest he might change his mind. I knew he needed the rest, and that no

matter what the case was in the islands he could not work as hard as he was doing in New York.

Accordingly my own arrangements with the Star were easily made. I had a sort of roving commission, anyhow, since my close association with Kennedy. Moreover, the possibility of turning up something good in the islands, which were much in the news at the time, rather appealed to the managing editor. If Kennedy could arrange his affairs, I felt that the least I could do was to arrange my own.

Thus it came about that Craig and I found ourselves in the forenoon in a taxicab, on the front of which was loaded the precious box as well as our other hastily packed luggage, and we were on our way over to Brooklyn to the dock from which the Arroyo sailed.

Already the clearance papers had been obtained, and there was the usual last−moment confusion among the passengers as the hour for sailing approached. It seemed as if we had scarcely boarded the ship when Kennedy was as gay as a school−boy on an unexpected holiday. I realized at once what was the cause. The change of scene, the mere fact of cutting loose, were having their effect.

As we steamed slowly down the bay, I ran my eye over the other passengers at the rail, straining their eyes to catch the last glimpse of the towers of New York. There were Burke and Sydney, but they were not together, and, to all appearances, did not know each other. Sydney, of course, could not conceal his identity, nor did he wish to, no matter how beset with unseen perils might be his mission. But Burke was down on the passenger−list as, and had assumed the role of, a traveling salesman for a mythical novelty− house in Chicago. That evidently was part of the plan they had agreed on between themselves. Kennedy took the cue.

As I studied the various groups, I paused suddenly, surprised. There was the party which had sat at the table next to us at the Burridge the night before. Kennedy had already seen them and had been watching them furtively.

Just then Craig jogged my elbow. He had caught sight of Whitson edging his way in our direction. I saw what it was that Craig meant. He wanted purposely to avoid him. I wondered why, but soon I saw what he was up to. He wanted introductions to come about naturally, as they do on shipboard if one only waits.

On deck and in the lounging and smoking rooms it did not take long for him to contrive ways of meeting and getting acquainted with those he wished to know, without exciting suspicion. Thus, by the time we sat down to dinner in the saloon we were all getting fairly chummy.

We had met Burke quite as naturally as if we were total strangers. It was easy to make it appear that Whitson and Sydney were shipboard acquaintances. Nor was it difficult to secure an introduction to the other party of four. The girl whom we had heard addressed as Leontine seemed to be the leader of the group. Leontine Cowell was a striking personality. Her clear blue eyes directed a gaze at one which tested one's mettle to meet. I was never quite sure whether she remembered seeing us at the Burridge, whether she penetrated the parts we were playing. She was none the less feminine because she had aspirations in a commercial way. As Kennedy had first observed, she was well worth study.

Her companion, Barrett Burleigh, was a polished, deferential Englishman, one of those who seem to be citizens of the world rather than subjects of any particular country. I wondered what were the real relations of the two.

Jorgen Erickson was, as I had surmised, a Dane. He proved to be one of the largest planters in the island, already wealthy and destined to be wealthier if real estate advanced. The other woman, Nanette, was his wife. She was also a peculiarly interesting type, a Frenchwoman from Guadeloupe. Younger and more vivacious than her husband, her snappy black eyes betokened an attractive personality.

Leontine Cowell, it seemed, had been in the islands not long before, had secured options on some score of plantations at a low figure, and made no secret of her business. When the American flag at last flew over the islands she stood to win out of the increase of land values a considerable fortune.

Erickson also, in addition to his own holdings, had been an agent for some other planters and thus had met Leontine, who had been the means of interesting some American capital.

As for Burleigh, it seemed that he had made the acquaintance of Leontine in Wall Street. He had been in the Caribbean and the impending changes in the Danish West Indies had attracted his notice. Whether he had some money to invest in the speculation or hoped to profit by commissions derived from sales did not appear. But at any rate some common bond had thrown the quartet together.

I need not dwell on the little incidents of life on ship. It must have been the second day out that I observed Leontine and Sydney together on the promenade−deck. They seemed to be quite interested in each other, though I

felt sure that Leontine was making a play for him. At any rate, Burleigh was jealous. Whatever might be the scheme, it was apparent that the young Englishman was head over heels in love with her.

What did it mean? Was she playing with Sydney, seeking to secure his influence to further her schemes? Or did it mask some deeper, more sinister motive? From what I had seen of Sydney, I could not think that he was the man to take such an affair seriously. I felt that he must be merely amusing himself.

Busy with my speculations, I was astonished soon after to realize that the triangle had become a hexagon, so to speak. Whitson and Nanette Erickson seemed to be much in each other's company. But, unlike Burleigh, Erickson seemed to be either oblivious or complacent.

Whatever it might all portend, I found that it did not worry Kennedy, although he observed closely. Burke, however, was considerably excited and even went so far as to speak to Sydney, over whom he felt a sort of guardianship. Sydney turned the matter off lightly. As for me, I determined to watch both of these women closely.

Kennedy spent much time not only in watching the passengers, but in going about the ship, talking to the captain and crew and every one who knew anything about the islands. In fact, he collected enough information in a few days to have satisfied any ordinary tourist for weeks.

Even the cargo did not escape his attention, and I found that he was especially interested in the rather heavy shipments of agricultural implements that were consigned to various planters in the islands. So great was his interest that I began to suspect that it had some bearing on the gun−running plot that had been hinted at by Marlowe.

It was the evening after one of Kennedy's busy days scouting about that he quietly summoned both Burke and Sydney to our cabin.

"There's something queer going on," announced Craig, when he was sure that we were all together without having been observed. "Frankly, I must confess that I don't understand it—yet."

"You needn't worry about me," interrupted Sydney, hastily. "I can take care of myself."

Kennedy smiled quietly. We knew what Sydney meant. He seemed to resent Burke's solicitude over his acquaintance with Leontine and was evidently warning us off. Kennedy, however, avoided the subject.

"I may as well tell you," he resumed, "that I was quite as much influenced by a rumor that arms were somehow getting into Mexican ports as I was by your appeal, Burke, in coming down here. So far I've found nothing that proves my case. But, as I said, there is something under the surface which I don't understand. We have all got to stick together, trust no one but ourselves, and, above all, keep our eyes open."

It was all that was said, but I was relieved to note that Sydney seemed greatly impressed. Still, half an hour later, I saw him sitting in a steamer−chair beside Leontine again, watching the beautiful play of the moonlight on the now almost tropical ocean after we had emerged from the Gulf Stream. I felt that it was rather dangerous, but at least he had had his warning.

Seeking Kennedy, I found him at last in the smoking−room, to my surprise talking with Erickson. I joined them, wondering how I was to convey to Craig what I had just seen without exciting suspicion. They were discussing the commercial and agricultural future of the islands under the American flag, especially the sugar industry, which had fallen into a low estate.

"I suppose," remarked Kennedy, casually, "that you are already modernizing your plant and that others are doing the same, getting ready for a revival."

Erickson received the remark stolidly. "No," he replied, slowly. "Some of us may be doing so, but as for me, I shall be quite content to sell if I can get my price."

"The planters are not putting in modern machinery, then?" queried Kennedy, innocently, while there flashed over me what he had discovered about shipments of agricultural implements.

Erickson shook his head. "Some of them may be. But for one that is, I know twenty whose only thought is to sell out and take a profit."

The conversation trailed off on other subjects and I knew that Kennedy had acquired the information which he sought. As neatly as I could I drew him apart from Erickson.

"Strange he should tell me that," ruminated Kennedy as we gained a quiet corner of the deck. "I know that there is a lot of stuff consigned to planters in the island, some even to himself."

"He must be lying, then," I hastened. "Perhaps these promoters are really plotters. By the way, what I wanted to tell you was that I saw Sydney and Leontine together again."

He was about to reply when the sound of some one approaching caused us to draw back farther into the shadow. It proved to be Whitson and Nanette.

"Then you do not like St. Thomas?" we heard Whitson remark, as if he were repeating something she had just said.

"There is nothing there," she replied. "Why, there aren't a hundred miles of good roads and not a dozen automobiles."

Evidently the swiftness of life in New York of which she had tasted was having its effect.

"St. Croix, where we have the plantation, is just as bad. Part of the time we live there, part of the time at Charlotte Amalie in St. Thomas. But there is little difference. I hope Jorgen is able to sell. At least I should like to live a part of the year in the States."

"Would he like that, too?"

"Many of us would," she replied, quickly. "For many years things have been getting worse with us. Just now it seems a bit better because of the high price of sugar. But who knows how long that will last? Oh, I wish something would happen soon so that we might make enough money to live as I want to live. Think; here the best years of life are slipping away. Unless we do something soon, it will be too late! We must make our money soon."

There was an air of impatience in her tone, of restless dissatisfaction. I felt also that there was an element of danger, too, in a woman just passing from youth making a confidant of another man.

It was a mixed situation with the quartet whom we were watching. One thing was sufficiently evident. They were all desperately engaged in the pursuit of wealth. That was a common bond. Nor had I seen anything to indicate that they were over−scrupulous in that pursuit. Within half an hour I had seen Leontine with Sydney and Nanette with Whitson. Both Sydney as consular agent and Whitson through his influence with the shipping trust possessed great influence. Had the party thought it out and were they now playing the game with the main chance in view?

I looked inquiringly at Kennedy as the voices died away while the couple walked slowly down the deck. He said nothing, but he was evidently pondering deeply on some problem, perhaps that which the trend of affairs had raised in my own mind.

Our delay had not been long, but it had been sufficient to cause us to miss finding Leontine and Sydney. We did, however, run across Burke, bent evidently on watching, also.

"I don't like this business," he confessed, as we paused to compare experiences. "I've been thinking of that Mexican business you hinted at, Kennedy. You know the islands would be an ideal out−of−the−way spot from which to start gun−running expeditions to Mexico. I don't like this Leontine and Burleigh. They want to make money too bad."

Kennedy smiled. "Burleigh doesn't seem to approve of everything, though," he remarked.

"Perhaps not. That's one reason why I think it may be more dangerous for Sydney than he realizes. I know she's a fascinating girl. All the more reason to watch out for her. But I can't talk to Sydney," he sighed.

It was an enigma and I had not solved it, though I felt much as Burke did. Kennedy seemed to have determined to allow events to take their course, perhaps in the hope that developments would be quicker that way than by interfering with something which we did not understand.

In the smoking−room, after we left Burke, Kennedy and I came upon Erickson and Burleigh. They had just finished a game of poker with some of the other passengers, in which Burleigh's usual run of luck and skill had been with him.

"Lucky at cards, unlucky in love," remarked Burleigh as we approached.

He said it with an air of banter, yet I could not help feeling that there was a note of seriousness at the bottom of it. Had he known that Leontine had been with Sydney on the deck? His very success at poker had its effect on me. I found myself eying him as if he had been one of the transatlantic card sharps, perhaps an international crook. Yet when I considered I was forced to admit that I had nothing on which to base such a judgment.

Erickson presented a different problem, to my mind, There was indeed something queer about him. Either he had not been perfectly frank with us in regard to the improvement of his properties or he was concealing something much more sinister. Again and again my mind reverted to the hints that had been dropped by Marlowe, and I recalled the close scrutiny Whitson had given the four that night. So far, I had felt that in any such attempt we might count on Whitson playing a lone hand and perhaps finding out something to our advantage.

It was the morning of the last day of the voyage that most of the passengers gathered on the deck for the first glimpse of the land to which we had been journeying.

Before us lay the beautiful and picturesque harbor and town of Charlotte Amalie, one of the finest harbors in the West Indies, deep enough to float the largest vessels, with shipyards, dry− docks, and repair shops. From the deck it was a strikingly beautiful picture, formed by three spurs of mountains covered with the greenest of tropical foliage. From the edge of the dancing blue waves the town itself rose on the hills, presenting an entrancing panorama.

All was bustle and excitement as the anchor plunged into the water, for not only was this the end of our journey, but the arrival of the boat from New York was an event for the town.

There was much to watch, but I let nothing interfere with my observation of how the affair between Sydney and Leontine was progressing. To my surprise, I saw that this morning she was bestowing the favor of her smile rather on Burleigh. It was Sydney's turn now to feel the pangs of jealousy, and I must admit that he bore them with better grace than Burleigh, whatever that might indicate.

As I watched the two and recalled their intimacy at the Burridge the first night we had seen them, I almost began to wonder whether I might not have been wrong about Leontine. Had it been that I had distrusted the woman merely because I was suspicious of the type, both male and female? Had I been finding food for suspicion because I was myself suspicious?

Erickson was standing beside Sydney, while we were not far away. Evidently he had been saving up a speech for the occasion and now was prepared to deliver it.

"Mr. Sydney," he began, with a wave of his arm that seemed to include us all, "it is a pleasure to welcome you here to our island. Last night it occurred to me that we ought to do something to show that we appreciate it. You must come to dinner to−night at my villa here in the town. You are all invited, all of us who have become so enjoyably acquainted on this voyage which I shall never forget. Believe me when I say that it will be even more a tribute to you personally than because of the official position you are to hold among us."

It was a graceful invitation, more so than I had believed Erickson capable of framing. Sydney could do nothing less than thank him cordially and accept, as we all did. Indeed, I could see that Kennedy was delighted at the suggestion. It would give him an opportunity to observe them all under circumstances different enough to show something.

While we were thanking Erickson, I saw that Whitson had taken the occasion also to thank Mrs. Erickson, with whom he had been talking, just a bit apart from the group. He made no secret of his attentions, though I thought she was a bit embarrassed by them at such a time. Indeed, she started rather abruptly toward the group which was now intent on surveying the town, and as she did so, I noted that she had forgotten her hand−bag, which lay on a deck− chair near where they had been sitting.

I picked it up to restore it. Some uncontrollable curiosity prompted me and I hesitated. All were still looking at the town. I opened the bag. Inside was a little bottle of grayish liquid. What should I do? Any moment she or Whitson might turn around. Hastily I pulled off the cap of my fountain−pen and poured into it some of the liquid, replacing the cork in the bottle and dropping it back into the bag, while I disposed of the cap as best I could without spilling its contents.

Whether either she or any one else had observed me, I was not going to run any chances of being seen. I called a passing steward. "Mrs. Erickson forgot her bag," I said, pointing hastily to it. "You'll find her over there with Mr. Whitson." Then I mingled in the crowd to watch her. She did not seem to show any anxiety when she received it.

I lost no time in getting back to Kennedy and telling him what I had found, and a few moments later he made an excuse to go to our state−room, as eager as I was to know what had been in the little bottle.

First he poured out a drop of the liquid from the cap of my fountain−pen in some water. It did not dissolve. Successively he tried alcohol, ether, then pepsin. None of them had any effect on it. Finally, however, he managed to dissolve it in ammonia.

"Relatively high amount of sulphur," he muttered, after a few moments more of study. "Keratin, I believe."

"A poison?" I asked.

Kennedy shook his head. "No; harmless."

"Then what is it for?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He may have had some half−formed idea, but if he did it was still indefinite and he refused to commit himself. Instead, he placed the sample in his traveling laboratory, closed and locked it, and, with our luggage, the box was ready to be taken ashore.

Nearly every one had gone ashore by the time we returned to the deck. Whitson was there yet, talking to the captain, for the shipping at the port interested him. I wondered whether he, too, might be suspicious of those cases consigned to Erickson and others. If so, he said nothing of it.

By this time several vessels that looked as if they might be lighters, though fairly large, had pulled up. It seemed that they had been engaged to carry shipments of goods to the other islands of St. John and St. Croix.

Kennedy seemed eager now to get ashore, and we went, accompanied by Whitson, and after some difficulty established ourselves in a small hotel.

Most of the tourists were sightseeing, and, while we had no time for that, still we could not help doing so, in going about the town.

Charlotte Amalie, I may say, proved to be one of the most picturesque towns in the Windward Islands. The walls of the houses were mostly of a dazzling whiteness, though some were yellow, others gray, orange, blue. But the roofs were all of a generous bright red which showed up very effectively among the clumps of green trees. Indeed, the town seemed to be one of gaily tinted villas and palaces. There were no factories, no slums. Nature had provided against that and man had not violated the provision.

The people whom we met on the streets were mostly negroes, though there was a fair sprinkling of whites. What pleased us most was that nearly everywhere we went English was spoken. I had half expected Danish. But there was even very little Spanish spoken.

Burke was waiting for us, and in spite of his playing the role of traveling salesman managed to direct us about so that we might as quickly as possible pick up the thread of the mysterious death of Dwight. It did not take long to gather such meager information as there was about the autopsy that had followed the strange death of Sydney's predecessor.

We were able to find out little from either the authorities or the doctor who had investigated the case. Under the stress of suspicion, both the stomach and the contents of the stomach of the unfortunate man had been examined. No trace of anything out of the way had been found, and there the matter had rested, except for suspicion.

One of our first visits was to the American consulate. There Sydney, by virtue of his special commission, had, with characteristic energy, established himself with the consul. Naturally, he, too, had been making inquiries. But they had led nowhere. There seemed to be no clue to the mysterious death of Dwight, not even a hint as to the cause.

All that we were able to discover, after some hours of patient inquiry, was that Dwight had suffered from great prostration, marked cyanosis, convulsions, and coma. Whether it was the result of some strange disease or of a poison no one, not even the doctor, was prepared to say. All that was known was that the blow, if blow it had been, was swift, sudden, sure.

We ran across Whitson once or twice during the day, busily engaged renewing acquaintance with merchants and planters whom he had known before, but I do not recall having seen either Burleigh or Leontine, which, at the time, I thought rather strange, for the town was small and strangers were few. The more I thought of it the more firmly convinced I was that Dwight had discovered some secret which it was extremely inconvenient for somebody to have known. What was it? Was it connected with the rumors we had heard of gun−running to Mexico?

Erickson had invited us to come late in the afternoon to the dinner and we did not delay in getting there. His house proved to be a veritable palace on the side of one of the hills rising abruptly back of the shore. Flights of massive stone steps, quaint walls covered with creepers, balustrades overlooking charming gardens, arcades from which one looked out on splendid vistas and shady terraces combined to make it a veritable paradise such as can be found only in tropical and subtropical lands. Most wonderful of all was the picture of the other hills unfolded, especially of the two ruined pirates' castles belonging to semi− mythical personages, Bluebeard and Blackbeard.

The Ericksons were proud of their home, as well they might be, in spite of the complaints we had heard Nanette utter and the efforts of Erickson to sell his holdings. Mrs. Erickson proved to be a charming hostess and the host extended a hospitality such as one rarely meets. It quite made me uncomfortable to accept it at the same

time that I knew we must view it all with suspicion. Nor did it make matters any better, but rather worse, to feel that there was some color of excuse for the suspicion.

Burleigh arrived proudly with Leontine, followed closely by Sydney. At once the game was on again, Leontine pitting one against the other. Whitson came, his attentions to Mrs. Erickson a trifle restrained, but still obvious. Burke and ourselves completed the party.

To the repeated urging of Erickson we made ourselves quite as much at home as we politely could. Kennedy and Burke, acting under his instructions, seemed to be ubiquitous. Yet, beyond a continuation of the drama that had been unfolded on the ship it did not seem to me at first that we were getting anywhere.

Kennedy and I were passing alone along a colonnade that opened off from the large dining−hall, when Craig paused and looked in through an open door at the massive table set for the dinner.

A servant had just completed setting out cocktails at the various places, pouring them from a huge tankard, for the purpose, which had been standing on a sideboard. Guests had been walking past through the colonnade ever since we arrived, but at the moment there was no one about, and even the servant had disappeared.

Kennedy stepped lightly into the dining−hall and looked about sharply. Instinctively I stepped to a window where I could hear any one approaching. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him narrowly scrutinizing the table. Finally he pulled from his pocket a clean linen handkerchief. Into an empty glass he poured the contents of one of the cocktail−glasses, straining the liquid through the handkerchief. Then he poured the filtrate, if I may call it such, back into the original glass. A second he treated in the same way, and a third. He had nearly completed the round of the table when I heard a light step.

My warning came only just in time. It was Burleigh. He saw us standing now in the colonnade, made some hasty remark, then walked on, as if in search for some one. Had it been interest in Leontine or in the dining−room that had drawn him thither?

Kennedy was now looking closely at the handkerchief, and I looked also. In the glasses had been innumerable little seeds as if from the fruit juice used in concocting the appetizer. The fine meshes of the linen had extracted them. What were they?

I took one in my fingers and crushed it between my nails. There was an unmistakable odor of bitter almonds. What did it mean?

We had no time now for speculation. Our prolonged absence might be noticed and we hastened to join the other guests after finishing the round of glasses in which he had been interrupted.

How, in my suppressed excitement, I managed to get through that dinner I do not know. It was a brilliant affair, yet I found that I had completely lost my appetite, as well one might after having observed Kennedy's sleuthing.

However, the dinner progressed, though each course that brought it nearer a conclusion afforded me an air of relief. I was quite ready when, over the coffee, Kennedy contrived to make some excuse for us, promising to call again and perhaps to visit the Erickson plantation.

In the secrecy of our room in the little hotel, Craig was soon deeply buried in making use of his traveling laboratory. As he worked I could no longer restrain my impatience. "What about that little bottle of keratin?" I asked, eagerly.

"Oh yes," he replied, not looking up from the tests he was making. "Well, keratin, you know, is also called epidermose. It is a scleroprotein present largely in cuticular structures such as hair, nails, horn. I believe it is usually prepared from pieces of horn steeped in pepsin, hydrochloric acid, and water for a long time. Then the residue is dissolved in ammonia and acetic acid."

"But what's its use?" I demanded. "You said it was harmless."

"Why, the pepsin of the stomach won't digest it," he returned. "For that reason its chief use is for coating what are known as 'enteric capsules.' Anything coated with keratin is carried on through the stomach into the intestines. It is used much in hot countries in order to introduce drugs into the intestines in the treatment of the tropical diseases that affect the intestines." He paused and devoted his entire attention to his work, but he had told me enough to assure me that at least the bottle of keratin I had found had proved to be a clue.

I waited as long as I could, then interrupted again. "What are the seeds?" I queried. "Have you found out yet?"

He paused as though he had not quite finished his hasty investigation, yet had found out enough to convince him. "There seem to be two kinds. I wish I had had time to keep each lot separate. Some of them are certainly

quite harmless. But there are others, I find, that have been soaked in nitro−benzol, artificial oil of bitter almonds. Even a few drops, such as might be soaked up in this way, might be fatal. The new and interesting phase, to me, is that they were all carefully coated with keratin. Really, they are keratin−coated enteric capsules of nitro−benzol, a deadly poison."

I looked at him, aghast at what some of us had been rescued from by his prompt action.

"You see," he went on, excitedly, "that is why the autopsies probably showed nothing. These doctors down here sought for a poison in the stomach. But if the poison had been in the stomach the odor alone would have betrayed it. You smelt it when you crushed a seed. But the poisoning had been devised to avoid just that chance of discovery. There was no poison in the stomach. Death was delayed long enough, also, to divert suspicion from the real poisoner. Some one has been diabolically clever in covering up the crimes."

I could only gasp my amazement. "Then," I blurted out, "you think the Ericksons—"

Our door burst open. It was Burke, in wild excitement.

"Has anybody—died?" I managed to demand.

He seemed not to hear, but dashed to the window and threw it open. "Look!" he exclaimed.

We did. In the late twilight, through the open sash we could see the landlocked basin of the harbor. But it was not that at which Burke pointed. On the horizon an ugly dark cloud rose menacingly. In the strange, unearthly murkiness, I could see people of the town pouring out into the narrow streets, wildly, fearfully, with frantic cries and gesticulations.

For a moment I gazed at the sight blankly. Then I realized that sweeping on us was one of those sudden, deadly West−Indian hurricanes. Our harbor was sheltered from the north and east winds. But this wind was southern born, rare, oncoming in a fury against which we had no protection.

Hastily closing his armamentarium, Kennedy also hurried out on the street. The gale had become terrific already in the few minutes that had elapsed. From our terrace we could see the water, gray and olive, with huge white breakers, like gnashing teeth, coming on to rend and tear everything in their path. It was as though we stood in an amphitheater provided by nature for a great spectacle, the bold headlands standing out like the curves of a stadium.

I looked about. The Ericksons had just driven up with Burleigh and Leontine, as well as Whitson, all of whom were stopping at our hotel, and were about to take Sydney on to the consulate when the approach of the storm warned them to stay.

Leontine had hurried into the hotel, evidently fearful of the loss of something she treasured, and the rest were standing apart from the trees and buildings, where the formation of the land offered some protection. As we joined them I peered at the pale faces in the ghastly, unnatural light. Was it, in a sense, retribution?

Suddenly, without further warning, the storm broke. Trees were turned up by roots, like weeds, the buildings rocked as if they had been houses of cards. It was a wild, catastrophic spectacle.

"Leontine," I heard a voice mutter by my side, as a form catapulted itself past through the murkiness into the crazily swaying hotel. It was Burleigh. I turned to speak to Kennedy. He was gone. Where to find him I had no idea. The force of the wind was such that search was impossible. All we could do was to huddle back of such protection as the earth afforded against the million needles of rain that cut into our faces.

The wind almost blew me flat to the earth as, no longer able to stand the suspense, I stumbled toward the hotel, thinking perhaps he had gone to save his armamentarium, although if I had stopped to think I should have realized that that strong box was about the safest piece of property on the island.

I was literally picked up and hurled against an object in the darkness—a man. "In the room—more keratin—more seeds."

It was Kennedy. He had taken advantage of the confusion to make a search which otherwise might have been more difficult. Together we struggled back to our shelter.

Just then came a crash, as the hotel crumpled under the fierce stress of the storm. Out of the doorway struggled a figure just in time to clear the falling walls. It was Burleigh, a huge gash from a beam streaming blood down his forehead which the rain washed away almost as it oozed. In his arms, clinging about his neck, was Leontine, no longer the sophisticated, but in the face of this primeval danger just a woman. Burleigh staggered with his burden a little apart from us, and in spite of everything I could fancy him blessing the storm that had given him his opportunity.

Far from abating, the storm seemed increasing in fury, as though all the devils of the underworld were vexed at anything remaining undestroyed. It seemed as if even the hills on which the old pirates had once had their castles must be rocking.

"My God!" exclaimed a thick voice, as an arm shot out, pointing toward the harbor.

There was the Arroyo tugging at every extra mooring that could be impressed into service. The lighters had broken or been cut away and were scudding, destruction−bent, squarely at the shore almost below us. A moment and they had crashed on the beach, a mass of timbers and spars, while the pounding waves tore open and flung about heavy cases as though they were mere toys.

Then, almost as suddenly as it had come, the storm began to abate, the air cleared, and nothing remained but the fury of the waves.

"Look!" exclaimed Kennedy, pointing down at the strange wreckage that strewed the beach. "Does that look like agricultural machinery?" We strained our eyes. Kennedy did not pause. "The moment I heard that arms were getting into Mexico I suspected that somewhere here in the Caribbean munitions were being transhipped. Perhaps they have been sent to Atlantic ports ostensibly for the Allies. They have got down here disguised. Even before the storm exposed them I had reasoned it out. From this port, the key to the vast sweep of mainland, I reasoned that they were being taken over to secret points on the coast where big ships could not safely go. It was here that blockade−runners were refitted in our Civil War. It is here that this new gun−running plot has been laid."

He turned quickly to Sydney. "The only obstacle between the transfer of the arms and success was the activity of an American consulate. Those lighters were not to carry goods to other islands. They were really destined for Mexico. It was profitable. And the scheme for removing opposition was evidently safe."

Kennedy was holding up another bottle of keratin and some fruit seeds. "I found these in a room in the hotel," he added.

I did not comprehend. "But," I cut in, "the hand−bag—the dinner— what of them?"

"A plant—a despicable trespass on hospitality—all part of a scheme to throw the guilt on some one else, worthy of a renegade and traitor."

Craig wheeled suddenly, then added, with an incisive gesture, "I suppose you know that there is reputed to have been on one of these hills the headquarters of the old pirate, Teach—'the mildest manner'd man that ever scuttled ship or cut a throat!'"

Kennedy paused, then added, quickly, "In respect to covering up your gun−running, Whitson, you are superior even to Teach!"

XII. THE SUNKEN TREASURE

"Get story Everson and bride yacht Belle Aventure
seeking treasure sunk Gulf liner Antilles."

Kennedy and I had proceeded after a few leisurely days in St. Thomas to Porto Rico. We had no particular destination, and San Juan rather appealed to us as an objective point because it was American.

It was there that I found waiting for me the above message by wireless from the Star in New York.

San Juan was, as we had anticipated, a thoroughly Americanized town and I lost no time in getting around at once to the office of the leading newspaper, the Colonial News. The editor, Kenmore, proved to be a former New York reporter who had come out in answer to an advertisement by the proprietors of the paper.

"What's the big story here now?" I asked by way of preface, expecting to find that colonial newspapermen were provincial.

"What's the big story?" repeated Kenmore, impatiently pushing aside a long leader on native politics and regarding me thoughtfully. "Well, I'm not superstitious, but a honeymoon spent trying to break into Davy Jones's locker for sunken treasure—I guess that's a good story, isn't it?"

I showed him my message and he smiled. "You see, I was right," he exclaimed. "They're searching now at the Cay d'Or, the Golden Key, one of the southernmost of the Bahamas, I suppose you would call it. I wish I was like you. I'd like to get away from this political stuff long enough to get the story."

He puffed absently on a fragrant native cigar. "I met them all when they were here, before they started," he resumed, reminiscently. "It was certainly a picturesque outfit—three college chums—one of them on his honeymoon, and the couple chaperoning the bride's sister. There was one of the college boys− −a fellow named Gage—who fairly made news."

"How was that?" inquired Kennedy, who had accompanied me, full of zest at the prospect of mixing in a story so romantic.

"Oh, I don't know that it was his fault—altogether," replied Kenmore. "There's a young lady here in the city, the daughter of a pilot, Dolores Guiteras. She had been a friend of some one in the expedition, I believe. I suppose that's how Gage met her. I don't think either of them really cared for each other. Perhaps she was a bit jealous of the ladies of the party. I don't know anything much about it, only I remember one night in the cafe of the Palace Hotel, I thought Gage and another fellow would fight a duel— almost—until Everson dropped in and patched the affair up and the next day his yacht left for Golden Key."

"I wish I'd been here to go with them," I considered. "How do you suppose I'll be able to get out there, now?"

"You might be able to hire a tug," shrugged Kenmore. "The only one I know is that of Captain Guiteras. He's the father of this Dolores I told you about."

The suggestion seemed good, and after a few moments more of conversation, absorbing what little Kenmore knew, we threaded our way across the city to the home of the redoubtable Guiteras and his pretty daughter.

Guiteras proved to be a man of about fifty, a sturdy, muscular fellow, his face bronzed by the tropical sun.

I had scarcely broached the purpose of my visit when his restless brown eyes seemed literally to flash. "No, sir," he exclaimed, emphatically. "You cannot get me to go on any such expedition. Mr. Everson came here first and tried to hire my tug. I wouldn't do it. No, sir—he had to get one from Havana. Why, the whole thing is unlucky—hoodooed, you call it. I will not touch it."

"But," I remonstrated, surprised at his unexpected vehemence, "I am not asking you to join the expedition. We are only going to—"

"No, no," he interrupted. "I will not consider it. I—"

He cut short his remarks as a young woman, radiant in her Latin− American beauty, opened the door, hesitated at sight of us, then entered at a nod from him. We did not need to be told that this was the Dolores whom Kenmore's rumor had credited with almost wrecking Everson's expedition at the start. She was a striking type, her

face, full of animation and fire, betraying more of passion than of intellect.

A keen glance of inquiry from her wonderful eyes at her father was followed by a momentary faraway look, and she remained silent, while Guiteras paused, as if considering something.

"They say," he continued, slowly, his features drawn sharply, "that there was loot of Mexican churches on that ship—the jewels of Our Lady of the Rosary at Puebla.... That ship was cursed, I tell you!" he added, scowling darkly.

"No one was lost on it, though," I ventured at random.

"I suppose you never heard the story of the Antilles?" he inquired, turning swiftly toward me. Then, without stopping: "She had just sailed from San Juan before she was wrecked—on her way to New York from Vera Cruz with several hundred Mexican refugees. Treasure? Yes; perhaps millions, money that belonged to wealthy families in Mexico—and some that had the curse on it.

"You asked a moment ago if everybody wasn't rescued. Well, everybody was rescued from the wreck except Captain Driggs. I don't know what happened. No one knows. The fire had got into the engine−room and the ship was sinking fast. Passengers saw him, pale, like a ghost, some said. Others say there was blood streaming from his head. When the last boat−load left they couldn't find him. They had to put off without him. It was a miracle that no one else was lost."

"How did the fire start?" inquired Kennedy, much interested.

"No one knows that, either," answered Guiteras, shaking his head slowly. "I think it must have been smoldering in the hold for hours before it was discovered. Then the pumps either didn't work properly or it had gained too great headway for them. I've heard many people talk of it and of the treasure. No, sir, you wouldn't get me to touch it. Maybe you'll call it superstition. But I won't have anything to do with it. I wouldn't go with Mr. Everson and I won't go with you. Perhaps you don't understand, but I can't help it."

Dolores had stood beside her father while he was speaking, but had said nothing, though all the time she had been regarding us from beneath her long black eyelashes. Arguments with the old pilot had no effect, but I could not help feeling that somehow she was on our side, that whether she shared his fears and prejudices, her heart was really somewhere near the Key of Gold.

There seemed to be nothing for us to do but wait until some other way turned up to get out to the expedition, or perhaps Dolores succeeded in changing the captain's mind. We bowed ourselves out, not a little puzzled by the enigma of the obdurate old man and his pretty daughter. Try as I might among the busy shipping of the port, I could find no one else willing at any reasonable price to change his plans to accommodate us.

It was early the next morning that a young lady, very much perturbed, called on us at our hotel, scarcely waiting even the introduction of her plainly engraved card bearing the name, Miss Norma Sanford.

"Perhaps you know of my sister, Asta Sanford, Mrs. Orrin Everson," she began, speaking very rapidly as if under stress. "We're down here on Asta's honeymoon in Orrin's yacht, the Belle Aventure." Craig and I exchanged glances, but she did not give us a chance to interrupt.

"It all seems so sudden, so terrible," she cried, in a burst of wild, incoherent feeling. "Yesterday Bertram Traynor died, and we've put back to San Juan with his body. I'm so worried for Orrin and my sister. I heard you were here, Professor Kennedy, and I couldn't rest until I saw you."

She was looking anxiously at Craig. I wondered whether she had heard of our visit to the Guiterases and what she knew about that other woman.

"I don't quite understand," interposed Kennedy, with an effort to calm her. "Why do you fear for your sister and Mr. Everson? Was there something—suspicious—about the death of Mr. Traynor?"

"Indeed I think there was," she replied, quickly. "None of us has any idea how it happened. Let me tell you about our party. You see, there are three college chums, Orrin and two friends, Bertram Traynor and Donald Gage. They were all on a cruise down here last winter, the year after they graduated. It was in San Juan that Orrin first met Mr. Dominick, who was the purser on the Antilles— you know, that big steamer of the Gulf Line that was burned last year and went down with seven million dollars aboard?"

Kennedy nodded to the implied query, and she went on: "Mr. Dominick was among those saved, but Captain Driggs was lost with his ship. Mr. Dominick had been trying to interest some one here in seeking the treasure. They knew about where the Antilles went down, and the first thing he wanted to do was to locate the wreck exactly. After that was done of course Mr. Dominick knew about the location of the ship's strong room and all

that."

"That, of course, was common knowledge to any one interested enough to find out, though," suggested Kennedy.

"Of course," she agreed. "Well, a few months later Orrin met Mr. Dominick again, in New York. In the mean time he had been talking the thing over with various people and had become acquainted with a man who had once been a diver for the Interocean Marine Insurance Company—Owen Kinsale. Anyhow, so the scheme grew. They incorporated a company, the Deep Sea Engineering Company, to search for the treasure. That is how Orrin started. They are using his yacht and Mr. Dominick is really in command, though Mr. Kinsale has the actual technical knowledge."

She paused, but again her feelings seemed to get the better of her. "Oh," she cried, "I've been afraid all along, lately. It's dangerous work. And then, the stories that have been told of the ship and the treasure. It seems ill−fated. Professor Kennedy," she appealed, "I wish you would come and see us. We're not on the yacht just now. We came ashore as soon as we arrived back, and Asta and Orrin are at the Palace Hotel now. Perhaps Orrin can tell you more. If you can do nothing more than quiet my fears—"

Her eyes finished the sentence. Norma Sanford was one of those girls who impress you as quite capable of taking care of themselves. But in the presence of the tragedy and a danger which she felt but could not seem to define, she felt the need of outside assistance and did not hesitate to ask it. Nor was Kennedy slow in responding. He seemed to welcome a chance to help some one in distress.

We found Everson and his young wife at the hotel, quite different now from the care−free adventurers who had set out only a few days before to wrest a fortune from chance.

I had often seen portraits of the two Sanford sisters in the society pages of the papers in the States and knew that the courtship of Orrin Everson and Asta Sanford had been a true bit of modern romance.

Asta Everson was a unique type of girl. She had begun by running fast motor cars and boats. That had not satisfied her, and she had taken up aviation. Once, even, she had tried deep−sea diving herself. It seemed as if she had been born with the spirit of adventure.

To win her, Everson had done about everything from Arctic exploration one summer when he was in college to big−game hunting in Africa, and mountain−climbing in the Andes. Odd though the romance might seem to be, one could not help feeling that the young couple were splendidly matched in their tastes. Each had that spirit of restlessness which, at least, sent them out playing at pioneering.

Everson had organized the expedition quite as much in the spirit of revolt against a prosaic life of society at home as for gain. It had appealed strongly to Asta. She had insisted that nothing so much as a treasure hunt would be appropriate for their wedding− trip and they had agreed on the unconventional. Accordingly, she and her sister had joined Everson and his party, Norma, though a year younger, being quite like her sister in her taste for excitement.

"Of course, you understand," explained Everson, as he hurriedly tried to give us some idea of what had happened, "we knew that the Antilles had sunk somewhere off the Cay d'Or. It was first a question of locating her. That was all that we had been doing when Bertram died. It is terrible, terrible. I can't believe it. I can't understand it."

In spite of his iron nerve, the tragedy seemed to have shaken Everson profoundly.

"You had done nothing that might have been dangerous?" asked Kennedy, pointedly.

"Nothing," emphasized Everson. "You see, we located the wreck in a way somewhat similar to the manner in which they sweep the seas for mines and submarines. It was really very simple, though it took us some time. All we did was to drag a wire at a fixed depth between the yacht and the tug, or rather, I suppose you'd almost call it a trawler, which I chartered from Havana. What we were looking for was to have the wire catch on some obstruction. It did, too, not once, but many times, due to the unevenness of the ocean bed. Once we located a wreck, but it was in shallow water, a small boat, not the one we were looking for."

"But you succeeded finally?"

"Yes, only day before yesterday we located her. We marked the spot with a buoy and were getting ready for real work. It was just after that that Bertram was taken ill and died so suddenly. We've left Dominick, Kinsale, Gage, and the rest on the trawler there, while I came here with Traynor's body. God! but it was awful to have to send the news back to New York. I don't know what to think or what to do."

"How did he die?" asked Kennedy, endeavoring to gain the confidence of young Everson. "Do you recall any of his symptoms?"

"It came on him so suddenly," he replied, "that we hadn't much time to think. As nearly as we could make out, it began with a faintness and difficulty in breathing. We asked him how he felt— but it seemed as if he was deaf. I thought it might be the 'bends'—you know, caisson disease—and we started to put him in the medical lock which we had for the divers, but before we could get it ready he was unconscious. It was all so sudden that it stunned us. I can't make it out at all."

Neither Asta nor Norma seemed able to tell anything. In fact, the blow had been so swift and unexpected, so incomprehensible, that it had left them thoroughly alarmed.

The body of Traynor had already been brought ashore and placed in a local undertaking shop. With Everson, Kennedy and I hastened to visit it.

Traynor had been an athlete and powerfully built, which made his sudden death seem all the more strange. Without a word, Craig set to work immediately examining his body, while we stood aside, watching him in anxious silence. Kennedy consumed the greater part of the morning in his careful investigation, and after some time Everson began to get restless, wondering how his wife and sister− in−law were getting on in his absence. To keep him company I returned to the hotel with him, leaving Kennedy to pursue his work alone.

There was nothing much that either of us could say or do, but I thought I observed, on closer acquaintance with Norma, that she had something weighing on her mind. Was it a suspicion of which she had not told us? Evidently she was not prepared to say anything yet, but I determined, rather than try to quiz her, to tell Kennedy, in the hope that she might confide in him what she would not breathe to any one else.

It was perhaps an hour or more later that we returned to Craig. He was still at work, though from his manner it was evident that his investigations had begun to show something, however slight.

"Have you found anything?" asked Everson, eagerly.

"I think I have," returned Craig, measuring his words carefully. "Of course you know the dangers of diving and the view now accepted regarding the rapid effervescence of the gases which are absorbed in the body fluids during exposure to pressure. I think you know that experiment has proved that when the pressure is suddenly relieved the gas is liberated in bubbles within the body. That is what seems to do the harm. His symptoms, as you described them, seemed to indicate that. It is like charged water in a bottle. Take out the cork and the gas inside which has been under pressure bubbles up. In the human body, air and particularly the nitrogen in the air, literally form death bubbles."

Everson said nothing as he regarded Kennedy's face searchingly, and Craig went on: "Set free in the spinal cord, for instance, such bubbles may cause partial paralysis, or in the heart may lead to stoppage of the circulation. In this case I am quite sure that what I have found indicates air in the arteries, the heart, and the blood vessels of the brain. It must have been a case of air embolism, insufflation."

Though Everson seemed all along to have suspected something of the sort, Kennedy's judgment left him quite as much at a loss for an explanation. Kennedy seemed to understand, as he went on:

"I have tried to consider all the ways such a thing could have happened," he considered. "It is possible that air might have been introduced into the veins by a hypodermic needle or other instrument. But I find no puncture of the skin or other evidence that would support that theory. I have looked for a lesion of the lungs, but find none. Then how could it have occurred? Had he done any real deep diving?"

Everson shook his head slowly. "No," he replied. "As I said, it wouldn't have been so incomprehensible if he had. Besides, if we had been diving, we should have been on the lookout. No, Bertram had only tested the apparatus once, after we located the wreck. He didn't much more than go under the surface—nothing like the practice dives we all made up in Long Island Sound before we came down here. He was only testing the pumps and other things to see whether they had stood the voyage. Why, it was nothing at all! I don't see how it could have given any one the 'bends'—much less a fellow like Traynor. Why, I think he could have stood more than Kinsale with a little practice. Kennedy, I can't get it out of my mind that there's something about this that isn't RIGHT."

Craig regarded Everson gravely. "Frankly," he confessed, "I must say that I don't understand it myself—at this distance."

"Would you come out to the Key with me?" hastened Everson, as though grasping at a possible solution.

"I should be delighted to help you in any manner that I can," returned Craig, heartily.

Everson could not find words to express his gratitude as we hurried back to the hotel. In the excitement, I had completely forgotten the despatch from the Star, but now I suddenly realized that here, ready to hand, was the only way of getting out to the Key of Gold and securing the story.

Asta Everson and Norma, especially, were overjoyed at the news that Kennedy had consented to accompany them back to the wreck. Evidently they had great faith in him, from what they had heard at home.

Accordingly, Everson lost no time in preparing to return to the yacht. Nothing more now could be done for poor Traynor, and delay might mean much in clearing up the mystery, if mystery it should prove. We were well on our way toward the landing place before I realized that we were going over much the same route that Kennedy and I had taken the day before to reach the home of Guiteras.

I was just about to say something about it to Kennedy, and of the impression that Norma had made on me, when suddenly a figure darted from around a corner and confronted us. We stopped in surprise. It was no other than Dolores herself—not the quiet, subdued Dolores we had seen the day before, but an almost wild, passionate creature. What it was that had transformed her I could not imagine. It was not ourselves that she seemed to seek, nor yet the Eversons. She did not pause until she had come close to Norma herself.

For a moment the two women, so different in type, faced each other, Dolores fiery with the ardent beauty of her race, Norma pulsating with life and vigor, yet always mistress of herself.

"I warn you!" cried Dolores, unable to restrain herself. "You thought the other was yours—and he was not. Do not seek revenge. He is mine—MINE, I tell you. Win your own back again. I was only making sport of him. But mine—beware!"

For a moment Norma gazed at her, then, without a word, turned aside and walked on. Another instant and Dolores was gone as suddenly as she had appeared. Asta looked inquiringly, but Norma made no attempt at explanation. What did it mean? Had it anything to do with the dispute in the hotel which Kenmore had witnessed?

At the landing we parted for a time with Everson, to return to our hotel and get what little we needed, including Kennedy's traveling laboratory, while Everson prepared quarters for our reception on the yacht.

"What do you make of that Dolores incident?" I hastened to ask the moment we were alone.

"I don't know," he replied, "except that I feel it has an important bearing on the case. There is something that Norma hasn't told us, I fear."

While we waited for a wagon to transfer our goods to the dock, Kennedy took a moment to call up Kenmore on the News. As he turned to me from the telephone, I saw that what he had learned had not helped him much in his idea of the case.

"It was the Interocean Company which had insured the Antilles," was all he said.

Instantly I thought of Kinsale and his former connection. Was he secretly working with them still? Was there a plot to frustrate Everson's plans? At least the best thing to do was to get out to the wreck and answer our many questions at first hand.

The Belle Aventure was a trim yacht of perhaps seventy feet, low, slim, and graceful, driven by a powerful gas−engine and capable of going almost anywhere. An hour later we were aboard and settled in a handsomely appointed room, where Craig lost no time in establishing his temporary traveling crime clinic.

It was quite late before we were able to start, for Everson had a number of commissions to attend to on this his first visit to port since he had set out so blithely. Finally, however, we had taken aboard all that he needed and we slipped out quietly past the castle on the point guarding the entrance to the harbor. All night we plowed ahead over the brilliant, starry, tropical sea, making splendid time, for the yacht was one of the fastest that had ever been turned out by the builders.

Now and then I could see that Kennedy was furtively watching Norma, in the hope that she might betray whatever secret it was she was guarding so jealously. Though she betrayed nothing, I felt sure that it had to do with some member of the expedition and that it was a more than ordinarily complicated affair of the heart. The ladies had retired, leaving us with Everson in the easy wicker chairs on the after−deck.

"I can't seem to get out of my mind, Everson, that meeting with the Spanish girl on the street," suddenly remarked Kennedy, in the hope of getting something by surprise. "You see, I had already heard of a little unpleasantness in a hotel cafe, before the expedition started. Somehow I feel that there must be some connection."

For a moment Everson regarded Kennedy under the soft rays of the electric light under the awning as it

swayed in the gentle air, then looked out over the easy swell of the summer sea.

"I don't understand it myself," he remarked, at length, lowering his voice. "When we came down here Dominick knew that girl, Dolores, and of course Kinsale met her right away, too. I thought Gage was head over ears in love with Norma—and I guess he is. Only that night in the cafe I just didn't like the way he proposed a toast to Dolores. He must have met her that day. Maybe he was a bit excited. What she said to−day might mean that it was her fault. I don't know. But since we've been out to the Key I fancy Norma has been pretty interested in Dominick. And Kinsale doesn't hesitate to show that he likes her. It all sets Donald crazy. It's so mixed up. I can't make anything of it. And Norma—well, even Asta can't get anything out of her. I wish to Heaven you could straighten the thing out."

We talked for some time, without getting much more light than Everson had been able at first to shed on the affair, and finally we retired, having concluded that only time and events would enable us to get at the truth.

It was early in the morning that I was wakened by a change in the motion of the boat. There was very little vibration from the engine, but this motion was different. I looked out of the port− hole which had been very cleverly made to resemble a window and found that we had dropped anchor.

The Key of Gold was a beautiful green island, set, like a sparkling gem, in a sea of deepest turquoise. Slender pines with a tuft of green at the top rose gracefully from the wealth of foliage below and contrasted with the immaculate white of the sandy beach that glistened in the morning sun. Romance seemed to breathe from the very atmosphere of the place.

We found that the others on the yacht were astir, too, and, dressing hastily, we went out on deck. Across the dancing waves, which seemed to throw a mocking challenge to the treasure−seekers to find what they covered, we could see the trawler. Already a small power−boat had put out from her and was plowing along toward us.

It was as the boat came alongside us that we met Gage for the first time. He was a tall, clean−cut fellow, but even at a glance I recognized that his was an unusual type. I fancied that both proctors and professors had worried over him when he was in college.

Particularly I tried to discover how he acted when he met Norma. It was easy to see that he was very eager to greet her, but I fancied that there was some restraint on her part. Perhaps she felt that we were watching and was on her guard.

Dominick greeted Everson warmly. He was a man of about thirty−five and impressed one as having seen a great deal of the world. His position as purser had brought him into intimate contact with many people, and he seemed to have absorbed much from them. I could imagine that, like many people who had knocked about a great deal, he might prove a very fascinating person to know.

Kinsale, on the other hand, was a rather silent fellow and therefore baffling. In his own profession of deep−sea diving he was an expert, but beyond that I do not think he had much except an ambition to get ahead, which might be praiseworthy or not, according as he pursued it.

I fancied that next to Everson himself, Norma placed more confidence in Dominick than in any of the others, which seemed to be quite natural, though it noticeably piqued Gage. On the part of all three, Gage, Dominick, and Kinsale, it was apparent that they were overjoyed at the return of Norma, which also was quite natural, for even a treasure−hunt has hours of tedium and there could be nothing tedious when she was about. Asta was undoubtedly the more fascinating, but she was wrapped up in Everson. It was not long before Kennedy and I also fell under the spell of Norma's presence and personality.

We hurried through breakfast and lost no time in accepting Everson's invitation to join him, with the rest, in the little power−boat on a visit to the trawler.

It was Dominick who took upon himself the task of explaining to us the mysteries of treasure−hunting as we saw them. "You see," he remarked, pointing out to us what looked almost like a strangely developed suit of armor, "we have the most recent deep−sea diving− outfit which will enable us to go from two hundred to three hundred feet down—farther, and establish a record if we had to do it. It won't be necessary, though. The Antilles lies in about two hundred and fifty feet of water, we have found. This armor has to be strong, for, with the air pressure inside, it must resist a pressure of nearly half a pound per square inch for each foot we go—to be exact, something like a hundred and five pounds per square inch at the depth of the wreck. Perhaps if Traynor had been diving we might have thought that that was the trouble."

It was the first reference since we arrived to the tragedy. "He had only had the suit on once," went on

Dominick, confirming Everson, "and that was merely to test the pumps and valves and joints. Even Kinsale, here, hasn't been down. Still, we haven't been idle. I have something to report. With our instruments we have discovered that the ship has heeled over and that it will be a bit harder job to get into my office and get out the safe than we hoped—but feasible."

Kennedy showed more interest in the diving apparatus than he had shown in anything else so far. The trawler was outfitted most completely as a tender, having been anchored over the exact spot at which the descents were to be made, held by four strong cables, with everything in readiness for action.

I saw him cast a quick glance at the others. For the moment Dominick, Gage, and Kinsale seemed to have forgotten us in their interest explaining to Norma what had been accomplished in her absence. He seized the occasion to make an even closer examination of the complicated apparatus. So carefully had accident been guarded against that even a device for the purification of the air had been installed in the machine which forced the fresh air down to the diver, compressed.

It was this apparatus which I saw Kennedy studying most, especially one part where the air was passed through a small chamber containing a chemical for the removal of carbon dioxide. As he looked up, I saw a peculiar expression on his face. Quickly he removed the chemical, leaving the tube through which the air passed empty.

"I think the air will be pure enough without any such treatment," he remarked, glancing about to be sure no one had observed.

"How is that?" I inquired, eagerly.

"Well, you know air is a mechanical mixture of gases, mainly oxygen and nitrogen. Here's something that gives it an excess of nitrogen and a smaller percentage of oxygen. Nitrogen is the more dangerous gas for one under compressed air. It is the more inert nitrogen that refuses to get out of the blood after one has been under pressure, that forms the bubbles of gas which cause all the trouble, the 'bends,' compressed−air sickness, you know."

"Then that is how Traynor died?" I whispered, coming hastily to the conclusion. "Some one placed the wrong salt in there—took out oxygen, added nitrogen, instead of removing carbon dioxide?"

Norma had turned toward us. It was too early for Kennedy to accuse anybody, whatever might be his suspicions. He could not yet come from under cover. "I think so," was all he replied.

A moment later the group joined us. "No one has been down on the wreck yet?" inquired Craig, at which Everson turned quickly to the three companions he had left in charge, himself anxious to know.

"No," replied Kinsale before any one else could answer. "Mr. Dominick thought we'd better wait until you came back."

"Then I should like to be the first," cut in Craig, to my utter surprise. Remonstrance had no effect with him. Neither Norma nor Asta could dissuade him. As for the rest of us, our objections seemed rather to confirm him in his purpose.

Accordingly, in spite of the danger, which now no one no more than he knew, all the preparations were made for the first dive. With the aid of Kinsale, whom I watched closely, though no more so than Craig, he donned the heavy suit of rubberized reinforced canvas, had the leads placed on his feet and finally was fitted with the metal head and the "bib"—the whole weighing hardly short of three hundred pounds. It was with serious misgiving that I saw him go over the side of the trawler and shoot down into the water with its dark mystery and tragedy.

The moments that he was down seemed interminable. Suspiciously I watched every move that the men made, fearful that they might do something. I longed for the technical knowledge that would have enabled me to handle the apparatus. I tried to quiet my fears by reasoning that Craig must have had perfect confidence in the value of his discovery if he were willing to risk his life on it, yet I felt that at least a show of vigilance on my part might bluff any one off from an attempt to tamper again with the air−supply. I stuck about closely.

Yet, when there came a hasty signal on the indicator from below, although I felt that he had been down for ages, I knew that it had been only a very short time. Could it be a signal of trouble? Had some one again tampered with the apparatus?

Would they never bring him up? It seemed as if they were working fearfully slow. I remembered how quickly he had shot down. What had seemed then only a matter of seconds and minutes now seemed hours. It was only by sheer will power that I restrained myself as I realized that going under the air pressure might be done safely quite

fast, that he must come out slowly, by stages, that over the telephone that connected with his helmet he was directing the decompression in accordance with the latest knowledge that medical science had derived of how to avoid the dread caisson disease.

I don't know when I have felt more relief than I did at seeing his weird headgear appear at the surface. The danger from the "bends" might not be entirely over yet, but at least it was Craig himself, safe, at last.

As he came over the side of the trawler I ran to him. It was like trying to greet a giant in that outlandish suit which was so clumsy out of the water. Craig's back was turned to the others, and when I realized the reason I stood aghast. He had brought up a skull and had handed the gruesome thing to me with a motion of secrecy. Meanwhile he hastened to get out of the cumbersome suit, and, to my delight, showed no evidence yet of any bad effects.

That he should have made the descent and returned so successfully I felt must be a surprise to some one. Who was it? I could not help thinking of Kinsale again. Was he working for two masters? Was he still employed by the insurance company? Was this a scheme to capture all the rich salvage of the ship instead of that percentage to which Everson had secured an agreement with the underwriters?

Kennedy lost no time in getting back to the Belle Aventure with the skull which I had concealed for him. It was a strange burden and I was not loath to resign it to him. None of the others, apparently, knew that he had brought up anything with him, and to all questions he replied as though he had merely been testing out the apparatus and, except in a most cursory way, had not made an examination of the ship, although what he had observed confirmed the investigations they had already made from the surface.

In our cabin, Kennedy set to work immediately after opening his traveling laboratory and taking from it a small kit of tools and some materials that looked almost like those for an actor's make− up.

I saw that he wished to be left alone and retired as gracefully as I could, determined to employ the time in watching the others. I found Norma seated in one of the wicker chairs on the after−deck, talking earnestly with Dominick, and, hesitating whether I should interrupt them, I paused between the library and the sumptuously fitted main saloon. I was glad that I did, for just that moment of hesitation was enough for me to surprise a man peering out at them through the curtains of a window, with every evidence of intense dislike of the situation. Looking closer, I saw that it was Gage. Had I expected anything of the sort I should have gone even more cautiously. As it was, though I surprised him, he heard me in time to conceal his real intentions by some trivial action.

It seemed as if our arrival had been succeeded by a growth of suspicion among the members of the little party. Each, as far as I could make out, was now on guard, and, remembering that Kennedy had often said that that was a most fruitful time, since it was just under such circumstances that even the cleverest could not help incriminating himself, I hastened back to let Craig know how matters were. He was at work now on a most grotesque labor, and, as he placed on it the finishing touches, he talked abstractedly.

"What I am using, Walter," he explained, "might be called a new art. Lately science has perfected the difficult process of reconstructing the faces of human beings of whom only the skull or a few bones, perhaps, are obtainable.

"To the unskilled observer a fleshless skull presents little human likeness and certainly conveys no notion of the exact appearance in life of the person to whom it belonged. But by an ingenious system of building up muscles and skin upon the bones of the skull this appearance can be reproduced with scientific accuracy.

"The method, I might say, has been worked out independently by Professor von Froriep, in Germany, and by Dr. Henri Martin, in France. Its essential principle consists in ascertaining from the examination of many corpses the normal thickness of flesh that overlies a certain bone in a certain type of face. From these calculations the scientists by elaborate processes build up a face on the skull."

I watched him, with an uncontrollable fascination. "For instance," he went on, "a certain type of bone always has nearly the same thickness of muscle over it. A very fine needle with graduations of hundredths of an inch is used in these measurements. As I have done here, a great number of tiny plaster pyramids varying in height according to the measurements obtained by these researches are built up over the skull, representing the thickness of the muscles. The next step will be to connect them together by a layer of clay the surface of which is flush with the tips of the pyramids. Then wax and grease paint and a little hair will complete it. You see, it is really scientific restoration of the face. I must finish it. Meanwhile, I wish you would watch Norma. I'll join you in a short time."

Norma was not on deck when I returned, nor did I see any one else for some time. I walked forward, and paused at the door to the little wireless−room on the yacht, intending to ask the operator if he had seen her.

"Where's Mr. Kennedy?" he inquired, before I had a chance to put my own question. "Some one has been in this wireless−room this morning and must have been sending messages. Things aren't as I left them. I think he ought to know."

Just then Everson himself came up from below, his face almost as white as the paint on the sides of his yacht. Without a word, he drew me aside, looking about fearfully as though he were afraid of being overheard. "I've just discovered half a dozen sticks of dynamite in the hold," he whispered, hoarsely, staring wide−eyed at me. "There was a timing device, set for to−night. I've severed it. Where's Kennedy?"

"Your wireless has been tampered with, too," I blurted out, telling what I had just learned.

We looked at each other blankly. Clearly some one had plotted to blow up the yacht and all of us on board. Without another word, I took his arm and we walked toward our state−room, where Kennedy was at work. As we entered the narrow passage to it I heard low voices. Some one was there before us. Kennedy had shut the door and was talking in the hall. As we turned the corner I saw that it was Norma, whom I had forgotten in the surprise of the two discoveries that had been so suddenly made.

As we approached she glanced significantly at Kennedy as if appealing to him to tell something. Before he could speak, Everson himself interrupted, telling of his discovery of the dynamite and of what the wireless operator had found.

There was a low exclamation from Norma. "It's a plot to kidnap me!" she cried, in a smothered voice. "Professor Kennedy—I told you I thought so!"

Everson and I could only look our inquiries at the startling new turn of events.

"Miss Sanford has just been to her state−room," hastily explained Craig. "There she found that some one had carefully packed up a number of her things and hidden them, as if waiting a chance to get them off safely. I think her intuition is correct. There would be no motive for robbery—here."

Vainly I tried to reason it out. As I thought, I recalled that Gage had seemed insanely jealous of both Dominick and Kinsale, whenever he saw either with Norma. Did Gage know more about these mysterious happenings than appeared? Why had he so persistently sought her? Had Norma instinctively fled from his attentions?

"Where are the others?" asked Craig, quickly. I turned to Everson. I had not yet had time to find out.

"Gone back to the trawler," he replied.

"Signal them to come aboard here directly," ordered Craig.

It seemed an interminable time as the message was broken out in flags to the trawler, which was not equipped with the wireless. Even the hasty explanation which Kennedy had to give to Asta Everson, as she came out of her cabin, wondering where Orrin had gone, served only to increase the suspense. It was as though we were living over a powder−magazine that threatened to explode at any moment. What did the treachery of one member of the expedition mean? Above all, who was it?

We had been so intent watching from the deck the all too slow approach of the little power−boat from the trawler that we had paid no attention to what was on our other quarter.

"A tug approaching, sir," reported the man on watch to Everson. "Seems to be heading for us, sir."

We turned to look. Who was she, friend or foe? We knew not what to expect. Everson, pale but with a firm grip on his nerves, did not move from the deck as the power−boat came alongside, and Dominick, Gage, and Kinsale swung themselves up the ladder to us.

"It's the tug of that pilot, Guiteras, sir," interposed the man who had spoken before. Not a word was spoken, though I fancied that a quiet smile flitted over Kennedy's face as we waited.

The tug ranged up alongside us. To my utter astonishment, I saw Dolores, her black eyes eagerly scanning our faces. Was she looking for Gage, I wondered? It was only a moment when the party that had put out from the tug also came tumbling aboard.

"I got your message, Kennedy, and brought Guiteras. He wouldn't join the expedition, but he thought more of his daughter than of anything else."

It was Kenmore, who had at last achieved his wish to get on the treasure−hunt story. Everson looked inquiringly at Craig.

"Message?" repeated Kennedy. "I sent no message."

It was Kenmore's turn to stare. Had some one hoaxed him into a wild−goose chase, after all?

"Nothing? About Dolores being deserted, and—"

"He shall marry my daughter!" boomed a gruff voice as Guiteras shouldered his way through the little group, his hand shooting back to a pocket where bulged a huge Colt.

Like a flash Kennedy, who had been watching, caught his wrist. "Just a second, Captain," he shouted, then turned to us, speaking rapidly and excitedly. "This thing has all been carefully, diabolically laid out. All who stood in the way of the whole of the treasure were to be eliminated. One person has sought to get it all—at any cost."

In Craig's own hand now gleamed a deadly automatic while with the other he held Guiteras's wrist.

"But," he added, tensely, "an insane passion has wrecked the desperate scheme. A woman has been playing a part—leading the man on to his own destruction in order to save the man she really loves."

I looked over at Norma. She was pale and agitated, then burning and nervous by turns. It was only by a most heroic effort that she seemed able to restrain herself, her eyes riveted on Kennedy's face, weighing every word to see whether it balanced with a feeling in her own heart.

"The Antilles," shot out Kennedy, suddenly, "was burned and sunk, not by accident, but with a purpose. That purpose has run through all the events I have seen—the use of Mr. Everson, his yacht, his money, his influence. Come!" He strode down the passage to our state−room, and we followed in awed silence.

"It is a vast, dastardly crime—to get the Mexican millions," he went on, pausing, his hand on the knob of the door while we crowded the narrow passage. "I have brought up from the wreck a skull which I found near a safe, unlocked so that entrance would be easy. The skull shows plainly that the man had been hit on the head by some blunt instrument, crushing him. Had he discovered something that it was inconvenient to know? You have heard the stories of the ill−fated ship—"

Craig flung open the door suddenly. We saw a weird face—the head apparently streaming blood from a ghastly wound. There was a shrill cry beside me.

"It's his ghost—Captain Driggs! God save me—it's his ghost come to haunt me and claim the treasure!"

I turned quickly. Dominick had broken down.

"You were—just leading him on—tell me—Norma." I turned again quickly. It was Gage, who had taken Norma's hand, quivering with excitement.

"You never cared for her?" she asked, with the anxiety that showed how in her heart she loved him.

"Never. It was part of the plot. I sent the message to get her here to show you. I didn't know you were playing a game—"

Suddenly the sharp crack of a pistol almost deafened us in the close passageway. As the smoke cleared, I saw Dolores, her eyes blazing with hatred, jealousy, revenge. In her hand was the pistol she had wrenched from her father.

On the floor across the door−sill sprawled a figure. Dominick had paid the price of his faithlessness to her also.

THE END